

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Week 2 - December 6-12, 2020



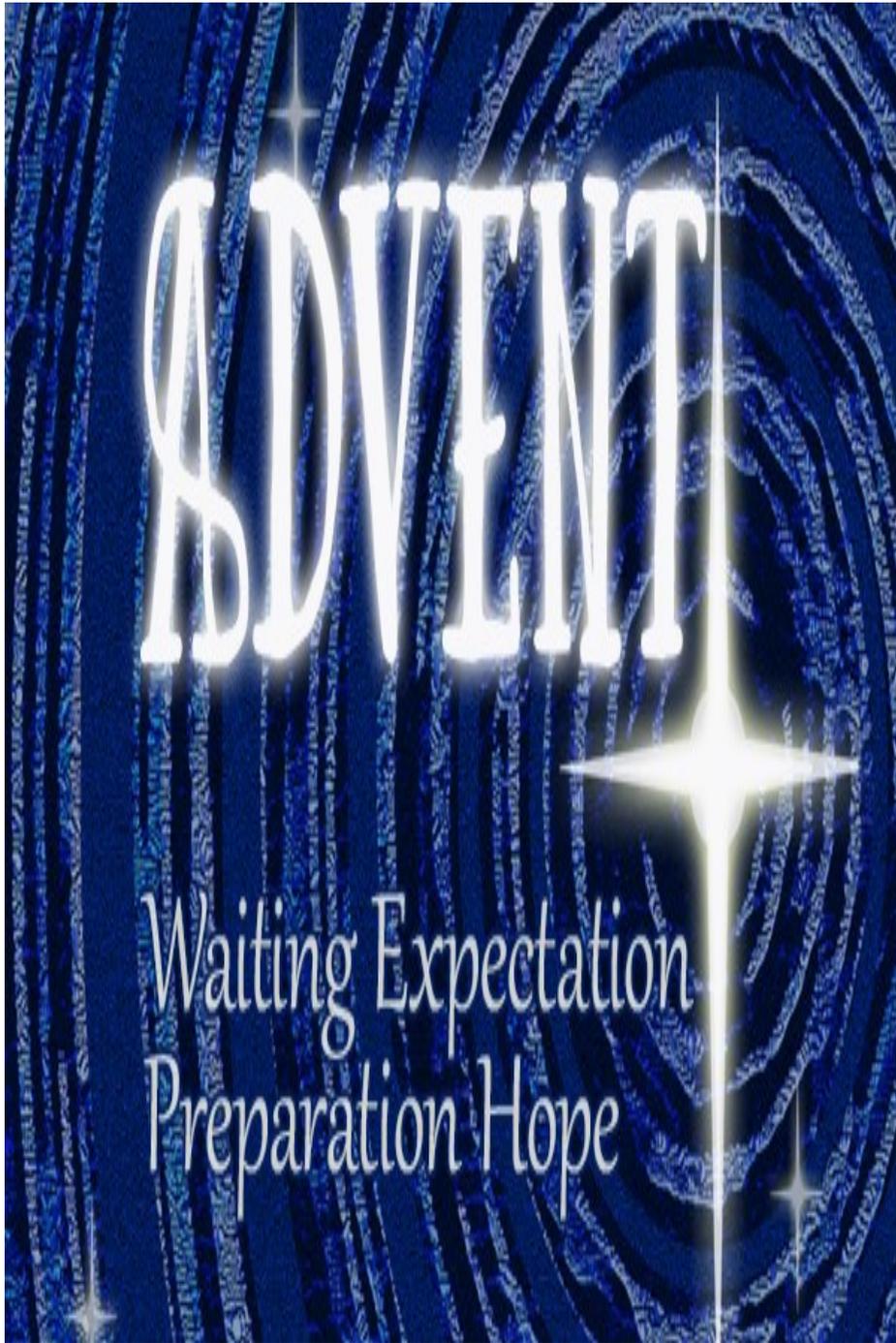
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NOTES

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Greetings Bethlehem Family,

I am excited to extend this invitation to you to join your church family on a 2020 Advent devotional journey! This year's journey is marked and marred with challenges (as if we need more in the light of a national epidemic). In the aftermath of an international pandemic, national protests, and a divisive presidential election we are called to:

***HOPE** against hope that our lives and livelihood will return to a sense of normalcy;*

*Find **JOY** in the midst of despair and the untimely and unwarranted deaths of our love ones;*

*Work for **PEACE** and justice in face of systemic racism, sexism, gender discrimination, healthcare disparity, and economic inequity until Jesus returns; and*

*Go high with the **LOVE** of Christ when the enemy goes low preying on human fear, insecurity, and pride.*

We have a tedious journey ahead this month, however the rewards that await us at the finish line will overshadow all we will go through. With God on our side, we are assured that each round will go higher and higher. So much so that in the end, we will not look like what we have been through. Follow alongside in the daily readings, reflections, and prayers as God will each day prepare our hearts for the "GIFT that will keep on giving!" I hope to see you along the way!

Growing in Grace,

Pastor White

Sunday December 6, 2020

Second Sunday of Advent

Mark 1:1-8

The year 2020 could be listed in the history books as the “year of bad news”. Since March we have endured reports of increasing deaths from COVID-19, alarming instances of racial injustice and the continuous attacks on American democracy. Like the people in the Gospel of Mark, many of us are beginning to believe that “bad news” is a sign of the times in which we live. The evangelist Mark wrote his gospel to people who like us, were living in a world that appeared to be filled with hopelessness and despair. They were anxious and unsure of their future. They asked the following questions: “How will I feed and clothe my family? How will I keep my job in this failing economy? Where is God in these troubling times? Where is the Messiah?”

Mark changed the headlines from one of “bad news” to one of “Good News”. The Gospel means “good news”. John the Baptist entered the scene preaching the “good news”. We need to remember and reconfirm the “Good News” daily. The “Good News” for us today is that Jesus, the Lamb of God is on His way back. When He returns all sickness and despair will cease to exist. COVID-19 and racial injustice will be defeated. We may not know the exact day or hour that He will arrive, but Jesus told us to always expect His return and be ready to join Him. Let us chose to spend this Advent season in joyful preparation of the return of our Savior.

PRAYER.... *Let us pray: Grant us, the wisdom to see your purpose today and the openness to hear your will, Quiet our minds that we may watch for you. Expose our sins that we may repent and prepare for You. Open our eyes that we may recognize and welcome You. Lord, hear our prayers and come to us, bringing light into the darkness of our hearts; for you live and reign now and forever. Amen!*

Saturday December 12, 2020

Reverend Dr. Moris Hargrove

Our Final Exam Matthew 21:28-32

“What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go.

Matthew 21:28-30

All through college and school we took many subjects and had to take the exams in each to see how we were doing. Some subjects were east to pass with little effort (like math for me) but others we had to put in a great deal of time in order to get a good grade.

Most of us don’t even think about the fact we are being graded spiritually for our action every day. One day, we will take our final exam at the judgment seat of Christ. We may not realize it, but we are both brothers in Scripture. When someone has wronged us or treated us badly, we will say, “we will not forgive them”. But after being convicted by the Holy Spirit, and asking the Lord to help us, we are able to forgive them. On the other hand, the Word tills us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to treat every-one equal within the Body of Christ. We say that we are doing this, but we let pride slip in and our action tells a different story. Jesus Christ came through incarnation, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. He lives within us to help us on our spiritual journey. He is our life, teacher, helper, counselor and our elder brother. All we have to do is to surrender our will to Him and ask Him to guide us on our spiritual journey.

PRAYER *Jesus reveal unto us al areas that we are failing in our spiritual walk. Help us to live in obedience of Your Word. Amen.*



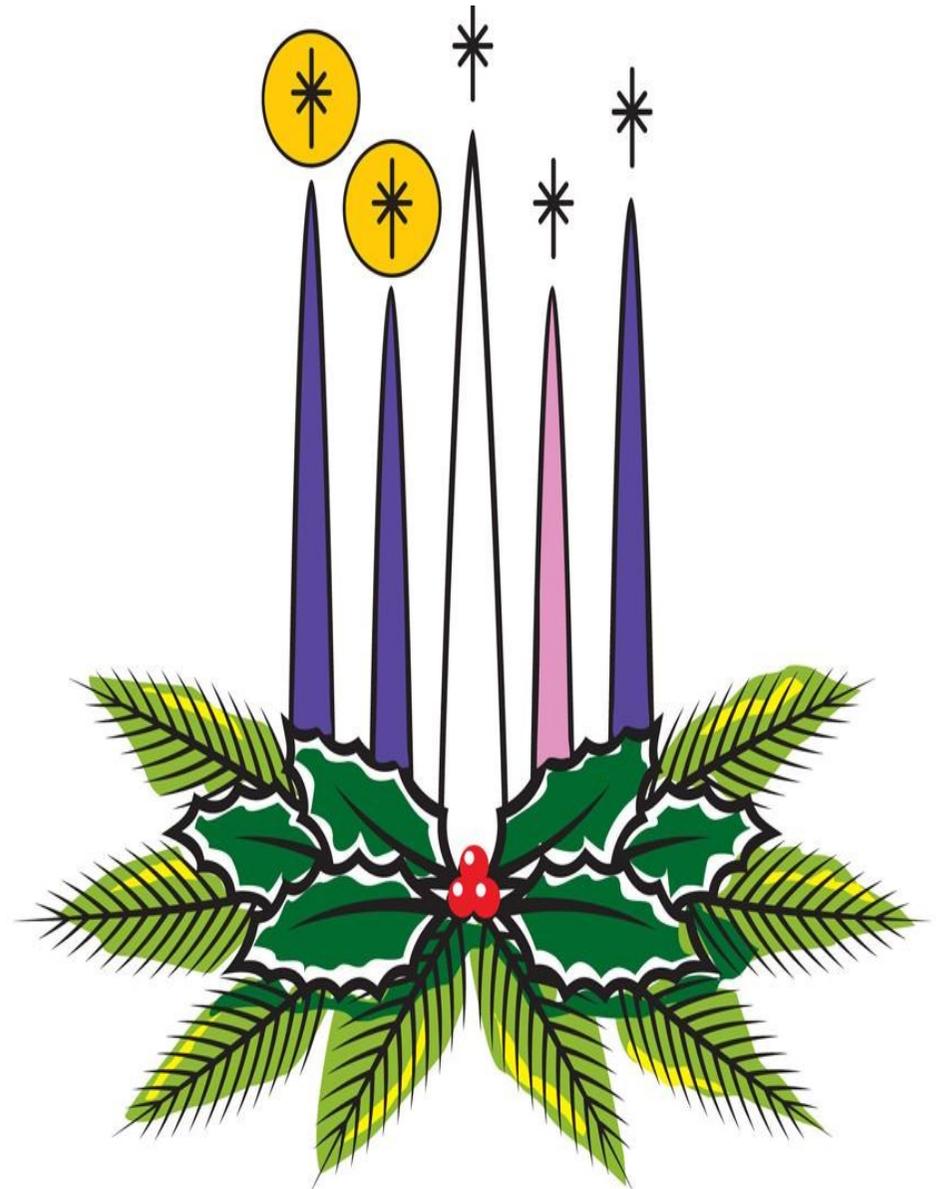
Philippians 3:7-11

Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:13-14 (NRSV)

Set your goals on the things that will draw you close to God so, that God will draw close to you. I retired 2 years ago, and I recently celebrated my 63rd birthday. The goals that I set for retirement were: (1) to celebrate my retirement with family and friends, (2) go on a cruise, and (3) commit to some form of formal Biblical studies. Evidently, God agreed that this was a good plan for me because I have completed the first and second goals and now, I am well on my way with my Biblical studies. My learning and studying moments can be challenging as I move forward each semester but by the grace of God, I persevere. As Paul stated in Philippians 3:12 (NKJV) ***“that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.”*** When we invite God into our life’s challenges, He reveals and provides everything that we need to meet our goals from start to finish.

PRAYER Heavenly Father, I thank You that the goals that I hope to accomplish, are Your goals that You have for me. Amen.



Advent

Monday, December 7

Minister Cheryl Stewart

Rescued from a Crooked Generation Acts 2: 37-42

“Peter said, “Turn back to God! Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven. Then you will be given the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:38 (CEV)

In our “BC” or “Before Christ” days, perhaps our reality was that going to church was merely a “habit” or familiar ritual practiced every Sunday. We went to church because our parents or grandparents informed us that we would be attending church as long as we resided in their home.

The preacher routinely was “background noise” that was largely ignored. Then one Sunday, the Holy Spirit anointed our ears to hear and our heart to feel what God was saying directly to each of us. When we heard the Word about Jesus, we were “cut to the heart”. The Pastor told us like Peter told the brand new church in antiquity, “Be saved from this perverse and crooked generation”.

The year 2020 has indeed showcased a perverse and crooked generation. This generation seems to have forgotten that Jesus is love and He came to show us the way of love and salvation. Unfortunately, this generation has reached monumental and unprecedented levels of selfishness, greed, ungodliness and pride. The good news is, the Holy Spirit is still empowering God’s people. He is still speaking to all who will hear and draw near. The Lord is interested and very active in the rescue of His people from this corrupt and wayward generation.

It has been said, “When you know better, you do better”. Knowing Jesus is our “know better”. Now that we know the love of God through Jesus, and have the empowering assistance of the Holy Spirit, we can do much, much better. We can operate in love, not hate; generosity and kindness, not selfishness or exclusion.



Thursday December 10 2020

Brenda Faison

Philippians 3:7-11

But Christ has shown me that what I once thought was valuable is worthless. Nothing is as wonderful as knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have given up everything else and count it all as garbage. All I want is Christ.

Philippians 7-8 (CEV)

As 2020 draws to an end, I find myself agreeing with Paul that “what I once thought was valuable is quickly becoming worthless”. All of those things (cars, houses, jewelry, clothes etc.) that we thought we could not live without have lost their glamour. Unfortunately, it has taken facing death from COVID-19, racial injustice, and the closing of our houses of worship to force us to look again at what is important to God and what we should value.

As we enter the Advent Season of expectancy, we are able to place our hope in Jesus knowing that He will protect and keep us during these challenging times. We can trust Him to bring eternal peace when He returns for His church. Therefore, although the world may appear to be in chaos, we know that God is in control and will “keep us” in perfect peace.

PRAYER Thank you Lord for your peace that passes all understanding. Thank you for being our shelter in the times of storm. Thank you for keeping us during the pandemic. Father help us to value goodness, righteousness, justice and love. Amen.



cont... ***Praying for a Miracle in a Dark Time Luke 1:5-17***

During the 10 days of waiting and not knowing what to expect, all I could do was to remain in a continued posture of prayer. After a few days of continued prayer, a certain PEACE came over me. Just like Zacharias and Elizabeth in our devotional scripture (Luke 1:5-17,CEV), I held onto my anchor of faith during those 10 days of waiting. I put all of my trust in GOD, certain that God was performing a miracle of healing upon my Mother.

“Oh what peace we often forfeit, Oh, what needless pain we bear, All because to do not carry EVERYTHING to GOD in prayer”.

PRAYER *Lord, we thank You for the spiritual strength that You give us when we surrender our all to you in prayer. The weight is lifted from us, we have comfort and peace knowing You are the only one who can carry us to this assurance. You are like a warm blanket on a cold night, we feel your peace. Amen*



cont from page 6...

Share the Good News about Jesus! Be bold and unashamed to enlighten the people in your sphere of influence and even a stranger with the extraordinary news of the goodness of the Lord and His everlasting love.

PRAYER..... *Great and Mighty are You, O’ Lord. Thank You for rescuing us from this perverse and corrupt generation. Thank You for entering our world to love us. Thank You for sacrificing Your life to save us! Thank You for making our eternal future bright! Jesus we love You! Amen.*



Tuesday December 8, 2020

Acts 11:1-18

When they heard Peter say this, they stopped arguing and started praising God. They said, "God has now let Gentiles turn to him, and he has given life to them!" Acts 11:18 (CEV)

Advent is a time for us to give praise to God in spite of our circumstances. The year 2020 has been a very challenging. We have had to learn to navigate the obstacles of survival brought on by COVID-19, racial unrest and an unusual presidential election. Many of us have lost jobs and loved ones unexpectedly. We are finding new ways to worship, work and shop. Our lifestyle as we knew it has changed in the twinkle of an eye and we are learning to adjust to a "new normal".

Through all of these changes, God has been good to us. He has been our constant companion as our world has shifted beneath us. God continues to love us and provide for our every need. As we wait with anticipation for His return, let us remember to praise Him for being our Immanuel (God with us).

PRAYER..... Father we thank you for keeping us in 2020. Thank you for blessing our families, friends, neighbors, community and nation. Help us to see past our circumstances, to what you will do with and through them. Help us to trust you. Use our adversity for your glory. Amen.



Wednesday December 9, 2020

Edora Greenhill

Praying for a Miracle in a Dark Time Luke 1:5-17

On Saturday, April 25, 2020 (my birthday), I received a phone call from my cousin, (who lives with my mother), informing me that my mother was not herself. Mama was moving slowly, very sleepy, and out of sorts. Therefore, we left to go home and check on her.

On route to my hometown of Blackstone, Virginia, many thoughts were racing through my mind concerning my 93-year-old mother's health; *"What is going on with mama? Will she need to go to the hospital during this time of surging COVID-19 cases?"*

I begin to feel anxious, heavy- laden and frighten. I kept telling myself, *"stop worrying and calm down, Edora!"* I heard a soft voice say *"Take it to the Lord in Prayer"*and that is what I did! I began seeking God in prayer. When we arrived and assessed her condition, I called the emergency squad to take her to Farmville Hospital. With COVID guidelines in place I could not ride in the ambulance with my mama. Upon arriving at the hospital, I was told that I could not go in the Emergency Room with her either. I had to communicate with the doctors and nurses over the phone.

After several hours of waiting outside in the car, the call finally came. She would have to be admitted so they could perform additional test, which could not be done until Monday. The test results showed she had a slight stroke. My mother remained in the hospital for 10 days. COVID-19 restrictions did not allow any visitors.

