

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Week 4 - December 20-25, 2020



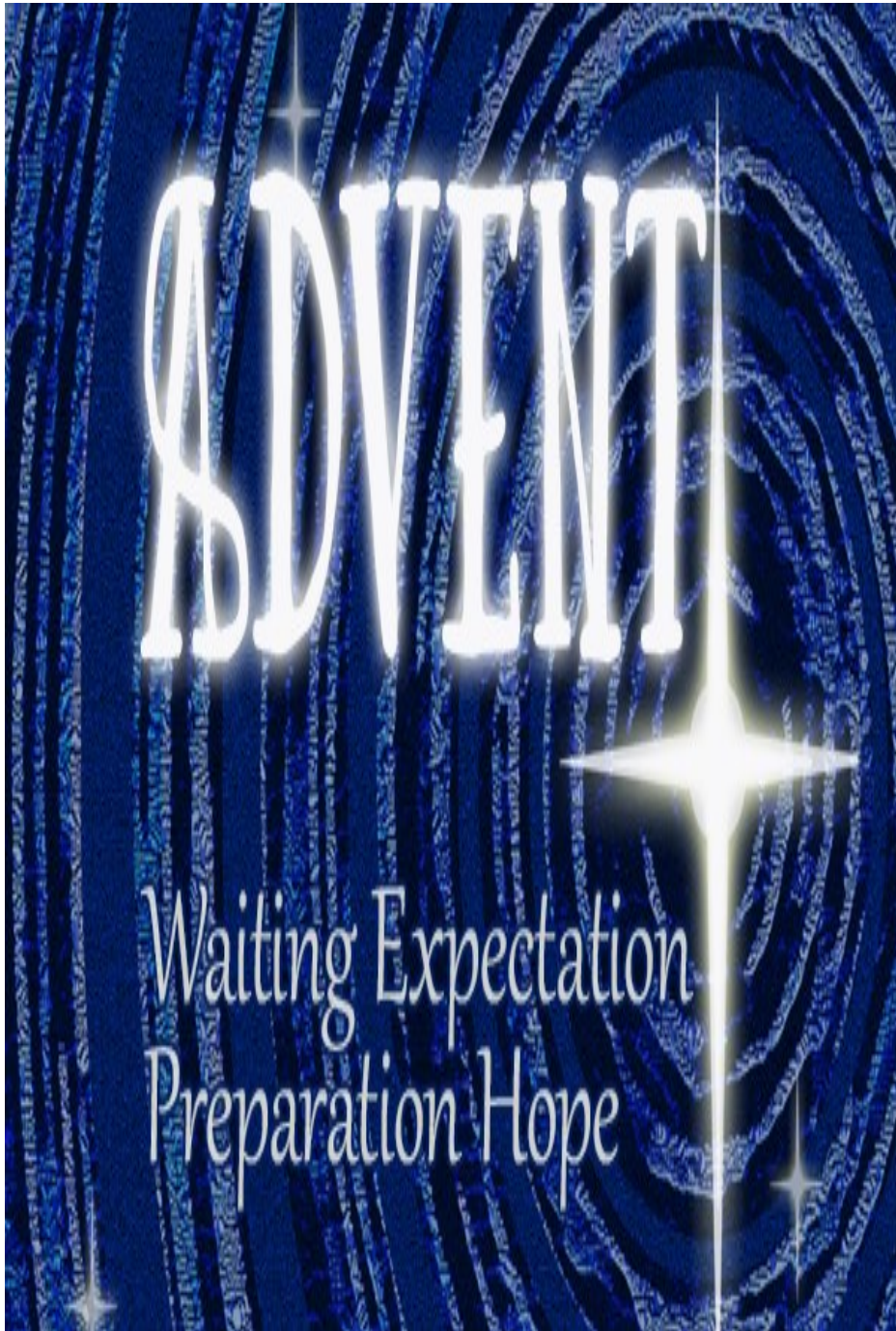
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Greetings Bethlehem Family,

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

Luke 1:26-38

Why did God choose a young unmarried girl to be the mother of the expected Messiah? What characteristics set her apart from other young women in Palestine? Who was this young woman whose very proper wedding engagement was suddenly shrouded in scandal?

What is it about Mary that made her an appropriate object of God’s grace? There is nothing written in the Word to suggest that she had earned or deserved the honor of a heavenly visitation. But, when she was told of the expected birth of Christ by the angel, recognizing this to be God’s plan, she gave the correct response. She said, “Let it be with me according to your word”.

Like Mary, our response to this life interruption of COVID-19 should be “Let it be with me according to your Word.” We can stand firmly on God’s Word and declare “*nothing is impossible with God.*” Therefore, during this Advent Season we can remind ourselves that we do not need to live in fear of life’s “unexpected challenges”. We are assured that God is with us and we can live daily knowing that we have hope, peace, joy and love in our risen Savior.

PRAYER.... Dear Lord, help us to embody the Good News and to bless those who are struggling in these difficult times. Use each of us to offer hope and encouragement to those who are weary and heavy laden. Enable us to let your joy radiate through us so that others may see YOU. Help us daily to point others to the Light, Jesus the Christ so that they may experience HOPE, PEACE, JOY AND LOVE. AMEN.

John 1:1-14

feels like life is pointless. This “Light” that John was referencing draws families back together, loves their enemies, and prays for healing in the world. We all have The Light. I am reminded of a great hymn of the church, “*This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*”

PRAYER.... God, we thank you for Jesus, the Light of the World. This Light that we have confessed to be our Lord and Savior walks with us and talks with us each day to be a witness to others about the goodness of this Light. In a world that can be considered so dark, we thank you for the opportunity to have access to this great light. We have the hope of our ancestors to continue to reach the dark places in the world so that others may experience the faith that we have direct connection with.



Friday December 25, 2020

Minister Marcus Ferguson

John 1:1-14

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:5 (ESL)

I want you to imagine yourself in a house with no light. How do you know where to turn? What helps you determine the room you are in? I believe that many of us would have bruised shoulders from bumping into walls and pinky toes would be aching from hitting them on the corners of doors, bed posts, and coffee tables without lights. Having a lamp with a lightbulb can provide us with light to navigate through the house. Imagine a work environment that has so much negativity; a school where you are the only student pursuing respect, a home where there are hostile words spoken, a world that denies healthcare for all, and governments where equity and equality is exempt for certain people. We call these environments “dark” because there is a cold, evil, angered, and lifeless feeling in them. The only way that this environment will change is by providing light in a room. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said it this way, “darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that.” As believers, we have a light— **Jesus Christ** that can drive out the darkness.

John talks about a light that shines in the dark and darkness has never been able to put it out, drive it out, eliminate it, or destroy it. This light is Jesus Christ, the one who came to save a dying world. The passage goes on to talk about a man named John who was not the light, but he was called to talk about the light so that it may lead all people to Christ. This “Light” that John was referring to can change the language in a room and offer “favor” when it’s not deserved. This “Light” that John was talking about influence minds that are pessimistic and gives hope to a teen that



Monday, December 21

Felicia Moore

Hebrews 9:1-14

“However, only the high priest could go into the second part of the tent, and he went in only once a year. Each time he carried blood to offer for his sins and for any sins that the people had committed without meaning to”. Hebrews 9:8 (CEV)

Hello Saints! The good news is...We do not have to wait an entire year for the priest to go beyond the Tent of Worship to reach the Ark of the Covenant. The coming of our Lord and Savior, has afforded us the opportunity to be a living sanctuary – a place to worship and repent. Thank you Lord for sending your Son, Jesus who died for our sins. His blood gives us strength from day to day, and it never loses power.

It is now month #9 with COVID 19 and no one has gone inside of the church building. However, every week I try to text loved ones to share devotions and Scripture. Responses in a text thread included: *“We had church this morning.” “Amen.” “What a good word.” “I needed that.” “Thank you Lord!”*

Since Jesus came to save us...Hey Church – the wait is over! You and I have seats in the VIP section because the church is in us. I believe we are experiencing a pandemic with a purpose. We are reminded that no matter where we are, we can worship, repent, and seek understanding daily.

Think of our ancestors who had church in slave quarters, little or no reading skills but a Divine connection. They anticipated freedom with hopes of the right to earn an education and be recognized as viable citizens. I would imagine the level of anticipation of freedom was similar to the anticipation of the birth of Christ. For us today, we are awaiting a cure to end a pandemic. One thing is for sure, two of these events have occurred. So church – Relax!



Friday December 24 2020

Cameron Coleman

Luke 2: 1-14

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

The world today is out of control. People have gotten greedy, our respect for each other has nearly diminished and families have drifted apart. We are in the midst of a pandemic, civil unrest is high, hatred has escalated and our country is divided. With restrictions and lockdowns, we have been forced to distance ourselves from family, friends and co-workers. In these chaotic times, no one knows what the future holds. We pray for any kind of sign to point us in the right direction. These are troubling times, but in a time of trouble, God is most present.

Being in lockdown has forced families to come together, to communicate, spend more time with each other, and go back to basics. During the time of Jesus’ birth, Joseph and Mary’s trials and troubles were overwhelming. All of the suffering, inconvenience, and discomfort caused by their circumstances was actually the loving hand of God working things out to accomplish His purpose. In this passage, God used them to bring us the light of the world - Jesus. “... I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people” (Luke 2:10).

Reflection and Prayer

God uses our trials to mold us, make us strong and shape us into something beyond our imagination, if we will only allow Him to work in us and through us. When you are faced with trouble and feel like you are beaten, God is making you into something great. Whatever you are going through, just ask God: *“Father, what are you trying to teach in my time of trouble? How can this make me better and more like Jesus?”*

PRAYER... Dear God, thank You for giving us the precious gift of Jesus who is the light of the world. Please help us to be a beacon to someone else and live for You today and forever. Amen



Application

Jesus said in Matt. 18:3, "...become as little children", not literally but in the sense of humbling yourself before the Lord. Though the practice of celebrating Advent is based on designated time of the year leading to the honor of our Savior's birth, how will you prepare for His return?

Prepare as you begin to pray (as guided by the Holy Ghost) by confessing your sins to the Lord and for God to reveal Himself in this passage to you by making it plain on how you need to **prepare** during this Advent season and the Lord's Coming.

PRAYER... Dear Father....



Let's watch and pray while we anticipate the "new norm" – the miracles, self-reflection, a cleansing of the soul; and nurturing our first gift that came with life - FAMILY. The quiet time is a gift that allows us to reconnect with God's creations.

The text reveals, we don't have to wait until the pandemic is over, we can go to God anytime. The coming of Jesus Christ established a new norm. He came so that we can enter into the Holy Place as often as we want, this perfect tent was not made by man, and it was something different. The ultimate sacrifice was the precious Blood of the Lamb who redeemed us. We are embarking on "new" and "different". Just remember, while Bethlehem (the building) is closed due to the pandemic, the church doors are always open because the church is inside of you!

PRAYER... Lord, help me to steward my time well so that I can serve You better. When I am afraid remind me that I am safe with You. Amen.



Tuesday December 22, 2020

Hebrews 8:1-13

⁸ But the Lord found fault with it and said, "I tell you the time will come, when I will make a new agreement with the people of Israel and the people of Judah.

⁹ It won't be like the agreement that I made with their ancestors, when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. " They broke their agreement with me, and I stopped caring about them!

¹⁰ "But now I tell the people of Israel this is my new agreement: 'The time will come when I, the Lord, will write my laws on their minds and hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

¹¹ Not one of them will have to teach another to know me, their Lord.'

A Moment of Reflection

What catches your attention in this Scripture?

What questions does this Scripture raise for you?

PRAYER....Father, thank you for being forever faithful, even when I run from you. Help me Father to fully commit my life to you. Amen.



Wednesday December 23, 2020

Shana Donchatz

Prepare for the Coming of Christ

Mark 11:1-11



It was in the wilderness that God delivered His message through John the Baptist, a man whom we may consider in modern times a little suspect due to his outward appearance (Mark 1:6 King James Version). We learn in First Cor. 1, 26-31 that God can choose the most unlikely persons to carry out His work. Would you say that these times of the pandemic are considered *our wilderness*? 2020 has to be the most chaotic year experienced in recent history on a global scale.

Expressions associated with the term "20/20" usually means "perfect", "clarity", "normal visual acuity", etc.; however, we discover now that the year 2020 has proven "anything but". The one thing that at least it should have taught us is "to...prepare". As John exhorted, "...Prepare ye the way of the Lord..." (Mark 1:3).

Advent season reminds us of the anticipation leading to the birth of Jesus Christ. As a young child waits in great expectation of receiving all they asked for on their list on Christmas Day, our hearts should be filled in abundance for the ultimate gift of all, God's Son, Jesus the Christ!

