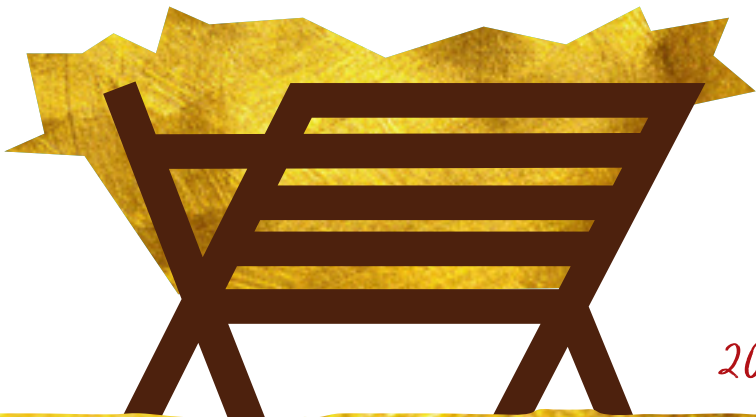




# *Prepare Him Room*

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



2020



## *Begin With The End In Mind*

*By Kristen Torres*

Advent, a season of preparation, "make ready for the Lord."  
In looking at your "to do" list, is this something you're prepared for?

How are you getting ready? What will Christmas look like this year?  
Beginning with the end in mind helps order your steps as it draws near.

On that very first Christmas, encountering Christ, each person's response was awe.  
So during this Christ(mas) season, let's consider our response at the end of it all.

The shepherds left glorifying and praising God for what they heard and saw.  
The wisemen worshipped and gave generously to Him; on their knees they did fall.

And Mary and Joseph, pondering and proud, hearts filled with love and joy,  
Recognized that the greatest gift for everyone came packaged as a little boy!

So in this season of preparation, "let every heart prepare Him room."  
Experiencing His presence doesn't require social distancing or meeting on Zoom.

Reading and reflecting on Scripture, hymns, and experiences to make Jesus known,  
is about a daily, personal response of resting in Him, as our home.

During Advent, keep the end in mind, that our joy may be made complete.  
Through Christ, we experience the greatest love, a certain hope, and eternal peace.



Christmas Day is preceded by Advent, a time of preparation for the coming of Christ. During this season, the coming light of Jesus shines brightly as we celebrate, with hopeful anticipation, His birth, and ultimately, our salvation. This 2020 Advent Devotional will guide you through daily steps of preparation while you take this prayerful journey and prepare Him room:

SUNDAY	Providing Understanding
MONDAY	Pondering Scripture
TUESDAY	Praising Through Hymns
WEDNESDAY	Praying The Psalms
THURSDAY	Purposeful Living
FRIDAY	Practicing Together
SATURDAY	Posturing Your Heart

Our 2020 Advent Spotify playlist, **Prepare Him Room**, is a meaningful supplement for your Advent journey as you: *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your heart to God (Colossians 3:16).*

[dawsonchurch.org/Spotify](https://dawsonchurch.org/Spotify)



# HOPE

## ISAIAH 9:6-7

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.



## Providing Understanding of HOPE

Sunday, November 29

On this first Sunday of Advent, please watch The Bible Project Advent video (link below) which will help to provide a biblical understanding of the word **hope**. As you watch, consider what this means as you “prepare Him room” with hopeful anticipation today and in the week ahead.

<https://bibleproject.com/videos/yakhal-hope>

In the video, **The Bible Project** defines *hope* as the ability to look back, see what God has done in the past, and, because of His faithfulness, choose to be expectant and hopeful that He will do something incredible again.

Reflect on what this truth about God’s faithfulness means to you. Think about when the Lord has been faithful, not just in biblical times or throughout history, but also in your own life.

### Prayer:

*Father, thank You for the certain hope You have given us through Christ. This advent season may Your hope fill me with joy and peace as I trust in You so that I may overflow with hope by the power of Your Holy Spirit. Help me to live fully in this joyous hope. Amen.*



## Pondering Scripture in HOPE

Monday, November 30

**Read Luke 2:1–7, Matthew 1:20b–21, 23, Isaiah 7:14, & Philippians 2:13.**

Have you ever had plans and then something unexpected happened? Joseph had plans. He was going to make Mary his wife and they would have a life like those around him. Yes, he was of the line of David, but he surely had no idea how that detail would play into his future.

Then he found out his anticipated bride was pregnant. In kindness, he prepared to remove himself from her quietly, but before he could do that, an angel came to him in a dream and explained what was happening. The baby Mary carried was from the Holy Spirit. This was the sign that Isaiah said would come! Imagine the intimacy Joseph and Mary must have felt when God revealed that long-awaited sign to them personally. Oh, the hope that must have swelled in their hearts!

And now that God-given hope would empower Joseph through the coming hurdles. With purposeful obedience, and amidst the hushed voices around him and the questions within him, he proceeded. He journeyed to Bethlehem with Mary, full term, and found there was no place to stay in the crowded city. Another hurdle. But God, his God, the One in whom he had placed his hope, provided a place for them. It was there that baby Jesus came into this world.

We make plans and many times something unexpected happens. Then what? How do we prepare for those times? The answer is to trust God's plan and keep our hope in Him. God orchestrated the fact that Joseph, who was betrothed to Mary, would be from the line of David. God also orchestrated Joseph and Mary's travel to Bethlehem to fulfill the prophecy of the birthplace of our Savior. Joseph placed his hope in the One who could. It is He who works in us too. Our hope is in Him. He will not disappoint.

**The hope in us —Jesus Christ.**

Have you received the message of hope that comes from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus?

Ask God to help you remove any "no vacancy" signs in your life and help you experience the hope of Christ Jesus today.



## *Praising through a Hymn of HOPE*

Tuesday, December 1

### **Christmas is a time of hope.**

What better hymn to remind us all of where our hope lies than the Christmas favorite, "O Little Town of Bethlehem." As the song states in the first stanza, "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." These words are so beautiful and so true.

Every hope and every fear experienced by humankind leading to the birth of Jesus, and every one since that beautiful night, was answered when He was born in the town of Bethlehem. Jesus fulfilled every prophecy and provided the way for all of humanity to be cleansed of our sin and live with Him in heaven forever. Because of Him we have hope that one day every wrong will be made right and that never again will we, or the ones we love suffer from injustice, illness, or even death. We will live forever with Jesus!

"O Little Town of Bethlehem" was first written for children. How appropriate, for what fills us with more hope than a new generation full of life and faith and zeal for Jesus? When a new child is born, hope springs anew for what they will accomplish. There is no baby who brings more hope than the babe born in Bethlehem; for only He can save us from our sins.

Read the words to this beloved hymn and then sing it aloud. Ask God to fill you with the hope of Bethlehem during this Christmas season and all throughout the new year.

### **O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM**

*by Phillips Brooks*

*O little town of Bethlehem  
How still we see thee lie  
Above thy deep and  
dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by*

*Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
The everlasting Light  
The hopes and fears  
of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight*



## Praying the Psalms in HOPE

Wednesday, December 2

### Read and meditate on Psalm 55:22.

*Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved. Psalm 55:22*

### What is sustaining you right now?

Everything from caffeine, online shopping, drive-thru meals, exercising, information overload, entertainment, and many other quick-fix things seem to be our go-tos when it comes to surviving day-to-day. Much of our surviving can seem to be based on our own striving.

As Christians, we desire to live freely and fully in the hope of Christ, but we also can so easily become desperate and depleted. In the midst of this incredibly busy time of the year, may we take a serious pause to ponder our burdens, cast them on the Lord, and then leave them there. May we embrace His presence, recognize that He is sustaining us, and live out of the fullness of Him—thriving rather than simply surviving.

### Prayer:

*Dear God, thank You that You are my Faithful Provider and Giver of Life. Lord, I cast my burdens on you... (pause and pray for specific circumstances and relationships that are burdensome). I pray Your righteous peace as I let go of the burdens that I am carrying and as I lean in to trusting Your faithful provision. Thank You for sustaining me in ways that I cannot even possibly imagine. Remind me again that "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight." Amen.*





## Purposefully Living in HOPE

Thursday, December 3

### Life is full of twists and turns.

One moment, we are walking down one path, thinking that we have it all under control, and the next moment the rug is pulled out from under us. Sometimes life is difficult and uncertain. We are not promised tomorrow, nor are we promised answers to all of our questions. But as believers, we are promised one important thing: our hope is not in vain when we put it in the one true Lord and the Father who loves us so much.

Hebrews 10:23 reads: *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.*

Biblical hope is the unwavering truth that we cling to for our entire lives: it is the truth that the God of the universe loves, cherishes, welcomes, and saves us. This truth is our cause for celebration and for worship. It is the reason we sing songs and hymns, and it is the reason why we gather together joyfully on Sunday mornings. Our hope in Christ and in His promises is the Good News.

Hope is also our comfort in times of trouble. At the end of a long day when nothing seems to go our way, after worldly promises have been broken and after all of our tears have been shed, we can cling to the ultimate hope of our Savior.

The book of Isaiah tells us: *...but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:31).*

Hope allows us to sing in the midst of mourning, choose joy in the midst of hardship, and continue on in the midst of the worst pain. Our Hope came to this earth in the form of a baby in a manger, died a gruesome death on a cross, and rose again three days later. Because of the gift of the Holy Spirit, we can see this hope lived out in our own lives.

### Prayer:

*Heavenly Father, help me to never forget where my hope comes from. Remind me daily that you love me and that you sent your one and only Son so that I can have a hope and a future. Remind me why I go to church on Sundays, why I pray, why I read my Bible, and why I follow you. Make Your Spirit evident in me like never before. Amen.*



## Practicing HOPE

Friday, December 4

Read Matthew 1:20–21 & Psalm 71:144.

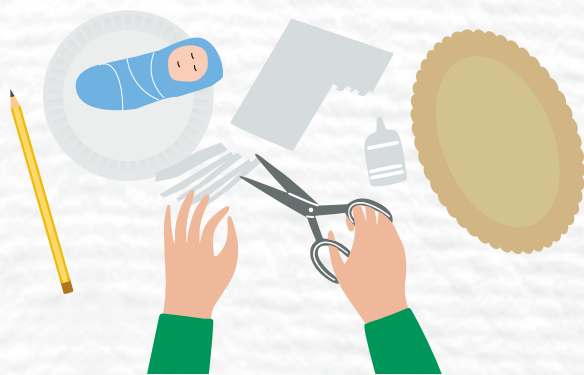
**Pray:** Find a quiet place where you or your family can focus. In your prayer today, thank God for His character and His promises. Name some of the ways God has been good to your family. Sometimes we feel scared, worried, or unsure of the future. Ask God to help you remember His love and faithfulness during those times. Thank God for being our very source of hope.

**Takeaway:** Joseph knew that God’s plan would always be the best plan. Joseph obeyed God and had great hope for his future with Mary and baby Jesus. He knew that he could trust God because God had proven Himself faithful to Joseph, and all God’s people, many times before.

**Advent Activity:** Your challenge today is to create a “manger” for baby Jesus that you will fill with “hay” throughout the Advent season.

Choose a basket, plate or bowl that can be used as a base for a manger. Cut paper into strips to use as hay. Invite family members to write (or draw) something good from God for which you are thankful. Some examples are family members and friends, promises found in the Bible, courage for difficult tasks, comfort during a time of loss, and even answered prayer requests.

By Christmas Eve, your manger should be full of “hay,” and you can add a baby Jesus using a small doll or paper plate craft to your family’s manger. Take time to reflect on these precious reminders of God’s love and goodness. We have hope for the future because God has already shown us over and over that He is good at all times.





## Posturing Your Heart in **HOPE**

Saturday, December 5

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin grey border, intended for journaling or reflection.

How did you **prepare Him room** with hope this week?

Use the blank space above to journal, reflect, pray, or write Scripture that has impacted you in a spiritually transformative way.



# Peace

## ROMANS 5:1-2

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.



# Providing Understanding of PEACE

Sunday, December 6

On this second Sunday of Advent, please watch The Bible Project Advent video, which will provide a biblical understanding of **peace**. As you watch, consider what this means as you rest in the promises of godly peace.

<https://bibleproject.com/videos/shalom-peace>

In this video, **The Bible Project** defines *peace* as not only the absence of conflict, but also as a feeling of wholeness and completeness. In biblical times, peace meant that people felt completely whole and fulfilled by their lives, relationships, families, and jobs. As Christians, we know that true wholeness, fulfillment, and ultimate peace can only be found through Jesus and His love for us. True peace is not found through our material, worldly things, but through the Father who loves us so deeply.

This week, reflect on areas of your life that may be causing you to feel worried or anxious. Ask God to give you peace over those situations. The next time you feel stressed, anxious, or fearful, remember to turn to the Lord and place all of your cares on him. Be still, and rest in His perfect peace.

## Prayer:

*Heavenly Father, You are so good. I thank You for all that you have done and will continue to do in my life. This week, I ask that You grant me peace for the things I cannot understand, for the relationships that are worrying me. I ask that you give peace to our great nation and to its leaders during this time of uncertainty and new beginnings. I pray that you help me to rest in your never-ending, everlasting peace for all of my days. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*



## Pondering Scripture in PEACE

Monday, December 7

### Read Luke 1:26–56.

Have you ever thought that if God would just call you by name and tell you what to do, then you would do it? That's what happened to Mary. She was a young, innocent teenage girl when God sent His angel, Gabriel, to her with an important message. Gabriel called her name, eased her fear, and told her that God had chosen her to be the mother of the long awaited Messiah. She got important details. The pregnancy would be a work of the Holy Spirit. The baby would be the Son of God. His name would be Jesus. Mary's response was simple and exhibited peace, "I am God's servant. May it be as you have said."

She got some personal information, too. Her relative Elizabeth, who was way too old to have a baby, was six months pregnant. "Nothing is impossible with God." So Mary went to see Elizabeth. It was there, through Elizabeth, that God lovingly confirmed what He was doing in her. With the confirmation came more peace, so much so that it propelled her to song!

God still speaks today. Not audibly, though we know He could. But because the Holy Spirit lives in us, His voice is always inside us. He speaks through the Bible, through His people, through thoughts and circumstances. There are other ways, but we know it is Him when there is peace, His peace, that is like none other.

So God has called you by name. He has told you what to do. Will you do it? The scripture says Mary "got ready" after Gabriel left. In the original language that means to "get up, stand up, come back to life." Mary did that quite literally. What about you? God is speaking.

### Are you listening?

Do you need to get up and do something? Do you need to come back to life in Him? Just as His peace led Mary, He will lead you too.

*Let the peace of God rule in your heart. Colossians 3:15*

Maybe you've never known that kind of peace. His name is Jesus. He is the Prince of Peace. He lived a perfect life, died for our sins, and came alive again to give us life. Just as Mary received Him in her arms that first Christmas, people all over the world have received Him in their hearts since then. The invitation and the gift this Christmas is for you. Is there room in your heart? He comes with peace.



## Praising through a Hymn of PEACE

Tuesday, December 8

### Doesn't everyone desire peace?

In 1935, Bing Crosby recorded the song "Silent Night." Today it is still the fourth best selling single of all time. Besides Bing's stellar voice, the song's lyrics are a big part of the reason for its popularity.

From the CEO of the world's largest corporation to the stay-at-home mom of preschoolers, everyone is searching for peace. Some people think peace comes from accruing enough money to be financially secure, or obtaining the proper degree, or even taking a vacation at the beach. The list goes on. However, as believers of Christ, we know that true peace only comes from Jesus.

How marvelous it is that no matter what the world throws our way—job loss, disease, pandemics, divorce, and even death—we can "sleep in heavenly peace" because of "God's redeeming grace." Whenever we start to worry about things, we can stop and remember that with Jesus "all is calm, all is bright." Our peace is because of Him, "love's pure light." Will you share this peace with someone who needs to know the Prince of Peace this season?

### **SILENT NIGHT**

by Joseph Franz Mohr

*Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright.*

*Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child.*

*Holy Infant so tender and mild.*

*Sleep in heavenly peace. Sleep in heavenly peace.*

*Silent night, holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight.*

*Glories stream from heaven afar.*

*Heavenly hosts sing 'Alleluia!*

*Christ the Savior is born. Christ the Savior is born.*

*Silent night, holy night! Son of God, love's pure light.*

*Radiant beams from Thy holy face.*

*With the dawn of redeeming grace.*

*Jesus Lord, at Thy birth. Jesus Lord, at Thy birth!*



## Praying the Psalms in PEACE

Wednesday, December 9

### Read and meditate on Psalm 119.

*Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. Psalm 119:105*

Psalm 119 gives us some of the wisest instructions about God's Word. John 1:14 reminds us that "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." At this season, we celebrate Jesus, the Word who became flesh, who brought us the greatest gift of all, eternal life. John 1:4 also reminds us that: *In Him was life, and that life was the light of men.*

Are you experiencing life in Christ to the fullest? In Psalm 119, the phrase "give me life" is repeated over and over again. As you reflect on this passage and these specific verses, which one(s) do you need to be reminded of, to rest in, and to meditate on as you experience the peace and power of Christ in you?

In Your ways...**give me life** (v. 37)  
In Your righteousness...**give me life** (v. 40)  
In Your promises...**give me life** (v. 50)  
In Your precepts...**give me life** (v. 93)  
**Give me life**...according to Your Word (v. 25, 107)  
**Give me life**...according to Your justice (v. 149)  
**Give me life**...according to Your rules (v. 156)  
**Give me life**...according to Your steadfast love (v. 159)

If you are lacking the peace of Christ and the life-giving presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit, immerse yourself in the living Word of God. As you prepare Him room this Advent season, allow space for Him to speak to you and shine through you in personal and powerful ways.

### Prayer:

*God, I recognize that I have sought the fullness of life in ways that are not of You or from You. Today, I ask You to give me life, according to Your Word, Your justice, Your rules, and Your steadfast love. In the days ahead, may "Your Word be a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Thank you for Jesus, the Word made flesh. In His Name, the Prince of Peace, I pray. Amen.*





## Purposefully Living in PEACE

Thursday, December 10

### Ask yourself this question.

"Am I growing more easily discouraged these days?" This is the diagnostic question that pastor and author John Ortberg encourages people to ask themselves in order to measure their peace. He contends in his book, *The Me I Want To Be*, that if the answer is "no," then peace is likely growing in you.

How do we allow peace and not discouragement to grow? Paul gives us a key in Philippians 4:6-7 when he says: *In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Too often our prayers may focus exclusively on supplication, lifting up the needs of others and ourselves. How much more peace would we feel if we incorporated more thanksgiving into our prayers and supplications?

A daily habit of thanking God for each day every morning encourages good days. Having "good days" does not mean that things will always be easy. It doesn't even mean that we will like everything that happens. (And it happens to us all.)

However, thanksgiving and peace are inextricably linked, and thanking God for the day He has made for us is worthy of our thankfulness and gratitude.

Are you becoming more easily discouraged these days?

For what are you thankful?

### Prayer:

*Prince of Peace, thank you for the ways you have blessed me. Even when life is difficult and I cannot see beyond the next step, I rest in the assurance that your Holy Spirit dwells within me. Grant me a heart of ever-increasing gratitude, and lead me forth in your perfect peace. Amen.*



# Practicing PEACE

Friday, December 11

**Read Luke 1:46–55.**

**Pray:** Find a quiet place where you or your family can focus. In your prayer today, praise God for who He is based on what the Scripture says. In your own life, what reasons do you have to praise God? Tell Him of these praises during your prayer time.

**Takeaway:** Some people know Luke 1:46–55 as Mary’s song, Mary’s hymn of praise, or the Magnificat. In today’s passage, Mary simply praised God with a song about how great God is. Though her circumstances were changing in a very unexpected way, Mary had peace because of her trust in God.

**Advent Activity:** Write a Family Song together! Remembering your prayer time and looking to God’s Word for inspiration, write a short song (or cheer) that your family can easily repeat. These are just a few lines to praise God for who He is and what He has done. When peace feels far away, remind each other of this song or sing it out loud to encourage one another. Because of Jesus, we can have true peace.

**Family Song Template:**

God, we praise you because \_\_\_\_\_.

You are \_\_\_\_\_.

You have given us \_\_\_\_\_.

We can trust you because \_\_\_\_\_.



# Posturing Your Heart in **PEACE**

Saturday, December 12

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin grey border, intended for journaling or reflection.

How did you **prepare Him room** with peace this week?

Use the blank space to journal, reflect, pray, or write Scripture that has impacted you in a spiritually transformative way.



Joy

PHILIPPIANS 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!



## Providing Understanding of JOY

Sunday, December 13

On this third Sunday of Advent, please watch The Bible Project Advent video, which will help to provide a biblical understanding of the word **joy**. As you watch, consider what it means to be joyful, not only when things are going well, but also during seasons of hardship or uncertainty.

<https://bibleproject.com/videos/chara-joy>

In this video, **The Bible Project** defines joy not as the absence of sorrow, but as choosing to rejoice in the Lord and in His promises no matter what. How does this definition apply to us in 2020, when so much has gone wrong? It means that, while we are allowed to be sorrowful and sad, we are not to abandon the Lord altogether. He is still with us—even on the darkest days. He will never forsake us, and for this reason, we can live in joy.

This week, reflect on what it means to be biblically joyful. Think about what it would look like to choose joy, even under the most difficult circumstances.

### Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank You for the truths of Your Word. Thank You for Your Son Jesus. Thank You for the good news of the Gospel. Because of these things, I can be joyful, even when the world is not. I ask that you help me to live in that joy to the fullest. I pray that, when I wake up every morning, You remind me that You are bigger than my troubles and disappointments. You have already claimed my victory over the things that are bogging me down. Remind me of that, and help me live in joy because of it. Amen.



## Pondering Scripture in 104

Monday, December 14

### Read Luke 2:8–20.

Don't you just love nativity sets? An artist's depiction of Mary and Joseph looking adoringly at the sweet baby—which seems like something any normal couple would do. But this scene is different because the baby is different. This baby was special; this baby was the Son of God, Immanuel, God with us.

There was no fanfare in the city of Bethlehem the night Jesus was born. Mary and Joseph didn't even have a place to stay. Our Savior's first bed was a manger. It was a non-event to the outside world. Yet, there was fanfare in a nearby field where shepherds were sleeping.

It was unexpected and sudden. An angel appeared with a message, and it was good news, the best of news, news of great joy for all people.

*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*  
Luke 2:11

And suddenly, a whole multitude of angels appeared. Together, they praised God for the news they themselves delivered. It must have been a spectacular sight!

And then they were gone.

Everything was strangely the same but would forever be different. With hearts full of joy, the shepherds hurried to Bethlehem. And there He was. Jesus. Just as they had been told. After they saw Him, they returned to their lives as shepherds, praising God and sharing with great joy this good news that they had just witnessed. People were amazed. God was glorified.

Isn't it interesting that the spectacular celebration was given to ordinary people—strangers outside of the miraculous birth? They were uninvolved, but joyful benefactors. Yes, Jesus' birth was good news to the shepherds, but it was also "new" news to them. This is a perfect reminder that we are to share this good news with others, and what better time to joyfully do that than at Christmas? And it's not something that we just casually retweet with a click or share on social media. It is precious and personal. It is good news of great joy to all people.

Is there joy in your heart that gives glory to God for this good news today?



## *Praising through a Hymn of JOY*

*Tuesday, December 15*

### **Do you have a favorite Christmas song?**

“Joy to the World” is one of the most beloved Christmas hymns of all time. It is based, in part, on Psalm 98. Below is this beautiful hymn, listed line by line, with some thoughts for pondering and reflection.

**Joy to the world the Lord is come!**

Hallelujah! Is there any news more glorious? The Lord is come!

**Let earth receive her King.**

The greatest gift ever imagined, the King of Kings, came as a little baby. He was wrapped, not in sparkly paper, but in swaddling clothes. A most wondrous gift, the very best gift! We must do our part and receive the gift. Let us receive our King!

**Let every heart prepare Him room.**

There was no room for Jesus in the inn. There was no room for Him in Herod’s heart either. Is there room for Him in your heart today? Are you prepared for the day when Jesus comes again? No man knows the hour, so we must prepare Him room.

**And heaven and nature sing.**

Those who have received the gift of His salvation will sing! We will sing for joy along with the trees, and the rocks, and all of creation for the Lord has come to make everything right. Oh what a day that will be! Sing for joy!

Now, read Psalm 98 then go outside and sing this beloved hymn. Sing for joy that Jesus came as a babe in Bethlehem and for joy that one day He is coming again. Let this joy fill your heart, and share it with others.

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!



## Praying the Psalms in 104

Wednesday, December 16

### Read and meditate on Psalm 121.

*The LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.*

*Psalm 121:8*

For many families, a favorite tradition is singing Christmas carols together in the car while driving around town, visiting family, or looking at Christmas lights. For the ancient Hebrew worshippers, a different kind of sing-along would have happened on their pilgrimages to Jerusalem for festivals and celebrations. Psalm 121 is one of the songs that would have been sung on their ascent to the temple. This Psalm is rich with reminders of who God is and what He has done.

During a season where the secular pull to prepare for Christmas looks very different than the sacred preparation that we, as followers of Jesus cherish, it is important to spend time claiming God's truth to guide our way. Meditate on the lyrics of Psalm 121 and consider God's Sovereignty in the midst of your own life and circumstances. May the truths of who He is capture your heart, step-by-step, along the way.

### Prayer:

*Lord, when I consider where I seek help and look for answers, it is not always and only You. May Psalm 121 be the song in my heart that reminds me that You are my help, Maker of heaven and earth. In the darkness of sleepless and lonesome nights, I cry out to You, who watches over me, who does not sleep or slumber. When I am fearful, may I rest in You, who keeps me from all harm and watches over my life. For You "watch over my coming and going both now and forevermore." Amen.*





## Purposefully Living in JOY

Thursday, December 17

### Have you ever heard this saying?

“Happiness is fleeting, but joy lasts forever.” There seems to be some truth to that statement. We are happy when everything around us seems to be going well. We feel happiness when we get the job, when our friend or family member gets better, or when there is something to celebrate.

Biblical joy is a bit different. Unlike happiness, the joy that Jesus calls us to is not temporary or based on external circumstances. Rather, biblical joy is a choice—one that comes from the inside and is the manifestation of Jesus on our outside, everyday lives. We must choose to have joy when things are not going so well, when we don’t get the job, or when our friend does not recover. Having true joy is a conscious decision to see God’s glory even on our worst days and in the places where we thought He’d never be.

Jesus’ brother, James, reminds us in Scripture when we should experience joy. *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).*

We can choose joy no matter what is happening in our lives. We can choose joy in the good, in the bad, in the laughter, and in the tears. Joy is one of the greatest gifts that the Lord has given us. Practicing joy daily allows us to take all that Satan has meant for evil and turn it into an opportunity for growth, endurance, and faithfulness to the one true God.

### Prayer:

*Heavenly Father, help me choose joy today. Help me choose joy when things are not going my way. Help me choose joy when there are things to celebrate, as well as when my mountains seem too big to climb. Help me see Your glory in everything – even in my most mundane inconveniences. And because of that, help me be joyful and thankful for You. Amen.*



## Practicing 104

Friday, December 18

**Read Luke 2:8–20.**

**Pray:** The shepherds were just ordinary people before the angels appeared in the sky, and they got scared when this extraordinary event happened to them as they were out watching over their flocks. Even so, they boldly went into town and told everyone that they had seen the Savior of the World. We all get scared sometimes when wanting to share the Gospel—even when telling others the amazing ways we personally have experienced Jesus. Spend some time today praying for new ways to boldly share the good news of Jesus Christ with others without any fear.

**Takeaway:** What was the first thing the shepherds did after seeing baby Jesus in the manger? (Hint: read Luke 2:17) They reported what they saw and were told about the child, and everyone who heard it was amazed. After they saw Jesus, they were intentional about sharing that wonderful news with other people.

**Advent Activity:** Make a large star with Jesus' name in the middle and then hang the star in your front window. Think of two or three neighbors who you can share the good news about Jesus with this Christmas. Next make star-shaped cards and write them a note to leave on their door or front porch. Remember to pray for these neighbors by name and ask God to give you the opportunity and the courage to share with them about the joy we have in Jesus.





# Posturing Your Heart in JOY

Saturday, December 19

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin grey border, intended for journaling or writing.

How did you **prepare Him room** with joy this week?

Use the blank space to journal, reflect, pray, or write Scripture that has impacted you in a spiritually transformative way.



Love

**JOHN 1:14**

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.



## Providing Understanding of **LOVE**

Sunday, December 20

On this fourth Sunday of Advent, please watch The Bible Project Advent video, which will help provide a biblical understanding of **love**. As you watch, consider what this means as you love the Lord and everyone around you.

<https://bibleproject.com/videos/agape-love>

Love is all around us—be it romantic love, family love, or friendship love. Our culture celebrates love, perhaps more than anything else. However, the Bible describes love differently than the world does. Jesus talked about the concept of agape love: He spoke about loving God and loving your neighbor. To Him, loving others was the outward manifestation of one's love for the Lord. However, Jesus takes things one step further. He used parables like the Good Samaritan to demonstrate that, in order to truly love your neighbor, you must love those you get along with, as well as those who are your enemies.

This week, reflect on how you can better love God, your family, your coworkers, your community, and your friends, but also those with whom you don't always agree.

### *Prayer:*

*Heavenly Father, thank You for pouring out the ultimate form of love by sacrificing Your only Son to die on the cross for my life. Thank You for showing me what it truly means to love not only my neighbor, but also those who I do not get along with. I ask that You help me show that love this week. I pray that You give me the patience and willingness to love You above all others. I pray that You help me to love my friends and family in the best way possible, and I pray that You remind me to show love to those whom I may find unlovable by the standards of the world. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*



## Pondering Scripture in LOVE

Monday, December 21

### Read Matthew 2:1-12.

Have you ever watched someone with a baby? You see happy faces and hear voices and sounds full of glee. The love that wells up in us for an innocent baby tends to make our response honest and vulnerable. What then is our honest and vulnerable response to baby Jesus?

God lovingly placed a star in the sky the night Jesus was born. Far away in the east, the Magi saw it. Much of what they did involved the stars, so God put that star where they were looking. He meant for them to come. Scripture says they went straight to Jerusalem and asked where the baby was. It must have puzzled them that the religious leaders did not know about the birth of this new King. The religious leaders knew the Scripture but were unaware of the Savior.

By now, Jesus was no longer a newborn. With new information, the Magi headed to Bethlehem. They followed the star to the exact house in which Jesus lived. There, they bowed down and worshiped the Christ Child.

In the ancient Orient, the word *worship* paints a picture of falling on one's knees with forehead to the ground. It is what one would do in the presence of someone considered vastly superior to themselves. That kind of humility before the Christ is in response to His love. Tremendous love! The Magi could not have known what else would come in the life and death of Jesus, but God did.

Worship is a serious business. As Christians, we worship the One who gave His Son, the One who gave His life, the One who loved us with perfect love from the beginning, and will to the end of time. We respond to that love with love. The picture of us dropping to our knees with our forehead to the ground is one of complete submission. No one in this life deserves that kind of worship except Jesus. He does not demand that from us, but the love He offers us compels us to give Him our heart, our life, our treasures, our all.

Right now, people who love each other are exchanging gifts.

What part of your heart, life, or treasure does your love for Jesus compel you to give to Him today?



## Praising through a Hymn of LOVE

Tuesday, December 22

### Love. It's what Christmas is all about.

God's love for us is shown by the gift of His precious son, Jesus, and Jesus' love for us shown by His willingness to come to earth to suffer and die for our sins. There is no greater expression of love in all of history. *In the Bleak Midwinter* is a Christmas carol based on a poem by the English poet Christina Rossetti.

*In the bleak mid-winter  
Frosty wind made moan;  
Earth stood hard as iron,  
Water like a stone;*

*Snow had fallen, snow on snow,  
Snow on snow,  
In the bleak mid-winter  
Long ago.*

The first stanza (above) conveys the condition the world was in when Jesus came. Sin had entered the world, and the world needed a Savior. So Love came down.

*Our God, heaven cannot hold Him  
Nor earth sustain,  
Heaven and earth shall flee away  
When He comes to reign:*

*In the bleak mid-winter  
A stable-place sufficed  
The Lord God Almighty –  
Jesus Christ.*

The second stanza tells about the answer to the world's sin and sadness, Jesus Christ! He loved us so much He came to this bleak world and was born, not in a palace, but in a stable. Love came down and changed everything. This love is unselfish, unconditional, unending, undeserved, and, at first, unreciprocated. When we recognize and understand this love given to us, we wish to give back. But what can we possibly give the King of Kings? The last stanza of the carol answers this question beautifully.

*What can I give Him,  
Poor as I am?  
If I were a Shepherd  
I would bring a lamb;*

*If I were a Wise Man  
I would do my part,  
Yet what I can I give Him,  
Give my heart.*

When you listen to this song this Christmas, let it remind you of the gift of love we have received and what our gift to the baby born in Bethlehem should be. Love. That's what Christmas is all about.



## Praying the Psalms in LOVE

Wednesday, December 23

### Read and meditate on Psalm 150.

*Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Psalm 150:6*

What moves you to stand to your feet, throw up your arms, and cheer loudly? Many of us picture a sports arena and imagine the fight song of our favorite team. Today, as you reflect on where, how, and to whom you pour out your praise, read Psalm 150. It reminds us that every instrument and everything with breath is to praise the Lord.

Psalm 150 is the conclusion to the entirety of the Psalms, the songbook of the Bible. It reminds us that all of life is in the presence of God and for the purpose of glorifying Him! This doxology ends by saying: *Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Psalm 150:6*

In a New Testament passage, Paul encourages his readers by spelling this out specifically. *Colossians 3:16-17* says:

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

Emmanuel, God with us. On Christmas Day, Christ came to dwell among us—a cause for exuberant praise!

### Prayer:

*Lord, today, I sing my heart out to You! Let every detail of my life—words and actions—praise You at Christmas and always. Amen.*





## Purposefully Living in LOVE

Thursday, December 24

### What is true love?

We live in a day and age in which there is much confusion about what love really is. True love, Scripture tells us, is found in sacrifice. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13).

Jesus literally laid down His life for us, and He calls us to demonstrate this same kind of sacrificial love with our own lives. In a world that repeatedly tells us to define ourselves, Jesus calls us to deny ourselves (Luke 9:23).

There are hundreds, even thousands, of missionaries doing God's work in foreign countries this Christmas. Many will experience intense homesickness and discouragement. These men and women have denied the comforts of home and spending time with family and friends to faithfully be about the Father's business. Why do they do this? Because of their love for Jesus and their love for their neighbor.

There may also be someone a little closer to home who feels down and discouraged this season. Maybe it's someone in your neighborhood, or a friend, or co-worker. Is there something you could do for this person to show him or her the love of Jesus? In his first Epistle, the Apostle John reminds us that the reason *why* we love is because God first loved us.

*Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:11).*

If true love is about sacrifice, what could you sacrifice in the name of love this Christmas?

### Prayer:

*Heavenly Father, you have always been and will always be the God of loyal love. I praise you for demonstrating this love by sending your Son, Jesus Christ, to live the life I could not live and die the death I deserved to die. As I abide in Christ, continue to fill me up and send me out, that many others might know your perfect love. Amen.*



## Experiencing God's LOVE

Friday, December 25

*From the manger to the cross to the crown...*



This block printed artwork was created by Dawson member, Ty Arendall, during his junior year of college. As you look at this piece, you can see how the light from the star is coming through the window and making everything so visible and clear. The poignancy of this picture still holds true today as it did over two thousand years ago.

The arrival of Jesus, the Light of the World, illuminates each of our hearts and brings us to the true climactic event of His birth. Let us celebrate His love on this Christmas Day! May the light of Christ shine brightly on you, in you, and through you, and may the words of this familiar song shown below ring true in your heart, today and every day.

*I have seen the Light shining in the darkness,  
Bursting through the shadows, delivering the dawn.  
I have seen the Light whose holy name is Jesus,  
His kingdom is forever; He reigns on Heaven's throne!*

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