

ADVENT
2022

O COME,
O COME
EMMANUEL.

2022 ADVENT READING PLAN

Advent is the 4 week season of preparation that precedes Christmas. Christmas is an event of joy and feasting, but if we don't attend to the reason for the celebration it can become superficial and materialistic.

This year we need the joy of Christmas more than ever—let's take the time to prepare so that our celebrations are as rich and joyful as the grace of God can make them.

READING PLAN DETAILS

Readings are Monday-Friday, beginning Monday, 11/28 and ending Friday, 12/23.

Asbury is a Bible-reading church. We believe that the Bible tells a unified story that leads to Jesus; many of the readings in this booklet come from the Old Testament to help us understand the story of which Jesus is the fulfillment.

Each day, I've written a brief commentary about that day's reading, and included a reflection or question or prayer focus or thought to help connect the reading to our everyday lives.

Of course, feel free to do your readings at any time, but I strongly encourage you to develop the habit of the First 15: spending the first 15 minutes of each day in silence, prayer, and scripture.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel.



✝ Andrew Forrest

Advent 2022

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 28 THE BEGINNING

Today is the first day of our Advent reading plan. My goal is to trace the whole story of salvation starting from The Beginning, because the entire Bible tells a unified story that leads to Jesus, and we rarely take time to see it. We'll have a very short scripture reading each weekday leading up to Christmas, and I'll write a brief thought to go with it. Christmas is great, and preparing for it makes it even better. Let's do this.

GENESIS 1:1-2

¹ In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

The Lord, like a master artist, brings beauty and purpose out of nothingness.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY:

A great prayer to pray during Advent 2022:

“Lord, can you make something beautiful out of all of this?”

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29 CREATION BY SEPARATION

GENESIS 1:3-19

³ And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶ And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷ And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. ⁸ And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹ And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so.

¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

¹¹ And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

Once you see the pattern, you'll never forget it:

God creates through separation.

Each division brings order and complexity to Creation.

- light from dark;
- day from night;
- water from water;
- land from sea;
- plant from dirt;
- sun from sky;
- etc.

One quick thought:

God brings order out of chaos; he does it at Creation, Jesus does it in his healing ministry—order to chaotic minds and bodies—and the Holy Spirit is doing the same thing today.

QUESTION FOR THE DAY:

Where do you need God to bring order out of chaos this advent season?

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30
THE IMAGE**

GENESIS 1:20-2:3

²⁰ And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” ²¹ So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. ²⁵ And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” ²⁹ And God said, “Behold, I have given you

every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

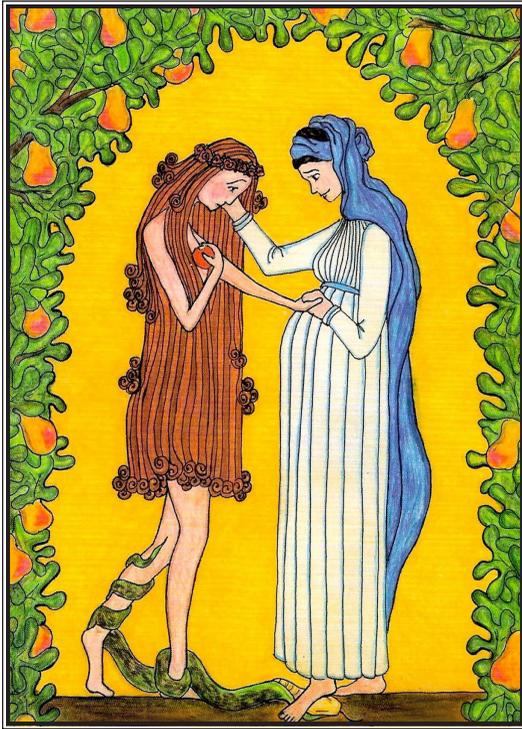
2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

The crowning achievement of Creation is the creation of the human, made in God's own image to join with God to steward the earth and bring beauty out of it.

QUESTION FOR THE DAY:

How can you step into your identity today of an image-bearer of God and use your God-given creativity to bring order out of disorder or to care for the civilization we have inherited?

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1
MY FAVORITE IMAGE OF CHRISTMAS



*I love this image, created by Sr Grace Remington, OCSO in 2003
at the Sisters of the Mississippi Abbey in Dubuque, Iowa.*

Do you understand?

GENESIS 3:8-19

⁸ And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”¹⁰ And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” ¹¹ He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹² The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” ¹³ Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

¹⁴ The Lord God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.”

¹⁶ To the woman he said,

“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you.”

¹⁷ And to Adam he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
‘You shall not eat of it,’
cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
¹⁹ By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”

The Lord announces in the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve's punishment for their rebellion and that the seed of woman shall bruise the serpent's head.

REFLECTION:

Go back and look at that picture of Mary consoling Eve again. Keep it in front of your mind this Advent season—maybe save it as the wallpaper on your phone? It's worth going back to over and over again. Praise God for his promise to **undue all the wrongs and to renew all things.**

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2
FAMILY IS HOW WE FIGHT

GENESIS 12:1-3

12 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

The Lord's plan to save all of creation begins with one man's family.

Despairing about the state of the world?

Worried about the future?

FAMILY IS HOW WE FIGHT.

Strong families are needed to raise strong children. The next generation is our hope. Remember, God's entire plan depended on one man's family. From Abraham's family comes Jesus, so many centuries later, but at just the right time.

QUESTION FOR REFLECTION:

What can you do this weekend to build up and build for the next generation?

**FAMILY
IS HOW WE
FIGHT.**

MONDAY, DECEMBER 5
THE STARS IN THE SKY

GENESIS 22:15-18

¹⁵ And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶ and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, ¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

The Lord promises to Abraham that by his descendants all the nations of the earth shall obtain blessing.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY:

Jesus, centuries and centuries later, comes from the line of Abraham. The Lord is always at work!
Be encouraged today—the headlines don’t tell the whole story.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6
A LAND OF DEEP DARKNESS

ISAIAH 9:2, 6-7

² The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.

⁶ For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it

with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

The prophet announces the birth of a king to a people in darkness.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY:

My favorite part is the last verse:
“The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”
What the Lord promises will come to pass.
Don’t be afraid today!

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7
PEACEABLE KINGDOM

ISAIAH 11:1-9

II There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

² And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

³ And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,

⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

⁶ The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.

⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den.

⁹ They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

The king is coming and will usher in a reign of justice for the poor and peace for all of God's creation.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY:

How can you be a peacemaker today?

P.S. “The stump of Jesse” is the idea that the Messiah will come from David’s family. (Jesse was David’s father.) In 586 BC, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and deposed David’s descendants from the throne—in the image that Isaiah uses, it is as if the “family tree” of David is cut down. Nevertheless, the line of David continued for the centuries and ultimately resulted in Jesus.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8 FRANKINCENSE FORETOLD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT!

I was reading through this passage a few years ago and I was SHOCKED when I got to the last sentence. Keep in mind this was written centuries before Jesus.

ISAIAH 60:1-6

60 Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

² For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you.

³ And nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising.

⁴ Lift up your eyes all around, and see;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from afar,
and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.

⁵ Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and exult,
because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

⁶ A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.

They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord.

All the nations will come to honor God's covenant people.

THOUGHT FOR DAY

Isaiah foretold what would happen! I just can't get over this passage—I'm not sure I ever before paid attention to verse 6—foreigners who come bringing gold and frankincense. **That's exactly what happened!**
Tell someone about this cool connection today.

(Why didn't Isaiah mention myrrh? This is because God is always adding something new and unexpected, like a jazz artist riffing on a familiar theme, but also creating something new. When myrrh was given by the Magi to the Holy Family, it signified the death that Jesus was to die.)

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9 JOHN THE BAPTIST FORETOLD

ISAIAH 40:3-5

³ A voice cries:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

⁵ And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

A voice cries:

**“IN THE
WILDERNESS
PREPARE THE
WAY OF THE
LORD;
MAKE STRAIGHT
IN THE DESERT
A HIGHWAY FOR
OUR GOD.”**

A voice crying in the wilderness: “Prepare for the King’s arrival!”

When John the Baptist came on the scene, people remembered these words of Isaiah and saw John as the one going before Jesus to prepare the way.

How can you be like John, today, and point someone toward Christ?

**MONDAY, DECEMBER 12
WHY WAS JESUS BORN IN BETHLEHEM?**

MICAH 5:2 -5a

² But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
from ancient days.

³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labor has given birth;
then the rest of his brothers shall return
to the people of Israel.

⁴ And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth.

⁵ And he shall be their peace.

The king will be born in Bethlehem.

Why was Jesus born in Bethlehem?

The above passage from Micah is what the scholars reference when the Magi show up in Herod’s palace asking to see the king of the Jews. Herod asks for expert opinion, and the scholars tell him that the Bible says that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem, the city of David.

Of course Luke tells us that the reason Jesus was born in Bethlehem is because Caesar made a decree for a census, causing Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem to be counted.

So, why was Jesus born in Bethlehem?
Was it because the Bible foretold that's where it would take place,
or was it because Caesar wanted a census?

Yes.

**God is always at work, even when we can't understand it at the time.
God is always at work, and he is using our free choices to realize
his divine purposes.**

“God works all things for good for those who love God and are called
according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13 WHAT'S THE LONGEST YOU'VE EVER WAITED FOR SOMETHING?

LUKE 1:5-25

⁵ In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah,
of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of
Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous
before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and
statutes of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was
barren, and both were advanced in years.

⁸ Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was
on duty, ⁹ according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by
lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And the whole
multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. ¹¹
And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right
side of the altar of incense. ¹² And Zechariah was troubled when he
saw him, and fear fell upon him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, “Do not
be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife
Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ¹⁴ And
you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for
he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong
drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's
womb. ¹⁶ And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord
their God, ¹⁷ and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah,
to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to
the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”

¹⁸ And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an
old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” ¹⁹ And the angel answered
him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent
to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰ And behold, you
will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take
place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled
in their time.” ²¹ And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they
were wondering at his delay in the temple. ²² And when he came out,
he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a
vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained
mute. ²³ And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

²⁴ After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months
she kept herself hidden, saying, ²⁵ “Thus the Lord has done for me
in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among
people.”

The birth of John the Baptism is foretold.

What's the longest you've ever waited for something?
I think this story is one of the sweetest ones in the scripture—this old,
faithful couple, waiting all these years for a child, only to be surprised
by the angelic message that the Lord is answering their prayers.
So poignant.

Are you waiting for something? Don't lose heart. Keep hanging on.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14 YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT'S HANGING ON YOUR OBEDIENCE

LUKE 1:26-56

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of
Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name
was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.
²⁸ And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord
is with you!” ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried
to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said
to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹
And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you

shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

³⁵ And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸ And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!

⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;

⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;

⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,

and the rich he has sent away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

The angel Gabriel announces to the virgin Mary that she will give birth to God’s promised Son whose kingdom shall never end.

You have absolutely no idea what’s hanging on your obedience.

Like Mary, obedience opens up opportunities that cannot come any other way.

What call to obedience are you resisting? What might be waiting on the other side?

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15

“STRONG IN SPIRIT”

LUKE 1:57-80

⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸ And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹ And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰ but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” ⁶¹ And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” ⁶² And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³ And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. ⁶⁴ And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. ⁶⁵ And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, ⁶⁶ and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.

And the angel said to her,

**“DO NOT BE
AFRAID, MARY,
FOR YOU HAVE
FOUND FAVOR
WITH GOD. AND
BEHOLD, YOU
WILL CONCEIVE
IN YOUR WOMB
AND BEAR A SON,
AND YOU SHALL
CALL HIS NAME
JESUS.”**

⁶⁷ And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

⁶⁸ “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people

⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,

⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us;

⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,

⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us

⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,

⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,

⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high

⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

The birth of John the Baptist.

I like that last sentence:

“And the child grew and became strong in spirit.”

*Sounds like something for which we each should be aiming in the year ahead:
Spiritual Strength.*

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16
JOSEPH THE RIGHTEOUS

MATTHEW 1:18-25

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

The righteousness of Joseph.

Joseph finds out Mary is pregnant *before* he hears from the angel. Thanks be to God Joseph decided to act mercifully toward Mary.

To whom can you show mercy—unmerited favor—today?

MONDAY, DECEMBER 19
CENSUS AT BETHLEHEM

LUKE 2:1-7

2 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the

town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Against a backdrop of emperors and taxes, Jesus is born.

Caesar had no idea that God was using his census as a way to move Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, thereby ensuring that the Messiah was born in David’s city.

What current events, happenings, or occurrences might God be using for his purposes in our time?

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20
CHRISTMAS WAR

LUKE 2:8-16

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

The shepherds go to see the Savior of the world, lying in a manger.

The meaning of the entire Christmas story changes when you understand that the word “hosts” is just an old fashioned way of saying “armies.”

Christmas is about WAR—war with spiritual weapons.

We wage spiritual war through prayer, silence, and love.

How can you fight back through prayer today?

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21 THE MAGI

MATTHEW 2:1-11

2 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

⁶ “And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” ⁹ After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ And going into the house,

they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

The wise men follow a star to find the child Jesus, the King of the Jews.

Just as the prophets had foretold, the Messiah was born in Bethlehem and representatives of the nations came bearing tribute:

- Micah 5:2-5 (see December 12, Day 11) says that the Messiah will come from Bethlehem;
- Isaiah 60:1-6 (see December 8, Day 09) says that the nations will come to honor God’s people.

And this is exactly what happened in its own surprising way.

God is endlessly surprising and always faithful.

Be encouraged today!

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22 THE GRACE OF GOD IS A PERSON

TITUS 2:11-14

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

The grace of God has appeared, saving all.

Titus is one of our New Testament letters, written by the Apostle Paul to a man named Titus. Like most of the New Testament letters,

it predates the Gospels and comes from the earliest days of the church.

What I find fascinating is Paul's simple statement: "for the grace of God has appeared."

The grace of God is Jesus Christ!

Question for the Day:

What does it mean for the world that the grace of God is a person?

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23 COSMIC CHRISTMAS

JOHN 1:1-14

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John unfolds the great mystery of the Incarnation.

Matthew and Luke start with the events leading up to the birth of Christ, but John starts before the beginning: with the pre-existent Word.

I'm grateful for the particularity and earthiness of the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke, but I'm also grateful for John's beautiful prologue that sets the Incarnation in a cosmic context.

And I love his beautiful reminder:

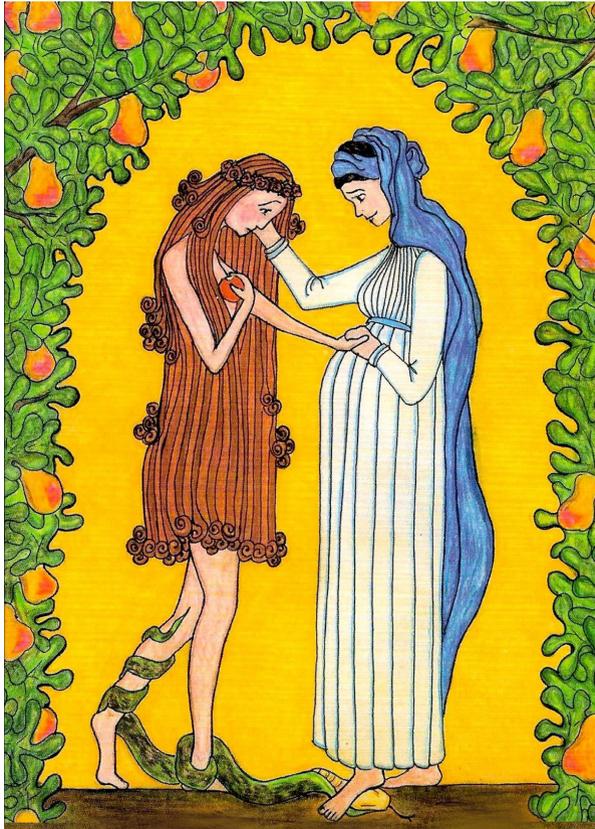
"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Be encouraged. Christmas means Hope!

Merry Christmas.

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