

The Wondrous Love Of Christ.

An Advent Devotional

The word “Advent” comes from the Latin word “Advenio” which means “to come.”

During the Season of Advent, Christians around the world purposely take time daily to focus on Christ’s first coming to this earth at Bethlehem. Yet, Advent has a double meaning, in that we also are celebrating His promised Second Coming in power and glory which we look forward to with great joy.

The Season of Advent is actually the beginning of the Christian calendar year. Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas Day and concludes on Christmas Eve. To find the first Sunday of Advent for any year, simply find Christmas Day on the calendar and go back four Sundays before Christmas Day and that Sunday is when the season of Advent begins. If Christmas actually falls on a Sunday, the first Sunday of Advent will be four Sundays before that day, not counting Christmas Day itself.

Many congregations still put up an Advent Wreath in which there are four candles. Each candle represents one of the Sundays of Advent. Different denominations have assigned different meanings to each candle. Below are four you can use this year. It’s meaningful to make your own Advent wreath at home and light a new candle each Sunday during Advent as you share the devotion for that day. The candles are typically purple which is the liturgical color of Advent. In the middle of the wreath should be a large white Christ candle to be lit on Christmas Day signifying that Christ, The Light of the world, has come to us.

First Sunday Candle: Love

Second Sunday Candle: Peace

Third Sunday Candle: Joy

Fourth Sunday Candle: Salvation

It is my goal that each page of this small devotional booklet will assist you to focus your daily attention on something amazing and exciting about God’s deep and abiding Love for you. God Bless you as you walk through these days of Advent and may He come to you anew this Advent and Christmas season.

First Sunday In Advent:

Candle of Love

"We love, because he first loved us." I John 4:19.

He Actually Came Just For You!

When you consider it, Jesus never had to come in the first place. As sinners who have rebelled against God, we certainly cannot make the claim that anything we have done demands that He come to rescue our souls and give us His Grace. We deserve Hell for our sins, not Heaven.

Yet, nonetheless He still came. Even though we didn't deserve it, He left His Throne in Heaven and as Scripture tells us, He did not selfishly cling and grasp onto His place of equality with God, but rather came to this earth on purpose with a purpose. It was actually His plan to end up on The Cross to take the punishment for our sins off of us and onto Himself. Above all the other great things He did while He was here, the most important thing He came to this earth to do, was to do what was necessary to make it possible for you and me to go to Heaven.

Sometimes we may wonder just how much God loves us, or if He really loves us at all. All you have to do to answer that question is to focus on two cities that are 5.2 miles apart. They are Bethlehem and Jerusalem. One is where He was born at Christmas and the other is where, on The Cross, He did what was necessary for you and me to be born again.

In one city He came into the world. In the other, He overcame the world and our sin and in so doing gave His Life so we could spend eternity with Him. I doubt anyone will ever love you more than that. That is *The Wondrous Love of Christ* for us. During this Advent and Christmas season it would be good to rejoice and take in, maybe for the first time ever, that God Himself loves you that much!

*"God rest ye merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay,
Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas day;
To save us all from Satan's power, When we had gone astray.*

*Oh tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy;
Oh tidings of comfort and joy!"*

First Week In Advent

Monday

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.” John 1:14.

He Became One Of Us To Save All Of Us.

When you stop to consider it, it is utterly amazing that Christ came to this earth as one of us. He was fully human and fully Divine at the same time. He didn't come as some high and mighty figure to subdue us and rule over us. He came as one of us to serve and to save all of us.

It took one of the great miracles of Christmas to pull this off. It's called The Incarnation. That simply means that by The Holy Spirit, Christ became a man like us and Scripture tells us that He was like us in every respect, even being tempted in every way any of us could ever be tempted, but yet He never sinned. That's critical because since He had come to pay for our sins, He'd never have been able to do that if He owed God for His own sins.

Instead, He laid down His Life for us as a ransom for ours, to pay for our sins, even when He didn't have to, even when He could have opted out of doing so. He could have come to rule the world, but instead He came to save the world and every one of us in it.

As the great hymn proclaims it, *“Amazing Love! How can it be, that Thou, my God shouldst die for me?”*

What amazing love Jesus has for you that He would come from Heaven to this earth so that one day you could be with Him forever in Heaven. That is “Amazing Love.”

*“Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory given!
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!
O come, let us adore Him, O Come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him,
Christ The Lord.”*

First Week In Advent

Tuesday

"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." Luke 1:31.

His Choices Are Very Surprising.

Most of us like surprises as long as they are good surprises. God also deals in surprises much of the time. He surprises us all the time with the way He does things and the people through whom He does them.

Moses was an unlikely leader, yet God chose Him to get the job done. Elijah was ready to give up and quit, but God still continued to use him for His purposes. The Apostle Paul was probably the least likely candidate for God to use to reach the world, but that's who He chose.

Many of us can recall a television show called "Candid Camera." The show started with a jingle that said, "When you least expect it, you're elected. You're the star today. Smile. You're on candid camera."

How amazing it is that when it comes to selecting someone through whom The Savior would come into the world, God chose Mary. She was a humble follower of God. She was working class, never went to college, never had a big bank account, a big house or big important position in life. Yet God chose her to bear His Son.

When the angel told her what would happen, she responded by simply saying, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." That's the kind of trusting humility God loves to see in us and it's that kind of trust and humility that allows Him to do His best work through us. During this Advent season, let's pray for more humility so we can better serve Him and others around us, sharing The Light of Christmas with them.

*"Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me,
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me."*

First Week In Advent

Wednesday

“It was about time for Jesus to be taken up into heaven. He turned toward Jerusalem and was sure that nothing would stop Him from going.” Luke 9:51.

The Walk From Bethlehem To Heaven!

Today’s Living Bible puts Luke 9:51 in the following way. *“As the time drew near for his return to heaven, he moved steadily onward toward Jerusalem with an iron will.”*

It’s clear that nothing would stop Jesus from going those 5.2 miles from Bethlehem to Jerusalem and the reason was you. There in Jerusalem on The Cross, He would accomplish what He came at Bethlehem to do for you and me. There He would give us the greatest Christmas gift we could ever desire to receive. There He would exchange His Life for ours. There He would secure our place in Heaven forever!

If asked, most of us could come up with what we felt was the best and greatest Christmas gift we were ever given. Whatever yours or mine was, it certainly pales in comparison to being given the gift of eternal life. That really is the best Christmas gift we’ve ever been given and nothing, absolutely nothing, can take that away from us as we follow and serve Jesus in our lives.

In II Corinthians 9:15, the Apostle Paul calls Jesus, God’s “inexpressible gift” to us. What that means is that Paul was unable to come up with words that fully and adequately express how tremendous a Christmas gift Jesus is to us.

This year when you are unwrapping your gifts, never forget that the best gift you ever received on Christmas was Jesus Himself, come from Heaven, just for you.

He was born in Bethlehem and 33 years later and just 5.2 miles away from The Manger, He gave His Life at Jerusalem, so you and I could be born again and have lives forever changed by that *Wondrous Love of Christ* which He offers to us.

“Yet in thy dark streets shineth, the everlasting Light.”

First Week In Advent

Thursday

"Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son," II John 3.

Amazing Grace And Mercy Mild.

A good definition of the word "grace" is "unmerited favor." In other words, grace is when you get favor or blessing or benefits that you never deserved or in any way earned.

Jesus' coming to this earth is pure grace. We can never say we deserved it, nor can we say we've earned it. It would be foolish to act as if God could ever owe us anything and that He could actually in any way, be in our debt.

So coming here to save our souls from the punishment of Hell was a pure gift of loving grace, which none of us deserves, but which all of us can receive.

On the other hand, there is another important theological word connected with Advent and Christmas. That word is "mercy." If grace is being given something we don't deserve, "mercy" is NOT getting something we DO deserve. How great it is when you get spared or saved from something horrible that you actually do deserve.

Jesus came at Christmas to wind up on The Cross on Good Friday. Therefore, in His grace, He gave us something we don't deserve, which is the opportunity to go to Heaven. However, it was through His mercy that while on The Cross, He took the punishment for our sins onto Himself, so we don't get what we DO deserve. Instead, in His mercy, He took the punishment we DO deserve onto Himself and off of us.

I call that "Amazing Grace and Mercy Mild!" Without both we are lost. However, with His grace and mercy, we are saved and eternal life can be ours. Praise be to God for His coming at Christmas to offer us His saving amazing grace and mercy mild.

*"Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"*

First Week In Advent

Friday

“O Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are but a small Judean village, yet you will be the birthplace of my King who is alive from everlasting ages past!” Micah 5:2.

Bread Of Heaven.

The word “Bethlehem” means “house of bread.” Today bread is still perhaps the most common staple of life around the world. A person can live on bread for a long time, even if they have nothing else. Bread nourishes our bodies and provides for us. When the people were wandering in The Wilderness for 40 years due to their disobedience of God, He nonetheless sustained them with “manna” or bread from Heaven. It literally saved their lives every day.

Jesus, Who said He had come down from Heaven also said, “I am the bread of life.” Indeed, He is all we have to have to feed and nourish our souls and our lives. He came down from Heaven to be here for us and He was born in a place literally named “House of Bread.”

All of us are hungry for spiritual growth and renewal. However, we are lured in by so much “spiritual junk food” these days which isn’t good for us and which can cause us to be seriously “spiritually malnourished.”

It’s the “Bread of Heaven” that we have to have. When we feed on Him, we are filled and satisfied as nothing else can do. It’s from Him that we receive abundant life.

Perhaps you’ll be baking some Christmas bread this year or eating some bread at your Christmas meal. When you do, never forget Bethlehem and The Bread of Life Who was born there just for you and me.

*“Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven,
Feed me till I want no more;
Feed me till I want no more.”*

First Week In Advent

Saturday

“For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” Matthew 3:3.

Getting Prepared For A Visit.

Whenever someone special is coming to visit you, it's quite likely you will take the time to make specific preparations for their arrival. If the President was going to visit your home, my guess is that you'd spend days, even weeks getting ready and prepared.

Jesus came across the light years of time to be born in a little village called Bethlehem. Yet few people actually prepared for His coming.

The Old Testament Prophets were chosen by God to share the message that The Messiah would one day come as promised. God shared the promise of His Son's coming for hundreds of years before it actually happened. He was trying to get His people to prepare and get ready, but so many of them missed His coming and His message. In so doing, they missed The Messiah Himself when in fact He did come.

You have to wonder how much of The Messiah's message we miss today, because we've done too little preparation for His coming into our lives. Perhaps we've never actually read The Bible from cover to cover. Perhaps we are just skating by without putting much effort in the practice of our faith and are therefore missing so much of what God has waiting for us.

God made great preparations for His Son's coming to us. Scores of specific Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus' coming at Bethlehem.

As we all prepare for Christmas, perhaps it would be good to ask how prepared we are to receive Christ into our lives, our homes and our families. The more prepared we are, the more He can use us, bless us and live through us.

*“How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is giv'n;
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His Heav'n.
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.”*

Second Sunday In Advent:

The Candle Of Peace

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6.

The Prince Of Peace.

Jesus is called “The Prince of Peace.” As one person once said, “Real peace is much more than the absence of conflict.” Jesus said that He would give us “His peace” which He said, is very different than whatever kind of peace the world can offer us. Paul talks about the peace which “passes all understanding.” Jesus stood up in the boat in a raging storm and said, “Peace! Be still!” and the waves and the wind calmed right down.

In this world in which we live, it all too often seems as though the wind and waves are just slamming us and doing their best to sink us. We have to have that peace of Christ which only He can give us, as He lives right inside us through His Holy Spirit.

Peace is also mentioned in Scripture as one of the nine Fruits of The Holy Spirit. It’s surely something we all have to have and it’s something Jesus is happy to give us if we let Him do it. Yet, if we’re honest, all too often we tend to focus more on the wind and waves, than on His Voice calling us to be still and trust Him.

This Advent would be a good time for us to pray for His peace to be more present in our lives and to trust that when we ask for it, He lovingly will give it and we can then watch it move out of the way, so much of the other junk in our lives.

*“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”*

Second Week In Advent

Monday

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.” John 1:14.

Of The Father’s Love Begotten.

For Christians, that word “begotten” is really important. Jesus is called the only “Begotten” son of The Father. That means He’s more than God’s *only* Son. He’s God’s only “Begotten” Son. That word is important because it tells us something very important about Jesus. He was “begotten” as opposed to “made” or “created.”

In the Greek there are two different words for “made” and “begotten.” The word in John 1:14 is the Greek word “protoktistos” which means “begotten.” As I said, that’s important because Jesus was “begotten” as opposed to “made.” When you beget something you beget something that is of the exact same thing and kind as yourself. People beget people. Dogs beget dogs. Rabbits beget other rabbits. Therefore, as it’s been said, what God “begets” is God and what God “makes” or “creates” is not God.

Therefore God’s begotten Son is God, because one is the father of what one begets. On the other hand the world and all of us and all the animals were all created or made by God. Even though we were made in His Image, we are still not God, because we are not begotten. A father begets a son or daughter. Yet he makes a chair or table which is clearly different than himself.

It was God’s co-eternal, everlasting Begotten Son Who came to this earth to save us. He was fully human and fully God. None of us can make that claim and it’s only the Begotten Son of God Who can do what He did to get us saved.

Words do make a difference and the difference in this case is of eternal significance to us and our salvation. As we prepare for Christmas, we prepare for the birth of God’s only Begotten Son, come to save us and live right inside us by His Holy Spirit.

*“Of the Father’s love begotten, ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega, He the source, the ending He,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see, evermore and evermore!”*

Second Week In Advent

Tuesday

*“Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’”
Luke 1:38.*

Attitude Matters.

Our attitude toward what God tells us matters a lot in His being able to work through us. When we trust that He will do as He says, we open doors for Him to work that otherwise might remain closed. The contrast between Mary and Zechariah, John the Baptist’s father, shows this clearly.

When Zechariah was in the temple, the angel Gabriel told him that his prayers had been heard by God and that his wife Elizabeth, would conceive and give birth to a son who would be John the Baptist. His response was basically, “I’m an old man, how in the world could that ever happen?” His attitude showed a lack of trust in God and for that attitude he was punished and made unable to speak until John was born. Then the first words he said were to proclaim John’s name just as the angel Gabriel had prophesied.

However, when the same angel Gabriel visited Mary and told her she would conceive and bear The Messiah, her attitude was one of great faith and trust in what God said He would do. She said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word.”

God has told and promised us many things as His children. Yet so often, like Thomas, we doubt Him. We lack trust and faith. When we do that, we close doors God would rather walk through into our lives.

This Advent season we can pray and ask God to give us more faith, faith like Mary had, to trust God implicitly, in ways that open doors for Him to live in us, work through us and touch the lives of others with His Grace.

*“O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem.”*

Second Week In Advent

Wednesday

“ . . . the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:28.

Both A King and A Servant.

Kings are people who have servants. People serve their kings, as opposed to kings serving their people. Yet Jesus, Who is The King of Kings and Lord of Lords, came to this earth to serve us. How incredible that fact is and it's something we often forget during Christmas. He is the "Servant King."

The words "servant" and "king" are normally seen as opposites. Yet Jesus said He came "not to be served, but to serve." Talk about amazing grace and love. The King of Kings came to this earth to serve you and me. It's difficult to fathom that kind of love.

He could have come in power and taken over the world and could have set up Israel and God's people as kings and rulers of the earth. Instead He came to a lowly manger and grew up like you and me and went to The Cross where He would give His life to save us all from Satan's power.

A study was done that shows that in the corporate world, the most effective leaders and CEO's and managers are those who relate to their employees and actually encourage and serve them, even though they hold a much higher position.

During Christmas we can get caught up in all the glitz and gifts and lots of other things, but Jesus is calling us to imitate Him and serve others with the gifts He's given us. Ask The Lord in your prayers today to show you how you can be a better servant to others around you. He's waiting to use you to share His Love with others in ways you may never have felt possible before.

"King of kings, and Lord of Lords.

King of kings, and Lord of lords,

And He shall reign forever and ever.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

Second Week In Advent

Thursday

"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:29b.

The Antidote For Sin.

Sin is a poison. It destroys our relationship with God and with each other. It's poison to our soul. It will eternally destroy our soul unless the proper antidote is applied in our lives. Whenever a person is bitten by a poisonous snake, the first thing that has to be found is an anti-venom, or the antidote which is the cure that will save the person's life. The person who is bitten can never produce this antidote themselves. It has to be given to them by someone else. I doubt many people would reject the appropriate antidote after being bitten by a snake.

Yet, today we see tens of thousands of people rejecting Christ and His Love for them every day, even though His Love is the antidote for the consequences of their sin. They can't produce the antidote themselves. It too has to be given to them. They have to receive it or they will be lost for eternity.

Many are blind to the fact that sin has bitten them in the first place and that its consequences are so devastating. That's why Jesus calls us to tell others about what He's done for us, allowing them to see how our lives have been changed by Him. As Christians, we are aware of the poison of sin and we are also aware of "The Antidote" and His Name is Jesus. If a friend or family member, or even a complete stranger, were to be bitten by a snake and you had the antidote, would you keep that antidote from them? Of course you wouldn't. So why is it, do you suppose, that all too often we see sin bitten people right in front of us and we choose to keep quiet about "The Antidote?"

During this Advent season we should all pray that Jesus will give us the courage and desire to speak lovingly with others about what He's done for us and how He's healed our lives of the poison of sin. That's The Good News He's asked us to share with others, both at Christmas and all through the year.

*"What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus."*

Second Week In Advent

Friday

"I don't reject God's kindness. If we receive God's approval by obeying the laws in the Scriptures, then Christ's death was pointless." Gal. 2:21.

Doing Good Works For All The Wrong Reasons.

While on earth we see that Jesus did many miracles and good works. He told us to do good works too, because those works glorify and point to God and His Love for us.

Yet all too often we get things mixed up. We feel that if we do enough good works, we'll please God and those works will be counted up or credited to us, so that one day we will have enough points to get into Heaven. However, if that is accurate and enough good works can get us into Heaven, why did Jesus go to The Cross? It seems that God The Father would be a pretty horrible Father to send His Son to The Cross if there was another way to get our sins paid for and off of our soul. The VOICE version of The Bible puts it pretty plainly. *"I can't dismiss God's grace, and I won't. If being right with God depends on how we measure up to the law, then the Anointed's sacrifice on the cross was the most tragic waste in all of history!"*

As Christians we are indeed commanded by God to do good works in this world and to do them in ways that serve and bless others. However, the difference is that we do good works **in thanks for being saved by Jesus**, as opposed to doing them **to get Jesus to save us**.

For the sake of argument, let's say that if you simply walked around the block one time for every sin you committed in your life, your sins would be wiped clean and you could go to Heaven. Do you have enough time to be able to do that? Of course not. We can't walk our way, or work our way to Heaven. The only way we are going to Heaven is because Jesus came down from Heaven at Christmas and did what was necessary to pay for our sins and secure us a place in Heaven. It's His Blood that saves us; nothing less, nothing more and nothing else!

He came at Christmas to do what was necessary to save us. All we have to do is accept it and live like it is real and oh the changes we will see in our lives. It really is that simple. Give it try and watch what God can do.

"For my cleansing this my plea, Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

Second Week In Advent

Saturday

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience,¹³ forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Col. 3:12-14.

“Must” Is An Important Word.

Here is a statement I’ve found to be very accurate. “Most of us are far more willing to receive forgiveness from others, than we are to give forgiveness to others.” That is completely natural because we are all fallen human beings who all too often, react with judgment rather than grace and mercy. We can be stingy about giving forgiveness to others.

Christmas is about a lot of things, but forgiveness may be the most critical and central theme of all. Jesus came here to make our forgiveness possible so that we could have our sin removed from us and thereby be made eligible for Heaven.

He was a great teacher. He did do miracles. He did heal people. He did give us great examples of how to treat and serve one another in this life. However, if He never made our forgiveness possible, all those other things mean very little in the long run.

He also told us in Col. 3 that we “*must*” forgive others in the very same way He has forgiven us. Notice that is a “command” as opposed to something that’s up for a vote. Forgiving others is certainly good for them, but it’s also really good for us. The more we harbor anger and hate toward someone, the more it can eat us up, long after they have forgotten whatever they did it to us. Sometimes forgiving someone, even when they don’t deserve it and aren’t repentant, is exactly what will bring new life to us. Yet, we’ll never experience that until we do it. Perhaps there is someone you should forgive who would be blessed to hear you have done so. Even more important, perhaps there is something you should forgive and let go of, even though the person who did it to you could care less. We can actually forgive them and give the rest to God to handle. It actually works! Go ahead and give it a try.

“O Holy night, the stars are brightly shining. It is the night of our dear Savior's birth. Long lay the world in sin and error pining. 'Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth.”

Third Sunday in Advent.

The Candle of Joy

“ Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy. . . .” Luke 2:10.

Joy To The World, The Lord Is Come!

The third candle in our advent wreath represents joy. Oh how we have to have more joy in this world of ours. Like love, joy is one of the nine Fruits of The Holy Spirit.

Here’s a dictionary definition of joy. "The emotion of great delight or happiness caused by something exceptionally good or satisfying." So joy is an emotion that brings us great feelings of delight and happiness. One has to wonder if there is anything better in the world than Jesus Christ loving us enough to come to this earth and go to The Cross to pay with His life for our sins. That should bring us tremendous joy.

So I would suggest to you that The Fruit of The Spirit of joy, is a divine joy that comes from The Holy Spirit which empowers us, encourages us, and wells up inside of us in a way that others can see. Joy from The Lord is different than joy from the world. As good as joy from the world might be, joy from The Lord is better. In Nehemiah 8:10, we read "*for the joy of the Lord is your strength.*" Every day we can experience the joy of The Lord strengthening us and encouraging us. Joy from God is a unique joy. The world's joy depends on things going well, but the joy of The Lord can be in a person's life even if things and circumstances around us look anything but joyful. His joy is never dependent upon the circumstances of the world.

In the city of London, one can visit Buckingham Palace where the Queen lives. If you look, you may see the British flag flying above it. The only time the flag is flying is when the Queen is in residence. It’s been said that when it comes to the Christian, joy is the flag that flies above the palace of our lives when The King is in residence. Joy is what one can see in us and through us when we have The King of Kings and Lord of Lords residing and living in us. Joy is something that should be visible in our lives as Christians. As someone once said, “If your soul is saved, it should send a message to your face.” This Christmas, let’s let others see the joy on our faces which comes from the joy of our salvation.

“Joy To The World, The Lord Is Come.”

Third Week In Advent

Monday

“Herod called a meeting of all the leading Jewish priests and teachers of the law. He asked them where the Messiah would be born.” Matthew 2:4.

One King vs. Another!

When King Herod heard that Jesus was born and was prophesied to be a king, he was insanely jealous. Because he was unable to determine exactly when and where this “new king” was born, he actually ordered that all male children under the age of 2 be executed so that he would be sure to eliminate the threat of this so called “new king.”

It is amazing how a powerful king was threatened by this tiny Baby born in a manger. Yet if we are honest, we will admit that Jesus still threatens us today as well. He threatens to change our sinful ways and cause us to live in a manner that is different than we would choose on our own. In fact, if we take him seriously, He could completely turn our world upside down.

However, if our world is already upside down due to sin, what Jesus actually does is turn it right side up and gets us on a path to healing and new life. Herod could have received Jesus as a welcome Gift, but he chose to see The Messiah as a threat.

I wonder how often we do that. I wonder how often we see Jesus more as a threat than our Righteous King come to save and change our lives for the better.

As one person once said, “It’s always good to periodically check our lives to see which of our ‘kingdoms’ we have yet to turn over to His Kingly rule.” Perhaps we are protecting the “kingdom” of our family, or our finances or our reputation or our business or any number of other “kingdoms” we prefer to rule ourselves. There is only one way to win the war on sin. That way is to surrender to The King of Kings and Lord of Lords and seriously live a life that shows we fully appreciate and grasp what He’s come to do on our behalf.

*“Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.”*

Third Week In Advent

Tuesday

“Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.” Romans 5:9.

Debt Free Living.

Most folks would like to be able to say they are completely debt free in life. Maybe you are actually debt free from a financial perspective, owing only what you purchase on a regular basis.

However, take a look for a moment at another debt. We all owe it and if we do end up paying it ourselves, it will be a very bad thing. That debt is the penalty we owe for our sins against God. That debt, or penalty, is to spend eternity in Hell paying for our sins. Can we pay that? Of course we can. Yet, spending eternity in Hell paying for my sins isn't something I'm looking forward to doing.

However, if someone who didn't actually owe that debt, because they never sinned, offered to step in and pay it for me, I'd be thrilled and would accept that offer in a minute. Wouldn't you?

Well, that's what Jesus has done. He has stepped up to pay our debt, which He didn't owe and which if we had to pay would cost us our eternal soul. You simply can't get into Heaven with any unpaid sin on your soul and the only way our sins get paid for, is if we pay for them ourselves, or find someone else who is willing to pay for them, someone who doesn't owe that payment for their own sins.

Only someone who doesn't owe anything for their own sins, can offer to pay for someone else's. That's why we call Him our Savior, because He has saved us from the otherwise eternal punishment for our sins. Hallelujah! What a Savior! Perhaps it's time for you to enjoy a debt free life in a whole new way this Christmas and to tell others the Good News about how they can become debt free too.

*“Guilty, vile, and helpless we;
Spotless Lamb of God was He;
'Full atonement!' can it be?
Hallelujah! What a Savior!”*

Third Week In Advent

Wednesday

“Thank God for his Son – his Gift too wonderful for words.” II Cor. 9:15.

The Gift That Unwraps You.

Oh how we look forward to those Christmas gifts and unwrapping them to see what hides behind the nice Christmas wrapping paper. However, sometimes in life we get all wrapped up in things that aren't so pretty and nice. We get wrapped up in doubt and fear and sin. It can cling to us and trip us up and make us feel miserable. We are supposed to be joyful Christians, but all too often we find our joy being stolen. We can become fearful, doubtful and anxious Christians, living as if Jesus never even came in the first place.

So perhaps this Christmas, we should put less emphasis on the all gifts we unwrap and more emphasis on that one special Gift that can unwrap us. Jesus is that Gift.

He can remove the layers of guilt, doubt and fear. He can remove all the negative things that try to wrap us up in life and conform us to their image rather than letting us be conformed more to His image. The VOICE version of The Bible puts it this way. *“Praise God for this incredible, unbelievable, indescribable gift!”*

Paul called Jesus the most “inexpressible gift.” Maybe you never looked at it this way before, but allowing Jesus to remove all the wrappings and trappings that slow us down, trip us up and put us in a daily state of flux and fear, can be the best Christmas gift we ever received.

*“Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight
Glories stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!
Christ, the Saviour is born
Christ, the Saviour is born”*

Third Week In Advent

Thursday

“But to all who received him, he gave the right to become children of God. All they needed to do was to trust him to save them.” John 1:12.

Gifts Are Meant To Be Received.

There is one thing that all real gifts have in common. If the benefit of the gift is to be realized, the gift must be received and applied to one's life. That may seem obvious, but when it comes to the Gift of Christ to us at Christmas, we sometimes fail to avail ourselves of so much of what He came to bring us.

If I told you that I had sent you a million dollars and the package was at the post office waiting for you to pick up, my guess is that you'd get in the car and go down and pick up that gift and use it.

Jesus is the best Christmas Gift ever! Yet so often we fail to avail ourselves of the blessings He came to offer us and which He waits every day to shower upon us. We come up with all kinds of excuses. We feel we're not good enough, or we are unlovable due to our sin. We feel God is much busier doing other things and far too involved in running the world to take time to get involved with our everyday lives.

All of the things I just listed and more, are common excuses for failing to receive much of what Christ actually longs to give us. They are false reasons that have zero merit except in our own estimation. They are utterly false, but as long as we keep feeling they're accurate, we will act accordingly, which means we'll keep our distance from God, and we'll miss so much of what He came at Bethlehem to give us.

It's time for us to take Jesus more at His Word and less according to our misplaced attitudes toward Him. Doing so has forever changed the lives of millions over the years. Maybe today would be a good day for that kind of change in your life too. Jesus is waiting on you. He's knocking. All you have to do is open the door and invite Him in.

*“No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.”*

Third Week In Advent

Friday

“And the angel said to them, “Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; ¹¹for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:10-11.

Miracles! Miracles! Miracles!

Our God is certainly a God of miracles. From the parting of the Red Sea to healing people, to raising His Son on Easter Day, God has shown us His miraculous power time and time again. Christmas is also about miracles. There was the miracle of the way Jesus was conceived by The Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb. There was the miracle of Elizabeth conceiving John The Baptist. There was the special star and the birth in a manger and the angelic hosts proclaiming all that had happened.

Yet, for centuries prior to His birth, God had miraculously blessed and led His people and had promised them The Messiah would come. But perhaps the biggest and greatest miracle of them all took place when Jesus, Who was born at Bethlehem, went to The Cross in Jerusalem to save our very souls. That is the ultimate miracle which came out of Christmas. He could have come here and simply taught us how to live a better life and how to follow Him more closely. Yet He came here to do what was necessary, to endure The Cross, to save our souls and secure a place with Him in Heaven forever!

When you consider it, God did numerous miracles from the first day of creation and all of them were done out of His great Love for us. Yet at Christmas, He sent us His Son, His only Child, so we could all become His children. It was all done so we could be with Him forever and so that lives on this earth could be filled with His Spirit. You’ll never find a love in this life greater than God’s love for you.

*“Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.”*

Third Week In Advent

Saturday

“Not one of the LORD’s faithful promises to the family of Israel was left unfulfilled; every one was realized.” Joshua 21:45.

Promises

We all make promises. However we also all fall short of keeping them. From promising to clean our room as kids, to promising to take our kids to a ball game or to the amusement park, we have all failed to keep promises along the way of life.

However, The Bible tells us that God has faithfully kept every promise He ever made to us. He has never failed to keep a single promise and that is such good news.

He promised to send a Messiah, a Savior, to love us, teach us, save us and fill us with His Spirit. He has kept that promise. It would be awful if we had to wonder about whether God would keep His promises to us.

Yet He’s never broken a single one. Therefore, we can fully trust Him and put our faith in Him to do everything He says He can do and is willing to do for us, in us and through us. He’s promised to encourage us, to answer our prayers, to work through us and to live right inside us to redeem our lives and use them to His glory.

He has promised to use us to love and serve others and to bring them to Him as well. When someone promises us something, we may have doubts and wonder if they will really come through for us. Yet, with God we never have to wonder or worry. He will always come through and always will keep His promises to us.

During this season of Advent, we would do well to step out into each day trusting His promises and standing on them with faith, rather than wondering if He is capable of keeping them. He is capable. He is worthy. He is God! When we approach Him with worry and doubt we diminish what He can do through us.

Yet, when we trust Him to fulfill His promises to us, we open doors for Him to work in us that nothing else will do. I promise you He can be trusted to keep every promise He ever made. His coming here at Christmas clearly proves that and as we live all year through like Christmas people, we will see Him work and move through us.

*“Standing on the promises of Christ my King,
Through eternal ages let His praises ring,
Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing,
Standing on the promises of God.”*

Fourth Sunday In Advent

The Candle of Salvation

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” John 3:16.

“There is no way to be saved from the punishment of sin through anyone else. For there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we can be saved.” Acts 4:12.

The Main Point!

Sometimes when we are listening to someone speak they may say something like, “If you hear nothing else of what I say today, hear this, because it’s the main point!”

Well, here’s one of those moments. If you hear nothing else, hear this.

The main point of Christmas and Jesus coming to this earth is to save our souls from Hell and give us the opportunity to be with Jesus forever in Heaven.

All the other things that Christmas has become, as good as they may be, pale in comparison to the main point of His coming. The two Scriptures above tell it so clearly and simply. The angel Gabriel told Mary that she should name her new baby Jesus. The name Jesus literally means “deliverer” or “one who rescues.” That is His main reason for coming to this earth. He came to deliver and rescue us from the punishment of our sins and from having to go to Hell. He took our punishment onto Himself at Calvary, thereby allowing us to be rescued and saved and *only* He could do it

As John 3:16 makes so clear, all that was done because of God’s great Love for you and me. WOW! I doubt if it can get any better than having God love you so much that He would take your punishment for you and rescue you from Hell. That surely is the Good News of Christmas. For years now we’ve seen buttons, signs and bumper stickers that say, “Keep Christ In Christmas.” They make a great point. Yet, perhaps we should also have some that say, “Keep Salvation In Christmas,” because if we forget the salvation of, the salvaging of, the rescuing of our souls from Hell, we miss the entire point of Christmas itself.

“God rest ye merry, gentlemen Let nothing you dismay

Remember Christ, our Saviour Was born on Christmas Day

To save us all from Satan’s power When we were gone astray.

O tidings of comfort and joy, Comfort and joy O tidings of comfort and joy.”

Fourth Week In Advent

Monday

“Now Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God. He existed before creation began, for it was through him that every thing was made, whether spiritual or material, seen or unseen. . . . It was in him that the full nature of God chose to live, and through him God planned to reconcile in his own person, as it were, everything on earth and everything in Heaven by virtue of the sacrifice of the cross.” Col. 1:15, 19.

If You’ve Seen Jesus. . . .

At some point in our lives most of us have asked the question, “What is God really like?” We hear all kinds of things with regard to what God’s like. Some people tell us He’s an angry God sitting on His throne ready to throw lightning bolts of judgment our way whenever we step out of line. Others tell us He’s sort of like Santa or some nice grandfather type who just loves to spoil us with gifts in spite of whatever we might do. Of course those are both uninformed and incorrect pictures of what God is really like.

Actually, it’s easy to find out what God’s like. All we have to do is look at Jesus. Our Scripture for today clearly tells us that Jesus is the visible expression of the invisible Father. Jesus Himself said, *“If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.” John 14:9*

Jesus is exactly like God in every respect and God is exactly like Jesus in every respect. We can see exactly what God is like by simply looking at Jesus. Everything that Jesus is, clearly shows us what God is like, how He acts and what He expects of us.

As we move closer to Christmas Day, let’s be sure that among the many reasons Jesus came to this earth, the most of which was to save our souls, He also came to show us exactly what our Father in Heaven is like and just how much He loves us. That should make a great difference in our lives every day.

*“Veiled in flesh the Godhead see
Hail the incarnate Deity
Pleased as man with man to dwell
Jesus, our Emmanuel”*

Fourth Week In Advent

Tuesday

“And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. And in that 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 fear. And the angel said to them, “Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:7-12.

Who He Appeared To First Matters.

A central theme we have picked up again and again during this Advent journey, is just how much God loves us. He showed it again when He determined to whom He would first reveal the miracle of Bethlehem and the birth of His Son.

Jesus is God in every respect. He is God come down to this earth to save us. It had all been planned and spoken about for hundreds of years through the Old Testament Prophets and Scriptures. At the time, one might expect that such a history altering announcement might be made in Rome to the ruler of the most powerful empire on earth.

Yet, God chose to reveal this amazing miracle of salvation to a group of blue collar shepherds who were out watching their flocks and doing their job. They were common, non-famous people like you and me. Yet it is to these people that God entrusted The Good News of salvation.

Jesus Himself would later call Himself the “Good Shepherd” and He did that to show that we are His sheep and He loves us and will protect and guide us like a good shepherd does his flock. Then He later would lay down His life for us to save all His sheep from the evil wolf of sin and brokenness.

Who He appeared to first matters. He made that conscious choice. He chose to appear and be born to people like you and me. That’s not to say that the rich and famous are outside His Love and Grace. They are not. But when you consider it, it shows that we, the average people on this earth, are as valuable and loved by God as anyone else. Today you can benefit by hearing once again that His Love really is for you and that He came just for you too.

*“Shepherds, in the fields abiding, Watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with man is now residing, Yonder shines the infant Light;
Come and worship, Come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King!”*

Fourth Week In Advent

Wednesday

"When people who are turning away from God hear about the cross, they say, 'That is foolish!' But for us who are being saved, the cross is the power God uses to save us." I Cor. 1:18.

None Of This Makes Any Sense.

When you look at how God does things, sometimes it makes very little sense to us. If we had the responsibility of saving the world we probably would have done it in a totally different way and our way would have failed. We humans often feel we are pretty smart and we like to feel we have a lot of wisdom.

However, our best wisdom is really foolishness compared to the wisdom of God. The Apostle Paul said, *"The foolishness of God is wiser than men. . . ."* I Cor. 1:25a.

What that means is that the greatest wisdom we may ever possess, is like foolishness compared with God's wisdom and His so called "foolishness" is wiser than anything we could come up with in our lives.

Simply put, God's plan to save our souls, which started at Bethlehem, made very little sense to the world. Sending His own Son to give His life for us and save us isn't something that we'd deem as very smart on His part. People in Jesus' day even called it foolish. But Paul says that he'll take the "foolishness of God" to get him to Heaven.

Actually lots of people have their own plan to get to Heaven and it doesn't necessarily involve anything about Jesus. They feel that if they just do their best, try to keep the laws of The Bible and never really do anything too bad, they will get in. However, that is completely false and a doomed and very dangerous plan to adopt.

The only way we're getting to Heaven is to accept what Jesus came here to do on our behalf when He ended up on The Cross to take the punishment for our sins off of us and onto Himself.

Foolish as it may appear, it's the only plan that actually works and it's the one He's told us to gladly accept so we can be with Him. I'm for God's so called "foolishness" and I trust you are too.

*"Sages, leave your contemplations, Brighter visions beam afar;
Seek the great desire of nations, Ye have seen His natal star;
Come and worship, Come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King!"*

Fourth Week In Advent

Thursday

“Even if my father and mother abandon me, the LORD will hold me close.” Psalm 27:10.

God Will Never Reject You.

We all like to be accepted and approved of in this life. However, just about everyone on earth has felt what it means to be rejected. Some have experienced a great deal of rejection and for reasons that were never their fault. They've been bullied and pushed to the side in many and various ways. Some have been told and made to feel that they are worthless. That of course is a lie, but if you are told it enough times and treated as if it's accurate, it can become a self fulfilling prophesy in your life and you actually will live as if it's a fact, even when it's not!

There are tens of thousands of people today living a broken and defeated life, because they have been lied to about who they really are in this life. I would never downplay for a moment how serious this is in people's lives and how difficult a cycle it is to break, but Jesus came to break it. He came to give us His Love and the very fact that He gave His Life to save us, shows how very much He values and loves us and how very much we mean to Him. We are His children. Nothing less!

He calls out to each one of us today and says He loves us and says He will never forsake us and He never rejects those who put their faith in Him. In fact, those who put their faith in Him, will be blessed by Him, loved by Him and given their very value in life by Him.

There's an old saying which says, "You are what you eat." Well when it comes to who we are in this life, who we are is often defined by what we "eat" so to speak. That is what we take into ourselves, about ourselves, often defines who we are. If we buy into the lies of bullies and those who don't love us, we can become what they say we are. However, if we buy into who Jesus says we are, our whole life and our whole perspective on life, can change and we can be set free from the lies of the world, living instead, in the grace of His Love for us.

*“And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow,
Look now! for glad and golden hours
come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing!”*

Fourth Week In Advent

Friday

"I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."
Matthew 3:11.

The Moment John The Baptist and Jesus First Met.

In John 1:29 we read that one day John The Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and he said, *"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* If you pick up and read The Gospel of John, and haven't read any of the other Gospels, you might conclude that this is the first time Jesus and John ever met. However, since they were cousins and since their mothers, Mary and Elizabeth, were pregnant with them at the same time, they probably played together and grew up together as cousins do.

However, the first meeting between John and Jesus happened years before what we read in John. It took place when Mary had gone to visit Elizabeth, when they were both pregnant. We hear about that meeting in Luke 1. When Mary reached Elizabeth's house she greeted her and something pretty amazing happened. Elizabeth put it plainly when she said to Mary. *"For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy."* Luke 1:44.

We are told that John leaped in Elizabeth's womb and it wasn't a normal in utero movement of a baby. She specifically says he "leaped for joy." What that means is that John was leaping for joy in the presence of the Messiah and somehow was aware of Him being there. Simply being in Jesus' presence caused this joyful leap by John.

I once heard a very strict and conservative Christian man say that he was out in a large field on his tractor one day all by himself. In all the years he'd been a Christian he had never really experienced much joy. However, as he was out there all by himself, he said that all of sudden it hit him just how much God loved him and what Christ had done for Him. He said he was immediately filled with joy and hopped down off his tractor and just danced in circles being joyful at how much he was loved by Jesus.

Christmas is about Jesus loving us that much. It's about us being in His presence and experiencing a joy that nothing else can bring. Maybe today is a day when that kind of joy would be welcome in your life. He's already here. He loves to live right inside us. He loves it when we receive His joy. Joy to the world, The Lord is come!

"Go tell it on the mountain, Over the hills and everywhere. Go tell it on the mountain

That Jesus Christ is born."

Fourth Week In Advent

Saturday: Christmas Eve

“He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them – both men and women – back to Jerusalem in chains.” Acts 9:2.

Choosing The Right Way.

We read in Acts 9:2 that the first Christians were called people of “the Way.” Jesus called Himself “The Way” because He had come to be our “Way” to Heaven. He said that no one gets to Heaven except through Him and what He would do on The Cross to make that possible. In the Scripture above from Acts 9:2 the “He” mentioned there is the Apostle Paul, then named Saul. He hated Christians and was on his way to Damascus to literally hunt down and find Christians, or followers of “the Way” and drag them back to Jerusalem in chains. He was asking the Chief Priest for letters of authorization to take to the synagogues in Damascus allowing him to do just that.

However, on his way to Damascus, Jesus appeared to Paul and Paul’s hate for Christians changed in a moment as he experienced the presence of Christ Himself. His whole life was changed. He became one of the greatest preachers and teachers and evangelists for Christ who ever lived. He chose to submit his “way” to “The Way.”

The very “Way” he was going to persecute and destroy, became the “Way” he chose to accept and follow. Jesus is still the only “Way” to Heaven. He came to bring us salvation, to save our very souls, to give us the most precious Christmas gift ever.

When it comes down to it, we all have to choose which “way” we’ll follow to get to Heaven. Jesus said we can only be forgiven and made fit for Heaven through Him.

There are plenty of other “ways” out there that people put their faith in all the time. However, as I’ve said to many, whatever “way” you chose to get you to Heaven, it better work, because the consequences of getting that choice wrong are ETERNAL!

I trust you will have a blessed Christmas and perhaps more than ever, rejoice in the fact that God loves you so much. You mean the world to Him and He gave everything He had to save you and make a place in Heaven just for you. Praise God!

*“Joy to the world! the Savior reigns Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy”*

HAVE A BLESSED CHRISTMAS DAY!



In the
beginning was
The Word, and the Word
was with God, and the Word was
God. He was in the beginning with God;
all things were made through him, and without him
was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and
the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the
darkness has not overcome it. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt
among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only
Son from the Father. (John bore witness to him, and cried, "This was He of whom I
said, "He who comes after me ranks before me, for He was before me."" . . . No one comes
to the Father
except through me."
He has risen,
just as He said He would!