

## Welcome to the NKUMC 2010 Advent Devotional Booklet

Advent is here and once again we anticipate the second coming of Christ. This has been the hope of faithful believers for over 2000 years. As we remember Jesus birth, we open our hearts to welcome and celebrate all that is represented in the presence of God among us. We remember the forgiveness available to each one of us through the grace of God. We remember God's justice for all people and the planet. Finally, we remember the covenant begun with Abraham and extended through Noah, Moses, and David; and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Members of the congregation have prepared this Advent devotional with the hope that we might journey together, and grow deeper in relationship with each other and with Christ our Savior. May God bless each of these persons who have written a reflection and may God bless each reflection to our understanding.

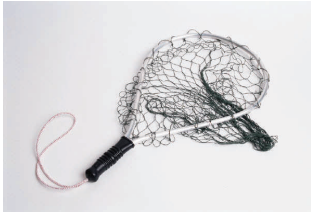


Grace and peace,  
Pastor Lori  
2010



December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010  
Matthew 13:47-52

This is The Parable of the Net. It likens the Kingdom of Heaven to a net cast into the sea. When it is pulled up, there are "good" fish and "bad" fish caught in it. The good fish are collected in baskets; the bad fish are thrown away. But who makes the decision? Jesus tells us that at the end of the age, the angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous. Jesus emphasizes that it is The Lord who will make that final decision and that we (man) should not try and make that decision now. It is not our place to judge others, only The Lord, can make the final judgment on all of us. Are our lives that of "good" fish, or of "bad"? Will we be put in the basket of God's love in His eternal Kingdom, or will we be thrown back, never to know the Love of God. Something to think about and pray upon as we await the coming of our Lord and Savior!



May the Grace of God always surround you and yours,

Steve Brooks.

• • •

December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010  
Matthew 24:36-44

*<sup>36</sup>No one knows the day or hour. The angels in heaven don't know, and the Son himself doesn't know. <sup>42-44</sup> So stay awake, alert. You have no idea what day your Master will show up. But you do know this: You know that if the homeowner had known what time of night the burglar would arrive, he would have been there with his dogs to prevent the break-in. Be vigilant just like that. You have no idea when the Son of Man is going to show up. (The Message by Eugene Peterson)*



These scriptures can be interpreted in several ways and the Monday Night Bible Study discussed them all. Taken in the spirit of the Advent season the message is one of watchfulness. To live awake to the coming of the spirit of Christ is to live in the Advent season. To live vigilant in the manner of Christ is to live as a ready disciple of Christ. Thinking of Christ showing up when I least expect Him makes me more aware of how to live in His light at all times. The Advent light calls us to live in patience and harmony, in love and peace with all people in the world. We live in the light of hope at all times. These scriptures make me more aware of how I need to always be a witness to Christ's love in His world and that helps me be vigilant to how I relate to others. During this Advent season let us be on our guard to how we live in the light. Let us be ready.

Dear Lord,  
We pray that we will be ready for you when you come. We pray that we will witness to your world as disciples of hope, peace, joy and love. Help us to live in your light and to make your light stronger by the way we live. Amen

Respectfully Submitted by Paula J. Martasian

• • •

December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010  
Isaiah 2: 1 – 5

The advent message for us in these scriptures is one of justice, peace and light.

The Lord's house is going to be established as the highest law of the land. The Lord's House is a reference to the temple and to Jesus who became the temple; the house in which God dwells. Jerusalem's mountain is the highest mountain meaning the highest God, who is above all others.

<sup>4</sup>He will settle arguments between nations.

This scripture refers to God's law, the mercy, the justice that is coming is the foreshadowing of the coming of Jesus and Christianity that is coming out of the temple of Jerusalem.

They will pound their swords and their spears into rakes and shovels; they will never make war or attack one another.

In this passage we are given the message of peace; a type of lasting peace.



<sup>5</sup>People of Israel, let's live by the light of the LORD.

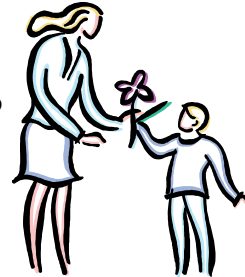
People are called to live in the light meaning to live in Jesus. The peace that Jesus brings us is one that is everlasting and forever. The light of the Lord is enlightenment. In this advent season we are called to be people of justice, peace and light.

Respectfully submitted by The Monday Night Bible Study  
Herb, Brian, Ellie, Carolyn and Paula



December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15: 12-20

Sometimes I wonder what God is up to in my life. When I was a pre-schooler, my mother was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. So, at a very young age, I was separated from her and lived with my father alone. For awhile -- thank God -- we had a very nice maid who took care of my sisters and myself like a mother. About a year and a half after my parents got divorced, my father met and married a very nice lady at work who later became my very-loving step mother. I had a pretty happy childhood, but always worried about, and prayed for, my mother who was given the best medication at the time and went to live with her mother. Many years passed without me ever seeing my mother. Once, when I was nineteen, I went to see her and my grandmother in Norfolk, VA where they lived. It was a sad and a happy occasion all at once. We were happy to see each other and spend some time together, but we both knew that it was a temporary reunion. On that occasion, I was very happy to learn that she was devoted to her Christian Faith and that she did read her Bible. Our contact after that visit was very sporadic, strained, and brief because I did not know how to deal with it all.



Many years passed before I got the fateful phone call from my father that my

mother had passed away in her apartment alone. I was very heavily burdened with grief and guilt for not having loved my mother more. I went to bed early that night extremely depressed. About four hours after I went to sleep, I perceived my mother's spirit, or her guardian angel, floating above my bed, and the message was given to me, "It's alright, I'm in a better place."

Within a twelve hour period of time, I had one of the worst and one of the best experiences of my life. I learned the pain of death, and the joy of Christian resurrection into a better life with Christ. I firmly believe:

- *Rom 8:28* "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." , and  
*Rom 8:11* "The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as he raised Christ from the dead, he will give life to your mortal body by this same Spirit living within you."

Herb Payan

• • •

December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
John 6:57-63

This story takes place after Jesus fed the five thousand from five barley loaves and two fish. No ordinary man could have fed the crowds from so little, but Jesus did it as representation that we don't so much need the physical food as we need the nourishment of His words sent from God through Him. Although Jesus used the words "blood" and "body" He was saying that we need to take on His life to become connected to God and live our Christianity in the world. So even as Jesus was in ministry He was preparing us for the words that He gave us in the Last Supper that became the liturgy of our Communion service. The important part of our Christian walk is to commune with Christ through the Holy Spirit and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us in all that we do.



Heavenly Father, we pray that in this Advent Season we would walk with you, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide in the work you would have us do throughout our families, our church and our community. Amen

Ruth Sperry

• • •

December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
Mark 10:13-16

Mark is typically abrupt and full of action verbs in this well known passage. Those of us of a certain age will hear the line, ‘Suffer the Little Children to Come Unto Me.’ We all know that children were an undervalued commodity in Biblical times. We all know that Christ was busy ushering in a sea change in social culture at this time. He was literally turning people away from the use of brute force to organize society and turning them towards the service of love to do so.



All that makes it easy for us to take the well worn path to the conclusion that we should all be nice to cherubic little kids. But if you do that you miss Jesus’ real point in rebuking his Disciples. What he is really saying is that if you cannot understand the Kingdom of God with the openness and innocent wonder of a first-time believer you will not be able to enter it.

We live in a world where many people hide behind a bulwark of cynicism. They make believe they don’t believe anything, thinking that will protect them from ridicule or disappointment. It’s a mistake made by those who worry about how others view them more than they worry about the opinion of God Almighty.

Don’t take that bait and you’ll avoid that trap.

Prayer: Lord God, our maker and master, please give us the vision and wisdom we need to see past earthly things. Having bestowed that gift upon us, please then give us the strength we will need to follow that vision. Amen.

Mark Zaccaria

• • •

December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
Luke 12:35-37 and Luke 12: 43-44

When we are growing up, if we are lucky, we have parents who work to teach us to travel in honorable directions. They first teach us the right way to behave when we are young so that doing the right things in life come naturally later. Now, of course, there is some level of “coercion” in the younger days. I fall short of using the term “threats”, but perhaps threats in some manner are the words to use after all.

If the only reason we choose appropriate actions and behaviors is the fear of retribution if we don't, perhaps as young children that's not such a problem. After all, if learning from the consequences of one's wrong actions leads to being "grounded for the day," there is a lesson well learned if the grounding is meaningful to the child and the understanding of why and where he/she went wrong is present. Thus the lesson learned is to do the right thing not only to avoid punishment but because it's the right thing to do.



In these passages, we are given the message to be ever-ready in maintaining the correct actions that we as adults have now understood to do. We "keep our lamps" burning and "function as the faithful manager" because we have been given explicit instruction about what and what not to do. We try to live our lives so that at any time, God can see that we not only understand what is right and true to do, but that we believe wholeheartedly in that process.

Are we always as faithful and true to our principles as we would hope? I leave that answer to the readers of this devotional booklet. It's comforting to understand from our faith that failures might occur, but, with repentance and our continued efforts, God will find us worthy.

Ruth Zaccaria



December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
Psalm 27:5-11



This is a beautiful psalm.

We learn that the psalmist has been kept safe in his time of peril and desires a relationship with God. The words of the psalmist contain both prayer and praise for God. The psalmist does not pray for a favor or indulgence, but asks God to inform him as to the path in which he should walk.

This psalm teaches us an important lesson, if we want God to hear our voice, we must respond to his voice.

Charlie Seekell



December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
Matthew 3:1-12

This passage, from the Gospel of Matthew, tells the very familiar story of John the Baptist. To those who sought him out in the wilderness, and confessed their sins, he offered baptism by water. He also preached to them of the coming of Jesus Christ. To those of the time, of course, this event was still in the future and his larger message may have seemed a bit strange to some and perhaps threatening to others. The time of the Old Testament was the time of laws. Judaic laws told the Jewish people what to do/eat, what not to do/eat etc. and there were rituals to cleanse themselves if they sinned. But as John Wesley wrote in his "Notes on the Bible," "Repentance is of two sorts; that which is termed legal, and that which is styled evangelical repentance. The former (which is the same that is spoken of here) is a thorough conviction of sin. The latter is a change of heart (and consequently of life) from all sin to all holiness." Understanding this difference offers us a clear lesson in what true repentance means.



For us today, the events that John foretold are well known history. We celebrate the birth of Christ during each Advent season. We know He died for our sins. But that doesn't mean we aren't subject to the same human doubts, darkness, confusion, and questioning as those who went before us. Try as we might, we can't rely on legal repentance and "earn" our way out of sin. But we can experience evangelical repentance by turning away from sin and embracing the grace of our Savior Jesus Christ...if we only "Let go, and Let God."

Jay Hickey



December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
Colossians 1:11-20

"The hope that is laid up for you in heaven" (1:5). It seems to be a condition of human life that the afterlife has to be a huge mystery. Jesus uttered a daring and hope-filled revelation about a home for us in heaven. No one can document it. It still has to be a mystery. But it is an essential part of our faith. Paul begins with that hope, here.



“That you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (1:9). We can actually know God’s will, or at least some part of it. That also is a stunning revelation. Jesus and the Spirit endeavor to uplift our understanding, and help us see a glimpse of God’s will for our lives. Wisdom also implies character; the Spirit changes our character.

“May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power” (1:11). Knowing God, feeling confident about God’s guidance, brings joy, and joy gives strength. The strength of Jesus is inseparable from his joy and his love.

“In him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible” (1:16). Along with John 1:3; Heb 1:2; and 1 Cor 8:6, this is one of the passages that says God actually created the world “through” or “in” Jesus. He has known all along that he would have a human race to tend to, like a farmer knowing that the seed he sowed would turn into crops. The seed Jesus sowed were “the worlds” (Hebrews 1:2).

“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (1:19)—even before he came to earth! But more important for us is the fact that he came and lived a human life, so human life has been touched by God, from the inside.

Stephen Finlan



December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
Isaiah Chapter 11, vs. 1-10

The king that rules Israel for 40 years had corrupt priests and officials that made unfair laws and levied heavy taxes on the poor and the needy, and they robbed widows & orphans.

The Lord allowed the Assyrian Army to capture the country and took the population back home as prisoners and slaves to punish the Jews for bowing to other Gods, and doing immoral acts.

Isaiah's message was given by the Lord to let all the people know a descendent from David's family is coming to give understanding, wisdom and insight to all the people being punished.

Isaiah's message tells of a day when all races on earth and all the religions, Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Buddhist, etc. with live together in peace.



This was his message of hope for the world if everyone turned back to God and served him as their Lord.

This is still the message we must follow during this advent season of hope.

Peace on Earth and Good Will to All. AMEN

Oscar DerManouelian



December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010

Psalm 72: 1-7, 18-19

This psalm was no doubt originally written with the kings of Israel in mind, describing both the duties expected of those kings, and also the trust that was given to those kings. It describes the great blessings that would be reaped when those kings acted in accordance with the judgments of the Lord God, and how the kings could lift up the poor and the needy.



And, like many of the writings of the Old Testament, these words seem to foreshadow the coming of Jesus, a king of a new kind, who would also bring blessings to all mankind. Jesus, a man who did wonderful things, and whose example has inspired many to follow him, and continue his work, bringing justice to mankind, justice that falls ‘like showers that water the earth,’ and bringing peace to mankind, peace that will last ‘so long as the moon endureth.’

There is still much work to be done to bring that vision of justice and peace to the world. But every year, the joy of the Christmas season renews our hope and our faith in that vision.

Yours in Christ,  
Al Brown



December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010

Romans 15:4-13

What a powerful calling for inclusion! In these passages Paul is giving a rallying cry to the Jewish Christians to reach out to the Gentiles with a spirit of unity. He reassures them that God will give them endurance and encouragement.

Eugene Peterson in *The Message* puts it this way: “May our dependably steady and warmly personal God develop maturity in you so that you get along with each other as well as Jesus gets along with us. Then we’ll be a choir—not our voices only, but our very lives singing in harmony in a stunning anthem to the God and Father of our Master Jesus!”

Paul calls upon us to welcome one another, to accept one another, quoting many passages from the Old Testament to confirm that this is God’s hope --for us all to be united in glorifying God.

Peterson uses different words to describe the Jews and the Gentiles. He calls them “insiders” and “outsiders”. How many of us recall Junior High when from one day to the next you didn’t know whether you were “in” or “out”? It is not a comfortable way to live. God wants us all to sing together, to rejoice together, to live together in harmony! How can each of us work to make this happen here in North Kingstown? How can we bring a message of unity and hope to a hurting world?

Peterson’s version of verse 13 is a prayer for us: “Oh, may the God of green hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope!”

May you live each day of the year, brimming over with hope and doing your part to sing in harmony!

Ellen Jacke

• • •

December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
Psalm 146:5-10



George Frideric Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus” is the most magnificent praise song ever written. The text of this soaring masterpiece is disarmingly simple: “Hallelujah: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth; and he shall reign for ever and ever, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, and he shall reign for ever and ever, Hallelujah!” Surviving the test of truly good music, it has endured for nearly 270 years.

The irony of this great chorus is that it appears in neither the Christmas nor the Easter sections of *Messiah*. The great Hallelujah is sung when God has broken the bonds of those who enslave people, the world and its rulers who reject the Gospel. Hallelujah! The Chorus echoes the words of today’s Psalm, “The Lord will reign forever ... Praise the Lord!” This is what is being born each Christ-

mas.

Further, The Psalm lays the foundation for the form Jesus' ministry would take: "Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, ... who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin." When Jesus opens the scroll of Isaiah to announce the beginning of his ministry, he gives notice that he is about to turn the world upside down.

When we read this Psalm, it is a warning that a transformation is in the air. There is more to it than a beautiful baby born on a silent night. This is about the birth of a Savior who will scatter the proud in the imaginations of their hearts, who will break the bonds of those who enslave people, and challenge the world and its rulers who reject the Gospel. For this we can praise the Lord and sing our Hallelujahs.

Prayer: O Sovereign God, as we read the Psalms and prepare for the birth of our Lord, help us to remember that he alone is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Make us ready to welcome into our hearts and in our way of living, so that what we say and do will be good news to a weary world; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

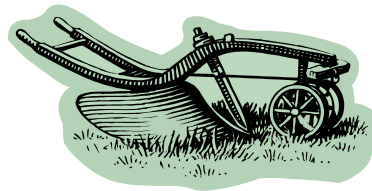
Rev. F. Richard Garland

• • •

December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
James 5:7-10

After my first reading of these four verses, I thought the message to be quite simple and direct. We are to have patience while we wait for our Lord's return. We also need to persevere through the tough times, as did so many before us. Upon further reflection, however, I found much more meaning and application.

A farmer certainly needs patience while waiting for the crops to grow before they can be harvested. Left unsaid, though, is how much work is necessary in preparing the land, planting and watering the seeds, and then, finally, the harvesting of the crops. Patience is a needed attribute, but does not contribute the process or the harvest.



Also, the rains that are waited for and welcomed for the crops may often be inconvenient or unwanted at other times. Similarly, circumstances that benefit some may not be welcomed by others. And we know too much rain (or sun or wind, etc.) is usually not a good thing, either. There are many situations that truly define us - molding our character, building our resolve and testing our faith. How we handle the good times and persevere through the tough ones will determine who we really are.

Since we often do not know the heart and mind of others, we must not judge how they respond to certain circumstances. (And we need to remember to remove the log from our own eye before we can deal with someone else's splinter.)

Patience is needed in every aspect of our life- for ourselves, for others and as we continue through life while waiting for our Lord's glorious return. In the meantime, we keep working, helping and loving others - striving to become the disciples Jesus calls us to be, just as he called so many before us.

Mark DerManouelian

• • •

December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
Matthew 11:2-11

I'm sure there is not a person that has never doubted, there's not one of us who hasn't stumbled at the way God's plans in our life seem to have taken. There are times when our lives are filled with mystery, and we may think and feel that the Lord has let us down, or that He hasn't worked things out the way that He should have. We doubt Him when life gets tough and we see innocent people suffer, when the bad so often succeed while the good fail, when we face a



world locked in the death grip of one meaningless war after another, when we see good people get sick and even die of diseases or accidents. Even John the Baptist had some doubts and he had spent his entire adult life telling people about coming of the Messiah! He **saw** the dove descend from heaven. He **heard** God speak "This is my son of whom I am most proud....." And yet he still had doubts. While in prison his disappointment really began. John, being human, thought that leaders and saviors should arrive in glory, not recognizing that The Messiah's glory wouldn't be fulfilled until His death. John also had doubts because of the manner

in which Jesus did things for "regular folks" who had no status or clout. Jesus' works and words didn't depend upon power, politics, and military force. They were done for people on an individual level; bringing peace, hope, and release to anyone who asked. This wasn't what John expected from The Messiah so he

told his disciples to go and ask Jesus who He was. Matthew 11:3 *“Are you the One we’ve been expecting, or are we still waiting?”* The Lord's reply to them, (Matthew 11: 4-6) *“Go and show John again those things which you have seen and heard; that the blind receive sight’ the lame walk; those who have leprosy are cured; the deaf hear; the dead are raised and the Good News is preached to the poor. Blessed is the person who has no doubts in me.”* However much John is struggling to believe in Jesus, struggling to believe in himself and his own mission, struggling to hold onto hope, Jesus responds to the people with a loving statement of His belief in John, His faith in John, His hope in John; Matt.11:11 *“ I assure you that John the Baptist is greater than any man that has ever lived, but in the Kingdom of Heaven, the one who is least will be greater than John.”* That statement wasn't showing faith and belief just to John but to all of us. However much we struggle to hold on to our faith in challenging times, or however much we struggle to trust in God and believe in His mercy, God keeps faith in us. He looks at us, as He looked at John, and with all our inadequacies and uncertainties and fears, He keeps faith in us. He holds on to all that He knows to be good in us, even when we struggle to trust in ourselves or Him. God keeps faith in us. Advent is about our faith and trust and belief in God; but much more importantly, it's about God's faith, God's trust, God's belief in us.

*Dear God, Thank you for always being here for us, even when we feel doubt. Open our eyes and ears to all levels of need around us. Help us equally serve those who have the least and those with the most, with the full depth of Your love. Amen*

Cibby Gardiner

• • •

December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
Luke 1:47-55

Mary's faith in her God sustains her not to be afraid of the future, even though it's not what she had planned for herself. She is accepting this plan and happy she has been remembered - even as a lowly servant. Would we all be so accepting, and able to have happiness even when not as we had planned? Perhaps this joy she adopts is now our joy at Christmas - a season of love to all.



The UMW Book Club

• • •

December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
Isaiah 35: 1-10

I love it when the Bible and the movies interface. Have you heard of asphodel? If you are a fan of Harry Potter you would remember this from Professor Snape's class in magical potions at Hogwarts. While many of the creatures and plants in the Harry Potter movies are imaginary, asphodel is a real plant.

The ancient Greeks believed it had magical power, especially in the realm of Hades and the dead. Persephone was the goddess of the underworld, daughter of Zeus and Demeter, goddess of the harvest. Persephone had been captured by Hades, god of the underworld, but was later made to release her. When he released her, he gave her a pomegranate and when she ate it she was bound to the underworld for one third of the year. When Persephone was in Hades, Demeter refused to let anything grow. The myth became a symbol of the budding and dying of nature.



This passage is a broad summary of God's promises; all that has been destroyed will blossom, the weak will be made strong, water will flow in the dessert, and wild animals will leave the city. There will be celebration in song, with the message, "Fear not, be strong."

Did you know asphodel is a member of the lily family? The lily is the flower symbolic of Jesus resurrection, and it is this flower Isaiah writes will bloom in the dessert. The Christ event, from birth to resurrection, is the fulfillment of all God's promises. In Christ all will be made new, he is the hope of our salvation!

Pastor Lori



December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
Hebrews 10:35-11:1

In the verses just before these Paul is reminding his listeners that they endured suffering and insult knowing that they had a treasure so much greater than anything men could take away from them,

Now Paul is telling them not to throw away that confidence in the assurance of God's love and protection. As Peterson in *The Message* puts it: "You were

sure of yourselves then. It's still a sure thing! But you need to stick it out, staying with God's plan so you'll be there for the promised completion."

How often are we tempted to give up just before completion! How many times have we heard of people who stopped just short of a breakthrough? Remember the stories of miners who quit just feet short of the mother lode?

Again we have the promise of the Christ's coming again. Meanwhile we are to hang on, to keep on keeping on with working God's plan for us and trusting, trusting God.

Peterson's version of the familiar verse 1 in Chapter 11 reads: "The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see."

May each of you step out into the future, every day, trusting fully in God to see you through to completion.

Ellen Jacke



• • •

December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
John 20:24-29

Thomas was not in the room when Jesus first came to the disciples. They had to explain to Thomas that they had seen the risen Christ. Thomas did not believe it possible. Couldn't be. Jesus, alive again? Here, in the flesh?



Thomas had been a student of Jesus for three years. He saw the early miracles; he was there when the leper's lesions healed, when Peter's mother-in-law was made healthy again, when Jesus called life out of the death and Lazarus walked out of the tomb. Somehow, these miracles were different from the one being described to him. He doubted, really doubted. Prove it he said. And Jesus, the resurrected Christ, entered the locked room and filled Thomas's life again.

Has the resurrected Christ entered your life this advent season?  
Do you see Him in the eyes of the homeless, the depressed, and the wounded?  
Do you see Him in the smiling face of your grandchild, at the family dinner table, or in the quiet of a long lonely night?

Jesus walked into that locked room two thousand years ago and blessed Thomas for believing; “My Lord and my God!”

During this Advent Season, the infant Jesus will enter our lives again. We will be blessed as we invite Him into our Christmas celebrations. But, it is the blessings of the resurrected Christ that will transform us into His likeness to do His work here on this side of the locked door.

Will you recognize Him as your Lord and God and invite Him to live in you, forever?  
Come, Lord Jesus Christ, Come. Amen

Nina Dunne

• • •

December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2010  
Habakkuk 2

All of us make the rash claim that we will Stand Our Watch, for God.

All of us are sincere when we first recognize our kinship to the Almighty and commit ourselves to the service of love, in God’s name.

All of us gradually come to realize that it is a commitment to an eternity of belief. As we begin to stand our individual watch at God’s ramparts we begin to understand that for most of us nothing dramatic will occur. Rather we will undertake a long process of believing while God simply looks on to see how we’re doing.

We have God’s promise to Habakkuk, among others, as proof that the kingdom of heaven will someday be established. So we have to prepare ourselves to make the long haul of Belief founded in Faith, alone. That is both to prove to God that we have that faith and to prepare us not to be too surprised when the promise is ultimately fulfilled.

Stand your watch. Keep the faith.

Mark Zaccaria



• • •

December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010  
Psalm 22

This is most obviously a true song of praise. It explains how the Psalmist was overwhelmed with joy and happiness because the “restoration of the fortunes of Zion” came to pass. Then everybody knew that their God was terrific and marvelous, etc, etc.

The second half then beseeches the Lord at this time to again “restore our fortunes” and basically make us a bunch of happy campers.

But since when is everything at any time of our lives all perfect with streams flowing in the Negev (a very icky desert) and only joy with no weeping? I appreciate the Psalmist wanting the “happily ever after”, but life does not happen that way. And, would we really want it to? I think that being as open, positive and joyful as one can be is imperative to our personal relationships and of course to our mental health. But I have never had life flowing perfectly with no adversity. I think if I had experienced only that, I would have no benchmark to understand just how thankful and happy I am and can be when the adversities diminished.



I think it was that great philosopher, Capt. James T. Kirk, who said, “I need my pain because that’s what makes me who I am.” So, to the Psalmist, yes, I love it when I can take a swim in the Negev of life and be refreshed. I love it when I have more to laugh about than to cry about. I love it when the sheaves of prosperity are slung over my shoulders or are those just Gucci handbags? But, the opposite to these joys have imprinted upon me just how valuable the good times are and that, even at the worst of times, those good times will return.

Perhaps that was what the Psalmist actually meant also. Praise God for delivering us from the sadness and sharing with us the gladness.

Ruth Zaccaria

• • •

December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010  
Matthew 1: 18-25

This particular scripture passage from the Gospel of Matthew follows the genealogy of Jesus and is a prelude to the birth of Jesus Christ. It tells of the betrothal of Mary to Joseph, Joseph's plan to divorce Mary due to her pregnancy, the appearance of an angel to Joseph in a dream and the subsequent obedience of Joseph to marry Mary.



According to Jewish custom, an engagement was a legally binding pre-marital contract, and could only be broken off for "good cause" by way of divorce. We all know the rest of the story –

Joseph obeys the angel's command, marries Mary, and helps raise Jesus.

Interestingly, it is only in Matthew's Gospel that these actions of Joseph are mentioned. Very little of Joseph is mentioned at all in any of the gospels, the exception being another visit of an angel to Joseph in a different dream with another command in chapter 2 of the Gospel of Matthew. So far, all we know of Joseph is that he was Jewish, of the line of Jesus, and he was obedient to God. It's as if God specifically intended for Joseph to be mentioned infrequently, while playing a major role in the birth of Christ.



I for one am glad that Joseph came into Mary's life and quietly did what he did. Let's highlight some of Joseph's actions:

- Pledges to marry Mary
- Quietly plans to divorce Mary, to help her avoid public disgrace
- Has a vision of an angel from God with a Godly plan
- Obeys the plan of God
- Takes Mary home to be his wife

Gives Jesus his name

When we first look at every thing Joseph had done, the first reaction may be, "the poor guy only got a few measly lines of mention in the Bible!" But if you look closely, you begin to see how God sees Joseph – righteous, kind, obedient, and a risk taker. For that is what Joseph was – a man of God who just happened to be the kind of carpenter that God wanted for his Son. He was some-

one who was not afraid to quietly go out on a limb, and risk life and limb for the love of his family and the Savior of the world. Not bad for being mentioned a few times in the Bible. And not a bad example of what a good father should be. God's peace.

Richard Dunne

• • •

December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
Isaiah 7:10-16

Isaiah 7:14 - "Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

When Ahaz was king of Judah, the Lord told Isaiah to say to Ahaz, "Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid." The Lord said this to Ahaz because Ahaz was very worried about enemies who were plotting his ruin. Later the Lord spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." But Ahaz refused God's help, because he really did not want to hear what God had to say to him and he tried to buy off Assyria. He refused to trust God or to accept a communication from God.



This is what brought Isaiah to utter the statement above from verse 14 of Isaiah chapter 7. This was probably a prophecy of an event signally that Judah would be spared, but it was also the prophecy of the coming of Immanuel, God with us, Jesus the Messiah. God sent his son to save us from ourselves over 2000 years ago. This gift is so precious. Let us keep our communication with God open through Jesus, his son and our Messiah. Let the trumpet sound with joyous music as we anticipate our celebration of Jesus' birth.

May the Peace of Christ fill your heart and soul for this season and for the coming New Year.

Jay Sperry

• • •

Dec 25<sup>th</sup> 2010  
Luke 2:1-14.



As I read the passage of the Christmas story, the thing that strikes me most, is the simplicity of the story. The son of God was born in a barn and laid on a bed of hay because there was no room at the inn. The first visitors to welcome the infant savior were local shepherds tending their sheep. The beauty of this simplicity gets lost today as I, like many others, find myself surrounded by and caught up in all the holiday frenzy. We spend so much time on the trappings – buying the perfect gifts, decorating our

homes, attending holiday parties and events that at times we forget the true underlying meaning of what we are celebrating. My goal for this year is to try to step back and focus on the simplicity of the Christmas story so as not to lose sight of the true meaning of Christmas and the wonderful gift that God has given us.

Jane Trehy

• • •

December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
Isaiah 62:6-7, 10-12.

In my first reading of Isaiah 62:6-7, I was left with the impression that the prophet is extolling the people of Jerusalem to incessantly pester God, “give Him no rest,” until he fulfills his promise to restore Jerusalem to greatness. If this ‘restoration to greatness’ is interpreted as earthly power and gifts to be showered upon the people, then the “never silent” watchmen posted on the city walls begin to resemble plaintive children pestering parents for gifts in the run up to yesterday’s Christmas celebration.

In the time of Isaiah, Israel was in conflict with both Syria and Assyria, and fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. One can hardly blame the Israelites for expecting salvation to take the earthly form of military victory, restoration of the city as the seat of power and influence, and the ejection of foreign occupiers. In verses 10 to 12, Isaiah appears to be telling the people to prepare the way for the arrival of this Deliverer, this Savior.

But, rather if the ‘greatest’ longed for is heavenly salvation, and Isaiah spent much of his ministry carrying the message of punishment for turning away from God and of God’s forgiveness, comfort and hope, then what I first took for pestering can be seen as continuous prayer, not for the restoration of man’s

kingdom on earth but rather the coming of God's heavenly kingdom.

But we must do more than pray. Verse 10 begins with Isaiah beseeching us to pass out 'through the gates.' We are not to stay within the city walls and wait for salvation to come to us; rather we must go out and through our actions begin to reshape the world around us in accordance with God's will. We are the builders of God's kingdom here on earth.

In the rest of the English speaking world, today, December 26, is Boxing Day. While there appears to be no consensus as to the origins of the name, for many today is a day perhaps closer in spirit to the meaning of Christmas than yesterday. Christmas can be a hectic day – gifts to be opened, family to visit, services to attend, dinner to prepare. But today, while we in the US rush out to exchange gifts, many others in Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand, are spending a quiet day at home, enjoying easy meals of left-over's and the company of close family.



Find a quiet moment today, now that some of the pressure of the holidays has been released, to offer up a prayer of thanks for the coming of Christ the Savior, and to look around for opportunities, no matter how small, to extend the reach of Christian fellowship.

Pete Pelegrino



December 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
John 1:1-14

#### "The Word of Life"

It is difficult to imagine that God created everything we know and experience; and that He could envision what our world would become. He is the Word that we use to identify Him and His Son who he gave to show us His love and teach us the way to the Father. His Son taught us the Word of the Father and how we must have faith and believe in Him.

Everything came from the Word who shed His light onto our lives. Our world, our possessions, our very thoughts are created and guided by the Word. We watched as His Son, who lived among us, showed how glorious it is to bask in His light, have faith in His being and experience the life ever after.

By following His Word, we are blessed by His presence and will bask in the forgiveness of sins and can look forward to living in His kingdom forever.

Bruce Reirden

• • •

December 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
Matthew 2: 13-18

I would think that this is one of the most well-known passages in Christianity. Sometimes we become so used to what seems a direct story in the passages that we forget to think of this from a different perspective.



Joseph did something that many of us don't readily do. He actually listened to God's advice and followed it. As we go about our lives either not listening or half-listening to God's directions, most of us will likely not face a cataclysmic event such as the murder of our child. Perhaps Joseph's strength was that he was so in the habit of listening and trusting divine direction that when the vitally important thing came along, he moved without question to follow the right path. Think of the effort it took for Joseph to steal away to a distant land with Mary and the baby. The man had TRUST in God. Joseph was a teacher then in his own, humble way. He has taught us through the ages to TRUST.

Ruth Zaccaria

• • •

December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
Revelation 21:1-7

At first, it may seem odd that this beloved passage of scripture would appear at Christmas time. It has, after all, been used for generations as a word of comfort and hope in the presence of death - a word of promise that, God himself will be with them [us], that he will wipe every tear from their [our] eyes, that death will be no more, that mourning and crying and pain will be no more. When important people in our lives have died, we have needed to hear these words.

But at Christmas? Yes, at Christmas! Consider the words: "See, the home of God is with mortals. He will dwell with them, they will be his peoples." What is that but Emmanuel?! The very Word that Joseph and Mary received when the angels told them what God would do through them! God, Who for so long had seemed hidden or absent, would now live among us, full of grace and truth!

When the child of Christmas grew up, he taught his disciples to pray for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. Those who mourn are called

“Blessed!” and given comfort. Those who gave a cup of cold water to the thirsty are called “Blessed!” It is, as Fanny Crosby put it, “A foretaste of Glory Divine.” And in the waters of baptism we receive “water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.”

When we look carefully at this beloved text, we see not only the promise of an eternal future, but also the blessed assurance of what we receive in the birth of Jesus. Not only do we celebrate his birth, we also celebrate what he will become when he grows up.

In the second verse of Charles Wesley’s timeless text, “Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus,” we sing:

“Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King,  
born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.  
By thine own eternal spirit rule in all our hearts alone;  
by thine all sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne”

Now that we have again welcomed Jesus into our midst, let us begin to honor his coming by living into the Word he came to proclaim

Prayer: O God, as we have welcomed, in the birth of the Christ Child, the grace and truth of Your Love, enable us to let him grow up and become, for a weary world, the Prince of Peace; even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Rev. F. Richard Garland

• • •

December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
Isaiah 61:10 thru 62:3

Toward the end of Isaiah a long list axioms to live by are coded into Psalm-like verses. The first section of today’s passage extols us to recognize the power of Lord to make things right for the Children of God here on Earth. Having convinced us of the power and authority we’re dealing with, the second section of today’s passage delivers the Twist: Once we recognize God’s power we, those very Children, should realize that we also have a responsibility to assist in getting the Word out to all corners of the Globe.



So now that we know that we will not keep silent ... What is it I am going to say? What is it you are going to say?

Prayer: Dear Lord and Parent of us all, grant me *Wisdom* to know the words that will communicate your presence and your Love to the world around me. Having granted that wisdom, grant me also *Strength*, that I may actually say them. Amen.

Mark Zaccaria

• • •

December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010  
Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7

The celebration of our dear Savior's birth is vivid in our minds.

The first reading for today reminds us of God's good plan to guard his people through the Mosaic Law. J.B. Phillips uses the metaphor of a "strict governess in charge of us until we went to the school of Christ" and thru our faith in Him were made right with God. Eugene Peterson describes it as



"until ...we were mature enough to respond freely in faith to the living God."

Then in God's timing He sent his Son, who was born of a human mother under the Law, and thus able to meet the conditions of it and redeem us from its authority. We were free to be adopted as true children of God who sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts to recognize him as Father! As children we are heirs to God's inheritance!

I enter the New Year buoyed by the promises of God and committed to a closer walk with Him, doing my part in sharing God's plan for his people. Our world is waiting to learn of God's love.

Marilyn Moffett

• • •

New Year's Day, 2011  
Psalm 147:13-21

I had very mixed feelings as I read this passage. When it talked about making the city secure and keeping peace at the borders, I thought back to the day I entered Jerusalem in March 2002. As we entered the city our bus was stopped, as were all vehicles entering the city. We were quickly waved through when

the guards learned that we were all American tourists. I know that was not the case for everyone trying to enter the city. At the same time, the speaker on our bus was playing the song “The Holy City”. The words that were playing were, “The gates were opened wide and all who would might enter, and no one was denied.” The irony was not lost on me.

Throughout the next few days, it was increasingly obvious to me that this was a place where there was no peace. On Saturday night, sirens rushing past our hotel kept us awake for quite awhile. We learned in the morning that there had been another suicide car bombing at a restaurant down the street from our hotel. When we went into Bethlehem, we had to walk past tanks guarding the border into the city. The streets were empty and it felt like a ghost town. There had been bombings there only a couple of days earlier and there would be again in a couple of days. These are the images that come to mind for me whenever I read in the Psalms about “peace at the borders” and “keeping the city secure”. I am filled with great sadness.

But then I read on and heard about God launching his promises earthward, swiftly and surely just like snow falling on the earth. I read about God breathing and winter suddenly becoming spring. It is a vision of tremendous and hope filled change. Today is the first day of a New Year. It is a day when many of us make New Year’s Resolutions; when we promise that we will make changes in our lives. The Bible tells us that it is God acting in our lives and the life of our world that brings about change. The vision of peace in Jerusalem and in other places of the world is a vision of hope and promise in the face of realities that are so very different. Yet, as we begin a new year, we can turn once again to God with hope and seek to be open to the promises that God gives to us, and the changes that only God can bring.

*Pastor Beverly Stenmark*

• • •

January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010  
Luke 2:15-21

Peace – To those far away and to those near at hand. Good Will to All. God will show the exceeding riches of His Grace in His kindness toward us, through Jesus.

### **A Star Is Born**

A son, Jesus, born to Joseph and Mary, from Galilee. Shepherds claim that Angels appeared to them and sang, “To all those far and near God will show the exceeding riches of His Grace in His kindness through this boy.” On shepherd said,



“We traveled as quickly as we could to see this child.” Another said, “I would have come if one Angel appeared, but we saw a Choir of Angels, who could resist?”



When they arrived they shared what they heard and made their way through the crowd only to find the baby in a cattle stall with its mother quietly watching. How could this common woman possibly raise this child to do as the Angels proclaimed? What a sight. Thousands approached to look at this baby and then depart, leaving Mary to wonder what was God thinking when he gave such a special child to so common a woman. What was interesting in all this is that no one

seemed to question that this infant was the Son of God.

I wish my strength could compare to that of Mary's. She never questioned or argued. She simply took on the job. Wouldn't it be nice if we could all have such Faith? Praise God for the example of Love and Faith that Mary set for us.

Deb Snow

• • •

January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011  
Isaiah 60:1-6

This passage from Isaiah may be experienced in different ways. The passage speaks of the light that has come. We can see this as foreshadowing of the birth of Jesus and his showing us the way out of darkness. We can see this as the Lord providing us guidance through the birth of Jesus. We can see this as the opportunity for all people to rally together for the clarity of truth. We may feel the joy of the wealth of our blessings even as we do not understand all of our blessings. We may feel the peace that God's love has provided for us. In this season of Advent it is important for us to experience all that has been provided through the birth of Jesus.



Prayer: Lord, we thank you for the opportunities that you give us. Please help us to see the light and the joys that you give us. Help us to remember them each day throughout the year. Amen

Dave Beutel

• • •

January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011  
Psalm 73: 1-3, 21-28

Christmas also comes at the turning of the year, a time when the days begin getting longer, bringing the promise of eventual spring, and the start of a new year. This psalm is a confession, as statement of faith, and a pledge to repent. It is an appropriate text to consider as we make our resolutions for the new year. We need to be honest about the mistakes we have made, look at why and how we made them. We need to look for an example of proper behavior and put our trust in that example. And we need to commit ourselves to change.



The psalm was written thousands of years ago, but still speaks to us today. It offers us a prescription for change, and example we can follow as we commit to lead a better life in the new year. Like the psalmist, we can put our trust in the Lord, and look forward to being received in glory.

Yours in Christ,  
Al Brown

• • •

January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011  
Ephesians 3:1-12

Even as he is imprisoned, Paul continues to spread the Good News to everyone he can, so that Jews and Gentiles alike would have the same opportunity to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior and be able to enjoy new life in Him empowered by the Holy Spirit. But with this new thinking (belief), we have the obligation to live (behave) as Christ did; to put into action just what we believe. We must not only give our prayers, presence, gifts and offerings, but also to witness to others, which is no easy task for most of us. As Eugene Peterson writes in "The Message"- "it is imperative that we join in vigorously and perseveringly, convinced that every detail in our lives contributes (or not) to what Paul describes as God's plan worked out by Christ". God will provide for us and prepare us for our work-we just need to be ready to step out-to share with others His love and peace....How about it?

Marsha Taylor

• • •

January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
Matthew 2: 1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the three wise men from the east followed the star to see the “King of the Jews” but they encountered King Herod who tried to trick them into letting him know where the child was. They continued on their way and found Mary and the baby and delivered their gifts of gold, incense and myrrh. They realized that Herod was not a truthful man and went home a different route.

Oh to have been the wise men, to have been able to welcome the baby Jesus. It must have been amazing, to be able to be a part of that blessed time, to be able to follow a star and find him at the end.

May all your journeys in life lead you to such a fulfilling final destination. But be aware of the pitfalls along the way. Stay true to your beliefs, and the Lord will always be with you.

Elaine Roffo

• • •

