



WHEN GOD
GIVES A *gift...*

DAILY ADVENT READER
2022

CHRIST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

Another year, another Christmas. The busyness of the season lends itself to getting lost in the hustle and never stopping to ponder the significance of Christmas. Yes, it's a holiday to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ, but if that's all we get out of the season, we're missing the best part. Every figure that stands to represent every religious system the world has ever known has a birthday. So what sets apart the birth of Christ?

Jesus is a gift.

When we celebrate birthdays, it's customary that the person whose birthday we celebrate receive the gift. Not so with the birth of Christ; in this case, Jesus *is* the gift. It's God's backward, paradoxical nature acting contrary to what we expect. So what does God demand of us? The deity of every other religion in the world tells us to bring forth our gifts and lay them on the sacrificial altar. But the God of Christianity? He is the gift-bearer, and the gift comes in the form of an infant who would grow up and place himself on the sacrificial altar.

Through this act, it's as if God is telling us, "It must be my gift to you, not your gift to me. It must come from me."

1 Corinthians 15:22 says, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." In this statement, we find the reason *why* it had to be God's gift. If the gift to satisfy God came from us (Adam), it would be tainted, unacceptable, and imperfect. Therefore, God had to provide the gift—the sacrifice set apart from Adam's race—it had to come from God himself to be untainted, acceptable, and *perfect*. This is what it looks like when God gives a gift.

We've designed this reader to help you meditate on God's gift to you, Jesus Christ. Each Monday, you'll read the scripture passage the following Sunday's advent service will center upon (Weekly Advent Scripture). The readings for Tuesday through Friday are other scripture passages drawn from phrases in the Weekly Advent Scripture with a brief thought of reflection. And then, on Saturday, you'll again read the Weekly Advent Scripture in preparation for Sunday's message.

As you proceed, recall that Jesus Christ is God's gift to you—a gift that *only* he could give, and the *only* gift he could give that would cost you *nothing* and give you *everything*.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2022

THE ANNUNCIATION OF IMMANUEL—GOD WITH US

The Weekly Advent Scripture

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read this passage in preparation for the message on Sunday, November 27, 2022:

Luke 1:26-38:

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a **virgin betrothed** to a man whose name was Joseph, of the **house of David**. And the virgin’s name was Mary.

²⁸ And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, **and of his kingdom there will be no end.**”

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

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

Thank the Lord for his Word and that he uses it to teach, inspire, and reveal himself to us.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2022

THE ANNUNCIATION OF IMMANUEL—GOD WITH US

Today, we will meditate on the phrase “**a virgin betrothed**” taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Luke 1:26-38.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

Isaiah 7:13-16:

¹³ And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. ¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.

A Brief Word for Reflection

Prophecy in the Bible often has an immediate context for what is happening at the time of the writing but also a context that projects out to something that would happen hundreds of years later. For example, Isaiah 7:13-16 speaks of an evil king named Ahaz, who led Judah (God’s people) into practices of idolatry. When neighboring nations threatened Ahaz, Isaiah went to the king with words of deliverance, telling him, “God will deliver you,” certainly not because he deserved it, but because God is merciful and faithful to his people, even when they are not. The sign given to the king, as told by Isaiah, was “a virgin” who would “conceive and bear a son,” whose name would be called “Immanuel,” which means “God with us.” Ahaz’s story should feel familiar. The people of God would yet again need deliverance, not from neighboring kings, but from sin and death. God is faithful, even when we are not, and his sign for us? A virgin betrothed who would be called Immanuel, God *with us*. This is his sign—and gift—of deliverance for us.

Thank the Lord for his grace and mercy; he is faithful even when we are not.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2022

THE ANNUNCIATION OF IMMANUEL—GOD WITH US

Today, we will meditate on the phrase “**house of David**” taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Luke 1:26-38.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

2 Samuel 7:1-11:

¹ Now when the king lived in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, ² the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.” ³ And Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you.” ⁴ But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, ⁵ “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in? ⁶ I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. ⁷ In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”’” ⁸ Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. ⁹ And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰ And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹ from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house.

A Brief Word for Reflection

During the reign of King David, the house of the Lord wasn’t a house—it was a tent—a mobile dwelling that moved around with the people of God. David perceived a particular injustice as he pointed out that he, the king, dwells in an opulent house of cedar, but God dwells in a tent. David purposed in his heart to rectify this and build a permanent temple for the Lord. Despite his

heart's desire, David would not be the one to build this temple. The Lord made no complaints about dwelling in a tent, but he did make a promise reflective of David's wishes; he told David, "I will make you a house." But this wouldn't be a house of cedar, rather a house established by one of David's descendants, Jesus Christ. His gift to us is a *permanent* home in the hearts of his people.

Thank the Lord for his promises kept, that he built his permanent house of David in your heart.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2022

THE ANNUNCIATION OF IMMANUEL—GOD WITH US

Today, we will meditate on the phrase **“of his kingdom there will be no end”** taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Luke 1:26-38.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

Revelation 11:15-18:

¹⁵ Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” ¹⁶ And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, ¹⁷ saying, “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. ¹⁸ The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.”

A Brief Word for Reflection

What incredible words are these: “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” These words mark the end of the dominion of sin in the world. This is the fulfillment of the longing of all creation ever since the fall. In the book of Revelation, the scripture poses the question, “who is worthy to open the scroll?” No one was worthy to open the scroll—except Christ. Many Bible scholars believe the scroll is the title deed to the earth. After the fall, Satan was given dominion over the earth that God gave to man, but when Christ paid the penalty for sin on the cross and declared, “it is finished,” he broke the power of hell and Satan’s dominion over the earth. One day, God will judge Satan for all the evil he has done and throw him into the abyss, and Christ will have everlasting dominion over the earth. God’s people and his world will never again be under Satan’s rule. Christ will reign in perfect righteousness forever and ever!

Thank the Lord for the promise of a righteous forever-king whose dominion will have no end.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2022

THE ANNUNCIATION OF IMMANUEL—GOD WITH US

Today, we will meditate on the phrase child to be born will be called holy—the **“Son of God”** taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Luke 1:26-38.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

Hebrews 1:1-8:

¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. ⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”? Or again, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”? ⁶ And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him.” ⁷ Of the angels he says, “He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.” ⁸ But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.

A Brief Word for Reflection

Since the birth of Jesus, many well-meaning people have ascribed to him polite descriptions such as “good teacher” or “great example to follow.” If this is all he is, then why was he crucified? It’s not typical for people who are good teachers and great humanitarian examples to receive a death sentence. So what was it that upset his detractors? At Jesus’ trial, the High Priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of God?” (Matthew 26:63), to which Jesus replied, “Yes, it is as you say.” This response infuriated the Jewish leaders, who charged him with blasphemy because a claim to be the Son of God meant to be *equal* with God—to be, in very nature, God. The author of Hebrews makes it explicitly clear what Jesus confessed; he is “the exact imprint of his nature.” God’s gift to us is not just a good teacher or an exemplary humanitarian; God’s gift to us is an exact imprint of himself.

Thank the Lord for his gift to you, the very presence of God—and nothing less—who now resides in you.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2022

THE ANNUNCIATION OF IMMANUEL—GOD WITH US

The Weekly Advent Scripture

Pray for God to use this passage of scripture to prepare your heart for worship tomorrow.

Read this passage in preparation for tomorrow's advent message.

Luke 1:26-38:

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

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

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

Thank the Lord for his gift to us; his very presence united to us forever.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2022
WHEN THE PRIEST BECOMES THE SACRIFICE

The Weekly Advent Scripture

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read this passage in preparation for the message on Sunday, December 4, 2022:

Isaiah 53:4-7:

⁴ Surely he has **borne our griefs** and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was **pierced for our transgressions**; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶ **All we like sheep have gone astray**; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; **like a lamb that is led to the slaughter**, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

Thank the Lord for his Word and that he uses it to teach, inspire, and reveal himself to us.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2022
WHEN THE PRIEST BECOMES THE SACRIFICE

Today, we will meditate on the phrase “**borne our griefs**” taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Isaiah 53:4-7.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

Leviticus 16:20-22:

²⁰ “And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. ²¹ And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. ²² The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.

A Brief Word for Reflection

It might feel like Old Testament sacrifices are far removed from our modern-day worship practice. Still, their descriptions give us a vivid picture—a foreshadowing—of Christ’s sacrifice for us. As described in the book of Leviticus, the priest would bring two goats before the Lord; he would sacrifice one for the people’s sins, and the other would serve as what the Bible calls a *scapegoat*. The priest would use the blood from the sacrifice of the first goat to cleanse the altar, and then the priest would lay his hands on the scapegoat and symbolically place all the people’s sins on the head of the goat, and then the goat was cast off into the wilderness carrying away all their sins. This act foreshadowed the work of Christ, who would serve as all three—our priest who receives our confession, our sacrificial lamb who gave his blood for our sins, and our scapegoat who bears the burden of our sins and takes them away. God’s gift to us is a priest, a sacrifice, and a means to carry away our sins.

Thank the Lord for his provision—his gift to us—in Jesus Christ, who hears us when we pray, pays for our sins, and removes them from us forever.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2022

WHEN THE PRIEST BECOMES THE SACRIFICE

Today, we will meditate on the phrase “**pierced for our transgressions**” taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Isaiah 53:4-7.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

John 19:31-37:

³¹ Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. ³² So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. ³⁵ He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. ³⁶ For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” ³⁷ And again another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced.”

A Brief Word for Reflection

After Jesus breathed his last, the apostle John provided us with a detailed account of the specific events that took place next. Included is how one soldier tending to his crucifixion “pierced his side with a spear,” resulting in a flow of blood and water. In addition to the fulfillment of the scriptures in Isaiah 53, this act informed the soldier that Jesus had died, which prevented him from breaking Jesus’ legs—customary for those subject to crucifixion as it would accelerate death. Little did the soldier know that he acted according to God’s design by piercing the side of the Savior and leaving his bones unbroken. God’s gift to us is his sovereign hand.

Thank the Lord for having the world at his disposal and providing a sacrifice according to his perfect will.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2022
WHEN THE PRIEST BECOMES THE SACRIFICE

Today, we will meditate on the phrase “**All we like sheep have gone astray**” taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Isaiah 53:4-7.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

Matthew 9:35-38:

³⁵ And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

A Brief Word for Reflection

The scriptures are replete with references to sheep. In addition to their use as a means of sacrifice, there are numerous instances where the Bible refers to the people of God as *sheep*. It may not be the most flattering comparison—and for good reason. Like sheep, we are prone to wander away. We’re creatures who are helpless when pursued and attacked by a predator. Apart from the watchful eye of the Good Shepherd, we couldn’t survive on our own. God’s gift to us is a Good Shepherd, but his gift doesn’t stop there. The Good Shepherd shows us his compassion, seeks us, and keeps us by becoming the sacrificial lamb and putting himself in harm’s way. He became “harassed and helpless” so that we would not. God’s gift is the Good Shepherd, who sacrificed himself as the Lamb of God.

Thank the Lord for the watchful eye of our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who numbers us and calls us his own by his sacrifice as God’s Lamb.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2022

WHEN THE PRIEST BECOMES THE SACRIFICE

Today, we will meditate on the phrase “**like a lamb that is led to the slaughter**” taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Isaiah 53:4-7.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

Hebrews 9:11-14:

¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

A Brief Word for Reflection

A lamb led to the slaughter is the picture God made for us to show us the work of Christ before the work of Christ happened in time-space history. However—it should be made clear—the sacrificial lambs we read about in the Old Testament *did not* remove sin and guilt; they pointed to the one who would remove sin and guilt. The author of Hebrews states it straightforward for us, “how much more will the blood of Christ” purify us as compared to what amounts to “dead works.” If we try and earn God’s favor through good works—or even sacrifice—it will not accomplish anything. It is only the blood of Jesus Christ—the one without blemish—who made himself a sacrifice for us that gains us favor before the Father. God’s gift is the sacrifice of his Son, the only one who could earn God’s favor through his righteousness.

Thank the Lord for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—on our behalf and for our sake—who was not only without blemish but perfectly righteous.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2022
WHEN THE PRIEST BECOMES THE SACRIFICE

The Weekly Advent Scripture

Pray for God to use this passage of scripture to prepare your heart for worship tomorrow.

Read this passage in preparation for tomorrow's advent message.

Isaiah 53:4-7:

⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

Thank the Lord for a Priest and Good Shepherd in Jesus Christ who intercedes on our behalf and supplies the sacrifice—by his blood—to make us acceptable before God our Father.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2022

THE KING BECOMES THE SERVANT

The Weekly Advent Scripture

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, "Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?"

Read this passage in preparation for the message on Sunday, December 11, 2022:

Isaiah 42:1-9:

¹ Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; **I have put my Spirit upon him**; he will bring forth justice to the nations. ² He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; ³ **a bruised reed he will not break**, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. ⁴ He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. ⁵ Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: ⁶ "I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations," ⁷ **to open the eyes that are blind**, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. ⁸ I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. ⁹ Behold, the former things have come to pass, and **new things I now declare**; before they spring forth I tell you of them."

Thank the Lord for his Word and that he uses it to teach, inspire, and reveal himself to us.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2022

THE KING BECOMES THE SERVANT

Today, we will meditate on the phrase **“I have put my Spirit upon him”** taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Isaiah 42:1-9.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

1 Samuel 16:11-13:

¹¹ Then Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here.” ¹² And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the Lord said, “Arise, anoint him, for this is he.” ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.

A Brief Word for Reflection

In ancient Israel, prophets would anoint kings before rising to the throne. The act of anointing signified God’s blessing and favor as well as the setting apart of an individual for a specific task or role. In this manner, the prophet Samuel anointed Saul to be king—not for their need of a king, for the Lord was their king—but because the people were impressed by his tall, stately appearance. On the other hand, David was the youngest and least in his family, engaged in the most humble of professions: shepherding sheep. The Lord reminds us in the book of 1 Samuel that man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. God would later describe David as a man after his own heart. Much of David’s humble position and heart posture would foreshadow the One who would come to sit on David’s throne forever. David’s anointing with oil before assuming the role of Israel’s king foreshadowed Jesus’ anointing at his baptism before beginning his earthly ministry. God empowered David to shepherd his people through the power of the Holy Spirit, just as the Spirit rested on Christ in his ministry—now in us as we walk by faith in newness of life.

Thank the Lord for the gift of His Holy Spirit, our Comforter, Guide, and Counselor.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2022

THE KING BECOMES THE SERVANT

Today, we will meditate on the phrase “**a bruised reed he will not break**” taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Isaiah 42:1-9.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

Matthew 27:37, 45-50:

³⁷ And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.”

⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” ⁴⁷ And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, “This man is calling Elijah.” ⁴⁸ And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹ But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.”

⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

A Brief Word for Reflection

When Isaiah speaks of a “bruised reed that he will not break,” he’s talking to the weak and vulnerable—spiritually or physically. His word to the bruised reeds of the world is that God is compassionate and provides strength for the weak. And how would he do it? The only hope for the weak would be for the mighty to absorb the bruise. This is God’s gift to the wounded. Though they mocked Jesus with the sign above him that read “King of the Jews,” they were making an enormous understatement; he is the Mighty One—the King of All Creation! God’s answer to the bruised reeds is to place the King in harm’s way. To strengthen the weak, he became weak. To heal the bruised, he was bruised. And to mend the broken, he was broken.

Thank the Lord for absorbing the bruise meant for us and sharing in the inheritance that was rightfully his.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2022

THE KING BECOMES THE SERVANT

Today, we will meditate on the phrase **“to open the eyes that are blind”** taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Isaiah 42:1-9.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

Matthew 9:27-31:

²⁷ And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, “Have mercy on us, Son of David.” ²⁸ When he entered the house, the blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They said to him, “Yes, Lord.” ²⁹ Then he touched their eyes, saying, “According to your faith be it done to you.” ³⁰ And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, “See that no one knows about it.” ³¹ But they went away and spread his fame through all that district.

A Brief Word for Reflection

Have you ever lost power in a storm and found yourself frozen in place and then fumbling around in darkness, searching for a flashlight? Without light, we can lose our way even in places we know as well as our own home. Scripture says that Jesus is “the light of the world” (John 8:12). In creation, on the very first day—before there were sun, moon, and stars—God said, “let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). At this moment, he did not create the light but let the light enter the world to pierce the darkness. Theologians believe this light was the shekinah glory of God or Christ himself! At the fall, sin put man in spiritual darkness and separated us from God. Without Christ, there is no knowledge of the truth of the Gospel, and mankind stumbles around in darkness, blinded by sin and unbelief. Jesus’ healing of the blind man during his earthly ministry was symbolic of the spiritual sight he gives to all who have faith in him.

Thank the Lord for sending Christ to open our eyes to spiritual truth and for promising we will never walk in darkness when we walk with him.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2022

THE KING BECOMES THE SERVANT

Today, we will meditate on the phrase “**new things I now declare**” taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Isaiah 42:1-9.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

Revelation 21:1-5:

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

A Brief Word for Reflection

When the King of kings lays down his life for his people, it yields a profound result. Yes, he grants forgiveness as his suffering was the just punishment for our sins. Yes, we receive his righteousness draped over us as a robe and declared so. But the gift doesn't end with these two profoundly gracious outcomes. His promise to restore his people as a new creation will perpetuate through *all* of the creation. The former things will pass away, and he will turn back the clock on sin's destruction and make all things new again. Sin will be no more. Death will be no more. Mourning, crying, and pain will finally see their just and rightful end. Because the all-powerful King became the servant, he provided the all-powerful result.

Thank the Lord for his work in you—that he has made you a new creation and will continue to renew you until all is accomplished and made new again.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2022

THE KING BECOMES THE SERVANT

The Weekly Advent Scripture

Pray for God to use this passage of scripture to prepare your heart for worship tomorrow.

Read this passage in preparation for tomorrow's advent message.

Isaiah 42:1-9:

¹ Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. ² He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; ³ a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. ⁴ He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. ⁵ Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: ⁶ "I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, ⁷ to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. ⁸ I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. ⁹ Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them."

Thank the Lord for setting his glory aside, laying down his life, becoming a servant, and offering it as his gift to anyone who would believe in him.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2022

THE PROPHET BECOMES THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION

The Weekly Advent Scripture

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, "Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?"

Read this passage in preparation for the message on Sunday, December 18, 2022:

Isaiah 6:1-13:

¹ In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said: "**Holy, holy, holy** is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" ⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: "**Woe is me! For I am lost**; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for **my eyes have seen the King**, the Lord of hosts!" ⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; **your guilt is taken away**, and your sin atoned for." ⁸ And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me." ⁹ And he said, "Go, and say to this people: "Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'" ¹⁰ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." ¹¹ Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, ¹² and the Lord removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. ¹³ And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump.

Thank the Lord for his Word and that he uses it to teach, inspire, and reveal himself to us.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2022

THE PROPHET BECOMES THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION

Today, we will meditate on the phrase “**Holy, holy, holy**” taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Isaiah 6:1-13.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

Ezekiel 36:22-27:

²² “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. ²³ And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. ²⁴ I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

A Brief Word for Reflection

We tend to read the scriptures and walk away believing we are the central figure in God’s redemptive story. However, the Bible more accurately reflects the notion that everything is really about *him*. Before creation, God existed in perfect fellowship as the Triune God; he needed nothing. Yet in a show of his sovereign power, he created everything, not out of need, but out of love. God created man at the onset of creation, and man turned on him. And the rest of scripture is the story of how God would redeem man—how he would make man holy to live in perfect fellowship *him*—but not for our sake—for *his*. He makes us holy because he is holy, and he stands by his word and his work. God gave of himself—he gave a gift—to create us, redeem us, and make us holy as *he* is holy.

Thank the Lord for his holiness; he wasn’t content to keep it to himself but freely, graciously, and mercifully gave it to us through his Son.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2022

THE PROPHET BECOMES THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION

Today, we will meditate on the phrase “**Woe is me! For I am lost**” taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Isaiah 6:1-13.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

Luke 5:1-8:

¹ On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, ² and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. ⁴ And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” ⁵ And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” ⁶ And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. ⁷ They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

A Brief Word for Reflection

There’s an interesting dynamic the scriptures detail when unholiness encounters holiness. Like Isaiah’s reaction upon seeing the exalted Lord in Isaiah 6, Peter reacts similarly in Luke 5. When Jesus reveals to Peter just a glimpse of Christ’s deity, Peter’s reaction is parallel to Isaiah’s, “Woe is me . . . depart from me.” Holiness exposes the deficiency of unholiness. We can’t conceal a bright red stain on a clean white blanket—the stain is all the more visible. Peter’s deficiency was on full display before Jesus. Sometime later, there was a repeat of this encounter (John 21), but on this occasion, Peter couldn’t wait to stand in the presence of Jesus. What changed? Jesus wasn’t content to leave the deficiency as it stood; he atoned for Peter’s sin and declared him righteous because of his work on Peter’s behalf. Jesus, the Prophet, exposed Peter for what he was but gave of himself to close the gap between holiness and unholiness.

Thank the Lord for not allowing us to wallow in our sin, but instead, giving of himself to make us right before the Father so we can run to him and enjoy his presence forever.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2022

THE PROPHET BECOMES THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION

Today, we will meditate on the phrase “**my eyes have seen the King**” taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Isaiah 6:1-13.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

Luke 2:25-32:

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ²⁹ “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

A Brief Word for Reflection

When Isaiah declared, “my eyes have seen the King,” he was distressed because the Lord’s holiness revealed Isaiah’s sinfulness. But Isaiah’s cry of distress was immediately followed by the cleansing action of the Lord; Isaiah saw the King and was *comforted* by the King. Simeon experienced a similar encounter—he was at death’s door, yet he would not pass-through death until his eyes saw the King. Like Isaiah, Simeon awaited and relied upon the consolation—the comfort—of the Lord to relieve him of his distress. That relief would arrive when he placed his eyes on the King. Simeon eventually departed this world, but he left “in peace.” How can peace accompany death? We only find this peace when we set our gaze on the face of God in Christ, who gives the gift of eternal consolation.

Thank the Lord for his peace which overcomes all of sin’s distress. Pray that he would help us set our gaze on him, providing comfort to us in this life and into the next.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2022

THE PROPHET BECOMES THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION

Today, we will meditate on the phrase “**your guilt is taken away**” taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Isaiah 6:1-13.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

Matthew 9:1-8:

¹ And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city.
² And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.” ³ And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” ⁴ But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? ⁵ For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? ⁶ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Rise, pick up your bed and go home.” ⁷ And he rose and went home. ⁸ When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

A Brief Word for Reflection

If granted one wish to relieve the single greatest obstacle in your life today, what would you wish? Financial freedom? Restoration of health? Reconciliation in a broken relationship? When Jesus encountered the paralytic, he said, “take heart” or, in other words, *be encouraged*. You can imagine the paralytic likely didn’t expect the words that followed to be “your sins are forgiven.” Being confined to a bed would have meant this man had no way of working. He probably struggled with nearly every mundane task in life, utterly dependent on others. You can bet he probably felt his greatest need was healing his paralysis. The order of Christ’s healing of the man shows the primacy of our need to be forgiven of our sins and made right with God. However, Jesus, in his kindness, did not stop with the enormous gift of spiritual healing but went on to heal the man of his physical paralysis as well. How great is the love the Father has lavished on us through Christ!

Thank the Lord that he has removed our guilt and our sins are separated from us as far as the east is from the west.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2022

THE PROPHET BECOMES THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION

The Weekly Advent Scripture

Pray for God to use this passage of scripture to prepare your heart for worship tomorrow.

Read this passage in preparation for tomorrow's advent message.

Isaiah 6:1-13:

¹ In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" ⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" ⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." ⁸ And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me." ⁹ And he said, "Go, and say to this people: "Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' ¹⁰ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." ¹¹ Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, ¹² and the Lord removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. ¹³ And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump.

Thank the Lord for the salvation brought to us by his word—though it exposes us for what we lack, it is also the healing balm that makes us pleasing in his sight.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2022
CELEBRATING GOD'S EXTRAORDINARY GIFT

The Weekly Advent Scripture

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, "Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?"

Read this passage in preparation for the message on Sunday, December 25, 2022:

Luke 2:8-20:

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "**Fear not**, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is **Christ the Lord**. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and **lying in a manger**." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!**" ¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Thank the Lord for his Word and that he uses it to teach, inspire, and reveal himself to us.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2022
CELEBRATING GOD'S EXTRAORDINARY GIFT

Today, we will meditate on the phrase "**Fear not**" taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Luke 2:8-20.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, "Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?"

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

Isaiah 43:1-7:

¹ But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. ² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. ³ For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. ⁴ Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. ⁵ Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you. ⁶ I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, ⁷ everyone who is called by my name whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

A Brief Word for Reflection

"Fear not . . . I have called you by name. You are mine." What comforting words are these! They speak to the deepest longings of our souls: to be known personally, to have identity and purpose, and to belong. Throughout the book of Isaiah, the prophet made the case against Israel for her idolatry and sinfulness; she turned away from the Lord despite his faithfulness to her. Yet, even in declaring that her enemies would carry her off to Babylon in judgment, he promised to bring her back and to be with her in the fiery trials she would experience. He will never forsake his people but will go with us wherever we go and ultimately draw us back to himself. God will fulfill all his purposes for you and me, just as he did for Israel.

Thank the Lord for his faithfulness in walking with us and drawing us back to himself.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2022
CELEBRATING GOD'S EXTRAORDINARY GIFT

Today, we will meditate on the phrase "**Christ the Lord**" taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Luke 2:8-20.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, "Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?"

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

Matthew 16:13-17:

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

A Brief Word for Reflection

The more we read the scriptures, the easier it becomes to read phrases like "Christ the Lord" as commonplace. We read it so often we forget not only what it means, but what it meant in the moment. When Peter tells Jesus, "You are the Christ," this is an astonishing statement. In Jesus' time, to call someone "the Christ" was to say that they are the Anointed One—the Messiah the Jews awaited for hundreds of years. The Old Testament prophets spoke of the one who would come and restore the kingdom of David—a mighty and feared empire amongst the surrounding nations. Peter's confession served to say, "The Anointed One is finally here!" But Jesus the Christ didn't come to bear the sword—he came to bear the weight of our sin and construct a kingdom—not in Jerusalem—but in the hearts of all believers.

Thank the Lord for being our Christ, our Savior who defeated the greatest enemy we would ever know—sin and death.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2022
CELEBRATING GOD'S EXTRAORDINARY GIFT

Today, we will meditate on the phrase “**lying in a manger**” taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Luke 2:8-20.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

Philippians 2:5-8:

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

A Brief Word for Reflection

Jesus is the Messiah, the long-awaited consolation of Israel, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. There is no one higher, for he is God in the flesh. What might it look like for the earthly arrival of someone who holds these titles? One might expect fanfare fully equipped with the sound of trumpets, loud cymbals, and grand ceremony. Instead, his arrival was quiet, almost unnoticed. There was nothing prepared for him ahead of time, not even a bed. Instead, the Savior of the world was placed in a makeshift cradle—an animal's trough. Is this an arrival fitting of a king? On the contrary, it serves as a living illustration whereby the only way to save God's people would be if God *condescended* and saved us himself—for the all-powerful to become powerless; for the one who was in the form of God to empty himself and become a servant. Christ's arrival and placement in a manger set the pattern. His extraordinary gift is salvation which comes by way of *humility*—our conformity to the likeness of Christ—strength through weakness, riches through sacrifice, life through death.

Thank the Lord for the Holy Spirit, who occupies our hearts and is actively conforming us to Christ's likeness. Ask him to supply every opportunity to exercise the humility of Jesus.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2022
CELEBRATING GOD'S EXTRAORDINARY GIFT

Today, we will meditate on the phrase “**peace among those with whom he is pleased**” taken from our Weekly Advent Scripture which is Luke 2:8-20.

Pray for God to illuminate your heart and mind through his Word. Then, ask the Holy Spirit, “Why is this passage important to what I believe as a Christian?”

Read the passage below in reflection of our Weekly Advent Scripture.

Isaiah 9:6-7:

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

A Brief Word for Reflection

What comes to mind when you hear the word *peace*? We often think of peace as synonymous with serenity—we could all use a little *peace and quiet* every so often. Sometimes we think about it in the context of battle; when two nations are at war, we'll pray for peace. As harsh as it might sound, in the Garden, when Adam pursued his own interests above God's, in essence, he declared war on God *on our behalf*. We weren't just at odds with God; our relationship became violently fractured. What hope do we have? The enmity between man and God presented far too great a chasm for us to repair. Could anyone repair it and restore it to its former state? Yes—the Prince of Peace of which the prophet Isaiah spoke. But the Prince of Peace—Jesus Christ—wouldn't merely bring us serenity; instead, he would bring about a ceasefire in the war between God and man. The apostle Paul described it like this, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” In other words, because the Father is *perfectly pleased* with the work of his Son and because he has applied that work to those who, by faith, believe in the saving work of Jesus, he is pleased with them. The gift of God is the peace of God through Jesus Christ.

Thank the Lord for giving us his peace. He gave us peace—and is now pleased with us—even though we could not bring about peace on our own. Thanks be to Christ.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2022
CELEBRATING GOD'S EXTRAORDINARY GIFT

The Weekly Advent Scripture

Pray for God to use this passage of scripture to prepare your heart for worship tomorrow.

Read this passage in preparation for tomorrow's advent message.

Luke 2:8-20:

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" ¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Thank the Lord for the Savior he gave to us—the one who came in humility and brought us peace with God. Jesus is our gift to enjoy forever.