ADVENT 2026

Welcome to Advent 2026. During Advent, Christians prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, called Immanuel, "God with us." This devotional is meant to help you reflect on Jesus' presence with us each day of Advent by *singing* praises, *reading* Scripture, *reflecting* on its meaning, *praying* to God.

If you have an Advent wreath, start each devotional by lighting one of the purple candles. Each candle represents a different week of Advent. First is the candle of Hope, second is the candle of Peace, then the candle of Joy, finally the candle of Love. If you do this as a family, have your children take turns lighting the candle each night. Add a new candle each week.

Start each lesson by lighting the proper candles on the advent wreath. Then sing together using the song suggested in the devotional or you can choose a Christmas carol of your own to sing. You can find the lyrics for several well-known Christmas carols in the back of this devotional. Then you can read the Scripture out loud followed by the reflection on that passage. Please take time to discuss the passage and how that tells you a little bit more about the Christmas story. Conclude each time with a prayer, either using the prayer printed in the devotional or pray as a family in your own way.

Each week has a memory verse for you to work on each day. Each memory verse comes from each of the 4 Sunday's texts.

My hope with this devotional is that you will see Jesus revealed in the Old and New Testament and that He is fulfillment of God's redemptive plan for all of history. He is the reason we celebrate Christmas. God has not left us alone in dark world. He has shined light into the darkness leading us into life with Him! May this be a way that you and your family can stop for a few minutes each day and reflect on the majesty and glory of Christmas, when the Lord took on flesh and dwelt among us.

Happy Advent,

Pastor Jonathan

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29

*** Light the Candle of Hope**

SING: *Joy to the World* (see back pages of devotional)

READ: ***Luke 1:46-55***
And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

WEEK 1 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 1:49-50
For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

REFLECT:
Mary had a lot going on. She received a visit by the angel Gabriel informing her that she would be the mother of the Messiah, the one for whom Israel searched and waited for generation after generation. The Messiah was on his way, and Mary would be the woman by which he would be born. Mary was understandably surprised by this news she was still a virgin. The angel assured her that God will make it happen. As proof that God can do this, the angel informed Mary that her cousin, Elizabeth, who was much older, who was not able to have children, was going to give birth to a son herself! If God can bring a child out of a womb that had been closed, of course God could bring a child out of a womb that had never been opened! And hearing this news, Mary says, Behold, I am the servant of the LORD, let it be to me according to your word (Luke 1:38).

After the angel departed, Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth for 3 months. If anyone would be able to understand what Mary was going through, it was Elizabeth. Elizabeth understood the mystery of what was happening to Mary because it was happening to her too! Though John the Baptist was conceived

in an ordinary way, and Jesus in a supernatural way, both children were miracles from God. God was using these women as instruments of his divine power and grace to the world. During her visit with Elizabeth, Mary sang the song in our reading above. Mary went from a place of fear and doubt, to a place of trust and hope in the LORD.

She sings "he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name." She knows the God who has given her this son. This God who brought the world out of nothing and had brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. This God raised up David from a lowly shepherd to Israel's greatest king. Mary knew that God earned her trust and that He would be faithful to her just like He has been faithful to the generations of Jews before her. Mary's song is filled with deep knowledge of God and his work in the world and in her life. This knowledge led her into praise and adoration for God and his amazing work.

This is who Jesus is. He came to give mercy to those who fear him, to scatter the proud and to fill the hungry with good things. Mary's song gives a picture of God, and how God chose to reveal himself in Jesus Christ.

DISCUSS:

1. Make a list of the words Mary uses to describe God. (What adjectives does she use? For example: he who is ***mighty*** and ***holy***…)
2. Make a list of the actions that Mary says that God has done. (For example: ***he scattered the proud***, ***filled the hungry***, etc.)
3. Are these descriptions and actions of God new, or have they been around for a long time? What clues from the text give us an answer?
4. How do these descriptions of God and actions of God give us a clue for how we can put our trust in God?

PRAY:

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are almighty God. That you are all powerful and holy, and worthy of our praise. We thank you that you are faithful to us and that you show us your mercy just like you did to Mary, Elizabeth, and to your people since the beginning of time. Help us to see you as we prepare to celebrate Christmas. In Your name we pray, Amen.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30

*** Relight the Candle of Hope**

SING: *Joy to the World*

READ: ***Genesis 1:1-5***
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

WEEK 1 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 1:49-50
For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

REFLECT:
Before the days of cell phones, we had to use telephones that were connected to the walls of our homes. Caller ID did not exist in those days, so when the phone rang, you really never knew who was on the other end. In order to know who was calling, we had to answer. Much of the time, I knew the person on the other end of the line before they said their name; I knew their voice. I could identify in the first syllable my grandmother, my father, my friend Greg, and so on. If I didn't know the voice of the person on the other end of the phone, I had to ask: "may I ask who's calling?"

God created the world by speaking it into existence. Genesis 1 records that God spoke 10 times over the course of creation. Every facet of creation knew the sound of their creator's voice. His voice carries with it the authority and sovereignty that comes from being the creator. Nothing that was made needed to ask: "may I ask who's calling?"

John 1 refers to Jesus as the Word of God. He is the one who reveals the maker of heaven and earth. He is the one who reveals the very person and nature of God. God is not an unknowable force, or merely a divine being. God reveals himself in flesh and blood in Jesus Christ, who speaks to His

creation, makes Himself known to it and personally knows His creation Himself.

This is what is so remarkable about Jesus. He is the one through whom everything was made, including you and me. He is also the one that God chooses to make himself known to us and enables us to know him. This is why we celebrate Jesus' birth. The King of Kings and LORD of Lords invites us to know him. May we listen to His voice and recognize the power of the one behind it and the love of the one who delights in us as his beloved creation. As his creation we are to listen to his voice and obey it because he is our maker and LORD and because he loves us so much to allow us to know him and have a relationship with him.

DISCUSS:

1. Whose voice can you recognize without seeing their face?
2. How do we recognize God's voice?
3. What are ways that we can hear God's voice in Jesus and learn how to obey him?
4. What are ways that you know God is worthy to obey? What are ways that you know God loves you?

PRAY:

Lord Jesus, we thank you for the fact that you were with God in creation and that we can recognize the voice of our Creator when we hear your voice. Thank you for being the source of all creation and for being the source of our very lives. We pray that you would continue to sustain us, provide for us, and lead us in the ways that you intended for us to live. Teach us to depend upon your leading, to listen to your voice, so that we might trust you more and more in our daily life. Jesus, we pray this in Your name, Amen.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1

*** Relight the Candle of Hope**

SING: *Joy to the World*

READ: ***Genesis 2:18-25***
Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

WEEK 1 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 1:49-50
For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

REFLECT:
Throughout all of Genesis 1, God declares his creation good. Everything is good; and when God created man and woman he declared it VERY good. Genesis 2 gives us a picture of how the creation of man and woman came to be. The only time God said something was not good was when man lacked a suitable helper. Adam had looked for a helper among the animals, but none was found. He searched high and low for something in God's creation to bring him fulfillment, and nothing was found. So God did what God does: he created something new. He formed Eve out of Adam's own flesh. Nothing in creation could fully satisfy Adam- only God could provide that complete satisfaction.

The memory verse this week reminds us that God has done great things for us. God does not leave us alone in our moments of need. God is always with us; his faithfulness never ends.

This is a picture of Jesus. In our sinful condition, we look for satisfaction in the things of this world. We look high and low for things that will fulfill our desires and needs. But nothing will ever satisfy it. Just like Adam, God has seen our need, he has seen that things are not good. And so he sent us a helper- even more than that, he sent us a Savior. God sent Jesus Christ into the world in order to save the world from sin so that we might be fulfilled and satisfied in Him.

In the text we see a picture of the first wedding in human history- when Adam and Eve became husband and wife. In Revelation, God describes Jesus' return as a wedding day. When Jesus returns, he will be the groom to take the church as His Bride. We will be united to God in perfect union through our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. This is why Mary can sing that He who is mighty has done great things for me.

DISCUSS:

1. What was not good about Adam's condition at the beginning of the Bible passage?
2. How did God solve the problem?
3. What are things that you are looking for to make you happy?
4. How does God meet our need?
5. What are ways that you need Jesus to show you God's strength?

PRAY:

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you do not leave us in a place of need or of despair. We thank you that you meet our needs in Jesus Christ. You sent him to earth in order to make us your children again. We pray that we would not seek to be satisfied by anything else in the world except through your Son Jesus and the life he gives us through his death on the cross. We pray all of this in Jesus' name, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2

*** Relight the Candle of Hope**

SING: *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*

READ: ***Genesis 3:1-15***

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die." "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

WEEK 1 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 1:49-50

For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

REFLECT:
The serpent tricked Eve. His words made Adam and Eve second-guess what God told them. "Did God really say…?" the serpent asked. On Monday we saw how God created the world by speaking it into existence. He revealed himself to his creation by letting his voice be heard. And now his very creation is starting to question that voice. Did God really say that? Is that what God meant? When Adam and Eve began to question God's voice, they started listening to their own voice. Eve saw that the fruit of the tree was very good so she ate it and then gave some to Adam.

This is what happens when we sin. We no longer hear God and we question if He really has our best interests at heart. If Jesus is the Word of God, and we start doubting God's voice, we are actually then wavering in our faith in Jesus. So what do we do? We repent. We turn again to hear the voice of God, and when we do, we see Jesus. At the very end of this passage, God promised that he would put enmity between the woman's offspring and the offspring of the serpent. "He will crush your head, and you will strike his heal." This is a promise of Jesus' victory at the cross. God will not let his voice be silent. He extends his mercy to all who fear Him, from generation to generation. Listen closely to God's voice. He sent Jesus as His way of calling out to us so that we might obey Him and trust His voice instead of trying to listen to our own.

DISCUSS:

1. When was a time when you questioned something God has commanded you to do?
2. When was a time that you did something you wanted to do, even when you knew God would not want you to?
3. How can you be reminded that God's voice, Jesus Christ, rescues us from sin and shows us his mercy?

PRAY:
Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can trust your voice; that your love and mercy is shown from generation to generation. Forgive us for doubting your Word and for following our own desires instead of listening to your voice. Thank you for rescuing us from the noise in our head by speaking to us through your Word Jesus Christ. Thank you that He has defeated sin and death on the cross and given us new life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3

*** Relight the Candle of Hope**

SING: *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*

READ: ***Genesis 12:1-3***
Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

WEEK 1 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 1:49-50
For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

REFLECT:
Abraham was not always a faithful follower of the LORD. Scripture tells us that Abraham was called by God out of Ur, the land of the Chaldeans. There was a time when Abraham worshipped false gods apart from the LORD. What happened? In Genesis 15:7 and Hebrews 11:8, we learn that Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place that God would give to him. We learn that Abraham responded to God's call, but instead of leaving his father and all his family behind, he started toward the Promised Land with his Father and they got halfway there, to a place called Haran. They ended up settling in Haran, only halfway to where God called him to go. At the beginning of Genesis 12, Abraham is in Haran. He had responded to God's call to leave Ur, but now he needed to go the rest of the way.

And God says to Abraham, go from your country, leave the security of your family and your father's inheritance behind. Go to the place where I will show you. God promises that the security and peace that Abraham experienced in Haran needs to be given away for something even greater and more blessed than Abraham can begin to even dream of. And this move that God is calling Abraham to make will impact more than just him and Sarah. It will make a difference for his family- he will have children and offspring that will become a full nation. And more than that, Abraham will become a blessing to the whole world. God was calling Abraham to look past the

difficulty and the struggle that would come from him venturing out on his own and leaving behind his family and his inheritance. Abraham trusted that God would give him more than he would ever leave behind. And God was faithful to His promise. God brought Abraham into the Promised Land and made him successful there. God gave Abraham and Sarah a son, Isaac, and eventually became the father of the nation of Israel. Abraham believed God's promise that even if he left everything behind, he would be okay, and that the entire world would be blessed through him.

This is a picture of Jesus. Just like Abraham, Jesus left everything behind in obedience to His Father. Jesus left His Father's side, He stepped down from eternity into time, from being uncontainable to being wrapped in skin. Why did Jesus do this? Because He loves us. Abraham's faithfulness ultimately led to the birth of his greatest descendant: Jesus Christ. Through Abraham's obedience, he became part of God's plan to bless the entire world. Through Christ's obedience, the entire world is blessed because we are given the chance to be forgiven of our sin. This is the joy of Christmas.

DISCUSS:

1. How did God bless the world through Abraham?
2. How does Abraham's obedience to God show us a picture of Jesus?
3. How does God bless you through Jesus?

PRAY:

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are faithful to your promises. You promised Abraham that you would make him the father of your people, including the distant human ancestor of your Son Jesus. Thank you for sending Jesus to save us from our sin. We praise You for blessing us through the obedience of your Son. Teach us to trust your promises for our lives so that we might continue to show your love to the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4

*** Relight the Candle of Hope**

SING: *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

READ: ***Genesis 22:1-14***

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

WEEK 1 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 1:49-50

For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

REFLECT:
Isaac was Abraham's promised son. Abraham had received everything he could possibly receive in life: wealth, power, and success. But he did not have a son until God made it possible for him and his wife Sarah to have Isaac. Finally, Abraham had an heir, someone to inherit his success and continue to the family line.

In today's Scripture, we see that God now is asking Abraham to give up this son that he had been hoping for and waiting for, for so long. And what does Abraham do? He obeys God. He knew that God had given him Isaac and that if God now wanted Abraham to give Isaac back to God, then that was God's right to do so, and Abraham obeyed.

It is clear that Abraham did not like this plan, nor did he fully understand it. But why would Abraham obey God in this instance? Hebrews 11:19 states that Abraham knew that God would be faithful to His promises, even if that meant bringing Isaac back from the dead. Abraham trusted that God would not break his promise, even if it meant raising his son back to life. As it turned out, God provided a different way. Instead of allowing Abraham to follow through with this sacrifice, God provided another sacrifice. A ram caught in a thicket. God spared Isaac's life by offering another in his place.

This is what God does for us. At Christmas, we celebrate that God has provided another way to deal with our sin. Instead of punishing us, he has made it possible for Jesus to take our punishment himself. God spared Isaac, but He did not spare Jesus, who was sacrificed for our sins. But three days later, Jesus was raised from the dead, never to die again. There is never a time we cannot trust God, because He has saved us and given us new life. God has provided the lamb for the burnt offering in his own Son, Jesus Christ.

DISCUSS:

1. Did Abraham know what God was going to do on the mountain? Why do you think Abraham trusted God?
2. How did God save Isaac? How does God save us?
3. How does this help us trust God with all of our lives?

PRAY:
Heavenly Father, thank you for providing another way to deal with our sin. Thank you for sending Jesus to take our place. Teach us to trust you with our lives, knowing that you will always provide. In Jesus' name, Amen.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5

*** Relight the Candle of Hope**

SING: *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*

READ: ***Genesis 32:22-30***
The same night [Jacob] arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered."

WEEK 1 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 1:49-50
For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

REFLECT:
Jacob had spent more than 14 years living and working with his Uncle Laban in Haran. You might remember that Jacob's grandfather Abraham moved to the Promised Land from Haran. Jacob had family in that region because that was also where his mother, Rebecca, was from. He went there because he was afraid of his brother Esau. Jacob had tricked Esau and knew that Esau wanted to hurt him, even kill him for what he had done.

Now, after 14 years in Haran, the LORD is calling Jacob back home. This is good, but the problem is that he has to pass through Esau's land in order to get back home. Jacob is afraid that his brother might still be really mad at him because of what he did to him.

So Jacob comes up with a plan. He divides all his belongings into two parts and sends them ahead of him. If Esau is angry and attacks one of these parts of his belongings, at least the other part has a chance to escape. Then Jacob starts sending Esau gifts. He sends him camels, goats, rams, cows, bulls, and donkeys. In three different waves, Jacob sends these things to Esau in order to make Esau forget about being angry with him. Finally, Jacob had sent everyone else ahead of him and he was all alone, still afraid of crossing over into Esau's land. While he was alone, a man came and wrestled him all night until morning. They fought and wrestled, and neither one could win. Finally, the man Jacob was wrestling touched Jacob's hip and put it out of joint, which stopped Jacob from being able to keep fighting.

Jacob was scared to follow God's commands. The LORD had told him to go to the Promised Land, and yet Jacob was scared. He sent everyone else in front of him, he stayed behind afraid of what Esau might do. We learn at the end of the passage that Jacob was actually wrestling with the LORD himself that night. Jacob struggled with God over his obedience and trust to do what God told him to do. And instead of yelling at him, God wrestled with him. He entered into Jacob's difficulty and struggle in order to remind Jacob that He is with him in the good times and the hard times.

This is a picture of Jesus. God sent Jesus not to condemn us for being afraid to trust him, but to enter into our struggle and fear in order to show us that he will be with us through it all. Jacob saw God face to face; He saw an early glimpse of Jesus himself. We do not need to be afraid because God knows our struggle and he wrestles with us through it all. And he will take care of us every step of the way.

DISCUSS:

1. What does the man ask Jacob, when they are wrestling? What does the man rename Jacob?
2. What are some things that you are scared of that you are 'wrestling with God' about?
3. How does God assure us that he will never let us go?

PRAY:

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you enter into our struggles and fears. Thank you that you tell us not to be afraid, but to trust in you because you are victorious over our fears, through what Jesus did for us at the cross. In Jesus' name, Amen.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, light the Candle of Peace**

SING: *O Come, All Ye Faithful*

READ: ***Luke 1:68-79***
And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

WEEK 2 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 1:68-69
Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised us up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.*

REFLECT:
Most of Luke chapter 1 focuses our attention on the birth of John the Baptist. John the Baptist was born to Zechariah and Elizabeth. Zechariah was a priest in the temple and Elizabeth was Mary's cousin. Zechariah was the priest who was selected to enter the Holy of Holies and burn the sacred incense. This was a great honor for priests, as only once a year was one priest permitted to enter the holiest place in the temple. When he was in this special, most holy place, God sent an angel to tell Zechariah that he and his wife Elizabeth were going to have a son who would grow up to be a prophet like Elijah. And more than that, he would be the prophet to announce the arrival of the Messiah.

This was too good to be true for Zechariah. He and Elizabeth were too old to have children. He didn't believe what the angel was saying to him. In order to prove that the angel was telling the truth, Zechariah would not be able to talk from that day until his son was born. When Zechariah came out of the temple, he couldn't tell people what happened because he could not talk!

And the LORD's promise came true. Months later, John the Baptist was born and when they brought him to the temple, they gave him his name and all of a sudden Zechariah could speak again! The first words we hear from his lips are the song recorded in our passage today.

Zechariah praises God for promising to send the Messiah. Zechariah praises God for the deliverance that Jesus will bring. Zechariah prays for his son John, declaring that his job will be to prepare the way of the LORD and to lead people into repentance and forgiveness of sins. Zechariah declares that his son John will be the prophet of the Most High.

John the Baptist's birth points us to Jesus Christ. From the way that he came into the world, to the message that he preached in his ministry, John the Baptist serves as the one who comes before Jesus and says: He's here! The Messiah has arrived!! We can join Zechariah in praising God for sending us Jesus, the one who has visited and redeemed his people.

DISCUSS:

1. How does God visit us and redeem us?
2. What is John the Baptist's job? (see where it starts: 'And you, child,')
3. Because God has come to us in Jesus, how can we 'serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness in all our days'?

PRAY:

Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending Jesus to be our redeemer. Thank you that we have nothing to fear because he has come to save us from our sin. Thank you for sending John the Baptist to point us to Jesus, our Messiah, reminding us that you keep your promises and that you are greater than we could ever know. In Jesus' name, Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 7

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace**

SING: *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*

READ: ***Exodus 3:7-15***
Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain." Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

WEEK 2 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 1:68-69
Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised us up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.*

REFLECT:
Today's Scripture is part of God's conversation with Moses at the burning bush. Moses has fled into the wilderness and was there for 40 years because he had tried to stand up for the Israelites against Egyptians. Now 40 years later, God is coming to Moses saying that he has seen what Moses saw. "I have heard their cry… I know their sufferings, and I have come down to

deliver them.…" God knows when we hurt. God knows when we are suffering, and God has promised to deliver us.

God tells Moses to go to Egypt in order to free his people. Moses knows that he is not up for the task. He remembers that he tried that once before and it didn't work out so well. God tells Moses: "I will be with you."

One of the names for Jesus is Emmanuel, which means "God with us." God promises to deliver us from our sin. God promises to be with us in our sufferings, to deliver us from evil.

A lot of times we wonder where God is when bad things happen. We wonder if God even cares about our struggles. The reality is that He does care. He is with us in the midst of them and he promises to deliver us from them. It will not always look like what we expect, but the reality is that God is with us in good times as well as hard times. And He invites us to know Him. He invites us to call him by his name: Yahweh, which means I am.

The song you sang at the beginning of today's devotional paints a clear picture of our need for God to come to us. O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (God with us), and ransom captive Israel. Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel (God with us) shall come to thee O Israel. God is with us. He has come to us and he has redeemed us from our sin. In good times and hard times, God will see us and come to us from generation to generation.

DISCUSS:

1. What are some of the things that God has seen Israel suffering?
2. What are some things that God might see you suffering with?
3. How does God promise to deliver Israel?
4. How can we know that God will rescue us from difficult times?
5. How does this passage connect to this week's memory verse?

PRAY:

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you do see our difficulties and struggles. We thank you that you have saved us from these through Jesus Christ. Teach us to remember that you are with us always. Thank you that you tell us to call you by name. Thank you for sending Jesus to be our savior and redeemer. In Jesus' name, Amen.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace**

SING: *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*

READ: ***Exodus 12:21-28***
Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you. You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. And when you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

WEEK 2 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 1:68-69
Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised us up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.*

REFLECT:
This is the story of the first Passover. Each lamb that was sacrificed had to be unblemished- perfect in every way. These were special animals. The Israelites who raised them took special care of them and invested a lot of time and energy in keeping them perfect. And God asked the Israelites to sacrifice it to the LORD. Why? Because God deserves the best that we have. We do not simply go to God and offer something that is not that important to us. Instead, God asks us to give our best to him. Because God has given us everything and he asks us to hold nothing back from Him.

After sacrificing the lamb, they were to take its blood and put some on the door frame of the house as a sign that this house was covered by the blood

of the lamb. And once the blood was spread on the door, no one was to leave the house. This way, when the Lord comes, he will not hurt anyone in that house.

The Passover was a defining moment for Israel. Because all Israel obeyed the LORD and listened to his voice, because they trusted that the blood of the lamb would protect them from harm, they were spared. But the Egyptians didn't listen and as a result, God "struck" them down. God saved his people by the blood of a perfect lamb. And after this Passover night, the Egyptians were so afraid of God that they let the Israelites go. God used this event to set his people free.

To help them remember this night, God commands Israel to eat this meal once a year and have children ask: what does this meal mean? And their parents are to tell them again of how God saved them by the blood of the perfect lamb.

This is a picture of Jesus. God sent Jesus to earth to be a perfect sacrifice for our sin. No human being could be perfect enough to die for the sins of the world. Only God could be perfect enough for that. So God put on skin and lived with his people. He lived a perfect life and died so that we might be set free. God saves us by the blood of THE perfect lamb, Jesus Christ.

DISCUSS:

1. What does the blood do for the people who have it on their door?
2. Why is it important for Israel to remember the meaning of this event?
3. How does Christmas become a reminder of God's grace to us?
4. How does this passage connect to our memory verse this week?

PRAY:

Heavenly Father, thank you for Christmas. Thank you for sending Jesus to be the perfect sacrifice to save us from our sin. Just like you used the Passover lamb to free Israel from slavery in Egypt, we pray that we would learn to live in the freedom from sin that you have given to us through Jesus. We pray this in His name, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace**

SING: *O Come All Ye Faithful*

READ: ***Leviticus 4:1-7***
And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If anyone sins unintentionally in any of the Lord's commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them, if it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, then he shall offer for the sin that he has committed a bull from the herd without blemish to the Lord for a sin offering. He shall bring the bull to the entrance of the tent of meeting before the Lord and lay his hand on the head of the bull and kill the bull before the Lord. And the anointed priest shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it into the tent of meeting, and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle part of the blood seven times before the Lord in front of the veil of the sanctuary. And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense before the Lord that is in the tent of meeting, and all the rest of the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

WEEK 2 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 1:68-69
Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised us up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.*

REFLECT:
God takes our sin seriously because our sin is serious. In Romans, Paul says that the wages of sin is death. In the Old Testament, God provided a way for the Israelites to be forgiven of their sin. Sin requires the death penalty. But God made a way for an animal to be killed instead of the person who committed that sin. This way, God's justice would be fulfilled and the person who sinned could be forgiven and still live.

The priests had a role to play in these sacrifices. The priests knew the procedures of how to perform these offerings. They were even given the authority to make sacrifices on behalf of people who didn't know that they

had committed a sin. The Priest would serve as a mediator between man and God, performing the sacrifice so that the Israelites would be saved.

This is a picture of Jesus. Hebrews 4:14-16 describes Jesus as our great high priest. He knows our struggles, he knows our difficulties, he knows the ways we fall short. He knows how easy it is for us to mess up. He knows all this because he was one of us. He can relate to our weakness because he himself was weak, but unlike us, he did not sin. He knows how hard it is to be tempted and yet not sin.

Jesus functions as our High Priest in that he offers a sacrifice to God on our behalf. But the sacrifice he offers is not a bull or a lamb, it is his own flesh and blood. His body is the horn of salvation that God has raised up for us. Jesus takes our sin upon himself and then presents us to his Father as perfect righteous children.

DISCUSS:

1. Read Hebrews 4:14-16. How does Jesus fulfill the role of High Priest that is described in our passage today?
2. How does God show you how serious your sins are?
3. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus is our High Priest?

PRAY:

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus to be our high priest. We thank you that he knows what it is like to be human and to experience what it is like to be tempted and to know hunger, thirst, and weariness. Thank you that Jesus did not sin even dealing with those limits. Teach us to continually turn to Jesus and ask him for help and to give us his righteous forgiveness each day. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace**

SING: *Joy to the World*

READ: ***Leviticus 23:15-22***
"You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the Lord. You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked with leaven, as first fruits to the Lord. And you shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, and one bull from the herd and two rams. They shall be a burnt offering to the Lord, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord. And you shall offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of peace offerings. And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the first fruits as a wave offering before the Lord, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the Lord for the priest. And you shall make a proclamation on the same day. You shall hold a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a statute forever in all your dwelling places throughout your generations. "And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God."

WEEK 2 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 1:68-69
Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised us up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.*

REFLECT:
The Israelites calendar revolved around different feasts. Passover was the biggest feast that they celebrated, remembering how God rescued them from slavery in Egypt. Each of the feasts were accompanied by sacrifice and a time to gather together as a people, remembering God's provision and care for them.

The feast celebrated in the passage here is the Feast of Weeks (it's also referred to in the New Testament as Pentecost). Rather than waiting to the end of the harvest time to offer to God what they had produced, God instructed the Israelites to bring an offering of the first parts of their crops. This was an act of faith that while they are offering to God the first part of their crop, they were trusting that God would produce the rest of the harvest later that year. God wanted to teach his people that he can be trusted so he asks them to bring their first fruits to him.

At the end of the passage, you'll see that God instructs Israel to remember not to harvest the edges of the land. Instead, they are to leave the outer edges of the fields and whatever falls to the ground for the widow, the orphan, and the sojourner (immigrant). For a farmer who makes their living on what they grow, leaving some behind is not a good way to make money. But God told his people to leave some of their crop behind in order to help those who had no way of surviving without it. God wanted his people to know that he is generous and wanted them to be generous to others.

This is a picture of Jesus. Jesus extends his love to everyone who needs it. It doesn't matter if they are from one country or another, it doesn't matter if they are rich or poor. Jesus wants to show his love to everyone. And He calls us to share his love with everyone we encounter. His love is extravagant and we should do the same. God calls us to offer all of ourselves to Him and sends us out to share his abundant love with all we meet.

DISCUSS:

1. In what ways has God been generous to you?
2. What ways do you offer your material resources to God?
3. How does God show his love to all people?

PRAY:

Heavenly Father, thank you that your love is extravagant toward us. Thank you for providing everything we need for our lives. Teach us to use our resources and material possessions as you lead us to, being generous to those who are in need. Help us to show your love to everyone we encounter. In Jesus' name, Amen.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace**

SING: *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*

READ: ***Numbers 13:25-33***
At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan." But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are." So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."

14:5-9
Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the people of Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, "The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them."

WEEK 2 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 1:68-69
Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised us up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.*

REFLECT:
Zechariah's song reminds us that God has visited and redeemed his people. We need to be reminded of that because we are too quick to forget it.

Israel had just been rescued by God from slavery, out of Egypt, and was being led to the Promised Land. When 12 spies went and spied out the land from Israel, they came back and 10 of them were afraid. They thought the people were too big and strong and that there was no way they could take the land from them. However, Joshua and Caleb remembered what God had done for them. They remembered their escape from Egypt, they remembered the God who brought them through the desert, providing food and drink every step of the way. They knew that nothing was too big for God. "The LORD is with us; do not fear them" they said.

We too quickly forget what God has done for us. As we celebrate Advent, we remember that there is no obstacle or challenge that is too big for God. God has redeemed us through the blood of Jesus. Not even death itself can keep us from God's love. We have nothing to fear. Jesus reminds us that God is with us (Emmanuel) and that he will rescue us from danger and give hope even in the face of despair.

DISCUSS:
1. What were the 10 spies afraid of?
2. Why were Caleb and Joshua confident in victory?
3. How can we be confident that God is with us throughout our life?

PRAY:
Heavenly Father, thank you for being bigger and more powerful than any enemy could ever face. Remind us that you are always with us, as Emmanuel, and that you have redeemed us through Jesus Christ, your Son. In His name we pray, Amen.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace**

SING: *Joy to the World*

READ: ***Deuteronomy 30:1-6***
"And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, and return to the Lord your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. And the Lord your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

WEEK 2 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 1:68-69
Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised us up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.*

REFLECT:
The book of Deuteronomy Moses' final speech to the Israelites. The generation that God freed from Egypt had passed away and now their children and grandchildren were standing at the border of the land that God promised to give to them. Moses wants to make sure that this new generation understood what God had done and was about to do for them. He wanted to make sure they were clear about what God expects of the Israelites as well. Which is why He takes the time to tell them the law one more time. He wants to make sure that they are clear about God's instructions before Moses leaves them. Deuteronomy literally means second law: Deutero- second, nomy- law.

Today's Scripture has Moses beginning to conclude his speech. He has told them the blessings that God will bring to them when they are obedient. He has told them the curses that will be brought on themselves when they are disobedient. And he wants to remind Israel of God's faithfulness through it all.

Read the first line again: "and when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse…." Moses is very aware that the Israelites will get some things right and other things wrong. Israel will not be perfect. They will experience the curses; but even in the curses God will not abandon them. Instead what does Israel have to do? Repent; return to the LORD. The LORD your god will "circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." God promises to change us. When we repent, when we ask for forgiveness, God promises to hear us and to change us from sinful people to righteous people.

This is a picture of Jesus. Even from the beginning of Israel's history, God knew that they would get it wrong. Human beings are sinful creatures. But God promises to be with us, to restore us when we repent of our sin and seek Him with all our heart. Jesus changes us. His sacrifice on the cross makes it possible for us to be made right with God. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to His people that when we repent, God will forgive us and restore us in right relationship with him and each other. This is why Zechariah can sing, "God has visited us and redeemed his people!"

REFLECT:

1. When was a time you experienced God's blessing? God's curse?
2. Why do you think we do good things sometimes and bad things other times?
3. According to the end of the passage, when God changes our hearts, what will happen to us?

PRAY:

Heavenly Father, thank you for never letting us go. We admit that we get some things right and other things wrong. Thank you for not giving up on us. Thank you for sending Jesus to die on the cross to save us and to change us into people who worship you with every little part of our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace, light the Candle of Joy**

SING: *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*

READ: ***Luke 2:8-15***
And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 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. 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. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" 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."

WEEK 3 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 2:14
"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

REFLECT:
The shepherds were minding their own business. It was a typical night out in the fields, watching, keeping warm, making sure that the sheep whose job it was to protect and keep track of were all okay and out of harm's way. And out of nowhere an angel appears to them, full of the glory of heaven. And the angel says: "Fear not… I bring you good news!" The angel did not come with a message of God's anger or wrath against his people. Instead, he comes with good news! Not just good news for the kings and upper classes of the day, but for everyone, including these shepherds!

What is this good news? "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the LORD." The first part of this good news is that a the one who has been born is a Savior. This was indeed good news. So much of the Old Testament prophecies talk about a coming Day of the

LORD where God would destroy his enemies and redeem His righteous people. But a question remained: who were God's righteous people? Any sincere soul searching would lead people to realize that they were disobedient to God and could realistically be called God's enemy. If the LORD returned, would they be counted among the righteous or God's enemies?

When the angel comes to the shepherds and announces that God was going to send a Savior, this was really good news! God was not sending someone to destroy them, but to save them! And it got even better: this Savior who was to come would be none other than the Messiah! The one promised throughout all the Old Testament; the one all of Israel was waiting for! He was coming! And it got even better than that: that Messiah, that deliverer, that Savior, would be the LORD Himself! God was not going to pass off this job of saving His people to anyone else. Instead, God was going to come himself to save Israel and all who believed in Him. And God did come to us: Jesus was born to be our Savior, and He is Christ, the LORD!

Unable to contain their excitement anymore, a multitude of the angelic army appeared in the sky praising God for what He has done! God reveals His glory not in displaying His power of destroying people, but of saving them. The Savior has come to establish peace between us and God. Only God can do this and He has done it for us by sending Jesus. Glory to God in the highest!

DISCUSS:

1. Why do you think the first thing angel told the shepherds was "fear not?"
2. What did the shepherds do when all the angels left?
3. Do you ever fear that God is angry with you? How do the angel's words to the shepherds help you believe something different than that?

PRAY:

Heavenly Father, thank you for coming to us to save us. We know that we are sinful and that we deserve to be treated like your enemies. Remind us that you sent Jesus to show your love for us, that you do not want to destroy us but to save us. Thank you for reminding us of that reality at Christmas. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 14

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace, relight the Candle of Joy**

SING: *Joy to the World*

READ: ***Joshua 5:13-15***
When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" And the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

WEEK 3 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 2:14
"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

REFLECT:
This is one of my favorite encounters in all of the Bible. The Israelites have just crossed the Jordan River, and are preparing to enter into the Promised Land. Jericho is standing in stretched out in front of them and Joshua is perhaps considering what kind of battle strategy he needs to put in place for victory.

As Joshua is in thought, he looks up and sees a man standing in front of him with his drawn sword in his hand. Encountering a warrior with a drawn sword would put anyone on high alert. A drawn sword is an indicator that this guy was ready to fight. Cautiously, Joshua goes to him and asks if he is a friend or an enemy.

And the warrior says, "No." The warrior is not on Joshua's side, nor is the warrior on Jericho's side. He is on the LORD's side. He is none other than the commander of the army of the LORD. At the moment that God's people need His leading and strategy, He has arrived.

Joshua's reaction indicates that this is more than just an angel. (As if an angel is no big deal). Joshua bows and worships this warrior. And the warrior receives it! The text indicates that this is none other than the LORD himself who is ready to lead His army into battle. His command to Joshua is the same as what the LORD commands Moses at the burning bush: take off your sandals for you are standing on holy ground.

Joshua found himself in the presence of God himself. God does not delegate His responsibility to subordinates to do His work. If God says that He will lead His people, then HE will lead his people!

This is a beautiful picture of Jesus. This warrior stood before Joshua ready to lead God's army into battle for his people. The angels that appear to the shepherds are part of that same heavenly army. The angel army appears and praises God for sending their leader once more into battle to rescue His people from their enemy. This time the enemy is not of flesh or blood. The enemy Jesus frees us from is sin. And this enemy is the kind that only God himself can defeat. The warrior who appeared to Joshua was on the LORD's side and would do the will of God. Jesus Himself comes to earth doing the will of His Father, in humble obedience. Dealing with His enemies personally and definitively.

REFLECT:

1. How would you react if you saw a warrior with his sword drawn ready for battle?
2. What does it mean for you to know that God Himself fights for us on our behalf?
3. How does Christmas show us God's desire to fight for us?

PRAY:

Lord Jesus, thank you for sending John the Baptist as a witness to you and to call our attention to the fact that you came to us. Thank you for sending all the prophets of the Old Testament to prepare us for your birth at Christmas. Teach us to bear witness about you like John did so that others might put their faith and trust in you. In Your name we pray, Amen.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace, relight the Candle of Joy**

SING: *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*

READ: ***Judges 6:11-16***

Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, "The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor." And Gideon said to him, "Please, sir, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian." And the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?" And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." And the Lord said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man."

WEEK 3 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 2:14

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

REFLECT:

The Angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon while he was beating out wheat in a wine press, hiding from the Midianites. And the angel gives him a surprising greeting: "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor." This is a moment of humor in the Bible. Gideon is acting like anything but a mighty man of valor. He is currently beating out wheat in a wine press. Beating out wheat was typically done in an open area with a good amount of air circulation. Wind was needed in order to separate the heavy wheat kernel from the chaff that blows away in the wind. Gideon is in a wine press, in an enclosed place hiding from his enemies. He's doing work in a closed, secret place that should be done out in the open. He's acting less like a mighty man of valor and more like a scaredy cat.

We later learn another reason that Gideon does not think he really fits the description of a mighty man of valor: he is from the weakest clan of one of the weakest tribes in Israel, and in his own clan, he is the least in his family. Gideon is a nobody in the eyes of the world. He does not have nobility in his blood, he does not have a great and mighty family history. Instead, he's a guy who is scared for his own life and has resorted to beating out wheat in a wine press.

What does the LORD say to him: He says to him, 'do I not send you?' and 'I will be with you' (Emmanuel). The LORD says, do not look at yourself with the eyes of the world, I am greater than anything the world can imagine. I am the one who is telling you to do this. You are not mighty because of your own power or your own reputation, of course not! Instead, you are mighty because of my power and my reputation. I am with you! You will be victorious because I will make you victorious.

By the world's standards, Christians don't look all that powerful. We do not pursue power of our own, instead we submit to the will of our Father in Heaven. We are not independent people, but people who are utterly dependent on God. And yet God uses us. It is in the moments that we are afraid that we need to trust in God. We are called to live lives of humility because we know where our power and strength comes from: the LORD! The LORD is with us. We do not walk through this life alone. God has come to us in Jesus Christ to redeem us. And when He does, He reveals his glory and his worthiness of our praise.

REFLECT:

1. What does Gideon ask the Angel of the LORD first? Does Gideon see God at work around him at that moment?
2. What assurance does the Angel give to Gideon that God has not abandoned His people?
3. How can you know that God will be with you, even when you're scared?

PRAY:

Heavenly Father, thank you for being with us even when we are afraid. Teach us to look back on our lives and over history to see you working and saving your people. Teach us to trust in you when times are really good and when times are really bad. Thank you for sending Jesus to reveal your power and glory. In His name we pray, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace, relight the Candle of Joy**

SING: *O Come All Ye Faithful*

READ: ***Isaiah 43:1-5a***
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. 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. 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. 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. Fear not, for I am with you…

WEEK 3 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 2:14
"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

REFLECT:
Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 43 is a beautiful reminder of the depth and breadth of God's love for us. It starts out by introducing the LORD as the one who created us and formed us. And then this God who made us says to us these words: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine." Our maker and creator has declared to us that we have been redeemed. So many Christians are riddled with guilt, trying to make up for our sinfulness and earn our way back into God's favor. God says, stop! I have done all that is necessary to redeem you. God knows us; he knows our weaknesses and our struggles; he knows that we have sinned. And yet He loves us; He has paid the price for our sin and redeemed us from the death that we deserve.

God knows each of us by name. Think about that for a minute: God knows every single person in the world by name. The US Government assigns us a number to know us by. To our own leaders, most of us are merely a number in a computer that keeps tracks of our taxes and our citizenship. It is not that way with God. God knows every person in the world by name. And he

promises that for all who believe in him, that we have nothing to fear. We belong to him and he will take care of us. In the next sentence, God says when you pass through the waters, I will be with you (Emmanuel). In hard times, when nothing seems to be going right, when you are being attacked from all sides, I am with you, God says. You are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you. What incredible words to hear from our Father; from the God of the universe; from the one who made us!

John 3:16 tells us that for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. God loves us so much that he did not leave us to die in our sin. Instead he rescued us. He redeemed us through Jesus. God comes to be with us, to lead us from death to life. This is why we celebrate Christmas. This is why we join the angels' song on that first Christmas singing glory to God in the highest! He is with us and has redeemed us and shown his great love for us.

REFLECT:

1. Why does the LORD tell us not to be afraid?
2. How does it make you feel to hear God say that you are precious in His sight and that He loves you?
3. When was a time when you experienced God walking with you through a difficult experience?

PRAY:

Heavenly Father, thank you for creating us. Thank you for being with us in times of hardship and struggle. Remind us again and again of your love for us and how you have called us precious in your eyes. Thank you for showing your love for us by sending Jesus. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace, light the Candle of Joy**

SING: *O Come All Ye Faithful*

READ: ***Daniel 3:19-25***

Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up…? But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

WEEK 3 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 2:14

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

REFLECT:
The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is one of the most famous stories in the Bible. They refused to worship anyone but God alone. They were willing to be killed instead of worshipping the golden image. And so Nebuchadnezzar sent them to the fiery furnace. He heated it 7 times hotter than usual in order to really show his anger toward their disobedience. Yet when he looked into the furnace to see them all burned up, he saw them walking around like they were enjoying a day at the beach! And instead of just three people in there, there were four! The fourth had the appearance like the son of a god!

Yesterday we read how God will be with us in difficult times: "*when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you (Isaiah 43:2).*" Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego understood that and trusted that God would be with them, even if they didn't survive. In this case, God saved their lives to demonstrate His power and glory to the Babylonians and to King Nebuchadnezzar. It is often thought that the one walking with those three in the furnace was none other than Jesus himself!

Jesus comes to us and walks beside us in hard times. Our temptation is to think that God has left us when we are being attacked or when things are not going our way. The opposite is true. It is in those moments that God is beside us, never letting us go. Jesus the evidence we have that God means this. Just like he was with those three in the furnace, so Jesus is with us. God has delivered us from our sin in Jesus. When other things try to take our attention away from God, we need to remember that Jesus is leading us to follow him with all of our lives and even if that means going through difficult times, God will be with us and never let us go.

REFLECT:
1. Why was Nebuchadnezzar so angry with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?
2. Why weren't Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego afraid of the king?
3. What are ways that you can be courageous in following God?

PRAY:
Heavenly Father, teach us to trust in you no matter what, knowing that even when our lives are threatened, that you will deliver us from all evil. Thank you for sending Jesus to save us from our sin and to show us how to live our lives in complete obedience and trust in you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace, light the Candle of Joy**

SING: *What Child is This?*

READ: ***Daniel 7:13-14***
"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

And Revelation 1:12-20
Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

WEEK 3 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 2:14
"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

REFLECT:
During the Christmas season, we spend a lot of time reflecting on the humble beginnings of Jesus Christ. We look at the frailty of the newborn king laying in the manger and we are rightly captivated by the beauty of God wrapping himself in the flesh to dwell with us. We need to be cautious about fixing our eyes on the baby Jesus and forgetting just who this child really is. As the Christmas carol we sang just now reminds us, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing. This child is no ordinary child. He is none other than God himself.

Today's Scripture tells us clearly just who this child is. He is the Son of Man who is wrapped in the glory of God, the Ancient of Days. He has dominion, glory and a Kingdom that will never end. He is all-powerful, the first and the last- He was around before anything else was and He will be the last one standing.

This is a picture of Jesus' power and glory. This is the one whom the angels knew when they sang their song to the shepherds. It is amazing that this child laid in a manger is the very one who all people will serve and worship as the one true God. Let us be careful not to focus so much on little baby Jesus that we forget the majesty and power of the King of kings and LORD of Lords. Let us join with the angels to sing glory to God in the highest!

DISCUSS:
1. What are the images that the Bible uses to describe the Son of Man in these two passages?
2. How does this change the way you think about the little baby Jesus?

PRAY:
Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us a clear picture of the power and majesty and glory of Jesus. These images of Jesus give us a clearer understanding of just who this child is who was born to Mary and Joseph and laid in a manger. Let us not just see Jesus as a cute little baby, but the mighty King who saves us from sin and death. In His name we pray, amen.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace, light the Candle of Joy**

SING: *O Little Town of Bethlehem*

READ: ***Acts 9:1-9***
But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

WEEK 3 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 2:14
"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

REFLECT:
According to the Jewish law, Saul was righteous. He kept the commandments, he made sure that he followed all the rituals in order to keep himself pure and righteous according to the law. But in spite of all that law-keeping, Saul was not a good man. He was seeking to kill people who believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah. He was convinced that Jesus was a liar and a false prophet. Anyone who believed in Him was also guilty of worshipping a false god and they needed to be punished. So Saul decided to chase down these followers of Jesus in order to prevent them from spreading these false teachings any further.

On his way to Damascus, in one of his attempts to arrest Christians, a light from heaven blinded Saul. It was so bright that he fell off his horse! And he heard a voice call to him: "Saul! Why are you persecuting me?" Saul gives

an interesting response: he asks, "who are you Lord?" He seems to know that this is the LORD appearing before him, but he doesn't quite really recognize him. He got right that this was the LORD, and but he doesn't know him! And the voice answered back: "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!" Saul recognized that this was the LORD, but now the LORD reveals himself to Saul as Jesus. Saul loved and served the LORD, and now the LORD appears to him and surprises him: the LORD is Jesus! Jesus is the LORD!! This revelation changed Saul's life. He turned around from a persecutor of Christians to an apostle and a witness to Jesus Christ as LORD.

This shows how God does not wait for us to get our act together in order to speak to us. God's grace comes to us and rescues from our sinful behavior. God sent Jesus into the world not when it was good enough to receive him as LORD, but when God determined it was time to send us the Savior. Romans 5:8 tells us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Christ meets us in our sinful condition and pulls us out of it. He reveals himself as LORD and saves from a life of sin. What Jesus did for Paul he does for you and me too! Glory to God in the highest!

REFLECT:

1. What was Saul doing before Jesus appeared to him?
2. What did Jesus tell Saul to do?
3. When was a time that you heard God speak to you?
4. Why do you think that God does not wait for us to be perfect before coming to us?

PRAY:

Heavenly Father, thank you for not waiting for us to get everything right before you come to us. Too many times we think we're doing what is right only to discover that we are disobeying you. Forgive us. Thank you for sending Jesus to die for us before we even knew to ask for your help. We pray all this in Jesus' name, Amen.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace, relight the Candle of Joy, light the Candle of Love**

SING: *What Child is This?*

READ: ***Luke 2:22-35***

And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." 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. 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. 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, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

WEEK 4 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 2:30-32

"My eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."*

REFLECT:

Simeon is described by the Bible as a man who was righteous and devout. The Holy Spirit was upon him. This is a remarkable statement because the Holy Spirit was not yet dwelling in every believer. The fact that the Holy Spirit was upon Simeon is a clear indication of how he was righteous and devout. He leaned in and listened to the LORD and trusted in what He said.

Simeon believed the LORD's promise that he would not die until he had laid eyes on the LORD's Christ, or Messiah. And sure enough, Simeon followed the LORD's leading him to the temple and it was there that he encountered Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, fulfilling their parental responsibilities by presenting their son to the LORD in the temple. And Simeon says something amazing: he says that this child is the very salvation that God has prepared in the presence of all people. Not just the Jews, but for everyone. Jesus would be a light for revelation to the gentiles and for glory to Israel. Everyone would be impacted by Jesus' arrival on earth.

And so it is. Jesus Christ has come and he has not just rescued people of one ethnicity or another, but he offers his salvation to anyone who would believe. The world is walking in darkness- whether in America, Iran, India, Kenya, or China, everyone needs to be exposed to the light of Jesus Christ. He has come not just to save a few, but save everyone who would put their faith and trust in him.

Simeon's song is a reminder for us that Jesus is LORD of everyone. And so we are called to share with everyone we know about how God sent Jesus to earth at Christmas in order to show us how much he loves us.

REFLECT:

1. Simeon trusted that God would keep his promise to him that he would see the Messiah before he died. Do you trust God to keep his promises to you?
2. What are ways that you can share the good news of Christmas to someone who does not know Jesus as their Savior?

PRAY:

Heavenly Father, thank you that you sent Jesus to be the Savior of not just some people, but to all who would believe in Him. Teach us how to share your love with those around us by telling them that you sent Jesus at Christmas to save us from our sins. In Jesus' name, Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 21

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace, relight the Candle of Joy, relight the Candle of Love**

SING: *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*

READ: ***Isaiah 60:1-5***
Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

WEEK 4 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 2:30-32
"My eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."*

REFLECT:
Isaiah prophesied 700 years before Simeon laid eyes on Jesus in the temple. The words that Simeon proclaimed about Jesus being a light for revelation to the gentiles was nothing new. It was something that Isaiah himself taught about in our Bible passage today. Long before Jesus was born, Isaiah understood that the world needed a Savior. Darkness covered the earth, thick darkness over all people. Sin continued to spread across the world. People did what was right in their own eyes. They did not listen to God; they only listened to themselves. As a result, people became lost. They didn't know how to distinguish right from wrong anymore.

It is in this setting that Isaiah declares for the world to rise up! Our light has come upon us! The glory of the LORD will be seen upon His people again. Out of nowhere, God will return and once again show people how to live. He will teach people right from wrong. He will rescue people from their sin and enable them to live in His righteousness again.

When the LORD comes, His light will not only be seen by His people, but by everyone! Everyone will be so attracted to His light that the whole world will be changed.

Jesus says "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." When we follow Jesus, we live in the light. We live obediently to Jesus and not like the rest of the world around us. And when we do this, other people see us living differently, trusting in someone other than ourselves. This provides us away to invite them to know the light of Jesus for themselves!

Take a moment and close your eyes. Try to walk from where you are to the other end of the house. Can you make it across without bumping into anything? That is how the Bible says it is to live without Jesus. We bump into things, hurting ourselves and other people in the process. Jesus says, I'm the light of the world. He came so that you can see where you are going; so that you can let Him show you the way you should go. Everyone is invited to do this; even people we might describe as our enemies. God wants everyone to turn away from sin, and to live in the light of His love.

DISCUSS:

1. What was it like to walk around your house with your eyes closed? Was it hard? How many things did you bump into?
2. Who do you know that needs the light of Jesus in their life? What is a way you can share Jesus' light with that person?

PRAY:

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus to be the light of the world. Thank you for shining it on people like us who walk in darkness. Teach us to live in obedience to you, trusting that your light will never lead us astray. Help us to share your light of love to those around us. In Jesus' name, amen.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace, relight the Candle of Joy, relight the Candle of Love**

SING: *What Child Is This?*

READ: ***Isaiah 53:1-6***

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 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. 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.

WEEK 4 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 2:30-32

"My eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."*

REFLECT:

If you lived in Jesus' day, would you recognize Jesus as the Messiah? In this passage, Isaiah describes the Messiah as one who took on weakness and an unassuming nature. He had no beauty that would attract us to him. He had no form or majesty that we should look at him. Throughout this devotional we have seen pictures of Jesus appearing as a mighty warrior, as one like the son of man, crowned in glory, as the light of the world attracting everyone to him, and so on. Yet Isaiah describes the Messiah as one who was rejected by men. He was one who was acquainted with sorrow and grief. These are not the typical adjectives Scripture uses to describe the Messiah. As the Messiah, is Jesus crowned with glory and honor or is he despised and rejected by men? The answer, interestingly, is yes.

In Philippians, Paul writes that Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. Instead he made himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. When Jesus came to earth, he did not assume a charismatic quality about himself, he didn't come in with fanfare and adoring fans. He was first welcomed by smelly shepherds straight from the fields. John wrote that though the world was made through him, the world did not know him.

This unassuming servant is the very demonstration of the power of God that saved the world from sin. This man of sorrows bore our griefs and carried our sorrows for us. He was crushed for our iniquities and took the punishment in order to give us peace. On the quiet night of that first Christmas, our Savior was born. He was laid in an ordinary manger, wrapped in every day cloths of working class children. Yet this was no ordinary child. This child is the salvation that God prepared in the presence of all peoples. This, this is Christ, the King.

DISCUSS:

1. Write a list comparing the adjectives used to describe Jesus in this passage with the adjectives used to describe Jesus in the passage from Friday, December 18. What are the differences?
2. When you think of Jesus, do you think of this description in Isaiah 53?
3. How does this Bible passage show us God's glory and power?

PRAY:

Heavenly Father, we are amazed that you would send Jesus to earth and be just another ordinary person. We are humbled at the way you came to earth not to be attractive or powerful, but obedient, even to death. Thank you for taking the punishment for our sin upon yourself. Teach us to see your glory and majesty as well as your humbleness and servanthood. In Jesus' name, amen.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 23

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace, relight the Candle of Joy, relight the Candle of Love**

SING: *O Come All Ye Faithful*

READ: ***Malachi 3:1-4***
"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.

WEEK 4 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 2:30-32
"My eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."*

REFLECT:
There are two messengers in this Bible passage above. The first is the messenger who will come to prepare the way of the LORD. The second messenger is the messenger of the covenant who comes into the temple, the one whom the people of Israel have been looking forward to for so long.

The first messenger points us to John the Baptist, who came before Jesus, preparing people for the messiah by calling them to repent and turn away from their life of sin. The second messenger, the messenger of the temple is none other than Jesus himself.

When Jesus arrives, he will have a significant impact on the world. Malachi describes Jesus like a refiner's fire or launderer's soap. Think about your dirty clothes for a second. What kind of dirt is on your jeans? Grass stains? Mud? Maybe a spilled juice box or some food from dinner? How do you get those stains and all that dirt out? With soap! You put your jeans in the washing machine and you add soap to it. When the wash is done, your jeans are clean!

That is the picture that Malachi uses to describe He is the soap that gets the stains of sin out of our lives.

Without Jesus, we cannot get anything right. Yes, we might do some good things from time to time, but even when we do those things, most of the time, our motivations will be wrong. We may do what's right, but only to show how good we are and to get some credit for ourselves. Without Jesus, even the good we do is done the wrong way.

When we receive Jesus as our LORD, we are able to do good things for the right reasons. We are transformed from people who can't get anything right to people who can serve God completely! When God cleanses His people, the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable. Jesus washes us clean and enables us to serve the LORD with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. We celebrate Christmas because Jesus has come to change us from people who can't get anything right to people who can love God completely.

DISCUSS:

1. What is the role of the first messenger?
2. Who is the second messenger? What does he do?
3. What changes happen to the Levites after the LORD comes to His temple?
4. What changes has Jesus brought into your life?

PRAY:

Heavenly Father, thank you for coming to the earth to wash us clean from sin. Thank you that you change us from people who are stained with sin to people who reveal your righteousness and love to the world around us. Help us to serve you with all our hearts. We pray all this in Jesus' name, Amen.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24 - CHRISTMAS EVE

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace, relight the Candle of Joy, relight the Candle of Love, light the Christ Candle**

SING: *Joy to the World*

READ: ***Luke 2:1-7***
In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

WEEK 4 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 2:30-32
"My eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."*

REFLECT:
Caesar Augustus was the emperor of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was the most powerful empire in the world, which makes Caesar Augustus the most powerful man in the world. What he said went. Caesar was curious to know just how powerful he was, so he ordered a census in order to know how better to tax the people that he ruled over. He wanted to make sure people knew who was in charge.

Little did Caesar Augustus know just how small he was compared to God. Caesar thought he was manipulating people to serve his purposes. He didn't even consider how God was manipulating him in order to send Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem to give birth to Jesus.

In Micah 5:1-5, the Messiah was prophesied to be born in Bethlehem. However, Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth, 80 miles north of Bethlehem. But not to worry. Thanks to this census, Joseph took his wife Mary to his

hometown of Bethlehem. Joseph was a distant relative of King David. That connection made Jesus a descendent of King David too. Joseph probably met up with some 2nd and 3rd cousins and stayed in Bethlehem while the census was being taken. While they were there, Mary gave birth to Jesus.

While Rome was busy checking on how powerful it was, God showed up. Jesus was born just the way any other baby was born. He was laid in a bed of straw, used as a feeding trough for animals, because there was literally nowhere else to put him. The world kept going like nothing had happened. Little did anyone know that the world would never be the same. Almighty God, the Prince of Peace, Christ the Savior was born.

Think about this for a minute. How much do you know about Caesar Augustus? Have you ever heard of him apart from this Bible story? If you have, do you know more about him or more about Jesus? You probably know more about Jesus because Jesus is central to our lives. Caesar Augustus has become little more than a footnote in the annals of history. He was significant to the Roman Empire, and in his day, but Jesus Christ continues to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, leading you and me each day through his love.

DISCUSS: (adapted from *Christ in Christmas*)

3. How should we treat famous people that we hear about all the time compared to Jesus?
4. How did the birth of Jesus change the course of history?
5. How did the birth of Jesus change your life?

PRAY:

Lord Jesus, you are the author of history. Thank you that you are more important and faithful to our lives than anyone else in the entire world. We are amazed that you took on flesh to dwell among us so that we might know you as our Savior and Lord. Purify us as we wait for your return in glory. In your name we pray, Amen.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25 - CHRISTMAS DAY

*** Relight the Candle of Hope, relight the Candle of Peace, relight the Candle of Joy, relight the Candle of Love, light the Christ Candle**

SING: *Joy to the World* (verses 1-3)

READ: ***John 1:1-18***

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ") Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

WEEK 4 MEMORY VERSE: Luke 2:30-32

"My eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."*

REFLECT:
Take time to reflect on these first 18 verses of the Gospel of John. Think about the magnitude of this day and its significance on your life.

DISCUSS:

- Share with one another what stands out to you in this passage after having worshipped through this devotional.
- How have you grown in your understanding of the meaning of Christmas?

PRAY:
Take turns praying out loud as a family. Take time to give thanks to God the Father for his great gift to us in Jesus Christ. Thank Jesus for his birth and for becoming human. Pray that the Holy Spirit would lead you to see Jesus more clearly in all of the Scripture.

If you haven't opened the gifts under the tree yet, do so with the prayer that the gifts given and received will remind you that God has given the gift of Jesus' visit and that he will visit again.

When you have finished, conclude with the final verse of Joy to the World.

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL

O Come, O Come Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.

REFRAIN
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight.

REFRAIN

O come, Desire of nations, bind
All peoples in one heart and mind;
Bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease,
Fill all the world with heaven's peace.

REFRAIN

O COME ALL YE FAITHFUL

O Come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant
O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem!
Come and behold Him, born the King of angels.
O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Sing choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
O sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;
Glory to God, all glory in the highest;
O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning,
Jesus to Thee be all glory given;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!
O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

O Little Town of Bethlehem, How still we see the lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth, the everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years Are met in Thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above
While mortals sleep, the angels keep Their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together Proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing to God, the King, And peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently, The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem! Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin and enter in, Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Emmanuel!

WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

What Child is this who laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, while shepherds watch are keeping?

REFRAIN
This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste to bring him laud, the Babe, the Son of Mary.

Why lies He in such mean estate where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here The silent Word is pleading.

REFRAIN

So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh, Come peasant king to own Him;
the King of kings salvation brings, Let loving hearts enthrone him.

REFRAIN

SILENT NIGHT

Silent night, Holy night, all is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and Child. Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, Holy night, shepherds quake at the sight.
Glorious streams from heaven afar, heavenly hosts sing alleluia.
Christ, the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born.

Silent night, Holy Night, Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face, With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth, Jesus, Lord at Thy birth.

HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING

Hark! the Herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinner reconciled!”
Joyful al ye nations rise, Join the triumph of the skies;
With the angelic host proclaim, “Christ is born in Bethlehem!”
Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King.”

Christ by highest heaven adored; Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold him come, Offspring of the virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see; Hail the Incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.
Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King.”

Hail, the heaven-born prince of peace! Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings, risen with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glories by, Born that man no more may die;
Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King.”

JOY TO THE WORLD

Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the world! The Savior reign:
Let men, their songs, employ
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found
Far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of his love, And wonders of his love,
And wonders, wonders of his love.