

**Devotions for the 3rd Week of Advent  
December 13 - December 19, 2020**

**Sunday, December 13**

*We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us. (1 John 1: 1-2)*

The apostle John, regarded also as the one who wrote the gospel of John, writes this first letter to believers in western Asia Minor between 85 and 95 AD. His writings resemble more of a sermon than a letter, but that is the beauty of the way John writes.

Christmas is about the birth of Jesus, true God and true man, born of Mary in a stable in Bethlehem. John vividly reminds us that Jesus was not some invisible, esoteric being. Jesus was flesh and blood, like you and me. People saw Jesus with their eyes; people looked at Jesus and touched Him. He lived and breathed and walked this earth. His followers marveled at His compassion, faith, and wisdom. His enemies despised Jesus because He showed them that their ways were not God's ways. He called them out on their greed and hypocrisy.

Jesus' life has been revealed to us and to His followers for over 2,000 years. We have seen it and testify to it and declare to others that through Jesus, the Word of life, we have eternal life. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)*

**Question to ponder:** When have you seen Jesus with your eyes or touched Him with your hands?

*As you light the first, second, and third candles on your Advent wreath, I invite you to pray: Precious Savior, we see you in the eyes of friends as well as complete strangers, in the hands of those who greet us, in the words of love and compassion spoken to us. Your Holy Spirit advocates for us and we testify with our voice and declare with our life that you have the words of eternal life. Prepare our hearts for your coming again, that we may gaze into the manger*

and once again, be astonished at the miracle of your birth. In your name we pray. Amen.

### Suggested Scripture Readings

1 John 1: 1-10

John 1: 1-18

### **Monday, December 14**

*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. (Luke 1: 26-27)*

Narnia, Cair Paravel, Aslan's Country, Bree, Misty Mountains, Mordor, Hogwarts, Arborlon, Paranor, Shady Vale. . . these are places that exist, but don't really exist. When reading The Chronicles of Narnia, Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, and the Sword of Shannara Trilogy, I came to know the people, creatures, and places of these great books. Sometimes I wish this towns and people really did exist and I could take a trip to visit them (well, most of them anyway. I could do without seeing Mordor).

When Gabriel was sent by God to Mary, we know exactly where he found Mary. We can locate Galilee on a map and we can find Nazareth, too. The town was not part of a fantasy story in some make-believe country that exists only in the minds of the author and readers.

Luke wanted his readers to know that Jesus came from a real place and the surprising thing is that Nazareth is significant mostly because it was insignificant. It was an unimportant village in Galilee, north of Judea. In John 1:45, Philip tells Nathaniel that they have found the Messiah, "Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathaniel asked Philip, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip said, "Come and see."

**Question to ponder:** What surprises you today about the life of Jesus?

*As you light the first, second, and third candles on your Advent wreath, I invite you to pray: Holy God, thank you for saving us through your Son Jesus, our Lord and Savior. In Jesus, you were born of an ordinary woman in an ordinary town. Help us to live our life telling people to "Come and see." For we have seen and have been amazed at your love, grace, and forgiveness, not only for each of us, but for everyone. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

### Suggested Scripture Readings

Luke 1: 26-38

Romans 16: 25-27



### Tuesday, December 15

*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you!" But she was much perplexed and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. (Luke 1: 26-29)*

I can't even imagine what Mary thought when she saw an angel standing in front her. "Perplexed" would be just the beginning of how I would feel. "The Lord is with you." What in the world does that mean? I think my cynical side would have kicked in pretty quickly and thought I was being set up for something. "Favored one?" Favored by whom? The Lord? What could the Lord possibly want with me!

Remember that Mary was probably 15-16 years old. She lived in a small town with no real status or social standing. According to the standard of that time, she was a nobody from nowhere. But Mary had found favor with God and God wanted her to know that.

Gabriel's reassurance that "The Lord is with you," was a commonly used greeting when God was calling someone to a difficult task (Genesis 31:3; Exodus 3:12; Jeremiah 1: 8,19). Mary knew the conversation she was about to have would change her life. Little did she know that it would also change the course of history.

**Question to ponder:** Think of a time when you knew “the Lord was with you.” What did God say to you?

*As you light the first, second, and third candles on your Advent wreath, I invite you to pray:* God of grace and hope, we thank you for the willingness of Mary to answer your call to be part of one of the greatest miracles of all time. Open our hearts to hear your voice and to respond to your call. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

### Suggested Scripture Readings

Isaiah 7: 10-16

Luke 1: 26-38

### Wednesday, December 16

*When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?”* (Luke 1: 41-43)

Just after Mary was told that she would give birth to the long-awaited Savior of the world, she went to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, who was also expecting a child. Elizabeth and her husband, Zechariah had wanted a child for many years and now Elizabeth was pregnant and would give birth to their son, John, in a few months. When Mary first entered Elizabeth’s house, the child Elizabeth was carrying “leaped in her womb.” By the power of the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth knew the miracle that Mary carried inside her. “For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

The faith of these two women is extraordinary. God had formed a deep bond between them that God knew they’d need during these ambiguous times. Elizabeth was a safe person for Mary to spend time with after her encounter with Gabriel and the news of her pregnancy. Elizabeth did not judge Mary, nor did she turn Mary away. Pregnancy outside of marriage was punishable by death, so Elizabeth knew the gravity of Mary’s situation. Yet, Elizabeth listened to the Holy Spirit as He filled Elizabeth’s soul

with the absolute truth of the child Mary carried in her womb. Thank God for faithful friends and family, like Elizabeth, who offered Mary grace, love, and acceptance during that stressful, yet sacred time.

**Question to ponder:** Have you been Elizabeth to someone? Or have you experienced the hospitality of one like Elizabeth?

*As you light the first, second, and third candles on your Advent wreath, I invite you to pray:* Faithful God, we are grateful for the ministry and friendship of Elizabeth and Mary. You helped them understand the truth and sanctity of the exceptional gift of life that grew within each of them. Thank you for their witness and courage. Help us to show such kindness and love to those in need. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### Suggested Scripture Readings

Luke 1: 5-25

Romans 15: 7-13



### Thursday, December 17

*And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked with favor on the lowliness of His servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name. (Luke 1:46-49)*

The Magnificat that Mary prays echoes Hannah's song over Samuel's birth, in which God is also praised for salvation of the lowly and the oppressed. We often think of the Magnificat as a beautiful hymn of praise and either knowingly or unknowingly pass over Mary's bold language of salvation for the oppressed.

Mary spoke these words in response to Elizabeth's proclamation about who exactly the child in Mary's womb was and what His long-awaited birth would mean. Read the words of the Magnificat as one who is hungry, powerless, and oppressed.

The news of Jesus' birth gives hope when all seems hopeless. Then read the Magnificat as one who is rich and powerful. . . not good news at all if they plan to maintain hold of

their rich and powerful status. But maybe it is good news to the rich and powerful. Maybe Mary's words have provoked an awareness of the senseless greed and unfair power of our world. Maybe Mary's words continue to challenge the comfortable and proud. . .

**Question to ponder:** What do Mary's words in the Magnificat stir in your soul?

*As you light the first, second, and third candles on your Advent wreath, I invite you to pray:* Holy and gracious God, stir up in us your power, not ours. Stir in our hearts a sense of hope that your birth as Jesus was good news to all people—rich and poor alike—even if it seems for different reasons, but in truth, you came to set all people free. Help us to know what it is you have set us free from. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### Suggested Scripture Readings

Luke 1: 46-56

Isaiah 25: 4-10

### Friday, December 18

*She will bear a son and you are to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.* (Matthew 1:21)

Here we have the purpose of Jesus' life—to save His people from their sins. Many 1st century people (including His disciples) thought Jesus would be the one to save them from an oppressive Roman government. They wanted a political Messiah. Jesus spent His life preaching about the Kingdom of God, healing people, and forgiving people. He was setting people free from the oppressive powers of sin, death, and the devil—which are more lethal to our souls than any political enemy.

When the angel came to Joseph in a dream and told him about the child that Mary was carrying in her womb, Joseph immediately understood and believed. He knew he was being asked to be part of a miracle that would fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah (7:14).

“When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.”

(Matthew 1:24). I admire Joseph for his strong and courageous faith. God knew Joseph was the right man to raise the son of God. What a daunting task! I wish we knew more about Joseph, but the Scriptures don't tell us a lot about him. But I think what the Scriptures do tell us about Joseph is all we really need to know about him.

**Question to ponder:** What would you like to know about Joseph?

*As you light the first, second, and third candles on your Advent wreath, I invite you to pray:* Holy God—thank you for Joseph: for his courageous faith, his obedience to your will, for his fatherly influence and love of Jesus and Mary. Help us to honor our responsibilities to our families, to be courageous and obedient and to love those whom you have given to us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### Suggested Scripture Readings

Matthew 1: 18-25

Matthew 2: 13-23

### Saturday, December 19

*And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. (Luke 2:7)*

The “innkeeper” usually gets a bad rap—the villain of our Christmas story. I'm sure he or she had no idea what not having a room available for this tired couple who was about to have a baby would mean to their reputation! But hasn't the “No Room for Jesus” sign been displayed throughout history as not only a fact of that evening, but also as an age-old question that we have each needed to answer throughout our life.



Ann Weems wrote a beautiful poem about this very thing titled, “In Search of Our Kneeling Places”.

In each heart lies a Bethlehem  
    an inn where we must ultimately answer  
    whether there is room or not.  
When we are Bethlehem-bound  
    we experience our own advent in His.  
When we are Bethlehem-bound  
    we can no longer look the other way  
    conveniently not seeing stars  
    not hearing angel voices.  
We can no longer excuse ourselves by busily  
    tending our sheep or our kingdoms.

This Advent let’s go to Bethlehem  
    and see this thing that the Lord has made known to us.  
In the midst of shopping sprees  
    let’s ponder in our hearts the Gift of Gifts.  
Through tinsel  
    let’s look for the gold of the Christmas Star.  
In the excitement and confusion, in the merry chaos,  
    let’s listen for the brush of the angels’ wings.  
This Advent, let’s go to Bethlehem  
    and find our kneeling place.

**Question to ponder:** Is there room in your heart for Jesus?

*As you light the first, second, and third candles on your Advent wreath, I invite you to pray:* Precious Savior—we want to make room in our hearts and in our lives for you. It is what we crave most of all. Yet, we are also really good at excuses that keep us from living how we really should. Be patient with us, be near to us, and guide us to a stronger, more committed faith. In your name we pray. Amen.

Suggested Scripture Readings  
Roman’s 7: 14-25  
John 15: 1-11

