

**Devotions for the 4th Week of Advent
December 20 - December 25, 2020**

Sunday, December 20

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. (Isaiah 9:2)

Linda Clader writes, “This passage from Isaiah challenges us to push a few inches beyond the comfortable picture of the nativity tableau. The child whose birth we attend on Christmas was born into a world painted not in pastels but in dust and blood. This incarnation is not a spiritual, otherworldly concept, but the mystery of God present in a real human child, welcomed into a real world with all its agonies and ambiguities and challenges and joys.”

With all the “darkness” we’ve experienced this year, it truly feels like we are living in a land of deep darkness. The light that Jesus brings to us offers us hope not only for a temporary reprieve from the sadness and gloom of our current situation, but also for an eternal reprieve from sin, death, and evil.

I think this year, the star of Bethlehem’s light will seem even brighter because the darker the night, the more brightly shines the light.

Question to ponder: What do you need the light of Jesus to shine on in your life?

As you light all 4 candles on your Advent wreath, I invite you to pray: Precious Savior, shine your light into the darkness of our lives and of our world. We are a people who are walking in darkness and are living in a land of deep darkness. Shine your light, Lord, for all to see. Pierce the darkness of our despair, sadness, sickness, and worry and give us hope for all that is yet to be. In your name we pray. Amen.

Suggested Scripture Readings

Isaiah 9: 1-7

Titus 2: 11-14

Monday, December 21

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us: authority rests on his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:7)

For us. To us. Simple little words that mean everything. Jesus wasn't born for someone else, for people who "deserve Him, for people who are righteous or important or rich. Jesus was born for us. Jesus was given to us.

What do we do with such a wonderful and miraculous gift? Accept it, open it, and live it. God chose to join us on the road of life, to listen to our story, and to guide us through this life into eternal life. That is one of the great mysteries and comforts of Christmas—we are not alone in our journey.

Henri Nouwen writes, "The God of love who gave us life sent us His Only Son to be with us at all times and in all places, so that we never have to feel lost in our struggles but always can trust that He walks with us. Christmas is the renewed invitation not to be afraid and let Him—whose love is greater than our own hearts and minds can comprehend—be our companion." Amen and amen.

Question to ponder: What do you think makes it difficult for people to accept the gift of Jesus? Have you accepted the gift of Jesus?

As you light all 4 candles on your Advent wreath, I invite you to pray: Holy God, for the gift of our Savior, Jesus, we give you thanks. Help us to accept this amazing gift, to open up all its possibilities and to live our life as a reflection of your love. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Suggested Scripture Readings

Psalm 96

Titus 3: 4-7

Tuesday, December 22

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.” (Luke 2: 8-10)

The shepherds were given an amazing gift that night—a gift I’m sure they didn’t know what to do with. I think once they got past the terror of seeing a heavenly host of angels bringing them “good news of great joy for all people,” they had to figure out what to do with this news. What do you do with something you’ve received that you have no idea what to do with?

In Luke 2:15, we find out what they did. “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” These lowly shepherds, bottom-of-the-totem pole guys with no social standing, no importance, no impeccable resumes from the finest universities. They were nobodies whom the Lord God Almighty told His army of angels to tell this miraculous and magnificent news to because God knew that they would “go and see this thing that has taken place.”

It’s amazing, don’t you think, how radically our world has changed over the centuries? Or maybe I should say, it’s unfortunate how much we’ve changed. The word of poor, bottom-of-the-totem pole people is usually immediately dismissed or ignored. Every person is a beloved child of God. And God’s good news of great joy is for **all** people.

Question to ponder: Who are the “nobodies” of our country or community that are often dismissed or ignored?

As you light all 4 candles on your Advent wreath, I invite you to pray: Holy God, you sent your heavenly host of angels to poor shepherds with no standing in their communities. Help us to look upon those we often dismiss or ignore and realize that they, too, are your beloved children. Convict our hearts when needed, to remind us of how our actions contribute to their misfortune. Help us to shout and share the good news of great joy that is for all people. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Suggested Scripture Readings

Isaiah 43: 1-13

Philippians 2: 1-13

Wednesday, December 23

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage. When King Herod heard this he was frightened and all Jerusalem with him." (Matthew 2: 1-3)

"The wise men who came to worship the newborn King were astrologers and considered scientists in 1st century middle East. Jewish people generally doubted that the stars controlled Israel's future, but they thought that the stars predicted the Gentiles' future. It was widely believed that comets and other heavenly signs predicted the demise of rulers." (*Cultural Background Study Bible*)

Herod was afraid for his life. He respected what the scientists told him, yet feared the end of his powerful reign would soon be over. Herod was an evil man who would not let anything get in the way of his power and control over the people. Herod was the reason Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus escaped to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15). Herod was the reason innocent children were killed (Matthew 2:16-18).

These stories don't often get told at Christmas time. We shield our hearts and minds from the awful truth of what unchecked power and greed has done and can do to those who, like Herod, care only for what they want.

Yet, God shielded the wise ones from returning to Herod. God led them home through a safe way and God continued to shield His Newborn Son from the evil of King Herod. The holy family remained refugees in Egypt until Herod died (Matthew 2:19-23). The welcome they received from the Egyptians saved the life of our Savior. Thanks be to God.

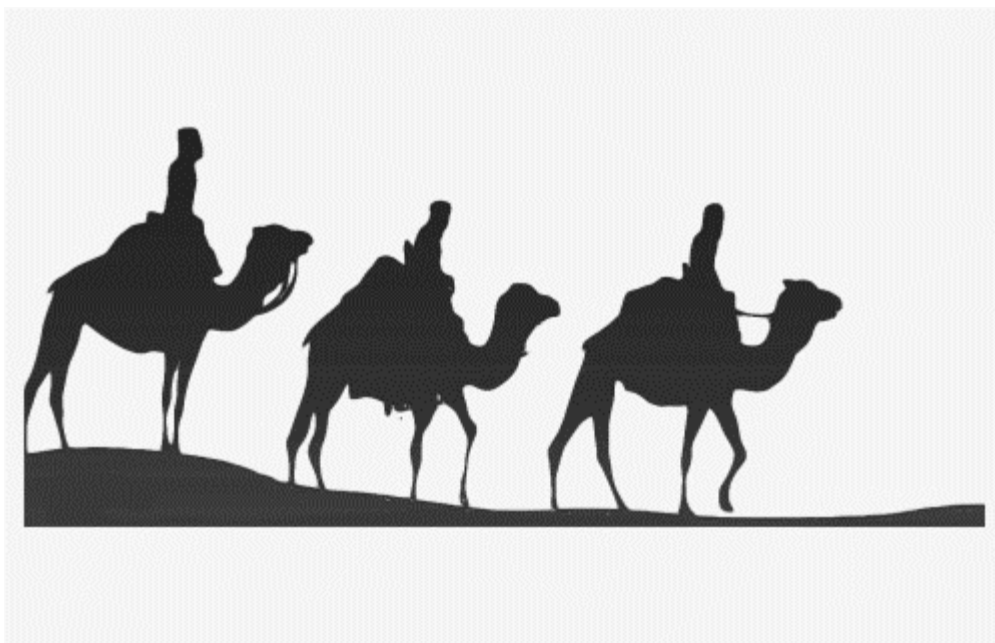
Question to ponder: When have you been asked a question that immediately stopped you, caused you to think about it or perhaps even frightened you?

As you light all 4 candles on your Advent wreath, I invite you to pray: Almighty God, we thank you for the faithfulness of the wise men who journeyed from far away to worship the newborn King. Shield all families and children from harm. Protect all countries from power-hungry and greedy leaders. Let the gentle wisdom and love of Jesus always guide us. In His name we pray. Amen.

Suggested Scripture Readings

Matthew 2: 1-2

Matthew 2: 13-23



Thursday, December 24—Christmas Eve

So the shepherds went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. (Luke 2: 16-20)

From “Cloth for the Cradle” by Wild Goose Worship

This, Tonight, is the Meeting Place

This, tonight, is the meeting place
of heaven and earth.

For this, tonight, is the stable
in which God keeps His promise
to meet His people.

Not many are here,
not many holy;
not many innocent,
not many world wise;
not all familiar faces,
not all frequent visitors.

But, if tonight only strangers met,
that would be enough.

For Bethlehem was not the hub of the universe,
nor was the stable a platform for famous folk.

In an out-of-the-way place
which folk never thought to visit—
there God kept and keeps His promise;
there God sends His Son.

Question to ponder: How has God met you this Christmas Eve?

Suggested Scripture Readings

Isaiah 9: 2-7

Luke 2: 1-20

Friday, December 25—Christmas Day

And the Word became flesh and lived among us (John 1:14a)

From *Guerrillas of Grace* by Ted Loder

Lord God, in the deepest night
there rises the star of morning,
 of birth,
 the herald of a new day you are making,
a day of great joy dawning
 in the yet faint shafts of light and love.

I hear whispers of peace in the stillness,
fresh breezes of promise
 stirring,
winter sparrows chirping of life,
a baby's cry
 of need
 and hope—
 Christmas!

In the darkness I see the light
and find in it comfort,
 confidence,
 cause for celebration,
for the darkness cannot overcome it;
and I rejoice to nourish it
 in myself,
 in other people,
 in the world
for the sake of Him
in whom it was born
 and shines forever,
 Jesus the Christ.

Question to ponder: With the light of Jesus, what can you now see in the darkness that is cause for celebration?

Suggested Scripture Readings

John 1: 1-18

Psalm 97

