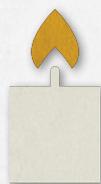


The
Gifts
of
Christmas

2024 SALEM ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



The Gifts of Christmas: An Advent Devotional

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The Old Testament is full of prophecies foretelling the birth of Jesus, our Savior and Messiah. These Old Testament prophecies along with the New Testament narrative give a full picture of the story of redemption. During Advent 2023 we took a look at these Old Testament prophecies.

Salem's Advent devotional this year, *The Gifts of Christmas*, focuses on the fulfillment of these prophecies in the New Testament and utilizes familiar Scriptures about the birth of Christ.

THE GIFTS OF CHRISTMAS

The Gifts of Christmas is a four-week devotional that guides you through the Advent season. As you read through the devotions, allow the Holy Spirit to show you how the story of redemption is evident in all Scripture.

STRUCTURE

This book is separated into four sections—one for each week of Advent. Each day has a main Scripture passage, devotional thought, and a prayer. We encourage you to carve out some time each day to read through the Scripture passage. You may even want to look at the verses before and after each passage to give you an idea of the context. The deeper you dig into God's word, the more wonderful meaning you will find.

Thanks to Salem's members and staff for their contributions to *The Gifts of Christmas*. Your creativity, hard work, and love for God are evident in these pages.

May you encounter the Savior in a new, fresh, and exciting way this Christmas season.

WEEK
ONE

WHAT IS HOPE?

ISAIAH 9:2, 6-7 | BY BRIAN JENNINGS

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. — Isaiah 9:2

WHEN WE SAY WE “HOPE” FOR SOMETHING nowadays, we are usually describing our preferred outcome. We hope our team will win the game. They might not, but we hope they do. We hope for our candidate to win the election. They might not, but we hope they do. We hope to get the perfect gift for Christmas. We might not, but we hope we do. Our team or candidate may be favored; our Christmas gift nearly assured. Our team or candidate may be the underdog; our gift nearly impossible to get. Whether a likely or unlikely outcome, we use the same word – hope. Hope is our desire for a preferred outcome. It may happen; it may not.

This is not biblical hope. Biblical hope is assurance and conviction, the evidence of the unseen (Hebrews 11:1). It is a confident expectation that something will happen. In this sense, I hope the sun will rise tomorrow. I hope I will get paid after two weeks of work. I hope my heart will continue to beat. These things are not completely certain, but they are grounded in my experience of reality. I can be confident they will indeed happen.

The people in the north of ancient Israel had walked in darkness. They were the first to be raided, invaded and conquered. Empires had marched across their lands, foreigners had moved in, and resources were scarce. But the prophet Isaiah gave them hope in chapter nine of his book. For those in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali (which bordered the Sea of Galilee), a great light would shine (9:2). A light that would bring hope, not only to them, but to all who walk in darkness. This hope would be the birth of a child, and not an ordinary child (9:6). He would be a king, sitting on the throne of his father David (9:7). A Wonderful Counselor – always knowing and doing what is best. He would be one with Israel’s Mighty God. An Everlasting Father, caring and providing for his people. The Prince of Peace, putting an end to the conflict that rages across humanity (9:6).

Having heard this good news, God’s people waited and hoped. Until one day, a baby was born in a manger in Bethlehem and what they had confidently expected for so long finally happened. This child grew into a man, walked the shores of the Sea of Galilee and the blind saw, the deaf heard, the lame walked, the sick were healed, the demons fled, and the dead were raised. The light shined in the darkness, and we still witness it today. Our hope, the hope of Christmas, is not wishful thinking. It is not crossing our fingers for our preferred outcome. It is our confident expectation that the child promised by Isaiah, born in Bethlehem, who performed signs and wonders, who died on a cross and rose from the grave has saved us, is for us, and will give us a glorious future.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for the assurance of true hope found in Jesus Christ. The hope of peace, salvation, and a future with You.

Amen

THE DWELLING PLACE OF GOD IS WITH MAN

ISAIAH 7:14 | BY RANSOM MURPHY

Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign [of Himself]. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel — Isaiah 7:14

QUAKING IN HIS BOOTS AND WITH HIS HEART TREMBLING IN FEAR, Ahaz, King of Judah, stands and watches as the armies of Syria and Israel amass against Jerusalem to wage war against it. These invaders want to conquer Jerusalem and install their own king to rule. But the Lord God almighty has other plans, and He steps in through the prophet Isaiah and offers hope through a profound promise. He first says in 7:7 about the threat, *“It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass.”* but Ahaz needs further reassurance. The Lord then offers to comfort Ahaz through a sign of Ahaz’s choosing, but Ahaz refuses, not wanting to put the Lord to the test. Finally, God in His mercy decides on the best sign to offer to reassure Ahaz and his people – he chooses Himself, as his incarnate son Jesus!

Most Christians understand that the name Immanuel translates from Hebrew into “God with us”. What a simple English phrase that is - “with us”. So trivial. So understated. We use it in our daily lives all the time. “Come with us to the fair”. “We’re going to dinner; would you like to come with us?” We use it as an invitation to have others to join our own activities.

God’s use of “with us” is much more profound. Purity mixing with blemished. Holiness mixing with unholiness. Righteousness with unrighteousness. The God who is perfect in all things, creator of the universe and all things in it, loves us so much that He promises to step down from Heaven, to dwell amongst His rebellious and defiant creation. He promises to come along side and overshadow us with protection in troubling times. He promises not to just join our activities, but to shepherd and guide us into His plans. He offers to infuse everything we do with His spirit. “With us” just isn’t enough to describe it. Maybe there aren’t appropriate English words to do so.

His promised presence gives hope to His people throughout time, through the prophets of the Old Testament like Isaiah; through Jesus and his birth which we are celebrating now; and through his promises of the eternal life to come.

In Revelation 21:3, the Lord declares, *“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.”*

Consider in prayer:

What does it mean in your life for God to be with you? Are you finding hope in close communion with Him, or are you just taking Him along for the ride?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help me to recognize what "God with us" truly means. Help me to find the hope you offer me in yourself and in Jesus's sacrifice for me.

Amen

AN UNWILLING PROPHET

NUMBERS 24:17A | BY JOHN SUMMERVILLE

*I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob,
and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; — Numbers 24:17a*

PROPHECY IS SOMETHING MOST CHRISTIANS SHY AWAY FROM because we don't always understand it. The more we read our Bible, the more God reveals in His Scriptures to us. Yet, even as we read and we grow closer to God, it is easy to miss a prophecy like the one in Numbers 24:17, as it is part of the story of Balaam.

Balaam was not a prophet of God the Father. Actually, Balaam was a prophet of the false gods that God was preparing to remove from the Promised Land.

Moses and the 12 tribes were camped below, and Balak, king of the Moabites, was afraid. Balak had heard the stories of what had happened to Pharaoh with the 10 plagues and with the Red Sea. So Balak paid Balaam to curse Israel. But God wouldn't allow it. Instead of cursing Israel, every time Balaam would open his mouth, Balaam blessed Israel. Balak was confused and frustrated and grew even more fearful. The more Balak wanted Balaam to curse Israel, the more Balaam would bless Israel. I've always found the story funny, especially the part in chapter 22 where Balaam's donkey talks to him.

But getting back to our prophecy. Balaam starts again to bless Israel, and gently tucked in there is, "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel" (Numbers 24:17a).

Even though the prophecy of the Messiah came out of the mouth of Balaam and went into the ears of Balak, they somehow missed the good news of what was to come. In this Christmas season with Journey to Bethlehem, holiday parties with your BFG, and shopping for just the right gift, well, it might become easy to miss what's truly important. Prophecy was fulfilled. Jesus was born. He came to save us from our sins by dying on the cross, rising from the dead and sitting at the right hand of our heavenly Father. And our salvation in Jesus is what gives us hope.

Prayer

*Lord, help us not to miss the wonder of the prophecies fulfilled in Jesus. As we celebrate His birth this season, may our hearts be open to the hope and salvation He brings.
Thank You for sending Your Son to give us hope in You.*

Amen

PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD

ISAIAH 40:3-5 | BY JEFF OLDS

Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. — Isaiah 40:4

Isaiah begins by prophesying of “one crying in the wilderness”. The voice prophesied is the voice of John the Baptist, who calls His people to prepare for the coming of their triumphant King. The road should be made ready for the King to travel with glory and ease.

Verse 4 tells us that every obstacle must be removed! Whatever is wrong in the road must be corrected. Whatever is low must be lifted up and whatever is high must be made low. This is a beautiful picture of what must happen in our hearts to prepare the way for His coming. Will you allow the Spirit of God to reveal to you the places in your heart that need to be lifted up and those place that need to be made low?

The result of the road being corrected is the glory of the Lord being revealed! As we prepare our hearts and open them to the King, His glory is revealed. Regardless of nationality, “all flesh shall see it together.” His glory is revealed to every prepared heart.

We have confidence and certainty in this hope because “the mouth of the Lord has spoken”.

During this Advent season will you allow the Spirit of God to reveal to you the ways you can prepare your heart for Him so that His glory may be revealed in your life?

Prayer

Father, reveal to me the places in my heart that need to be made low and the places that need to be lifted up so that your glory may be revealed.

Amen

CHRISTMAS IN FOUR WORDS

JOHN 1:14 | BY SCOTT MCALISTER

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. — John 1:14

GOD GAVE US HIS VERY OWN SON to be born into a human family, to live as we do but without sin. In becoming flesh, He started as a single-celled human being, a zygote, just like all of us. Luke 2:52 says that baby Jesus grew in wisdom. How could the infinite God grow in wisdom? It's a mystery beyond me. When did He realize He was God? When did He know that He was here to die for us? The Bible says He is the lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8), but did He have to decide, while in the flesh, that He would die for us? Did He experience horror when He realized the full impact of His future sacrifice? Did He love all of humanity from the beginning of His human existence, or did He acquire that love as He grew?

When we started out in the womb, we had no idea of our need for God. As we grew, we became capable of understanding the idea of God and that He loves us, yet we still couldn't truly know Him until the Holy Spirit drew us to Him -- another mystery. We started out, from the first sin, with an insurmountable, infinite debt that we could never pay. But God paid it for us by coming to earth in the flesh and dying on the cross. It was the best, most important, most magnificent, generous gift we could ever receive. The Word Who became flesh -- it's Christmas in four words.

Prayer

Father, I can never truly comprehend the infinite sacrifice of Your Son on my behalf. Thank you, thank you, thank you for becoming flesh for me.

Amen

WHEN DID YOU LAST SHOUT OVER GOOD NEWS?

ISAIAH 40:9-11 | BY JEFF FISHER

Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" — Isaiah 40:9

Let's think about shouting today as we continue our focus on Isaiah 40. Isaiah has shared that God is bringing "comfort" to His people (v.1). War is over and sins are forgiven (v.2). And He says "the glory of the Lord will be revealed" (v.5).

In verse 9, he summons the shouters. "You who bring good news to God's People (Zion, Jerusalem)".

"go up on a high mountain"

"lift up your voice with a shout"

"lift it up, do not be afraid"

Share the Good News you know about! Shout it out! Don't be afraid. Make a big noise!

Q: What kinds of things make you shout for joy?

Q: What have you erupted over and couldn't help yelling out?

For me it's been:

- A good grade on a test.
- My wife saying "yes" to marriage.
- Making a big sale.
- Landing a job.
- Getting a bonus or promotion.
- My son and daughter-in-law getting married.
- Watching a big play happen at a sporting event.
- And I might have shouted uncontrollably a few rock concerts!

When we shout over good news, we can't help it. Our excitement has to come out. We don't care what others think. We want to celebrate, high five someone, or maybe dance around the living room.

For God's People the explosive news is that Messiah has come. "Here is your God." HE. IS. HERE!!!

Prayer

Dear God, fill my heart to be so full of the Good News of Jesus that I can't help but shout it to others!

Amen

A RIGHTEOUS JUDGE

ISAIAH 11:1-5 | BY NOLA SUMMERVILLE

And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; — Isaiah 11:3-4a

AS A PARENT, MEDIATING DISPUTES AND GRIEVANCES between my five children was one of the least desirable aspects of parenting. It was often challenging to get a true picture of what really happened when a disagreement occurred. Each child would tell the situation from his perspective, and I would be left to discern who was really at fault and what appropriate action should be taken to rectify the situation. I certainly did not always get it right. Sometimes I would make a hasty judgment without hearing both sides or fully understanding what had happened. Later when more of the situation was revealed, I would have to apologize to the one I had judged too quickly and try again to resolve the dispute more fairly. The greatest challenge in my role as judge in my family was to determine what the heart of the issue was and how I could help my children act and respond in a godly manner.

Although my days of judging childhood disputes are over, Isaiah 11:1-5 gives me great hope because there is a truly righteous and faithful judge who will one day judge the inhabitants of Earth. His name is Jesus. Verses 3-4 remind me that “He will not judge by what His eyes see nor make a decision by what His ears hear”; but with righteousness He will judge and with fairness He will make decisions. There will be no flawed judgments because of lack of wisdom and knowledge. He is omniscient. He knows all. In fact, He is unable to make a wrong decision because verse five tells us that He is girded in righteousness and fairness. He simply cannot act contrary to His character. Jesus is the righteous judge who will rightly judge the world. My heart overflows with gratitude that Jesus willingly takes on this necessary task, and I am at peace knowing that He will do it just right.

Prayer

Thank you, Jesus, for the righteousness and fairness of your coming judgments. I am full of hope and have nothing to fear because your decisions will be just and fair.

Amen 9

WEEK
TWO

PEACE

MICAH 5:2; 4-5A | BY PHIL AUSTIN

And he shall be their peace. — Micah 5:5a

MICAH, IN VERY FEW WORDS, GIVES US A LOT OF INFORMATION. He tells us the Messiah's origins, His earthly birthplace, and His mission. Jesus is eternal. He is from the line of Judah as descended from King David, and His ultimate ruling over all His chosen.

But for our purposes just now, let's focus on what is said at the first part of verse 5. Certainly, "he" is Jesus. But who is "their" and what does "peace" exactly mean?

When we think of peace, it is most often external. Absence of conflict. No wars. No disagreements. But all of these were present before Micah, during his life, all the years up to Jesus' birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and up to and including our current times. So, what is this peace that Jesus promises and brings?

In John 14:27 Jesus says *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."* And He affirms this again in John 16:33. The message is the same throughout Scripture. Psalm 5:11-12 tells us those who are faithful and trusting in God will receive His shelter and refuge. In Luke 2 the angels announce peace to those with whom God is well pleased, as closure to the glad tidings of great joy in proclaiming the birth of Jesus. So faithful acceptance of Jesus as Lord, and our full trust in Him, gives us the peace that only comes from Him: the peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

So placing our faith, trust and reliance on God puts us in the "their" category. And the peace Jesus speaks of is real, but internal. But also eternal, and exceeds any worldly peace, which is very short indeed, if at all. Peace in the midst of chaos.

But am I positioned for peace? In Romans 12:18, Paul encourages us that if possible, as it depends on us, to live at peace with all. How do we do that? Read the instructions in the entirety of Romans chapter 12! Remember Jesus' instructions in the Sermon on the mount (Matthew 6 and 7). We are given the expectations of the life of a faithful believer, and are given the Holy Spirit to provide the wisdom and power to let our pride go and assume His humility as a servant to reflect Jesus. Put on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-17)

Do I always call upon this power? At home? At work? Behind my steering wheel and gas pedal? Behind those in front of me at the gas station pump, the grocery counter, the DMV? On social media?

How about when your child is sick? When your aging parent needs long term care? When you can't find a job? When you are all on your own?

Prayer

I pray that we will choose to walk humbly with you, my God. That I will share this Good News. That I will remain in You, and be attached to the Vine in order to bear good fruit.

Amen

THE PATH TO PEACE

ISAIAH 53:4-5 | BY MIKE COOPER

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.— Isaiah 53:4-5

Pace on earth is something we would all agree could be on our societal Christmas list. If peace is what you are looking for, then Iceland may be the place for you to live! At least according to the Global Peace Index, which states it is the safest place in the world. But what is peace?

Some may say that peace is the absence of conflict, living without fear or worry, or a time where humans get along and work together for the common good. Everybody is searching for peace but few seem to find it.

This is because real peace is restoring to wholeness that which was broken. Our transgressions and iniquities have broken our relationship with God. Our sin has brought brokenness into the world. The reality is there will never be peace on earth because of sin. To experience real peace our broken relationship with God must be restored.

How can our brokenness be restored? The path to peace these verses lay out for us involves a perfect man, the only one who was not broken, to be broken, to experience grief, sorrow, conflict, and violence towards him. This path to peace is one that only our gracious God could come up with. To make a way for us to experience peace by sending his son Jesus to be broken.

Today, as you search for peace look to Jesus. Jesus said, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace.” (John 16:33). To have peace, you must be in relationship with the One who can give it. Jesus is the only one who can heal our souls, cleanse us of our sin, and make a way for us to have peace with God. This peace can be yours if you repent of your sins and believe that Jesus died for your sins on the cross and rose from the grave.

Not only does Jesus grant us peace with God; he alone is the one who can bring us the peace of God. He can soothe our aching hearts, comfort our troubled souls, and mend any broken relationship. If your heart is troubled and you are searching for peace, then slow down, rest in God’s promises, and trust that he wants to bring you peace. Cast your cares upon him, and thank him for how God cares for you.

Prayer

Jesus, I thank You for the peace You have given to me, which does not depend on feelings or circumstances. Help me to trust you more and more as this world brings me trouble.

Amen

A MIND THAT IS STEADFAST

ISAIAH 26:3 | BY AMANDA KIELY

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.
— Isaiah 26:3

ISAIAH 26 IS A SONG OF PRAISE THAT FOLLOWS A DARK, sobering scripture about the coming day of God's final, great judgement and the destruction of the earth (Isaiah 24). This reminds me that despite the evil we see on the news or the troubles we experience in our community and homes, we don't have to be consumed by them. This divisive election year was a prime example of that. We don't all agree which leaders and policies are best for our government, but we can all find peace with every outcome and decision by turning our thoughts toward God and trusting in His promises and plan.

As we walk through the hustle and bustle of December and prepare for the year ahead, my hope and prayer is that we can keep our thoughts on the Messiah. Satan loves to distract our minds with to-do lists, online shopping, social media comparison and so much more. Don't let him rob you of the perfect peace God gifted us. The more we learn about God, think about His Word, remember His promises, and live out Philippians 4:8-9 (Fix your thoughts on what is true, honorable, right, and pure), the more peace we will feel each day. When our thoughts wander into dark places or become consumed by the things of this world, let's take a moment to recognize that temptation and pray that God will help transform our thoughts and minds.

Steadfast also means immovable or not subject to change. What never changes about Christmas? The presents, food, popular movies, activities and even guests can change year to year despite our best attempts to continue family traditions. However, the reason we celebrate and the perfect peace we experience when we set our minds on the birth of our Messiah, who He is and His plans for us can stay with us year after year.

Prayer

Lord, please help us to not become consumed by what is temporary this holiday season, rather help us fix our minds on you so that we may experience the perfect peace you want for us.

Amen

THE ANTICIPATION

MARK 1:1-3 | BY CRAIG HARDEE

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'"— Mark 1:1-3

Little Jimmy had been waiting for Christmas for a very long time. Why did time seem like it slowed down the closer it got to Christmas? Finally, it was just a few days until Christmas. If he thought time slowed down earlier, now it almost stood still. He couldn't wait. His parents reassured him that Christmas would be here soon.

Just like Little Jimmy, the Israelites had been waiting in anticipation for hundreds of years, waiting for a Messiah. Way back during the prophets of Old Testament time, the hope of a Messiah had been coming forth. When would Messiah come? Of course, the Israelites were looking for a Messiah to lead them and defeat their enemies.

But in Mark, we see another type of Messiah. Actually Jesus went far beyond an earthly ruler. Jesus came to die for our sins, and then to arise in victory over the grave. When we receive His free gift, we are assured eternal life with Jesus. What a gift!

But today, we should have anticipation, just like Little Jimmy and just like the Israelites. Why have anticipation now?

No, not for gifts we might receive for Christmas, but for the opportunity to worship our Lord and Savior during this special season of the year. Many around the world don't have opportunity to openly worship Christ this season of the year or any season of the year.

It's an opportunity that we shouldn't take for granted. And that should extend to all the times we worship.

Is Christ worthy of our worship? Yes, He definitely is! So, starting with this season let us approach Him with anticipation and readiness to worship.

Then, let's extend it to all the times we worship.

Prayer

Lord thank you for what you've done for us. Help us to approach each opportunity with worship you with anticipation.

Amen

THORNBUSH, OR JUNIPER?

ISAIAH 55:12-13 | BY CECILIA NAVY

Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord's renown, for an everlasting sign, that will endure forever." — Isaiah 55:13

THESE WORDS WERE ORIGINALLY WRITTEN REGARDING the Jewish people leaving captivity and returning home and just like the rest of the Bible, how they still resonate with us today. There are so many reasons we may wake up each day filled with dread - the opposite of joy. Dreading our day will be fraught with fear; pain, be it physical or emotional; opposition; worry; stress and anxiety.... We could fill this page with the negatives that overrun our lives. Maybe your recent days are filled with worry of losing income, a chronic illness that is continuing to worsen, anxiety of the choices of a wayward child, never ending grief that washes over you. Perhaps there is a sin you struggle to let go of. These pains so easily overshadow the good God has poured over us. Without even realizing it, we have allowed our focus to shift from all God has provided to the brokenness of this world. Our refrain shifts from one of praise to the very human cry of "Oh Lord, how can these things happen? Why do You let me struggle if You love me?"

But this is not the life God designed for us. Our words may say "God's power and love know no limits," but our human minds tend to think in very human ways and we limit God's abilities without even realizing it. His ability to forgive us. His ability to love us despite our sinful ways. How He can fill our days here with peace even amidst all of the sin surrounding us, our own and others'. All of the good He offers is at the ready, we just have to take the step towards Him. He can and will restore us. It may be that we start anew every day in asking for His forgiveness and guidance. It may be that we are taking the tiniest steps forward; but the tiniest step with God is beyond measure, compared to any leap we take on our own.

We choose, every day. Is this a day of dread or a day of joy? Do we allow ourselves to be the thornbush, fruitless and useless or do we grow as the juniper? Do we go forth carrying the weight of this broken world or do we go out in joy knowing we cannot be plucked from His hand? When choosing, try to always remember God is the Father who sacrificed His perfect Son for us. His enduring love lasts forever.

Prayer

Lord, turn me from my ways to Your ways, filled with peace and joy, knowing Your love endures forever.

Amen

DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?

HEBREWS 2:9 | BY MICHELLE MCHENRY

But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. — Hebrews 2:9

IT'S FRIDAY THE 13TH. NO WORRIES! PEACE IS OUR WORD THIS WEEK. TODAY. EVERYDAY, ACTUALLY.

But. Such a pivotal word, especially in Scripture. We must learn to pay attention when we see that word. In order to do that, we must back up one verse. From verse 8 we learn that right now, in our present time, we don't yet see everything subject to God's authority. Hello! I don't think that's news to any of us, unfortunately. Verse 8 - We don't see that. Verse 9 - BUT we see Jesus.

Or do we?

To see something we must look. Stop. Maybe turn our head. Focus. Take it in. This past year God has been teaching me about being aware of Him. God is always present, but am I aware of His Presence? Being aware of God is an active process. We must stop. Be still. Breathe. Be quiet. We can learn to regain the lost art of stillness.

And the Jesus we see? Let us see Jesus as revealed in Scripture rather than an idea of who we think He is, or a Jesus we're comfortable with, or a Jesus who's really just made in our image. Today's passage says "He was made lower than the angels for a little while." A little while, thirty three years, but oh, what He accomplished in that little while! " He is now crowned with glory and honor because He suffered death." He's back now in His position of being higher than the angels. Crowned. Jesus, wearing a crown of glory and honor. "He tasted death for everyone." Yes, everyone. That is something to ponder in the quiet.

Do you see Him? Jesus. Crowned with glory and honor, because He tasted death for us all. Glory!

Prayer

God of peace, our glorious Jesus, may we have eyes to see You. Teach us how to take it all in, to see You and join You in what You are doing in this world. Open our eyes, LORD. Teach us how to be still. How to be quiet. How to focus and be present in Your Presence. We want to see You.

Amen

WHEN THE WORLD RESHAPES

ISAIAH 54:10 | BY LYNN ESKRIDGE

For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you. — Isaiah 54:10

PEACE. WHAT A WONDERFUL WORD. But, how often do we really feel Peace? Is there such a thing? There is so much chaos in the world, in our homes, in our hearts.

We live in a fallen world where chaos reigns, everything is off the rails. It seems that the whole world is out of whack. There is war all over the world, and hunger, and suffering. In our personal lives, there may be sickness, even death. There may be trouble in the family. There may be difficulties at work or school. You may be angry, and, the way you see it, justifiably so! There are so many things to be fearful of, that you just can't see any way to get through it. So many things bring chaos, that we may forget that there is even the possibility of peace. Everything in this world just feels wrong!

But wait.

God has given us promises of peace. He has it all under His control. He promises us His Peace “which surpasses all understanding” and that He will “guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phillippians 4:7). In this world of chaos, it makes no sense to feel at peace. But, God says that He will not depart from us, and will never take His peace from us. (Isaiah 54:10). Now, I know that there are times that we just can't see His peace. We feel anything but peaceful. I've been there. I've cried out to Him asking where He was, and why was He letting this chaos happen to me. Many times, I have looked back and realized that what I was crying out for wasn't peace, but comfort. Not in the way of someone holding me and saying, “There, there. It'll be alright”. I was looking to be comfortable. I was looking for the chaos to go away. I was looking for everything to be easy. That isn't the promise. The promise is peace when the mountains are moving, peace when your world is reshaping. Sometimes, there must be chaos, not comfort. But God, in His perfect wisdom, has promised that He will be there with us as each hill is reshaped. He will be with us as each mountain becomes a valley. He will be with us when the waters threaten to drown us. He is there. “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.” (Isaiah 26:3) He has promised us His perfect peace, because He has compassion on us. He sent His only Son into the chaos to show us that He loves us beyond all measure. All we have to do is keep our minds focused on Him. Not an easy thing when the chaos reigns, but Oh the peace, the joy that comes with doing so.

Prayer

Dear Father, when my world is reshaping, help me to remember that You have promised Your Love and Peace will never be removed from me. Help me to find Your Peace in the chaos. Thank you for this promise.

Amen

WEEK
THREE

THE JOY OF FINDING PEACE WITH GOD

LUKE 2:8-14 | BY DENNIS COTTEN

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. — Luke 2:10

AS WE CONTINUE TO PREPARE FOR OUR CELEBRATION of our Savior’s birth, let us review this scripture passage with the purpose of determining what the Holy Spirit is speaking to us through His Word. As we examine the scripture that was inspired to be written so many years ago, we need to draw from this passage the message that God is sharing with us today.

In the ESV (English Standard Version) of the Bible, there are key phrases that can provide a better understanding of what this scripture passage speaks to us.

Let us begin with “...keeping watch...”. As the shepherds kept watch over their sheep, the Good Shepherd is forever keeping watch over our lives.

“...an angel of the Lord appeared to them...”. When we are aware of the Lord’s presence “in our lives, He speaks to us.

“... and the glory of the Lord shone around them...”. When we are made aware of His Holy Presence, the darkness of our sin is revealed.

“...and they were filled with great fear”. The Holy Spirit convicts us of the darkness of our sins.

“And the angel of the Lord said to them fear not”. The Holy Spirit of God can provide for us today, comfort from our fears.

“...for behold, I bring to you good news of great joy for all people”. Here is the good news of the coming of our Savior to save us from the penalty of our sin.

“...unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”. Jesus Christ is our Savior from eternal death in order that we may have eternal life with Him.

“And this will be a sign for you...” In the awareness of the joy of our salvation, we can become more aware of the presence of God through the Holy Spirit in our lives.

“... you will find...” Seek and you shall find the constant presence of God.

“...and suddenly...” When we are provided peace, comfort and joy in the loving presence of our Lord, we should praise God.

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those whom he is pleased”.

Let us pray this offered prayer that God is pleased with us.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, what a joy to be considered an adopted child of God. May I become more pleasing to you as I grow in appreciation of your gift of salvation to me through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of your Son, my Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen

PERFECT JOY

JOHN 1:1-4 | BY DARYL HYDEN

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. — John 1:1

ONE OF THE THINGS THAT MAKES THE CHRISTMAS SEASON SO JOYFUL is the presence of family. What is seen in John 1:1-4 is no less the same. It is joy on a different level because it is a joy that is perfect.

“In the beginning...”: From before time or anything else began, the Father, The Son, and the Spirit were together joyfully in One Another’s Presence. There was perfect union and communion among them. There was Joy! Then one of the most tremendous acts of grace took place.

“All things were made through Him...”: Wanting to share the love and joy They experienced within Their holy union – God, through the Word created the world and all that was in it. Can you imagine what that must have been like? It is often on a Sunday morning, or during the week in our house, I get to see the joy on the faces of children who have “created” something. They want to share it with everyone hoping it will bring the same joy it has brought them. God, through the Word, spoke heaven and earth into existence with joy! But then something even greater happened...

“...The light of men”: God, through the Word, created man and woman. Can you imagine the joy that filled the heart of our Creator? He molded and shaped man from the dust and finally breathed life into him. But He didn’t stop there. As man slept, the Creator went to work again forming his helpmate. What a day that must have been. What a joy-filled time as the Word walked with Adam and Eve in the garden. His Presence with them brought joy! But that’s not all that happened...

“...Light shined in the darkness”: The day would come when joy, through a choice, would be stolen. The Presence of the Word could no longer dwell freely with man because the darkness of sin would not allow it. Joy was stolen and life became dark. But - praise God - that’s not the end of the story!

“And the Light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overtake it”: Our Creator longing to be present with us, chose (with joy) to clothe Himself in humanity and leave the light and safety of Heaven to enter the darkness and brokenness of this world so that all things can one day be made new again. The day would come on an old rugged cross where darkness would appear to win; but three days later all creation found that darkness’ greatest weapon could not overcome the Light. Can you imagine the joy in Heaven and on earth as they witnessed the triumphant, empty tomb?

As we look to the truth of the Word who filled the manger, may we also find joy in the fact that the tomb is empty. There is One whose Presence surrounds us. And one day soon we will see His precious and joy-filled face.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, Thank you for the joy You bring to each one who knows You. Thank you for sending us the perfect gift of salvation, the Word, Jesus! Help us be the light to others in such a dark world. Help us to show them true joy.

Amen

SEEK AND KNOW GOD

ISAIAH 12:1-6 | BY BETTY EVANS

And in that day you will say: Praise the Lord, call upon His name, declare His deeds among the peoples, make mention that His name is exalted.” — Isaiah 12:4

A SONG CAME TO MY MIND MANY TIMES during the past year. “Jesus is the center of my joy. All that’s good and perfect comes from you. You’re the heart of my contentment and hope for all I do.” This year has brought me challenges I had not experienced before. After many doctors’ visits and tests, being told I had cancer, experiencing severe knee issues and nerve pain in my other leg, many physical therapy visits and needle therapy, having to change many activities, and learning many new things, God gave me messages through His Word and Spirit to praise Him for His faithfulness and love poured out to me each day. Through challenges and unknown happenings, God’s presence gave me joy and hope each day. Seeking God, knowing Him and praising Him became more important every day. Through all the days God placed me in places to share with others His deeds in my life.

Pray each day with praises to God for His love and for ways to declare His deeds to all people.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your constant presence and unwavering love. In the midst of challenges and uncertainties, help me to always seek You, praise You, and share Your faithfulness with others. May my heart overflow with joy and hope, and may my life reflect Your goodness to all.

Amen

JOY IN TRIALS

JAMES 1:2-4 | BY NITA GREEN

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. — James 1:2-3

UPON READING THE FIRST PHRASE OF THIS PASSAGE, the word JOY already brings a strong presence. We know that word gives us a positive feeling. So I looked up joy in the Webster's dictionary and it says, "The emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune, or by the prospect of possessing what one desires." The definition tells us that something good has happened in order for us to feel "joy". This is what we usually think of when we imagine having joy. Maybe we have good health, or a big promotion is coming, an "A" was made after submitting a project or paper, or we just closed on our dream home. These examples are all well and good and we never think of the possibility that joy could be derived from a different situation.

When I googled "joy" it also came up with "Joy in Christianity"... another way of looking at joy in the Christian's life. What is Joy in Christianity? 'It is a natural human inclination to think that living through trials and negative circumstances would not be an occasion for joy.' Choosing to respond to life's difficult situations with inner contentment and satisfaction doesn't seem to make sense. Joy is a choice! But the Lord is the originator of pure joy.

So for the Christian we must know that even though we are facing trials in our life, we also have an awareness that God is working in our lives and that He has a purpose for what we are dealing with.

If we have put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ as our own personal savior (Romans 10:9), and if we believe that His Word teaches us that God is at work in our lives (Philippians 2:13), then we will come to the logical conclusion that trials, suffering, and difficult times in our lives are ultimately designed by God and that He has a specific purpose for us in mind.

We can respond to life's trials with genuine joy if we "know" that the Lord has a purpose for why He would allow those difficult times of suffering and trials. In this passage, the purpose for trials was to produce patience or endurance (the ability to hold up under a trial) in our lives.

Knowing that our loving Heavenly Father is doing something specific in our lives and that He is doing what is best for us helps us respond with genuine joy. Life's trials are certainly not fun, but we can react to those painful situations with joy if we understand that God is demonstrating His love for us through those circumstances. May we ask Him to abide within us during this Christmas season so we will have true JOY in Him! (Romans 15:13)

Prayer

Lord, please help me to always know you have a purpose for everything in my life. Give me patience and understanding that you are in control and I can have inner peace with you as my guide. Thank you for the birth of Jesus and for His love for me, even though I'm a sinner saved by grace. May I show inner joy to those who need it.

Amen

CHOOSE TO FIND JOY

HABAKKUK 3:17-18 | BY PETER THOMPSON

Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

— Habakkuk 3:17-18

NOT MUCH IS KNOWN ABOUT THE MINOR PROPHET HABAKKUK. He most likely lived no later than the end of King Josiah's reign in Judah (640 - 609 BC). Before King Josiah's reign, the kingdom of Judah had turned away from God and followed the wicked practices of the kings Manasseh and Amon. They worshiped false gods, sacrificed their children, and allowed the temple to fall into ruin (2 Kings 21:1-7; 19-22). Under Josiah's leadership, the nation experienced a time of revival with the restoration of the temple and a reinstatement of the celebration of Passover, but it was short-lived. After he died, the nation soon returned to their evil ways. Habakkuk opens with the prophet complaining to God that He is allowing evil and violent men to persist. Habakkuk asks God why He is not bringing judgment and executing justice. God responds and tells Habakkuk that he is raising up the Babylonians to bring judgment upon His people. Habakkuk then responds - but they are even worse people than Judah! God reassures Habakkuk that He will punish all the wicked at the correct time, even if it doesn't seem right to Habakkuk. The book then ends with Habakkuk's prayer; he praises God's character and wants to see God's great judgment and mercy. He is reminded of God's great acts of the past and has chosen to wait on God's will. He closes his prayer with a beautiful reminder of what true faith looks like - when there are no crops and the livestock are lost and there is no guarantee there will even be food to eat, he can trust God and His plan. No matter the circumstances, Habakkuk chooses to have joy in the Lord.

Where is your heart today? It can be easy for us to feel like we are in Habakkuk's shoes. When we look around us, in business, sports, politics, entertainment, or even just down the street, we see examples of people who refuse to acknowledge God, who disobey His commands, yet who live lives full of prosperity, recognition, and happiness. We have a choice to make. Will we be frustrated with God's delayed judgment? Will we be bitter over the hardships God allows us to enter? Or will we come to the same decision Habakkuk does, and find our joy solely in Christ. No matter what suffering or pain your heart and my heart is experiencing, know that we can find true joy only in Him.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, help my heart to long for you, to seek for joy in who you are. Do not let me be discouraged or tempted by what I see in the world around me, but train my eyes to seek more of you.

Amen

THE JOY OF THOSE WHO TRUST IN GOD

PSALM 34:3 | BY BRIAN HILL

Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together! — Psalm 34:3

ADVENT IS A TIME OF WARMTH AND JOY. Everywhere we go there is the sound of Christmas music to remind us of the season. Music provides us a way to express the joy that is an overflow of our hearts. Why are we joyful? God has come! He has rescued us from the darkness of this world and given us the hope of eternal life.

The Bible tells us that David was a man after God's own heart. In the Psalms, the biblical songbook, we find the overflow of David's heart. When we read of David's life and circumstances, we find that the joy that filled David's heart could only come from the Lord. Whether he was running for his life from his enemies, reigning as king over God's people, or mourning over his own sin, David expressed the same joy. Earlier in chapter 34 of Psalm, David reveals the source of this joy when he says: "My soul makes its boast in the Lord..." Psalm 34:2. This overflow of joy from David's soul is primarily expressed through music. Throughout the Psalms David provides us a glimpse into his renowned heart. As we read the Psalms we find that David takes every opportunity to magnify the name of the Lord, and not only that, he encourages everyone to join him in exalting the God in whom his trust lies.

From the very line of David, born in the city of David, would come the one who is our source of joy: Jesus Christ, our Savior. We know that, like David, no matter our circumstances or our feelings, Jesus is with us. He will never leave us, nor forsake us. He is truly our source of eternal joy! As we rejoice over his first Advent, let us look forward to His return in the 2nd Advent, when we join Him in the heavens and join in the heavenly chorus! What a glorious day that will be!

This Advent season, don't be afraid to express the joy that is in your soul, that only comes from the Lord. Join your voices together with those of King David, the angels in Heaven, and the whole family of God as we magnify the Lord and exalt his wonderful name!

Prayer

Father, we thank you for filling our hearts with everlasting joy and saving us through your son, Jesus Christ! May your name be exalted and lifted high! Give us strength to sing your praises and boldness to proclaim your greatness to the nations!

Amen

REJOICE—THE LORD IS NEAR

PHILIPPIANS 4:4–7 | BY TAMMY PRESSLEY

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. — Philippians 4:4

THESE WORDS BEGIN THE CONCLUSION OF PAUL'S LETTER to the church in Philippi. Joy has been the primary theme of this letter, so it's fitting that Paul encourages his readers to rejoice. As he writes these words, Paul is in a prison cell in Rome. In spite of his circumstances, being bound with chains, he had incredible joy because God was using his suffering to advance the gospel. He learned to be content in all circumstances, and he constantly reiterates his joy throughout the book.

Paul tells his readers that joy is not based on circumstances, but it comes from Christ dwelling in them. The fact that Jesus is near brings joy, which should cause our hearts to be glad. It's always easier to rejoice when things are going well, but we are also to rejoice when we've had a rotten day, or when our health is in jeopardy, or when our friend has turned against us, or when our finances are upside down. Being a Christian doesn't mean that you never have any worries, but one of the reasons you can rejoice is that you can bring all your concerns to the Lord. You can turn those worries into joyful prayers, leave them at God's feet, and feel His peace.

The joy of being chosen by God, eternally adopted as His children, can bring a deep sense of peace that goes beyond a happiness that can fluctuate based on circumstances. We have hope even in the midst of trials and a promise of God's presence, and both should cause us to rejoice.

Joy is not a feeling you have, but a choice you make. The peace that God gives allows you to have a deep sense of joy even in difficult situations. As you look toward this Christmas season, consider all the blessings Jesus has brought you, and let the peace of God guard your heart and mind. True joy comes from a relationship with Jesus and trusting in the peace that He brings.

"Rejoice always. I say it again: Rejoice!"

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Sometimes it's so hard to find joy in life's situations, but help us remember that our joy comes from You. May we gratefully lay our requests at Your feet so we can feel the peace that only You can give. Help us to choose joy always.

Amen

WEEK
FOUR

MERCIES FOREVER NEW

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24 | BY ANDREW OSBORNE

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." — Lamentations 3:22-24

IN THE MIDST OF OVERWHELMING SORROW AND DEVASTATION, the prophet Jeremiah found a wellspring of hope. Lamentations is a book of grief, as it records a lament over the destruction of Jerusalem. Yet, in these verses, we find a powerful reminder of God's unshakable faithfulness. Jeremiah, despite the desolation around him, declares that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. This is not merely a hope based on circumstances, but a deep conviction that is rooted in the heart of God's character.

The word "steadfast" conveys an unwavering, committed love; one that is not subject to change or failure. God's mercies are fresh each morning, and no matter what troubles we face, He offers new grace every day. Like Jeremiah, we may experience seasons of pain and loss, but we are invited to fix our eyes on God's unchanging nature and find hope in His continual presence.

We can never exhaust His mercies. We will never mess up one time too many, bring one too many whiny prayers, or in any way test God's patience and grace to the limit... His mercies never end and they are new every morning. Never fear that you're too far gone, for God's mercy always extends farther still as long as we will turn to Him and receive it.

When we declare, "The LORD is my portion," we are affirming that God alone is our true source of satisfaction. In Him, we find everything we need. This truth leads us to hope, not in the temporary relief of our circumstances, but in the eternal goodness of the Lord.

Today, if you are walking through difficult times, let these verses be an encouragement to your soul. God's mercies are new every morning, and His faithfulness is great. Trust Him, for He is always with you.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for Your unwavering faithfulness and mercy that are new every morning. Help me to trust in You fully, finding my hope and strength in Your steadfast love.

Amen

CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION

ISAIAH 52:7-10 | BY KASEY COOPER

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

— Isaiah 52:7-10

WE SEEK JOY IN A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT PLACES. As Christians, we know that Jesus gives true joy, but as we are still living in the flesh, our sin nature may pull us every way other than towards the Lord. We ride the highs and the lows as life throws them at us and sometimes forget where we, as children of God, find rest for our souls. If we are in Christ, the Holy Spirit reminds us that true joy can only be found in salvation and sanctification through Jesus.

Everyone loves good news. When we have good news to share, we usually get excited to share it. When we receive good news, we rejoice, but that emotion doesn't last forever. Isaiah describes the Israelites as they worship their great God, while simultaneously describing what our reaction should be when we celebrate Christ's birth. He has comforted us, He has redeemed us, and that is cause for celebration.

Today, receiving good news may look like placing your faith in Jesus and if that is the case, praise God! Today, maybe you feel conviction for not placing one hundred percent trust in God for your source of joy and satisfaction. That conviction is good news indeed! When the Holy Spirit convicts us, we are to run into the arms of the Father, not wallow in our guilt and avoid any repercussions. Repentance is a beautiful thing. Run to Jesus, the true and only source of eternal joy.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for the joy that we have in Jesus. We pray we would live our lives every day in celebration of this truth that we have. In the source of our joy, Jesus, we pray,

Amen

DON'T BE AFRAID

MATTHEW 1:18-23 | BY EMILY JENNINGS

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.. — Matthew 1:20

DON'T BE AFRAID. IT'S ALMOST COMICAL TO WRITE OR SAY THOSE WORDS. In the garden, as Adam hid from God because of his sin, fear was woven into every human heart. Now, there would always be something for God's image-bearers to fear - loneliness, hunger, the sword, and a thousand other terrors.

Just as you cannot command a person to enjoy asparagus, you cannot command a person to *not* be afraid. How could this angel ask the impossible of Joseph?

Things were looking dark. Joseph's wife Mary was pregnant. Both his integrity and their relationship were in jeopardy. Joseph resolved to endure the fallout of a divorce. The root of his decision? Fear. Fear of man. Fear of shame. Fear of a lost future. Joseph walked the same planet as you and me, a planet spinning in fear.

Joseph, Son of David, don't be afraid.

There's only one reason the angel could brazenly demand that Joseph not be afraid of his circumstances: the good news of new circumstances. This news was not local, but global. *Everyone* was going to receive a new set of circumstances. God was coming down to be with His people and save them from their sins.

Brothers and sisters, don't be afraid. Your circumstances have changed.

You were once enemies of God, racing away from Him in fear toward your own ways and wants. Because Christ has come, you are no longer God's enemy. He is not angry with you, and you don't have to hide. God holds the cosmos in the crevice of His hand, and yet He stoops down to calm our crippling fears.

The glorious distractions of lights, parties, and presents will soon run their course. In the coming weeks, we will once again look our circumstances square in the face. On these seemingly bleaker days, the most important thing about you will remain: Jesus left heaven to save you. *You do not have to be afraid.*

Brothers and sisters, *rejoice.*

Prayer

Lord, thank You for the gift of Your presence, which frees us from fear. Help us to remember that in every uncertain moment, we are no longer enemies but beloved children, held in Your care. May the good news of Christ's coming fill us with courage, peace, and rejoicing!

Amen

JUST WAIT

GALATIANS 4:4-5 | BY JAMIE HYDEN

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. — Galatians 4:4-5

AS A CHILD, I REMEMBER THE LONGEST DAY OF THE YEAR was Christmas Eve. All I wanted to do was tear into those gifts containing my name but I had to wait. The second longest time of the year was the next morning. I would wake up before the Lord, go into the living room, look at all the gifts, sit on the sofa, and wait until my parents woke up. When they finally did all that I had been waiting for, it was over in minutes but the wait was worth it!

As I look at our text I love how it begins. “But when the set time had fully come...” It implies that people had been waiting on something or someone and finally what they waited on came. In this phrase, I see what we have been looking at this Advent season – hope, peace, joy, and love!

We find hope in the setting of the “time”. It was a time when the world was looking for a Messiah while trying to find Him in all the wrong places. A time when darkness ruled and hope was diminishing. A time when hope was found in leaders, armies, money, and lineage. A time when they (and we) were slaves to that which could never set us free and never bring us hope. It is in that setting that we see God step in. It is in that setting when He could have walked away from His creation that He chose to enter our world and remind us that hope is only found in Him.

We find Peace because we are reminded that God had a plan and that plan would not be executed until the right time. This reminds us that God is so much more than just mindful of us. He is closer than our breath and adores us to the point that He knows the hairs on our heads. We have peace because at this moment, although we cannot see Him, we are in His Presence our Father!

We find Joy in the truth that God’s plan will always come through. Nothing stops our Father from carrying out His plan in our lives. No force of hell can stop our God. He relentlessly pursues us and when we encounter Him we cannot leave the same. There is Joy in His plan!

Finally, we find the greatest definition of love in these words – “God sent His Son”. At a time when the world least expected it and when we least deserved it God gave us Jesus! The King of all kings was born to die so that we might live. Oh, what love!

As we close out Christmas day and 2024 may we also be reminded that hope, peace, joy, and love can be found as we, like I had to do so many Christmas mornings, wait with great expectation for the time when our Savior will return, time will be no more, sin will be gone, death will be a has been, and we will see His face! Even so, come Lord Jesus!

Prayer

Father, thank You that the gifts of Christmas are who You are. Help us to find hope, peace, joy, and love as we wait for our Savior’s return. Even so come Lord Jesus.

Amen



Salem-BC.org | info@salem-bc.org
1821 N. Salem Street | Apex, NC 27523
(919) 362-7327