

Calvary Baptist Church
ADVENT
DEVOTIONAL
2018

Entering the Advent Season

The celebration of the season of Advent (which begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas day) dates back to the 4th century. It is a time that focuses our attention on the birth and ministry of Jesus as well as his Second Coming, when he will return to redeem all creation and rule with all power and authority. Since we do not know the day or hour of Christ's return, we are filled with both a sense of joyful expectation and humble reverence. The church has used the season of Advent (which means "coming" or "arrival") to focus and reconnect on themes such as John the Baptist's preparation for the ministry of Christ, the annunciation to Mary that she would be the mother of Jesus, Christ's return to gather his people, and the final judgment. Throughout the season we are constantly reminded that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world.

Historically, the primary color of Advent is purple (or blue), the color of royalty, to welcome the coming of the King. This points to the important connection between Jesus' birth and his death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father. The nativity and the Incarnation cannot be separated from the crucifixion and the Atonement.

One way we mark the time of this season is with the Advent wreath. The evergreens symbolize the new and everlasting life brought through Jesus Christ. The wreath consists of five candles—four candles around the wreath and one white candle in the center. One candle is lit the first Sunday of Advent, two are lit the second Sunday, and so on. The fifth and final candle—the Christ candle—is lit on the evening before Christmas Day. The growing light reminds us that Jesus is the light of the world who comes into the darkness of our lives to bring newness, life, and hope (Isaiah 42:6).

Sunday, December 2

Portions from “Christ the Conqueror of Satan (No. 1326),” a sermon delivered on Lord’s-Day Morning, November 26, 1876, by C. H. Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, England.

Scripture: Genesis 3:15

THIS is the first gospel sermon that was ever delivered upon the surface of this earth! It was a memorable discourse, indeed, with Jehovah, Himself, for the preacher and the whole human race and the prince of darkness for the audience. Is it not remarkable that this great gospel promise should have been delivered so soon after the transgression? As yet no sentence had been pronounced upon either of the two human offenders, but the promise was given under the form of a sentence pronounced upon the *serpent*. Not yet had the woman been condemned to painful travail, or the man to exhausting labor, or even the soil to the curse of thorn and thistle. Truly “mercy rejoices against judgment.” Before the Lord had said, “Dust you are, and unto dust you shall return,” He was pleased to say that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head! Let us rejoice, then, in the swift mercy of God, which in the early watches of the night of sin came with comfortable words to us.

We do not know what our first parents understood by it, but we may be certain that they gathered a great amount of comfort from it. They must have understood that they were not, then and there, to be destroyed, because the Lord had spoken of a “seed.” They would argue that it must be necessary that Eve should live if there should be a seed from her. They understood, too, that if that seed was to overcome the serpent and bruise his head, it must promise good to themselves. They could not fail to see that there was some great, some mysterious benefit to be conferred upon them by the victory which their seed would achieve over the instigator of their ruin. That seed of the woman that glorious One—for he speaks not of *seeds* as in many but of *seed* as in one—you know how he abhorred the devil and all his devices. There was enmity between Christ and Satan, for he came to destroy the works of the devil and to deliver those who are under bondage to him. For that purpose was he born; for that purpose did he live; for that purpose did he die; for that purpose he has gone into the glory, and for that purpose he will come again—that everywhere he may find out his adversary and utterly destroy him and his works form amongst the sons of men. This putting of the

enmity between the two seeds was the commencement of the plan of mercy, the first act in the programme of grace.

Monday, December 3

Ramesh Mikkilineni

Scripture: Mark 13:32–37

It happens every year – what we expect to be a slower-paced summer whirs by, and before we know it, it's Labor Day weekend. Autumn comes and goes faster than a withered leaf falling to the ground from a lofty branch. Fireworks give way to football, then pumpkins to pilgrims. Now, it's all we can do to finish our Christmas shopping and get our yuletide greetings in the mall before the “guaranteed delivery by Christmas” date. And the reality is, if left unchecked, we'll be right here again this time next year wondering, “Where did the time go?”

The Advent season calls us out of our slumber. It bursts into our passive experience of time and calls us to “stay awake.” Jesus' words from Mark 13:32-37 are a stunning reminder that Jesus is coming again. Our Master has departed on a journey, but He's left us with work to do while He's away. And the word we're called into cannot be put off until later because Jesus' second advent will come at a day and hour that only the Father knows.

It's so easy to get lulled into slumber by the turning of time, buzzing by at what seems to be an ever-increasing pace. But this sleepy apathy toward time's passing is not the life we've been called to live. Advent reminds us that we are a commissioned people, granted a stewardship of the gospel message. We have the privilege of heralding this message day by day, season by season, year by year, eagerly anticipating the return of Christ. Our Master is away, but He's coming again. May we be a people about His work, hastening His return.

Think about the past year. What seasons did you experience? Were they slow or fast-paced? What did you learn about God through them? About yourself?

How does the immanence of Christ's return impact how you view what you're doing in the here and now? How does the way you structure your life reflect a belief that Jesus really is coming back?

Jesus calls His disciples to “be on guard” and “stay awake.” Is there a conversation with a friend or loved one about the gospel that

you've been putting off? What steps could you take to make that conversation happen this week?

Song: "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus"

Tuesday, December 4

Daniel Brueske

Scripture: Revelation 22:10–20

Jesus describes what his return would be like in Matthew's Gospel. As you listen to our Lord describe this event, think about your reaction to his words. Ask yourself if you are ready to see the things that you hear.

Immediately after the distress of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shed its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the peoples of the earth will mourn; and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (*Matthew 24:29–31, CSB*)

In the fifth century, the church father Cyril of Alexandria wrote the following words regarding Christ's exhortations to his disciples:

The only-begotten Word of God consented to take our likeness upon himself and to endure the birth in the flesh from a woman, in order that he might save all under heaven. [. . .] It was necessary that Christ should remain unknown during the time that preceded his passion. His second advent from heaven, however, will not happen secretly, as did his coming at first, but will be illustrious and terrifying. In the glory of God the Father, he will descend with the holy angels guarding him to judge the world in righteousness.

Many Christians read these words describing Jesus' return with a sense of joy and anticipation, ready for him to return this very day if it be the case. They enthusiastically agree with John in Revelation 22: "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!" But there are also many Christians who read these words with a sense of anxiety and conviction, and in their hearts they may reply, "But not quite yet."

How do you respond to Jesus' words: "Yes, I am coming soon"? If you feel convicted that you are not yet ready for him to descend from heaven this very day in the glory of his Father, then praise God for that conviction. It is the Holy Spirit himself who warns you that you are not yet ready. Heed this warning. Take time during this season of Advent to ask how you can prepare yourself for his return. In God's mercy and grace, he waits for you to be prepared. Do not waste his mercy.

If, on the other hand, you feel yourself saying with John in Revelation, "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!" then thank God for the anticipation that he has put in your heart. Spend some time thinking about his mercy and patience toward his children whom he is still gathering and preparing and think and pray about how you might be an encouragement to them.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we pray that your Holy Spirit would prepare our hearts for your return. Guard our thoughts from the worries of this life that steal our devotion. Break us from our worldly desires. Fix our eyes on your kingdom and your King.

Wednesday, December 5

Michael Compton

Scripture: John 11:35

John 11:35 is the shortest verse in the English Bible, but the simple truth that it reveals is easily forgotten in our daily lives. The false religions of this world so often require their subjects to clamor, chant, or perform rituals in order to gain the indifferent or fleeting attention of their gods. However, as followers of Christ we serve a God who is not far removed from us nor is He indifferent to our strife and troubles. We serve a God who loves us, His creation, to such an extent that He sent His Son as the only sacrifice capable of justifying us in His sight. Not only do we find God's love in this church-wide redemption, but we also see it on a very personal

level. In John 11:35 we see that His son, Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us, creator of the heavens and the Earth, felt and shared the pain of those he loved. He did not respond to the sorrow caused by the death of Lazarus by declaring in His omniscience "he is better off." Far from it. Jesus wept. He wept tears brought about by the intimate knowledge of His creation in its fallen state and the anguish that His people suffer. In this season let us praise God for who He is and the personal love that he shows us in our daily lives. For it is because of this love that God redeems us as sinners that we may glorify Him in His mercy.

Thursday, December 6

Roy Wallen

Scripture: Genesis 3:15

Here we see God's redemptive promise to send a savior into the world to save His people. This could also be called the covenant of grace, for man sinned against God and disobeyed Him which leads to death. Yet, God graciously chose to save His people instead of leaving them to die in their sin and to suffer His eternal wrath and judgment.

For hundreds of years God's people looked forward to the day when Christ would come into the world and save them. They unfortunately didn't understand what that would look like. They were wanting and expecting for Christ to be a political leader and didn't understand that He must suffer and die for their sins in order to secure eternal life for His people.

However, they still looked forward to that day when the Christ would come to save them from their sin. Like them, we today look forward to the day when Christ is going to return and wipe out sin for all eternity. As Christians, we long for the day when sin will no longer rule, but will be abolished for all eternity.

We await the day when Christ returns to set up His eternal kingdom and His words in Revelation 21:3b-4 will be fulfilled, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

We long for the day when Christ returns to set up the new heaven and new earth and make all things new. For when sin and death are no more and all wrongs are made right. When all of the wicked are judged and thrown into the lake of fire. When all of God's people will reign and rule with Him, praising and worshiping Christ, our God and Savior for all eternity in glory, for Him and with Him. Like the saints of old, who longed for the coming of Christ to save them from sin and death, we long for the return of Christ to completely abolish sin and death. They held onto God's promise of the coming Savior. We too hold onto the promise of God for the return of Christ and eternal life with Him in the new heavens and new earth. God said, "Behold I am making all things new." (Revelation 21:5) and Jesus promised, "Behold, I am coming soon." (Revelation 22:7a).

Friday, December 7

Daniel Brueske

Scripture: Matthew 24:36–44

This passage belongs to a speech of Jesus to his disciples describing the troubles they will face in the future as they strive to remain faithful to him. Many Bible teachers have meticulously searched this speech for information about the future, hoping to decipher Jesus's prophecies and predictions to find clues for when he might return. While there are various interpretations of this passage, two things are strikingly clear: the timing of Jesus's return is a mystery, and, therefore, we must always be ready for it.

This begs the question—what does it mean to be “ready” for Jesus's return? When we look at the state of our world, when we see poverty, injustice, suffering, and evil wreaking havoc in God's creation, it's easy to say, “Come quickly, Lord!” Maybe this is one reason why Jesus spends so much time describing the suffering and wickedness that believers will face—to keep our eyes looking upward.

At the same time, the Christian life is more than just sitting around waiting for Jesus to come back. We have a mission and a purpose in this life. As we wait for Jesus to return, we have work to be doing. In that sense, there's more to being ready than just waiting.

In this passage, being ready means not being caught “off-guard.” It would mean that, when he returns, Jesus would find us faithfully working to fulfill the mission that we've been given. It means, first of

all, habitually repenting of the sin that continues to trip us up as we seek to follow Jesus. It means continually trusting in what Jesus has done for us—that he himself has suffered the death required for our sins, that he has defeated the power of death by rising from the grave, and that he has reconciled us to our Heavenly Father. But it also means loving and serving our Christian brothers and sisters. And it means taking this message of reconciliation and redemption that we have in Jesus Christ to our family, our friends, our neighbors, and to the ends of the earth.

This passage exhorts us to “be ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” The season of Advent offers us an opportunity to intentionally prepare ourselves for the arrival of our King. As you pray this season, ask God to cultivate a spirit of readiness and anticipation among his people. Let us not be caught off-guard at his appearing. In the same way that the eyes of the magi were turned heavenward for his nativity, may not just our eyes but also our hearts, our minds, and our hands be ready and waiting for his return.

Saturday, December 8

Scripture: Matthew 1:18–35

The story of Jesus’ birth began centuries before his father and mother (Mary and Joseph) knew him. The Hebrew people had long been expecting a Messiah—the anointed one who would come and rescue them from the sin and misery of the world. Their prophets, the prophets of our own Old Testament, had long foretold of one to come who would break the hardness of God’s peoples’ hearts and bring everlasting peace. This passage gives us context—to help us to see ourselves in the midst of this story—as we ourselves journey with the Magi to the humble manager scene.

The story of Jesus’ birth is about God showing that he keeps his promises and is trustworthy. How can we honor the story of Jesus’ birth this week by keeping our promises and our word?

Prayer: God, you are truthful. Unlike us, you do not lie. Forgive us for the ways we have been untrue. Help us trust you and your promises. Help us believe they are true. Make us more like you, being truthful in all we say and do.

Sunday, December 9

Jonathan Hancock

Scripture: Luke 2:29–32

For many years, my Dad's family has all met at his parent's home for Christmas Eve dinner. We often enjoy great food, each other's company, and of course a gift exchange. Naturally, as a young child (and admittedly sometimes as a young adult even now) this was my favorite part of the night. The joy of ripping open wrapped gifts and finding out what waited inside was exhilarating!

The worst part about this time though was that the gift exchange was usually the last event that would happen before we all left. As soon as we would walk into my grandparents' house, we could see the tree all decorated with dozens of presents underneath just waiting to be opened, and it was quite agonizing to have to wait through dinner before we could open the presents. All of us grandchildren would attempt to finish our dinner as quickly as possible, so we could move on to see what gifts we had received!

After dinner, we would all gather in the living room as a family as my grandfather would read for us Luke 2:1-20 before we opened presents. Naturally, the birth narrative was a fitting passage to read during our family Christmas celebration, but as I grew older, I came to appreciate the passage immediately following almost as equally.

This passage (verses 22–38) writes of two individuals who were advanced in years who not only recognize the infant Savior for who He is, but also exhibit the joys and rewards of waiting. Both Simeon and Anna had been waiting and longing for God's promised Messiah to come. Luke even writes of Simeon that he was filled with the Holy Spirit and had been promised that he would not see death until he had seen the Christ.

I imagine that day and night these two individuals waited in great anticipation for the promised Messiah to come. As a child, I found it almost unbearable to have to wait an hour and a half to open Christmas presents, so I cannot imagine how much more difficult it must have been to wait for over eighty years like Anna must have.

The great joy of waiting is that as the promised gift is drawing nearer, you can feel a heightened sense of anticipation and excitement that overflows into joy once that gift has been discovered. This was certainly the case in this passage. Once Simeon had experienced the fulfillment of the promise made to him by the Holy

Spirit, he was completely satisfied for he knew that God had brought to the world the hope of the nations for salvation.

We too are in a time of waiting. The Lord is coming again to judge the living and the dead and to bring to completion the work of salvation by restoring all things back unto God. We eagerly await that day as people between the times of the resurrection and the consummation. This is the greatest gift and the greatest hope that the world has ever known. Come Lord Jesus. Amen.

Monday, December 10

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6

With good reason, the sum of the gospel is held to consist in repentance and forgiveness of sins. Any discussion of faith, therefore, that omitted these two topics would be barren and mutilated and well-nigh useless. Now, both repentance and forgiveness of sins – that is, newness of life and free reconciliation – are conferred on us by Christ, and both are attained by us through faith.

The Hebrew word for “repentance” is derived from conversion or return; the Greek word, from change of mind or of intention. The meaning is that, departing from ourselves, we turn to God, and having taken off our former mind, we put on a new mind. On this account, in my judgment, repentance can thus be well defined: it is the true turning of our life to God, a turning that arises from a pure and earnest fear of him; and it consists in the mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit.

Therefore, in a word, I interpret repentance as regeneration, whose sole end is to restore in us the image of God that had been disfigured and all but obliterated through Adam’s transgression. I say, the closer any man comes to the likeness of God, the more the image of God shines in him. In order that believers may reach this goal, God assigns to them a race of repentance, which they are to run throughout their lives.

Grant, Almighty God, that as You invite us daily so kindly and delightfully, to make known to us Your paternal goodwill, which you once showed to us in Christ Your Son, O grant that, being allured by Your sweetness, we may surrender ourselves wholly to You, and become so teachable

and submissive that wherever You guide us by You Spirit You may follow us with every blessing. Let us not in the meantime be deaf to Your warnings; and whenever we deviate from the right way, grant that we may immediately awake when You warn us and return to the right path; and deign also to embrace us and reconcile us to Yourself through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.3.1, 5, 9; and Lecture 4)

Tuesday, December 11

Ramesh Mikkilineni

Scripture: Isaiah 2:2–5

The brokenness of our world is inescapable. Watching a newscast or quickly scrolling through your social media timeline reveals atrocity upon atrocity. Whether it's acts of terror or nations warring or genocide or injustice or senseless acts of murder, we remain a people bombarded with this reality: Things are not as they should be.

The season of Advent breaks into our broken world and reorients our hearts around a better reality – the present darkness which shrouds creation has been defeated in Jesus Christ and will one day be fully realized. Advent is turning away from despair and toward hope.

The prophet Isaiah heralded this hope to Israel, and like him we can look ahead in hope when the instruments of war, destruction and death of our day are hammered into plowshares and pruning hooks. The Light of the World shines into the darkness. Let us join with the prophet Isaiah in his exhortation, “O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.”

Think of an event in your life where you waited with a longing expectation. What were you waiting for? How did you feel in the waiting? What was it like when the event finally happened? What are some evidences of the brokenness of this world that you've seen this week? How does the return of Christ help reframe the way you see them? Think about someone you know who might be feeling overcome by darkness. What are some ways you can point them to the hope of Christ's advent this week?

Song: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

Prayer: Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son, Jesus Christ, came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

Wednesday, December 12

Scripture: Isaiah 9:1–7

Have you ever been promised something that seemed too good to be true? That's the kind of promise God's people received in Isaiah 9. They were promised light in the places that only knew darkness. They were promised freedom instead of slavery. They were promised glory instead of shame. They were promised peace instead of war. They were promised a child. Not just any child. They were promised a king—better than any king they knew. They were promised a king whose reign would be known by things like justice, righteousness, and peace. They were promised a king whose reign would be without end. They were promised an eternal king who would make everything right. Forever.

When Isaiah spoke of such things, few listened, and few believed. For those who did believe, it wasn't Isaiah they believed, but instead the God who promised again and again that his passion for his people would make this miracle happen.

As kings came and went, as leaders rose and fell, God's people were tempted to doubt his promises. The stories of God's past deliverance seemed like ancient history to many people under the oppressive rule of a foreign king or the unjust rule of one of their own kings. So, while they longed for the deliverer Isaiah promised, it was tough to really hope God's promise would come true. Why was God taking so long? Did he remember? Did he care? God did remember. God did care. When the time was right, he sent his son Jesus—the promised Messiah, the great and everlasting king. Jesus was everything Isaiah promised and more.

Now, on this side of Jesus' birth, we face a situation similar to those in Isaiah's day. We read of Jesus' promised return, when the work he started will be complete. When everything (including us!) will be made right. Forever.

But it seems like God is taking a long time. When we start to wonder if God remembers or if he cares, we also start to wonder why we should care. When that happens, worship becomes ritual, obedience becomes a burden, and Jesus' return becomes something we think about only when things get really, really bad. Do you long for Jesus' return? If so, why? If not, why not? Do you recognize things in your own life, in your family, in your community, in this world that aren't as they are supposed to be? If so, how do you think they will change if Jesus comes back?

Prayer: Come quickly, Lord Jesus. Speed the day of your return.

Thursday, December 13

Scripture: Matthew 1:1–17

Like us, Jesus was born with parents, grandparents, and great grandparents. In fact, Jesus' family line stretched all the way back to King David and even as far back as Abraham and Adam. Matthew makes a point of showing us who Jesus' family is because of the words of God in the book of Isaiah that spoke of Jesus as a "shoot from the stump of Jesse."

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
(Isaiah 11:1–2)

Have you ever watched a gardener working with her plants? Or have you ever picked up a piece of grass or a plant and seen the roots? Usually they are hidden but they are very important to the life of a plant or tree. Often we speak of our ancestors as our "family roots". Jesus had family roots as well, that were hidden in the soil of the Old Testament, which Matthew uproots to shows us. Why are Jesus' family roots important? Why does it matter that his line stretched back to King David, Abraham, and even Adam?

Prayer: Father of All Creation, when we think about your plan, the way you revealed it to your people generation after generation, the way you made promises that only you could keep and then kept them in ways that are far beyond our understanding, we are amazed. What a wonderful God you are! What an amazing God you are! What a loving God you are! What a promise-keeping God you are! Thank you that you cared for us when we didn't care about you. Thank you that you continue to care about us, continue to keep your promises to us, and continue to accomplish your great plan in and through us. Thank you for continuing to do what you said you will do. Help us to trust you more and more.

Friday, December 14

Scripture: Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:26–38

When the angel Gabriel appeared in Nazareth, to the home of the woman who promised to marry Joseph (who was a descendant of David and Jesse), Mary was not expecting the visitor. The house was not cleaned nor a meal prepared. And she certainly didn't know how she was to bear a child who would take the throne of David! She was confused and troubled. Despite the unbelievable words of the angel, Mary submitted to God's wondrous plan for her life.

Have your parents ever asked you to do something that didn't make sense? Have you ever been asked to believe something unbelievable? This takes a great amount of truth and faith. In this passage we see that God tells Mary she will do something that won't make sense and will have to believe something unbelievable. Because Mary loves God and trusts in his Word to her, she allows God to shape her life according to his plan. What do you think is the most unbelievable thing the angel told Mary? What part of the passage gives you hope?

Prayer: Father, help us believe that nothing is impossible with you. Help us submit to you. Help us obey you. Let the way you fulfilled your promises in the past bolster our faith. Let us long for you to fulfill your promises in the future. And let us rest in the present, trusting in you and you alone.

Saturday, December 15

Joel Elmore

Scripture: Colossians 1:13

As a kid, I always enjoyed watching the movie *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In the movie, four siblings, Peter, Lucy, Susan, and Edmund, enter a whole new world through a wardrobe. Lucy is the first of her siblings to discover this new world and meets a creature that is half-goat and half-man called Mr. Tumnus. In this world, Lucy learns from her newly found friend, Mr. Tumnus, that it has been winter for the last hundred years and the world has been ruled by the White Witch. We learn that the only hope for the world is for the return of Aslan. When he returns, the White Witch will be defeated, and the winter will end. This is where we are in redemptive history before Christ comes. Creation bears the curse of Adam and Eve's sin and the only hope for salvation is holding to God's promise that he would one day come and curse the head of the serpent with his heel. In the Chronicles of Narnia, Aslan returns to Narnia and ends up dying to bring an end to the winter and to die for the sins of the people. In the same way, Christ died to make all things new. He died to redeem us from our sins and to redeem all of creation. As we approach, Christmas let us remember the king who sacrificed his life to transfer us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

Sunday, December 16

Joel Elmore

Scripture: Philippians 2:5–11

As we prepare for Christmas, let us remember the example that Jesus Christ has put forth. We should look to him and remember the humility that He exhibited by taking on the fleshly nature of the created. While He was God, he did not seek equality with God as something to be grasped. For us, we often seek to be like God because of our fallen nature. Often, we act like the first Adam and seek our own desires and glory above God's desires and Glory. But we should seek to be like the Second Adam, Christ, who chose to submit to the will of the Father even when that plan included his death. Our response to this glorious example should be to praise the name of Jesus. He is the lamb that was slain on our behalf and gave

all the glory to God that we should give. He is a faithful son, servant, redeemer, and friend. May we seek to follow His example this season and grow in our likeness to Him.

Monday, December 17

Scripture: Matthew 2:1–6

When the wise men showed up in Jerusalem inquiring where the Messiah was to be born, it got the whole place up in a tizzy. These were foreigners inquiring the whereabouts of the future King! How could foreigners know about the Messiah but the Jewish leaders not know? Everyone from King Herod to the religious leaders (chief priests and scribes) were greatly troubled. Herod quickly gathered the Jewish leadership together and asked them where the Messiah will be born. The Jewish leaders pulled out their scrolls and read from the prophet Micah (quoted in verse six). They read that the Messiah would be born in the little town of Bethlehem. The king and religious leaders knew the right answers but were too concerned with the threat to their own power to understand why the fulfillment of God's promises were good news for the whole world!

Have you ever had the experience of finding yourself on the defensive on your own turf? What about when someone new shows up in your classroom? Or how about when a new employee arrives at work? Or when someone moves into your neighborhood that seems to know everything? We can be very protective of what we perceive as our own insider standing and knowledge! Why is that? What causes that? How can we overcome that temptation?

Prayer: Dear God, sometimes you speak to us from people that are strange and of no account. They seem to know more about us than we know of ourselves. Sometimes we also can look down on people who are not from places we value. Help us to love outsiders as we marvel in Jesus' humble beginnings.

Tuesday, December 18

Roy Wallen

Scripture: 1 Peter 5:10

We know that according to Scripture that all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12). Peter also warns Christians to be watchful for Satan is seeking to devour

you (1 Peter 5:8). Trials and tribulation will come for all who are in Christ and yet we know that trials and tribulation are the testing of our faith. We are to endure with patience trials and suffering. We are to rejoice in our sufferings for Christ. Suffering is only for a little while because we can rest in God's promise of Grace.

God has called His people to eternal glory in Christ. There is a day coming in which Christ is going to return and judge all wickedness and put an end to death for all eternity. On that day we will be able to shout praise to God and sing, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? Thanks be to God, who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:55–56). The Creator of the universe will Himself restore all things. He will purify the universe and all that is in it. As John declared, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:1–2).

We rest in God's promise knowing that He will strengthen us and establish us to live for Him. We know that when we live to glorify God, we will enjoy Him because He is a holy, righteous, just, loving, merciful, gracious, and good God who deserves to be worshiped to the fullest. He will not share His glory with anyone. We long for the day when we will reign in His glory and be in His presence for all eternity living in perfect harmony with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Father, help me to be sober-minded in all things and help me to be watchful, for I know that Satan seeks to devour me. By the power of the Holy Spirit, please help me to resist Him and His temptations and make me stand firm in my faith. I know that suffering is going to come, please help me to endure sufferings and hardships with patience and joy, knowing that you are with me and that sufferings will only last for a little while and that one day you will put an end to all suffering. Help me to trust in you and your ways and to not lean on my own understanding. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Wednesday, December 19

Martin Luther

Scripture: Luke 2:10

The Gospel teaches that Christ was born, and that he died and suffered everything on our behalf, as is here declared by the angel. In these words you clearly see that he is born for us.

He does not simply say, Christ is born, but to *you* he is born. Neither does he say, I bring glad tidings, but to *you* I bring glad tidings of great joy. Furthermore, this joy was not to remain in Christ, but it shall be to all the people. This faith no condemned or wicked man has, nor can he have it. Christ has a pure, innocent, and holy birth. Man has an unclean, sinful, condemned birth; as David says (Psalms 51:5): “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Nothing can help this unholy birth except the pure birth of Christ. For this purpose Christ willed to be born, that through him we might be born anew.

O, this is the great joy of which the angel speaks. This is the comfort and exceeding goodness of God that, if anyone believes this, he can boast of the treasure that Mary is his rightful mother, Christ his brother, and God his father. For these things actually occurred and are true, but we must believe. This is the principal thing and the principal treasure in every Gospel. Christ must above all things become our own and we become his. This is what is meant by Isaiah 9:6: “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.” To *you* is born and given this child.

Therefore see to it that you do not treat the Gospel only as history, for that is only transient; neither regard it only as an example, for it is of no value without faith. Rather, see to it that you make this birth your own and that Christ be born in you. This will be the case if you believe, then you will repose in the lap of the virgin Mary and be her dear child. But you must exercise this faith and pray while you live; you cannot establish it too firmly. This is our foundation and inheritance, upon which good works must be built.

The Gospel does not merely teach about the history of Christ. No, it enables all who believe it to receive it as their own, which is the way the Gospel operates. Of what benefit would it be to me if Christ had been born a thousand times, and it would daily be sung into my ears in a most lovely manner, if I were never to hear that he was born for me and was to be my very own? If the voice

gives forth this pleasant sound, even if it be in homely phrase, my heart listens with joy, for it is a lovely sound which penetrates the soul.

If Christ has indeed become your own, and you have by such faith been cleansed through him and have received your inheritance without any personal merit, it follows that you will do good works of Christ? Is it not true that they are good because they have been done for your benefit, for God's sake, who commanded him to do the works in your behalf? In this then Christ was obedient to the father, in that he loved and served us.

Therefore since you have received enough and become rich, you have no other commandment than to serve Christ and render obedience to him. Direct your works that they may be of benefit to your neighbor, just as the works of Christ are of benefit to you. For this reason Jesus said at the Last Supper: "This is my commandment, that you love one another; even as I have loved you." Here it is seen that he loved us and did everything for our benefit, in order that we may do the same, not to him, for he needs it not, but to our neighbor. This is his commandment, and this is our obedience. Christ helps us, so we in return help our neighbor, and all have enough.

Notice then how far off those are who expend their energies uniting good works with stone. Of what benefit is it to your neighbor if you build a church entirely out of gold? Of what benefit to him is the frequent ringing of great church bells? Of what benefit to him is the glitter and the ceremonies in the churches, the clergy's robes, the sanctuary? Of what benefit to him are the many candles or the singing of vigils and liturgies? Do you think that God wants to be served with the sound of bells, the smoke of candles, and such fancies? He has commanded none of these, but if you see your neighbor going astray, sinning, or suffering in body or soul, you are to leave every thing else and at once help him in every way in your power and if you can do no more, help him with words of comfort and prayer. Thus has Christ done to you and given you an example for you to follow.

Here Jesus does what he says: "And the poor have good tidings preached to them," and "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew 11:5, 5:8) Here are no learned, no rich, no mighty ones for such people do not as a rule accept the Gospel. The Gospel is a heavenly treasure, which will not tolerate

any other treasure, and will not agree with any earthly guest in the heart. Therefore whoever loves the one must let go the other, as Christ says, "You cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 6:24)

This is shown by the shepherds in that they were in the field, under the canopy of Heaven, and not in houses, showing that they do not hold fast and cling to temporal things. And besides being in the fields by night, they are despised by and unknown to the world which sleeps in the night, and by day delights so to walk that it may be noticed; but the poor shepherds go about their work at night. They represent all the lowly who live in Earth, often despised and unnoticed but dwelling under the protection of Heaven; they eagerly desire the Gospel.

That there were shepherds means that no one is to hear the Gospel for himself alone, but every one is to tell it to others who are not acquainted with it. For he who believes for himself has enough and should endeavor to bring others to such faith and knowledge, so that one may be a shepherd of the other, to wait upon and lead him into the pasture of the Gospel in this world, during the nighttime of this earthly life. At first the shepherds were sore afraid because of the angel; for human nature is shocked when it first hears in the Gospel that all our works are nothing and are condemned before God, for it does not easily give up its prejudices and presumptions. Therefore let us beware of all teaching that does not set forth Christ. What more would you know? What more do you need, if indeed you know Christ, as above set forth, if you walk by faith in God, and by love to your neighbor, doing to him as Christ has done to you. This is indeed the whole Scripture in its briefest form: that no more words or books are necessary, but only life and action.

Let everyone examine himself in the light of the Gospel and see how far he is from Christ, and what is the character of his faith and love. There are many who are enkindled with dreamy devotion, and when they hear of the poverty of Christ, they are almost angry with the citizens of Bethlehem. They denounce their blindness and ingratitude, and think, if they had been there, they would have shown the Lord and his mother a more kindly service, and would not have permitted them to be treated so miserably. But they do not look by their side to see how many of their fellow humans need their help, and which they ignore in their misery. Who is there upon Earth that has no poor, miserable, sick, erring ones around him? Why does he

not exercise his love to those? Why does he not do to them as Christ has done to him?

Thursday, December 20

Excerpt from St. Augustine's Christmas Day sermon

Righteousness has looked down from heaven. in order that people may have a righteousness which is not their own, but God's.... Unless He had a human birth, we would never attain to the divine rebirth; He was born that we might be reborn. Let nobody hesitate to be reborn; Christ has been born; born with no need of being reborn. The only ones in need of rebirth are those who have been condemned in their first birth. And so let His mercy come to be in our hearts. His mother bore Him in her womb; let us bear Him in our hearts. The virgin was big with the incarnation of Christ; let our bosoms grow big with the faith of Christ. She gave birth to the Savior; let us give birth to praise. We mustn't be barren; our souls must be fruitful with God.

The birth of Christ from the Father was without mother; the birth of Christ from his mother was without father; each birth was wonderful. The first was eternal, the second took place in time. When was He born of the Father? What do you mean, when? You're asking about "when" there where you won't find any time? Don't ask about "when" there. Ask about it here; it's a good question, when was He born of His mother. When was He born of the Father is not a good question. He was born, and He has no time; He was born eternal, from the eternal, co-eternal. Why be astonished? He's God. Take divinity into consideration, and any reason for astonishment disappears.

And when we say He was born of a virgin, it's a great thing, you're astonished. He's God, don't be astonished; let astonishment give way to thanksgiving and praise. Let faith be present; believe that it happened. If you don't believe, it still happened, but you remain unbelieving. He agreed to become man; what more do you want? Hasn't God humbled Himself enough for you? The one who was God has become man."

Friday, December 21

Roy Wallen

Scripture: Luke 2:11

God's people longed for the day when God would send them the promised Savior who would save them from their sins (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:21). When Mary was a virgin an angel proclaimed to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). The angel then revealed to Joseph, "Which is conceived in Mary is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20-21).

From the time of the fall to the time of Christ, God's people was looking for the day when God would send the Christ, His promised Savior for His people. Generation after generation prepared, hoped and prayed for the coming of Christ. When the time came and God sent His Son into the world to save His people, His people were not expecting Him to come in such a way. Most people rejected Jesus as their Savior and denied that He was the Christ because he was born as a baby, had to learn and grow up. Because He had a family that everyone in his town knew. Yet, God made it clear to Mary, Joseph and to shepherds. God told certain people of the Savior's coming and those faithful people told others.

Today, we look back at the birth of Christ, knowing that God who made a covenant promise in the beginning kept His promise to His people. It is through His Son, Jesus Christ that we are saved because Jesus is the eternal Son of God who came to this earth born of a virgin, lived a holy and sinless life, took your sins upon Himself, suffered God the Father's wrath and judgment for your sins, He died on the cross to pay the unbearable price required for sin. Jesus is God's one and only true sacrifice that saves His people. Jesus Christ is God's sacrificial lamb. Jesus did not stay dead in the grave though, He defeated death and conquered hell by raising from the dead and breaking out of the sealed tomb. He rose from the grave and ascended into heaven where He reigns today until He returns. Jesus gives His people His righteousness, which allows all who believe in Him to be able to stand before God as holy and blameless (Colossians 1:22). We look back at the birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus and we today now long for His return to end all

sin and death for all-time and to set up His eternal kingdom on the new earth.

Prayer: Father, thank You for keeping Your promises as I know that I can fully trust You and Your word. Please grant me true and genuine repentance from all of my sins. Help me to grow in Christ and to become more and more like Jesus. Please allow me to fully and truly submit my entire life to the Lordship of Jesus. Lead me by the Holy Spirit and allow me to bear much fruit for Your glory. Give me saving faith and keep me in Your hand as I look back at all You've done. Give me desire, urgency and opportunities to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus to all as I look forward and long for the day when Jesus returns knowing that then all sin and death will be forever defeated as I will reign with My Savior for all eternity in Your glory. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Saturday, December 22

Jonathan Hancock

Scripture: Luke 2:14

My Mom and I love Christmas movies. Every year during the Christmas season, she and I enjoy watching some of our old favorites such as *A Christmas Story*, *Holiday Inn*, and *Elf*. My Dad and younger brother are usually not as forthcoming with the “Christmas spirit” as my Mom and I are; I would more readily compare them to Dr. Seuss’s Grinch or Charles Dickens’s Ebenezer Scrooge. My brother often laments at how dreadfully commercialized Christmas has become, and in many respects, I believe that he is right. In spite of this, however, we usually all watch *A Charlie Brown Christmas* together as a family.

In this short cartoon, Charles Shultz’s beloved Charlie Brown expresses feelings of depression and dissatisfaction with the approaching Christmas season. While all of his friends (and even his dog) are enjoying the holiday season, Charlie Brown is fed up with how commercialized Christmas has become. Lucy suggests that Charlie Brown just needs to feel a sense of involvement to stop feeling so glum, so she asks him to direct the local Christmas program.

Unfortunately, none of the other kids will listen to Charlie Brown as he tries to direct the play, and they even laugh at him when he brings in a feeble little Christmas tree in an attempt to reclaim “what

Christmas is all about.” In frustration, Charlie Brown exclaims, “Isn’t there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?”

Charlie Brown’s good friend Linus goes on to explain, quoting from Luke 2:8-14:

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this [shall be] a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, 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, good will toward men.

This scene is always incredibly timely during the Christmas season as it can become easy to become distracted by all of the presents and trees and lights all while missing the whole point of the season in the first place.

But maybe, these elements are not so far off from what Christmas is all about. Because of Christmas, everything in all of human history is turned completely on its head – the world was forever changed on that day. Now when we celebrate Christmas, we take lights from inside the home and place them outside. We take trees from outside the home and bring them inside. And this all points to and helps us remember that Christmas is about Holy God leaving His place in Heaven to come down to earth in order that we sinners could be redeemed and brought into God’s dwelling place in Heaven. And that’s what Christmas is all about.

Sunday, December 23

From Charles Spurgeon’s, Morning and Evening

Scripture: Isaiah 7:14

Let us to-day go down to Bethlehem, and in company with wondering shepherds and adoring Magi, let us see Him who was born King of the Jews, for we by faith can claim an interest in Him,

and can sing, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." Jesus is Jehovah incarnate, our Lord and our God, and yet our brother and friend; let us adore and admire. Let us notice at the very first glance His miraculous conception. It was a thing unheard of before, and unparalleled since, that a virgin should conceive and bear a Son. The first promise ran thus, "The seed of the woman," not the offspring of the man. Since venturous woman led the way in the sin which brought forth Paradise lost, she, and she alone, ushers in the Regainer of Paradise. Our Saviour, although truly man, was as to His human nature the Holy One of God.

Let us reverently bow before the holy Child whose innocence restores to manhood its ancient glory; and let us pray that He may be formed in us, the hope of glory. Fail not to note His humble parentage. His mother has been described simply as "a virgin," not a princess, or prophetess, nor a matron of large estate. True the blood of kings ran in her veins; nor was her mind a weak and untaught one, for she could sing most sweetly a song of praise; but yet how humble her position, how poor the man to whom she stood affianced, and how miserable the accommodation afforded to the new-born King!

Immanuel, God with us in our nature, in our sorrow, in our lifework, in our punishment, in our grave, and now with us, or rather we with Him, in resurrection, ascension, triumph, and Second Advent splendour.

Monday, December 24

From "The Observation of the Birth of Christ, the Duty of All Christians" or the "True Way of Keeping Christmas" by George Whitefield (1714-1770)

Scripture: Matthew 1:21

The celebration of the birth of Christ hath been esteemed a duty by most who profess Christianity.

When we consider the condescension and love of the Lord Jesus Christ, in submitting to be born of a virgin, a poor sinful creature; and especially as he knew how he was to be treated in this world; that he was to be despised, scoffed at, and at last to die a painful, shameful, and ignominious death; that he should be treated as though he was the off-scouring of all mankind; used, not like the son of man, and, therefore, not at all like the Son of God; the consideration of these things should make us to admire the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was so willing to offer himself as a ransom for the sins of

the people, that when the fullness of time was come, Christ came, made of a woman, made under the law: he came according to the eternal counsel of the Father; he came, not in glory or in splendor, not like him who brought all salvation with him: no, he was born in a stable, and laid in a manger; oxen were his companions.

O amazing condescension of the Lord Jesus Christ, to stoop to such low and poor things for our sake. What love is this, what great and wonderful love was here, that the Son of God should come into our world in so mean a condition, to deliver us from the sin and misery in which we were involved by our fall in our first parents! And as all that proceeded from the springs must be muddy, because the fountain was so, the Lord Jesus Christ came to take our natures upon him, to die a shameful, a painful, and an accursed death for our sakes; he died for our sins, and to bring us to God: he cleansed us by his blood from the guilt of sin, he satisfied for our imperfections; and now, my brethren, we have access unto him with boldness; he is a mediator between us and his offended Father.

Therefore, if we do but consider into what state, and at how great a distance from God we are fallen; how vile our natures were; what a depravity, and how incapable to restore that image of God to our souls, which we lost in our first parents: when I consider these things, my brethren, and that the Lord Jesus Christ came to restore us to that favor with God which we had lost, and that Christ not only came down with an intent to do it, but actually accomplished all that was in his heart towards us; that he raised and brought us into favor with God, that we might find kindness and mercy in his sight; surely this calls for some return of thanks on our part to our dear Redeemer, for this love and kindness to our souls.

How just would it have been of him, to have left us in that deplorable state wherein we, by our guilt, had involved ourselves? For God could not, nor can receive any additional good by our salvation; but it was love, mere love; it was free love that brought the Lord Jesus Christ into our world about 1700 years ago. What, shall we not remember the birth of our Jesus? Shall we yearly celebrate the birth of our temporal king, and shall that of the King of kings be quite forgotten? Shall that only, which ought to be had chiefly in remembrance, be quite forgotten? God forbid!

No, my dear brethren, let us celebrate and keep this festival of our church, with joy in our hearts: let the birth of a Redeemer, which redeemed us from sin, from wrath, from death, from hell, be always

remembered; may this Savior's love never be forgotten! But may we sing forth all his love and glory as long as life shall last here, and through an endless eternity in the world above! May we chant forth the wonders of redeeming love, and the riches of free grace, amidst angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, without intermission, for ever and ever! And as, my brethren, the time for keeping this festival is approaching, let us consider our duty in the true observation thereof, of the right way for the glory of God, and the good of immortal souls, to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ; an event which ought to be had in eternal remembrance.

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