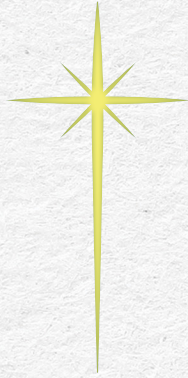


THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD

2023 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL





**“Taste and see that the Lord is good;
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.”**

PSALM 34:8

**“And beginning with Moses and all the
Prophets, he explained to them what was said
in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”**

LUKE 24:27

When was the last time you heard a really good story? Not just any story—one that left you laughing on the floor or wiping away tears—but the kind of story that stuck with you long after it was over.

Our world is shaped through stories. Most of our daily conversations center around stories. We watch them play out on our TVs, we tell stories through photos and videos on social media, and we read about the stories of others in books or magazines. And this is nothing new. For hundreds of thousands of years, stories have been the primary way humans communicate. We crave good stories. In fact, scientists believe we're twenty-two times more likely to remember a good story, rather than facts alone.

Humans are hardwired for stories; Stories shape how we make sense of the world, our views on love, hate, relationships, and everything in between. They inspire us. They can bring us together. Or in the wrong hands, tear us apart. Stories are powerful.

It should come as no surprise then, that when God wanted to communicate the greatest truth in human history, God gave us the greatest story ever told.

During Advent, we recount the story of a baby who was born in a manger, surrounded by straw, horses, cattle, and two loving parents who were likely feeling a bit overcome and exhausted. The baby, we're told, will grow up to become the savior of the world and our only hope for light in the midst of great darkness. It's a powerful scene, reminding us how God can work miracles in the most unlikely of circumstances.

However, this is not where the story of Jesus begins.

This Advent, we're embarking on a journey through the Scriptures, going back thousands of years to uncover the deep roots of the Christmas story. As we explore how the promise of Jesus unfolds through the Old Testament, our hope is that we will experience the light of Christmas in a new and profound way this year. The story of Jesus truly is the greatest story ever told.

So, may God bless us as we prepare our hearts once more to gaze upon the birth of our Savior this Advent season!

Amen.

THIS ADVENT DEVOTIONAL WAS WRITTEN BY

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DAY ONE

Sunday, December 3



GENESIS 1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

JOHN 1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This is the story of creation.

It's not a story of how things were made; it's a story about who made things and for what purpose. The narrator never intended to spark (or settle) a debate about whether species evolved or God set up shop for six literal days.

The point is God created. And everything else was created by Him.

Here's why that's important: in ancient times, people worshiped the sun, moon, and stars.

What does it do to your deity when you discover it was made on the fourth day?

We don't worship the sun anymore. We've chosen more sophisticated idols like money, sex, and power.

The narrator of Genesis reminds us that these are flimsy places to put our strength, hope, and affection—in other words, our worship—and only God is worthy of this.

Centuries later, John, a close friend of Jesus while he walked around our dusty planet, dared to suggest that Jesus is God, uncreated, before the beginning. He is God in skin, showing us who created us and for what purpose.

He is the light that cannot be extinguished.

Draw near, and be warmed.

QUESTIONS

- Look at your calendar for the month of December. What or who is your Advent season organized around? Is it stuff?
- How can you reorder your December around the creator of all this stuff?
- What darkness surrounds you? In prayer, can you invite Jesus into that dark space to offer light? Contemplate this image. Allow his light to expose, reveal, and comfort you.

DAY TWO

Monday, December 4



GENESIS 3:8-15

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

God walks through the garden in the cool of the day, desiring to be close with those He created, to spend time with them as He often did. But instead of joy and closeness, Adam and Eve greet God with distance and fear. Something had gone terribly wrong.

An enemy slithered into God's good garden, convincing the first humans that God was holding out on them, that God can't be trusted. And so Eve eats the forbidden fruit, and gives some to her husband, and then they hide from God. Where there once was intimacy and relationship, there is now shame and brokenness.

God addresses the snake, cursing this dark influence that corrupted His people. From this day forward, there will be two lineages at constant war with one another: those born of the snake—who give into darkness and temptation—and those born of the woman—who trust God and follow the light. God promises one day an offspring of the woman would come to make all things right again, crushing the serpent's head and destroying evil at its source. But at the very same moment this snake-crusher is victorious, he will also be bitten.

So it is we have our first glimpse at God's ultimate plan to restore humanity. For thousands of years, God's people waited for a seed of a woman, one who would allow himself to be destroyed by evil, so he could simultaneously defeat evil and death once and for all.

QUESTIONS

- Are there parts of your life you'd rather keep hidden from God?
- Where do you find yourself shying away from God's presence?
- Where do you see hope in this story, both for yourself and for humanity as a whole?

DAY THREE

Tuesday, December 5



GENESIS 12:1-5

The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

Generations after the Fall, God tells a 75-year-old man to leave everything behind and go somewhere new. God promises to make this childless man the father of an entire nation, and not just any nation, but the very nation God will use to bless all the people of the world. Abram and his family will be blessed and their name made great not just for their own benefit, but for the benefit of others. Somehow, God will work through the offspring of this one family to bring blessing to all families.

The book of Genesis follows the adventures (and misadventures) of Abram's family. Abram, who God renames Abraham, becomes the father of two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Isaac then has two sons of his own, Jacob and Esau. Jacob will famously go on to have twelve sons, who later become the twelve tribes of Israel. It is through this lineage that Jesus will eventually come: an imperfect family who are often just as likely to give into temptation and follow the lineage of the snake as they are to bless those around them. But even when they mess up, God doesn't abandon them. He promises to stick with them and to bear the consequences of their unfaithfulness Himself.

Thousands of years later, Jesus would indeed give himself up for the unfaithfulness of humanity. But through his death, he fulfills God's original promise to Abraham to bring blessing to all people.

QUESTIONS

- Why do you think God chose to work through one family in order to bless the rest of the world?
- You are blessed to be a blessing. How can you go out of your way this week to bless those around you?

DAY FOUR

Wednesday, December 6



GENESIS 49:8-10

“Judah, your brothers will praise you;
your hand will be on the neck of your enemies;
your father’s sons will bow down to you.
You are a lion’s cub, Judah;
you return from the prey, my son.
Like a lion he crouches and lies down,
like a lioness—who dares to rouse him?
The scepter will not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,
until he to whom it belongs shall come
and the obedience of the nations shall be his.”

Have you ever heard Jesus referred to as the Lion of Judah? Jesus descends from Judah's line, and it seems like an odd choice because, when you read through Genesis, Judah was messy. Judah had a broken family and complicated relationships, and it was Judah who came up with the idea to sell his own brother, Joseph, into slavery in Egypt simply because his father favored him more than the others. So, why did God choose Judah?

Several years after Joseph is sold into slavery, the tables have turned. Joseph has miraculously risen to a position of power in Egypt, and when his brothers show up in Egypt looking for help during a famine, he decides to test them and see whether they have changed. He sets them up to betray their youngest brother, Benjamin. But instead of betraying his brother once again, Judah steps in. In an act of tremendous self-sacrifice, he kneels in front of Joseph, begging him and saying, "Listen, you can't take him prisoner. It will kill our father from grief. Take me instead."

Instead of envying the favorite brother, Judah puts himself last, and he models the kind of selfless love that Jesus shows us. The kind of love that moves someone to give their own life as a substitute. He foreshadows a king who seeks to serve rather than be served, a king who would give up his life as a ransom and call that a victory. His story reveals the love of a father who cannot bear to be separated from his beloved child and a son who volunteers to take the place of the Father's beloved so they will never be separated again. This is the same kind of love that Jesus has for you and for me.

QUESTIONS

- God looks at you and sees a beloved child. Who are the people in your life that are your beloved?
- How does it change your perspective when you consider that God cherishes you in a way incomprehensibly greater than even than the love you feel?
- God loves to use messy people like Judah for his glory. What "messy" areas in your life have you seen God transform?

DAY FIVE

Thursday, December 7



EXODUS 12:21-28

Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning. When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.

"Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.'" Then the people bowed down and worshiped. The Israelites did just what the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron.

Abraham's descendants eventually find themselves in slavery in Egypt. They face harsh labor and brutal oppression at the whims of a tyrant king. But God raises up a mediator, named Moses, to speak on His behalf and act as God's representative to His people and to Pharaoh. Over and over, Moses demands that Pharaoh let God's people go. And over and over, Pharaoh declines. Until the tenth such time, when God decides enough is enough.

Through Moses, God instructs the people to slaughter an innocent lamb, one that is spotless and without any imperfections. God tells them to wipe the blood of the lamb over their doorposts as a sign that those inside the home are faithful to God, marked as members of His family. That night, when the destroyer came, it passed by any house marked with the blood of the lamb.

Generation after generation, God's people continued this tradition, eating the Passover meal together and remembering how God protected them and delivered them from slavery in Egypt. On one such occasion, Jesus gathered with his twelve disciples, only this time, there was no Passover lamb on the table. Instead, Jesus says it is his blood that will be poured out for them, not just to protect them from the darkness out in the world, but also from the darkness within their own hearts (Matt. 26:27-29).

Today, Christians around the world regularly remember Jesus' sacrifice and the blood he shed for the forgiveness of our sins every time we receive Communion. Jesus is the blameless and perfect lamb who died for us, so we could escape the grip of sin and death as part of God's treasured family.

QUESTIONS

- When you look back on your story thus far, what has God rescued you from? What are you hoping for God to rescue you from today?
- If you were to commemorate an act of God in your life with a meal, what would you be remembering, and what would the meal be?

DAY SIX

Friday, December 8



EXODUS 32:11-14, 30-32

But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. “LORD,” he said, “why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.’” Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

The next day Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” So Moses went back to the LORD and said, “Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.”

After rescuing Israel from slavery in Egypt, God leads them out into the desert to the foot of Mt. Sinai. God initiates a covenant between them, and Israel promises to obey God and remain faithful to him. This covenant is like a marriage between God and His chosen people, the ones who are meant to be the vehicles of the Abrahamic blessing to the world; Israel is called to stand in the gap between God and the nations, acting as an intermediary.

Just a few weeks after promising to stay faithful to God, Israel breaks the first two terms of the covenant—don't worship other gods or make any idols—by making a golden calf and worshiping it, right at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Let that sink in for a moment. That is a betrayal, and it stings. God is understandably hurt, and his anger burns towards them.

But Moses intercedes for the people, asking God to have grace instead of allowing them to face the consequences they deserve. Moses goes so far as to offer himself in place of the Israelites, laying down his life if God will spare the people. Ironically, Moses is doing the very thing for his people that Israel was supposed to do for the rest of the world: standing in the gap between them and God.

God relents from his anger and stays faithful to the covenant, but the problem remains: humanity is meant to partner with God and walk in his ways, but we have trouble staying faithful. That's why God had plans for a better Moses, the ultimate intercessor whose sacrifice would cover all of humanity. In this way, Jesus stands in the gap now for you and me, with grace and love in his eyes.

QUESTIONS

- We all make idols of worldly things at times—sometimes even out of good things. Is there an idol in your life right now that might be creating distance between you and God?
- Who in your life might God be calling you to stand in the gap on behalf of? In other words, who needs to hear about all that God has done for you so they can see what God might do for them?

DAY SEVEN

Sunday, December 10



LEVITICUS 4:1-7

The Lord said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites: ‘When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord’s commands—

“If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring to the Lord a young bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed. He is to present the bull at the entrance to the tent of meeting before the Lord. He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it there before the Lord. Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull’s blood and carry it into the tent of meeting. He is to dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle some of it seven times before the Lord, in front of the curtain of the sanctuary. The priest shall then put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense that is before the Lord in the tent of meeting. The rest of the bull’s blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

Back in the Garden, evil entered God's good world. And in the time of the Israelites, evil is still prevalent—even within the hearts of God's own people. This evil wreaks havoc on relationships and creates injustice in God's community and the world around them. And so God gave His people a symbolic system that would remind them about the power of mercy and forgiveness—a way God can take care of evil that doesn't spell the end for humanity.

God sets up the sacrificial system described in the Torah, particularly in Leviticus. Though it may seem bizarre and cruel to us, for God's ancient peoples, sacrificing animals was a visceral reminder of the death they were being spared—a way of inviting them to participate in the story so they might recognize the gravity their actions have on the world and those around them. God wanted to show them how the debt created by their sin and the sins of their community were covered through the death of the sacrificial lamb.

It's fitting, therefore, that as Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples, there was no lamb on the table as there traditionally would've been. Jesus wanted to make it clear—he is the new sacrificial lamb, and his death would cleanse God's people from the ways they've contributed to sin and death in the world. Every time we receive Communion, we're remembering the power of Jesus' life, and how his death is actually an act of mercy for us from a God who loves us deeply.

QUESTIONS

- Reflect for a moment on how you may have contributed to bringing sin and death into the world. Spend a few moments in prayer thanking God for the mercy and grace He offers you through the death of Jesus.
- How does it change the way you view the Christmas story to consider the power behind the death of Jesus, even as we anticipate celebrating the birth of Christ?

DAY EIGHT

Monday, December 11



DEUTERONOMY 5:23-27, 18:15

When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, all the leaders of your tribes and your elders came to me. And you said, "The LORD our God has shown us his glory and his majesty, and we have heard his voice from the fire. Today we have seen that a person can live even if God speaks with them. But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer. For what mortal has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived? Go near and listen to all that the LORD our God says. Then tell us whatever the LORD our God tells you. We will listen and obey."

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die."

MATTHEW 1:1

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham...

Have you ever looked at the sun directly? Look too long and your eyes will water and close to protect you from harm. This is why we wear sunglasses or shield our eyes. The sun is too much to behold.

The same is true when people stand face-to-face with God. God is too much to behold. Something about how God showed up at Sinai, in power, with fire and thunder, made it impossible for the Israelites to stand unscathed in his presence. Except for Moses, called by God and recognized by the people as a prophet. He was the go-between for God and humans.

At the end of his life, on the crest of the Promised Land, Moses tells the Israelites another prophet will be raised up. Someone who could stand before God to represent the people, and live. Read Matthew's story of Jesus's birth and early ministry, and echoes of Moses ring out from the page. Moses was born under Pharaoh's harsh rule, and Jesus, under Herod's. Moses narrowly escaped infanticide; Jesus did too. Moses spent 40 days and nights on Mount Horeb, preparing to receive the Law at Sinai; Jesus spent 40 days and nights in the wilderness before preaching his famous "Sermon on the Mount."

Moses delivered Israel from slavery to Pharaoh. Jesus would deliver Israel from the taskmaster within. Jesus is the prophet Moses pointed to. And so much more.

QUESTIONS

- What would it be like to stand in the presence of God, without anything between us? Why do you think we need a "go-between?"
- If Jesus is the new Moses, what happens when we develop a relationship with him?

DAY NINE

Tuesday, December 12



1 CHRONICLES 17:10-14

Nathan replied to David..."I declare to you that the LORD will build a house for you: When your days are over and you go to be with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor. I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever."

Things were looking up for King David. Wars had ceased. The dust has settled on the construction of David's palace. Convicted that he lived in a mansion while the Ark of the Covenant stayed in a tent, David decided to build God a house of his own. But God was not interested in a permanent structure. In fact, God pushed back and insisted He will make a "house" for David, a throne that will be filled forever by the ultimate king. And this king will build God's house.

Who is this king?

That's the question on everyone's mind just over one thousand years later, as Israel ached and agitated for deliverance from King Herod and the Roman occupation. So when Matthew opens his eyewitness account by naming Jesus as "the son of David," he's turned on the flashing lights of a billboard that shouts, "THIS is the guy we've been waiting for!"

Jesus is "the one who will build a house for [God]," a place where God will dwell. And do you know what kind of house he builds? It's not made of brick and mortar. It is made of people.

God will not (and cannot) be pinned down to a building. Because Jesus, his son, the eternal king, has built—and is still building—a community of people in, with, and through whom God is pleased to dwell. King Jesus will lead on.

QUESTIONS

- What makes a great king?
What does a great king do for his people?
- What does it mean for you that Jesus is king
(and by extension, you are not)?

DAY TEN

Wednesday, December 13



1 KINGS 6:11-18, 29-30

The word of the Lord came to Solomon: “As for this temple you are building, if you follow my decrees, observe my laws and keep all my commands and obey them, I will fulfill through you the promise I gave to David your father. And I will live among the Israelites and will not abandon my people Israel.”

So Solomon built the temple and completed it. He lined its interior walls with cedar boards, paneling them from the floor of the temple to the ceiling, and covered the floor of the temple with planks of juniper. He partitioned off twenty cubits at the rear of the temple with cedar boards from floor to ceiling to form within the temple an inner sanctuary, the Most Holy Place. The main hall in front of this room was forty cubits long. The inside of the temple was cedar, carved with gourds and open flowers. Everything was cedar; no stone was to be seen.

On the walls all around the temple, in both the inner and outer rooms, he carved cherubim, palm trees and open flowers. He also covered the floors of both the inner and outer rooms of the temple with gold.

Decades after his father first got the idea to build a house for God, Solomon begins construction. He pulls together the finest architects and artisans in all of Israel to craft the massive building, filling it with all kinds of imagery—flowers, trees, and gold—meant to remind God’s people of how good life was in the Garden of Eden. The Temple takes seven years to build, and when it’s finished, the glory of the Lord fills the magnificent structure (1 Kings 8:10-11). It’s a joyous and hopeful moment for God’s people, a sign that God is with them in their midst, once again dwelling among them.

Their hopes would be dashed when, generations later, a Babylonian king invaded Jerusalem and destroyed Solomon's Temple, carting God's people away as slaves to a foreign power. The destruction of the Temple was a direct result of the people's unfaithfulness, their worship of other gods, and their lack of justice for the vulnerable among them. It was a fate prophets like Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah tried to warn the people about, but to no avail.

By the time of Jesus, a new Temple had been built by King Herod, but instead of being a place of hope for God's people, it was filled with corruption. And so Jesus points to the coming of a new kind of Temple, the Temple of his body as the means through which all people can experience God (John 2:21). Jesus is the place where heaven and earth come together, where people can know God's love and grace, and where they can be with God.

But it doesn't end there. The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:16, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" As followers of Jesus, we carry God's Spirit within us, and thus, we are like mini temples ourselves. We are meant to carry God's light and love to the far corners of the world, to help people experience God's life-giving presence through the way we live as followers of Jesus together.

QUESTIONS

- How does viewing yourself as God's mini-temple, His representative to the rest of the world, change the way you think about your identity and purpose? Think about this idea as it relates to your family, your work, your hobbies, etc.
- Do your current habits, rhythms, and relationships help people experience the love and mercy of God? If not, how might God be calling you to grow in those areas?

DAY ELEVEN

Thursday, December 14



DANIEL 7:9-14

“As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.

“Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.)

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

When was the last time you had a strange dream? One you couldn't shake, that stuck with you? God's people were carted off to a foreign nation, far away from everything they knew and held dear, wondering whether their God was still with them and still cared for them. And in this strange land, as he struggles to stay faithful in a culture that is anything but, Daniel receives a vision from God. He sees God, the Ancient of Days, sitting on a throne, and another with him, a son of man who was given power and authority over all nations and people. This son of man is given a kingdom that could never be conquered or destroyed.

In the days of Jesus, God's people were once again under the thumb of a foreign power. They hoped for the day a Messiah would come to overthrow their oppressors. They longed to be part of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom that would never end and couldn't be shaken. Little did they know the one who would usher in this Kingdom was in their midst. Only Jesus didn't plan on overthrowing the Roman empire by force. Instead of raising an army of soldiers, Jesus raised an army of disciples.

Jesus' Kingdom was characterized by generosity and love, hospitality and hope. You and I get to be part of that kingdom—one that will last forever and include people from all walks of life, races, and ethnicities. This doesn't mean our world is perfect; there are still aspects of the Kingdom that are yet to come. But as we follow Jesus and become more like him, we get to be part of bringing more and more of God's kingdom to earth.

QUESTIONS

- Where do you see evidence of Jesus' everlasting Kingdom at work in the world today?
- How might God be inviting you to participate in bringing more of God's kingdom to earth as you continue to follow Jesus?

DAY TWELVE

Friday, December 15



PSALM 1:1-6

Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.
Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

There are two paths we can take as we navigate the world around us, but both paths are not equal. On the one hand, we can do whatever we wish, live by our own set of rules and values and see how that works out for us, or we can choose another route. Picture yourself as a tree planted by a stream whose waters feed your roots beneath the soil. What is your stream? What are you allowing to nourish you, to give you life? If it's anything other than the Word of God, the psalmist warns you're eventually going to find yourself so dry that a mere gust of wind could blow you away.

In reality, only one man in history has ever gotten this perfectly right. Where we tend to go our own way, Jesus dug his roots in deep, soaking up the wisdom of God and teaching his followers how to produce fruit that lasts, no matter what their circumstances were. It's for this reason Jesus says in John 15, "I am the vine; you are the branches." Only when we are connected to Jesus, the true vine, or tree, can we be the kind of people whose lives produce fruit. Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing. He is our source of living water, the one who nourishes us when our rebellious hearts have left us dry and parched.

QUESTIONS

- Of the two paths described in Psalm 1, which do you find yourself on currently? How do you know?
- What is one step you can take this week to reorient yourself in Jesus as the one who gives you life and direction?

DAY THIRTEEN

Sunday, December 17



JEREMIAH 31:31-34

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD,
“when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.
It will not be like the covenant
I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to them,”
declares the LORD.

“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel
after that time,” declares the LORD.

“I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God,

and they will be my people.

No longer will they teach their neighbor,
or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,”
declares the LORD.

“For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more.”

Something wasn't working. God's people had the Law, a roadmap for what it meant to love God and love others, but it wasn't enough to keep them from turning to other things as their source of life. If God's people were going to learn how to be truly faithful, God needed to act in a new way. The prophets knew this. God told them a time was coming when He would write the law on their hearts and minds. In this way, God would be with us in a new way.

Many years later, Jesus sat with his disciples around a table. He took bread and broke it, and he took a cup of wine and offered it to each of his disciples, telling them to eat and drink, saying, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." No longer was forgiveness mediated by the Temple, but by the broken body and blood of Jesus. It would be these elements, his body and blood, that marked God's new covenant with His people. Through Jesus, not only do we encounter God's forgiveness and mercy, we find a model for how to truly live as followers of Christ. It is through Jesus we experience God. And because of Jesus, all our mistakes and missteps are no more because God is truly with us.

QUESTIONS

- Just like the Old Covenant, God's people are set free before they are called to walk in God's statutes. How has your relationship with God led to freedom for you? Are there areas where you're still hoping for God to move in this way?
- How have you felt God's presence with you through your relationship with Jesus?

DAY FOURTEEN

Monday, December 18



EZEKIEL 36:24-28

For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

What do you long for? What hopes and dreams do you live towards through your actions?

We have been following the story of a God who longs for the hearts of His people and a nation that chases after their other desires instead. Ezekiel is speaking to the Israelites in exile, living through the consequences of their stumbling and sin. They have behaved like rebellious kids determined to disobey their parents; for generations, they have been worshiping idols, breaking God's laws, and keeping Him at a distance. And what is the fruit of their actions? Spiraling. Harm to themselves and others. Hearts that are hard like stone.

Here, as the Old Testament draws near to its close, it is clear that no great leader, no set of rules, and no fresh wave of determination to obey can heal their heart problem. Nothing short of a transplant will do, and Ezekiel prophecies into the darkness that one is coming.

God is on a mission to heal and save humanity, and since no earthly person could manage that task of healing their own hearts, the Son of God came to be the heart surgeon himself. He repairs the selfishness and waywardness of the heart, and he gives us his spirit instead. He longs for us, and through this transformation, he gives us soft hearts to long for him, too. Soft hearts that hope and dream for the things of God.

QUESTIONS

- The deepest desires of our hearts are often what we live towards through our actions. What do your actions say about what you long for? What are your greatest hopes and dreams?
- Are there parts of your heart that are hardened? Where do you need God to soften you so you can long for him and his ways?

DAY FIFTEEN

Tuesday, December 19



ZECHARIAH 6:12-13

‘Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne.

HEBREWS 7:17-22

For it is declared: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever.’”

Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant.

In Eden, God creates Adam and Eve in His image. They are created to be like priests and kings over creation, ruling and representing His divine presence, power, and purpose on Earth. After they abandon this calling and are cast out of the garden, humanity is left waiting for deliverance. They wait for God to restore this world and bring them back to life as He intended.

Hope for this restoration is foreshadowed by an enigmatic figure named Melchizedek. Abraham meets Melchizedek in Genesis 14, and he exemplifies what it looks like to be a leader who blesses people and participates in God's work in the world. He is both a priest and the king over a city called Salem, the city that would later be called Jerusalem. This minor character creates an expectation for readers that there is hope for the roles of priest and king to be joined in a person once more, like they were in Eden.

Yet, throughout the generations, neither Israel's priesthood nor its kings ever fulfilled this ideal, and centuries later, Israel is still waiting when the prophet Zechariah foretells that the Messiah will "be a priest on his throne." Zechariah joins in on this conversation about the coming priest-king and declares to Israel that God is sending someone! A Messiah who will take them back to the garden.

These prophecies weave together through the Old Testament like a complex, beautiful tapestry. The author of Hebrews brings all of these threads together and recognizes that Jesus is this priest-king, the one who is like Melchizedek. He is the perfect expression of both roles, creating both an eternal kingdom and an eternal priesthood. Jesus is our hope that, one day, this world will be restored to life as God intended it in the beginning.

QUESTIONS

- What places and spaces do you walk into daily that could use restoration?
- Not only is Jesus our priest-king, but he is making us all into a royal priesthood. How can you partner with God to bring that restoration and life to your world?

DAY SIXTEEN

Wednesday, December 20



LUKE 4:16-19

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.

ISAIAH 61:1-3

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
Because he has anointed me
To proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed,
To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

When Jesus steps into the synagogue and speaks the words of Isaiah, he's waving a flag that says, "It's me! I'm here. Let's roll."

And so his ministry begins.

As we follow Jesus through the four gospels, we see the way he liberates those who are oppressed by spirits, sickness, and sin. He recovers sight to the blind, literally, and spiritually, by making things clear about God, people, and the world that had once been shrouded in darkness. He brings good news to the poor, and comforts those who mourn. In other words, he does what he says he came to do.

Imagine what it would have been like to see this prophecy fulfilled in your own community.

The word "gospel" means good news. For whom is the coming of the Messiah good news? How is the coming of Jesus "good news" for you this Christmas?

QUESTIONS

- If a stranger asked you why Jesus came, how would you answer?
- Compare your answer to the list offered in Isaiah 61. What's different?
- Why is the coming of Jesus "good news" for you this Christmas?

DAY SEVENTEEN

Thursday, December 21



ISAIAH 53

Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.
Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.
He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;

for the transgression of my people he was punished.
He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.
Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.
After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.
Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

This prophecy was written seven centuries before Jesus was born. 700 years.

Knowing Jesus, how and why he suffered, it seems impossible that this could not be about Him! And still, it's astounding. Could God really have had all of this in mind ages before it came to pass?

QUESTIONS

- In the text, underline anything that reminds you of Jesus. How is your faith affected, knowing this prophecy was written 700 years before Jesus was born?
- Why would God offer a Messiah who had no "beauty or majesty to attract us to him?"
- "We all like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to our own way." Take a moment to reflect on how you have been turning your own way. In prayer, ask God to lead you back to Him.

DAY EIGHTEEN

Friday, December 22



ISAIAH 7:10-14

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz: “Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.” And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

MATTHEW 1:22-23

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means God with us).

Have you ever asked for a sign? It's sort of taboo, which is why it would be easy to extend sympathy to Ahaz. But Ahaz was not a good dude. Among other things, he burned his own son as an offering. (Read 2 Kings 16:2-4 for details.) Ahaz demurring God's offer for a sign is not a sign of piety. It's safer to assume Ahaz does not want to know what God has to say.

But God will not stay silent. So he will go ahead and offer the sign anyway: a virgin will have a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means "God with us." Sound familiar?

This is how far God is willing to go for his people to know Him: the cosmic author will write himself into the play so the rest of us on stage can hear his voice.

QUESTIONS

- Over the course of your life, how has God shown up to you? Either in writing or with spoken words, take a moment to thank God for showing up. Try to be specific.
- Have you ever made choices (conscious or unconscious) to avoid hearing God's voice?
- How are you experiencing "God with us" this Advent season? If you aren't, take a moment to ask God to show you a glimpse of himself. He wants to be known by you.

DAY NINETEEN

Sunday, December 24



ISAIAH 9:2-9

The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.
You have enlarged the nation
and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice
when dividing the plunder.
For as in the day of Midian's defeat,
you have shattered
the yoke that burdens them,
the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor.
Every warrior's boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.
For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.

For thousands of years, Israel waited for the one who would save them, who would once and for all defeat the darkness of this world, both within them and around them. Christmas marks the culmination of the story that began with Adam and Eve in the garden.

As we sing “Silent Night,” we celebrate how God’s light entered the world through the surprising promise of a newborn child—the salvation of the world wrapped in the loving arms of his mother and father, surrounded by animals in a lowly manger. To anyone else, it wouldn’t seem like a holy night. What could this child born to humble circumstances do against a world bathed in violence, greed, and darkness?

Jesus wasn’t born in a palace; He didn’t grow up to become a wealthy businessman, military leader, or sly politician. Jesus created a new kingdom, not by bloodshed but by the shedding of his own blood, not by exercising authority over others but through using his power to serve others, not through power, but through love.

It is for this reason on Christmas Eve, we lift high our candles as a reminder that the light has come. As our light illuminates the darkness, we remember that, in the end, darkness cannot win. The light of Jesus comes to break the chains of oppression, to loosen the shackles of darkness, and to guide us in the light of love, justice, and faithfulness. The story of Christmas is the story of you and me and millions of others around the world who rejoice because God is with us. And no matter how deep the darkness, the light of Christ cannot be extinguished.

QUESTION

- Take a moment today to thank God for the gift that is the light of Christ. Spend time reflecting on what this gift means to you personally, to your family, and to the body of believers we call the Church. Is there anything God is teaching you or revealing to you this Christmas that is unique?

DAY TWENTY

Monday, December 25



ROMANS 5:6-11, 18-21

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Today, the weary world rejoices because the long-foretold Messiah has come!

The human heart was broken, and all nations were trapped. Until Jesus.

He has come. The better Adam, who sets right what went wrong in the garden. The better Abraham, Moses, and David. He is the perfect sacrifice, the perfect prophet, priest, and king. This Son of God, whose birth we celebrate today, not only put on flesh but even gave up his own life so that we can have a new birth, too.

“Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Some of us might be bursting with joy today. Some of us might just be distracted from our reality. And some of us might feel like Christmas only serves to multiply the weight of our reality. Our world is not yet fully restored, and God is not yet finished. But no matter where you find yourself today, may you be reminded that, though our world is still weary, it rejoices because of the triumph of this incomprehensible sacrificial love.

In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “God is so free and so marvelous that he does wonders where people despair, that he takes what is little and lowly and makes it marvelous. And that is the wonder of all wonders, that God loves the lowly...God is not ashamed of the lowliness of human beings. God marches right in.”

God marched right in and became what you are so that you could become what he is. We have a new life, a new family, and a new future in him.

QUESTIONS

- God doesn't always come the way we expect him to, but nevertheless he comes. Do you have expectations of how or where God should come to you in your life?
- What does a new life and a new future in Jesus look like for you? Where can you rejoice about what God has done, and where can you hope for renewal in the future?

DAY TWENTY-ONE

Tuesday, December 26



HEBREWS 4:14-16

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

So, Jesus was born. Now what?

It's not enough to celebrate his birth, strip the lights off the tree, and pack up the decorations. That's like receiving the gift, but keeping it unwrapped.

The joy and delight of Jesus's birth lies in understanding how he lived and why he died.

The writer of Hebrews highlights something important about Jesus: he was just like us, tempted in every way. While he lived, Jesus was not self-righteous or immune from struggle. He wasn't a Marvel superhero. He wasn't Hercules. He was human. He gets us.

And still, he managed to keep temptation from evolving into sin. How do you think he did that?

One of the great lies we're prone to when we're stuck in a habit we can't shake, or a lie we can't re-write is the message that we are alone. It can sound like this: "I'm the only one who struggles with..." or "Nobody else has..." or "Nobody would understand this..."

What does that voice sound like in your life?

As we move beyond Christmas, take a moment to consider that when God became flesh, he shed every heavenly privilege. He didn't wear protective armor. He needed his diapers changed, skinned his knees, and became vulnerable to the same things we are as grown ups. And still, he showed us what it looks like to overcome.

QUESTIONS

- How would you describe the difference between "temptation" and "sin" to a seventeen-year-old? What tools would you offer her to keep temptation from becoming sin?
- Knowing that Jesus struggled similarly to us, how do you imagine he looks on you in moments of struggle or weakness?
- In what ways are you prone to be tempted? Either in writing or in spoken words, ask Jesus to help you resist temptation before it wreaks havoc as sin.

DAY TWENTY-TWO

Wednesday, December 27



2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-20

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Every New Year's Eve, there are things I hope to leave behind in last year's calendar. And every New Year's Day, there are things I hope I will become or do differently in the calendar pages ahead. Old and new. That's what Paul is writing about in his letter to the Christians in Corinth: In Jesus we are made new. The old stuff is continually being sloughed off to make room for God's goodness in us. And at the top of the list of what's "new" is that we are reconciled to God.

To be reconciled is to have what is broken or fragmented made whole again. Our connection with God has been broken by sin, and in Jesus that relationship has been made whole again, reconciled. As we follow him, our assignment is to re-weave the broken pieces of the world: broken hearts, broken relationships, broken creation. We have been reconciled with God, and now we get to help others do the same!

QUESTION:

- How has your connection with God been broken in the past?
- Is there anything now that needs to be reconciled so that you can reconnect with God?
- As you examine your life at the end of this year, what relationships might be in need of repair?

DAY TWENTY-THREE

Thursday, December 28



JOHN 15:5-14

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.

Throughout the Old Testament, God's people were often referred to as a vine. God hoped they would produce good fruit, fruit that brought peace, justice, love, and righteousness to a hurting world. But on their own, they struggled, and their fruit turned sour. Jesus called himself the true vine; He thought of himself as the fulfillment of Israel's story, the one rooted in the life-giving presence and power of God who was, therefore, able to produce good fruit, and lead God's people to produce good fruit of their own in return.

We like to think we can do everything by ourselves. But Jesus reminds us that if we are not connected to him, we will eventually wither away into nothing. It is only when we abide in Jesus that we are able to draw upon his life-giving nutrients to sustain us. The picture is of a close, intimate relationship with Christ that impacts every aspect of how we live, from our habits, practices, thoughts, decisions, and more. Our connection with Jesus is what produces in us the kind of good fruit Galatians 5 speaks about—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

QUESTIONS

- What are some alternate vines that the world calls us to “abide” in? What kind of fruit do those vines produce in us?
- How are we called as Christians to “abide” in Jesus? What kind of fruit does that produce in us?

DAY TWENTY-FOUR

Friday, December 29



REVELATION 21:1-4, 22-27

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

We live in the midst of the now and not yet. Jesus has come, and God's kingdom is alive and active in the world today. Yet we know things are not entirely as they should be; There is still darkness all around us and within us, and therefore, none of us are immune to trouble or difficulty, sickness or grief. But we stand hopeful despite our circumstances, because we know darkness and evil are only temporary.

God promises a day is coming when all wrongs will be made right, and there will be no more death nor mourning. Jesus comes again to make all things new, including us! In the meantime, we wait with hopeful anticipation, knowing God is with us. But we do not wait idly; we follow Jesus' example of bringing more and more of God's kingdom to earth now by doing justice, and loving God and others as ourselves. Until the light of Christ fills every crevice of the earth, we lift high the light that comes from within each of us through our love for Christ. And together we cry out, echoing all creation, saying "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Amen.

QUESTIONS

- What are you hoping will be made new for you in the year to come?
- How can you partner with Jesus and the Holy Spirit in bringing more of heaven to earth now, even as we wait for Jesus to return?



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