



ADVENT 2023

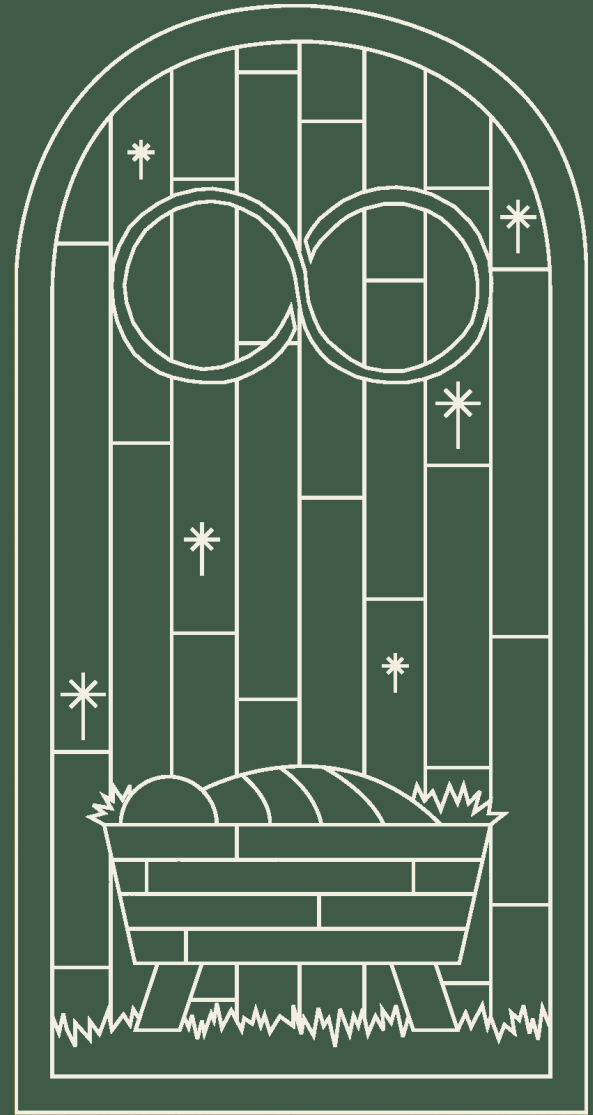
UNWRAPPING  
*Christmas*

unraveling the mysteries of hope promised



# ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Within the busyness of Christmas, it can be easy to lose the true reason we celebrate. We invite you to set aside time each day and join us as we explore the story of Christmas as it unfolds throughout scripture. We will begin with creation and move through the scriptures as we ponder the gift of His birth and the hope we have in His second coming. We will also be lighting an Advent Candle each week during our services. Our celebration will culminate with special Christmas Eve Services.



Visit our Advent page for Christmas  
playlists, activity guides, and more!  
[waysidechapel.org/advent](https://www.waysidechapel.org/advent)



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## WEEK ONE

In our first week of Advent, we are lighting the Hope/Prophecy candle which reminds us of God's faithfulness and the hope we have because He always keeps His promises. We'll also begin our journey through scripture by looking at some of the patriarchs who received the promise of a Messiah hundreds of years before His birth.

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# NOVEMBER 27

*Genesis 3:8-15*

<sup>8</sup> And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" <sup>10</sup> And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." <sup>11</sup> He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" <sup>12</sup> The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." <sup>13</sup> Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

<sup>14</sup> The Lord God said to the serpent,  
"Because you have done this,  
cursed are you above all livestock  
and above all beasts of the field;  
on your belly you shall go,  
and dust you shall eat  
all the days of your life.

<sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel."



## Adam & Eve

The entirety of scripture is the story of Advent. The term from which we get the word advent is the Latin word "adventus", which means a "coming or arrival".

Children often think of Advent as waiting on the excitement of Christmas morning. And while that can be technically true, as we could be awaiting any number of people or events to arrive, the real meaning of Advent starts at the very beginning. Well not quite the beginning, but really close to it.

Adam and Eve had directly disobeyed God and they ran. This symbolized and epitomized the broken relationship between man and God that had just occurred. Sin had entered the world through Adam and created a chasm that Adam, Eve, nor any of us could bridge.

Sin also brought separation between people as Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent. The damage of sin was, and still is, complete in our lives.

But there in the midst of creation being ruined, permanently damaged by pride and disobedience, God offered hope. It's the first appearance of the gospel in scripture just a little bit into the story.

Someday, eventually, a descendant will have a clash with the serpent. The serpent will get a bite in, but it won't be the end of the story, as the serpent will face a much greater wound. By what we now know, this is an allusion to the cross.

This is one of the first promises of God. And promises of God are guaranteed because He's God. That's where we come to understand hope. It's not hope in a possibility, it's hope in the absolute fact of God's promise.

This moment was a prophecy of whom would come: the Messiah. In time, the prophets would more fully detail whom He is, but scripture from the moment of the fall points to the Messiah, the Savior. There was hope even on the dark day that changed all of human history.

This is the hope that the patriarchs had as they looked forward to the promises God made to them. They were hoping in God's promises, many of which they would not get to see, but they were still guaranteed. That's the picture of hope. It goes far beyond this moment. It reaches beyond our lifetime.

From the very beginning, God had a plan and He is not swayed or deterred by our failures. He offers hope in the darkest moments. He offers the promise to fix things. He offers the plan and the guarantee that His plan will come to fruition. In His promises, in Him, we have hope.

Just like the patriarchs awaited the advent of God's promises in hopeful expectation, we too await. We look forward in hope because we've seen His promise fulfilled in the first coming of the Messiah.

Advent is about hope in Christ's return.

- What advent are you awaiting? Is it something more than just a fun Christmas morning with family?
- What is our hope in? Is it something that fixes our temporary situation or is it something eternal?

TIM NOWELL  
Pastor of High School Ministries

We encourage you to take time to worship and thank God for His faithfulness in keeping His promises as we begin this Advent season!

You can find a Spotify playlist of songs on our website at [waysidechapel.org/advent](https://www.waysidechapel.org/advent).

## FAMILY DEVOTION & Activities

This week of Advent we will be talking about hope. Most people think of hope as “wishful thinking”. Like when you hope to have a white Christmas. You may be wishing for a bike for Christmas and hope that wish will come true. When our hope is just “wishful thinking”, we don’t feel very sure that it will really happen. That kind of hope is kind of like flipping a coin: sometimes it is heads and sometimes it is tails, but we can’t know for sure. HOPE is so much more than that. Hope is more about WHOM we hope in than WHAT we hope for. The Bible tells us to put our hope in God. You can think of it like gravity. When you throw a ball up, you know it will come down. Hebrews 6:18-19 (NIRV) says, “When God made His promise, He gave His word. He did this so we would have good reason not to give up. Instead, we have to run to take hold of the hope set before us. This hope is set before us in God’s promise. So God made His promise and gave His word. These two things can’t change. He couldn’t lie about them. Our hope is certain. It is something we can hold onto. It is strong and secure.” For generations, people waited in hope for the promises of God to come true. This Advent we can also wait in hope looking back at God’s fulfilled promises and forward to His return one day.



- Make a Christmas “bucket list” of things you want to do as a family during Advent.
- Make a Christmas paper chain to count down the days until Christmas.
- Finding Jesus: Use a baby Jesus figure from a nativity set. Hide the figure each day for the kids to look for. Each day hide it closer to the Nativity.
- Hang your Christmas stockings. Talk about how the Christmas stockings hang from a hook, but we hang our hope on Jesus (Hebrews 6:19).
- Hope in Jesus helps us to keep from sinking into despair. Make hot chocolate and add marshmallows. Like the marshmallows, hope floats.
- Plant winter rye grass or another fast-growing plant and watch it grow. Just as the grass grows, the more we trust in God, the more our hope grows!
- Ask your kids what they “hope” for. Decide together if their hope is merely “wishful thinking” or if it is a confident hope in the promises of God.

### FAMILY ACTIVITY GUIDE

If you'd like to download the PDF of our family activity guide with these and more activities, visit our website via the link below!

[waysidechapel.org/advent](http://waysidechapel.org/advent)

# NOVEMBER 28

*Genesis 9:8-16*

<sup>8</sup> Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup> “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, <sup>10</sup> and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. <sup>11</sup> I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” <sup>12</sup> And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: <sup>13</sup> I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup> When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup> I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. <sup>16</sup> When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”

# Noah

“Never again.” We’ve all heard those words and wondered whether or not we could trust them. Our confidence and hope in whether or not someone would live up to their “never again” statement is often tainted by our level of pain and the number of times the words have graced our hearing. But when God says, “never again,” our certainty can soar. We can release the doubt we face and go about our lives with full assurance of the outcome. Why? Because God is not like mankind, He cannot lie. In His very nature He is always truthful. Always.

But have you ever noticed who God makes a covenant with in the story of Noah? If I just asked you that question and you answered from memory, I’m sure you would say that God made a covenant with Noah. But a more careful reading of this story shows that God actually covenanted with three groups. First, God covenanted with Noah and his family. Secondly, Noah would need to tell his story and bring hope to subsequent generations with complete assurance. So God, covenanted with all the subsequent generations as well. That’s us! But did you notice the third group?

Every living creature. That’s the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field and even the creepy crawly things. God made a covenant with every living thing, not just Noah, forever.

If every living creature was to “be fruitful and multiply” after such complete destruction, then wouldn’t they need complete confidence in God’s desire to sustain the earth?

“Never again.” Two of the most reliable words God has ever spoken. Two words that give us great hope and confidence in the One who will do just as He says. Two words that let us rest, this Christmas season, knowing that the same God who made the unconditional covenant with Noah is the One who has made an unconditional covenant with us through Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God for His steadfast Word.

- How does God’s covenant with Noah inform His command to “be fruitful and multiply?”
- What does God say He will do when He sees the rainbow appear in the clouds? In legal terms what does the rainbow represent for Noah, the creatures, and us?
- What guarantee has God given you in the New Covenant with Jesus Christ? How does the story of Noah and the flood inform your hope regarding the character of God in these great promises?

STEPHEN LAY

Pastor of Men’s Ministries, Connect,  
& Leadership Development



# Abraham

## NOVEMBER 29

*Genesis 15:1-6*

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"<sup>3</sup> And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."<sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir."<sup>5</sup> And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."<sup>6</sup> And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

The purpose of Advent is to intentionally prepare our hearts for the remembrance of Jesus' birth and His return. As we reflect on God's past actions, we eagerly look forward to what He will accomplish in the future.

This is the essence of what Christmas is meant to represent: joyfully recalling His arrival and eagerly anticipating His return. The Christmas season is designed to revolve around hope.

In contemporary culture, hope is often seen as mere wishful thinking or luck, such as hoping to win the lottery. However, biblical hope is fundamentally different. It is grounded in God's faithful promises and represents a confident expectation that what God has pledged will surely come to pass.

Hope is, therefore, one of the foundational elements of faith. We can observe this principle from the very beginning of the Bible. In Genesis 15, God revealed to Abraham that he would have a child from his own body, and through this child, his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. In Genesis 15:6, it is stated, "Abram believed in the Lord, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

In Genesis chapter 15, we witness a dialogue between God and Abraham that resembles a conversation between friends. Abraham expresses his feelings, including his insecurities and doubts, to God.

In response, God reassures Abraham because he has endured a challenging journey. It began when the Lord instructed him, “Abram, leave your country, your people, and your father’s house. Leave everything and go to the land I will show you” (Genesis 12:1).

Hebrews 11:8 tells us, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called... And he went out, not knowing where he was going.” Abraham exhibited radical faith, leaving everything to follow God. However, in Genesis 15, he may have been reevaluating his journey, wondering about its purpose and God’s plan.

At this point, Abraham likely felt uncertain, confused, and struggled with the waiting game. He appropriately shared these doubts with God, and surprisingly, God did not rebuke him but rather provided reassurance.

In Genesis 15, God essentially says, ‘Abram I promise I’m going to bless you. I WILL bless you Abram, even if it means that I have to die.’ It’s an astonishing moment. God makes an unconditional covenant with Abraham and his descendants.

You see, the beautiful thing about God is when He makes a covenant with you, it’s permanent. Because God is utterly faithful. Need proof of this? Look no further than the cross, as Jesus bore all our sins and paid for them in full. Our God is the great covenant keeping God. He always keeps His promises. Always.

No matter what you may be going through this season, you can trust in Christ. If your faith is in Christ, God is going to come through for you.

Because for the Christian, there is always hope.

Christmas serves as a reminder that our hope is not rooted in the government, it’s not based upon our 401K, it isn’t hinged on our social status or on what we have or don’t have, it’s not based upon our mistakes, or our past... rather, our hope is rooted in a Person, the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

He left His throne in Heaven in order to dwell among us, so that He might be Immanuel, God with us – to show mankind that He isn’t done with us. And because of His great love, better days are on the horizon. That’s the meaning of Christmas.

- How has the secular understanding of hope as “wishful thinking” or “luck” influenced your perspective on hope? In what ways can you shift your understanding of hope to align with the biblical concept?
- In your current season, what challenges or uncertainties are you facing, and how can you trust in Christ with a sense of hope, as described in the devotional?
- In what ways can you actively share the message of hope with others, especially during the Christmas season, to remind them of the true meaning of Christmas and the hope found in Jesus?





NOVEMBER 30

*Exodus 12:23-28*

<sup>23</sup> For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you. <sup>24</sup> You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. <sup>25</sup> And when you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. <sup>26</sup> And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' <sup>27</sup> you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

<sup>28</sup> Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

## Moses

Several weeks ago my wife, Bekah, and I showed our boys the animated classic, *The Prince of Egypt*. The movie, which was released by DreamWorks in 1998, is a musical drama that tells the Exodus story as seen through the eyes of the main character, Moses. Discerning viewers will notice numerous inconsistencies between the story as presented in the movie and scripture. However, the movie remains a personal favorite as a beautiful and carefully crafted depiction of the Exodus, which strikes a mindful balance between rigidly faithful and creatively accessible storytelling. To this day, I tear up several times throughout the movie as I marvel at the true story this movie captures in a surprisingly emotional way. It's hard to imagine a major production company releasing anything like it today.

The movie opens with a montage depicting the plight of the enslaved Hebrews set to song. Under the weight of backbreaking labor, the people cry out in song as they plead with God singing, "Deliver us!" The filmmakers skillfully utilize both song and illustration to set the tone for a heart-wrenching epic. My youngest son, Judah (3) preferred to sing along to the catchy songs while my oldest, Noah (5), was gripped by the story from the beginning. As the film reached its climax, the plagues, he leaned in. As we reached the moment in the movie, which depicts this week's passage, I could tell he was confused.

I asked him, "What is it, Noah?" He said, "What are they painting on their doors?"

I said, "That's the blood of a lamb."

I could see I hadn't dispelled the confusion.

I continued, "God sent the Destroyer to judge everyone who'd done wrong. If God's people didn't paint the blood on the door, their firstborn children would have died along with the Egyptian children."

"But, why?" He said. "God's people didn't do anything wrong..."

Suddenly, I realized I was having a conversation Jewish fathers have had with their sons in one way or another for thousands of years. The fathers in Israel understood what their children struggled to grasp. Yes, it is true that the Egyptians are guilty of awful, horrible sin. But, so were they. The apostle Paul states it bluntly, "we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). In our own way, we've each contributed and broken what was once beautiful about God's good world.

Led by Moses and Aaron, the sons of Israel took shelter under the blood of an innocent lamb because they understood that when God judged Israel, he was judging all of the evil in the land – not just the evil of the Egyptians. To this day, the Jews remember and celebrate this day because although they were also guilty, God passed over the homes of those who sought salvation through the sacrifice.

Thousands of years later, God's own Son took on flesh and blood to be our once-and-for-all sacrificial lamb. For those of us who are willing to face the stain of our own sin, Jesus Christ is the abiding hope of our salvation. The God of the Bible is a God of justice and grace. He's just because He will judge all sin – no one gets away with anything. This is good news for anyone who has been denied justice in this life. Yet, God is gracious because His Son stood in our place, taking the consequences of our sin. As we celebrate Advent, let us also "bow low and worship" the God who spared us by the blood of the Lamb.

- Why is it so difficult for us to see ourselves as sinners? Why is it so easy to give in to a victim mentality that excuses our own mistakes?
- How is God's judgement of all sin an encouragement to us? How can we ensure we're seeing our own sin rightly so we can worship God for the salvation He offers in Jesus?

CAMERON CONTRESTANO  
Pastor of College & Singles Ministries

What have been your takeaways as you've pondered God's promise for a Messiah given to the Patriarchs?  
We'd love to hear what God has shown you!

Tag us on our social channels @waysidechapelsa and use #waysideadvent



## WEEK TWO

In the second week of Advent, we are lighting the Love/Bethlehem candle and focusing on how God's promises were seen by those in the Promised Land. In both Old and New Testament passages, God shows up over and over as the loving Father who never leaves us or changes and whose word always comes to pass.

**Rahab** | Joshua 2:1-21

**Ruth & Boaz** | Ruth 2:8-13 & 4:18-22

**David** | 2 Samuel 7:4-16 & Isaiah 11:1-2

**Solomon** | 1 Kings 9:1-9

*Luke 2:1-7*

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all the people were on their way to register for the census, each to his own city. Now Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was betrothed to him, and was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

# DECEMBER 4

*Joshua 2:1-21*

And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there. <sup>2</sup> And it was told to the king of Jericho, "Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land." <sup>3</sup> Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land." <sup>4</sup> But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. And she said, "True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from." <sup>5</sup> And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them." <sup>6</sup> But she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof. <sup>7</sup> So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. And the gate was shut as soon as the pursuers had gone out. <sup>8</sup> Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof <sup>9</sup> and said to the men, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. <sup>10</sup> For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. <sup>11</sup> And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there

was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. <sup>12</sup> Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign <sup>13</sup> that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death." <sup>14</sup> And the men said to her, "Our life for yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the Lord gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you." <sup>15</sup> Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was built into the city wall, so that she lived in the wall. <sup>16</sup> And she said to them, "Go into the hills, or the pursuers will encounter you, and hide there three days until the pursuers have returned. Then afterward you may go your way." <sup>17</sup> The men said to her, "We will be guiltless with respect to this oath of yours that you have made us swear. <sup>18</sup> Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household. <sup>19</sup> Then if anyone goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be guiltless. But if a hand is laid on anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head. <sup>20</sup> But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be guiltless with respect to your oath that you have made us swear." <sup>21</sup> And she said, "According to your words, so be it." Then she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.



# Rahab

God made His love very clear for us with the birth of Jesus. In the incarnation, we see His faithfulness, His promises fulfilled, and His love for all of us. He has been faithful even when we are not.

God made His love for His people very clear as He led them out of Egypt, never giving up on them despite their repeated lack of trust in Him. He had made them a nation as He had promised Abraham. He gave them a land that He had promised them many generations before.

In the middle of figuring out what the next steps for entering the land were, the Israelites found a woman who understood quite a lot about God and who He is.

Rahab is relatable. She was far from God. She was a Gentile, not one of God's chosen people. She was a prostitute, and living a lifestyle that didn't exactly honor God's commands. She was not from the right family. She had nothing that gave her any kind of advantage. She was not the picture of spiritual or religious piety. While we cannot fully identify with Rahab, we certainly understand what it means to be far from God by our lifestyle choices and sin that has separated us from Him.

Rahab was far from God. On the other hand, she undoubtedly had a strong understanding of this God who was foreign to the land in which she lived.

She knew of His strength. She had heard of His great deeds. And she believed them. She trusted that He was all of the things the rumor mill had said about Him.

She knew of His love for His people. She knew that He would take care of them. She was willing to risk everything in service to those who served this God she should have known so little about.

What does this story have to do with Christmas? How does this connect to Advent? Rahab awaited the advent, or arrival, of God's people there to take the Promised Land. The Promised Land was just that, promised by God. It was guaranteed because God had promised. It was proof of His love for His people.

In faithfulness, and by following His commands, the people could stay in the land forever. God would not stop at that; the people were awaiting still more of God's promises. A King and a Messiah was still to come.

Rahab knew that this God, who loved His people, would give His people the land He had promised. She was awaiting the advent of this promise. She knew He could and would do it because she had heard what God had done for the people leading them out of Egypt.

We, too, have the same hindsight, only better. We have seen God's love made clear in the incarnation of His Son. We have seen that He loved us enough to give His life for our sins. And we await the final advent, the ultimate display of His love for us: the victorious return of Jesus.

- How have we seen God's love on display in His promises?
- How does looking ahead to the return of Jesus remind us of His love?

TIM NOWELL  
Pastor of High School Ministries

We encourage you to take time to worship and thank God for His faithfulness in keeping His promises as we begin this Advent season!

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DECEMBER 5  
*Ruth* 2:8-13 & 4:18-22

<sup>8</sup> Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. <sup>9</sup> Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn." <sup>10</sup> Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" <sup>11</sup> But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. <sup>12</sup> The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" <sup>13</sup> Then she said, "I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants."

<sup>18</sup> Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, <sup>19</sup> Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, <sup>20</sup> Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, <sup>21</sup> Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, <sup>22</sup> Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

## Ruth & Boaz

It is with love, redemption, and grace that we receive the favor of the Lord. It is not something we earn or can even obtain on our own.

Ruth, a widowed Moabite, would not have been the typical, likely choice for favor in the Old Testament. She came from a tribe whose history is heavy with shame and dishonor. Yet, Boaz, a man of wealth and honor, chose to show undeniable favor to Ruth as her kinsman redeemer. Ruth had no way of obtaining any kind of favor from Boaz. Her receiving of anything strictly depended on Boaz giving it.

The Hebrew word "favor" (hen) Ruth speaks of in 2:13 is written in the context "to find favor." The favor received is dependent on the one with the power to give it. Boaz had the authority and power to give favor with his reputation and resources.

Ruth recognized this because she perceived a great contrast between herself and Boaz's maidservants. She fell to the ground in a posture of humility, fully aware of the grace Boaz was showing her. Given Ruth's history, how was she able to receive such grace from Boaz? Was he just simply a compassionate man towards Ruth? Was it random for her to be the recipient? The favor Ruth received was from the sovereignty of God. There is no randomness in this story. The favor is a part of the redemptive story of Jesus Christ.

In Ruth 4:18-22, scripture states that Boaz's family lineage leads to King David. In 2 Samuel 7 David is promised, by God, that the throne of his kingdom will be established forever. Matthew 1 goes into the lineage of Jesus, not for just mere information, but to prove that Jesus will be that King established on the throne of David forever.

While Boaz had the authority and power to give Ruth favor in their part of history, King Jesus, who would come from the lineage of Boaz, has the ultimate authority and power to give the favor of redemption into eternity.

Jesus' birth, ministry, death, and resurrection has caused us to become recipients of unlikely favor. We are the "Ruth" in this story. In the world's standards, we are not a typical choice to receive this extreme favor because of our sin, shame, and guilt. But, God.

God's redemptive plan for mankind is full of "unlikely" stories. It is in that unlikeliness that we, too, can recognize that the coming King brings favor to those who belong to Him. The anticipated coming of our Lord should result in a posture of humility before a God who provides.

As children of God in the season of Advent, we can remember the favor we have received by Jesus' coming. Jesus is coming again and in His authority and power we will receive His favor for all eternity. "I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20b)



- How does the perspective that there is no randomness in God's redemptive plan change the way you view God's work in your life?
- In what ways do you personally relate to the idea that you are the "Ruth" in your story, receiving God's favor despite your sin, shame, and guilt?
- Consider your own journey of faith and redemption. Are there specific moments or experiences where you have felt the favor and grace of God in a profound way? How have these experiences shaped your walk with God?

AMBER GRIFFIN  
Director of Women's Ministries

## FAMILY DEVOTION & Activities

The second week of Advent focuses on LOVE. The dictionary says love means "a strong liking for something." People sometimes say they love gingerbread cookies, or twinkling Christmas lights, or visiting grandma. What do you love? In the Bible, the word "love" means so much more than a strong liking for something. Read 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8a. Love is an action. When we love others, we SHOW them by putting them first and caring for their needs.

God's love for us is a special kind of love. God's love is not conditional, which means He loves us NO MATTER WHAT. Also, God loves us ALL the time. There is never a moment when His love stops. Lastly, God loves us without expecting ANYTHING in return. That is a really amazing kind of love! We see God's love very clearly during Advent as we look to the birth of His Son, Jesus. As we remember His love, we can focus this week on showing love to others.

- Bake Christmas cookies to enjoy and share with others.
- Think of ways to help others in need and then act on it! If you want, try to keep your act of love a secret.
- Donate toys as part of the [Wayside Christmas Outreach Project](#) (pick up information in the Foyer on Sundays).
- Make a birthday card for Jesus and thank Him for all the ways He has shown love to you.
- Look at family photos from when each of you was a newborn.
- Write a Christmas letter to a deployed soldier.
- Do chores to earn money to buy gifts for a child in need.

### FAMILY ACTIVITY GUIDE

If you'd like to download the PDF of our family activity guide with these and more activities, visit our website via the link below!

[waysidechapel.org/advent](http://waysidechapel.org/advent)



# DECEMBER 6

2 Samuel 7:4-16 & Isaiah 11:1-2

<sup>4</sup> But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, <sup>5</sup> "Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in? <sup>6</sup> I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. <sup>7</sup> In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"' <sup>8</sup> Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. <sup>9</sup> And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. <sup>10</sup> And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, <sup>11</sup> from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house.

<sup>12</sup> When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup> I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, <sup>15</sup> but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. <sup>16</sup> And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."

"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

<sup>2</sup> 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."



# David

An article in Kingdom News stated, “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree at Calvary, and the tree of life in eternity sum up the history of the world. To understand the impact these three trees have on humanity is to understand the good news.” These trees reveal God’s love for us in the deepest sense.

Trees found in scripture often symbolize life, growth, and fruitfulness. They reflect the abundant blessings that God bestows on creation. Juxtapose that to a lowly tree stump. A stump represents life ended or the brevity of life. In scripture, a stump symbolizes God’s judgement because of sin. As we take a closer look, we find that even though sin entered the world, God’s love has always been coming for us.

God promised David that his throne would be established forever. The promise is found in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who is a descendant of the house of David, and whose kingdom will last forever. So what does that have to do with a stump? Promises were made that related to David’s immediate successor, Solomon, and the royal family line. Sadly, David’s choice to commit adultery and the murder of one of his mighty men, Uriah, created a downward spiral of faithlessness. Solomon’s downfall was rooted in a quest for power, pleasure, and idolatry. The third king in David’s line, Jeroboam, was one of the most evil kings to ever exist.

Due to their continued sinful slide, the “tree” (life, growth, and fruitfulness) was reduced to a stump. The kingly lineage failed due to their sin. Israel was a stump like a mighty tree that had been cut down. Israel had been given terrifying warnings of judgment and destruction, but it was not final. Despite David and his sons’ failures, God keeps His promise to provide a faithful descendant of David to reign.

However, at the time, it seemed this would never happen because the family of David was removed from ruling over Israel after four centuries due to the compounding evil in the land. Then the prophet Isaiah tells us about a lifeless stump, all that was left of a once mighty tree that had been cut down. There was the appearance of no life in it, but God brought forth a sprout that would bud and bring forth a righteous ruler and redeemer of Israel.

It would be close to 1000 years later in a small village called Bethlehem where Jesus would be born. Jesus was called the Son of David, referring to the everlasting kingship of David’s house, according to the covenant, making Him the King promised by God. It had been so many years since God made this promise. It was a promise to David and a promise to the world and to you and me.

The “sprout” from the stump was part of God’s plan all along, His salvation was not about David and his kingly lineage, but One whom God had planned for before He spoke creation into existence.

God loved us so much He sent His Son, the awe of Christmas! God knew so many years ago that we needed a Savior from the consequences of our sin. Because of God's love for each of us, He made a promise and He made a way through His Son, Jesus. Jesus took the punishment for our sins, He died on the cross, was buried, and three days later He rose from the tomb. Those who believe in Jesus will not perish, but enjoy His kingdom forever. Praise to the King of kings!

- In what ways have you experienced the consequence of sin followed by the fulfillment of God's promise of love in your life?
- When the landscape of the culture seems bleak, what gives you hope?

BELVA STRINGER  
Director of Kids' Ministries

## DECEMBER 7

*1 Kings 9:1-9*

As soon as Solomon had finished building the house of the Lord and the king's house and all that Solomon desired to build, <sup>2</sup> the Lord appeared to Solomon a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. <sup>3</sup> And the Lord said to him, "I have heard your prayer and your plea, which you have made before me. I have consecrated this house that you have built, by putting my name there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time. <sup>4</sup> And as for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my rules, <sup>5</sup> then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, 'You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.' <sup>6</sup> But if you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, <sup>7</sup> then I will cut off Israel from the land that I have given them, and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight, and Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. <sup>8</sup> And this house will become a heap of ruins. Everyone passing by it will be astonished and will hiss, and they will say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?' <sup>9</sup> Then they will say, 'Because they abandoned the Lord their God who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt and laid hold on other gods and worshiped them and served them. Therefore the Lord has brought all this disaster on them.'"

# Solomon

In 1 Kings 9:1-9, we read about God conveying a message to Solomon, urging him to remain close to God, just as his father David did in the past. Now, David was not perfect - he failed miserably at times. But despite David's disobedience, he consistently returned to God through confession and repentance, which is precisely what God is asking from Solomon.

Unfortunately, though, as we continue reading in 1 Kings, we'll read that Solomon failed to heed the Lord's command. He committed some serious sins and failed to repent like his father had done. Sadly, Solomon's life took a tragic turn, and ended with his heart far from God. Ultimately, Solomon's disobedience resulted in a civil war in Israel, dividing the kingdom into Judah in the south and Israel in the north.

The core message though of 1 Kings 9:1-9 is that God was trying to encourage Solomon to obey based on a profound truth: God had promised David an eternal throne. Now, if this promise had depended on the obedience of David or Solomon, it would have fallen apart rather quickly. But fortunately, this promise was not based on their obedience, but rather upon the expectation of a future Son descending from the line of David, who would be wholly obedient. And with this future Son in mind, God pledged to Solomon, that David's throne would endure for all eternity.

The essence of Christmas lies in the fulfillment of God's promise to David and Solomon. The scriptures show us that indeed a Son was given to us, born through the line of David, who would perfectly meet all of God's requirements to Solomon. His name was Jesus. He is the obedient Son to whom the covenant in 1 Kings 9:4-5 points. Jesus is the promised king who would never rebel against the Father. And Jesus is the king that you and I desperately need.

Because what we truly need is a Savior. A perfectly obedient, sinless Savior who can represent us. That's precisely who Jesus is. You see, Jesus lived the life that none of us could ever live, and died the death that each and every one of us fully deserved. And what propelled Him to draw near to us was nothing short of love. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life'(John 3:16). That's the message of Christmas.

In 2 Corinthians 5 we see that "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." This Christmas we are reminded that Jesus is the obedient King. He's therefore the perfect substitute for us. And because of His great love shown toward us, if we'll trust in Him and Him alone, He'll give us His righteousness. He'll forgive us of all of our sins and grant us eternity with Him forevermore.



- Reflect on the idea that Jesus is the obedient and promised King. How does His obedience provide hope and fulfillment in our lives?
- In what ways can you strive to be more obedient to God in your own life, following the example of Jesus and the encouragement from 1 Kings 9:1-9?
- Take a moment to reflect on the gift of Jesus this Christmas. How can you express your gratitude in prayer or through a personal reflection?
- How can you share the message of Christmas and the significance of Jesus as the obedient King and perfect substitute with others in your community or circle of influence?

JASON UPTMORE  
Associate Pastor

What have been your takeaways as you've pondered God's promises to His people in the Promised Land and how He has shown love to them and us? We'd love to hear what God has shown you!

**Tag us on our social channels @waysidechapelsa and use #waysideadvent**



## WEEK THREE

This week of Advent, we are lighting the Peace/Angel candle and considering the promise of peace given by God to the prophets hundreds of years before Christ's birth. Jesus came to save humanity and brought true peace. As we reflect on this truth this week, where do you need the Prince of Peace in your life?

**Isaiah** | Isaiah 9:2-7

**Jeremiah** | Jeremiah 31:31-34 & 33:14-16

**Micah** | Micah 5:1-5

**Daniel** | Daniel 7:13-14

*Luke 2:8-14*

And in the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields, and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger." And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."



# DECEMBER 11

*Isaiah 9:2-7*

<sup>2</sup> The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone.

<sup>3</sup> You have multiplied the nation;  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

<sup>4</sup> For the yoke of his burden,  
and the staff for his shoulder,  
the rod of his oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

<sup>5</sup> For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle  
tumult  
and every garment rolled in blood  
will be burned as fuel for the fire.

<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.



# Isaiah

When I was a kid, I loved driving through our neighborhood to look at Christmas lights. I still love it. Now that I'm a dad, I'm always on the lookout for great Christmas lights to show my kids. So when I discovered the annual Windcrest Light Up, I thought I hit the jackpot. The Windcrest Light Up is a decades-old tradition in which the city of Windcrest's residents decorate their homes with great, elaborate displays of holiday lights. I couldn't wait to take my boys, and it did not disappoint.

We visited last year, and there were lights at nearly every house and down almost every street. Some had beautiful displays of traditional Christmas scenes, while others had surprising and imaginative designs not really related to the Christmas story. The entire family loved it, and our drive through Windcrest was filled with wide grins and whoops of joy.

Twinkling lights are a great sign that the Christmas season has arrived. You see them as soon as Thanksgiving ends (sometimes earlier!), and as Christmas day gets closer, more and more houses light up. For many, the lights are simply decorative and nothing more than part of the general holiday season; but, the truth is these lights have a deeper meaning and great significance. Christmas lights are a symbol that means the true light has come, and with it, peace.

The prophet Isaiah promised the people, those walking in darkness and living in a dark land, that a great light would shine upon them. They needed this promise of light, and it's easy to understand why. At the time of Isaiah's preaching, the people of God were in a period of great turmoil, uncertainty, and darkness. The Kingdom of Israel was facing threats of invasion from neighboring nations, which brought about political instability, conflict, and the fear of war and its consequences. Rather than turning to God, the people were stuck in sin, idolatry, and in need of redemption. There was nothing the people could really do to pull themselves out of this darkness. A light would have to come to save them.

Isaiah promised that a child would be born who would embody this light. This child would bring peace, and His rule would be characterized by the increase of peace. Not only was this child Israel's hope through their current period in history, but in fact this would be the child promised to rule over the throne of David, the seed promised ages ago through whom the world would be blessed.

Though we don't face the threat of invasion from our neighboring countries, certainly we live in the midst of darkness. One deep look inside our hearts and minds will be enough to help us recognize our need for light and peace. If that is not enough, one deep dive in the day's news ought to be convincing. There is conflict, uncertainty, and fear all around. There are idols and sin in our hearts that hold us in darkness.

Christmas tells us that a light has come to pull us out of this darkness, to save us, and to bring us peace. The true story of Christmas is that the child promised by Isaiah has come into the world as Jesus of Nazareth. He is the light of the world (John 8:12), our only hope, and the only true peace we can find - peace with God (Romans 5:1) and peace in our hearts (John 14:27).

As we approach Christmas Day this year, let the lights remind you to seek Jesus, to worship Him, and to make Him known.

- How does the imagery of light in Isaiah 9:2-7 impact your understanding of Christmas and your worship of Jesus?
- In what ways can you apply the concept of Jesus as the "Prince of Peace" to your life during this Advent season?

STEVEN VILLACIN  
Community Pastor

## DECEMBER 12

*Jeremiah 31:31-34 & 33:14-16*

<sup>31</sup> "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. <sup>33</sup> For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

<sup>14</sup> "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. <sup>15</sup> In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. <sup>16</sup> In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'

# Jeremiah

As I read these passages, I was struck by the fact they both begin with the phrase, "Behold, days are coming, declares the LORD when I will..." Behold is a bold word. It calls for attention and says, "Look at me. I'm going to do this thing." It is not something you say unless you are sure you can do the thing that follows. It reminds me of when my children were small and they would say, "Mommy. Mommy. Watch this. Are you watching?" Then they would proceed to show me something new they had learned. Most of the time, I had already seen them practicing, but they didn't call for my attention until they were sure they could demonstrate their skills impressively.

Of course in these passages, it is not God who needs the practice but the people. God had made a covenant with the people that depended in part upon their obedience, and they had failed, and they were dealing with the consequences of their failure. But God tells them this new covenant is different. The outcome only depends on God. The people don't need to do anything but watch Him. Look at all the things He says will happen. The people will know God. He will be their God and they will be His people. He will forgive their wrongdoing. He will no longer remember their sins. He will execute justice and righteousness on the earth.

For a people who were suffering, I imagine Jeremiah's words brought peace. It is hard now, but a time is coming when God will make it better.

Friends, that is true for us, too. We live in a world filled with hard things - war, disease, death, betrayal, injustice. The holidays highlight many of our pain points. We have loved ones who are ill or no longer with us. We have relationships that are broken. Some are out of work and don't have money to live day-to-day much less to spend on gifts. There may be circumstances in your life right now that are hard, but, behold, a time is coming when God will make all things new.

Jesus' birth was the beginning of the fulfillment of these prophecies. Jesus is the righteous Branch of David we read about in these verses. As we celebrate the birth of our Savior, we can rest on the promise already fulfilled. What was prophesied has come to pass. Through Jesus, God has made a way for our sins to be forgiven. Through Jesus, He is our God and we are His people. No matter where we are in life, our peace comes from trusting God is who He says He is and will do what He says He will do. We may not see justice and righteousness in the world around us right now, but we can believe it is coming.

Behold is a bold word for a big God - one who can bring to pass all these things. May we watch and pray expectantly as we trust His word.



- How have you seen God at work in your life? Make a list of ways so when times are hard, you can review your list and find peace in God's past faithfulness.
- Where do you need to behold God at work right now, remembering and trusting that God's plans and purposes will be fulfilled?

MICHELLE JENKINS  
Senior Director

We encourage you to take time to worship and thank God for His faithfulness in being our Prince of Peace!

You can find a Spotify playlist of songs on our website at [waysidechapel.org/advent](https://www.waysidechapel.org/advent).

## FAMILY DEVOTION & Activities

All of us have times in our lives when we feel afraid or worried about what we see going on around us. When we feel scared, we would say that we are not at peace. In Hebrew, the word for peace is shalom. Shalom means "wholeness" or being "complete". Have you ever done a puzzle, gotten to the end, and realized you were missing a few of the pieces? Without those pieces, the puzzle was not complete. It was not whole. Sometimes our lives feel like we are missing things. We may be sick or lonely. When that happens, we may not feel peaceful. God's peace doesn't only happen when everything is exactly how we want it. We can have God's peace even when everything around us is going wrong. How can we do that? We can do that by spending time with God and remembering that God promises He is ALWAYS with us, He ALWAYS loves us, and He ALWAYS cares for us. When we believe that, we can choose not to focus on the things that make us afraid and worried. And when we stop focusing on those things and focus on God, then we can feel His peace.

Our world is not always a peaceful one. That was true even back when Jesus was born. In John 16:33 Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that you can have peace because of Me. In this world you will have trouble. But be encouraged! I have won the battle over the world." During Advent we can look to the "Prince of Peace" to be our peace and we can seek peace with those around us.

- Do a Christmas puzzle as a family but remove some of the pieces. Tie it to the devotional above. Then bring out the missing pieces to make the puzzle complete.
- Go to look at Christmas lights. Discuss that Jesus is the “Light of the world.”
- Eat dinner by candlelight and soft music. Talk about things that are “peaceful”.
- Name someone who is hard to enjoy. Pray for that person and leave a secret surprise for them with a note.
- God gave Jesus many names. Read Isaiah 9:2,6. Ask everyone to tell their favorite name and why.
- Tell about a time you walked in the dark. Give it a try. How did you feel? How can Jesus help you when you feel that way?
- Play [‘Separation Anxiety’](#) Minute to Win It Game. Each participant needs a cup full of the same number of various holiday candies. Sort the candies by type in under sixty seconds without dumping them out and using only one hand.

### FAMILY ACTIVITY GUIDE

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[waysidechapel.org/advent](http://waysidechapel.org/advent)



# DECEMBER 13

*Micah 5:1-5*

Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops;  
siege is laid against us;  
with a rod they strike the judge of Israel  
on the cheek.

<sup>2</sup> But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,  
from you shall come forth for me  
one who is to be ruler in Israel,  
whose coming forth is from of old,  
from ancient days.

<sup>3</sup> Therefore he shall give them up until the time  
when she who is in labor has given birth;  
then the rest of his brothers shall return  
to the people of Israel.

<sup>4</sup> And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the  
strength of the Lord,

in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.

And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great  
to the ends of the earth.

<sup>5</sup> And he shall be their peace.

When the Assyrian comes into our land

and treads in our palaces,

then we will raise against him seven shepherds

and eight princes of men;



# Micah

Many of us have never felt the desperation of war happening in our backyard, and we definitely wouldn't connect it to Christmas. However, this entire passage focuses around God's deliverance of His people from war and oppression. For hundreds of years before and after this was written (and even to this day), the Jewish people are intimately familiar with the desperation of war. It is because of their intimate familiarity with being worn down, under siege, and desperate for help, that they were looking for a Messiah to rescue them.

Yet, when Jesus showed up, it didn't look like anything anyone expected. The Messiah came to be a shepherd, born into one of the smallest families in Judah, born to nobody parents, born in a manger, born without an earthly kingdom. How was this baby going to protect Israel, become their ruler, and bring peace to the land? After all, "...can anything good come out of Nazareth (Jn.1:46)?" When the Jewish people read this passage, their version of events involved immediate rescue from physical oppression. They focused on their physical needs and completely missed their greater spiritual need.

Perhaps, we judge their lack of response to the Messiah and wonder how they missed Him. Yet, how often in our lives, whether we are facing illness, death, grief, family and relationship struggles, loneliness, or life just not going how we planned, do we feel the desperation of being under siege?

We, like the Jewish people, miss our Messiah because He doesn't come the way we expect. He often doesn't remove the hardship we are facing, but rather invites us into a place of dependence on Him so He can meet our true need.

Jesus' whole mission in His first coming was to bring peace through a restored relationship with God. He showed love to the prostitutes and tax collectors, healed those who were outcasts because of their diseases and infirmities, and challenged the legalism of the religious leaders. But He didn't tear down the Roman rulers, and He didn't free the people from their military oppression.

Instead, He showed love and invited them into a relationship that provided peace in the midst of physical struggles. Jesus' primary concern isn't our immediate rescue from physical difficulties, but rather, rescuing our hearts which are separated from God. Jesus is our peace. Peace is about our restored relationship with God and our hearts trusting in His sovereignty and goodness regardless of our circumstances.

His peace is about eternity. We often miss this eternity-focused peace because it looks different from the way we expect or want. Sometimes life's challenges are necessary for us to more fully depend on and understand His love. His peace gives us the courage and strength to trust and know, without a doubt, our eternity with Him is assured and we are not alone as we walk through life.

Peace doesn't rely upon our circumstances - peace comes as we relinquish control and trust our God and His sovereign plan.

As we spend time preparing to celebrate the Messiah's birth, let's remember His birth is the beginning of our hope and access to true peace. God, in all His power, came to earth as a helpless baby from a nobody family, walked with those who were hurting, and through His death and resurrection provided a way for us to have His eternity-focused peace in our lives. Let's also remember God isn't done. We see His faithfulness in fulfilling prophecies like Micah 5:1-5, while remembering we can wait with hope for His second coming and the culmination of His eternity-focused plan for each of us to have true peace. Let's rest in God's faithfulness and let His perfect peace soak into our imperfect hearts, so we can show the world true peace as we await His return.

- What are you expecting the Messiah to look like? Have you missed Jesus because He has not looked the way you expected, or rescued you the way you wanted?
- What does it look like to live with an eternity-focused mindset in the midst of life's difficulties?

HEATHER STAGG  
Director of Communications

## DECEMBER 14

*Daniel 7:13-14*

<sup>13</sup> "I saw in the night visions,  
and behold, with the clouds of heaven  
there came one like a son of man,  
and he came to the Ancient of Days  
and was presented before him.

<sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion  
and glory and a kingdom,  
that all peoples, nations, and languages  
should serve him;  
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
which shall not pass away,  
and his kingdom one  
that shall not be destroyed.

# Daniel

Today's passage from Daniel 7 is a small part of the prophet's much longer description of a disturbing dream. In vv. 1-8, Daniel describes four powerful and violent beasts which have emerged from the nations of the earth. The last beast in the vision is particularly nasty being described as an archenemy of God's people, targeting them for persecution, and trampling them underfoot boastfully.

The dream is particularly troubling to Daniel since it appears to be a symbolic representation of what he, and the rest of the exiles, have just experienced. Daniel and his friends are a narrative example of what the people of God have had to endure all throughout history. History, and the Bible in particular, bear witness to the fact that God's people often experience persecution, hardship, and are targeted by evil kings and kingdoms.

You and I (Western Christians) are living in a time and place of relative peace for a small group of God's people that is unparalleled. For the vast majority of history, the people of God have been brutalized by the wicked forces of the world. For this reason, we struggle to resonate with the cry of the exile who longs for the violence and oppression to come to an end. Still, we must lean in and strive to empathize with Daniel as he cries out to God saying, "How long will the wicked have power on the earth? God, when will You make good on Your promises to deliver Your people? When will You make sense of the senseless violence?"

This dream is God's answer to Daniel. So, how does it encourage him (and us)?

It shows him that a day is coming when the trampling of God's people will end. History is going somewhere. One day, God's people will no longer be victims of wicked rulers, but will themselves share in God's righteous and just rule of the world. And yet, this will come about through a surprising set of circumstances.

Hundreds of years later, Jesus Christ stands before the high priest on trial. The high priest attempts to lure Jesus to incriminating Himself by admitting He is the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus instead chooses to respond by claiming a different title. He says, "from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Jesus is claiming to be "the Son of Man" from Daniel 7. And – this gives me chills to think about – but He views this moment—the moment that the high priest is going to condemn Him to death as the moment that He will ascend to the right hand of power. In other words, when Jesus is lifted up onto the cross, it is actually the moment He proves His worth to sit on the throne.

Jesus is saying, "I am the Son of Man. I am bringing God's kingdom. I am here to deal with all of humanity's wickedness... all of humanity's evil... and all of humanity's violence..."

And, how?



Not through violence, but by allowing violence to kill Him. He took all of the horrendous things that humans have done to each other since the beginning of time, and buried them in the dirt. Jesus conquered the world by allowing it to conquer Him.

As the Son of Man, Jesus died humiliated and trampled at the hands of wicked men. But, at the resurrection, God vindicated Him for the whole world to see. Today, Jesus is at right hand of God. And one day soon, He will establish God's kingdom on earth. As we reflect on His coming, let us rejoice that, unlike the kingdoms of this world, Christ's kingdom will be one of righteousness, justice, and peace.

- Why is it so difficult for us to resonate with Daniel's pain as he saw God's people marginalized by wicked kingdoms?
- How can we be sure we maintain a biblical perspective of the seeming victory of the wicked rulers in the world?
- How is Jesus' claim that He is the Son of Man who brings peace an encouragement to us? Why is the cross a surprising part of God's plan to bring all nations under the rule of His Son, Jesus?

CAMERON CONTRESTANO  
Director of College & Singles Ministries





## WEEK FOUR

In the last week of Advent, we are lighting the Joy/Shepherd candle and considering God's faithfulness seen in the birth of Jesus and our hope as we look toward His second coming. From the patriarchs through to our present day, God has faithfully kept His promises. We look forward to celebrating Christmas Eve with each of you!

**Paul** | Philippians 2:2-11

**Shepherds** | Luke 2:8-20

**Mary** | Luke 1:39-55

**John** | 1 John 1:1-4

## *Luke 2:15-20*

"When the angels had departed from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let's go straight to Bethlehem, then, and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen Him, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it were amazed about the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them."



# FAMILY DEVOTION & Activities

The last week of Advent is all about JOY. What makes you feel happy? Maybe spending time with people you love. Maybe opening up your Christmas presents and playing with a new toy. Or eating your favorite dessert. It is easy to feel happy when things are good and you have everything you need. It is harder to feel happy when bad things happen. Joy is when we feel happy and content even when things aren't always going well. How is that even possible? Psalm 126:3 says, "The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy." Do you want to have joy? One of the best ways to have joy is to REMEMBER all of the great things God has done for us. We call that counting our blessings. When something goes wrong in your life, it is normal to feel sad. The next time you feel sad, take a moment and think REALLY hard about things that God has done for you that make you happy. When we are thankful for what we DO have instead of looking at what we DON'T have, and when we trust that God loves and cares for us, then we will find that we are joyful more and more often. For kids, the Advent season is often filled with lots of joyful anticipation but with all of the twinkling sights, yummy smells, and lively Christmas carols, there can be anxious thoughts and worries as well. Use this week, to focus on what God has done and is doing in their lives. . . and make some JOYFUL memories.

- Play the Jump for Joy Game. How high you can jump? How far you can jump? Can you jump on one foot? The other? Can you jump in place? In between the different ways to jump, have kids share what makes them feel joy.
- Cut out stars or snowflakes from paper. Write Jesus is . . . on each one. Then complete the sentence.
- Sing Christmas carols. Turn on your favorite Christmas songs and have a dance party.
- Read Luke 1:46-47. Mary was happy that God chose her to be Jesus' mom. What's something you're happy about today? Praise God for it today.
- At the dinner table, instead of saying a prayer of blessing sing it! It can be a prayer you are familiar with, or you can be creative and make one up!
- Share some [Christmas jokes](#) and have a good laugh.
- Write a Christmas list but instead of making it what you want, make it a list of what you have that you are thankful for.

## FAMILY ACTIVITY GUIDE

If you'd like to download the PDF of our family activity guide with these and more activities, visit our website via the link below!

[waysidechapel.org/advent](https://waysidechapel.org/advent)



## DECEMBER 18

*Philippians 2:2-11*

<sup>2</sup> complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

*Paul*

One of my favorite Christmas carols is “Joy to the World” written by Isaac Watts. It’s an excellent example of a song whose music conveys the theme of its lyrics. Not only are the words full of joy, but the music feels joyful, too. What greater joy can we have than in celebrating the birth of Jesus during the Christmas season?

What I’ve come to find out about this song is that Isaac Watts didn’t intend for the hymn to be sung primarily during Advent and Christmas. Watts wrote “Joy to the World” as part of a greater work called “The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament”. The song is Watt’s paraphrasing of Psalm 98, which resoundingly calls for the joyful praise of God’s Savior, Jesus Christ, when He establishes His kingdom on earth. Both the song and the Psalm actually look to Christ’s second coming, not necessarily the first.

Of course, this doesn’t mean we shouldn’t sing it to celebrate Jesus’ first coming at Christmas. It was certainly an event worthy of joy and joyful praise, but it’s a great reminder that Christmas is not the end of the story (Romans 8:23), and we have a great part to play as we await its completion.

Paul, in the book of Philippians, explains how we can carry to completion the joy that dawned at Christmas. He instructed the Philippians to “make my joy complete” by becoming one in mind, love, spirit, and purpose.

In other words, Paul's joy would increase as he witnessed the unity of God's people increase. He gave two additional directions for how they were to achieve this unity: 1) by pursuing selfless humility (v. 3-5); 2) by remembering Jesus' attitude at Christmas (v. 6-8).

Perhaps you've not often considered these verses to be part of the Christmas story, but look closely at verses 6-8, and you'll see Christmas between the lines. Jesus, God himself, emptied Himself to become a man born of the virgin Mary. On our behalf, He came as a helpless babe, grew to be a humble and obedient man, and died on the cross for our sins. The One promised throughout all of scripture finally came. We rejoice at His coming.

Our God is ever seeking to increase our joy. Through Christmas and through these verses we see the multi-faceted ways He offers it to us. First, we receive joy as we consider the great gift and fulfillment of promise that we have in Jesus. Second, we complete our joy by pursuing unity through selfless humility, considering the example of Jesus at Christmas. Third, we receive joy as we anticipate Jesus coming again to complete the story. On that day, "no more will sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground, He will come to make His blessings flow as far as the curse is found".

As we near the end of Advent and approach Christmas day, rejoice! Rejoice, and remember that the story continues through you. In the end, together with heaven and nature we'll confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

- In what ways can you emulate the humility of Christ in your interactions with others during this Advent season?
- How can you joyfully worship and acknowledge Jesus as Lord in your life, reflecting the universal worship described in Philippians 2:9-11?

STEVEN VILLACIN  
Community Pastor

What have been your takeaways as you've journeyed through this Advent season with us? We'd love to hear what God has shown you!

**Tag us on our social channels @waysidechapelsa  
and use #waysideadvent**



# DECEMBER 19

*Luke 2:8-20*

<sup>8</sup> And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

<sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. <sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

<sup>15</sup> When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup> And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.



# Shepherds

Have you ever noticed that every time humans encounter angels in the Bible their first response is fear? Luke tells us that the shepherds were just going about their nightly routine when an angel appeared to them out of nowhere. No warning flight in, no nothing. Not only that, but God's glory, the manifestation of His holiness lit up the place. No wonder they were terrified! I'm sure I would be, too!

But the message the angels brought to the shepherds that night was a message of good news! No wonder the announcement came with the words "do not be afraid." Since when does good news bring fear? The shepherds couldn't experience the good news as long as they remained terrified because joy and fear do not coexist. They are complete opposites, antonyms to be sure. While God knows we often fear because we are fallen creatures who are greatly limited, He doesn't desire that we fear. The psalmist said, "when I am afraid, I put my trust in you" (Psalm 56:3). The apostle John said, "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18).

This love that drives out fear is the kind of love God displayed when He "so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life" John 3:16.

Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" John 15:11. Joy is the experience of good news!

It is the experience God wants us to associate with Jesus! It is the emotion God desires for us to enjoy when we hear good news, especially good news of a Savior!

- What is your first response when you hear good news? Is it skepticism? In what ways do you make sure the good news is real? How do you live with the hope of good news?
- It is only natural for humans to have fear some of the time, especially after the fall. How do you move past fear in your life? What is the spiritual antidote to fear that leads us to joy?
- Name or write down the truths of Christmas you can reflect and meditate upon. May you experience the joy of Christmas with the good news of Jesus Christ!

STEPHEN LAY

Pastor of Men's Ministries, Connect,  
& Leadership Development

# DECEMBER 20

*Luke 1:37-55*

<sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God.” <sup>38</sup> And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant[a] of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her. <sup>39</sup> In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, <sup>40</sup> and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, <sup>42</sup> and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! <sup>43</sup> And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

<sup>48</sup> for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

<sup>49</sup> for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

<sup>50</sup> And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;

<sup>52</sup> he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate;

<sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.

<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

<sup>55</sup> as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

# Mary

“For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, ‘Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word’ (1:37-38).

Imagine how Mary might have felt and processed the promise that was given to her. The promise that she, of all the women, would be the mother of the Savior of the world and the baby that was surely coming. There was so much doubt she could have embraced. She was a young, unmarried virgin in a culture that would have shamed her for an unwed pregnancy. This act of God would have to be divine and supernatural. God would have to make the impossible possible. Yet, she believed the Savior was coming, and she would be His mother.

Jesus is coming! Mary believed it and in obedience went to Elizabeth.

Jesus is coming! Elizabeth believed it and blessed Mary that the fulfillment would surely happen.

Jesus is coming! Elizabeth’s baby believed it and leaped for joy.

Blessed are they who posture their heart, in faith, believing and waiting for God to fulfill what He has promised. The Father was bringing His Son to the world in His saving grace. The fullness of time had come. Hundreds of years had passed by waiting for this moment. God’s appointed timing was finally here.

And in His perfect timing, the redemption of sin and brokenness was coming through the little baby that Mary would carry and birth.

So, again, how do you think Mary processed what had been spoken to her? In the promise and waiting, Mary praises the Father for what He has done, is doing, and will do. The promise was made to her and in her awe and wonder, she praised God. Mary, the “mother of the Lord” rejoiced in being chosen.

Looking at her song, Mary has rejoiced in God who has noticed her in her humble state. She acknowledges that He has chosen her and she is blessed. Mary recognizes that by God choosing her, He has done great things for her. She deeply understands that being chosen by God is a blessing. Holy is God to bring mercy upon the generations. She believes that God is merciful to bring this baby forth through her. Oh what a marvelous thing to process. Mary was praising God even before the promise was fulfilled. She trusted her faithful God.

Her song radiates of God making things right in what seems so broken. The proud will be humbled. The humbled will be exalted. In the empty handed will be abundance, and the hand with abundance will be emptied. Redemption was coming through her baby boy. She believed.

Child of God, a promise has been made to you. Jesus is coming again. Jesus is coming back to bring final redemption to people and creation. Let’s believe and posture ourselves through praise in the waiting.



- How do you process this truth? What is your posture in the promise and in the waiting?
- What can we learn from Mary's unwavering belief in God's promise, even in the face of potential shame and societal judgment?
- Examine Mary's song of praise. How can you incorporate a similar attitude of praise and gratitude, even before the fulfillment of God's promises, into your own life?

AMBER GRIFFIN  
Director of Women's Ministries

## DECEMBER 21

*1 John 1:1-4*

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— <sup>2</sup> the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— <sup>3</sup> that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

# John

In a court of law, one of the most powerful and compelling elements in a criminal trial can be the testimony of an eyewitness. The decision of a jury and judge of whether to convict or acquit a defendant can hinge on the single testimony of what a credible first-person eyewitness heard, saw, or even touched. Verifiable eyewitness testimony can provide both irrefutable and convincing proofs. The Apostle John in his gospel, his three letters (1 John, 2 John, 3 John), and in his Revelation, is one of many other first-person eyewitnesses.

In the opening four verses of the first of his three letters, John qualifies himself as an eyewitness to what he has heard with his ears, seen with his eyes, and touched with his hands. To re-emphasize his qualification as an eyewitness, he more pointedly repeats in verse two what he has already stated in verse one. Senses like hearing, seeing, and touching inform the mind.

Beginning in the first verse, John's testimony is to "that which was from the beginning", reminds us of both Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1. Referring to the "Word of life" as that which he heard, saw, and touched reminds the reader of what John states in his Gospel in 1:14, "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

What John is stating is that he is an eyewitness to the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

As the "Word of life", John is explaining that Jesus is God's communication to us. He is both God's messenger, as well as the message itself. Of Jesus, John states in his Gospel "In Him was life" (John 1:4), while Jesus refers to Himself as "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25) as well as "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). This life being the Christian message of eternal life Jesus defines: "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). John is therefore an eyewitness to the eternal life personified in the life of Jesus Christ - a quality of life available in this life to all, Jew and Gentile alike, only through fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. John is stating that Jesus is the only source and substance of eternal life.

John then makes his purpose statement for writing his letter in verse three stating his desire that the reader, too, would enjoy fellowship, or share in common, not only with other eyewitnesses who personally experienced Jesus in human flesh, but fellowship "with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." In verse four, John concludes his introduction stating, "These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete."

This Christmas, let your own joy be made complete through the eyewitness, promised hope of eternal life in the "Word of life."

- How have you been influenced by someone else's eyewitness account of an event?
- How do you evaluate whether someone else's eyewitness account is true or false?
- How would the Apostle John's eyewitness account stand up to that kind of examination?
- How does the Apostle John's eyewitness account impact your trustworthiness of the scriptures?

JOHN GORDON  
Pastor of Congregational Care

We hope this devotional has allowed you to connect more deeply with the beauty and joy of this season and the amazing gift of Jesus' birth. We invite you to join us Christmas Eve for services!

Visit us at [waysidechapel.org/christmas](https://waysidechapel.org/christmas)  
to see service times





