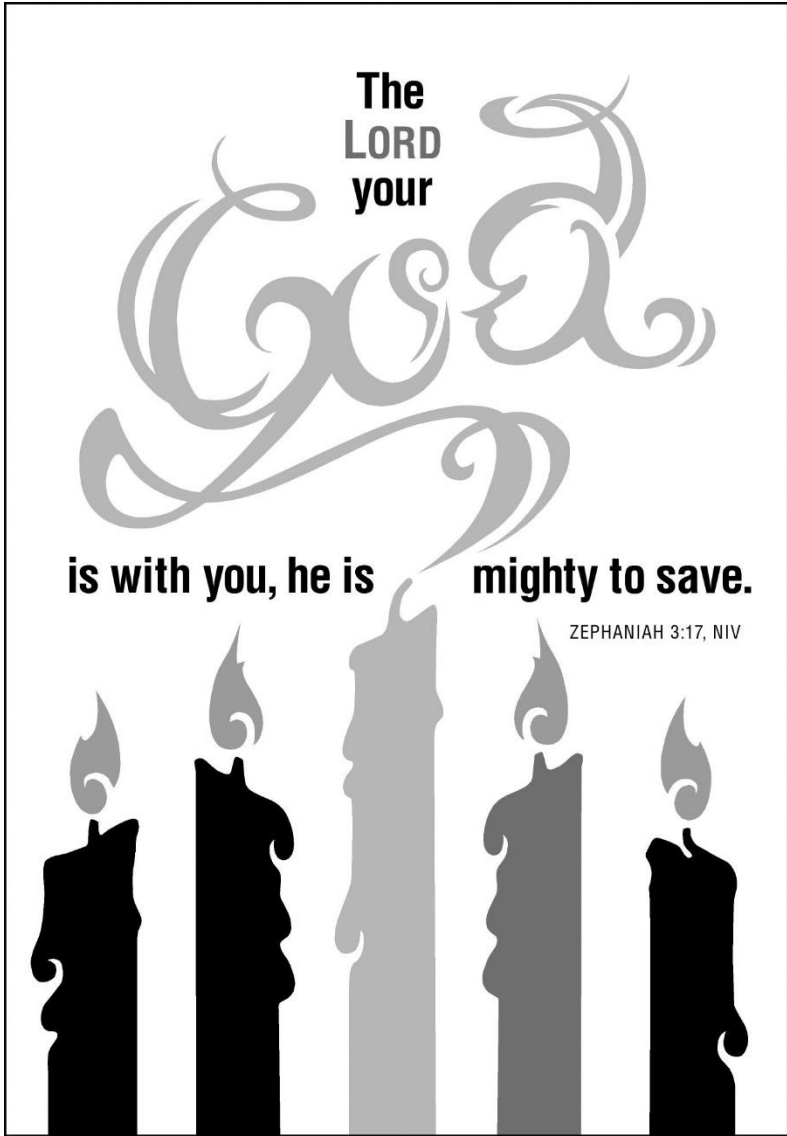


2023 Advent Devotional

Part 1 of 2



By Pastor Barry Nelson

This is Part 1 which includes:

Hope: December 3-9

Peace: December 10-16

Part 2 of our Advent Devotional is now available which includes:

Joy: December 17-23

Love: December 24-30, which includes a Christmas Day devotional for December 25.

Both parts can be downloaded from our website at:

FAHope.org/advent

Happy New Year! Ok, that might not make sense as January 1st is still almost a month away, but the new Church year always starts four Sundays *before* Christmas. The first season in the new Church year is called Advent. Just like the calendar year has different seasons – spring, summer, fall, and winter, so the Church year also has different seasons. The Church year was created to help us remember the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The Advent season prepares us for the coming of Jesus. The 12 days of the Christmas season celebrates the birth of Jesus. Imagine if your birthday party lasted 12 days! The next season, starting January 6th each year, is called Epiphany. During Epiphany, we remember all the ways in which Jesus showed the world that He was the Son of God.

Next, in the season of Lent we prepare for the death of Jesus by remembering the ways in which Jesus showed how much He loved us, and how we need to ask God to forgive us for the times when we haven't loved Him in the same way. The season of Lent leads us up to Good Friday, the day Jesus died.

It seems strange to call that day, "good," but it is good because Jesus chose to die to save us from our sins. We sin whenever we don't listen to God. Because of our sin, we deserve to be punished. But Jesus was the Son of God and never sinned. Even though Jesus didn't deserve to be punished, He chose to take our punishment for us. Because Jesus did this, when we pray to God and ask Him to forgive us, He always does! So now you know why we call it Good Friday.

Thankfully, that is not the end. For on the third day after Jesus' death, (1-Friday, 2-Saturday, 3-Sunday) we celebrate Easter Sunday. Yes, Jesus had died, but God showed the world that Jesus was His Son by bringing Him back to life – never to die again! Throughout the Easter season we celebrate all the times Jesus proved to His disciples and others that He was truly alive. On the 40th day after Easter Sunday, Jesus went up, alive, into Heaven. Ten days later, we celebrate Pentecost Sunday, which is the day when Jesus gave the Church the gift of the Holy Spirit. God gives this gift to all who are baptized into Jesus Christ – including you and me! The rest of the Church year is the season of Pentecost. During that time, we learn about all the ways in which Jesus has blessed and protected His people – the Church.

All of this is what makes Advent so special. As we go through this devotional for the next four weeks, we will see why the coming of Jesus as a little baby was so special. We will also look at how God had announced that Jesus was coming hundreds, if not thousands of years, before Jesus was born. What an awesome God we serve!



Sunday, December 3 – First Sunday in Advent: Candle of Hope

“Everything written in the past was written to teach us. The Scriptures give us strength to go on. They encourage us and give us hope.”
– Romans 15:4

Today at our church service we lit the candle of Hope. Now some churches don't light candles in Advent, and some use different names for the candles, and that is OK as long as each one points us to Jesus.

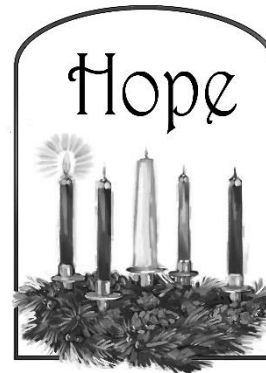
The Hope candle reminds us of all the promises that God gave to His people long before Jesus was born. He gave those promises through men called prophets. Some prophets in the Old Testament were Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, but there were many others as well. The prophets all said that God would send His people a special King called the Messiah. He would save God's people from their enemies and would lead them back to God.

God kept those promises by sending us Jesus. Jesus is the King of Kings. He came and defeated the enemies of sin, death, and the Devil by dying for us on the Cross. On the third day, Jesus showed His power by coming back to life on Easter! It is the power of Jesus and the promises He gives us through His Word, the Bible, that give us hope each and every day.

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for the Holy Bible that tells us about your promises and shows us how Jesus kept those promises. We thank you that by believing your promises we can always have hope. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus, verse 1

Come Thou long expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.



Monday, December 4

“Her son will crush your head. And you will bite his heel.” – Genesis 3:15

While this verse may seem strange, it is the first verse in the Bible that talks about the Hope of Advent. This verse is found in the account of Adam and Eve. They were the first people God created, and He put them in a beautiful garden. God said they could eat from all but one of the trees. God warned them that if they ate the fruit of that tree, they would die.

The serpent, who is also called the Devil or Satan, tricked Eve into not believing God, and she ate that fruit. Adam also didn't listen to God, and he ate the fruit too. God was angry at Adam and Eve for not obeying Him, but God was angrier at the serpent. That's when God told the serpent that, “Her son will crush your head. And you will bite his heel.” What God meant was that one day, the son of a woman would destroy the serpent's power. God was giving Adam and Eve the promise of Jesus, thousands of years before Jesus was even born!

Jesus came to earth as a human being to defeat that serpent. The serpent, also called the Devil, tricked people into hurting and killing Jesus. Even though this was a bad thing, it was part of God's plan. This is what God meant when He said the serpent would bite His heel. When Jesus died, the disciples thought Jesus lost. But Jesus showed them (and us!) He won by coming back to life again on Easter! His resurrection shows us that Jesus defeated the serpent!

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for promising to save Adam and Eve and us from the power of the serpent. We thank you that Jesus won! We pray that we will always trust Jesus to save us from all the bad things in this world. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: Joy to the World, verse 3

No more let sin and sorrow grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.



Tuesday, December 5

The LORD..said to [Abraham]... “I will make you into a great nation. And I will bless you... All nations on earth will be blessed because of you.” – Genesis 12:1-3

Abraham lived over 2000 years before Jesus. Even way back then, God knew that He would send His Son, Jesus, to save us, but God waited for the right time to send Jesus. Most of the nations worshiped false gods, so God wanted a special nation that He would call His own. God wanted a people that would believe His promises.

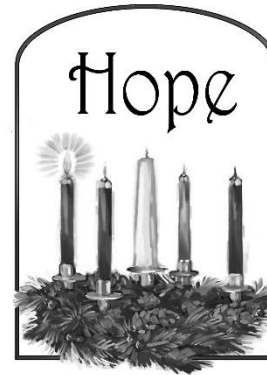
God told Abraham and his wife, Sarah, that their children would be God’s special nation. The problem was, Abraham and Sarah didn’t have any kids and they were too old to have kids – they were over 80 years old! The Bible tells us Abraham and Sarah believed God’s promise, and God kept His promise by giving them a son, Isaac. Isaac would later have a son named Jacob. God would give Jacob a new name, Israel. Jacob would have twelve sons, and those sons would be the start of a new nation, the nation of Israel.

The Old Testament tells us about all the promises God gave to Israel. It also tells us that Israel didn’t always obey God. There were times when God punished the nation of Israel, but each time, He promised to bring them back to Him. God didn’t just promise Abraham that He would bless Israel, but God said that all nations would be blessed through Abraham. God kept that promise by sending Jesus, who was a descendant of Abraham. For Jesus didn’t just come to save Israel, He came to save everyone in the world who believes in Him – including you and me! What a great promise of hope!

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for keeping your promise to Abraham. We thank you for keeping your promises to your people, Israel. We thank you for keeping your promises to us. We thank you for blessing everyone by sending us Jesus. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: *O How Shall I Receive Thee, verse 1*

O how shall I receive Thee, How greet Thee, Lord, aright?
All nations long to see Thee, My Hope, my heart’s delight!
O kindle, Lord most holy, Thy lamp within my breast,
To do in spirit lowly, All that may please Thee best.



Wednesday, December 6

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” - Jeremiah 29:11

God kept his promise to Abraham, and after many years, Israel grew into a great nation. However, Israel did not always obey God. They started worshipping false gods. As a punishment, God let other nations, Assyria and Babylon, invade the nation of Israel.

In the days of the prophet Jeremiah (around 600 years before Jesus), God warned His people that they would soon be taken away from the land of Israel to the land of their enemy, Babylon. This made the people very sad. They thought if that happened, they would never live in Israel again. However, God gave them the promise that He had a plan to bring them back to Israel. Even when things were at their worst, God gave them a promise of hope.

The greatest part of that promise was that God was planning to send them His Son, Jesus. The word “Advent” means coming, and it is a season when we remember the promises that God gave to Israel that their Savior was coming. Advent is a promise that because we can’t go to God, God would come to us. At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, when God kept the promise of hope that He gave to His people through the prophets in the Old Testament.

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you that even when Israel was bad and forgot about you, you still had a good plan for them. We thank you for your good plans for us, and we pray that we will always remember to follow you. We thank you for the hope we have for the future because of Jesus. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, verse 1*

O come, O come. Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.



Thursday, December 7

“He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord... to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” – Luke 1:16-17

In the very last verse in the Old Testament (Malachi 4:6), God gave Israel another promise. Not only would He send them the special king called the Messiah, but He would also send them a prophet who would announce to Israel the coming (or Advent) of the Messiah. The Messiah that God sent was His

Son, Jesus. Do you know the name of the special prophet who announced the coming of Jesus? His name was John the Baptist.

Today’s verse was spoken by the angel Gabriel who was sent by God to tell Zechariah the priest that he and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a baby boy – even though they were too old to have kids! The angel told Zechariah that his son would be that special prophet who would tell the world that Jesus was coming. When John the Baptist grew up, he told the people that they needed to get ready to receive Jesus as their King.

During Advent, we should also prepare our hearts to receive the Good News, or Gospel, of Jesus. When we remember how God kept all of His promises to Israel long ago, we can know for sure that God will keep His promises to us as well. God always keeps His promises in the same way – by sending us Jesus!

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for John the Baptist and how you used him to tell people that Jesus was coming. We thank you for all the people who have told us about Jesus, and we pray that you would use us to tell others about Jesus. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: *Joy to the World, verse 1*

Joy to the world!

The Lord is come:

Let earth receive her King;

Let ev’ry heart prepare Him room,

And heav’n and nature sing,

And heav’n and nature sing,

And heav’n, and heav’n and nature sing.



Friday, December 8

“God has helped the people of Israel, who serve him. He has always remembered to be kind to Abraham and his children down through the years. He has done it just as he promised to our people of long ago.” – Luke 1:54-55

Not only did God send the angel Gabriel to Zechariah, but God also sent Gabriel to a young woman in Israel named Mary. The angel Gabriel told Mary that she was the one that God chose to be the mother of Jesus. At first, Mary didn’t know what to say about being given such a great honor. But Mary knew she could trust God. She said, “I want to serve the Lord. I trust that God will keep His promise to me.” Later, Mary would sing a beautiful song of praise to God. She was so happy that God decided to use her to keep His promise to the nation of Israel. Today’s verse is the end of that song. Mary was so glad that God did not forget about her and her people.

We also sing many songs of praise to God during Advent and Christmas. We sing these songs because we know that God will never forget about us. Like Mary, we know we can always trust God.

Prayer: Dear God, we are glad that we can always trust you like Mary did. We thank you for Mary’s beautiful song of praise. When we sing Christmas songs, help us to remember how good you always are to us. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing, verse 2*

Christ, by highest heav’n adored,

Christ, the everlasting Lord;

Late in time behold Him come,

Offspring of a virgin’s womb.

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;

Hail th’ Incarnate Deity,

Pleased as man with man to dwell;

Jesus, our Immanuel.

Hark! The herald angels sing,

“Glory to the newborn King.”



Saturday, December 9

“You are full of hope as you wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to come again.”
– 1 Corinthians 1:7

So far when we’ve talked about Advent, which means the coming of Jesus, we have been looking back to the past when Jesus came to earth as a little baby. Did you know that Jesus is coming back to earth again in the future? When Jesus went back up into Heaven, Jesus promised us that one day He will come back to earth. The next time Jesus comes, He isn’t

going to come as a little baby. Instead, Jesus will come as the King of the whole earth.

When Jesus comes back, He is going to get rid of all the bad stuff in this world. The world will be made into something completely new and good! During Advent, we look forward to what we call “the second coming of Jesus.” Today’s verse tells us that the promised return of Jesus gives us hope. It even says we are “full of hope.” We don’t just have a little hope, but we are full of hope – from head to toe! This means that no matter what happens, we always have hope when we remember Jesus.

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for sending Jesus to earth many years ago as a little baby. We thank you for the promise that, one day, He will come again. We thank you for the promise that one day everything bad will disappear. We pray that you would fill us with hope whenever we think of Jesus. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, verse 5*

O come, Thou Key of David come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.



Sunday, December 10 – Second Sunday in Advent: Candle of Peace

“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.’” – Luke 2:13-14

Today at our church service we lit the candle of Peace. As we lit that candle, we remembered the song the angels sang when Jesus was born. The song starts with “Glory to God in the highest heaven,” which means that we should

remember to praise God and give Him thanks for sending Jesus to us.

And why should we be thankful? We should be thankful because the second part of the song tells us that through Jesus, God has offered “peace to those on whom his favor rests.” When we sin, that is, when we do the things God doesn’t want us to do, that sin separates us from God. When we disobey God we are fighting against God. We are acting like His enemies. Jesus came to take away our sins so that we can have peace with God. “Those on whom God’s favor rests” means that everyone that God is happy with will have this peace with God. And what makes God happy with us? God is happy when we love Jesus and believe that He has taken away our sins. If we believe in Jesus, God is happy with us and gives us His gift of peace!

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for giving us your peace. We thank you for sending Jesus to take away our sins. We thank you that you have promised to be happy with us if we love Jesus. Help us to always remember to thank you for sending Jesus to us. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing, verse 1*

Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.”
Joyful all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With th’ angelic host proclaim,
“Christ is born in Bethlehem.”
Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King.”



Monday, December 11

“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.” – Isaiah 9:6

This Bible verse is found in the Old Testament. Even though this verse was written by Isaiah over 700 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah was telling the people about Jesus! Isaiah was a prophet of God. A prophet is someone that God uses to bring special messages to His

people. Sometimes prophets tell the people what God is planning to do in the future. Many times, God used the prophet Isaiah to tell the people that one day God would send them a special King. This King was also called the Messiah. This King was Jesus! Isaiah said this King would be called the “Prince of Peace.” Jesus would be a good King, and following Jesus always leads us to the peace of God.

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for sending Jesus as our great King. We thank you for using the prophets, like Isaiah, to tell your people hundreds of years ahead of time about Jesus. We thank you for telling us about Jesus through your Word, the Bible. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing, verse 3*

Hail, the heav’n-born Prince of Peace!

Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!

Light and life to all He brings,

Ris’n with healing in His wings.

Mild He lays His glory by,

Born that man no more may die,

Born to raise the sons of earth,

Born to give them second birth.

Hark! The herald angels sing,

“Glory to the newborn King.”



Tuesday, December 12

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” – Micah 5:2

Remember how we talked about how some churches have different names for the Advent candles? Some people call the second candle the Bethlehem candle. Bethlehem was the town where Jesus was born. Today’s verse is from another prophet of God. His name was Micah. He lived around the same time as the

prophet, Isaiah, who we talked about yesterday. Through His prophet, Micah, God told His people that their special King, called the Messiah, would be born in Bethlehem. Talk about a special birth announcement!

It was not just the prophecies about Him that made the birth of Jesus special. Jesus would also be unlike anyone else ever born. For Micah said that this “ruler over Israel” would come “from of old, from ancient times.” Remember, Micah wrote this about 700 years before Jesus was born, and Micah said this King was around in times ancient to Micah. Jesus is the only One who would fit that description. For Jesus is the Son of God, and He was never created. He has always existed – even in the times way before Micah. In this verse we see a very special birth announcement for a very special King – Jesus the Messiah.

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for showing us how special Jesus is through the messages of your prophets. Help us to always remember that there is no one else like Jesus. We thank you that Jesus is our King, and that He has invited us to live forever in His Kingdom – the Kingdom of Heaven. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: *O Little Town of Bethlehem, verse 1*

O little town of Bethlehem,

How still we see thee lie;

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep

The silent stars go by.

Yet in thy dark streets shineth

The everlasting Light;

The hopes and fears of all the years

Are met in thee tonight.



Wednesday, December 13

The angel [Gabriel] went to her [Mary] and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus."
– Luke 1:28-33

When the angel Gabriel first spoke to Mary about her favor in the eyes of God, the Bible says that she was "greatly troubled." She didn't know what that meant. So Gabriel assured her that she didn't have to be afraid. He told her that God had a good plan to save His people from their sins, and she would be a big part of that plan. It would be her son that would be the Messiah – the special King that God had promised to send to save His people. Even though Mary would go through some difficult times, she trusted that God's plan for her was a good one. She was willing to live as a servant of God. She found peace by trusting in God's plan.

Sometimes we might be afraid when we wonder what God might want us to do. When we are not sure what to do, we can remember Mary and her faith in God. She was willing to do hard things because she trusted that God always has a good plan for His people. God's good plan for us is the same plan He had for Mary. His plan is always to lead us to Jesus!

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for choosing Mary to be a part of your plan to save your people. We thank you for the example of her faith and willingness to serve you. We pray that you would help us to trust your plan for our lives. We pray that you would always lead us close to Jesus. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: What Child Is This? verse 1

What child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the king,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The babe, the son of Mary!



Thursday, December 14

"An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'"
– Matthew 1:20-21

When Joseph found out that Mary, the woman he wanted to marry, was going to have a baby without him, he was sad, confused, and frightened. He didn't know that Mary's baby was the Son of God. Something like that had never happened before. God knew Joseph was a good man, and God wanted Joseph and Mary to be the parents of the baby Jesus. So God sent an angel to Joseph to tell him that Mary's baby was God's Son. The angel also said God wanted Joseph and Mary to get married. After the angel left, Joseph wasn't sad, confused, and frightened anymore. He had peace knowing that everything that was happening was part of God's good plan. He knew that God would use Jesus to save us from our sins.

Sometimes we can be sad, confused, and frightened also. We can also find comfort in knowing that God has a good plan for our lives, even when we don't understand what is happening. When we are confused, God can speak to us through His Word, the Bible. We can also pray to God and ask Him to give us peace, just like God gave to Joseph!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for saving us from our sins. When we don't understand what is happening, help us to trust your good plan. Thank you for using Joseph as part of your plan, and we pray that you would use us, too. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: O Little Town of Bethlehem, verse 2

For Christ is born of Mary;
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wond'ring love.
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth;
And praises sing to God our King,
And peace to men on earth.



Friday, December 15

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations.”
– Luke 2:29-31

Shortly after Jesus was born, his parents brought him to be presented at the temple. The temple was where people gathered to worship God in Israel. Even though Jesus was just a little baby, there were other people who already recognized how important He was. In

Luke 2, we see two people who spent a lot of time at the temple worshipping God – Simeon and Anna. When they saw the baby Jesus, they were so happy because they both realized that God had kept His promises. They knew that all the things the prophets had promised would come true. Simeon and Anna were both very old, and they thanked God for letting them live long enough to see the Messiah.

Today’s verse is part of the praise that Simeon sang to God as he held the baby Jesus in his arms. Seeing Jesus, Simeon was now ready to go to Heaven to be with God. Even though we don’t get to see Jesus with our own eyes, or hold Him in our arms as a little baby, we still can have peace knowing Jesus is with us today. We might not see Jesus like they did, but we can get to know Jesus by learning about Him in the Bible and spending time with Him in prayer. When we see Jesus in this way, by faith, Jesus brings us peace as well. We should also praise God, like Simeon, for helping us see Jesus through the Bible.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for showing Jesus to your servants, Simeon and Anna. Thank you for showing us Jesus through the Bible. Help us to see Jesus by faith and to remember that He is always with us. Help us to always remember to sing songs of praise to you. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus, verse 2

Born Thy people to deliver, Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever, Now Thy gracious Kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit, Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit, Raise us to Thy glorious throne.



Saturday, December 16

We have been made right with God because of our faith. Now we have peace with him because of our Lord Jesus Christ. – Romans 5:1

We started this week by talking about how our sin separates us from God. Throughout the week, we have seen times when people received peace when they believed the message about Jesus. Remember Mary and Joseph? At first, they were scared and confused as God started to reveal His plan to them. But when they believed that Jesus would be the Son of God

who would save us from our sins, they found peace. First, they found peace with God when they knew that God was happy with what they were doing. Second, they also found peace with God’s plans. They knew that God would lead them every step of the way.

In our verse today, the Apostle Paul assures us that we can also know that we have peace with God because of Jesus. When we come to Jesus in faith, we can know that our sins have been forgiven. We can know that God is happy with us. We can know that we are part of God’s family. Because of Jesus, we don’t need to be scared of God’s plans for us. For we know that God loves us, and that following Jesus will always bring us God’s peace.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for giving us peace. Thank you for forgiving our sins through Jesus. Thank you for helping us not to be scared, because we know that you are always with us and that you always love us. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: Silent Night, verse 1

Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright,
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.