

Journey to Bethlehem

Advent 2023



“The Journey to Bethlehem” Advent 2023

We begin a new series of Advent devotionals this year that will feature our children. Check out the “Journey to Bethlehem” mural on the wall downstairs in the Sunday School area. Each day our children will add artwork or a poem to the road as a representation of their gift to Jesus. Feel free to add your own contribution to the mural as you are inspired by these daily words and consider what you wish to give to Jesus this season.

In the Bleak Midwinter

Song by Christina Rossetti and Gustav Holst

In the bleak midwinter
Frosty wind made moan
Earth stood hard as iron
Water like a stone
Snow had fallen
Snow on snow on snow
In the bleak midwinter
Long, long ago

Angels and Arc Angels
May have traveled there
Cherubim and Seraphim
Thronged the air
But only his Mother
In her maiden bliss
Worshiped the beloved
With a kiss

What can I give him?
Poor as I am
If I were a shepherd
I would give a lamb
If I were a wise man
I would do my part
But what I can I give him
Give him my heart
Give him my heart

Monday – November 27 Introduction



Image to Ponder:

How do you prepare for Christmas?

How do you prepare for the day when you will meet Jesus face to face, either in this life or the world to come?

What are you bringing to Jesus

this Advent season?

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36²⁵ “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. ²⁶ People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁷ At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

³⁴ “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

Thoughts to Consider:

Imagine that King Charles, or Connor McDavid, or Taylor Swift was coming to your house. The excitement could turn to panic as you consider how to prepare for their coming. In the same way, Jesus tells us that he will return and “Every eye shall see, and every tongue

confess that He is LORD.” Advent is about getting ready for his appearing. We don’t know when that day will be, so we need to have our lives clean and in order. We don’t want our lives to be full of bitterness, greed, selfishness and unclean living. In that way, we can be excited about the fact that Jesus is returning and anticipate it with hope, peace, joy and love.

Prayer:

Thank you, God, for the promise that Jesus will one day return. Through your Holy Spirit, help us to be ready for that day by living lives that are pleasing to you. Thank you for forgiving us when we tell you we have done wrong. We want to welcome King Jesus at his coming and so to share the joy of his rule. Amen

**Tuesday – November 28
Jesus Our Humble King**



Image to Ponder:

Which animal would you expect to see in a parade that featured the King?

Tradition tells us that Jesus started his life in a stable with a donkey. He ended it riding into Jerusalem on a donkey.

What does that tell us about his ministry?

Matthew 21:1-11 (NIV)

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If

anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

⁵ “Say to Daughter Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹⁰ When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

¹¹ The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Prayer:

Jesus, we associate the humble donkey with your birth and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. You deserved a royal parade as the King of Kings, but instead you arrived as a servant. Teach us to set aside our need to be recognized and praised in order to serve you in the ordinary places of our world. Amen

Wednesday - November 29
The Coronation



Image to Ponder:

Millions of people around the world witnessed the coronation of King Charles III. “Long live the King!” Who will crown Jesus as the King of Kings?

The voice of God was there at the baptism of Jesus, and on the Mount of Transfiguration. What did it say?

What is the value of an eyewitness

account?

Who were the eyewitnesses of Jesus?

2 Peter 1:16-19

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

¹⁹ We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Matthew 21:12-17

¹² Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. ¹³ “It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’”

¹⁴ The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.

¹⁶ “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read,

“From the lips of children and infants, you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?”

Prayer:

We consider who you are, Lord Jesus, as we journey through advent. We believe the accounts of eyewitnesses who were there throughout your ministry, including the sick, the lame, the poor, and children. They could not be silenced because they had been with you, and they believed. May our hearts be open to just such an encounter. Amen

Thursday – November 30 God’s Timing



Image to Ponder:

What do you consider “a long time”?

How to consider your life as compared to the age of the universe?

It's been 2,000 years since Jesus came to earth. Why is he so slow to come back?

2 Peter 3:3-10

³Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. ⁴They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." ⁵But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. ⁸But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief.

Acts 1:7-12

⁷He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

⁹After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Prayer:

Lord, your people waited for thousands of years for you to send the Messiah. When he came, he was rejected. We too have waited thousands of years for you to return and set the world right. Let us be ready and live in joyful anticipation of that day. Amen

Friday – December 1
Be Prepared to Meet Jesus



Image to Ponder:

What needs to be done to prepare this space for important guests?

The fire engine reminds us to be prepared for emergencies. How do we prepare for spiritual emergencies?

What areas of your life need to be cleaned up as you prepare for your advent journey?

2 Peter 3:11-14

^{11b} You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation.

1 Thessalonians 5:5-10

Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ²for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

⁴But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, examine our hearts and point out areas where we need your work of forgiveness and healing. We are serious about living lives that honour you. Thank you that your grace is sufficient for our salvation. Amen

Saturday – December 2 The Advent Log



The Advent Log is a simple idea that helps us focus upon our preparation for the coming of Jesus' birth. The four outside candles represent the four Sundays of Advent and the one in the middle is the Christ candle that is lit on Christmas day.

December 3rd - we light our first candle of hope.

December 10th – we light the second candle of peace.

December 17th – we light the third candle (the pink one), of joy.

December 24th – we light the fourth candle of love

December 25th – we light the white Christ candle

**Sunday - December 3
First Sunday of Advent**



Image to Ponder:

What does the advent wreath symbolize for you?

How do you get ready for Christmas?

What is your response to hope, peace, joy and love

as you think about your daily walk with Jesus?

Isaiah 40:3-6

A voice of one calling:

"In the wilderness
prepare

the way for the LORD;
make straight in the
desert

a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be
raised up,

every mountain and
hill made low;
the rough ground shall
become level,

the rugged places a plain.

⁵ And the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.

For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."



I John 3:1-3

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, as we begin Advent this year help us to be like children. We want to anticipate your coming with hope, peace, joy and love. Remind us to take time to ponder what it means to be a Christian in this busy, confusing, upside down world. Help us to simplify our lives, and to spend time with you each day. Amen

Monday – December 4 The Feast is Ready



Image to Ponder:

How would you feel if you prepared a special meal and no one came?

Who are the people you want to share a meal with?

Who are the people you would never invite?

Are there those who come to a communion table in this world that you would be uncomfortable standing next to?

Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ²“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

⁴“Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

⁵“But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. ⁶The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ^{7a}The king was enraged.

⁸“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ ¹⁰So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹⁴“For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Prayer:

Lord, you invite us to come to your communion table. Remind us that it is a special invitation for all who come to you in faith. Let us be accepting of those who join with us regardless of who they are or where they come from. Help us to practice hospitality toward strangers and outsiders, and to become like Jesus who “ate with tax collectors and sinners.” Amen

Tuesday – December 5 Miracle Babies



Image to Ponder:

John and Baptist and Jesus were relatives: one born to a barren woman and the other to a virgin. Why is that significant?

What role did John play in Jesus's ministry?

Luke 1:36-42

The angel [told Mary], "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born in you will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth, your relative is going to have a child in her old age. . . For nothing is impossible with God."

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea,⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!

⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

⁵⁷ When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. ⁵⁸ Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

⁵⁹ On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, ⁶⁰ but his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John.”

⁶¹ They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.”⁶² Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. ⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” ⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁶ Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child?”

Prayer:

Lord, Jesus was born into an extended family of faith. Scripture tells us how his relative, John, had a special purpose in making him known. When we are discouraged about our lives, help us to remember that you have a plan for us and that this purpose fits into your plan for the family of faith created by Jesus. Let our primary goal be to glorify your name. Amen

**Wednesday – December 6
Jesus Our Shepherd**

Image to Ponder:



The child holds the lamb; her father holds them both. We hold in our hearts those whom we love. Who do you hold close?

How does it make you feel to know that Jesus carries you?

What makes you tired or weary as you journey to Bethlehem? How does Jesus comfort you?

Isaiah 40ff

Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God. ² Speak
tenderly to Jerusalem, and
proclaim to her that her hard
service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from
the LORD's hand double for all
her sins. ⁵ And the glory of
the LORD will be revealed,
and all people will see it
together. You who bring good
news to Jerusalem, lift up your
voice with a shout, lift it up, do
not be afraid; say to the towns
of Judah, "Here is your God!"
¹⁰ See, the Sovereign
LORD comes with power,
and he rules with a mighty
arm. ¹¹ He tends his flock like a

shepherd: He gathers the
lambs in his arms and carries
them close to his heart; he
gently leads those that have
young.

²⁸ Do you not know? Have you
not heard? The LORD is the
everlasting God, the Creator of
the ends of the earth. He will
not grow tired or weary, and
his understanding no one can
fathom. ²⁹ He gives strength to
the weary and increases the
power of the weak. ³⁰ Even
youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and
fall; ³¹ but those who hope in
the LORD will renew their
strength. They will soar on
wings like eagles; they will run
and not grow wear

Prayer:

Lord, we are your children and we long for you to carry us when we
are tired, afraid, sick, or overwhelmed. At times we just need to sit in
silence and listen to what you have to say to us. Let us feel your
presence in a real way as we come to you this moment in prayer.
Amen

Thursday – December 7
Jesus the Light of the World



Image to Ponder:

Jesus brought justice and peace to the world by shining His light in the darkness. What sorts of things hide in the darkness?

How does exposing sin to the light help to eliminate it?

How is hidden sin the enemy of peace?

Isaiah 42

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold,

my chosen one in whom I delight;

I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.

² He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.

³ A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.

In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;

⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged

till he establishes justice on earth.

⁶ “I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness;

I will take hold of your hand.
I will keep you and will make you

you
to be a covenant for the people

and a light for the Gentiles,

⁷ to open eyes that are blind,
to free captives from prison
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

John 3:19-21

¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus the world longs for peace. Hear the cries of the people caught in the grip of war. Eliminate evil ambition and hatred and champion truth and light. Give us the courage to expose our sin to the light so that we can have enjoy true peace and forgiveness. Amen

Friday – December 8th Jesus Our Deliverer



Image to Ponder:

Jesus delivers us from the troubles we face in life by going before us and leading us to safety. Recall a time when this was true in your life.

Experience teaches us that we can trust in God. How does this give us peace when we face the unknown?

John 14: 27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

John 16:33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Isaiah 43:1-5,25

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

²When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;

and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.

When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.

³For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;

⁴Since you are precious and honored in my sight,
and because I love you,

⁵Do not be afraid, for I am with you;
¹¹I, even I, am the LORD,
and apart from me there is no savior.

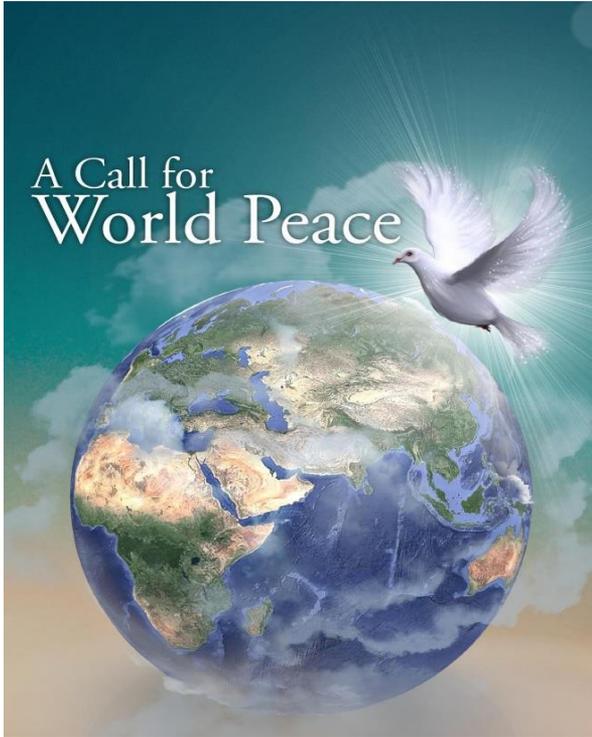
²⁵“I, even I, am he who blots out
your transgressions, for my own sake,
and remembers your sins no more..

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, when we face uncertainty, walk beside us and carry us through. The world is filled with messages that often cause us to despair or to become afraid, even though in our personal lives, we see how you care for us and keep us safe. Thank you that you deliver us from our fears. Amen

**Saturday – December 9th
Pray for Peace**

Image to Ponder:



- Israel and the Gaza Strip
- Ukraine and Russia
- Afghanistan
- Ethiopia
- South Sudan
- Syria
- Indigenous peoples
- Immigrants
- Minority groups
- Political parties
- Family feuds

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thought to Consider:

Jesus came to teach us about the Kingdom of God. It is different from the world around us. What would the world be like the Lord's Prayer was lived out? Pray for areas of the world that trouble you.

Prayer:

Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad your Spirit, that all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince of Peace, as children of one Father; to whom be dominion and glory, now and for ever. Amen
“The Book of Common Prayer”

Sunday – December 10
Second Sunday of Advent

**Matthew 25:1-13**

“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴ The wise ones,

however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵ The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶ “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

⁷ “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

⁹ “‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

¹⁰ “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

¹¹ “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’

¹² “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’

¹³ “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Prayer:

O holy, patient, and loving God, in this season of grace-filled longing, we await the coming of your Son and our Savior. In the midst of our busy lives, we need your help to remind us of what is important and necessary. The one gift that will last comes from you alone, gracious God, as we grow in our awareness of your love. Bless us, our family and friends. Increase in us a growing urgency to celebrate the birth of your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen

Monday December 11
Good News – The Light Has Come



Image to Ponder:

Why are lights used to celebrate Christmas?

What does it mean to say that God is light?

Why is the coming of Jesus good news?

Isaiah 60

“Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.

² See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the LORD rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.

³ Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

⁴ “Lift up your eyes and look about you:
All assemble and come to you;
your sons come from afar,
and your daughters are carried on the hip.

⁵ Then you will look and be radiant,
your heart will throb and swell with joy;

²⁰ the LORD will be your everlasting light,
and your days of sorrow will end.

²¹ Then all your people will be righteous
and they will possess the land forever.

They are the shoot I have planted,
the work of my hands,
for the display of my splendor.

²² The least of you will become a thousand,
the smallest a mighty nation.

I am the LORD;
in its time I will do this swiftly.”

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you are the light of the world. There are many dark places of war, poverty, and sin among the peoples and nations on our planet. Beginning in our own hearts, cast out those shadows so that we can be agents of good news to a world that is dying. Amen

Tuesday – December 12
Good News – God Forgives Us

Image to Ponder:



How are baptism and the death of Jesus related?

Do we need to be baptized?

Why did Jesus have to come and die? Couldn't God forgive us without Christ's death?

Isaiah 1

² Hear me, you heavens! Listen, earth!

For the LORD has spoken:

"I reared children and brought them up,
but they have rebelled against me.

³ The ox knows its master,
the donkey its owner's manger,
but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand."

⁴ Woe to the sinful nation,
a people whose guilt is great,
a brood of evildoers,

children given to corruption!
They have forsaken the LORD;
they have spurned the Holy One of Israel
and turned their backs on him.

¹¹ "The multitude of your sacrifices—
what are they to me?" says LORD.

I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.

They have become a burden to me;
I am weary of bearing them.

¹⁸ “Come now, let us settle the matter,”
says the LORD.

“Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson,
they shall be like wool.

¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient,
you will eat the good things
of the land; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Prayer:

Holy God, you formed me from the dust in your image and likeness,
and redeemed me from sin and death by the cross of your Son.
Through the water of baptism you clothed me with the garment of his
righteousness and established me among your children in your
kingdom. Receive me again into the arms of your mercy and restore
me to the blessed company of the redeemed. Amen
“Book of Common Prayer”



**Wednesday –
December 13
Good News – God is
For Us**

Image to Ponder:

What does it mean to
have someone
“champion” your cause?

What does it mean that “Nothing can separate us from the love of
God?”

Romans 8:28-38

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you have won the battle over sin and death. We get caught up in uncertainty about the future, regrets from the past, and circumstances in the present that are beyond our control. From worry about passing a test or going to the dentist, to the threats to world peace and climate change, we feel helpless and either choose to ignore things, or push through with determination and positive self-talk. Yet, you have won the final victory over all that threatens to

destroy us. Nothing can separate us from you and your loving purpose for us. Let that seep into our bones. We need you. We are weak. We are mortal. Lord have mercy. Amen

Thursday – December 14th
Good News – Better Days are Coming



Image to Ponder:

What would you expect to happen if a lion encountered a lamb?

What would a perfect world look like?

What causes you to weep?

Isaiah 65:17-25

¹⁷ “See, I will create
new heavens and a new
earth.
The former things will not be
remembered,
nor will they come to mind.
¹⁸ But be glad and
rejoice forever
in what I will create,
for I will create Jerusalem to
be a delight
and its people a joy.
¹⁹ I will rejoice over Jerusalem
and take delight in my
people;
the sound of weeping and of

crying
will be heard in it no more.
²⁰ “Never again will there be in
it
an infant who lives but a few
days,
or an old man who does not
live out his years;
the one who dies at a hundred
will be thought a mere child;
the one who fails to reach^[a] a
hundred
will be considered accursed.
²¹ They will build houses and
dwell in them;
they will plant vineyards and
eat their fruit.
²² No longer will they build

houses and others live in them,
or plant and others eat.
For as the days of a tree,
so will be the days of my people;
my chosen ones will long enjoy
the work of their hands.
²³ They will not labor in vain,
nor will they bear children
doomed to misfortune;
for they will be a people
blessed by the LORD,
they and their

descendants with them.
²⁴ Before they call I will answer;
while they are still speaking I will hear.
²⁵ The wolf and the lamb will feed together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,
and dust will be the serpent's food.
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,"
says the LORD.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you opened the way for us to be saved. Through the disobedience of Adam sin and death entered the world. Your coming gave us a way to be put right with God. Our tired, sick world needs that redemption now. Don't forget about us? Come quickly. Amen

**Friday – December 15
Good News – Heaven Awaits**

Image to Ponder:



What do you imagine heaven to be like?

What images on earth make you think about heaven?

What does it mean to have eternal life?

Revelation 22

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

⁶ The angel said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.”

⁷ “Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.”

Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, the peace and joy we get from pondering our eternal future with you is beyond measure and without comparison. Our deepest desires you've written into our hearts, our most intense longings for relationships and intimacy, the insatiable thirst for a perfect world and perfect everything—**all** these things they **will** find their fulfillment in the life to come. Never let our pain outweigh your praise. Never let us outlive our love for you, Jesus. Amen.

“Scotty Smith – Blog”

Saturday – December 16



Image to Ponder:

What are the things that bring your joy?

How will you share joy with those around you as we Journey to Bethlehem?

Thanksgiving and joy go together. What are the positives in your life today?

Luke 2:8-13

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

Prayer:

Lord, would you restore the joy of our salvation? Help us to be willing to follow you with all we have. As we read the Scriptures that remind us who you are and the ways you love us, give us a sense of joy that overflows from our hearts! And let this holy joy be contagious and spill over into the lives of those around us. May your peace that surpasses all understanding be upon us...especially as we're wrapping up a year that has felt very scary and uncertain. Encourage our hearts with the knowledge that with *you* we can live in your perfect peace, no matter our circumstances. We thank you for the joy and peace you give! Amen.

“Crosswalk”

Sunday – December 17
Third Sunday of Advent



Jesus said:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom
of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be
comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the
earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who
hunger and thirst for
righteousness for they will be
filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown
mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called
children of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are
persecuted because of
righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom
of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when
people insult you, persecute
you and falsely say all kinds of
evil against you because of
me. ¹² Rejoice and be
glad, because great is your
reward in heaven, for in the
same way they persecuted the
prophets who were before
you.

Matthew 22:36-40

³⁶ "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"³⁷ Jesus
replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your
soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest
commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as
yourself.

Prayer:

O God, the Father of all, whose Son commanded us to love our
enemies; Lead them and us from prejudice to truth; deliver them and
us from hatred, cruelty, and revenge; and in your good time enable
us all to stand reconciled before you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

Monday – December 18
A Change of Heart



Image to Ponder:

What charities do you support with money, donations, or volunteer labour?

What can children do to show their love to others?

How do we overcome selfishness—"Me first?"

Luke 3:8, 10-18

⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

¹⁰ "What should we do then?" the crowd asked.

¹¹ John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."

¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"

¹³ "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.

¹⁴ Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?"

He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay."

¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. ¹⁶ John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” ¹⁸ And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you came to earth to save us from our sins and to give us the hope of eternal life. When we give our lives to you, there is a change of heart. By nature we often forget to think of others. JOY can be defined in terms of, Jesus, Others, You. Show us ways to give this season. Amen

**Tuesday – December 19
Jesus Loves the Little Children**



Image to Ponder:

Children identify with the baby Jesus. How do we relate to the Christ child to God?

Jesus took children on his knee and blessed them. Why would this be offensive to the disciples?

What did Jesus mean when he said we should all become like little children?

Isaiah 49

Before I was
born the LORD called me;
from my mother's womb he
has spoken my name.
² He made my mouth like a
sharpened sword,
in the shadow of his
hand he hid me;
he made me into a polished
arrow
and concealed me in his
quiver.

³ He said to me, "You are my
servant,
Israel, in whom I will display
my splendor."
¹⁸ Lift up your eyes and look
around;
all your children gather and
come to you.
As surely as I live," declares
the LORD,
"you will wear them all as
ornaments;
you will put them on, like a
bride.

Matthew 19

¹³ Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them.
¹⁴ Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

Matthew 18:3

And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, help us to come to you as children again this Advent season. We easily forget the excitement and wonder of the manger scene. The miracle of God becoming a baby shows us your love and vulnerability. Open our hearts to the joy of allowing you to hold us like a child so that we can feel the breath of your Holy Spirit on us. Amen

Wednesday – December 20
Jesus Loves Families



Image to Ponder:

What is the purpose of families?

How did Jesus respond to his family?

What causes discord in families?
What are

the things you can't talk about when you get together?

How are we to respond as Christians to those who make us angry?

John 2:1-12

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

⁴ "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled

them to the brim. ⁸ Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.”

They did so, ⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ and said, “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.”

Matthew 12:46-47

⁴⁶ While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. ⁴⁷ Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.”

⁴⁸ He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹ Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Prayer:

God we thank you for our families and the friends who support us in our joys and sorrows. Make us sensitive to the needs of others and make us willing to share our lives with our Christian family. Celebrations are sweeter when we are in community. Thank you for the Christmas Eve services that unite us in joy and love. Amen

Thursday – December 21
Jesus Loves the Church



Image to Ponder:

Can a choir consist of one?

Is it possible to be a Christian and never go to church?

⁷ The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

⁸ Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

⁹ Fear the LORD, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing.

¹⁰ The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

Psalm 34:1-11

I will extol the LORD at all times;
his praise will always be on my lips.

² I will glory in the LORD;
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.

³ Glorify the LORD with me;
let us exalt his name together.

⁴ I sought the LORD, and he answered me;
he delivered me from all my fears.

⁵ Those who look to him are radiant;
their faces are never covered with shame.

⁶ This poor man called, and

the LORD heard him;
he saved him out of all his troubles.

Ephesians 5: 18-20,25-27

Be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Prayer:

The church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is his new creation
By water and the Word.
From heaven he came and sought her
To be his holy bride;
With his own blood he bought her,
And for her life he died. Lord let us be united in love and purpose as we await your return. Amen

Friday – December 22 Jesus Loves the World



Image to Ponder:

How would the world change if we truly believed that God loved everyone?

What does it look like when we love our enemies and pray for those who hate us?

How is the Kingdom of Heaven different than the kingdoms of this world?

Isaiah 49:6-7, 22-25

I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

⁷ This is what the LORD says—
the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel—
to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation,
to the servant of rulers:

“Kings will see you and stand up,
princes will see and bow down,
because of the LORD, who is faithful,
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

²² “See, I will beckon to the nations,
I will lift up my banner to the peoples;
they will bring your sons in their arms
and carry your daughters on their hips.

²³ Kings will be your foster fathers,
and their queens your nursing mothers.
They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground;
they will lick the dust at your feet.
Then you will know that I am the LORD;
those who hope in me will not be disappointed.”

²⁵ But this is what the LORD says:
I will contend with those who contend with you,
and your children I will save.

²⁶ Then all mankind will know
that I, the LORD, am your Savior,
your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”

Prayer:

O God, you made us in your own image and have redeemed us through Jesus. Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which often infect our hearts. Break down the walls that separate us. Unite us in bonds of love so that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

“The Book of Common Prayer”

Saturday – December 23
Mary's Song



Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called^[a] the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be

unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail.”

³⁸ “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

Sunday – December 24th Christmas Eve



Luke 1:46-55

“My soul glorifies the Lord

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—

holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him,

from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;

he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones

but has lifted up the humble.

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things

but has sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,

remembering to be merciful
⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”

**Join Us for Christmas Eve Services at St. Peter's Lutheran Church,
Cochrane At 4:00 pm, 7:00 pm, 10:00 pm**

December 25th – Christmas Day



Luke 2:1-20

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ²(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

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

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

