



“We Meet God”
Stories from Scripture
And
The Congregation of
Saint Peter’s Lutheran Church
Cochrane, Alberta
December 2024

Advent 2024



Christmas is the time of the year when we remember that God has met us in human history. During this advent season we will examine moments in scripture where God revealed himself and prepared us for his coming. We meet Him through Creation and the Word. He is the God of the general and the particular; the God of the whole world, and the one who knows our DNA.

This devotional is meant to be a companion to the daily Advent videos beginning December 1st to the 24th. We will be featuring the stories of people in our congregation who meet God in various ways. These stories will be added to a "Living Directory" which will be a collection of all our stories collected over the past five seasons. You will be able to access these in the new year through the St. Peter's website. You are more than a picture in the directory; you are someone who has met God. Thank you for sharing your journey with us.

***And the Word became flesh and lived among us,
And we have seen his glory,
The glory as of a father's only son,
Full of grace and truth.
John 1:14***

Website: <https://saintpeters.ca/>
Advent 2024

Contact: office@saintpeters.ca
Daily e-mails will begin December 1, 2024
Contact Tim Bauer at the above e-mail to be included in the list

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With special thanks to Elaine Buss, Marg Bowen and Kathy Thorneycroft

Sunday, December 1st
Meeting God in Creation



In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so.

Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so.

And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky." So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so.

God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. (Genesis 1)

Paradise was created for us to enjoy and bask in God's presence and love. C.S. Lewis says,

This desire for our own far off country [is] the secret which hurts so much. . . The secret we cannot hide and cannot tell, though we desire to do both. We cannot tell it because it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience. . . [Beauty and longing] are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never visited. ("The Weight of Glory")

This is our final destination. The beginning and end of our story.

**We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.**

(T.S.Eliot, "The Four Quartets")

Prayer: LORD God, we see you in the beauty and complexity of nature. It is an open book that inspires us as we walk in the cool of the evening down quiet pathways. There is a longing in our hearts to meet you and be restored to the Garden. May that longing open our hearts and minds to seek you during this advent season. Amen

**Monday, December 2nd
Meeting God in Exile
Adam and Eve**



They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"

He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of

which I commanded you not to eat?"

The man said, "The woman who you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" . . .

Therefore the LORD God sent [them] forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which [they were] taken. (Genesis 3:8-13;23)

We were created to live in harmony with God in a lovely garden where all our needs were met. God was knowable and present, spending time with us in the cool of the evening. This was the culmination of His work—Creature and Creator delighting in each other's presence. But free will, so necessary for a loving relationship, opened us to other choices that lead away from God's perfect plan. As the Apostle Paul states in his letter to the Romans:

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned. . . (Romans 5:12)

Humanity was cut off, incapable of overcoming the curse of sin and death. God removed himself from our presence and we floundered under our new-found freedom to choose our own destiny. We could no longer meet with God on our own terms—He had to find a way to bring us back.

Prayer: Dear LORD, we want to hide from you when we are ashamed of life choices. But we can't forget the time when we knew you as a child before the allures of life captured our hearts. Faithfully you follow us into our self-imposed exile, calling our name and saying, "Where are you?" Never give up on us or those we love who are still hiding. Amen

Tuesday, December 3rd
Meeting God in Disasters
Noah



Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth.

Make yourself an ark. For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die.

But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark. Then God said, to Noah, "Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you.

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, nor will I ever again destroy every living creature. When the rainbow 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. This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth. . . As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter. . . day and night shall not cease."

(Genesis 6-9 paraphrased)

Noah met God in a time of crisis and trusted him to preserve his life and restore the earth. How close we came to ending the story right then and there. Just as God saved humanity through the ark, the Apostle Peter describes how Christ is our boat that brings salvation through his death and resurrection.

After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. (1 Peter 3:19-20)

Prayer: Dear Lord, in times of disaster we call out to you for mercy and helplessly wait for you to save us. In these crisis points, prayer is our thread that keeps us from fear and despair. We climb into your boat and ask you to still the storms raging in us and strengthen our faith. Amen

Wednesday, December 4th
Meeting God Through His Covenants
Abraham



Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:1-3)

God needed to establish a people group through whom he could reveal himself to the whole world. Abraham was an unlikely choice to be their patriarch, but God found in him someone who listened to his voice and obeyed. Even when it seemed unlikely that he would be the father of any children, let alone an entire nation, he continued to believe that God would fulfill his promises. The Apostle Paul states: He believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. (Romans 4:13-21)

Abraham met God through faith and he believed in spite of the circumstances. When he tried to take matters into his own hands by using Hagar, an Egyptian slave-girl as a surrogate, it caused disruption in the home and resulted in the alienation of an entire race of people who are the ancestors of modern day Arabs. It was only when he had given up on the hope of having a son with Sarah that God visited him and promised that a baby would be born to them within the next year. It was impossible for Abraham and Sarah to understand the birth of Isaac as anything but a miracle.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, when we walk by faith we are at your mercy to answer our prayers and keep us in your care. It is easy to have faith when we can do something to make it happen but when there is no clear path forward, you test our faith and cause us to depend entirely on you. Give us the grace to believe in answered prayer. Amen

**Thursday, December 5th
Meeting God in the Wilderness
Hagar**



After Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. . . and she conceived. Then Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my slave-girl to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!"

But Abram said to Sarai, "Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she ran away from her.

The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, and he said, "Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai."

The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her. I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude. Now you have conceived and shall bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael, for the LORD has given heed to your affliction.

"You are El-roi (God who sees). Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?" Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. (Genesis 16)

(After the birth of Isaac, Hagar was sent away into the wilderness, but God protected her)

The angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him."

God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and become an expert with the bow. (Genesis 21)

Hagar was the victim of poor choices made by Abraham and Sarah. They used her to produce a child when it was evident to them that God needed a little help. The time for child-bearing was over; Abraham believed the promise God had given that he would be the father of many nations, and yet he had no children. For Hagar, there was joy in having Ishmael and giving Abraham a son. There was also a sense of rivalry with her mistress that resulted in her being sent away. The wilderness experience was the death of her dreams, but God found her there and restored her to Abraham's household. She was given a second chance.

Prayer: God, thank you that you see everything and care for us even when we are the victim of circumstances. You draw near to us in our disappointment, at our lowest point, and comfort us. You are the God of second chances. You never give up on us, sometimes turning us around and giving us hope when all seems lost. We clutch hold of your presence and care. Amen

Friday, December 6th
Meeting God in Good News
Sarah and Abraham



The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread." Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

"Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he said.

Then one of them said, "I will surely return to

you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh."

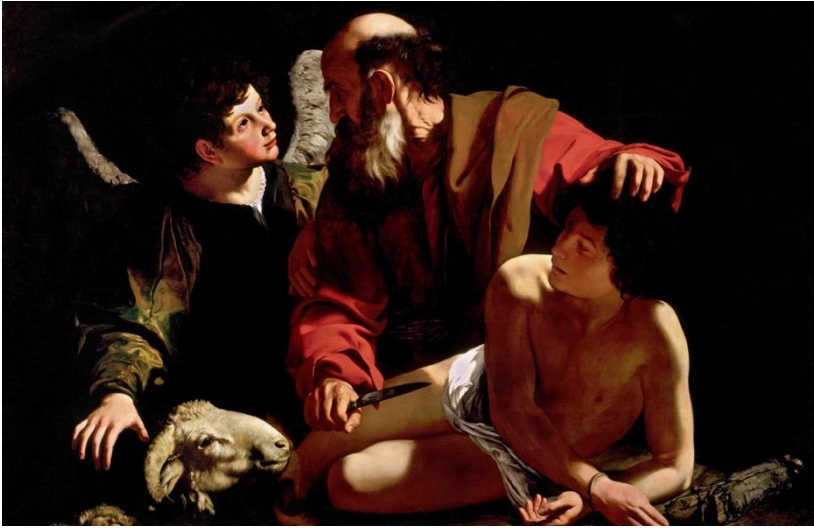
But he said, "Yes, you did laugh." (Genesis 18)

The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. . . Now Sarah said, "God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." And she said, "Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." (Genesis 21)

There are times in our lives when God steps in and changes the narrative for the better. The unexpected surprises are often the best because they are seen as a "gift" rather than a reward for our hard efforts. It may come in the form of a partner when it seemed we would be alone; or a child when we were childless; or a new job when we faced rejection; or a positive report when our prognosis seemed bleak. He is the God of the impossible and he cares about our deepest needs, even when we have given up hope. Like Sarah, we laugh for joy when he blesses us.

Prayer: LORD, we are leaky vessels, full of disappointments and fears. When our best efforts and faint hopes come to an end, we surrender our dreams and resign ourselves to "No." But it is at moments like these when you step in and surprise us with your grace. Your plans are often better than we could imagine. As we look back on our lives, help us to be thankful for your interventions that exceeded our small ambitions, and give us faith to trust in the future. Amen

Saturday, December 7th
Meeting God Through Testing
Abraham and Isaac



Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son

Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, “I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.” (Genesis 22)

God will not ask us to deliberately sin: adultery, theft, covetousness, idolatry, or murder are contrary to his nature. But it seems that he asks Abraham to do exactly that by taking Isaac to the mountain. In the end, God produced a ram to prevent Abraham from offering Isaac as a human sacrifice. Why? Did Abraham get it wrong? Did God change his mind? This event is often described as a “test”—how far are you willing to go?

Prayer: LORD, we don't like to be pushed to the edge, especially if it doesn't make sense. When we leave our safety net behind and walk into the unknown future, you are asking us to trust in your mercy and love. We pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” We trust in your goodness and faithfulness. Give us the courage to believe. Amen

**Sunday, December 8th
Meeting God in the Ordinary
Rebekah and Isaac**



Abraham was now very old, and the Lord had blessed him in every way. He said to the senior servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had,

“The Lord, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father’s household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, ‘To your offspring I will give this land’—he will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from my homeland.

Then the servant left and made his way to the town of Nahor. He had the camels kneel down near

the well outside the town; it was toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water. Then he prayed, “Lord, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. May it be that when I say to a young woman, ‘Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink, and I’ll water your camels too’—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master.”

Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again.

Rebekah met the test. The servant asked her to take him to her family. When her family heard how God answered his prayers, they replied,

“This is from the Lord; we can say nothing to you one way or the other. “

Then they said, “Let’s call the young woman and ask her about it.” So they called Rebekah and asked her, “Will you go with this man?”

“I will go,” she said. So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse and Abraham’s servant and his men.

Now Isaac went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching. Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel and asked the servant, “Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?” “He is my master,” the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself. Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death. (Genesis 24)

Rebekah was given the choice of marrying a man she had never met in a far-off country or staying home with her family and continuing her life in Haran, the land of Abraham’s birth. She chose to leave the familiar behind and trust that God would be with her as she followed his leading. It takes faith and courage to leave behind the familiar and go in a new direction. We can be assured that no matter where we go, if we are following God’s leading, he will be with us, and we will experience his love and presence with us. As parents, we can rest on this assurance as we release our children to follow their calling. Go with God.

Prayer: LORD, we know that you are with us no matter where we go. We are comfortable being surrounded by the familiar, but your plans for us may involve a change. If we resist, we may miss opportunities that will bring satisfaction and fulfillment. When we believe in your providence, we can accept new challenges, both for ourselves and our family. Give us wisdom to discern your leading and grant us courage to take the first step in a new direction. Amen

Monday, December 9th
Meeting God in Families
Jacob and Esau



Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" The Lord said to her,

*"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger."*

When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. The boys grew up, and Esau became a skilful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents.

Jacob and Esau couldn't be more different. Jacob recognized the value of being the first-born and tricked his brother Esau into selling him his birthright for a bowl of stew. Together, with his mother, Jacob deceived his father into giving him the blessing that belonged to Esau. Through this blessing, God chose Jacob's line to be one through whom Jesus would be born. The Apostle Paul interprets this as an example of God's compassion and sovereignty:

Even before they had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose of election might continue, not by works but by his call), Rebekah was told "The elder shall serve the younger. I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau." What then are we to say? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy. (Romans 9:11-16)

Jacob was a man who valued God's blessing but he pursued it through deceit and trickery. The blessing Jacob sought came with a price. He endured years of servitude at the hands of his father-in-law, Laban, and barely escaped with his life. In the end it was Esau who showed grace to his brother, by offering love and forgiveness when Jacob finally returned to the land of his birth. The years in between changed them both as they accepted their individual callings.

Prayer: LORD, we are placed in families that do not always function smoothly. We are human and it takes a lifetime to learn obedience and humility. In the messiness of growing up, some are damaged and alienated from each other. Help us to be patient and forgiving with those who have hurt us, and to examine our own hearts to discern where we have been at fault. Let us seek peace and demonstrate grace and love. Amen

**Tuesday, December 10th
Wrestling with God
Jacob**



That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

**The man asked him, "What is your name?"
"Jacob," he answered.**

Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

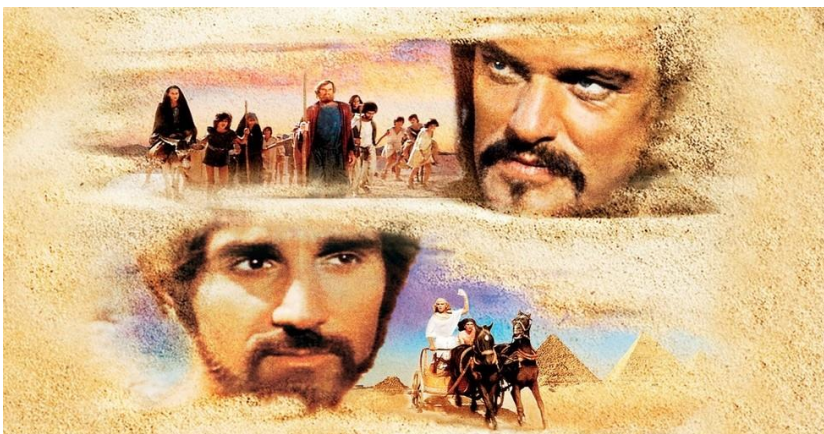
But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." (Genesis 35:22-31)

Before Jacob could return to Canaan and fulfil his divine calling, he needed to make peace with his brother. His family and flocks went ahead of him as a decoy and distraction. But first, Jacob needed to make peace with God. As he schemed about a plan to placate Esau, he rested. That night "an angel of the lord" wrestled with Jacob. They fought through the night until morning when Jacob declared, "I will not let you go until you bless me." At this point it was revealed that the angel was the LORD. He changed Jacob's name to Israel and confirmed his role as the father of Israel. As a reminder of his battle with God, he was left with a dislocated hip that caused a limp for the rest of his life.

Prayer: Dear Lord, before we can have peace with our neighbour, we need to make peace with you. We can be alienated from you for many reasons—some valid, some simply excuses, but regardless, our anger blocks us from fulfilling your calling in our lives and finding peace. Meet us at the point of our hurt, Lord and help us battle through until you bless us. Amen

**Wednesday, December 11th
Meeting God Through Rejection
Joseph**



Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated

him all the more. He said to them, “Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.”

His brothers said to him, “Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?” And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. “Listen,” he said, “I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”

When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, “What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?” His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind. (Genesis 37)

Joseph was the favoured one in the family. He would tattler on his brothers and held himself in high regard. God saw Joseph’s potential and used visions and dreams to prepare him for his ultimate purpose. However, the young man needed to learn humility and graciousness towards others, despite their flaws. God used the resentment of his brothers to preserve and train Joseph in the land of Egypt. They saw their opportunity to get rid of him by tossing him in an empty cistern.

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing—and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it. As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed.

So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

As a slave in Egypt God taught him to resist temptation, obey God’s leading, and be faithful in his work. Through Joseph’s leadership, his family was saved from starvation during the time of famine, and the children of Israel were welcomed into Egypt under Pharaoh’s protection. Years later the guests had become slaves in exile and the legacy of Joseph was forgotten. God needed to renew his calling with a new generation.

Prayer: Dear Lord, You have a purpose for each of us, no matter where we come from or what our family is like. At times we experience rejection from those who are closest to us. Help us to be thankful for challenging circumstances that refine our personalities and make us more useful in your kingdom. We submit to your discipline that teaches us to rely on you. You are our true, loving father. Amen

**Thursday, December 12th
Meeting God on Holy Ground
Moses**



Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.”

“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Then he said, “I am the God of your father the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

God said to Moses, "I am who I am. [YAHWEH] This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3)

Moses was raised by Pharaoh's daughter. She had pulled him out of a basket in the bullrushes where he was hidden by his mother to protect him from being killed by the Egyptians for being a Jewish boy. Growing up in privilege he recognized his separate identity as a Jew. He became troubled by the treatment his people received at the hands of the Egyptians. In his rage he killed a slave driver and ran into the desert to hide. There he established a life for himself, married, and became a shepherd.

God was not prepared to let Moses go. His unique position as a Jew in Pharaoh's house qualified him to be the leader of the Israelites. God called Moses to lead his people out of slavery into the land promised to the patriarchs. Through them the great "I AM WHO I AM" would send Jesus Christ into the world to save us all from the bondage of sin and death. In Hebrews, Christ's mission is proclaimed:

We see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of [his] suffering of death. . . so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone and destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. (Hebrews 2:9,15)

Prayer: God you have created each of us with a unique purpose. Your love and grace can be expressed in our lives to a fearful, dying world. You lift us out of slavery into newness of life and call us to share that good news with all people. We do not go alone; you go before us as we encounter the challenge of living in a hostile world. Grant us courage to accept your call on our life. Amen

**Friday, December 13th
Meeting God at the Crossroads
Jacob and Caleb**



It is calculated that the time it took to travel from the Red Sea to Sinai was under three months. The Israelites were on the brink of entering Canaan. Moses sent twelve spies to scout out the land and report back to the people. Ten of them were cautious and warned of eminent danger:

"We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Yet the people who live in the land are strong, and the towns are fortified and very large. . . The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we

saw in it are of great size. We seemed as grasshoppers compared to them." (Numbers 13)

Caleb quieted the people and reported:

"Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it. . . The land that we went through as spies is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. Only, do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they are no more than bread for us; their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them." (Numbers 14:7-9)

But the people lacked courage. As a result of their lack of faith, they refused to act. Moses pleaded with God to forgive them for their lack of faith and he responded:

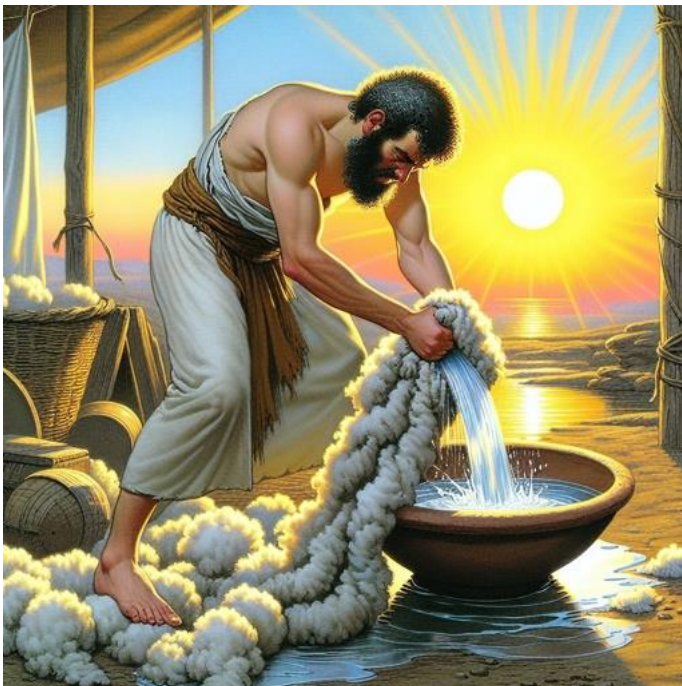
“I do forgive, just as you have asked; nevertheless—as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD—none of the people who have seen my glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have tested me these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors; none of those who despised me shall see it. But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me wholeheartedly, I will bring into the land into which he went and his descendants shall possess it.” (Numbers 14:20-23)

The moment for action had passed. When they realized that they were condemned to die in the wilderness, they mounted an aborted attack in their own strength and were soundly defeated. Resigned to their fate, they settled in the land of Goshen, just outside the promised land, until only the two courageous spies--Caleb and Joshua, were left alive. Not even Moses was allowed to enter.

Failure to act on God’s leading can result in years of wilderness wandering. We have moments when we are called to speak or act courageously. God rewards those who step out in faith and trust him. Forty years later, only Caleb and Joshua were allowed to cross into the promised land from the original Israelites who left Egypt. Joshua took on the mantle of leadership from Moses and Caleb encouraged the people as they entered Canaan and returned to Jericho, to the place where Rahab had given them safety forty years earlier.

Prayer: LORD, when we come to the crossroads in our lives, give us the courage to do the right thing, even though it may lead through troubled paths of uncertainty. Let us discern between what you are asking us to do despite our own fears and misgivings. Lead us to wise counsellors and people of faith and prayer who can walk beside us through these times of indecision. We want to live in the promised land rather than settle for second best in the wilderness. Amen

**Saturday, December 14th
Bargaining with God
Gideon**



When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.” “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.”

The Lord turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?”

“Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.”

The Lord answered, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive.”

Gideon replied, “If now I have found favor in your

eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me.

Gideon used excuses and deflection to avoid being accountable to God. He was chosen to lead the Israelites into battle against the Midianites who were terrorizing his people. At first he offers up resistance, but when he realized he was speaking to the angel of the LORD, he began to bargain.

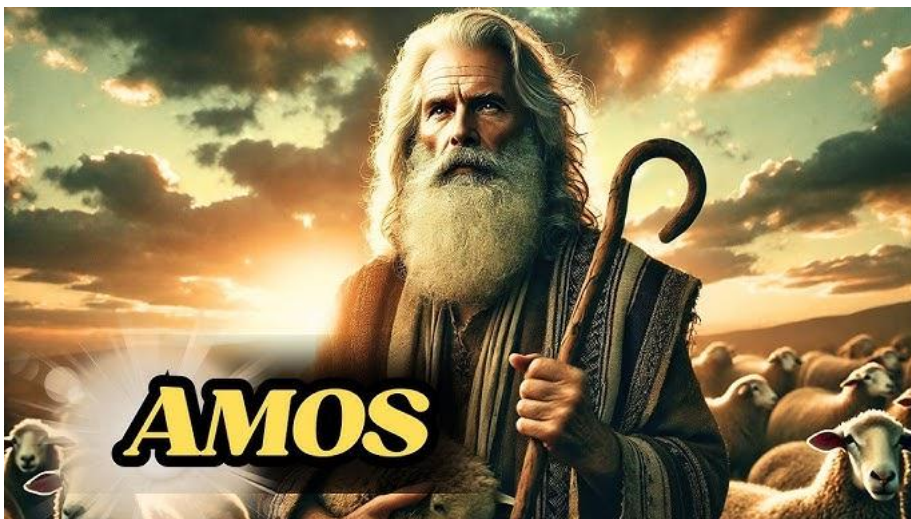
Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised—look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said." And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water. Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew." That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

(Judges 6)

Gideon had run out of excuses. God had passed every test and Gideon had made a bargain that required him to step into leadership. Through God's continued leading, they were able to defeat their enemies and live at peace in the land. Gideon had gambled that God would not answer his challenge. Instead, he was confronted with the power of God to do the unexpected. Reluctantly he stepped into the role God had chosen for him.

Prayer: Dear Lord, it is a dangerous thing to make a bargain with God. But when our faith is weak and our resistance strong, we use excuses to avoid following you. Thank you that you a God that meets us at the point of our doubt and offers a way through the quagmire. Give us grace to surrender to your leading. Amen

**Sunday, December 15th
Meeting God Through the Call
Amos the Prophet**



This is what the Sovereign Lord showed me: He was preparing swarms of locusts after the king's share had been harvested and just as the late crops were coming up. When they had stripped the land clean, I cried out, "Sovereign Lord, forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!" So the Lord relented. "This will not happen," the Lord said.

This is what the Sovereign Lord showed me: The Sovereign Lord was calling for judgment by fire; it dried up the great deep and devoured the land.

Then I cried out, "Sovereign Lord, I beg you, stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!"

So the Lord relented.

"This will not happen either," the Sovereign Lord said.

This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord asked me, "What do you see, Amos?"

"A plumb line," I replied.

Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.

"The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam."

Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: "Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words.

Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom."

Amos answered Amaziah, "I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.' Now then, hear the word of the Lord.

(Amos 7)

Amos did not expect to be called up before the King of Israel to answer for his words. He was a simple shepherd who knew the voice of the Lord. When God began to share with Amos his displeasure with the nation of Israel, Amos interceded for them and God relented. But the time came when God could withhold his judgement no longer, and he used Amos to declare his intentions to the people. The purpose was always to have the people repent and turn from their wickedness, but when that failed, Amos proclaimed God's judgement.

Prayer: Dear God, the purpose of Law and judgement is to get us to face our sins and turn our lives around. We are slow to believe that God is displeased with our actions; we ignore him if our conscience is pricked. But the time comes when there are consequences for our actions. Give us ears to hear and respond to your invitation to repent before it is too late. Amen

**Monday, December 16th
Meeting God Through Love
Ruth and Naomi**



Naomi and her family left Bethlehem for Moab during a famine in Israel. While there, she became a widow along with her two daughter-in-laws, Moabites, who had married her sons. Naomi wanted to go home when her husband died, and she encouraged her daughter-in-laws to return to their relatives in Moab. Ruth made an unusual decision; she stayed with Naomi and swore an oath:

But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May

the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me."

When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?"

"Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me." So, Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning. (Ruth 1)

Ruth's loyalty was rewarded. She adopted the God of the Israelites and worked in the barley fields gleaning grain to feed Naomi and herself. Her faithfulness was not unnoticed, and she caught the eye of Boaz. He spoke kindly to her:

“All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the LORD, the God Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.” (Ruth 2)

Her virtue and love were rewarded when Boaz took her as his wife and they conceived a son, Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David. Boaz, from the line of Rahab the harlot, and Ruth, a Moabite, were the great grandparents of royalty. Through their offspring, Jesus was born. Love won the day.

Prayer: LORD, you don't check with our family of origin before calling us into a relationship with you. No matter how secular or irreligious our family may have been, you overlook that history and speak to us personally. Your love for us draws us into a new family of faith. For those of us who grew up in homes where the faith was lived and taught, we are deeply grateful. Help us to pass that legacy on to our children. Thank you for the privilege of being a child of God. Amen

**Tuesday, December 17th
Meeting God in Nature
David**



David was the youngest son of Jesse, a shepherd boy, who spent most of his days contemplating life in the hills of Bethlehem. He was a dreamer, a writer, a musician, a man who sought God. The first 40 chapters of Psalm are attributed to him. Many of them have to do with nature. He equated the creation with the majesty of God and his provision. David was in conversation with God.

***But you, O LORD, are a shield around me,
My glory, and the one who lifts up my head.
I cry aloud to the LORD,
And he answers me from his holy hill. (Ps.3)***

***When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
The moon and the stars that you have established;
What are human beings that you are mindful of them,
Mortals that you care for them?***

O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! (Ps.8)

***The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside still waters;
He restores my soul.***

He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake, (Ps.23)

When it came time to replace Saul as king of Israel, David was God's obvious choice. He knew that David understood his sovereignty, majesty and power along with his intimacy, love and care. All of this understanding

was needed during the reign of David. While he often failed, he always returned to the LORD for forgiveness, comfort and direction. The lessons learned in the hills of Judea followed him all the days of his life.

When we spend time in nature, our eyes are lifted up to see the power and beauty and magnificence of God. Sitting quietly by a flowing stream or listening to the crash of waves on an ocean beach or walking through the shade of tall trees in a forest are moments when God can speak peace into our hearts and assure us that he is much larger than our small lives. If we ponder what nature teaches us about God, we can almost hear his voice as he speaks in the stillness.

In times of turmoil, a walk through the woods can restore us and connect us with our creator who loves us and lives eternally. Just as David was shaped by his time as a shepherd, we too can put our lives in perspective when we see ourselves as part of God's beautiful world.

Prayer: O Sovereign God, we see in your creation evidence of your eternal presence and faithfulness. Sunrise to sunset, season to season, you are consistent and reliable. You do not depend on us to plant wild flowers or feed the animals of the forest or the fish in the sea. Long after we are gone, the mountains and the prairies will endure, giving testimony to your eternal presence in our world. Give us a longing to take time to sit in silence and consider you. Make us open to see and hear you in all that is around us. Thank you for this beautiful world. Amen

**Wednesday, December 18th
Meeting God in Great Sorrow
Hannah**



1 Samuel 1-2

Because the Lord had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat.

Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord's house. In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, "Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's

misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine."

"Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

Hannah felt a deep sense of emptiness and pain because she was barren. During the family's annual visit to the temple she would pour out her heart to the LORD, despite the assurance from her husband that she was loved. When Eli, the high priest noticed her, he recognized that she was either drunk or distraught and addressed her personally. It was like getting the ear of God. She took Eli's blessing by faith and a year later she returned to the temple with a new baby boy---Samuel.

Hannah did not forget her vow and she gave testimony to priest that God had indeed answered her prayer.

Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.”

**Then Hannah prayed and said:
“My heart rejoices in the Lord;
in the Lord my horn is lifted high.
My mouth boasts over my enemies,
for I delight in your deliverance.
“There is no one holy like the Lord;
there is no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God.**

**“The Lord brings death and makes alive;
he brings down to the grave and raises up.
The Lord sends poverty and wealth;
he humbles and he exalts.
He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
he seats them with princes
and has them inherit a throne of honor.
“For the foundations of the earth are the Lord’s;
on them he has set the world.
He will guard the feet of his faithful servants,
but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness.
“It is not by strength that one prevails;
those who oppose the Lord will be broken.
The Most High will thunder from heaven;
the Lord will judge the ends of the earth.
“He will give strength to his king
and exalt the horn of his anointed.”**

God sees our deepest sorrow, whatever the source. It is in the times when we can’t even articulate a prayer that God listens to our heart. Though the answer is not always instantaneous, he promises to give us peace and the patience and faith to wait. In Hannah’s case she was given a son, but as part of her vow, she gave him up to live in the temple after he was weaned. That boy became Samuel, the great prophet who anointed the kings of Israel.

Hannah’s prayer of thanks is echoed across the centuries in the prayer of Mary when she is promised a son, Jesus. The Magnificat begins:

**My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.**

Prayer: In my sorrow Lord, hear me. Even when words allude me, listen to the cry of my heart and give me peace. I believe in the goodness and faithfulness of the LORD. Be with me as I wait for you to reveal yourself in my hurting places. I give you praise for getting me through the dark times and giving hope. Amen

**Thursday, December 19th
Meeting God In Times of Want**

Elijah and the Widow at Zarephath



In our vulnerability God often makes himself known through the kindness and compassion of others. Whether it is a financial, physical, emotional or spiritual need, God steps in when we come to the end of our resources. God came to the widow at Zarephath through the prophet Elijah. By the miracle of the flour and oil, she received an endless source of food while the prophet stayed in her home. Her needs were provided for and God received the glory.

Sometime later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah: “Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.” So, he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”

“As surely as the Lord your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”

Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.’”

She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. ¹⁶ For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah. (1 Kings 17:7-16)

Prayer: Dear God, thank you that we are never alone or abandoned. You know our needs and use others to extend your love towards us. Give us the grace to accept these provisions as from your hand, and make us sensitive to opportunities for us to pass it on to others. Amen

Friday, December 20th
Meeting God Through Renewal

Ezra and Nehemiah



God judged the children of Israel for their idolatry and apostasy. For seventy years they lived in exile, away from the land and the city of Jerusalem. Nehemiah, a Jew living in exile in Persia, heard about the desolation of the city and was granted permission by the King of Persia to return and rebuild the walls. Along with the building program came a spiritual renewal. Ezra, a teacher of the law, was brought back to remind the people of the covenant that had been broken:

All the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

The Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors. "Now therefore, our God, the great God, mighty and awesome, who keeps his covenant of love, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes—the hardship that has come on us, on our kings and leaders, on our priests and prophets, on our ancestors and all your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until today. In all that has happened to us, you have remained righteous; you have acted faithfully, while we acted wickedly.

"But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our ancestors so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces. Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress.

"In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it."

God has plans to rebuild our lives even when our dreams lie in ruin. The enemy destroys; God creates. As we seek his purpose and leading in our lives and in our community, he raises up people with a vision for the future to lead us forward. The building of St. Peter's came from such a vision. We give God thanks for this place of prayer and for those who were faithful to his call.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we thank you for those who have carried the torch of faith in generations past. Raise up a new generation of men and women who catch the fire of your spirit and build the church through their support and efforts. We cannot do it alone, but there is a message that the world badly needs to hear. Let us be a people who reflect the gospel and provide a place for those who seek you. Amen

**Saturday, December 21st
Meeting God Through his Word**

Lydia



We (Luke and Paul) travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to

Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us. (Acts 16:11-15)

God continues to meet us through his word. After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples on the road to Emmaus and explained scripture to them. "They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road while he was opening the scriptures to us?'" (Luke 24:32)

During Advent we have seen how God meets individuals in different ways, some very ordinary, and some supernatural. The common thread is that their hearts were open and they recognized God's hand in their situation. Isaiah describes it this way:

***Strengthen the weak hands,
And firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
"Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.
He will come and save you.
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
And the ears of the deaf unstopped;
Then the lame shall leap like a deer,
And the tongue of the speechless shall sing.*** (Isaiah 35:3-6)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, keep our hearts and minds open to your presence in our everyday lives. As we approach Christmas, we are especially mindful of the miracle of the incarnation, where God became man and lived among us. As your followers, we know that you are ever present in our hearts and homes as well. We welcome you as a special guest to our table this season. Amen

**Sunday, December 22nd
Meeting God Through Witnesses
Simeon and Anna**

At first, only Mary knew of God's plan to enter the world through her son. Her cousin Elizabeth confirmed the good news before anyone else knew she was pregnant. Joseph was given a special angel visitation, assuring him that the child to be born of Mary was the son of God. The majesty of Jesus was manifest at his birth through the angels, shepherds, and wisemen. And Simeon and Anna confirmed the fulfilment of the ancient prophecy at the temple, on the day Jesus was circumcised.



When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

"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: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary,

his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:22-38)

All these witnesses assured Mary that her newborn son was indeed the promised Messiah. She took comfort in this from the manger to the cross. Through her son, God was revealed to the whole world. The Bible is the story of God's plan from creation to his second coming at the end of time. Their stories are our story—"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

Prayer: Almighty God, we give thanks that you did not leave us in our sin, but chased us down through history, finally becoming one with us in Jesus. It is an unbelievable story from beginning to end, but we bear witness to the truth of this revelation as we experience it in our hearts and as it is reawakened each Christmas. Thanks be to God! Amen

**Monday, December 23rd
Meeting God Through Music
The Soundtrack of Faith**



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

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.”***

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.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Music is the language of the soul. It has become a tradition to stand during the singing of “The Hallelujah Chorus” in deference to the “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” The impact of music is felt at a live concert in the presence of adoring fans. They raise their hands, sway to the music, and look heavenward, much like charismatic congregations during worship service. Whether singing in a choir or listening to music alone in your car, music connects to our emotions and memory evokes a response. For many Christians, music is the prayer language used to praise and approach God. When set to profound words of theology or scripture, music can be the playlist of our walk with the Lord. The shepherds never forgot the “Glory to God in the Highest” they heard from the angels.

Prayer:

***Hallelujah!
For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.
Hallelujah!
The kingdom of this world
Is become the kingdom of our Lord,
And of His Christ, and of His Christ;
And He shall reign for ever and ever,
King of kings! And Lord of lords!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!***

What would be your Christmas soundtrack for all the key players in the story?

Mary
Joseph
Bethlehem and the Manger
The Shepherds
The Angels
The Christ Child
The Wisemen
Christmas morning

Tuesday, December 24th
Meeting God Through Jesus Christ
The Word



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

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1)

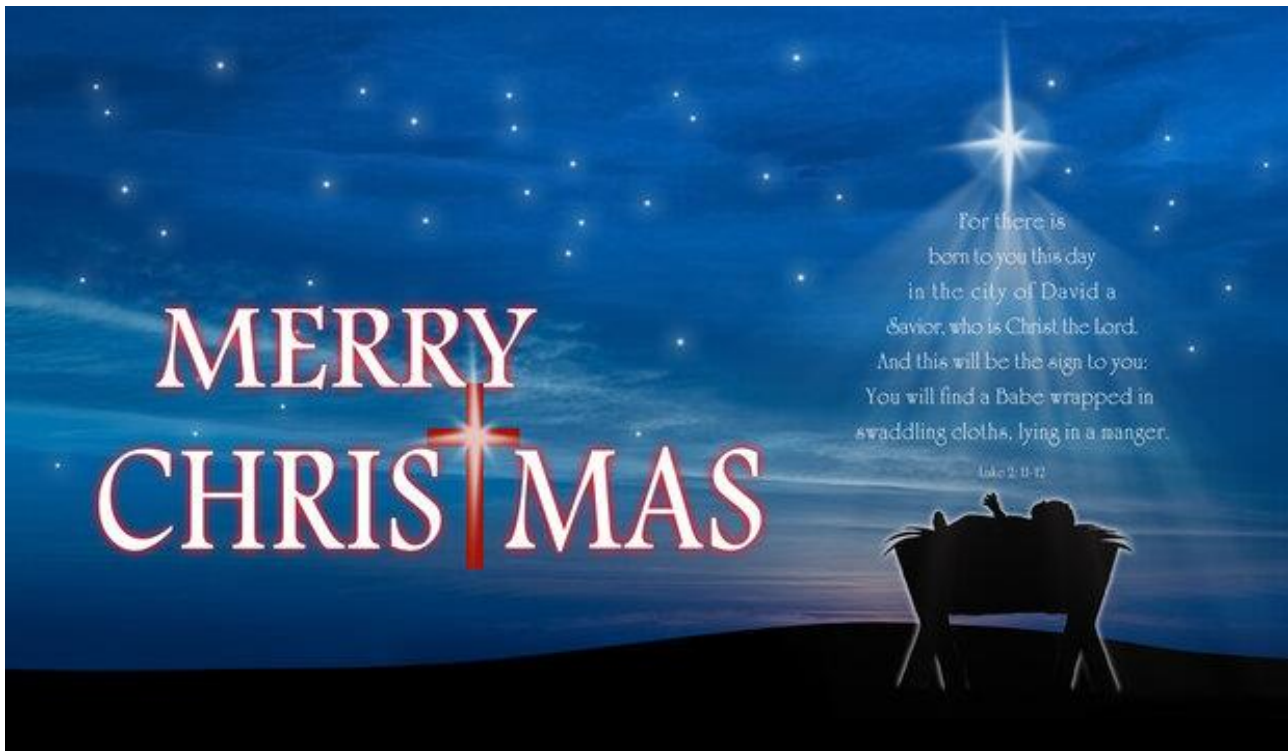
Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

*“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:
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.” (Luke 2:25-32)*

“It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

*The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.”
And let everyone who hears say, “Come.”
And let everyone who is thirsty come.
Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.*

*The one who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.”
(Revelation 22:16ff)*



**MERRY
CHRISTMAS**

For there is
born to you this day
in the city of David a
Savior, who is Christ the Lord.
And this will be the sign to you:
You will find a Babe wrapped in
swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.

Luke 2:11-12

Join Us for Christmas Services this Year at St. Peter's

**December 24th – 4:00 PM – Lead by Pastor Bart
7:00 PM – Lead by Pastor Rick
10:00 PM – Communion by Pastor Rick**

December 25th - 10:00 AM – Communion with Pastor Rick