



ALREADY/NOT YET

**2025 ADVENT
DEVOTIONALS**
REDEEMER CHURCH NC

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GENESIS 3:14-15

FIRST GOSPEL PROMISE – HOPE BEGINS

The Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.'
—Genesis 3:14-15

Main Idea – God has always had a plan to rescue his people from Satan through the Promised Child.

This is one of the saddest chapters in all of the Bible. It details the events where our first parents chose the lies of Satan over the promises of God. Satan told Adam and Eve that they would be like God, knowing good and evil. Before the fall, all they knew was good. Now they had to live with evil. Paradise was lost, but out of this tragedy we see hope for it to be found again.

God is a promise keeper. If he declares something it will come to pass. It is not a matter of if, but when. We see that throughout Scripture, and we see it in a beautiful way here in Genesis 3. From the very first sin, God made a promise. He promised that a child would be born who would be harmed by Satan (the bruised heel) but would eventually deliver a mortal blow to that snake (the bruised head). From this side of the resurrection, we know that happened on the cross, where Jesus died for our sins, defeating sin and death. Theologians call this verse the protoevangelium, because it is the first time that the Gospel is alluded to in the Bible. How cool is it that it happened at the very first sin? God always had a plan.

From the beginning, God made a promise that we live in the middle of today. We know Satan was defeated on the cross, but we still look forward to the day when Jesus returns and makes all things new. We live in the time between the times, the already but not yet, the time between the advents. I think this is why I love the Christmas season so much. We are reminded of the first advent, when Christ came to fulfill the promise of Genesis 3, and it gives us hope to remember that he is coming back again, just like he promised, in the second advent.

We believe in the future promises of the second advent because we have the fulfilled promises of the first advent. God always comes through on his promises. We long for the day when he returns, but it isn't a longing like that of a lovesick teenager, paralyzed in their home. It is a longing that is full of action and engagement. It is joining Christ on his mission – loving one another, remaining steadfast in trial, sharing the Gospel, serving those around you, encouraging your brothers and sisters, living a life of holiness, and staying watchful and prayerful.

That is my prayer for this advent season. That we join Christ on mission. That we live lives of action and engagement. And that we do all of this with glad and joyful hearts because he has come and defeated the ancient serpent, and he is coming again to bring us back to paradise.

ISAIAH 9:2-7

LIGHT IN DARKNESS, CHILD FORETOLD

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. —Isaiah 9:2-7

One of our favorite family traditions at Christmas time is our Christmas Light Tour. The family, all packed in the car (including the dog), peppermint milkshakes in hand, and the navigation set, ventured out seeking the great lights adorning homes that beckon visitors from far and wide. The lights are beautiful, sparkling amidst their backdrop of darkness. In fact, without the darkness, their beauty is lost. Not once has this light tour been done during the day!

Isaiah writes of a time of great darkness in the lives of the Israelites. They were captives living in a foreign land waiting for a savior to set them free. We are like the Israelites. We are a people in darkness. Our darkness comes in the form of sin; it is our captive, and has separated us from God.

But the Lord, in his kindness, has shown us great love by sending us ‘a great light.’ Jesus is this ‘light that has dawned,’ beautifully illuminating the darkness. Through Jesus, we not only have a beautiful light but also great hope, joy, and peace. Unlike our light tour, which lasts only one night, the promise of Jesus’ light enables us to be part of God’s great kingdom FOREVER.

When the second advent comes at Jesus’s return, all of the darkness will be driven from the earth, and only the bright light of the glory of God will shine. So as we longingly wait until that day, we must remember the charge from Matthew 5:14-16, that ‘we are the light of the world’ and ‘we must let our light shine before others.’ The light that’s been put inside us needs to shine into the dark places around us.

So, as you take in the lights of the season, we pray you find true light in the Light of the World. We pray that you will let that light shine through you. We pray that your hearts rejoice, knowing THE Light of the World has come!

ROMANS 5:1-5

PEACE NOW, GLORY LATER

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

—Romans 5:1–5

I was 22 years old when my life felt chaotic and wrong. Friendships didn't feel right, relationships didn't feel right, life didn't feel right and then I had a desire to go to a Sunday service at a local Baptist church. In that hour as I sat there by myself, I experienced the most unbelievable amount of peace. I knew in that moment, "this" is what was missing from my life. And to be honest, I didn't really understand what "this" was, but I knew I wanted it. Within a few weeks of attending, I made that walk down the aisle to profess my faith in Jesus and was baptized soon after.

Our world is filled with conflict, anxiety, pain and heartache. In the midst of this, we often look for peace in relationships, financial success, and social status among other things, but the Bible tells us true peace can only come from faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. This peace isn't dependent on our circumstances or performance but is rooted in the fact that we are reconciled to God because we acknowledge that Jesus took our sins to the cross. He has given us the ultimate gift of eternal life with the promises of what heaven will be like.

This peace that we have can get us through anything. We know what's waiting on the other side for us far outweighs any struggle we may have on this earth. This peace allows us to be able to rejoice in our sufferings. It allows us to reflect who Christ is despite our circumstances, and to do it with joy. We are not alone and never will be. We are anchored by Christ and all we have to do is hold on.

I pray we all have found that peace through Christ and I pray we live it out daily, exuding the character of Jesus in all things. I pray we can experience joy in our sufferings because of the hope we have, but most of all I pray others can see Jesus represented in the way we live. May that lead others to turn to Jesus.

LUKE 1:26-38

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF INCARNATION

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!' But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' And Mary said to the angel, 'How will this be, since I am a virgin?' And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her. —Luke 1:26-38

Most of us know the story of Mary's visit from the angel Gabriel. She was young, probably a teenager, living a simple life in a small town. When the angel appeared, her first reaction wasn't calm acceptance - it was fear. Luke says she was "greatly troubled." I can only imagine her heart racing, her mind spinning with questions: What does this mean? Why me? What am I supposed to do now? That moment feels so human. God interrupts her normal day and brings her a message she could never have prepared for. And before anything else, the angel says, "Do not be afraid."

How many times has God tried to tell us the same thing? When the next step feels uncertain, when the plan we thought we had suddenly changes, we tense up, trying to hold on to control. We want clarity. We want to know what's coming next. But God often meets us right in the middle of that anxious space, asking for our trust rather than our plan.

Mary was given a promise: that she was favored, that God was with her, that His Son would come through her life. She didn't run or demand proof. She stayed, listened, and answered, "Let it be to me according to your word." That single sentence carries both surrender and longing - trust that God's word was true, even if she couldn't yet see what it would mean.

Our lives are full of this same tension. Between school drop-offs and work deadlines, between prayers we've prayed for years and answers that haven't yet come. We live in the space between the promise and the fulfillment. And yet, that's exactly where Advent meets us - in the waiting. In the longing that keeps our hearts turned toward Him.

Let yourself feel both the ache of waiting and the comfort of knowing that God has not forgotten you. His promise still stands. His presence still fills the quiet spaces where you least expect it.

God, I come to You with a heart that's often full – full of plans, full of questions, full of noise. I want to trust You like Mary did, but sometimes my mind races ahead, trying to figure everything out before I take the next step. Slow me down, Lord. Remind me that You are present in my ordinary days, even when I don't feel ready or worthy. When I'm anxious, whisper again those same words You spoke through Gabriel: "Do not be afraid." Let them settle deep into my spirit. Teach me to rest in Your promises instead of my own understanding. When I can't see how things will work out, help me remember that You are already at work behind the scenes, weaving purpose into every detail. Thank You for choosing Mary to carry the extraordinary. Help me to respond with the same faith she had: "Let it be to me according to Your word." Stir up my longing for You. Replace my fear with peace, my hurry with stillness, and my doubt with trust. May my waiting be full of hope, and my days be filled with awareness of Your presence. Amen.

Brittanie Goldsmith

MICAH 5:2-5A

THE RULER FROM BETHLEHEM

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace. —Micah 5:2-5a

We can often look back on our lives and see ways God was working even if we didn't know it at the time. I moved to Dallas, Texas as a young adult, knowing nothing about the city and knowing no one there. I had no idea where to start looking for a place to live. I happened to see a bulletin board ad for an apartment complex. I went to check it out, and it looked OK, so I signed a lease and moved in. When I moved in, I got a flyer from a local church, so I visited and ended up joining as a member. During my time with that church family, I met my future wife, formed other lifelong friendships, and experienced great fellowship and significant spiritual growth. Looking back on it now, if I had not seen that bulletin board ad, would I have met Kim? Would our kids exist? Perhaps those are the wrong questions, because I believe the Lord was at work in how he arranged all the circumstances.

The same sovereignty that God displays in each of our lives was on even greater display in how he planned to redeem us through Jesus. In Micah 5, we see how He inspired someone writing 700 years before Christ to prophesy the precise city where Jesus would be born. God was already working to providentially arrange circumstances so that we could be redeemed through Christ long before he was born in Bethlehem and went to the cross.

Jesus brings peace, as Micah says in verse 5. And we can each have peace with God through believing in Christ's sacrifice for our sins and resurrection from the dead. This advent season, let's praise the Lord for sending Jesus so we can have peace. Let's also focus on how sending Christ for us was the culmination of a sovereign plan and how He is likewise sovereignly working today to glorify Himself through his redeemed people.

JOHN 1:1-5

THE WORD ENTERS THE WORLD

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. —John 1:1–5

There was only darkness. A void. Nothing. Into this scene, God by the word of His power spoke. Onto this black canvas, Jesus the Word, dwelling in perfect unity and fellowship with Father and Spirit, spoke. And then...there was light (Gen. 1:3). And from the light entering the darkness came life. The cosmos came forth – galaxies and planets, stars and streams, Humpback Whales and humans. A world teeming with creatures from the ocean floor to the expanse above. Divine artistry from the Divine Word.

This first scene of the Bible may seem a distant memory from a different time, but John 1:1-5 is an echo of it. Into the bleak landscape of a broken world, Jesus the Word enters. He brings with Him life and light that graciously flows down to mankind (1:4). He is the Word who spoke creation into existence (Gen. 1). He is the Word who became flesh, dwelt among us, and died for us so that we might have life in His name (John 1:14; 20:31). And He is the Word who, even now in this very moment, upholds the universe “by the word of his power” (Heb. 1:3).

Jesus the Word brings life and light, and those of us who once sat in the darkness of debt to sin and the bondage of this broken world rejoice in that truth.

Like the aftershock of a Richter Scale-breaking earthquake, the reverberations of the Word’s entrance into the world reach far and wide. The light of Christ shines into the darkest hearts and the darkest places, and it is not overcome (1:5). This is the great, hope-filled word that comes to us in the Advent season. In a world full of death, destruction, and decay, we have the light and life of Jesus the Word. Sin, Satan, and hell could not overcome. Debilitating disease cannot overcome. News of lost loved ones cannot overcome. The loneliness of an emptier house during the holidays cannot overcome. Dark nights of the soul cannot overcome. “The light shines in the darkness...”

The Word entered the world He made and “delivered us from the domain of darkness” (Col. 1:13). The light of Christ has “shone in our hearts” (2 Cor. 4:6). And one day, when Jesus the Word calls us home to eternal life with Him, He will drive away the darkness for good as He serves as our light (Rev. 22:5).

May your hope be renewed this Advent season as you’re reminded of the life and light that Jesus the Word brings.

GALATIANS 4:4-7

ALREADY SONS, AWAITING FULLNESS

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoptions as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. —Galatians 4:4–7

What does it mean to be chosen?

Whenever I reflect back on my life and my personal walk with Jesus, I typically find myself thinking about the night when I really met Jesus. I was 15 years old and at a summer camp in upstate New York. By this time in my life, I had been told the Gospel countless times, but it wasn't until this night, while looking up over the stars on Saranac Lake, that I felt the love of Jesus Christ. I was always chosen to be a Son, but I had never truly realized my freedom in Christ.

Adoption is one of the key words in this passage. "Adoption" simply means "choosing". While yet being chosen by God, we are adopted into being a child of God. Even in the time of leaving, we were always called to be His. In this season and the leading up to the birth of Jesus, let us reflect on the promise that God has given us. He has called us to be His. Let's be welcoming to all people by being the hands and feet of Jesus. Let's prepare the way for the Lord in ourselves and in our community. Allow ourselves to truly rely on Jesus and the power of the Cross.

We are meant for a purpose, like a glove. A glove is only made for a hand as it is a perfect shape and fit. This is how we are made for Christ. Nothing else will fulfill our lives, nothing else will be a perfect fit, except for Jesus Christ. Take time to reflect on what other things are taking up space in your "glove" this season. Lean into being a child of God and be set free knowing that you have been redeemed.

Father, Thank you for Jesus. Thank you for forgiving me and choosing me as your child. Thank you for bringing me in and showing me unconditional love. May I take your promise and share it with everyone I meet. I pray that your love will continue to grow in me so that I can live my life in full, knowing that I am yours. Amen.

ISAIAH 11:1-10

THE FUTURE HOPE OF A PEACEABLE KINGDOM

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. —Isaiah 11:1-10

The passage before us today is so full of promise and hope. The promise from the stump of Jesse – a Branch from his root that will bear fruit – is Jesus. Jesus' coming is said to have fulfilled over 300 Old Testament promises, and the one before us today is a personal favorite. We currently live in a world that is chaotic and uncertain and divided. It encourages the disheartened to remember that the Spirit of the Lord rested on Jesus. The Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, power, knowledge and the fear of the Lord. It gives us hope to know that Jesus judges with righteousness and justice. In a world of chaos – He is order. In the midst of uncertainty – He is steadfast and true. And when we are divided – He brings unity and peace.

His church – His children, the fruit from the Branch – walk in these blessings of His first coming today, but there is a future day coming when a different kind of peace that we have not known will be the norm. The wolf will be at peace with the lamb, and a child will play near the cobra. They will neither harm nor destroy on His holy mountain. Peace will reign, and the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord. The Lord keeps His promises so we can be sure this will be one day. He will fulfill this promise! So, we look forward to this future Kingdom. But we also live in the present and there is a lesson for us in Isaiah 11. Jesus shows us by His example to do all we can to live at peace with those around us – even those we may consider an enemy. In this Advent season, we have so many extra opportunities to be generous and hospitable. May we also look for opportunities to be forgiving and kind – to go out of our way to make peace. To be sure our conversations are full of the knowledge of the Lord and that our words are full of life and seasoned with grace.

This passage about the Branch and the roots brings to mind the New Testament passage, Ephesians 3:14-19, where we are encouraged to pray that we may be rooted and established in love. God has the power and the will and the resources to establish us before Him as His own.

Lord, please help us to follow your example and be peace makers. Help us to be rooted and established in love and help us to grasp how wide and long and high and deep your love is for us. Help us to know your love and to share your love. May we be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:17-19)

Kim Powell

HEBREWS 2:14-18

CHRIST SHARES IN OUR FLESH

Because God's children are human beings – made of flesh and blood – the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying. We also know that the Son did not come to help angels; he came to help the descendants of Abraham. Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. Then he could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people. Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested. —Hebrews 2:14–18

It's an indescribable feeling. The feeling of waking up fragile. For me, waking up can be the hardest part of my day. Betrayed by my body, my eyes spring open. Suddenly, I'm hit face-to-face with the reality of living with chronic pain and illness. Blinded by my circumstances, it is easy to feel like no one understands me. To somehow convince myself that within the isolation of my pain, I am forgotten.

But a pivotal moment in my journey of physical suffering was understanding the importance of Jesus' humanity. If we undermine Jesus' physicality, we undervalue the way in which He chose to save and redeem the world. Though often diluted, Jesus' humanity is very important. It reminds me that He himself understands my suffering, and is sovereign over every part of it.

Sometimes though, as the pain intensifies, and the future I once envisioned fades to black, I struggle to understand how I am to persevere. Suffering can do that, it can squeeze out of us every last drop of hope we have. In our deepest anguish we can wonder what is really true. The truth that holds me is this – my Savior understands. Jesus was never spared from difficulty. His life on earth was the embodiment of suffering...that was ultimately meant for me.

Remembering this truth helps me shift my focus, and instead of being led by my feelings of fear, I seek to find my comfort and my endurance in Jesus. Even though our lives may be filled with heartache or physical anguish, through our suffering Savior, we are given access to an ending that comes without fear, but expectant joy.

Author K.J Ramsey writes, "Our union with Christ does not rescue us from earthly existence.

Rather it plants our feet on the arid soil of suffering and makes it fertile ground." When my faith is tested at every doctor's appointment, or even at every sunrise, I tend to long for the days that have not yet come. I long for the gift of eternity with my Savior. Though I live in the in-between space of death overcome, and a life of waiting for Jesus' return, I find my comfort in knowing that "my pain has an expiration date, and my promise has a due date."

PSALM 130:1-8

WAITING WITH HOPE

Waiting for the Lord, Hoping in His word. That is a resounding echo in the Psalms.

A year ago, I found myself in a dark place. Grief struck me to my core, and I felt deep sadness. I had walked through, watching someone I loved dearly pass away all too soon. I watched my family feel the pain while stumbling through the decisions and the aftermath of shock. You try and keep going, put on a good face, and carry on, but there is now a hole that appears where someone once stood. In that time of despair, all I knew was that I wanted that feeling to go away. At first, I wanted Jesus to fix everything and make my life the same way it was before. Repair the hole like it never happened. But that is not what I needed, and God knew that.

I found myself drawn to wanting to read the Psalms. Funny, because the year before, in my “reading through the whole Bible in a year” plan, I got to the Psalms and found them hard to get through, and just decided to skip it altogether. So, I passed right over them. In December, Kim Powell had brought over a bunch of books to pass along, and after our young adult group got what they wanted, a book was sitting on my counter. It was a Year of Daily Devotionals in the Psalms. Ok, God had my attention. January 2025 rolled around, and I picked up the book and started Day 1, Hoping in God’s Word and Waiting for the Lord.

Through slowly reading the Psalms, I have learned more and grown more than I ever thought. This process has been a patient, steadfast renewal of trust and joy. Waiting in the Lord is a Holy exercise. One that I don’t know I ever really understood until I found myself in a place where the only way out was day by day, intentionally stopping, reading, listening, and praying. While we wait, we are not just biding our time “hoping” something will change. Instead, we are putting Hope in the One who never disappoints. Instead of busyness, I found myself resting. Instead of distraction, I found my anchor.

While we wait, God is working. Sometimes it feels or looks like He isn’t. It’s like the plant we put in the ground in the fall. We watch it all winter, sit dormant, lifeless on the outside. When all the while under the soil, the roots are growing. The plant is strengthening and getting ready for the Spring. When it finally blooms forth, it has everything it needs to get through the next season and flourish just as The Sower intended. This is us with Jesus - The Sower. Plants grow and produce fruit, but only when they are properly tended to. Sometimes the growth process hurts. Branches are pruned and the plant is hardened off. But why? So new growth can come alive and bloom into something even better than before.

It took almost a whole year to get me to the place I’m in now. It was a lot of dark, tearful nights, and still some tears while I wrote this. But the dawn began to show on the horizon. Before sunrise, watchmen see shadows in the receding darkness that make way for the clear beauty of the full light of Morning. They have no doubt what is about to come. Hope. I didn’t need Jesus to change me back to the old plant, to patch a hole. I just needed Him. I needed His tender care and understanding. I needed His love, affection, joy, forgiveness, and sweet redemption to fully wash over me. Here is the Gospel right in the Old Testament. “With Him is full redemption.” Not only did I get Jesus, the best gift of all. He also gave me redemption. He redeemed what was hurt. Turned darkness into Light. Gave me perspective and strength and showed me how to wait in Hope for Him. As sure as the morning light comes, Jesus is there. Redeemer Church, put your hope in the Lord.

This Advent, are you waiting? Are you waiting for your circumstance to change or waiting for Hope in the promised Redeemer - Jesus Christ, Our lord! The best gift of all. He’s worth the waiting.

Precious Jesus, I pray we will wait for You, hope in Your word, and rejoice in the dawn of a new morning. Amen.

Megan Carmona

LUKE 1:46-55

MAGNIFICAT: JOY IN THE PROMISE

“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped inside her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.” – Luke 1:41

Luke 1:46-55 is Mary’s beautiful song of praise to God. It pours out of her heart after her cousin, Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit (1:41), proclaims her blessedness as the mother of our Messiah. Mary, in response, after what was certainly a tiring journey, discards all fatigue and echoes the prophecy in her song: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,” (1:46-7). Her praise is a prayer of hope and promise. Her praise reminds us of God’s character. Her praise reminds us that we are deeply loved by a holy God. His holiness means He is free from sin and exalted above all creatures. The Lord is perfect, and we are lowly sinners in need of a savior. Yet, He calls us into fellowship with Him “just as he promised our ancestors” (1:55).

This relationship might seem “upside down” from our normal...and it is. We are reminded of this in the latter half of these verses. He “looked with favor on the humble condition of his servant” when choosing a mother for the Messiah, rather than selecting a woman in high society (1:48). The Lord “scattered the proud” rather than honoring them (1:51). “He has toppled the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly. He has satisfied the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.” (1:52-53). God’s kingdom inverts human structures and values, as we see in Mary’s own experience.

We can read Mary’s song and think these are wonderful thoughts. But do we really take what she said seriously? When we do this, the “Magnificat” unsettles us. Why? Because we tend to be proud. Because, though we are not kings nor billionaires, we live lives with authority, and we are not necessarily all that humble. So, Mary’s song can be unnerving to us, as, indeed, it should be. It challenges us to consider our values and goals. “Am I striving for the wrong things in life?” “How much of my life is devoted to seeking security, reputation, and power?” “How often do I hold on to my material blessings rather than sharing them with the poor and hungry?”

I don’t believe the Lord, through Luke, put the “Magnificat” in scripture to make us feel guilty for what we have in the way of possessions or influence. Rather, it calls us to devote our lives to being, like Mary, a willing and humble servant of God. It reminds us that, like Israel, we are called to be God’s servants in the world, serving others as a reflection of Christ and an extension of God’s kingdom, until Christ returns and establishes his eternal kingdom. Mary’s song stirs a desire to live today for what really matters, so that God might use us for his purposes and glory.

In the days before Christmas, there will be many distractions and worries that will battle for your heart. Mary’s song encourages us to step back, to think about our values and our goals. Perhaps this season of Advent can offer a different way, a way of seeking, a way of serving, a way of sacrifice. The Holy Spirit encourages us in the “upside-down” Truth: the great, great God of the universe loves us in our lowliness. He doesn’t love you because you built bridges or dug wells. He isn’t attracted to your riches or your accolades. He loves you because he created you to be loved. Then, when our sinfulness kept us away, He sent His Son in the form of that child in Mary’s womb as our hope and salvation, to take our sins upon Himself so that we could be restored to the Father forever! Amen.

ROMANS 8:18-21

PRESENT SUFFERING, FUTURE GLORY

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.—Romans 8:18-21

The world is groaning.

You can hear it if you listen. You can feel it in your own life... the ache of things not being as they should be. The weight of suffering that can sometimes feel too heavy to bear. In loss. In longing. Paul knew suffering on a first name basis, and yet he writes these words with such confidence: our present pain doesn't even compare to what's coming.

When Paul talks about creation waiting with "eager longing," I can't help but think about winter itself... how the barren trees in my back yard aren't dead... they're just waiting. Under the cold ground, seeds are holding their breath. Everything in creation knows without doubt, something that the curse of sin has tried to make you and me forget: spring is coming. That's us. That's all of creation. We're waiting for the day when everything that's broken gets fixed, when every tear is wiped away, when the groaning finally stops.

But here's what really floors me in this passage... creation wasn't subjected to brokenness willingly. It was subjected "in hope." Even in the breaking, there was a promise. Even in the fall, God had a plan. We know the groaning hasn't stopped quite yet... But it won't last forever. The King is coming. The dawn is breaking. And one day soon, there will be freedom for all of creation. One day soon, the children of God will be welcomed home.

Come, Lord Jesus.

*Now I can see the world is charged
It's glimmering with promises
Written in a script of stars
Dripping from the prophets' lips
But still, my thirst is never slaked
I am hounded by a restlessness
Eaten by this endless ache
But still, I will give thanks for this
'Cause I can see it in the seas of wheat
I can feel it when the horses run
It's howling in the snowy peaks
It's blazing in the midnight sun
Just behind a veil of wind
A million angels waiting in the wings
A swirling storm of cherubim
Making ready for the Reckoning*

Andrew Peterson / "Don't You Want to Thank Someone"

ZECHARIAH 9:9-10

THE HUMBLE KING COMES

Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey - riding on a donkey's colt. I will remove the battle chariots from Israel and the warhorses from Jerusalem. I will destroy all the weapons used in battle, and your king will bring peace to the nations. His realm will stretch from sea to sea and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth. —Zechariah 9:9-10

Zechariah was a prophet called to encourage the Jews returning from seventy years of exile in Babylon. Through his message, God urged His people not only to return to their land but also to return to Him. God promised that if they repented and sought Him wholeheartedly, He would once again dwell among them. Part of this restoration involved rebuilding the temple, and He assured them that He would provide everything they needed for the work—along with His peace, protection, and blessing over the land.

In Zechariah 8, the Lord is called “the Lord of Heaven’s Armies” eighteen times—a powerful reminder to a people who had recently faced severe oppression. God reassures His people that they need not fear their surrounding enemies. In today’s passage (Zechariah 9:9-10) the people are called to rejoice and shout in triumph over God’s work in bringing them home. They are also encouraged to look forward to a future, lasting peace that would come through the Messiah—Jesus, the humble yet victorious King who would conquer sin and death. He would come riding on a donkey which was a symbol of humility, gentleness, and peace.

Today, we live in the tension of “the already and the not yet.” The promise of Jesus’ coming has been fulfilled, and through His death and resurrection we have peace with God. Yet we still wait with longing for the day when He will return to bring perfect peace to the whole earth. As we wait, we can rejoice in the finished work of Christ and live with hope, knowing that one day sin and death will be fully and finally defeated.

God, thank you for the peace and restoration that you have brought to our lives through our good King Jesus. We rejoice in all that you have done while looking forward to the day that you return to bring peace and restoration and make all things new.

PHILIPPIANS 3:20-21

AWAITING TRANSFORMATION

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself. — Philippians 3:20–21

Sinclair Ferguson wrote in his essay “Already and Not Yet:”

“But there’s something else here. It’s that this macro-story is reflected in the micro-narrative of our own lives as Christians. There’s already a D-Day, and there will be a V-Day. There’s a ‘not-yet’ about the Christian life. We live now by faith united to Christ with our sins forgiven, set free from sin’s dominion, but we are not yet set free from sin’s presence. We still live in a fallen world.”

Thanks be to God, who gives the Holy Spirit to live in the heart of every believer at the time of salvation! The Holy Spirit is our promise and the One who can provide us with the strength and the peace we need to be patient, in this waiting, in the middle of the “not yet,” between our knowing Jesus as Savior and awaiting His return as King, even in the midst of a desperately broken and hurting world.

Although we live in the world and witness the consequences of sin all around us, Paul elsewhere tells us not to be “of the world,” and this clash creates friction. Even during this Christmas season, we can feel like we are living as aliens in a foreign land; that is because we are. While we know Jesus as Lord, we are still absent from Him in body until He returns as King and transforms our lowly bodies to be like His, when He subjects all things to Himself in His new Kingdom, where there will no longer be mourning or crying or pain or sin (Revelation 21:4).

Paul follows verses 20 and 21 with Philippians 4:1: “Therefore, my brothers...stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved”. So, in the meantime, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we wait in this “already but not yet” ... patient and ready, not anxious, angry, or apathetic, but trusting and resting in the Father Who alone knows when Jesus’ triumphant return will be (Mark 13:32). Amen.

ISAIAH 40:1-5

COMFORT AND PREPARATION

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 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. A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.' —Isaiah 40:1-5

God is always there.

In a time of captivity in Israel, Isaiah comforts God's people by prophetically speaking of the Messiah who is to come. The first half of the book shows how God is just and therefore there is judgment for sin, but the tone shifts here in chapter 40 to be much more tender. In the Christmas season, I find it is easy to want worldly comfort in things like warm fires, good food, family, and holiday cheer. A time to relax after a year of hard work, and get back to the things that "matter." Or perhaps this year was tough, and this last month is an opportunity to rest. In either case, God's word provides encouragement to look to what Jesus will do (for those in Old Testament times) or has done (for us). It is an extremely comforting thing to me to know that the suffering servant, Jesus Christ, has conquered death so I may have life eternal. It gives strength for each day knowing that my striving is not in vain, and one day His glory will be revealed for all to see.

Romans 5 gives further detail to the fruit produced through suffering:

"Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

We have a God who pours out every measure of his grace so that we are comforted in our suffering. Verses 4 and 5 of Isaiah 40 show how everything will become level for the glory of the Lord to be revealed, as everyone is level at the foot of the cross. I pray that we will return there this season in search of the comfort that we long for.

1 PETER 1:3–9

LIVING HOPE THROUGH RESURRECTION

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. —1 Peter 1:3–9

Gold is seen everywhere in Scripture. It is often used symbolically to represent ideas like purity of faith in Christ. Gold is also depicted literally, as a gift from the Wisemen to honor our newly born Savior, or to show the wealth and power of kings and emperors. Even today, gold is synonymous with wealth. Historically, gold was too brittle to be used in tools and too soft to be used as armor. Gold is and was valuable only because it is precious. It has worth because of what it is, not what it can do. In comparison, Peter points out in verse 7 that our faith is the most precious thing, even more than gold.

When studying the ancient world, historians frequently looked at the currency used by long-gone civilizations, usually gold coins, to find out what these people cared about. Gold was the most valuable and important asset these historic peoples had, so what they did with their gold, their money, demonstrated the priority in their hearts. Most of the time, gold coins were stamped with images of their emperor, king, or gods, because these were the figures that mattered the most. If our faith is to be like gold, yet even more precious, then what is stamped on our hearts? Is the Lord our God the object of our admiration, or are we focused on the trials of today? After it is all said and done, what will you be left with?

Like gold, our faith does not become better by going through the flames of trial. The furnace simply refines by removing that which is not gold. Tribulations do not give us a “greater faith” that saves us extra or makes us more holy. Peter reminds us in verse 6 that our trials only last “for a little while.” It is our faith in the living hope of Jesus Christ alone that will sustain us to make it through trials. One day, our hope will be fulfilled as we see the face of our risen Savior and he wipes away every tear from our eyes as we worship him forever.

MATTHEW 1:18-21

EXPECTATION VS. REALITY

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

—Matthew 1:18–21

In the cold winter of 1904, bells rang in the streets all across Russia. After four daughters, Tsar Nicholas II and his wife, Alexandra, finally had a son to maintain the 300-year Romanov Dynasty. Little Alexei was born into an empire and was the hope of his people's future. But, within weeks, he began to bleed uncontrollably, being diagnosed with hemophilia. This disease would haunt him the entirety of his short life, as his whole family would meet their end thirteen years later in a bloody rebellion. Not the kind of story we are used to hearing during Advent... Expectation vs. Reality.

In Matthew chapter 1, we find a very different birth announcement. There were no bells to be heard, heralding the birth of the king. There was to be no royal palace. No cannons fired in celebration. Joseph encountered an angel of the Lord and was given instructions. His soon-to-be wife was pregnant with a gift from the Holy Spirit. This was the one... the Messiah. His name was to be Jesus. He would save his people from their sins.

The Jewish people had waited centuries for this moment. They expected a warrior-king who would overthrow Roman oppression and restore Israel's kingdom. They imagined armies, a throne, and a crown. Their expectations were high, but reality would be completely different.

Jesus didn't arrive with military might. He came as an infant, born in a borrowed stable. His first visitors weren't dignitaries but shepherds. His nursery wasn't a palace but a feeding trough. The King of Kings entered the world in humility and poverty.

But this was the point.

Unlike Alexei, whose royal birth promised everything but only delivered tragedy, Jesus' humble birth promised nothing worldly but delivered everything eternally. He didn't come to save people from political oppression; He came to save them from sin and death itself. The expectations were shattered, but the reality was infinitely better.

This Advent, be reminded that God's ways are not our ways. Our expectations are often unraveled by His reality. But His reality is always better than our expectations.

This baby in the manger didn't meet anyone's expectations for a Messiah. He exceeded them beyond all measure.

REVELATION 21:1-5

THE NOT-YET: ALL THINGS NEW

Advent is our opportunity to turn our attention to the tension of living between what we know and what we hope for. It's the middle ground between what Christ has already done and the ache we feel as we wait for its completion. In Revelation, John offers us a glimpse into the solid ground that Christ's Kingdom will establish in our lives. No more achiness. No more waiting. All things new.

John writes his letter to churches struggling to bear up under suffering, persecution, and weariness. Things are harder than they anticipated, and the wait for Christ's return is longer than they hoped. He spends 20 chapters encouraging, admonishing, and warning them about trials to come. Things look bleak. But eventually, Babylon falls, the beast is defeated, and Christ reigns. And here John gets to the best part.

In verse 1, the first heaven and first earth have passed away, almost as if they always knew they were temporary. The groaning of Romans 8 has ceased. It is replaced by a new heaven and a new earth with a holy city as the crowning jewel. The new Jerusalem, likened to a bride on her wedding day, is the answer to the cries of generations. Since the garden, God's people have endlessly sought a home to dwell with their Creator. No more slavery in Egypt, wandering the wilderness, or captivity in Babylon. No more in-betweenness. God will establish a place where his people can dwell in safety forever.

Not only will God's people live here, but God himself will dwell with them. In fullness. Forever. This is such an outsized reality that our limited selves struggle to really appreciate its breadth and depth. Since the Fall, God has dwelt with man only in part. Maybe it's His presence behind a curtain four inches thick. Or a man hiding in a rock while He passes by. Or maybe it's Jesus, so shrouded in human flesh that even his own family couldn't see his divinity. These diluted experiences of God's presence were so significant that they marked history forever. But the promise in Revelation 21 is that we will see and know God fully. This is true Shalom: peace, completeness.

In this full and whole place with God's full and whole presence, our pain and suffering are wiped away. The people of God will only know the peace of life with our creator. In this life, we can only dream of such a respite. But God's Word dares us to dream.

This Advent, as we wait in an in-between place, may we rest in the knowledge that our God plans to make all things new and solid and unmistakably whole. He will give sight to our faith. Someday, our eyes will see what our hearts know. And He himself will be our light, illuminating it all.

In the words of the one seated on the throne, "these words are trustworthy and true."

COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

CHRIST SUPREME – ALREADY REIGNING

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. —Colossians 1:15-20

The Firstborn of All Creation... Was Jesus Created??

As you and I well know, the short answer to that question would be no. What is ironic to me is that the heart and motivation behind this hymn, which Paul wrote to the saints of Colossae, was to proclaim Christ's sovereignty and equality with the Father. To address and refute this specific error that false teachers were spreading. They were teaching that Christ was a prominent individual rather than preeminent. Claiming Jesus was just another created angelic being of God rather than God in the flesh. And today, the very same passage is misused and mistranslated to deny the preeminence of Jesus. This is a deeply troubling reality. And yet, this shouldn't surprise us.

"How can anyone ever read this passage, and yet say that Christ Jesus is only a man? By what twisting of words can such language as this be applied to the most eminent prophet or apostle who ever lived? Surely He must be God by whom all things were created, and by whom all things consist." – Charles Spurgeon

Something that I've learned to be true about the nature of Satan is that he often imitates what is holy, twisting reality just enough to lead humanity away from the truth of Jesus. After all, the best lies are 90% true. Paul himself warned in 2 Corinthians 11 that "even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." Throughout history, counterfeit "angels of light" have brought false gospels that deny Christ's eternal nature and minimize the work accomplished on the cross.

We live in the tension between what has been finished and what has not yet been fulfilled. And in this time, I want us to stay vigilant as a church family.

Knowing firstly, and writing onto your hearts these truths: The Messiah has come. The eternal Word became flesh. The Creator entered His creation, not as a created being, but as the Lord over all. He has already conquered sin and death, reconciling all things to Himself by the blood of His cross. You are saved as a result of this reconciliation, not as a result of your deeds, so that no one may boast.

And secondly, in the end, Satan will make himself out to look like our Lord (Revelation 13). Those who know of Christ but choose not to follow Him will see this cheap imitation and be deceived (Matthew 24:24). The world still echoes with false lights and false promises. Sin still tempts, creation still groans, and our hearts still long for His final victory (Revelation 22:20).

Until that day, we hold fast to the One who is before all things, in whom all things hold together. The Firstborn of all creation, the Firstborn from the dead. Our King who was, and is, and is to come.

Nate Daniels

ISAIAH 7:10-14

IMMANUEL – GOD WITH US

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz: 'Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.' But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.' And he said, 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.' —Isaiah 7:10-14

Lord, I ask for you to bless us in the reading of your word. Bless us with deeper understanding and appreciation for the message you wish to have us hear and know.

We as Believers are in a season of preparation and anticipation, the Advent season leading to the celebration of the birth of Jesus. At first glance of the prophecy spoken in Isaiah 7:10-14, I see the coming of Jesus, because I am in a time of Already. We have the story of the Gospel. Matthew 1:22-23 tells us the prophecy in Isaiah came to fulfillment in the birth of Jesus Christ. However, within the context of the book of Isaiah, King Ahaz and his people were not in the time of Already knowing the story of Jesus' arrival. I invite you to look more closely into the 7th chapter of the book of Isaiah and consider some things with me.

King Ahaz is a king of Judah. Ahaz is fearful that the Aramites and the Israelites are plotting to conquer Jerusalem. Isaiah speaks of a sign from the Lord to be looked for. Isaiah delivered a message of 'Do not fear. Have faith'. In a few years' time, the prophecy was fulfilled, when Israel and Aram were destroyed. In the near fulfillment of the prophecy, can you see God reaching toward Ahaz? God is offering an opportunity for the trust and faith of Ahaz to grow as God worked out his master plans.

Today, we know there was another fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, the far fulfillment through the birth of Jesus Christ. The ultimate fulfillment. When we hang onto God's Promises, those already fulfilled and those not yet, we are accepting an opportunity from God to grow in trust and faith. God reached down and offered something to Ahaz – undeserving as he was – and God reaches down to us offering his comfort and promises – undeserving as we are. I have to stand in awe of our God, who always reaches toward us. All we have to do is reach back, in trust and faith, to receive his gift of eternity. We stand in the Not Yet, but not without God working out his master plans. Our scripture offers us reason to patiently trust.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Behold. Believe. Amen.

JOHN 14:1-3

PREPARING A PLACE FOR US

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. —John 14:1-3

December is certainly a time filled with joy, especially for those of us who get to celebrate the birth of our Savior. But for many, the hymns and carols ring out a little emptier. Echoes of those no longer living can burden us as we try to balance the promise of Salvation with the grief of loss. For me, the tension my heart feels in “Already/Not Yet” is the strongest on December 20th each year.

As of the day you’re reading this devotion, it will have been five years since my father died. That first Christmas without him by our side, only five days later, was a surreal day. Honestly most of it is a blur in my memory. The one thing I remember thinking was how beautiful it would be to celebrate my Savior with my dad one day again in heaven.

Jesus, towards the very end of his time physically on earth, promised his followers that he would prepare a place for us. Think about that for a moment. The creator of the universe, the provider of all things, the one who stepped off of his throne and entered this world to provide a way for us to be saved. He came not just to provide a way out of sin, but to provide a way to himself. He goes to make a place we can dwell with him. Live with him. Share a table and a home.

In a world of so much uncertainty, so much heartbreak, so much strife, we know we already have a place. A perfect home with the God who chose to open his presence to us so we can bask in his power and glory, as sons and daughters, heirs to his kingdom.

So today, I encourage you to take your eyes off the world around you. Keep your heart from being dragged down by the state of our broken world. Look instead to your heavenly home. Your Savior is preparing a place made just for you. He has promised that once that place is ready, he will come to bring us to our eternal rest. And forever, we will be with the one who knows our hearts completely and loves us as we are.

ROMANS 13:11-14

WAKE UP! THE DAY IS NEAR

Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. —Romans 13:11-14

Wake up! Paul confronts the Romans with a charge to wake up, as they know the day is at hand. The time between Christ's first coming and his return. It presents us with an uncomfortable question: Are we spiritually awake or sleepwalking through our faith? Just as it was for the Christians in Rome, our default is to sleep, to go through the motions, to be conformed by our sinful nature.

How do we wake up? Put on Christ and "make no provision for the flesh" (v14) or literally, give it no forethought. This isn't just about avoiding the big, obvious sins. It's about casting off the subtle thoughts we entertain that slowly awaken sinful desires. The grievances we replay that feed resentment or entitlement. The comparisons we make that stir envy and pride. The fantasies we indulge that fuel lust or discontentment. We're not just occasionally stumbling into sin; we're mentally paving the road to it, often without realizing it. We're being formed by what we consume, by where we let our minds dwell, by the thoughts we entertain. The worn paths in our brain get deeper every time we walk them. We're not just entertaining sin, we're becoming people shaped by darkness, one unconscious thought at a time.

Notice, however, that Paul doesn't just tell us to stop sinning or only remove all hints of sin from our lives. He tells us to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ", which is becoming who you already are in Christ. Take, for example, the parent-child relationship. The moment your child is conceived, you are a parent. That identity is instant and permanent. But you are continually learning what it means to be a parent: how to love sacrificially, respond with patience, and disciple Christlikeness.

The same is true spiritually. If you belong to Christ, you are already a child of the light and a new creation. Yet we spend our lives learning to live out who we already are, not through our own strength, but through the power of the Holy Spirit. As we daily put on Christ and grow in Christlikeness by the Spirit's power, we become people who love as He does. This is part of Paul's larger call to love one another (v8). When we put on Christ and walk as children of the light, we become people of Christlike love. That only happens as we wake up to who we are in Christ and clothe ourselves with Him daily.

This Advent season, as we wait for the day that is drawing near, may we wake from our spiritual slumber. May we cast off the works of darkness, not through our own strength, but by putting on the Lord Jesus Christ.

May we remember our true identity in Christ, as his image bearers: children of the light, awake and alive in Him.

The night is far gone. The day is at hand.

Wake up. Put on Christ.

LUKE 2:1-7

THE BIRTH IN BETHLEHEM

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. —Luke 2:1-7

The Lord often works through circumstances that we would never expect. On arguably the most important day in human history—the birth of Christ—the Lord moved through a pagan ruler’s decision to call a census so that a prophecy from hundreds of years prior might be fulfilled.

When Micah the prophet first penned the following words, he never would have imagined the means God would use to bring about their fulfillment.

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

Over 700 years prior to the birth of Christ, Micah looked forward to the arrival of the Ruler of Israel—the Ancient of Days—in little Bethlehem of all places. None would have predicted a triumphant prophecy of such magnitude to find its fulfillment in an untimely census and undignified manger. Yet, this is the path that our Lord chose.

This reality reminds us of God’s character, both in the humility of the Savior and in the sovereignty of God to perfectly orchestrate such obscure circumstances for the fulfillment of His promises.

From a human perspective, the Caesar’s call for a census was likely a frustration, or an inconvenience at the very least. The lack of proper housing surely only multiplied the anxiety that young pregnant Mary and her betrothed, Joseph, were already feeling.

In the hours leading up to the birth of Christ, it would be natural for the couple to feel forgotten by God. However, it is within these gritty, anxiety-inducing circumstances that the Lord chose to make good on His promises.

More often than we realize, “unfortunate circumstances” are the means by which God makes good on His promises to us. So when our lives are met with interruptions, trials, or heartbreak, let us be quick to ask the question, “Why, God?” No, not in the sense that we are questioning His character—but in the sense that we are actively seeking out the hand of God in the midst of what might otherwise feel purposeless.

We won’t always be able to discern His purposes, but we can rest assured that just like on that seemingly unfortunate night in Bethlehem, He is lovingly working through all things to make good on His promises.

LUKE 2:8-14

GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST

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.' —Luke 2:8-14

“Do not be afraid.”

The angel delivered a message of reassurance to the shepherds, who were struck with fear by the bright glory of the Lord surrounding them. God chose the shepherds to hear this good news first because this kind of message was only to be received by those who would humble themselves, repent of their sin, and follow Christ. Their life experiences had made them humble. Are we humble enough to accept the Good News of Salvation?

“Good news of great joy for all people.”

This news was presented as a message of profound significance and joy meant to be shared with everyone, not just a select few. It's preserved in Scripture for a deeper reason. Uneducated and unskilled, shepherds were not only considered social outcasts but were also considered spiritually unclean and among the lowest of society. God wants us to see something vital: If there's hope for shepherds, those who are derided and considered lowlives, there's hope for all of us. If Jesus came as Lord and Savior to bleed and die for their sins, then there's hope for you and me in our sins. God thinks we are worthy because of his love for us, as shown by Jesus coming to earth. Do you believe yourself worthy of God's gift?

“A Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”

The angel clearly stated the identity of the newborn baby, identifying him as the Messiah (Christ) and the Lord. Jesus is your personal Savior, redeeming us by his blood on the cross. Will you accept Jesus?

“The sign to find him.”

The angel provided a specific sign to help them find the baby: they would see an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. The Bible, your Church, and your Christian brothers and sisters will show you where to find Jesus. Will you follow their encouragements and directions to your Savior?

“The heavenly host.”

Following the angel's message, a multitude of heavenly beings appeared, praising God and proclaiming, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests”. They sang “glory to God in the highest” to acknowledge that God was in the “highest” heaven and to be worshiped because He is as glorious as He possibly could be. Men or angels can't add to His glory, but we can reflect it when we do His will. How are you doing in your daily worship?

ROMANS 8:23

GROANING AND WAITING FOR REDEMPTION

And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

—Romans 8:23

As believers, Advent is a season of hope. It points back to Christ's first coming and forward to his promised second coming when He will return to make all things new.

The "already" of Advent reminds us that through Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, the barrier of sin that once separated us from God has been torn down. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:5, "He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee." The Holy Spirit within us is our down payment, a divine assurance that the work God began in us will be completed when Christ returns. Just as "firstfruits" indicate the nature and quality of the rest of the crop, Christ's resurrection is a preview of what awaits all believers. We already have the firstfruits of the Spirit, yet we eagerly await the fullness of our adoption as God's children, the redemption and resurrection of our bodies.

We currently live in the "not yet," a time of waiting and expectation, looking toward the day when every wrong will be made right and every tear will be wiped away by Christ's second coming. In this season of waiting, we should reflect on the scripture of Micah 7:7, "But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me." We should strive to have that same confidence that our God will act and have a firm understanding that God has not forgotten you or His promise. Even in the wondering and the longing, God is at work. In *Waiting Here for You*, Louie Giglio reminds us, "Waiting is not wasting when we are waiting on the Lord."

Our longing is not a lack of faith, but it is a sign of faith, a holy anticipation of all that God has promised. During the "not yet," as we look forward to ultimate redemption, may our hearts rest in the hope that one day, we will experience the fullness of eternity with God.

REVELATION 22:1-5

THE CONSUMMATION – HE IS COMING SOON

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. —Revelation 22:1-5

We have finally arrived at this day. All of the planning, all of the prep, all of the build-up, all leading up to this Christmas Day. Our family prays that your day is filled with the joy of Christ, family, friends, laughter and some really good food.

In our home, we open up presents on Christmas morning. Now, these presents have been waiting under the tree for weeks now (unless we are talking about the ones I (Justin) bought for Megan, those were placed last night after shopping). All the presents have a tag on them indicating who they are from and who they are for. Both the giver and the receiver of a gift are excited and full of anticipation. The giver can't wait for their gift to be received with joy; it was something that was specially prepared for them. The gift is the receiver's since the moment it was placed under the tree, and in the moment it is opened, they receive it in full.

In a lot of ways, this is like our passage today. Revelation 22:1-5 describes the consummation of all things. Every promise that was ever made, every event in Scripture, they all lead to this moment. When those in Christ receive in full the gift that was promised since that first sin in the Garden. Just like that gift under the tree, all of us in Christ already have ownership of these verses, we just don't have them in full yet.

Megan, Silas, and I are sitting here in early November thinking about the unspeakable joy we will experience when we walk along the shores of the water of life, this water that gives life because its source is the throne of God and the Lamb. What a thrill it will be to see the tree of life straddling that life-giving water constantly yielding its fruit. What peace we will have to know that people from all tribes, tongues, languages and nations are healed by its leaves. How wonderful to be where there is nothing accursed, because God reigns and rules. To see God's face, to have his name sealing us as his children, to be in the presence of the glory of God shining upon us – we can only imagine. This is a gift worth waiting for.

As sweet as the gifts you are giving and receiving today, they are but a shadow of the ultimate gift that Jesus has prepared for us. So today, let us celebrate the gift of Christ that we already have, and let us look forward to the promises that we have not yet taken hold of.

Christ is born, Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again to make all things new.

Merry Christmas, Redeemer! We love you!

