

The Anticipation of Christ

By PJ Wenzel and Matthew Parker

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Forward

The beauty and intricacy of the one, true, living God cannot be adequately expressed. There is simply no way a book can do justice to the glory of God revealed most clearly in His Son and the redemption through which He will save His people. But I am so very thankful for books that try. You are holding one. And you are about to take you or you and your family on a journey for these weeks leading up to Christmas that could, we pray, change their lives. And yours.

There is nothing more important than Jesus Christ. The place on earth where we can find out the most about Him, where we can find out what *God* wants us to know about Him, is the Bible. My brothers here have undertaken the task of revealing Jesus to you from the pages of Scripture. Jesus is not the center of all Scripture in some abstract way because, of course, the whole Bible is about God. Jesus is the *deliberate* center of all Scripture. God inspired men through His Spirit to write a book that would reveal His Son on purpose. Jesus is the Theme. The Point. The Goal. The Substance. The Interpreter. He is the Treasure that alone can satisfy the human soul. His blood washes us clean. His righteousness makes us righteous. He brings us close to a God we have no business being close to. This book wants to tell you about Him. The men who wrote it have a heart for you to see Jesus as He is unfolded across the pages of Scripture, right up to the moment He becomes a human in the belly of a little virgin girl, and beyond to eternity.

The Bible is not therapy. It is not methodology. It is the revelation of God to man in written form. It is a story of a Father who loves His Son, a Son who loves His Father, and their unified, inexplicable, sovereign desire to save people who don't deserve it. For their glory, for our joy. Christmas isn't commanded in the Bible. Advent isn't a requirement. But they are opportunities to zero in on the beauty and intricacy of God and His Son through His Spirit. I say we grab onto books like these and make them a part of who we are. Walk through these things with your family. Walk through them on your own. Marvel at how wise and detailed and sovereign God is. Wonder at how these things could be. And let your questions drive you to the one answer revealed consistently throughout this book: Jesus. The eternal God. The Creator. The Voice in the burning bush. The True King. True Wisdom. The Promise Made. The Promise Kept. The little baby. The maligned servant. The man of sorrows. The crucified Savior. The Risen and Reigning Lord who will most certainly come again.

Let Advent be an avenue to Him. Enjoy this journey. Treasure the destination.

Tony Romano
Pastor, Gateway Church, Brawley, CA
November, 2013

Preface

The Christmas season is one of my favorite times of the year. I really love the time with family, the worshipful evenings listening to our favorite Christmas hymns, and meditating upon the great gift we were given in Jesus Christ.

My wife Katie knows just how sentimental I become around the season, and I think its because the Spirit of God works in a very acute way during the month leading up to Christmas Day. He is softening hearts and calling us toward a deeper, firmer grasp on the significance of what happened in that manger.

When the Word became flesh, a new age of redemption was ushered in and everything changed. Forever. This short series of devotionals was written with that truth in mind. Our conviction is that the birth of Christ was a long anticipated event, and that all of Scripture leading up to the New Testament is primarily an anticipation of the coming Messiah.

My family grew up reading ‘Waiting Tree’ devotions for Advent, and I enjoyed them because of all the Old Testament stories leading up to Jesus’ birth. However, despite the fact that the stories we read were wonderful, I never understood as a child what they had to do with Christmas.

Therefore, the driving force underlying the devotions you hold in your hand is our examination of the Old Testament’s anticipation of the coming Christ and His Gospel. The excitement and anticipation we feel each year in the days leading up to Christmas Day ought to remind us of the anticipation that the Israelites felt for two thousand years prior to the advent of Christ.

In each devotion you will notice Bible texts at the top of the page. It is from these you will want to read prior to reading the devotion. At the bottom of each devotion there is a “symbol” which you may use for a “Waiting Tree” or “Jesse Tree” that go hand in hand with the lesson. In the coming year or so we hope to add a pattern book that will help you make these symbols for your own tree or banner.

These devotions were written with a younger audience in mind, but the truths to which they point are what theologians spend their lives to fully understand. And that is due to the One about whom they are written. Therefore these are for both young and old, mature Christians, and those just starting out on the Christian journey. I spent several years putting them together (off and on) and for those who pushed me to write these, I thank you for your patience and encouragement! I also want to thank my dear friend, Pastor Matthew Parker who co-authored this small book, and Pastor Tony Romano who has been a friend and mentor to both of us. It was my mother, Lisa Wenzel, who served as editor for the project, and without her wisdom and insight we wouldn’t have gotten this done. Lastly, I want to thank my wife, Katie, for her patience and love for me as I took many hours out of our evenings together to work on this project!

I hope you enjoy this time in study and in anticipation. May the Lord transform your heart and renew your mind in the days that follow.

Soli Deo Gloria!

PJ Wenzel
October, 2013

*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.*

*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, 6-7

All Quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

December 1st

Creation: Man Made in the Image of God

Reading: Genesis 1:26-31

In the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis chapter one, we read something really amazing – it says that God made man in “His image.” Did you know that you were made in the image of God? That sounds a little strange though, doesn’t it – after all, how can you, a human being, be like God who is all-powerful, and all knowing? Well, when the Bible says that God made us “after His own image”, it means that He made us to have character qualities like Him, and to live eternally like Him.

After God made Adam, we learn that God spent time with Him – they walked together every day, and God even considered Adam His son (Luke 3:38). But something went wrong, didn’t it? We’re going to talk a little more about how Adam sinned tomorrow, but for now we need to simply know that because Adam sinned the whole world could no longer perfectly please God or obey Him.

It is a special thing to be created in God’s image, isn’t it? It means that we are made for a special purpose: To glorify God and enjoy Him. The problem is that when Adam sinned, he caused us *all* to be born sinners (Romans 5:12). Every one of us sins now, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). That “image” that God made has been shattered. We have wrecked that beautiful creation.

But there’s good news! When Jesus came, He began to undue the damage of sin, and when we trust in Him as our Savior, He slowly begins the process of repairing the image of God. As Christians we are slowly being made like Jesus – this is what the Bible calls “being conformed to the image of Christ.” Isn’t this wonderful? It means that Jesus is doing what Adam and the rest of us could never do on our own. He’s making us beautiful and acceptable to God so that one day we can stand in heaven “pure” and “spotless.”

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
(2 Corinthians 3:18)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Advent Symbol: A man

December 2nd

The Fall and the Promise

Reading: Genesis 3:1-15

In Genesis 3:15 we read, “He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” When we get a bruise to the head, this can really hurt! In fact a person could die from that, right? What about a bruise to the heel? Could a person die from that? No!

That’s what God told Satan in the Garden of Eden that day when Adam and Eve sinned. God is saying here that Jesus will bruise the head of Satan, that old snake! Jesus will fatally wound him. But all Satan will be able to do is bruise Jesus’ heel. That means that no matter what Satan had up his sleeve it wouldn’t be enough to conquer the power of Jesus.

But we must not forget the seriousness of what Adam and Eve did in the garden. Their sin plunged all people everywhere into sin. The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 5:12 that, “...just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...” Praise God that was not the end of the story! For just as Adam represented all of mankind when he sinned, so too, the “Second Adam”, Jesus, would one day represent our race when He died in our place, on the cross (this is what we call ‘substitutionary atonement’).

It is a wonderful thing that so early in the Bible God tells us about His Son’s future victory over Satan and his evil schemes. When Jesus was born He sounded the victory trumpet of God’s saving plan for humanity. His birth signaled the beginning of the end for sin and death and the so-called ‘Ruler of this World.’

Today we can celebrate God’s victory announcement to Satan in the Garden of Eden by remembering the victory that Jesus accomplished on the cross at Calvary. When Jesus was born, He was fulfilling God’s promise to us to send a Savior. Not only that, but we know that one day Jesus will come back again and banish *all sin and sadness*, and Satan will plague mankind no more. Our celebration this Christmas season commemorates the beginning of God’s plan of salvation: Jesus Christ entered into the world, and brought us great hope for the future!

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

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (Colossians 2:15)

Advent Symbol: A Rock bruising the head of the snake

December 3rd

The Flood: God's Judgment and Faithfulness to Mankind

Reading: Genesis 6:12-18, 7:23, 8:20-22

When God made the world, He made everything “good,” which means that it was perfect. Everything God does is perfect! But when sin entered the world because of our disobedience, things started going down hill. In fact, it wasn't long before many people were sinning all the time – they couldn't *stop* sinning! They didn't want to listen to God, or to obey Him.

So, God decided to tell his servant Noah about a plan to start over – to clean the whole earth of all the sin that had continued since Adam first disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. But God's plan was radical – He would wash away all the sin by sending a flood to cover the whole earth!

The Bible tells us that Noah was a righteous man, which means that he loved God and obeyed God's words. He trusted that God meant what He said about the flood, and so he built the ark just as God commanded. When the flood came, many people died because they didn't trust God. When the rain finally stopped, and Noah's family was safe on dry land again, God set a rainbow in the sky to remind Noah and all the families of the earth that He would keep His promise and never flood the earth again.

Now that you have learned a little bit about Noah, let me ask you: was there any other way to be saved from the flood? No! The people had to get into Noah's ark. Just like during the days of Noah, the world is once again filled with sin and people are dying every day because of it. But once again God has provided a way of salvation! He has sent Jesus to save us from the flood of sin and death that fills our world, and just like the Ark, Jesus is the only way we can be saved.

The Bible tells us that God is faithful to keep His promises. Just like when God “sealed” His promise to Noah with a rainbow, God also promises to save all those who trust in Jesus by “sealing” us with His Holy Spirit. What a great gift! The Holy Spirit helps us understand the Bible, and teaches us to trust in God. When the Spirit comes to live inside of you, you can know that God has rescued you and that one day you will be with Him in heaven – that's a promise!

if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment
(2 Peter 2:5-9)

By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. (Hebrews 11:7)

Advent Symbol: An Ark

December 4th

The Priesthood of Melchizedek

Reading: Genesis 14:17-20; Hebrews 7:1-16

There are so many wonderful truths that we can learn about by reading the Old Testament! One of those truths is how Jesus is our “High Priest.” But what does a priest do? And what about a “high” priest? Well, a priest in the Bible was a man chosen to present offerings to God and to speak to God (through prayer) on behalf of the people of Israel. The High Priest was a special position that men from the tribe of Levi took turns at filling. The High Priest was in charge of the Temple in Jerusalem and made sacrifices on the altar in the Temple for the people of Israel.

The Bible tells us that not only is Jesus *our* High Priest, but that He is the *most important* priest in the Bible, a role that fulfilled many prophecies proving that Jesus is indeed our Messiah (Psalms 110:4; Isaiah 9:7). As our priest, Jesus speaks to God on our behalf when we pray.

Scripture tells us more about this by giving us the example of Melchizedek. Melchizedek is a man that we don’t know a lot about, but we know that he was important – in fact Moses tells us that he was the king of a city called Salem. Some people believe that the city of Salem, which means “peace”, was located in the same spot where the city of Jerusalem is today. Not only was Melchizedek a king, he was also a priest (Genesis 14:18). Even though Abraham’s descendants would serve God as His priests for many years, Melchizedek was a kind of priest that was greater than these men because their patriarch, Abraham, paid Melchizedek a tithe. That means that Melchizedek was a higher priest than Levi, or any of Abraham’s offspring.

The descendants of Abraham offered many sacrifices year after year on behalf of God’s chosen people, the Israelites. But those sacrifices were never meant to permanently cleanse the people from their sins. Instead, they pointed to a future Priest who would make a permanent sacrifice that would cleanse us from sin and bring us peace with God. Jesus is that great Priest who is like Melchizedek because His sacrifice is greater than all the animals ever offered to God by human priests. Jesus offered the ultimate sacrifice to God – Himself – on the altar of the cross.

The story of Abraham and Melchizedek reminds us of how long God’s chosen people waited for a true and final sacrifice, and how much that sacrifice cost God. In this season of peace let’s give thanks for Jesus’ great offering that brought us peace with God.

And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 5:2)

Advent Symbol: An offering

December 5th

God's Promises to Abraham

Reading: Genesis 12:1-7; 15:1-21; 22:15-18

In the Bible we learn that God interacts with His people in a special way. At special times He has made agreements with His people by promising blessing to them, and given them instructions and commands to obey these instructions. These agreements with His people are called “covenants.” Throughout the Bible God deals with His chosen people using covenants. In fact, God has made a covenant with you and me – did you know that? It’s called “The New Covenant,” and we’ll learn more about it, as we get closer to Christmas!

God made a covenant with Abraham that included a three-part promise. He promised him that that his family’s descendants would be as numerous as the stars, that they would inherit a great land, and that through his descendants the nations of the world would be blessed.

The Bible tells us that Abraham believed God’s word, and that just like Abraham, when we place our faith in Jesus, we are counted righteous in God’s eyes. Well what does that mean, exactly? Righteousness is just a long word for “right standing” before God. Because we are all sinners we cannot stand in God’s presence on our own. But God has found a solution for that – He sent His Son Jesus to live a perfect life, and die for our sins. Jesus lived a perfect life for us so that we don’t have to be perfect (because we can’t anyway!).

God kept his promises to Abraham. Millions of men and women have been born from his line, his people inherited the Promised Land after he died, and the nations were blessed by the greatness of the Israelite kingdom for many years before it fell. Even today God is fulfilling these promises by blessing Abraham with spiritual descendants, who are new creations in Christ, and bless the world by the spread of the Good News of Jesus’ saving work on the cross.

Just as God kept His promises to Abraham, He will keep His promises to us. In fact, God always seals His promises with a sign to show us that He means what He says. Abraham was shown the presence of God, as a flaming torch, that passed through several animal pieces. God was saying, “Abraham, I promise never to break my promises, and I love you so much, that if I should ever break my promises may I be torn in half like these animal pieces!” Today seals His promise of salvation by giving us His Holy Spirit. The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are His.

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Galatians 3:7,9)

And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.” Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. (Romans 4:5-10)

Advent Symbol: A flaming torch

December 6th

The Sacrifice

Reading: Genesis 22:1-14

Abraham *finally* had a son, Isaac, just as God promised! God was proving to the world that He is faithful to keep His promises. But one day, Abraham heard from the Lord, and what God asked him to do didn't seem to make any sense. "Sacrifice my son?" Abraham must have thought. "How can this be?" Abraham had waited *so* long for this promised child, and now, just when things were going so well, God was asking Abraham to give up the thing he loved most – Isaac.

Abraham obeyed God despite how difficult it was for him. Abraham obeyed God, knowing that God was even able to raise his son from the dead if necessary (Hebrews 11:19). His faith in God provides us with an excellent example of how we should respond to difficult circumstances in our own lives.

Yet there is a more significant truth for us to uncover in Abraham's story. As they climbed Mt. Moriah that afternoon, God knew that over a thousand years later His Son Jesus would climb that same mountain, located just outside of Jerusalem. The mountain's name had changed over time to 'Golgotha'.

Like Abraham, God laid His only Son upon the altar that day. God spared Abraham from sacrificing Isaac on Mt. Moriah because from Isaac's children would one day come the ultimate sacrifice – the sacrifice Jesus provided on the cross – whom God did not spare in order that we might be saved from the penalty of our sins.

Abraham's trial of faith reminds us that God is faithful to keep His promises – that the covenant God made with Abraham would be fulfilled. Even though we have sinned and broken the covenant, God paid the price for our sins. Remember the flaming torch from Genesis 15? It signified that God would tear Himself apart if either party couldn't live up to their end of the agreement. When we failed, God took upon Himself *our* punishment, and Jesus Christ who was God incarnate was torn for our sins on the cross.

God is a faithful God – a God who keeps His promises, even though it meant that He had to sacrifice His only Son. God has made this sacrifice available to *you*. He desires that *you* believe in His Son who has paid for your sins, so that you may have everlasting life with Him.

"For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:34-36)

Advent Symbol: An altar

December 7th

God's Sovereignty in the Life of Joseph

Genesis 37; 39; 41:1-43; 42:1-13; 45:1-8; 50:18-20

Today we read about how a young man named Joseph was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers who knew that their father, Jacob, loved Joseph more than all of them. God allowed Joseph to dream amazing dreams that offended his brothers. But even while enslaved in Egypt it didn't seem that anything could keep Joseph down. Why? Because he had the Spirit of the Lord in him, and gave glory to God for all that God had given him. No matter how dark or difficult the circumstance, Joseph persevered and God continued to take care of him – even when wrongly imprisoned by Potiphar.

Eventually, Joseph was given an opportunity to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh in Egypt – the most powerful king in the ancient world at the time! By correctly interpreting Pharaoh's dreams God used him to save Egypt from a terrible famine and preserve his own family from which would come the Redeemer and Bread of Life, Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, Joseph showed Godly behavior by treating his brothers, who had greatly wronged him, with mercy and grace instead of taking revenge.

Joseph understood that it was God's purpose and plan to send him ahead of his family to Egypt in order that they might be saved. Even though he suffered greatly at their hands, Joseph still loved his brothers because God had given him wisdom and a heart of love for those who didn't deserve it.

In this way Joseph reminds us of Jesus. Jesus went before his people and suffered so that we don't have to suffer even though we deserve punishment for our sins. Jesus saved us from spiritual famine and death and has delivered his family into permanent rest and peace.

The story of Joseph ought to remind us that sometimes God allows difficult things to happen in our lives for His purposes. Even though God is not the creator of evil and does nothing wrong Himself, He still controls all things, and uses bad things in our lives to bring about joy and His glory in the end. So remember His sovereignty and praise Him that He is in control of all things!

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Advent Symbol: A coat of many colors

December 8th

The Great 'I AM'

Reading: Exodus 1:8-14, 3:1-22

Of all the names for God that we find in the Bible perhaps there is none that is so awe-inspiring as the one we read about in Exodus chapter three. Moses had come before God, who had manifested Himself in the form of a burning bush that didn't burn up. What Moses saw was so wonderful and so amazing that he hardly knew what to think or say.

God spoke to Moses from out of the bush and told him of His plan to use Moses to rescue the Israelites, His chosen people, who were enslaved in Egypt under the cruel reign of Pharaoh (not the same Pharaoh who ruled during Joseph's lifetime).

Moses was so terrified, and unsure of how this mission would go, that he asked God what he should tell the Israelites, saying, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" Then Moses asked God to at *least* give him His name! Moses was unsure exactly what the name of God was - He had only been called 'The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob' until this time, and he knew that the Israelites wouldn't believe him if he didn't at least have a name to call this great God who was speaking to him from the bush!

God's response to Moses is important. He said, "I AM WHO I AM" and "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" This name tells us three beautiful things about who God is. First, it tells us that God is everlasting. God has always been and there is no beginning to Him, He simply "is." Secondly, it tells us that He is not limited to a space or a place. He is everywhere!

What a comfort for the people of Israel to know that the most powerful Being on earth and in heaven, the Creator of all things, was with them and knew about their struggles and their pain. The God who was from everlasting knew their names and had a plan for their deliverance.

Thirdly, this name for God speaks of his holiness. The word "holy" means "set apart" or "other" and this is exactly what the name "I AM" tells us about God. God is saying that He is unlike any other creature or person on earth, He simply "is" – He is self-existent, which means simply that God doesn't need anyone or anything to live. We are creatures who are dependent on God for our lives. We need Him, but He doesn't need anything.

Thousands of years after Moses, Jesus made a very similar and startling claim saying that He was the "I AM" (John 8:58)! This means that when we read about the holy name of God in Exodus 3, we are also reading about the name of Jesus, who would one day rescue His people from of a slavery of a different kind...

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58)

Advent Symbol: Burning Bush

December 9th

God Rescues His People

Reading: Exodus 14:10-31; Luke 4:18-19; Romans 6:16-18

Finally, after 400 years of life in Egypt, and much of it spent in slavery, the Israelites were going to be freed from the oppression of Pharaoh and his taskmasters. As we read in the book of Exodus, God sent amazing and terrifying plagues in order to demonstrate to the entire world that *He* was God and there was no other.

As the people of God made their way out of Egypt (the great exit or ‘exodus’) Moses led them and God guided them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The hand of God was so obvious and so clear that no one – not even the Egyptians – could miss what was going on here. Yet time after time before the children of Israel were freed, Pharaoh hardened his heart against the messengers of God.

This great exodus from Egypt has forever given us a picture of the great exodus that Christ has led – He has brought our souls from captivity to sin into a new and glorious “captivity” to Christ. The Psalmist says, “You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell there” (Ps. 68:18).

When Jesus began His ministry He knew that His mission was like that of Moses...only greater. He came to “set at liberty those who are oppressed” and to “proclaim liberty to the captives”!

Paul describes this great exodus to us in Romans 6, “But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.”

Moses’ mission to lead the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt foreshadowed the great day when our Lord Jesus lead us out of sin and death – into a land flowing with milk and honey!

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” (Luke 4:18-19)

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (Romans 6:16-18)

Advent Symbol: Chains that have been broken/opened

December 10th

God's Perfect Standard

Reading: Exodus 20:1-17

When we find them in chapter twenty of Exodus, God's chosen people, the Israelites, had come out of Egypt and were resting at the bottom of a great mountain. Moses went up the mountain to meet with God and receive His law – the “Ten Words” which we now call “the Ten Commandments.”

These commandments were not *all* of God's laws, but were the most important to their new lives as God's people. God was leading them into the promised land of Canaan and He wanted them to know how to live in ways that would please Him and bring them the most joy. He wanted the Israelites to be a light to the surrounding nations and show people from other countries what it looked like to have a relationship with God.

God promised them that if they obeyed His law they would receive blessings, but if they disobeyed they would receive curses. There was only one problem...the people rebelled. Over and over again they disobeyed the law God gave them. They learned that *no one* could keep these laws.

So God gave the people of Israel a system of sacrifices that reminded them of perfect holiness and His mercy toward their sins. These sacrifices would one day be fulfilled by a final once-for-all sacrifice by Jesus.

The Apostle Paul explained that these laws served the people of Israel as “babysitter” that led them to Christ because they showed the people how much they needed a Savior.

When Jesus came, he obeyed all of the laws of Moses and lived a perfect and sinless life – the only man to have ever done this. Jesus' goodness (called “righteousness”) has been given to us as a gift. Having the righteousness of Jesus doesn't mean that we are perfect, but it *does* mean that we can have a right standing before God when we get to heaven. Because we cannot get to heaven on the merit of our own good works, we have been given the righteousness of Jesus. Smart theologians call this gift from Jesus “imputation.”

Not only has Jesus given us His righteousness, but He has also sent us His Holy Spirit. When you become a Christian, the Holy Spirit comes to live within you and changes your desires so that you *actually want* to obey God. What amazing gifts God has given us! Jesus has fulfilled *all* of the Law of Moses and changed our hearts to match His!

And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. (2 Corinthians 3:3)

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, (Romans 3:21-24)

Advent Symbol: Stone tablets

December 11th

Promises Fulfilled: God Delivers Canaan to Israel

Reading: Genesis 12:6-7; Joshua 5:13-6:20

God is the ultimate Promise Keeper. If God says He is going to do something, He always follows through. God spoke to Abraham and told him that He was going to give the land of Canaan to Abraham's offspring. So when God was ready to give this land to His people, He acted in a miraculous way to keep His promise and bring glory to His name.

When Moses had died Joshua was appointed by God to lead His people into the Promised Land. Joshua led God's people across the Jordan River, but then he was faced with a huge dilemma. Standing between God's people and the Promised Land was the city of Jericho. The Israelites had been living in the wilderness for 40 years, and they had probably never seen a fortified city quite like Jericho. Not only that, they didn't have the weapons or manpower to conquer Jericho.

Joshua was distressed – wouldn't you have been? Joshua knew that God would keep His promise, but he was unaware of *how* God was going to act. But Joshua did exactly what we should do when we need wisdom, he went to God in prayer, and that's when Commander of the LORD'S Army, Jesus, appeared to Joshua saying, "I have given Jericho into your hand." Just as God parted the Red Sea, allowing the Israelites to walk through to safety, God planned to demolish Jericho so His people could walk into the Promised Land in safety.

God gave Joshua a strange battle plan that didn't involve any fighting, but it worked! Sometimes the ways of God confuse us and leave us asking, "Why does God do things this way?" It's times like that when we need to remember Joshua, and trust God for His provision – He will make a way, and always fulfills His promises.

Not long after the victory at Jericho, God's people were able to safely dwell in the land of Canaan. God had given them the land He had promised to Abraham. Unfortunately, God's people sinned and many years later they were carried out of the land.

Eventually God would send His promised Son who would set about making "new creations" out of you and me by the power of His Holy Spirit. Jesus' new creation is a reminder that one day God will renew the whole earth, and we'll reign with Him in that land forever and ever!

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. (Revelation 21:1)

Advent Symbol: A horn

December 12th

The Cycle of Judges

Reading: Judges 2:11-23

The people of Israel were finally in the Promised Land! But there was a problem. Joshua and Moses had died, and the people had no leader. Even worse, they continued to disobey God! But God continued to show them mercy and reveal to them how much they still needed to depend on Him for help.

In the book of Judges we learn that each time the Israelites were in trouble and cried out to the Lord, God would raise up a 'Judge' to deliver them from their sin and the hand of their enemies. The word "Judge" means "deliverer" in the Hebrew language. Each Israelite Judge was sent by God to deliver the people from oppression, and remind them of their need for God's mercy. God gave Israel many Judges, both men and women, who were faithful servants and helped rescue His people from many calamities and enemies.

But no matter how many times God was faithful to His people, they still disobeyed Him. In Judges we read that, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes", which means that no one paid attention to what God wanted them to do. God's laws and instructions were set aside so that people could follow their own ideas and desires. But when this happened, the people of Israel fell into sin, lived in poverty and were even put under foreign rule. This happened over and over again in a cycle that never seemed to end!

The unfaithful behavior of the Israelites shows us how human beings naturally love sin and run away from the wise instruction of God. The people of Israel needed a Judge who would break the cycle of disobedience and deliver them once and for all – we need a deliverer as well. We need a "Judge" who will rescue us from our sin, and rule over us in righteousness and love.

Just as God raised up judges for the Children of Israel in the Bible, God has raised up a Judge for us today – Jesus! Jesus is our great Deliverer who has saved us from our sins and given us His Holy Spirit to help us faithfully obey Him.

Today we can thank God for sending us His greater Deliverer, and ask for His help as we submit to the Holy Spirit and faithfully obey His commands.

*In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.
(Judges 21:25)*

*(Jesus) gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our
God and Father, (Galatians 1:4)*

*He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved
Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13-14)*

Advent Symbol: The recycle symbol

December 13th

A Kinsman Redeemer

Reading: Ruth 1-4

Can you imagine skipping breakfast, lunch, and then even dinner? Having no food to eat is kind of scary, and this is where Ruth and Naomi's family found themselves in our story.

To make matters worse, during the famine Elimelech and his sons died in Moab, leaving Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth as widows. During this time in this culture, being a woman without a husband was very dangerous, and things looked very bleak for Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth.

As we read, Naomi and Ruth heard that the famine in Israel had ended and decided to go back home. Ruth came with Naomi because of her love for her mother-in-law and her love for God.

Still, the life they had as gleaners was a difficult one, and their chances of getting married again were not good. Naomi was likely too old to get remarried, and Ruth was not likely to get married because she was from the enemy land Moab. Things looked pretty hopeless, didn't they...

But God intervened. According to God's sovereign plan, Ruth met a righteous man named Boaz who watched out for her in the fields. Amazingly, it turned out that Boaz was her kinsman because he was a relative of Naomi's husband. When Boaz married Ruth he also became her "redeemer." This is why we call Boaz the 'Kinsman Redeemer.'

Soon after marrying Boaz, Ruth learned that she was expecting a baby – even though she had been unable to have a baby when she lived in Moab with Mahlon. She named her son Obed. Little Obed would one day become the grandfather of the great King David. God made a covenant with David that one of his descendants would be an *everlasting* King and a *Redeemer* of God's people. He would also call them "brothers" because God the Father would adopt His chosen ones into His heavenly family.

Just as Boaz redeemed Ruth from poverty and hopelessness, Jesus redeemed his people from spiritual poverty, and eternal hopelessness, and adopted us into the family of God.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:29)

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" (Galatians 3:13)

For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers (Hebrews 2:11)

Advent Symbol: Barley

December 14th

A Shepherd Boy's Victory

Reading: 1 Samuel 17:20-51

God's people were in big trouble. The Philistine army had a giant of a man named Goliath who was almost ten feet tall and had the biggest weapons the Israelites had ever seen. Goliath's challenge to fight "any man in Israel" sent fear into the hearts of God's people; they looked at Goliath's size and forgot that God was in complete control.

It was a shepherd boy named David who heard Goliath's insults and said, "For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" Unlike the warriors in Israel's army, he was not afraid of Goliath because he knew that God was stronger than Goliath.

David knew that though he was small and not a skilled warrior like Goliath, he had the power and presence of the Lord God on his side. Just as God had helped David protect his sheep from lions and bears in the past, he knew that God was with him still and would give him victory over Goliath. David said, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand..."

David's stone killed Goliath instantly, and he knew that God had delivered Goliath into the hands of Israel.

God had a plan for young David. Even though he was just a shepherd boy, he trusted in God, and God raised him up to be a great king. This story points us ahead 1,000 years to when Jesus faced down His own enemies.

When Jesus was born, not many people would have thought that the King of kings would visit Earth in such a humble way. Just like David, God used the lowliest of families and the humblest of circumstances to showcase His great plan of redemption.

It seems odd that God would use a shepherd boy with a sling to defeat a giant skilled at war, just as it seems odd that God would send His Son to grow up in humility as a carpenter from a small town, and then go on to defeat sin and death – not by riding triumphantly into the cities of the world with a great army, but by dying a painful death on the cross. The Bible tells us that "...God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong." We face giants every day, but like David, we must boast in our weakness, because when we are weak, we are strong. Jesus said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:10)

Advent Symbol: A slingshot

December 15th

The Eternal Throne of David

Reading: 2 Samuel 7:8-16; Acts 2:29-36

King David was a great leader and a “man after God’s own heart.” God loved David and made a special promise to him that from his offspring (his children) would come a king whose kingdom would be everlasting – it would *never end*! This is the promise we read about in 2 Samuel 7, and it is what theologians call ‘The Davidic Covenant.’ The covenant was an agreement between God and the house of David, and David believed that God would keep His promises and one day bring a king to Israel whose reign would never end.

Who is this king? You might have guessed by now that the king we’ve been talking about is *Jesus*! Remember what 2 Samuel 7:14 said: “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.” This could be meant of Solomon, who would be David’s son, but it finds even greater meaning (fulfillment) in David’s greater son – Jesus the Messiah.

When Jesus was born 1,000 years later, this great promise came to pass. And we are told that after Jesus rose from the grave, He ascended up into the heavens and sat down at the right hand of God. That means that right now He is ruling over all creation (Hebrews 1:1-3). He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16).

We know that God kept His promise to David, because Jesus is ruling as King over all things. A ‘sovereign’ is a king or ruler who has absolute control over their kingdom. Jesus is the sovereign over our lives – He is the One in control of all that goes on here on earth. That is why we can rightly say that Jesus reigns over all things.

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. (Colossians 1:15-19)

Advent Symbol: A crown

December 16th

The Wisdom of God in Solomon

Readings: 1 Kings 3:16-28

God came to Solomon and said, “Ask what I shall give you,” and Solomon asked God for great wisdom. God was pleased to give Solomon a wise and discerning mind like the world had never seen before (1 Kings 3:5-9).

As the King of Israel, Solomon was the ultimate judge of the land; many were amazed at Solomon’s wisdom and perceived that it was from God. In fact, Solomon’s wisdom was so great that even the Queen of Sheba traveled to Jerusalem to ask him difficult questions. After testing him, she proclaimed, “The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom, but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report that I heard” (2 Chronicles 9:5-6).

Solomon’s wisdom and power brought his kingdom great riches and prosperity, and for this the Israelites loved and admired him. When Jesus arrived on the scene 1,000 years later and claimed to be “greater than Solomon,” (Matthew 12:42) many people who considered Jesus to be a mere man were offended at this bold statement. The people of Israel did not understand that Jesus was not a mere man; He was Wisdom personified, the Word of God become flesh.

The wisdom of God in Christ is displayed in many ways, but perhaps nowhere more mysteriously than in His plan for the redemption of mankind. In Exodus 34, God said, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” How can God both forgive sins and still not “clear” the guilty? For any mere man (even Solomon), this would be impossible to do, but through the wisdom of God and the redemptive work of Jesus it is possible.

The Bible says that, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” In His wisdom, God punished the guilty by allowing Jesus to take the punishment for our sins on His shoulders and offer eternal life to anyone who placed their faith in Christ for salvation. God forgives our sin because His wrath towards our sin was satisfied in the sacrifice of Jesus. Thus, the wisdom of God is fully realized in Christ alone.

Solomon’s wisdom was great and left many in awe, yet it still paled in comparison to the unsearchable wisdom of God’s plan of redemption in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:30-31)

Advent Symbol: A sword

December 17th

Isaiah's Suffering Servant

Reading: Isaiah 53:1-12; Philippians 2:5-11; John 15:13

For many years the people of Israel wondered when their great king would come. Some looked for a prophet, others for a political ruler. But during the time of Isaiah, it seems the people were too busy to look at all! The people were looking for deliverance, but this time it was from their neighbors the Assyrians who were constantly threatening to invade Israel from the north.

During this difficult time, God gave Isaiah several visions and many prophetic words to speak to His people, yet they did not listen or obey. God had hardened their hearts (Isaiah 6:9-13). But during this time God also told Isaiah about what kind of king He would send His chosen people – and it must have surprised the people to hear what God said.

God told Isaiah that His coming king would be a man of sorrows, would bear our “griefs” and would even be beaten and killed. All of this would happen “by God” according to God’s good plan.

God was telling Isaiah hundreds of years before Jesus came, that the King of kings would be unlike any other king of the earth – He would be humble, He would be meek, and He would bear in His body all the pain that we deserve for our sins. By doing this, Jesus would “bring us peace” with God, and in turn would make *us* peacemakers sent on a mission to reconcile other children to their heavenly Father.

Therefore, one of Jesus’ main missions was to end the “enmity” that was between man and God. Because of our sins, we have been separated from God – the Apostle Paul says we are “enemies” of God before Jesus saves us. Jesus’ mission was to make peace with God’s enemies, (us) and God told Isaiah that He would do this by taking all the beating, pain, and sorrow that we deserve upon Himself.

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

Advent Symbol: Serving hands with cuts on them

December 18th

Jeremiah Proclaims the Coming of a New Covenant

Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:6-13

Jeremiah was a prophet in the land of Judah during the reign of King Josiah in 627 B.C. until about 586 B.C. He is sometimes called the “weeping prophet” because of the difficult messages he had to deliver from God to the Israelites who were disobedient to God.

Even though Jeremiah had to deliver difficult messages, God also had *good news* for Jeremiah to deliver, and that good news was that despite Israel’s disobedience to God’s law, He would one day send a great High Priest to make a sacrifice for their sins – that High Priest was Jesus Christ.

In the Bible, the priest is the one who offers sacrifices and prayer from God’s people to God. He would “mediate” between the children of God and their heavenly Father. Now, Jesus is our priest – He is the only one we need to bring our prayers and offerings into God’s throne room.

During Jeremiah’s time, God saw how much His people struggled to keep the law – they didn’t even want to give Him offerings, and when they did give Him offerings they didn’t do it with a joyful heart.

God saw the hearts of His people, and how they didn’t love Him or His laws. But He had a plan to help His people keep His laws and love one another (and Him!) just as He loved them. God’s new plan was called “the new covenant.” The word “covenant” means something close to the word “agreement” or “promise.” God’s new covenant would involve not only sending His Son Jesus to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sins, but also giving us His Holy Spirit who would write His law upon our hearts.

The people of Israel had the laws God had given them, and they even had the prophets God sent to deliver His messages. But after Jesus rose from the grave and ascended into heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit. The Spirit helps us know what God wants us to do, and helps us obey His law. The Spirit helps us to remember what is in God’s Word, the Bible, and brings God’s truth to our minds when we need it most. What an amazing promise – and what an amazing gift!

Today we live under the ‘New Covenant,’ and we can thank God for giving us His Son and also His Holy Spirit who is our Helper who guides our hearts and minds into “all truth” (John 16:13).

And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. (2 Corinthians 3:3)

Advent Symbol: A heart

December 19th

The Coming Messiah

Reading: Daniel 6:1-24; 9:20-27; 12:2-3

Daniel was a devoted servant and prophet of God. To be a “prophet” means to be someone who speaks for God to God’s people.

Daniel lived in Babylon during a time of exile for the Israelites. Far away from their homeland, the Israelites longed for the day when they would be allowed to go back to their homeland and rebuild the temple.

Just as God delivered Daniel from the Lion’s Den, and just like when the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt and then delivered, the people of Israel needed a deliverer to free them from the Babylonians.

After God delivered Daniel from the Lion’s Den, He gave Daniel a vision which told of a time when the Israelites would be delivered from Babylon – but even greater still, the vision God showed him told of a day when they would be delivered from sin and death!

God was going to send a great “Son of Man” a “Prince” who would make a new covenant with His people. We read yesterday about the new covenant God would make – He was going to write His law on the hearts of His people.

God did exactly what He promised. The Israelites were freed from Babylonian rule, allowed to go back to their home, and even rebuild the temple.

Later God fulfilled the second and greater promise to His people by sending the Son of Man, a great prince who came to rule His people and also to set them free from the captivity that held them in spiritual bondage. That Son of Man was Jesus Christ, and His advent marked the time in history when those who believe upon His name were freed and set free to newness of life.

One day, when Jesus returns, the rest of Daniel’s vision will come to pass, “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:2-3).

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”*

(Luke 4:18-19)

Advent Symbol: Captives being freed

December 20th

Reading: Jonah 1:17-2:10

A Resurrection Preview

The city of Nineveh was perhaps the most wicked city on the face of the earth, but despite their wickedness, God wanted to show them mercy so He could make known the riches of His glory. In order to accomplish His purpose, God told the prophet Jonah to go to Nineveh and warn them of His wrath against their sin.

Unlike Jesus, Jonah did not love the sinners in Nineveh. Jonah knew that God was gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, but Jonah hated the sinners in Nineveh and tried to run away from God so that he wouldn't have to warn them of God's coming wrath.

Jonah learned the hard way that you can't run from God. When Jonah did run, he found himself at the bottom of the sea, and only moments away from death. But God saved Jonah by appointing a great fish to swallow him and keep him safe. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days. During that time, Jonah cried out to God because he understood that God is sovereign, which means he has complete control over all creation—even over the fish of the sea.

Even though Jonah was faithless, God was still faithful. God gave Jonah the faith he needed to pray for forgiveness and heard Jonah's prayer of repentance. So He spoke to the fish and the fish vomited Jonah onto the land. Like Jesus, Jonah was in the clutches of death for three days, before God sovereignly raised him from the bottom of the ocean – just as He raised Jesus from the dead after three days in the tomb.

So Jonah obeyed God by going to the people of Nineveh and warning them to repent or the city would fall to its enemies. After Jonah preached, the whole city repented. To repent means to turn away from sin and go the other way.

The Bible says that we are just like the people of Nineveh. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's perfect standard (Romans 3:23). The Bible also says that because of this, everyone stands condemned to die. However, just as the people of Nineveh needed to hear the message of Jonah in order to be saved from destruction, we also must never forget the good news that Jesus came to save us from our sins. The people of Nineveh believed God and he forgave their sins. If we believe the good news, the Bible says that God is "faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Just as Jonah came out of the belly of the fish, and Jesus walked out of the tomb, believers in Jesus have been risen spiritually and one day receive a glorified body just as Jesus did. Those that believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ will not only be saved from the wrath of God, but will rise again in newness of life, and live forever with Jesus.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:20-22)

Advent Symbol: A big fish

December 21st

God's Messengers and God's People

Reading: Luke 1:26-38

Mary was a virgin; a young and humble servant of the Lord. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, he called her "Favored One." This was an unbelievable honor. In fact, no other woman in history was ever as honored by God as Mary. Why did God choose Mary?

Mary was meek and submissive and trusted God completely. Even though Mary was a virgin, she believed that God, through the power of His Holy Spirit, could conceive a child in her womb. When Gabriel explained to Mary what was going to happen, Mary did not doubt, but told Gabriel, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." The Bible says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." God uses the humble to accomplish His grand purposes so there will be no doubt that He deserves all of the glory.

Mary was most likely overwhelmed by the news she received from Gabriel. She knew that it was physically impossible for her to have a baby, but when Gabriel said, "nothing will be impossible with God," Mary trusted. Mary knew that she was completely helpless in this situation, that God would get all of the glory by using her, a humble servant, to accomplish His purpose.

The incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ is a miraculous event that the world had never seen before and has never seen since. God the Holy Spirit impregnated Mary and she gave birth to the only begotten Son of God. Mary's humility and willingness to be used of God points us to the humility of Jesus himself. The Bible says of Jesus, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9) As humble as Mary was, her humility pales in comparison to the humility of leaving heaven, coming to earth as babe, lying in a manger, and trusting God unto death, even death on a cross.

We must do as the Apostle Paul instructed us, and "imitate Christ." We will all face trials and difficulties in this life. At times, our circumstances will seem impossible. In these times, we must humble ourselves and trust in God, because "nothing is impossible with God."

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. (Luke 1:35)

Advent Symbol: An angel

December 22nd

The Humility of Christ's Birth

Reading: Luke 2:8-20

To be humble means to not think more highly of oneself than one ought, or to have a feeling of insignificance. Perhaps another way to think of humility is being in agreement with God about your place in relation to His glory, and the rest of His created order.

Over 2,000 years ago, when Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem in Judea, Mary wrapped Jesus in strips of cloth and laid him in an animal's feeding trough. Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the world, came to us in the most humble of ways. It is difficult for us to think that Creator of the Universe would become a man, and even harder for us to understand that he would be born in the most humble of conditions. The story of Jesus' birth is amazing because to the world, it must have looked insignificant, but in reality, it was the most significant event ever to take place.

God's Son came into the world without a lot people noticing. In fact, God used men who were not well respected by others to let us know that our Savior was born. Shepherds were men of modest means who were looked down upon by others. So, not only was Jesus born in humble conditions, but also the news of his birth would be told to humble men. This was the greatest news in the history of the world, yet it was not broadcast for everyone to hear. In fact, only people chosen by God were privileged to know about it.

When the shepherds received the good news from the angels, they immediately went to Bethlehem to worship Jesus and began telling everyone the good news of the newborn Savior.

Tonight, as we reflect on the birth of our Savior, let's think about his humble entry into the world. Later in Jesus' life he said that he came to serve, not to be served (Mark 10:45). He was God, but became humble, in order to identify with us, and to live righteously before God in our place. Jesus laid aside the dignity and glory of a king, and lived a perfect life in humble obedience to his Heavenly Father (Philippians 2:6-8).

What He gave up temporarily, we gained for eternity.

There is nothing more important than having faith in Jesus Christ. We should imitate the shepherds and tell everyone we know the good news about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—even if other people think we are foolish. Most importantly, we should imitate Jesus, and have a humble heart and mind so that we can rely on God alone to work through our lives.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:8-12)

Advent Symbol: Manger

December 23rd

Out of Egypt

Reading: Matthew 2:13-15; Hosea 11:1

It didn't take long after the birth of our Savior for His life to be endangered. We read from Matthew's gospel that God warned Mary and Joseph to take Jesus away from Israel and flee to a foreign land in order to preserve His life. God could have sovereignly ordained to protect Jesus from Herod's soldiers, but instead His plan was to show us how intricately He was involved in the life of this baby, and how Jesus was to fulfill every prophesy of the Old Testament concerning the coming Messiah (Isaiah 61:1-2).

Perhaps more than any other time of the year Christmas is an opportunity to marvel at how many Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth – today's passage from Hosea is one such passage. But why is it important that Jesus fulfilled ancient prophecy?

First, it is important because we believe that “the Holy Scriptures chiefly contain what man ought to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man” (W.S.C.), Jesus Himself told us, “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). This means that the Bible is reliable and trustworthy, and that everything that God tells us in His Word is exactly right and truthful.

Secondly, it is important because it shows us that there is a main point of all Scripture, and the main point is none other than Jesus Himself. The Apostle John tells us that the account of Jesus' life was “written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” If we read Old Testament prophets like Hosea and miss Jesus, we are missing the whole point of the Bible, which is God's story about His Son.

Hosea spoke of Israel as the “son” of God, but we have learned that Israel never truly obeyed God's commands. God made promises to Israel, but there was always a need for obedience. The nation of Israel continually broke God's covenant, so when Hosea prophesied “Out of Egypt I called my son,” he was not just looking back at the great Exodus from Egypt, he was pointing ahead to the one true and obedient Israelite, Jesus Christ the Righteous. Jesus had to flee with his parents to Egypt to escape Herod's murder attempt. This same baby whose parents fled to Egypt, would one day lead us in a great exodus out of slavery to sin and death.

The Bible says, “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:20). This means that if by grace through faith you have been saved, everything promised by God to His children is yours – not because you earned it, but because Jesus earned it for you, and has led you out of bondage. We don't have to work to be accepted, we simply have to trust God's Son, who was called out of Egypt and has secured for us “every spiritual blessing.”

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will (Ephesians 1:3-5)

Advent Symbol: Egyptian pyramid

December 24th

The Word Became Flesh

Reading: John 1:1-14

When the New Testament was written, the word the Apostle John used to describe Jesus was “logos,” and in English we translate “logos” as “word.” So we say that Jesus is the “word of God.” Amazingly, the Apostle John tells us that “the Word became flesh” and that “in the beginning was the Word.” That means that Jesus has been around forever; He has always been!

John also tells us that “all things were made through him” – did you know that? Did you know that Jesus is God and that when the earth was formed it was Jesus who “spoke” those things into existence? John tells us that it was Jesus through whom God made all things.

Not only were all things made through Him, but He is also the very embodiment of God’s truth. What does that mean? That means that Jesus was born in order to show us what God was like – to help us understand more about who God is, and who God wants us to be. After all, we were created in His image. And He wants us to be more and more like Him. Everything that Jesus said is truthful and ought to be taken as absolutely perfect and from God (because He is God!).

John says that Jesus was the “light of the world” and that “darkness has not overcome it.” That means Jesus came to shine the light of God’s truth and spread the good news about God’s plan to the world. “Darkness” is used in the Bible to symbolize our sin, and “light” is used to symbolize purity and truth. Jesus was both pure and truthful. He never sinned, and lived a perfect life.

Remember earlier when I said that, “the Word became flesh”? Why is it so important that we think about how Jesus came down to earth as a human being? Why would He do that – especially as a little baby? In His humble birth, Jesus showed that He loves His Father and wanted to please His Father and that He loved us and wanted to save us from our sin.

Think about what it would be like for a great king to step down from his throne, to set aside his beautiful clothes, to not enjoy all the wonderful fellowship and company of those whom he loved so much, and to humiliate Himself by becoming a little baby born to a poor father and mother. Did Jesus deserve this? No, of course not. But because of the love He had for His Father and for us, He did it.

Jesus was once a child Himself. He clothed Himself in humility so that you could become a child of God. If you place your faith in Him, you will be given entrance into His heavenly family!

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

Advent symbol: The word “logos”

December 25th

Prophet, Priest and King

Reading: Matthew 2:1-11; Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Hebrews 4:14-5:6; Isaiah 9:1-6; Revelation 19:11-16

When Jesus was born He was destined to grow up and fulfill three different roles (theologians call them ‘offices’). These three roles were to be our Prophet, our Priest, and our King.

We have already talked a little bit about each of these and how God told His people that one day He would send a great Son of Man, a Prophet, a Prince, a High Priest, a Deliverer, a King who would rule over the House of David forevermore. Now the time had come! Angels appeared in the sky, shepherds learned of the birth, and wise men saw the signs in the sky of the coming of a great king.

The One who was born that night would not only be our great Priest who sacrificed Himself on the cross to pay for our sins, but He would also tell us of the wonderful Gospel of Peace – in this way Jesus was our great Prophet! A prophet is one who proclaims the word of the Lord to His people, and that is exactly what Jesus did during His time on earth.

“Gospel” means “good news” and the good news that Jesus proclaimed to the world was that if anyone would repent of their sins, and follow Him, He would forgive them and come to live within them. Jesus came to declare freedom from sin to all who believe in His name – the baby who was born in Bethlehem would be the greatest Hero the world has ever known.

But He wasn’t just a hero, or a deliverer; He came to proclaim the beginning of a kingdom on earth that would last forever (remember the promise to King David!). Jesus went about proclaiming the “kingdom of God” and telling people that if they repented, not only would He forgive them, He would also grant them a place in His eternal kingdom.

Jesus came to usher in an everlasting kingdom. God’s kingdom is spiritual and unseen, but Jesus also reigns over all that we see as well – He is Ruler over all creation. If you have not trusted in Jesus, and believed that He is the King of kings then you haven’t a moment to lose! Jesus came to give you life – wonderful “abundant” life (John 10:10)! But you need to place your faith in Him. If you can sense that His Spirit is working in your heart now, all you need to do is surrender and ask the King for forgiveness. He will forgive you, and He will love you like you’ve never been loved before! Jesus was born so that you could be born again – once you accept that gift you will be able to “see” His kingdom, and He promises that you will reign forever with Him in heaven. What a wonderful promise, and the greatest Christmas gift ever given!

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 9:6-7)

Advent symbol: The words “Jesus Christ”

*Oh, holy night
The stars are brightly shining
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till He appeared and the soul felt His worth*

*Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother
And in His name all oppression shall cease
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we
Let all within us praise His holy name
Christ is the Lord, let ever, ever praise Thee*