DAILY ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

November 29 – December 25

For unto us a child is born,

Unto us a Son is given;

And the government will be upon His shoulders.

And His name will be called
Wonderful counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of His government and
Peace there will be no end.

Isaiah 9-6-7a

While getting ready for Christmas and Advent this year, I was looking to see if I had an Advent Devotional that began on November 29th and found this one. Even though the introduction was written 22 years ago, I found that it was still relevant today, so I decided to leave it as it is. I hope you find it as relevant as I did.

Merry Christmas!

As Christmas approaches, we are reminded in many ways that it is almost the end of the Millennium. 1999 and then 2000. Many people wonder if this will be the end - the time for the return of Christ. Books are filling the shelves about prophecies and end times. What does the future hold? Will we be ready?

Over this past year I have been reminded in many ways that life is uncertain. My Dad was diagnosed with cancer early this year and has had surgery a few times. The doctors are unsure of what lies ahead for him. My husband was riding his bike early one Saturday morning, a car came up behind him, misjudged and my husband ended up in the Trauma Critical Care Unit at CMC. The doctors didn't know for two weeks if he would even live and if he did what kind of permanent injuries he 'd have. A good friend's sister was diagnosed with cancer last Christmas, within six weeks, she was dead. A young boy, running on the track team, steps off the curb, a car hits him, he dies. The future is uncertain. No one knows what tomorrow holds; no one even knows what the next moment holds. People are worrying if the end will come in a year; for any of us, it may come much sooner.

Many of you may be wondering why I started this with "Merry Christmas." It doesn't sound too Merry so far, but if the truth be known Christmas is far more than 'merry.'

As I sat in the waiting room at CMC, wondering if my husband would live or die, I knew peace. I knew the peace that comes from knowing your loved one is eternally secure. I knew the peace that comes from knowing your loved one's faith rested in Jesus Christ his Lord. I knew that whether my husband lived or died he was in his Savior's hands and that gave me peace.

When I say Merry Christmas, it is because I know why we celebrate. I know that it is not whether I feel happy at this moment or not that counts. I know that we celebrate the greatest gift of all time - Jesus Christ. I know that He - Jesus - was born to come and seek the lost, that He was born to walk among His sheep and call them back to the fold; that He was born to reconcile man to his Creator, that He was born to die and be resurrected so that we might live with Him eternally. I know the truth of Christmas and, in knowing, I have faith, a wonderful gift from God, and with that faith I have the assurance that in both the good and the bad God is with me, for me, and preparing a room for me in His mansion that I may spend eternity glorifying His name.

This Christmas accept the greatest gift ever offered and know that even though life is often full of sorrows, you walk hand and hand with the King Eternal - Jesus Christ.

My prayer is that this study will be used to open eyes to the greatest truth of all time - a baby born in Bethlehem, lived a sinless life, worked miracles, claimed to be the Son of God - the Messiah, was crucified dead and buried and on the third day He rose from the dead, paying the penalty for our sins, bearing the weight of our transgressions, so that we may have life everlasting. This is the truth that sets us free. It doesn't promise riches, it doesn't promise fame, it doesn't promise a problem free life, but what it does promise is reconciliation with God and life everlasting.

The Bible teaches that if we seek we will find, so I encourage you seek with all your heart, pray for faith, and accept the greatest gift ever offered and have a very Merry Christmas.

Advent

The following advent devotional guide will take you through advent and help you focus on the meaning of Christmas. Traditionally, on each of the four Sundays prior to Christmas, advent candles are lit. To do this, you can get or make an advent wreath. An advent wreath is a wreath with a place for four candles around the outside and one in the center. The four outside candles take you through the four Sundays in Advent, Nov. 29, Dec. 6, 13, and 20. Three outside candles are purple and one is rose. Purple is the color of royalty and with it we recognize Christ's majesty. The color rose is to represent God's love and faithfulness. The inside candle is white, symbolizing the purity and holiness of Christ. The candles should be lit in succession, the first week you light the first purple candle. This candle represents prophecy. The second candle, purple also, is lit the second week and it represents Bethlehem, the third one, the rose candle, represents shepherds. The fourth is purple and represents Angels. The fifth, the white candle, is lit on Christmas Eve and represents the light of Christ. The following devotional has scripture references and definitions for the meaning of each candle.

As you go through the devotional, you will find ideas for activities and crafts that will help you focus on the theme of the week. To get the most out of this devotional, it would be good to skim through the activities to see which ones you would like to do and make sure you have the necessary items.

Week One - Prophecy

November 29 – December 5

Sunday — Light the first candle on your advent wreath. This candle is to represent prophecy, God's Word bringing light to the world.

The Bible is full of prophecy. 2Peter 1:20-21 tells us that "no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

God spoke through men to let us know His plans. Throughout the Old Testament of the Bible there are prophecies dealing with all sorts of issues, many dealt with the coming Messiah. These prophecies told what to expect of the coming Messiah; they gave details of his birth, life, and death even though they were written hundreds of years prior to the events.

In the New Testament we read the eyewitness accounts of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. The writers, a varied group of people, tell us what they and others saw and witnessed. These accounts confirm the truth of the Old Testament prophecies.

Advent is not only a time to prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, it is also a time to look forward and remember that Jesus is coming back. For the Christian this should be a day we all hope for and anticipate.

Over the next week we will read scripture verses, prophecies both fulfilled and to come.

Proverbs 9:10-12 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Activities

This week we are going to be reading scriptures about God being the beginning and end of all things, the Alpha and the Omega. One activity you

can do is to make alpha and omega ornaments or cookies using the alpha and the omega symbols (A and Ω).

Make ornaments by using stiff paper or poster board. Cut out the shapes then decorate them using crayons, markers, glitter, paints, etc. You can put contact paper over them to make them more permanent.

Talk about the Greek alphabet and compare it to being the A and the Z of our alphabet. Think of other beginnings and ends; see how many your child/children can come up with.

Prayer

Pray this week for God's workers, for the missionaries, the pastors, and the evangelists who go out and proclaim God's truth throughout the world. Pray also for Christians everywhere, that they would have the boldness to speak and seek truth in all they do.

Bible Study

Sunday - John 1:1-5

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 nothing was made that was made. In Him was life and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

From the beginning of time Jesus, the Word, was. He was there in creation and has been since then. Jesus was not an afterthought of God's, He was God - "the Word was God." From the beginning God had a plan for the birth of Jesus, and He let us know about this plan through the words of His prophets.

Monday - Hebrews 1:1-3

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of

His nature and upholds all things by the Word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Tuesday - Acts 2:14-39

Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power ... This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore, having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear ... Therefore, let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ - this Jesus who you crucified." ...

And Peter said to them "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself."

Wednesday - Acts. 1:9-11

After Jesus' resurrection he appeared several times to his disciples and others. In Acts we read about His last appearance and His ascension. And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; and they also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

Thursday - Matt. 24:3-14

... "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

Just as we seek to know what the future holds, when the end will be, so the disciples wondered what would be and how anyone would know when the end of time was upon them. Jesus tells them of things to watch for (Matt. 3:24, 25 & 26) but he also tells them:

Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.

The future is unsure, but one thing is certain - there will be a day when the Son of Man comes in His glory, ... and all the nations will be gathered before Him... Matt. 25:31-32 and at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of the Father. Phil. 2:10

Friday - IThessalonians 4:13-18

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall be with the Lord.

Saturday - Revelations 20:11-21:8

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away ... And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

And He who sits on the throne said "Behold, I am making all things new."

And He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son."

"And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book (The Bible)." Rev. 22:7

Prophecy tells us what is to come. Old Testament Prophecy tells of a coming redeemer, one who would set the captives free, one who would free us from the bonds of sin and death. The New Testament tells us that Jesus is that Redeemer, Jesus was born to give us life. Other prophecies tell of the future, of the end of time, of the second coming of Jesus, of a new heaven and new earth where there will be no more death, no more sorrows.

At Christmas we remember His birth, but we also remember the purpose of His birth. Jesus was born to come and seek the lost, to walk among His sheep and call them back to the fold, to reconcile man to his Creator, to die and be resurrected so that we might live with Him eternally.

Week Two - Bethlehem

December 6-12

Sunday - Light the first and second Advent candles. The second candle is purple like the first. This candle represents Bethlehem, the place of the birth of Christ.

From of old, God has had a plan. Throughout the Old Testament we are given glimpses of who the coming Messiah, Redeemer of Israel, is to be. Prophecies throughout the Old Testament tell of a Redeemer, a King who would come and set the captives free. This week we will look at what these prophets have proclaimed, trying to understand the truth behind the birth that changes lives.

Activities

Bethlehem means 'house of bread,' an appropriate place for Jesus', the Bread of Life's, birth. This week bake bread. Try several different kinds if you have time or make a special loaf for Sunday dinner.

Prayer

Pray for the Middle Eastern countries. There is a lot of war, violence, and turmoil in that part of the world. Pray for God's peace to prevail.

Bible Study

Sunday - Micah 5:2-5a

This Sunday we light the Bethlehem candle. Thousands of years ago, the prophet Micah told how Bethlehem was to be the place of the birth of Christ. Micah 5:2 says, "He is to be the Ruler whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." In last week's study, we read about Jesus being the beginning and the end of all things. Here in Micah we read that His Bethlehem birth, His ways, were planned "from of old and everlasting". God planned Jesus' earthly birth and told of it, so His followers would know who the Savior was to be.

Monday- Matthew 2:1-15

God's plans are worked out to the minutest detail. Jesus is born in Bethlehem. Wise Men, Magi, come following a star to seek out Jesus and worship Him. King Herod hears of them and seeks them out to find if they know where Jesus was to be born. The Magi tell him, "In Bethlehem of Judea for so it has been written by the prophet." Herod, in his mistaken belief that Roman officials should be the rulers of the Jewish nation, feels threatened and calls for all children under two to be killed. But God protects His plans and has Joseph move Jesus to Egypt, further fulfilling prophecy (see Hosea 1:1).

Tuesday — Isaiah 61:1-3

Many prophecies throughout scriptures tell us what to expect from the Messiah. Isaiah teaches that the Redeemer will come "to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to comfort those who mourn, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." All of this is so "we may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified."

Jesus came to heal the broken hearted, to deliver us from the sorrows that bind us. This was not always what the people at the time of His birth thought. Many was the time when he shocked them with His compassion.

Wednesday - John 8:2-12

Here Jesus is asked to condemn a woman caught in the act of adultery. Jesus' response was one of understanding and compassion, telling the crowd that, "he who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." The crowd left, no one was able to cast the first stone.

Thursday - Luke 5:12-14

A man comes to Jesus, a man ill with leprosy. If a person had leprosy, they were not to be around people; when they came into town, they were to ring bells and cry out to let people know of their condition. Jesus, moved by compassion for this man, reaches out and touches him. What an act of compassion, to touch the untouchable; imagine the love this man knew at that moment.

Friday - Luke 17:11-19

Again, Jesus reaches out to the untouchables. This time ten lepers come to him asking to be healed. He heals them and sends them to show themselves to the Priests. After showing themselves, one of them returns to Jesus to give thanks to God. Jesus asks him, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner? "And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

Here Jesus shows it is not by who we are or who we were born to, but it is faith that makes us whole.

Saturday — Isaiah 53:1-6

In these verses we find that the coming Messiah, the baby born in a manger in Bethlehem, is to be a man "despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." He is to be an honorable man, who is "wounded for our transgressions, … bruised for our iniquities, … and by His stripes, we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, everyone, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him (Jesus) the iniquity of us all."

This Bethlehem baby was born to set us free. He was born to pay the eternal consequence for our sin, so we can have fellowship with the Holy God. We, like sheep, have all gone astray - A child born long ago and far away has given us the greatest gift, the gift of life.

Week Three - Shepherds

December 13 – 20

Sunday — Light three candles on your advent wreath, the first two purple ones and the rose one. The third candle, the rose one, represents Shepherds.

Shepherds are mentioned throughout scripture. A shepherd's job was to protect and care for his sheep. Sheep need guidance, if left on their own they will do things that can injure or kill themselves. The shepherd's care of his flock is used to help us understand God's care for us.

Activities

This week make cookies and shape them into sheep, shepherd's staffs, and candy canes. You can die some rolled cookie dough red and roll it and the plain dough into tubes then twist the red and plain cookie dough into candy canes and bake them.

Another idea is to make 'Chrismon's' for your Christmas tree. A Chrismon is a religious symbol that you can make and put on your Christmas tree. Some examples are sheep (use cotton balls to help make them fluffy), shepherd's staffs, a manger, stars, and angels.

Prayer

This week concentrate your prayers on praising God for all the ways He takes care of you.

Bible Study

Sunday - Ezekiel 34:11-16

Ezekiel is one of the Old Testament prophets who gives us a glimpse of the coming Messiah. In these verses we learn that God has said, "Indeed I myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. ... I will feed my flock and I will make them lie

down. ... I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick."

Last week we saw how Jesus had compassion on the broken, the sick; how he healed and reached out and comforted those He came in contact with. These verses today tell us of God's plan to walk among us, to heal, to comfort, and to protect us.

Monday - John 10:1-16

Jesus speaks in these verses, telling His followers that He is the good shepherd, His sheep know Him and answer when He calls. In these verses He's letting His followers know some of the truth behind His birth; letting them see prophecy fulfilled.

Jesus goes on to tell how a good shepherd, the true shepherd, lays down his life for his sheep. He says He will gather His sheep from the different flocks they are in and, "there will be one flock and one shepherd."

Jesus, God incarnate, walked among us. As a shepherd, He came to gather and care for His flock.

Tuesday — Luke 15:4-7

As we saw yesterday, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who has come to lay down His life for and gather His flock. Today's verses show Jesus' concern for each individual. He compares His care for us to the shepherd who upon losing one sheep, even though the 99 are safe, will go out and hunt for the one. He says when the shepherd finds the one, then he will go back to all of his friends and say come rejoice with me I have found my lost sheep. Jesus says, "as the shepherds rejoice over their found sheep, so much more is the joy in heaven when one sinner repents."

Wednesday - Isaiah 40:10-11

Isaiah tells us, that when the Lord God comes, "He will come with a strong hand. ... He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young."

What a picture of God's care for us. He comes with a strong arm to protect and yet He leads with tenderness and compassion.

Thursday - Jeremiah 31:10-14

Here again we see the image of God as the Shepherd, gathering His flock, caring for them. "For I will turn their mourning into joy, will comfort them and give them joy for their sorrow. ... And my people shall be satisfied with My Goodness, says the Lord."

Friday-Psalm 23

As you read Psalm 23 notice how David reflects on God's care for him. In this Psalm we see a vivid picture of how Jesus, the Good Shepherd cares for his flock.

Saturday — **Revelation** 7:9-17

Over the last several weeks we have looked at what the Bible, the Word of God, has to say about God, about man, and about Jesus. We have learned that God is Holy and that He calls us to live Holy lives. We have seen that we fail, we hurt, we suffer. But we have also seen that God has overcome. With the birth of the Messiah, God has come and walked among His flock, calling His flock home.

In today's verses, we see the outcome, the conclusion of the Birth and life of Jesus. These verses tell us that "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" They tell us that "He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore. ... for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes"

Jesus came to bring comfort, to bring salvation to His flock. Rejoice!

Week Four - Angels

December 21 - 25

Sunday - Light the four outside candles today. The fourth candle is the Angel's candle. The Angel's candle represents God's messengers who have come to the world to proclaim good tidings.

This week is Christmas week. As we read through the "Christmas Story" over the next several days seek God, accept His offer, open the door to your heart and receive the gift of life. Believe, have faith, and be made whole.

Activities

Be messengers for God. Go out to your neighbors and be ambassadors for Christ. Bring them good tidings, tells them we are celebrating the birth of a King, the birth of the Redeemer. Bring them either some cookies, a small gift or homemade craft, or a card and wish them a Merry Christmas.

(2020 Covid-19 – these might not be good ideas this year. Be safe and make sure to wish people Merry Christmas following Covid safety guidelines.)

Prayer

Pray that God's word would be proclaimed boldly this Christmas. Pray that you will remember to take the message of Christmas, the hope of the birth that took place so long ago, with you into the New Year.

Bible Study

Sunday - Luke 1:5-25; 1:57-66

In a small town, a man goes into the temple to take his turn in service and prayer. While there, an angel appears to him and tells him that his wife is going to have a son. Because of his and his wife's age, the man has a hard time believing. He is struck dumb because of his doubt and will not again be able to speak until the birth of his son. At the birth of his son, Zachariah

speaks out and names his son John, as the angel told him to. John is John the Baptist, the "voice of one crying out in the wilderness; prepare the way of the Lord." Luke 3:4 and Isaiah 40:3

Monday - Luke 1:67-80

After his son John's birth, Zacharias "was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant - As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old - Salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; to show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham our father, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways; to give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high shall visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Tuesday - Luke 1:26-38

A young girl, engaged to be married, still a virgin, is greeted by an angel. The Angel Gabriel comes to Mary and tells her she is to have a child. She questions, "how can this be, since I do not know a man?" Gabriel tells her "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called 'the Son of God." Mary responds "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word."

The Old Testament tells us what to expect, what prophecies are to be fulfilled. One of these prophecies was for a virgin to be with child and the child was to be called Immanuel which means God is with us. (Isaiah 7:14)

Wednesday - Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph, a young man, finds out his betrothed is expecting. The Bible says Joseph, "being a just man, and not wanting to make her (Mary) a public example, was minded to put her away secretly." Joseph had a heart of compassion; he did not want to publicly shame Mary, so he decided to quietly put her away. But as he was planning this, an angel came to him and told him, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Then Joseph did as the angel commanded.

Thursday — Christmas Eve — Luke 2:1-7

Light the Christ candle, the white center candle, along with all the other candles on your advent wreath.

A decree goes out from Caesar Augustus and Joseph and Mary have to travel to Bethlehem to register even though Mary is great with Child. "While they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

Friday - Christmas Day - Luke 2:8-20

Light all the candles on your advent wreath.

'Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.'

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly host praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.

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Isaiah 9:6-7a

Merry Christmas!