



## **ST. LUKE ADVENT DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET 2019**

**December 1, 2019**

**"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." Hosea 11:1**

{Hosea tells the story (generally) of a man to whom God said, Go marry this promiscuous woman. He does. It's not easy. She has no appreciation for the sacrifices the man makes, the kindness he shows, the faithfulness he extends. She keeps running off, running after other men. Again and again he goes back after her. It's heartbreaking.}

Our merciful God has loved us, redeemed us, called us. Despite the fact that too often we have run in the opposite direction, our Heavenly Father pursues us and leads us back to Himself with 'cords of loving kindness'. "This way to safety, my child. This way to wholeness, dear one. This way for rest with me, beloved." Still we hold back, unsure if we can trust him. My friends, if you are holding back even a little, still yourself and listen to God's words: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10) These are words of life. Your lack of trust, He can develop that. Your fear, He can quell it. Your pride, He will show you a better way, an easier way. Friends, this Christmas, lay down your (defensive) weapons, your fears, your 'identity' as an independent person, your whatever and give your heart, life, love fully to God. Every last drop, give it to God. Jesus came, emptying himself of his royal status to become like us: Emmanuel, God with us. He has loved you from the beginning of time and has called you out of darkness so that he can give you eternal life. Trust Him. Believe Him.

Lord, help us when we lack faith. Lord, show us Your ways. God above, draw us each to Yourself. Holy Spirit, this Christmas become more real to us than ever before so that when we say "I believe" there is no shadow of doubt. Amen.

**Melissa Gould**

December 2, 2019

## Surprise

**“Watch out! I’m sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly, the LORD you are looking for will come to his Temple. He is the messenger of the covenant whom you desire. Watch out! He is coming!” says the LORD of the Heavenly Armies.**

The people of Israel were surprised by John the Baptist when he told them to repent and prepare for the Messiah. They were surprised by Jesus when He suddenly came, performing signs and wonders that proved Him to be the Messiah. Later they were surprised by the explosive growth of the church that spread throughout the world, threatening to take away their place and their nation. They resisted His will and suffered great consequences.

Like the Jewish leaders of those days, the Church throughout history has been surprised by the Lord. At times, she grew complacent and forgot her first love. She trusted in her traditions and stopped trying to reach the lost souls around her. Jesus sent reformers to shake things up. Like John the Baptist, they called her to repent and return to Him. His coming is near.

Jesus tells us not to be surprised when He returns. We are to watch for the signs of the times and be ready. Many Bible scholars think we are living in those times. If you take an honest look at our world today, you will agree. Jesus says, **“But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your salvation is near!”** (Luke 21:28).

***Lord, we are sorry for the way we have rejected your messengers in our day. Help us be ready for Your return, doing the work you have for us to do, so that we will not be surprised and found to be working against Your will. Amen.***

Ted Horowitz

**December 3, 2019**

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD – and He will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what He sees with His eyes, or decide by what He hears with His ears; but with righteousness He will judge the needy, with justice He will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth; with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be His belt and faithfulness the sash around His waist. **Isaiah 11:1-5**

### **Lo! How a Rose E'er Blooming**

#### **Verse 1**

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming  
From tender stem hath sprung!  
Of Jesse's lineage coming,  
As men of old have sung.  
It came, a floweret bright,  
Amid the cold of winter,  
When half spent was the night.

#### **Verse 2**

Isaiah 'twas foretold it,  
The Rose I have in mind;  
With Mary we behold it,  
The virgin mother kind.  
To show God's love aright,  
She bore to men a Savior,  
When half spent was the night.

#### **Verse 3**

This Flower, whose fragrance tender  
With sweetness fills the air,  
Dispels with glorious splendor  
The darkness everywhere;  
True Man, yet very God,  
From sin and death He saves us,  
And lightens every load.

### **The Stump of Jesse**

During Advent, Christians look forward to the birth of the Savior. While Christmas joy rightly peaks at the birth of Jesus, sometimes we forget the Old Testament stories pointing to

that moment at the manger. The Jesse Tree, which invites the retelling of many of those stories, can heighten our joy at Christmas as we see God's promises unfold in history.

In the chapter leading up to our reading for today, Isaiah describes God's wrath against human rebellion and sin. The prophet declares that it will be like God taking an ax to the arrogance of human evil, cutting a forlorn scene like a hillside stripped bare of trees, leaving nothing but wretched stumps.

But wait, says, Isaiah: "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from His roots a Branch will bear fruit." There's hope for God's people! God plans to raise up a Savior, both tender and powerful, a promise not only to Israel but to all nations. Isaiah declares, "In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples."

This month we will trace passages in Scripture that show the promise developing right up to the coming of the Jesse Tree Himself—that is, Jesus, the Christ. As we recount the great, sweeping story of God's faithfulness, may we abound in hope, joy, and faith in God's promises of full life in Christ.

### **Prayer**

God of all hope, fill us this season with joy and peace as we remember the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

**Kurt Selles**

**<https://today.reframemedia.com/devotions/the-stump-of-jesse>**

**December 4, 2019**

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And He 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. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

**Isaiah 9:6-7**

### **For Unto Us a Child Is Born**

#### **Chorus**

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulders.

And His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

### **Recognizing the True Messiah**

No one except Jesus can fill the description in this passage. He is the only Savior of the world.

So today, if you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, please pray for people who don't yet know Him. Pray that they might recognize Him as the Messiah and Savior who is the ruler over all and the Lord of life and peace. Hopefully through these devotions you have developed a concern and compassion for people who have difficulty seeing Jesus in the Old Testament. Be ready to show others how Christians interpret Scripture. Pray that people can overcome intellectual and cultural doubts. Pray that they may realize Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation.

Pray for people who have a limited view of Jesus. Many see Him as only an enlightened wisdom teacher and a prophetic human being who struggled against the evil forces of society. But Jesus rose from the dead, and all who believe in Him will also be raised when He comes again.

Jesus is uniquely God and uniquely human. He is the one who walked this earth as a human being and as eternal God at the same time.

Let Jesus be your caring Counselor who speaks to your doubts! Let Him be your sufficient Father who cares for your every need! Honor Him as the Mighty God who rules over all! See Him as the Prince of Peace in this world!

#### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, may each day of our lives be filled with meaning because we are walking with You, our eternal God! Amen.

**Dean Deppe**

**<http://today.reframemedia.com/devotionals/recognizing-the-true-messiah>**

**December 5, 2019**

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. **Isaiah 9:2**

### **Promised Hope**

Tomorrow is Christmas, the day when Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus. The prophet Isaiah tells us why the birth of Jesus is such great news for the world. This good news comes to people who were “walking in darkness.” But now those same people “have seen a great light.”

In the prophecy of Isaiah, darkness and light are used to represent sin and salvation. Without Christ, we are lost in the darkness of sin. But because of the birth of Jesus, we have hope in God’s light, his victory over sin and death. God promises us salvation in Jesus.

In our world and in our lives, it can sometimes feel as though the darkness is overwhelming. It can seem as though sadness and sin have the upper hand, while the light of goodness and joy are hidden in shadow.

But God’s Word promises us that light is coming to the world in Jesus. Isaiah promises a Savior who will rule the world. “He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” His reign will bring peace and joy to the world. “Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.”

Jesus rules the whole world, and his rule is one of peace. That news is light for a darkened world.

### **Prayer**

God of promise, we look forward to celebrating the birth of Jesus tomorrow. We thank You for the light of hope You have given us in Him. In His holy name, we pray. Amen.

**Rebecca Heys**

<http://today.reframemedia.com/devotionals/promised-hope>



**December 6, 2019**

Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey when He knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right.     **Isaiah 7:14-15**

Anyone who has ever held a newborn infant has beheld the ironic combination of wonder, joy, and helpless dependence. ‘Powerful’ is rarely a word one would use at that moment. Yet, as the incarnation became reality, the Very God of Very God had embraced this utter dependence! We watch a young child learning to walk and to talk, exploring the word, knowing joy and pain, and are reminded “Jesus himself did so.” And the miraculous grace extends much further: Isaiah prophesied this event some 7 centuries earlier. Moreover, here we stand, some two millennia later, believing, behold, and amazed. We kneel at the manger because we also kneel in sorrow at the cross and bow in humble joy before the risen Christ! We cannot do other than sing, with our fifth-century brother Aurelius Clemens Prudentius:

O ye heights of heav’n adore Him; angel hosts His praises sing;  
Pow’rs, dominions, bow before Him, and extol our God and King;  
Let no tongue on earth be silent, ev’ry voice in concert ring,  
Evermore and evermore!

**Pat Schoenrade**



**December 7, 2019**

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah.

“In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.”

**Jeremiah 33:14-16**

### **The Prophecy**

#### **Chorus**

Behold, the days are coming when the Lord will raise up a righteous branch for David.

Behold, the days are coming when a King shall reign and prosper and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

In His days, Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell in safety and this is the name whereby He shall be called: The LORD our Righteousness.

### **Certain Hope**

In this month of December, we often hear the phrase “Christmas cheer.” We’re encouraged to have Christmas cheer as we sing carols, bake cookies, and shop for gifts. There can sometimes be good reason for cheer. But at other times we may feel that cheer is something on the surface, even something false, while underneath we feel sad or empty.

The prophet Jeremiah was in captivity in the courtyard of the king’s guard when he spoke the words of our text for today. He was not a “Christmas cheer” kind of prophet; he spoke the sad truth about the world and about people’s sin. But Jeremiah did have words of hope for the people of Israel and Judah. He said that God was going to keep His promises. He said that God’s promise-keeping was as certain as the sun rising every morning and setting every night.

For us today, Jeremiah offers something better than Christmas cheer. He offers Advent hope. He offers the assurance that God will keep all His promises.

As we wait for Christmas, we wait with joy and hope, which are deeper than just cheer. We wait, knowing that God will certainly keep his promises to save and renew us.

#### **Prayer**

Lord our God, we thank You for the assurance that You always keep Your promises. Give us hope as we wait for all Your promises to be fulfilled. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

**Rebecca Heys**

**<http://today.reframemedia.com/devotionals/certain-hope>**

**December 8, 2019**

“Marshal your troops, O city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel’s ruler on the cheek with a rod. ‘But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.’ Therefore Israel will not be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of His brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd in the strength of the Lord, His God. And they will live securely, for then His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And He will be their peace.”

**Micah 5:1-5**

When I was younger, I saw the Bible as collection of stories... God’s version of a Reader’s Digest of our church history. The more I read, and the more I listen to those much more educated and insightful about the Word, I see now how everything is connected. From Genesis to Revelations, God presents us with truth intricately interwoven with life.

As I studied this passage a bit, I was struck with several connections I had never known. I have heard the lyrics “Oh little town of Bethlehem” a million times, and I know it wasn’t a booming city or a place of power. I was not aware that the name Bethlehem means “House of Bread” in Hebrew, according to one source. The Bread of Life (John 6:35) was born in the house of bread, in the birthplace of David! And this quote from Charles Spurgeon explains more about the origins of Ephrathah:

*“And now for that word Ephratah. That was the old name of the place which the Jews retained and loved. The meaning of it is, ‘fruitfulness,’ or ‘abundance.’ Ah well, was Jesus born in the house of fruitfulness; for whence cometh my fruitfulness and thy fruitfulness, my brother, but from Bethlehem? Our poor barren hearts never produced one fruit or flower, till they were watered with the Savior’s blood” (Spurgeon).*

Jesus was born as a human baby that day in Bethlehem, but Micah is showing us he did not begin there. “His origins are from of old...” As miraculous as the story of Jesus’ birth is, it is even more amazing to think that He, the second part of the Trinity, always existed! He came to us a flesh and blood baby, leaving the glory of Heaven to abide here with us. He came to stand with us, to save us, to be our strength. He didn’t come to just bring peace, but as Paul wrote of Jesus in Ephesians 2:14, **He is our peace**.

The ruler chose to come to us in a humble town, in a humble way. The ruler and creator of all nations, whose greatness reaches the ends of the earth, arrived in human form to shepherd us. He came to stand with us. He has always stood with us. He will always stand with us! How awesome is that?

*Lord God, let us be steeped in your Word and open to all your miracles in this season and always. Help us to stay connected through prayer, through hope, through fellowship with your children. Fill us with your Holy Spirit and give us wisdom to see that it is your eternal love that connects every event in the Bible, every moment of our lives, and every one of us as Brothers and Sisters. Thank you for being our peace. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**Debbie Blackman**

**December 9, 2019**

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

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. **Luke 2:1-7**

### **Born Is the King (It's Christmas)**

#### **Verse 1**

Born unto us this day, a Savior.  
Gifted from heaven to a manger.

#### **Verse 2**

The hope of the world, a light for all mankind.  
All of the earth rejoice, it's Christmas time.

#### **Chorus**

So, lift up your voice, and sing out His praise, it's Christmas.  
Born is the King, rejoice in the day, it's Christmas,  
Make a joyful sound, it's Christmas.  
Let His praise resound, it's Christmas.

#### **Verse 3**

Goodwill to all the earth, and peace divine.  
All of the earth rejoice, it's Christmas time.  
It's Christmas time.

### **Christmas Prayer**

Loving Father, help us remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and the worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world.

Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting.

Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clear hearts.

May the Christmas morning make us happy to be Your children, and the Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake. Amen!

**Robert Louis Stevenson**  
**From "Christmas Stories for the Heart"**

**December 10, 2019**

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

“Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the hip. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.” **Isaiah 60:1-6**

### **Rise and Shine**

As I read today's Scripture passage, I couldn't help but think of the children's song "Rise and Shine." For those of you who don't know it, it goes, "Rise and shine and give God the glory, glory. Rise and shine and give God the glory, glory. RISE AND SHINE AND give God the glory, glory, people of the Lord."

This is what the people of Israel were in a sense asked to do: "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you." Why? To call others to Him because, if you read further, it says, "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn." Some of you may think of the wise men when you read this part due to the fact that they came after seeing the star that announced the birth of God's Son to them.

Yet, what about us? Are we rising and shining with God's light? What are some ways you feel God calling you to rise and shine? How are you calling others to Him? Can others see God's glory because of us? May we all shine bright this Advent season and all year long with God's love.

### **Prayer**

Lord God, we hear You calling us to rise and shine. We wish to be faithful in calling others to You. Help us to do so that we may be Your faithful witnesses. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

**Melissa Ball**



**December 11, 2019**

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born the king of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." **Matthew 2:1-2**

**We Three Kings of Orient Are**

**Verse 1**

We three kings of Orient are,  
Bearing gifts we traverse afar,  
Field and fountain,  
Moor and mountain,  
Following yonder star.

**Chorus**

Oh, star of wonder, star of night,  
Star with royal beauty bright,  
Westward leading,  
Still proceeding,  
Guide us to Thy perfect light.

**Verse 2**

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,  
Gold I bring to crown Him again,  
King forever,  
Ceasing never,  
Over us all to reign.

**Verse 3**

Frankincense to offer have I,  
Incense owns a Deity nigh.  
Prayer and praising,  
All men raising,  
Worship Him, God most high.

**Verse 4**

Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume  
Breathes of life of gathering gloom;  
Sorrowing, sighing,  
Bleeding, dying,  
Sealed in a stone-cold tomb.

## Verse 5

Glorious now behold Him arise,  
King and God and Sacrifice.  
Alleluia,  
Alleluia,  
Earth to heaven replies.

## King of the Jews

The Magi came a long way seeking the new “king of the Jews.” This seems ironic because the Magi, or “wise men,” were subject to their own king, the ruler of Persia. But they followed a star to honor the birth of a foreign ruler, the newly born “king of the Jews.” When they finally found the newborn king, the Magi worshiped him.

Herod’s jealousy revealed a second irony. Herod was anxious and jealous because he thought anyone looking for the “king of the Jews” should be seeking him. So, to protect his throne, Herod went on a murderous rampage (see Matthew 2:16).

These ironies point out some significant truths about Jesus, the “king of the Jews.” As Matthew later reveals, Jesus claims to be King not only of the Jews but also of Iraqis, Chinese, Americans, and all other peoples.

And this is not the last time Jesus is called “king of the Jews.” When Jesus hangs on the cross, the Roman governor Pilate hangs a sign above his head, proclaiming him “JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS” (John 19:19). This King of all humankind suffered and died for you and me.

How will you worship Him today with your thoughts, words, and deeds?

## Prayer

Jesus, King of the Jews and of all peoples, we bow down before You like the Magi did. By Your mercy and grace, help us to worship You in every area of our lives. Amen.

**Kurt Selles**

<http://today.reframemedia.com/devotionals/king-of-the-jews-2015-02-07>



**December 12, 2019**

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'"

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship Him."

**Matthew 2:3-8**

### **A Troubled City**

The city of Jerusalem was troubled – not because of corruption or poverty or the Roman occupation. The city was troubled because the Messiah had come. How strange! A city that should have been celebrating this good news was troubled. The city of David, which prophets had predicted to be the birthplace of David's greatest Son, was in distress because prophecy was finally fulfilled.

The city was troubled because King Herod was troubled. Herod had held onto his kingdom for 40 long years through sheer brutality. The suspicion that a rival king had been born fired his paranoia and fueled his fears. And a fearful Herod was a dangerous Herod. When he felt threatened, everyone felt threatened.

The coming of the Savior meant conflict and confrontation. For years, Satan had tried to keep the Savior from coming, and he would use King Herod in a last-ditch effort to destroy people's hope. Herod put to death the boys in Bethlehem up to two years old, causing "weeping and great mourning."

Today Satan is still trying to keep God's people from celebrating the coming of Jesus. But in spite of persecution and every attempt to keep Christ out of Christmas, the Lord has come. That calls for celebration, no matter what!

### **Prayer**

Father, please keep our eyes on You and on King Jesus. Deliver us from the evil one, who tries to keep us from celebrating. Amen.

**Arthur J. Schoonveld**

**<http://today.reframemedia.com/devotionals/a-troubled-city-2010-12-19>**

**December 13, 2019**

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

**Matthew 2:9-12**

### **The Gift of Salvation**

Many Christmas cards feature a decorated Christmas tree with colorful presents beneath its branches. Of course, we love Christmas gift-giving, but attractive packages can make us forget how the custom of Christmas gifts started and what it signifies.

Most likely, Christmas-gift giving stems from the story about wise men from the east who came to visit Jesus after his birth in Bethlehem. Following a star and a prophecy, they arrived at last. The star stood over the place where Jesus and his parents were staying, and the visitors dismounted their dusty camels and entered the house.

Matthew says that when they saw the child Jesus, “they bowed down and worshiped him.” He uses this expression several times throughout his gospel to describe people’s reactions to Jesus. The wise men also came bearing lavish gifts.

Mystery surrounds this story, but it teaches us several important things. Like the wise men, we too should bow and worship Jesus as King. We should also offer gifts to Him, the best of all that we have, and, most important, our hearts and our service. That’s the least we can do for the One who brings us the choicest gift of all: salvation and new life.

### **Prayer**

Lord, lead us, like the wise men long ago, to kneel before You in adoration and humble service. Thank You for coming to save us! We pray in Your name. Amen.

**Kurt Selles**

**<https://today.reframemedia.com/devotions/the-gift-of-salvation>**





**December 14, 2019**

When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

**Matthew 2:16-18**

This is what the Lord says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more." **Jeremiah 31:15**

### **The Coventry Carol**

#### **Verse 1**

Lullay, Thou little tiny Child, Bye-bye, lulloo, lullay.

Lullay, Thou little tiny Child, Bye-bye, lulloo, lullay.

#### **Verse 2**

O sisters, too, how may we do for to preserve this day?

This poor Youngling for whom we sing Bye-bye, lulloo, lullay.

#### **Verse 3**

Herod the king in his raging charged he hath this day

His men of might, in his own sight, all children young to slay.

#### **Verse 4**

Then woe is me, poor Child for thee, and ever morn and day

For Thy parting nor say nor sing, Bye-bye, lulloo, lullay.

Levi had a brother named Kahvavi (in the book Matthew's Story by Tim LaHaye) who was killed in Herod's rampage. Later on, Levi met Jesus and became one of His disciples. Jesus showed Levi that God feels his pain, and did not forget him. God used Herod for His greater plan, just as He uses you and me. Will you heed the call and follow Him?

**Kevin Kelly**

**December 15, 2019**

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

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end."

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

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. **Luke 1:26-38**

In this scripture, there is so much to think about. I can't begin to fathom the shock and fear Mary must have experienced. A visit from an angel of the Lord? The news that as a virgin she was with child? The worries of what Joseph would think and how others might perceive her? She probably wasn't sure she was ready for all that. And what about Elizabeth? That news was so shocking it put her husband in a state of mutism! It was news she had longed for, but had probably lost hope she would receive. The words that stand out to me are these...

***Nothing is impossible with God!***

As I read and reread this scripture, however, I am looking at it through the lens of where we are at St. Luke Joy in this advent season. When we talk about an upcoming birth, we often use the word **expecting**. As families await a new baby, they are in a period of preparedness. It is a time of joy, but also worry. They know things will change, and want to be ready. Our church is in our own season of rebirth. As time has passed, as our numbers have dwindled, we have prayed for things to change. Have we **expected** that they would? Like Elizabeth we are considered in our "old age". New growth has felt impossible, in this time in history and this time in OUR history. Change brings with it discomfort, fear of the unknown, and doubt that we can handle it.

But here is the thing.... WE don't have to handle it. God has this. God brought Luke, Jamie, and Norah to us. God has provided us resources through the gifts of Charlie, and so many more. He has a plan for St. Luke Joy. Like Mary, we just need to say, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be as you have said!"

***Nothing is impossible with God!***

Heavenly Father, fill us with a sense of expectation and wonder during this season of Christ's birth. Help us to stay open to the miracles that surround us, aware of all those in this community who need your saving grace, and confident that you will empower us as your servants to complete the work you have started. We praise you and love you! Amen.

**Debbie Blackman**



**December 16, 2019**

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.”

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave Him the name Jesus. **Matthew 1:18-25**

### **The Faith of Joseph**

The Christmas season is a time of wonder, joy and great expectations for young and old. I look forward to the reading of *The Christmas Story* from Luke and all the pageantry of the season.

Yet, there are stark reminders in our personal lives and community that remind us that the joy of the season is often overshadowed by sorrow, loneliness and hopelessness.

Mathew reminds us that from the beginning Christmas was not a “Hallmark” scene. The marriage plans and expectations of Mary and Joseph took a turbulent turn that not only changed their lives, but the path of the world! Imagine a husband to be learning his fiancée is pregnant: A young man who is willing to change his life based upon on a dream. What would he be called today! Joseph was God’s choice and a man for this “season”. The earthly father of Christ was a man of incredible faith, true to his beliefs and completely obedient to God.

We are entering a holiday season that can be both joyful and overwhelming. May the words of Dr. Phillip W. McLarty inspire us this advent season:

***“To the world, the faithfulness of Joseph may seem foolish, but to those who are willing to follow his example and surrender their wills to the will of God, the faithfulness of Joseph is not simply a way of pleasing God: it’s a way of fulfilling your own life’s destiny.”***

Christmas is cause for celebration! We can praise a God that is in control and be thankful that we do not have to rely on our own understanding! It is the time to remember the birth of the Savior who gives joy and hope to a broken world.

**Rosemary Graves**

**December 17, 2019**

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." So, he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

**Matthew 2:13-15**

### **Cutting-Edge Plans**

Some people thrive on taking extreme risks. They enjoy driving fast, skydiving, rock climbing, and other thrilling experiences that bring a rush of adrenaline. Some of us look at them and shake our heads, mumbling, "Irresponsible."

At the other extreme, some people want no risks at all. They like the comfort of their home, the security of a predictable job, and the routine of a regularly scheduled calendar. Some of us look at their lives and say, "Boring."

Most of us live between these extremes. On the one hand, we want security and reliability in our lives. On the other hand, we want a life that is interesting and challenging and may even involve some risk taking.

When Joseph and Mary were called by God to raise the Messiah in their family, they discovered that God gave them security as well as plenty of challenges. God kept them safe by warning them of Herod's plan, but that meant they had to flee with Jesus to a safer place. In faithfulness they fully engaged in a meaningful part of God's eternal plans.

Followers of Christ have the best of both worlds. We have the security of God's presence for eternity, while we also know that He will call us to challenging, meaningful tasks in which we will learn to lean on Him.

What tasks has God called you to do lately?

#### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, let me know the comforting assurance of Your presence as You challenge me with significant tasks for Your kingdom. Amen.

**Bill Sytsma**

**<https://today.reframemedia.com/devotions/cutting-edge-plans-2014-12-27>**

**December 18, 2019**

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

So, he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene. **Matthew 2:19-23**

### **Out of Egypt**

The book of Exodus tells of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, in which God, through Moses, led his people out of slavery. In the Old Testament this event was remembered each year in the celebration of the Passover, and in Christianity it is recalled in the same Passover week leading up to Good Friday and Easter. The New Testament shows that Jesus Himself became the final Passover sacrifice when He laid down His life to free God’s people from their slavery to sin.

Matthew notes the infant Jesus’ flight to Egypt to point out that God’s Messiah not only would be called out of Egypt, but also would free His people from captivity once and for all.

We remember Egypt as a place of slavery. And in paying the price for our sin, Jesus set us free from our slavery to sin – whether that be addiction to alcohol or drugs, negative self-talk, a life of constant searching, or plaguing doubts that keep us from experiencing God’s love. Jesus sets us free from the tyrannies of sin, whether they be evil inclinations like arrogance, character flaws like deceit, moral failures like sexual infidelities, or selfish actions like greed.

We live no longer as slaves of our sin. Jesus brings us to new life in which we are restored to God and to each other. Welcome to new life in the presence of God because of Jesus!

### **Prayer**

Lord and God, You have taken us out of Egypt. Now remove from us any remnants of our sinful ways. In Jesus, Amen.

**Dean Deppe**

**<http://today.reframemedia.com/devotionals/out-of-egypt>**

**December 19, 2019**

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” **Luke 2:9-12**

### **Hope Fulfilled**

When Jesus was born, a great company of angels announced His birth. He was the Son of God, after all – He deserved a grand entrance into the world. They sang a glorious song, and they must have looked amazing as they shone in the night sky.

But the angels announced the Savior’s birth to a group of peasant shepherds. They were not a very grand audience to receive the King of all nations, “the Messiah, the Lord.” Nevertheless, the birth of Jesus was announced to lowly shepherds.

It’s fitting that the birth of Jesus was announced to a lowly group of people. The purpose of the Messiah’s coming was to bring God’s love to lowly people like us and to fulfill the hopes and dreams of lowly people like us. The purpose of Jesus’ coming was to restore lowly people like us to relationship with God. So, the shepherds were just the right kind of people to hear this news.

The world desperately needs God. We desperately need God. But no matter how hard we try, we cannot get to God on our own merit. The good news of Christmas is that God has come to us. The good news of Christmas is that in Jesus the hopes of the world are fulfilled.

Let’s make this good news the focus of our Christmas celebration today!

### **Prayer**

Dear God, with the angels, we give You glory and praise. With the shepherds, we thank You that by Your grace You have come to lowly people like us in the birth of Jesus. Amen.

**Rebecca Heyes**

**<https://today.reframemedia.com/devotionals/hope-fulfilled>**



**December 20, 2019**

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

**Luke 2:13-14**

### **Angels We Have Heard on High**

#### **Verse 1**

Angels we have heard on high  
Sweetly singing o’er the plains,  
And the mountains in reply  
Echoing their joyous strains.

#### **Chorus**

Gloria in excelsis Deo,  
Gloria in excelsis Deo.

#### **Verse 2**

Shepherds why this jubilee?  
Why your joyous strains prolong?  
What the gladsome tidings be  
Which inspire your heavenly song?

#### **Verse 3**

Come to Bethlehem and see  
Him whose birth the angels sing.  
Come adore on bended knee  
Christ the Lord, the newborn King.

### **Angels We Have Heard on High**

This popular Christmas carol celebrates the news that the angel brought to the shepherds – the news of the birth in Bethlehem of “a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

Most popular media today portray angels as lovely, delicate, and feminine, but Biblical angels either had masculine names or there was no clue to their gender. They acted as God’s messengers (Luke 1:11-20; 1:26-38; 2:8-14).

The shepherds were frightened by the appearance of the angel – and by the glory of the Lord which shone around them. But the angel told them not to fear, because the birth of the Savior was “good news of great joy which will be to all the people” (Luke 2:10).

Then the heavens opened with a “heavenly army praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men’” (Luke 2:13-14). This heavenly army is the first glimpse that we get of the legions of angels that were available to Jesus (Matthew 26:53).



The chorus of this song, "Gloria in excelsis Deo," is based on the first part of the heavenly chorus, "Glory to God in the highest." "Gloria in excelsis Deo" is the Latin Vulgate translation of Luke 2:14, and means "Glory to God in the highest."

This is a traditional French carol, but beyond that we know nothing of its origins. What we do know is that it has blessed our Christmas worship for centuries, and continues to bless it today.

**Richard Neill Donovan**

**<https://sermonwriter.com/hymns/hymn-stories/angels-heard-high/>**



**December 21, 2019**  
**Seek and ye shall find**

Often when I think of the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks, I remember the high desert of Wyoming where I was born. On a clear night, the stars seem so close and so bright you almost feel you could easily reach up and touch them. Wyoming is a place of contrasts. There is much beauty there if one cares to look for it. In some places the beauty is so apparent it can bring tears to your eyes, in others you will miss it if you do not seek it. So, too the beauty in the story of Christ. One must seek him to receive the amazing beauty of his great gift.

The shepherds were in a different place but probably equally inspired by the beauty of the night sky. Can you imagine how they felt when an angel appeared to tell them of Jesus birth? Can you imagine the beauty around them as they were told a Savior has been born?

**And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:8-11**

In the quiet beauty that shines around us during the Christmas Season, stop and think of all the gifts that God has freely given to you. Think of the Promise of Salvation ---The most precious gift ever given. Think of our Savior and praise the Lord for this amazing gift.

Farther in Heaven, as I reflect on my life and the many gifts you have showered on me. I praise you Lord. I thank you Lord. I have failed to praise you often enough for all these blessings, Lord and I especially praise you for the gift of Christ Jesus who shouldered my sins that I might have eternal Life. Amen.

**Alice Staves**

**December 22, 2019**

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So, they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. **Luke 2:15-16**

### **Leaving It Behind**

Following Jesus can be costly.

Once the shepherds heard the news of Jesus' birth, they were told where to find the newborn Savior. They were barely able to contain their excitement as they decided to go to Bethlehem to see what the angel had told them about. But a cost might be involved. Shepherds weren't supposed to leave their sheep in the middle of the night.

Sometimes it may seem easy to leave our current situation in order to follow Jesus. I would imagine that hearing an angel chorus proclaiming the arrival of the promised Messiah, and inviting me to see what God was doing, would be exciting enough to get me to go right away and see what the angels had described!

But seeking Jesus usually means leaving something behind, and our attachment to some things can keep us from engaging fully in a life of serving our Lord. We may feel attached to our lifestyle, our friends, our ability to make our own decisions, or just the ease of not having to live up to someone else's standards.

When we are willing to leave our personal desires behind, however, we will find that the blessings of following the Savior will eventually be worth more than anything we might be called to give up.

### **Prayer**

Holy Spirit, move within my heart so that I am ready to leave behind anything that keeps me from pursuing Your plans. May I fully experience the joy of serving and knowing You. In Jesus, Amen.

**Bill Sytsma**

**<http://today.reframemedia.com/devotionals/leaving-it-behind-2014-12-12>**

**December 23, 2019**

When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what they had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

**Luke 2:17-18**

### **How Great Our Joy**

#### **Verse 1**

While by the sheep we watched by night,  
Glad tidings brought an angel bright.

#### **Chorus**

How great our joy!  
Great our joy!  
Joy, joy, joy!  
Joy, joy, joy!  
Praise we the Lord in heaven on high!  
Praise we the Lord in heaven on high!

#### **Verse 2**

There shall be born, so he did say,  
In Bethlehem a Child today.

#### **Verse 3**

There shall the Child lie in a stall,  
This Child who shall redeem us all.

#### **Verse 4**

This gift of God we'll cherish well,  
That ever joy our hearts shall fill.

### **Christmas Eve**

This very special night is my favorite one of the year, and I'm sure many of you share this feeling. For many years I have spent part of that evening at church.

Two of these times stand out in my mind. The first was many years ago, when my older children were about 7 and 8.

We were attending Winnwood Methodist at the time, and the program that night had included a re-enactment of the Christ Child's birth. When we got home, Mitch was so enthralled, he told Karen they were going to repeat the program – and she was to go find her baby doll. They located stuffed animals, blankets, and a cradle.

Then, they repeated the story, along with singing the hymns they could remember. I was, and knew it was a night, and a lesson they would always remember.

And, the other, many years later, was here at St. Luke. I was hurrying along the uneven, dark sidewalk toward the south Narthex door, tripped, and fell – right on my nose. There was a lot of bleeding, and a stranger helped me inside.

He put me in a chair, and directed people to bring paper towels and ice. He wanted to take me to an emergency room, and I refused. Finally, since he was making no progress, he asked, “Well where do you want to go?” I replied, “Why, into the sanctuary, for the service.”

So, he helped me in, carrying ice. Mercifully, the bleeding let up and I was surrounded by the peace, the familiar music, and the specialness of the blessed night.

I hope to be there this Christmas Eve, and again, it will be “the most wondrous night of the year.”

**Jan Wiley-Sammon**



**December 24, 2019**

**IN HIS HANDS**

*The hands that made the world and gave the sun and moon their light*

*Are the tiny Hands of a baby born one cold December night...*

*The Hands that stilled the wind and tamed the fury of the sea*

*Are the calloused Hands of a carpenter who lived in poverty...*

*The Hands that held the power to break the binding chains of sin*

*Are the gentle Hands that washed the feet of tired and dusty men...*

*The Hands that cleansed the leper, healed the blind and raised the dead*

*Are the praying Hands of one who cried, "Not My will, but Thine Instead..."*

*The Hands that shaped the universe and flung the stars in space*

*Are the nail-pierced Hands of a dying man who suffered in our place...*

*The Hands of our Creator, Lord and King of Heaven above,*

*Are the Savior's Hands, forever reaching out to us with love.*

*B.J.Hoff*

This Christmas,

May His Hands

Touch your heart with healing

And your life with blessing,

As they cradle you in love

All the days of your life.

**Russ & Alice Staves**

**December 25, 2019**

**Christmas Day**

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

So, Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. **Luke 2:1-7**

**Were You There on That Christmas Night?**

**Verse 1**

Were you there, were you there on that Christmas night,  
When the world was filled with a holy light?  
Were you there to behold  
When the wonder foretold  
Came to earth?

**Verse 2**

Did you see, did you see how they hailed Him King,  
With the gifts so rare that they chose to bring?  
Did you see how they bowed  
As they praised Him aloud  
At His birth?

**Bridge**

Did you hear how the choirs of angels sang  
At the glory of the sight?  
Did you hear how the bells of heaven rang  
All through the night?

**Verse 3**

Did you know, did you know it was God's own Son,  
The salvation of the world begun?  
Did you know it was love  
That was sent from above  
To the earth?

## Firstborn Son

It's so wonderful to hold a newborn baby in your arms. To look into the newly opened eyes, to feel the delicate skin, to hear the little squeaks. We pause here in wonder at Mary's firstborn son, lying in a manger.

But as we admire the baby in the manger, we know that He has to grow up. It's not a baby who "will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). It's not a baby who will take on the religious establishment and the Roman Caesar and Satan and sin and death. It's not a baby who will die for our sake on a cross. It's not a baby who will then rise from the tomb, ascend to heaven, and take His seat at the Father's right hand to reign.

That sweet little newborn will grow up and overturn the power structures of the world. Though He is almighty God, He becomes a helpless infant. Instead of royal robes He wears strips of cloth. Instead of a warrior surrounded by an army, He is attended by nobodies. The thunder of His authority is muted into the cries of a child.

But this helpless baby is a powerful threat because He is a promise that the days of the powerful are numbered.

Let's marvel that in this little bundle lies the power that will change our lives – and this world – forever.

"O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord!"

### Prayer

All glory to You, great God and Lord, for the gift of your firstborn Son, Jesus Christ, whom You sent to save us. Amen and Amen!

**Thea Leunk**

<http://today.reframemedia.com/devotionals/firstborn-son>

