

The
Wander
of
Advent
AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



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The Wonder of Advent: An Advent Devotional

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INTRODUCTION

THE WONDER OF ADVENT

The Wonder of Advent is a four-week devotional that guides you through the season of Advent. It's a tool to help focus our attention on the incarnation of our Savior – pointing us to the wonder of God's love and the peace, hope, and joy we find in Jesus.

STRUCTURE

This book is separated into four sections—one for each week of Advent. Each day has a main Scripture passage, devotional thoughts, and a prayer. We encourage you to carve out some time each day to read through the Scripture passage. You may even want to look at the verses before and after each passage to give you an idea of the context. The deeper you dig into God's word, the more wonderful meaning you will find. When you read through the devotional thoughts, allow yourself to refocus on the significance of this season and then come to God using the prayer provided as a starting place.

This year's Advent devotional is a compilation of devotions from the past four years. There are four new devotions that were written this year. Many thanks to the members and staff at Salem for their contributions.

May God, the Creator of the Wonder of Advent, fill your Advent season with joy and excitement.

Week One

THE ROAD TO GLORY

ISAIAH 35:1-10 | BY MARK HARPER

*A road will be there and a way; it will be called the Holy Way.
The unclean will not travel on it, but it will be for the one who walks the path.
— Isaiah 35:8*

THE OVERALL THEME OF OUR ADVENT DEVOTIONALS for this year is “The Wonder of Advent.” In Isaiah 35, the prophet talks about a “highway,” a road that the redeemed of the Lord will travel in returning to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon approximately 500 miles from their homeland. The mighty Babylonian army, under King Nebuchadnezzar, had conquered Judah, shattered the city walls of Jerusalem, and left the Jerusalem temple in ruins. As was the custom in those days, conquering armies would relocate thousands of leading citizens to prevent any organized rebellion. The only way home was through a vast, frightening, and overwhelming wilderness.

Describing those in exile, the Prophet Isaiah says that their hands were weak, their knees had grown feeble, and their hearts had become fearful. There appeared to be no hope, no help, and no way to be restored and renewed.

There are times when we feel like we are living in a wilderness with no hope and no help! Our world is in chaos. Life is tough. Our hands are weak; our knees feeble; and our hearts are fearful. We cannot do it alone. Where can we turn for strength, redemption, and healing? God promises us a way. It is God’s holy way through the wilderness we travel every day. It is a new way, a holy way, a safe way, a joyful way.

These words of Isaiah 35 are the central message of Matthew 11. Jesus described Himself using Isaiah’s words. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the deaf hear. Isaiah wrote of that promised Savior to come, 700 years before His birth.

The “Road to Glory” began at Christmas with the birth of Jesus but the final pavement was laid down at Easter. We celebrate His birth during this season. But we also remember His sacrifice on the cross, because only through His death can we experience the restored lives we so desperately need and want. Only by accepting his forgiveness and grace can we travel The Road to Glory!

Prayer

Father, thank you for providing a way through the wilderness for life through Jesus who brought hope and healing and redemption into our lives. We love you!

Amen

A CALL TO RADICAL OBEDIENCE

GENESIS 12:1-4 | BY MIKE COOPER

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. — Genesis 12:4

THE PASSAGE STARTS WITH THE LORD speaking to Abram and telling him to get up and leave everything that brought him security and comfort and to go somewhere unknown. God tells Abram to go to the land that he will show him. As Hebrews 11:8 points out, Abram did not know what his destination would be but he went by faith regardless. Abram left his home and his people and all he had because he believed the promises of God.

Fortunately, our God is the God who makes and keeps his promises. The call of Abram is a story full of promises from God. This passage contains seven different promises that have to do with what God will do. Notice how frequently God says “I will” in these verses. He will show Abram the land. He will make a great nation of Abram. He will make Abram’s name great. He will bless Abram. He will bless all the families of the earth through Abram. Ultimately this blessing is found through Jesus who became flesh to live a perfect life, and died on our behalf.

Sometimes God asks us to trust him and act on faith without having all the answers or details. When he does this we must act like Abram in verse 4 who “went, as the LORD had told him.” We can do this because we know that all of God’s promises find their “yes” in Jesus. Often God’s will for our lives is not revealed all at once, and the most difficult part of obedience can be the waiting. But obedience while we wait can be the best preparation for serving him when we arrive at our destination.

Prayer

Father, thank you for being faithful to keep your promises. Help us to act in obedience even when we don't have all the answers and as we wait to see what you will do. In Jesus' name,

Amen

CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION

ISAIAH 52:7-10 | BY KASEY COOPER

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

— Isaiah 52:7-10

WE SEEK JOY IN A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT PLACES. As Christians, we know that Jesus gives true joy, but as we are still living in the flesh, our sin nature may pull us every way other than towards the Lord. We ride the highs and the lows as life throws them at us and sometimes forget where we, as children of God, find rest for our souls. If we are in Christ, the Holy Spirit reminds us that true joy can only be found in salvation and sanctification through Jesus.

Everyone loves good news. When we have good news to share, we usually get excited to share it. When we receive good news, we rejoice, but that emotion doesn't last forever. Isaiah describes the Israelites as they worship their great God, while simultaneously describing what our reaction should be when we celebrate Christ's birth. He has comforted us, He has redeemed us, and that is cause for celebration.

Today, receiving good news may look like placing your faith in Jesus and if that is the case, praise God! Today, maybe you feel conviction for not placing one hundred percent trust in God for your source of joy and satisfaction. That conviction is good news indeed! When the Holy Spirit convicts us, we are to run into the arms of the Father, not wallow in our guilt and avoid any repercussions. Repentance is a beautiful thing. Run to Jesus, the true and only source of eternal joy.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for the joy that we have in Jesus. We pray we would live our lives every day in celebration of this truth that we have. In the source of our joy, Jesus, we pray,

Amen

HOPE OF THE NATIONS

MALACHI 4:2 | BY BOBBY BLANTON

But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings.. — Malachi 4:2

DURING CHRISTMAS SEASON, a song is often heard that was made famous by Bing Crosby. The song begins with the words: “Said the night wind to the little lamb, ‘Do you see what I see?’”

Here’s the story behind the song: It was written by Noel Regney and Gloria Baker in 1962 in response to the Cuban missile crisis. That’s why you find the line “Pray for peace, people everywhere.”

The song probably would have faded into obscurity had it not been for a couple of intersecting circumstances. Bing Crosby discovered the song and decided to include it on his new Christmas album. So he went into the recording studio... on November 22, 1963. You’ll recall this was the exact day in which President Kennedy was killed.

The song was shortly released and became a soothing balm to a grieving nation struggling to cope with the tragedy of a fallen leader. Our nation was in mourning, needing a word of hope during that Christmas of ‘63. Many found it in that song. The song ends “A child, a child sleeping in the night; He will bring us goodness and light.”

The prophet Malachi shared a similar word of hope. For those who trust God, He points to the coming of the Sun of righteousness, arising with “healing in his wings.” Of course, Malachi was referring to our Lord Jesus. He is our righteousness; the Sun that lights up our lives and breaks away our darkness. Our healer of all that ails us. Interestingly, this would be the last word given from heaven for hundreds of years. How dark and hopeless the world must have been during those years of silence! Then, in a small village of Nazareth, the angel Gabriel announces the dawning of a new day. The Sun was about to dawn. (Luke 1:26-38) Hallelujah!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for all the goodness you give us in Christ Jesus. Our hearts are comforted today knowing that your Light is more powerful than any darkness that tries to discourage me.

“A child, a child sleeping in the night; He will bring us goodness and light.”

Amen

THE G.O.A.T. MARATHON

HEBREWS 12:1-2 | BY CRAIG HARDEE

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

— Hebrews 12:1-2

ELIUD KIPCHOGE OF KENYA RECENTLY RAN THE FIRST SUB TWO-HOUR MARATHON, a time which many believed would never be broken. He had a lot of help. The race organizers chose a day within a nine-day window so that he could run at optimal time. Kipchoge also ran with 36 “pacemakers,” who would run in front of him in groups of five in a V-shape to provide a wind break for him. Two runners also ran behind him. Drinks and snacks were delivered to him by a bicyclist, so Kipchoge didn’t have to break stride to receive them.

But while it was impressive, it was not the G.O.A.T. (Greatest Of All Time) marathon.

Instead, we as Christians run the G.O.A.T. marathon every day of our lives! We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses and are encouraged to run with endurance the race set before us.

Best of all, our path has been prepared by Jesus, the founder and finisher of our faith, who died for our sins and rose victorious over the grave. He is seated at the right hand of the throne of God right now, cheering us on as we run the G.O.A.T. marathon.

As we wrap ourselves in the hustle and bustle this time of year brings, let us make sure that our focus is on the birth of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. He has come before us, preparing the way so we may have eternal life. Let us celebrate Jesus this season!

Prayer

Lord, we thank you for sending Jesus to earth to die for our sins and to prepare the way for us. Help us to run with endurance, focused on Jesus daily, as we live our lives for Him.

Amen

JESUS IS PEACE

JOHN 14:27 | BY JEFF OLDS

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. — John 14:27

JESUS UTTERED THESE WORDS to His disciples during the last meal they would share together before the crucifixion. He is assuring, no promising, those closest to Him that the Holy Spirit is coming to “teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14: 26). This was a dark hour in the life of Jesus’ followers and Jesus promises peace and comfort.

There is a huge correlation between the darkness the disciples were feeling at that moment and the darkness the world was experiencing before the Advent of Christ. Isaiah 60:2 says “For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and His glory will be seen upon you.” Jesus exploded the darkness through His first coming. And Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to “break” the darkness of the disciples after his departure back to the Father. That same promise is available for us!

Christ’s first advent brought the Prince of Peace and our salvation. Christ’s return to the Father, after His death and resurrection, brought the promise of the peace of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

During this Advent season may the Peace of God rule in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Prayer

Father, please help me to surrender my heart, life, and will to the Prince of Peace.

Amen

THE WORD WAS GOD

JOHN 1:1 | BY MIKE COOPER

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. — John 1:1

SHORTLY AFTER THIS PASSAGE, John indicates that “the Word” is Jesus. Here at the beginning of his gospel, John tells us that the Word has existed since “the beginning.” This reminds me of Genesis 1:1 which starts the Bible off with, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” John is stating that the Word – who is Jesus – has been in existence for all eternity. Not only this, but John also states that Jesus was with God. When God spoke the world into existence, Jesus was there. Jesus was taking part in the act of creation. In fact, Colossians 1 tells us, “For by Him all things were created... all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (vv.16-17). Not only did Jesus exist, but He was with God. He knew God. The word “with” indicates to us that Jesus knew God in a personal way. Lastly, John tells us that Jesus is God. So, not only did Jesus know God, but He is also the same God who created the universe.

Jesus, who has existed for all eternity, has been known and loved by God the Father before the world was ever created (John 17:24). For us today, this shows that Jesus – who is God – came to live on this earth in the likeness of humanity so that we might experience that same love. That we might be forgiven for our sins, and be made right with God. That we might be able to know God and partake in a personal relationship with God like Jesus does. That we might be able to be with God for all eternity.

Prayer

Father, thank You for sending us Your Son so we can experience the love You have for us through Him. Help us to remember the greatness of who Jesus is and what He has done for us.

Amen

Week Two

CRUSHED

ISAIAH 53 | BY JEFF OLDS

*He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

*Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.*

*But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.*

*All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all. — Isaiah 53:3–6*

I SAIAH 53 IS A POWERFUL PASSAGE! It outlines the incredible suffering Christ would endure on the cross for humanity. Verses 3-6 clearly lay out Christ's suffering for our sin and God's plan for our redemption. Then, Isaiah 53:10 says, "Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand."

This is an incredible verse! It was God's will to crush His only Son so that our relationship with the Father could be restored. But why would God "crush" His only Son? Because He loved humanity and wanted to restore the broken relationship. John 3:16 reminds us, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

So, during this Advent season, remember God willingly "crushed" His Son so that we might have eternal life.

Prayer

Father, thank You for Your willingness to send Your only begotten Son and to "crush" Him that we might have life. In Jesus's Name.

Amen

LIGHT

ISAIAH 60:1-5 | BY JEFF OLDS

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

*For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.*

And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

*Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.*

*Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and exult,
because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you. — Isaiah 60:1-5*

THIS PASSAGE SPEAKS ABOUT THE EARTH and its peoples being covered in thick darkness – the darkness of sin and separation from God. But then light comes and glory is revealed. Not only is it revealed, but it is seen “upon you” (v.1). What a glorious thought!

John 1:4-5 reminds us, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

Jesus is the light and the overcomer of darkness!

Remember that the light and overcomer of darkness, Jesus Christ, emptied Himself so that the darkness of sin has no hold on you and that the glory of God will be seen in you (Phil 2:4-7).

Let your LIGHT shine!

Prayer

Father, thank You for sending Jesus to be the light and overcomer of darkness in my life. May His glory be seen “all over me.”

Amen

FROM STONE TO FLESH

EZEKIEL 36:22-27 | BY KASEY COOPER

Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. — Ezekiel 36:22

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, WE SEE what great lengths God goes to in order to rescue and redeem His people. Each one of these times, the Israelites are less than deserving of restoration, yet our merciful God continues to pursue them. It is such a blessing to read about what God has done in Scripture and how He chooses to reveal His reasoning of redemption. Ezekiel 36:22 says, “Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of My holy Name”. Earlier in Ezekiel, the Israelites’ disobedience leads to the profaning of His name among the nations, and now they are now in desperate need of a Savior.

How similar the ancient Israelites are to us today. There is nothing we could have done and there was no other reason for God to send us His Son than the upholding of His awesome and holy Name and to bring glory to Himself by showing His great love for us. We must recognize just how much we need a Savior in order to effectively worship Him with our whole hearts.

God proclaims, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek 36:25-26). When we give our lives to Jesus, He not only cleanses us from our sins, but God transforms our heart of stone into a heart of flesh. We are a new creation whose hearts long to worship our King and it is only Jesus who can bring a dead heart to life in Him. Jesus is holy and good. He satisfies our hearts with joy so that we can rejoice in honoring His name.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for giving us such a wonderful gift of a new heart. It is not an improved version of our old hearts, but You have come to live within us and transform us. We ask that You continue to break down the hard parts of our hearts and restore them with Your love and truth. In Jesus’s name.

Amen

SINGING OVER US

ZEPHANIAH 3:17-20 | BY JEFF OLDS

The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you with his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

— Zephaniah 3:17

WHEN I THINK ABOUT the first part of Zephaniah 3:17 my mind immediately goes to John 1:14. John 1:14 says, “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.” The God of the universe came in the person of Jesus Christ to be in “our midst” and save us. What an incredible thought! How that should fill us with joy.

The second phrase tells us that God rejoices over us and quiets us with His love. When I think of the incarnation and the sacrifice Christ made for our redemption, it reminds me of the way God sees us. He does not see our sin, but the righteousness of Christ. Because of this perfect righteousness, God rejoices over us with gladness. He also quiets us with his love. Isaiah 40:1 says, “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.” In the difficulties and challenges of life God promises to comfort us and quiet us with His love.

God not only promises to rejoice over us with gladness and quiet us with His love, but He also “exults over us with loud singing”.

According to Merriam-Webster, exult means to be “extremely joyful.” I can hardly wrap my mind around the concept that the King of heaven, the Creator of everything, and the Author of my salvation rejoices over me with loud singing. I can’t imagine what that song must be like, but I revel in the knowledge that God is singing over me.

During this Advent season, reflect on these amazing truths: God is in our midst to save us, God rejoices over us with gladness and quiets us with His love, and God exults over us with loud singing.

Prayer

Thank You, Father, for rejoicing over us with loud singing and loving us so incredibly. In Jesus’s name,

Amen

GOD’S STEADFAST LOVE

MICAH 7:18-20 | BY MIKE COOPER

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. — Micah 7:18

“WHO IS A GOD LIKE YOU?” IS A QUESTION that should cause you to think about God. The remaining part of verse 18 is a beautiful exclamation of the unchanging character of God, who is able to pardon sin and pass over transgression like it no longer exists! That truth causes me to worship and praise God for Who He is and what He has done through Jesus!

God promises that He will remove our sin from His sight because He delights in steadfast love. The idea behind this is that God not only practices steadfast love, but God is steadfast love. He loves us in this way not because He is required to, or because He wants to, but it is out of faithfulness to His own promise to do so no matter what. Steadfast love is the kind of love that led Him to the cross on our behalf, and the kind of love that remains faithful to us today. It is the covenant promise God made to Jacob and Abraham (verse 20) that is only valid because it is a promise based on His own character and faithfulness to keep His promises.

Verse 19 points us to how God is going to act on that steadfast love. Micah states that God will have compassion on us, and He will trample over sin and cast it into the depths of the sea. God will deal with our sin completely! All of this is pointing forward to the future ruler of Israel who would come from Bethlehem that Micah speaks of in chapter 5. Today, we know this ruler to be Jesus; who humbled Himself in obedience to the Father and was born as a baby in Bethlehem. God shows us his faithfulness and steadfast love by sending Jesus to live among us, to have compassion on the lost and broken-hearted, and to give His life up for the forgiveness of our sins.

Despite everything that we have previously done against God, He is going to show us compassion and forgive us of our sins. Sometimes I just can’t wrap my head around that incredible truth! Only an amazing and gracious Father like our God would ever consider doing something like that!

Prayer

Father, words cannot describe how great You are! Help us to love and forgive like You do as we gaze at your beauty. In Jesus’s name,

Amen

DISPLAYING GOD'S BEAUTY

ISAIAH 61:1-3 | BY JEFF OLDS

*That they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord,
that He may be glorified. — Isaiah 61:3*

ISAIAH 61 IS FULL OF HOPE AND PROMISE!

Jesus the Messiah is anointed to bring good news to the poor. He is sent to bind up the broken-hearted, will proclaim liberty to the captives, and will open the prison of those who are bound.

He proclaims the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God.

The Messiah comforts those who mourn by giving them "a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit" (verse 3).

He does all this so that, "they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified" (verse 3).

That last statement is astounding to me! All of the good things that Messiah does is so that He might be glorified (glorified may also be rendered, "that he may display his beauty").

The Messiah's acts of kindness and redemption toward us are so the He may display His beauty.

His ultimate act of kindness – emptying Himself of the glories of heaven, taking on the form of man, and laying down his life for our redemption – demonstrates His desire to glorify Himself (display His beauty).

Prayer

*Father, during this Advent season, please help me to remember that any good thing,
including redemption, happened because You desire to display Your beauty.
In Jesus' name,*

Amen

EVERLASTING DOMINION

DANIEL 7:13-14 | BY KASEY COOPER

*And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and
languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not
pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. — Daniel 7:14*

HOW OFTEN DO WE CONTEMPLATE the majesty of God? Daniel 7 gives us amazing imagery of the moment God the Father granted eternal dominion to Jesus. Think about what it would be like to be Daniel and to witness that scene, even if it was only in a prophetic dream. The same God comes to earth from His place of eternal glory as the Son of Man who takes on the form of a humble baby born in Bethlehem.

We may be tempted to solely view the Christ-child as a helpless baby in a manger, but this perspective is incredibly dangerous to our walk with Christ. It is so important that we never forget to behold the majesty of the God who came in the form of that baby. In the book of Daniel, God the Father is referred to as "Ancient of Days," and Jesus is referred to as the "Son of Man" (Daniel 7:13). In chapter 7, Daniel illustrates the Ancient of Days as sitting on a throne of flames as fire flows out from Him and more than tens of thousands of attendants worshipping at His feet. This is the kind of imagery we are looking at here.

The Son of Man descends on the clouds and approaches the Ancient of Days and is presented with dominion over the nations. We learn that Christ's everlasting reign exists for the purpose that "all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him" (verse 14). Jesus's dominion exists so that we, as saints in His Kingdom, may serve Him, ultimately giving God the glory due His name.

We place our hope in the fact that Christ's kingdom will never pass away and that one day we will be in the presence of the Ancient of Days. And the same God who sits on a throne of flames loves and cherishes His children more than we could ever imagine, which makes His powerful love for us that much more precious and trustworthy.

Prayer

*Heavenly Father, we praise You and thank You that You are a God that is worthy of
praise; help us to glorify You in all that we do. In Jesus' name,*

Amen

Week Three

CREATOR, SUSTAINER, ANCHOR FOR OUR FAITH

JOHN 1:3 | BY MIKE MCMORRIS

*All things were made through him,
and without him was not any thing made that was made. — John 1:3*

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN ON SHAKY GROUND? Perhaps on a boat moving to and fro in the waves, or an earthquake that literally moves the earth under your feet? It's unsettling to stand without solid ground—you feel like you might literally fall down. How about spiritually, have you ever been on shaky ground? A feeling when you question what you believe as a Christian or second guess your belief in a Creator after a science class lecture on evolution? While the majority of Americans (~75%) claim to be Christians, up to 44 percent report God has no role whatsoever in their lives. Seventy percent of young people who grow up in the church leave by their 20's—whether people want to admit it or not there are many whose faith is on shaky ground.

John 1:3 is an anchor for our faith. Scripture is clear that we have a Creator. In John 1:1, He is called “the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Paul elaborates on this truth in Colossians 1:16: “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.”

In John 20:31, John tells us the purpose of his book—“but these are 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.” Many signs and wonders were recorded in the book of John so that we can believe in Jesus and have life in His name. This same Jesus is the one by whom all things were made.

If I find myself feeling spiritually weak, like I'm on shaky ground, I love to prayerfully look around at creation. Trees, clouds, birds, the wonderful metamorphosis that takes place from caterpillar to butterfly—our God is so creative and awesome. Our Lord, through whom all things were made, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe has provided us with solid ground for our faith. He strengthens our faith by the hearing of His Word and by the evidences in His wonderful creation.

Prayer

*Lord Jesus, help us to glorify You by building our lives on the firm foundation
of Christ,*

Amen

CHILDREN OF LIGHT

ISAIAH 9:2-7 | BY KASEY COOPER

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... — Isaiah 9:2, 6a

THOSE OF US WHO HAVE COME TO KNOW the light of Christ in our lives have once known what it was like to live in darkness. Whether you were five or ninety-five years old, take yourself back to the moment that God's light first shone into your heart. That moment that we first accept Christ as our Savior changes the entire course for our eternity. We were once without hope and now we are filled with Hope Himself.

We must be careful that we do not take this hope for granted. In the day- to- day busyness that is life, we can get so caught up with what needs to get done, that we may forget the life- changing power of the hope of the gospel in our lives and what it can do in the lives of others. Meditating on and remembering the hope that God has given us in His Son gives us motivation to live our lives in such a way that brings the hope of the gospel to others. We must never be selfish or greedy with the gospel, but be ready with generous hearts.

Let us remember today that our Hope was born in a manger in Bethlehem, that He grew in knowledge and wisdom and that He was born with the government on His shoulders. "He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace".

Prayer

Lord, let us share with others the light of hope that Christ has brought to us.

Amen

THE SHEPHERD GUIDES US

PSALM 80 | BY CRAIG HARDEE

You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth. — Psalm 80:1

THE IMAGE OF THE SHEPHERD IS PROMINENT in the beginning of this Psalm.

We've all heard about how the Lord is our shepherd, particularly if we've read the more familiar Psalm 23, where it talks about how the Lord is our shepherd. But think about who a shepherd is and what a shepherd does. A shepherd takes care of sheep. Now that sounds simple on the surface, but it's not.

Sheep are not the smartest animals that God ever created. In fact, some would even call them dumb. They need to be watched carefully or they will wander off and get into trouble or get lost. Because other animals are smarter, they see sheep as prey. Or lunch.

King David talked about how he had to kill a lion and bear when he was a shepherd working for his father.

What does this have to do with me? Are you calling me dumb?

No, I'm not, but everyone I know needs extra guidance in living their lives. Although God made us to be a lot smarter than sheep, there are always times when we need God. You know; you're never alone because God is always with us, gently guiding us and shepherding us through life.

Sometimes, we need more than just gentle guiding, and God has that covered as well. If we have a lion or bear come into our life, God is there, ready to guide us into His will.

Now that doesn't mean that we go out and find lions and bears to jump in front of so we can see how God takes care of us. God did make us smarter than sheep, and he gave us common sense to stay safe.

He also gave us His Word to help us know how to live our lives. Call out to God through prayer and discover how to live for Him through His Word. God has a plan for us and He's ready to guide us as a shepherd would lead sheep. Allow Him to do so and you'll have an abundant life.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for being my shepherd and help me to be open to your guidance through prayer and Your Word.

Amen

GRACE AND PEACE AND HOPE

1 CORINTHIANS 1:3-9 | BY MIKE COOPER

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus... God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. — 1 Corinthians 1:3, 4a, 9

PAUL WROTE THIS LETTER to the church in Corinth in order to address a variety of issues he had heard about. According to a few reports from believers in the area, the church was struggling with arrogance, disunity, and a lack of moral purity. But before he addresses these issues Paul follows standard letter-writing procedure for the first century. He identifies himself at the beginning, and then he sends his greeting and offers a thanksgiving. Go back and count how many times Paul mentions Jesus in his greeting and thanksgiving. By my count it is no fewer than ten times. Paul's letter was going to be dealing with a difficult situation, and so Paul's first thoughts for them are of Jesus Christ.

One problem the Corinthians faced was their own arrogance. They had become proud of their eloquent speech and their knowledge, to the point of claiming that the gifts they enjoyed were actually of their own doing instead of coming from God. They had crossed the line between celebrating what God had done, and taking credit for the result of God's work in their midst. They were no longer looking for Christ to be revealed. More to the point, they were no longer revealing Christ to the city of Corinth. Verse 6 tells us that these special gifts of the Holy Spirit which they had so lavishly received were for that very purpose! This is why Paul's greeting mentions Christ in every single verse: he wants to remind them that God's self-revelation in the person of Jesus Christ is ongoing, and they are to bear witness to that truth using the gifts God had given them.

Just as the church in Corinth was called to give testimony to Christ's saving power, so we are called to reveal Christ in our cities, workplaces, and schools. But we need to be careful that we don't fall into the same trap that caught the Corinthians. It is only in God's strength that we can be "enriched in every way, not lacking any spiritual gift" (v5) as we reveal Christ now, and "wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v7) when he comes again.

God will be with us through every trial, and through every challenge, keeping us strong as we wait for that revelation. God is faithful. (v9) God will do what he has promised. This is the grounds of our confidence as we wait.

Prayer

Lord, help us bear witness of your love to the world around us, and help us eagerly expect the day you return.

Amen

STAY ALERT

MARK 13:24-37 | BY COURTNEY AND PETER THOMPSON

Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. — Mark 13:30-33

SHORTLY BEFORE THE CRUCIFIXION, Jesus takes time to lay out some very serious and vivid truths about what the disciples should expect in the future. What he describes about the end times—the abomination of desolation, the sun and moon darkening, stars falling from the sky—are really scary things! He says that heaven and earth themselves will pass away, which is easy to read quickly and gloss over, but imagine! How terrifying would it be for the very earth you're standing on to just fall apart and disappear?

Jesus' instruction, though, isn't to give into fear or dismay; the proper response is to remain alert and pray. Although we don't know if we're living in the end times now (because "no one knows"), we're living in a hard, scary time. There's a pandemic, political and social unrest, discord even within the church, but our response should be the same: stay alert and pray. Share the gospel and preach the good news to the nations (Mark 13:10). Love one another (John 13: 34). Know God and make Him known (Matt 28:19).

It seems simple, but we are so easily distracted and lulled into spiritual sleep by our families, jobs, friends, money, and our lives. My hope and prayer for myself, my family, and our church during this Advent season is that we will take this time of celebrating our Savior incarnation as a reminder to be awake and prayerful for His imminent return. Let's not lose sight of the joy that's coming. Let's not let our present circumstances cloud our future hope. Jesus is coming back with great power and glory, and he will gather his elect "so we will always be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:17). There's hope now, and there's hope for the future. The end times are just the beginning.

Prayer

Lord, keep us awake and alert. Fill and focus our hearts on You.

Amen

GREAT MERCY

PSALM 85 | BY JEFF OLDS

*Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints;
but let them not turn back to folly.
Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,
that glory may dwell in our land. — Psalm 85:8–9*

THERE IS SO MUCH IN THIS PSALM!

Psalm 85 begins by reminding us of God's great faithfulness to His people Israel. God looked favorably on their land by graciously taking care of them, His special possession; He brought them back from captivity; and He forgave their iniquity and covered all their sin. What a beautiful picture and foreshadowing of Christ's sacrifice for His creation.

Throughout Psalm 85, the psalmist alludes to God's great mercy. "The word translated mercy is the great Hebrew word *hesed*, which often has the idea of grace or loyal love. This verse may have been the inspiration for what John later wrote: 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). For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). (Enduring Word Bible Commentary, comments on Psalm 85)

Christ's great mercy compelled Him to lay aside the riches of heaven and tabernacle with us in human flesh, live a sinless life, die on the cross, and rise from the dead. What amazing love and mercy.

During this Advent season, let's focus our heart's attention on the great mercy we have received in Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Father, thank you for your great mercy expressed to us through your gift of Jesus Christ.

Amen

JESUS OVERCOMES

JOHN 16:25-33 | BY CRAIG HARDEE

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. — John 16:33

THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS CERTAINLY QUALIFY AS YEARS OF TRIBULATION. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us into many situations for which we weren't prepared to handle.

Many, many people have been sick from the virus. Many people have died.

But Jesus overcomes.

We suffered through shortages. We've hunted for toilet paper and paper towels. We've scrounged for sanitizer and cleaning supplies. We've seen empty spaces in grocery stores where our favorite foods are usually stocked.

But Jesus overcomes.

Political divisions have been rampant. People have rioted, looted and destroyed property and businesses. Accusations, both founded and unfounded have been hurled at a record pace.

But Jesus overcomes.

A record number of hurricanes have made landfall, uprooting people and property. Fires have burned unchecked for weeks. Record rainfalls have flooded places where floods have not touched for hundreds of years.

But Jesus overcomes.

Yes, this has been a year of tribulation. But God has not left. He is still with us. He is still on His throne. He is still in charge. In the midst of all this tribulation, we are not alone. God is with us. He is always there. God loves us and has a plan for us, even in the midst of all this tribulation.

John 16:27 assures us that God loves us. If we are loved by God, that will help us endure any tribulation the world brings. So, world, bring on the tribulation, because Jesus overcomes!

Because Jesus overcomes, we can feel peace.

Because Jesus overcomes, we can transcend the tribulations of the world.

Because Jesus overcomes, we can communicate His peace and love to a lost and dying world who so need to hear the message that Jesus overcomes.

Because Jesus overcomes, we have the ultimate hope.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for sending Jesus to die for our sin and arise victorious over the world so that Jesus can overcome the world.

Amen

Week Four

COME AND SEE

LUKE 2:8-20 | BY TAMMY PRESSLEY

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 among those with whom he is pleased!" — Luke 2:13-14

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN A CHILD THAT IS EXTREMELY EXCITED for you to “come and see” something? As a preschool director, I hear these words all the time. When I visit a classroom, children rush to show me a craft they made, a tower they built out of blocks, or some delicious meal they’ve cooked with play food. They can’t wait to tell me all about whatever it is that has them so excited.

The same thing happened on the night that Jesus was born. An angel appeared to the shepherds and invited them to “come and see” the Savior. God had the best news of the ages to tell, and He chose to deliver this news first to the shepherds. The angel was there to tell them something significant, something exciting, something that would change their lives forever by giving them hope.

The shepherds were probably amazed that God had chosen them instead of the religious leaders, a king, or a rich man. Imagine how unworthy they must have felt, but how honored at the same time. As they listened, the angel told them that this good news was for all people, and all people included them. They were being invited to “come and see” this baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

When the angels had left them, the shepherds were ready to go and see. Can you imagine how awesome this must have been? The angel, the heavenly host, the journey, and then finding the baby with his parents just as was described. They were so excited after being in the presence of the Savior, that the shepherds couldn’t wait to tell others what they had seen. They were elated and overflowing with joy, and you know what happened when these uneducated, simple shepherds spread the word about what they had seen? People were amazed!

Just like children bursting with excitement for us to “come and see,” the shepherds did the same. They came and saw, and then reported the news of Jesus to others. Isn’t that what we should do when we experience Him?

Come and see the wonderful gift of Jesus and then take the Good News to others.

Prayer

Dear Lord, today I rejoice with the shepherds in the hope that Jesus gives. I want to spend my life sharing this news. In Jesus' Name,

Amen

ARE YOU LISTENING?

LUKE 2: 22-35 | BY MARK PRESSLEY

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” — Luke 2:29-32

WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG (and probably even as an adult!), did you ever wait on something special, anticipating that your expectations would be fulfilled? Maybe it was that team you tried out for or that special person you wanted to take to prom or that Red Rider BB gun you wanted for Christmas. I recall that feeling when I proposed to a beautiful young lady named Tammy. Now imagine how Simeon felt when he was promised that he would meet the Messiah, the Savior of the world, before he died. Of course, the anticipation of a special Christmas present can’t be compared to what Simeon was feeling. Our hopes are often built on human emotion, but Simeon’s hope was built on the power of the Holy Spirit. Notice that “the Holy Spirit was upon him” and that “it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit.” Simeon had the reassurance from God Himself that he would meet the Messiah. Talk about having high hopes, I don’t think anyone’s hopes could be greater.

As I read this scripture and think about how awesome it must have been to be Simeon, I remember that as a Christian, I am indwelt with the same Holy Spirit. If you are a Christian reading these words today, you also have the Holy Spirit in you and the promise of meeting the Savior of the world has already been fulfilled in your life. Unfortunately, we are sometimes like the shoemaker in a story often referred to as “The Cobbler and His Guest.” On Christmas Eve, the cobbler is told in a vision that the Lord will pass by his house the next day and that he is to invite him in to visit. As he keeps vigil on the street during the next day, many folks with various needs pass by his house and he helps each of them as best he can. As the day ends, the cobbler is feeling disappointed that Lord didn’t appear when suddenly the door is filled with a brilliant light and the voice of the Lord reminds him that He was there in every person he helped that day. I don’t do justice to this beautiful story, so I encourage you to read it on your own. It’s a great reminder that the Holy Spirit is actively speaking to us to encourage and give us hope. We just need to listen.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, please help us to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit as He guides, convicts and convinces us.

Amen

BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR

JOHN 1:6-8, 19-28 | BY PETER AND COURTNEY THOMPSON

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. — John 1:6–8

IT'S ALL TOO EASY FOR ME TO FALL INTO THE TRAP of believing I'm the main character in my story. After all, I literally view the world through my eyes. Maybe you struggle with that, too. We live in a time where self-promotion is encouraged and celebrated. In today's passage, however, we are introduced to John the Baptist, a man who is remarkably confident in his role as a supporting actor.

John the Baptist is described as being “sent from God” (v. 6) for the purpose of being a witness to the “light”, Jesus (v. 7-8). He is not the light, and is eager to correct anyone who might think he is (v. 8, 20). Instead, John points to God's Word, specifically Isaiah 40:3, where he lays out that he is there only to prepare the way for the coming savior. John's fulfillment of this prophecy is huge! It's specifically recorded in all four of the Gospels. And yet, he doesn't see this as a reason for pride. When John's ministry starts to pale in comparison to Jesus' ministry, John isn't worried or offended. Instead, he recognizes that he is just the “best friend” in this story, and that his role must decrease while Jesus' must increase (John 3:29-30).

John's confidence and hope came from God's promised Messiah, not from within himself or his accomplishments. He recognized that he was created to fill a supporting role in the grand story of Jesus. Just like John the Baptist, we are also created to be supporting actors. Paul came to this realization after his salvation. He describes in Philippians 3 how his accomplishments before his conversion are garbage in comparison to knowing and being in relationship with Christ. His self-centered life could only find hope in itself, an empty proposition. After his conversion, he found much greater hope in the promises of Jesus. Like Paul, there's still time to change your story, stepping out of the center of the frame and allowing Jesus to take that place.

Prayer

*Father, help me find my identity, purpose, and hope in your son, Jesus Christ.
Remove any selfish pride in my heart. In His name,*

Amen

WAITING ON THE LORD

PSALM 33:18-22 | BY MIKE COOPER

*Our soul waits for the Lord;
he is our help and our shield.*

*For our heart is glad in him,
because we trust in his holy name.*

— Psalm 33:20–21

IDON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT I HATE WAITING. When I was a kid, my parents would buy me and my brother Christmas presents, immediately wrap them, and then place them under the tree far before Christmas day. Every time I walked by the tree it was a reminder that there was something for me, something I wanted, but I had to wait for it. Even now I can't stand to wait and I feel like we are waiting in every aspect of our lives and in our church right now. Waiting to stop hurting, waiting to figure out how to move forward, waiting for our next lead pastor, waiting for things to get back to normal.

Psalm 33 is an unattributed psalm that begins by addressing the “righteous ones” and “the upright” (v1). The second half of this psalm begins to give us insight into how God works. Verses 13-22 show us that God does not work in light of our plans but rather we must learn to rely on God and place a confident trust in him.

The psalmist reminds us that God's attention is on those who fear him and hope in his steadfast love. In verse 19, we see that these people are in dire situations. They are facing death and famine, but because they fear God, they have no need to fear anything else. He is the Lord, the Holy One, our help, and our shield. Our hope in his steadfast love is a trust that through Christ, God will deliver us from the pains of death and trouble. Our hope is in Him, in His mercy, not in our own goodness, righteousness, or the best laid plans.

As we are in this season of waiting, let us make it purposeful and full of hope. Let us set our hearts on him and remember that he is faithful. God sees us, He knows us, and he is working on our behalf.

Prayer

*Lord, you are our help and our shield. Give us patience as we wait. Let us rejoice
in your steadfast love, and place our hope in you alone.*

Amen

GO OUT IN JOY

ISAIAH 55:12-13 | BY TAMMY PRESSLEY

*For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. — Isaiah 55: 12*

YOU WILL INDEED GO OUT WITH JOY and be peacefully guided; the mountains and the hills will break into singing before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush, a cypress will come up, and instead of the brier, a myrtle will come up; this will stand as a monument for the Lord, an everlasting sign that will not be destroyed

The coronavirus, civil unrest and violence, impending national debt, strained family relationships, and corruption within political parties have all caused a rising sense of fear and an increasing feeling of vulnerability in people all over the world. So, in the middle of all the unrest, what are God's people to do?

As Christians, we are called to be joyful, which is not a natural thing for us. Too often we place our joy in our circumstances. When things are trouble-free, we feel great, and it's easy to trust God. But when life starts getting difficult, we start to doubt that God is good.

Though the book of Isaiah was written to Israel, it is still relevant for believers today because it reveals the character of God. In Isaiah 55, God is speaking to a discouraged people in captivity whose future was uncertain and whose life was hard. These verses show God's path for moving His people from being insecure to being filled with peace and joy. Instead of being like scrubby desert plants, they will be like stable and useful trees. Isaiah reminds them, and us, that when we start to focus on God instead of the things around us, our feelings of fear, uncertainty, anxiety, or sadness are replaced with God's peace.

People are seeking joy and peace, and those who don't know Jesus are still looking for answers on how to be happy. That's why so many look for the next promotion, biggest house, nicest car, and perfect family. Instead of looking to the world for these things, if God's people will turn to Him, joy and peace are always the result. In fact, the joy is so great that even the mountains, the hills, and the trees of the field join in.

When we truly have the peace of God, we stop needing answers for everything, we stop having to worry about everything going on in the world and we can simply trust in Him for what is to come. When we seek His heart, we find peace, an inexplicable peace that will guide us through this life and all the trials we face. Isaiah ends verse 13 by saying that God's joy and peace in our lives will be an "everlasting sign" to those around us. God's goodness will be on display through as you go out in joy.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help us to experience the joy and peace that comes from you, not only during this Christmas season, but in each day of our lives.

Amen

THE ANNOUNCEMENT
OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS TO MARY

LUKE 1:26-38 | BY JEFF OLDS

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. — Luke 1:31-33

TODAY'S PASSAGE TELLS OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT TO MARY that she would be the mother of Jesus. This visit from the angel Gabriel is referred to as the annunciation – the announcement of the incarnation by the angel Gabriel to Mary.

In verse 28 the angel came to Mary and told her that she was the "favored" one and in verse 30 he told her that "you have found favor with God." At biblegateway.com there is some commentary that helps develop this idea,

"The portrait Luke paints of Mary is significant. She is a model believer, taking God at his word. She is favored of God (v. 30), thoughtful (v. 29; 2:19, 51), obedient (v. 38), believing (v. 45), worshipful (v. 46) and a faithful follower of God's law (2:22-51). It must be emphasized, however, that despite all these qualities, God's choice of Mary to bear this child springs from his grace, not from any inherent merit that she possesses. She is the object of God's unmerited, graciously provided goodness. Her description as one who has found favor with God (kecharitomene, v. 30) makes it clear that God has acted on her behalf and not because of her. In fact, Mary is totally perplexed by the sudden announcement. She did not ask for or seek this role in God's plans; God has simply stepped into her life and brought her into his service. Her asset is that she is faithful. She should be honored for her model of faithfulness and openness to serve God, but that does not mean she is to be worshiped. Luke wants us to identify with Mary's example, not to unduly exalt her person."

During this Advent season, may we strive to develop the characteristics that allowed Mary to be favored by God.

Prayer

Father, help me to find favor with you.

Amen

THE BEST GIFT

JOHN 1:1-18 | BY GREG AND CHRISTINA OWEN

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

— John 1:11-13

CHRISTMAS IS FINALLY HERE! This day will most certainly involve gifts. The gift a child opens that he has been longing for; the gift of family time with those you love; the gift of rest from the normal work pattern. Surely gifts will abound. But today is a celebration for the best gift: the birth of Christ. The Word made flesh. The One who made all things stepped down to be a light in this dark world. The image of the invisible God.

Even greater than his coming is that he invites us into a relationship with him. “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...” (John 1:12) That means that through Jesus, we now have an amazing Father, one who never makes mistakes and one who always gives good gifts. While we give our family gifts at Christmas, think of what Jesus says in Matthew 7:11, “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” We can surely name good gifts the Father has given us. Most of us have all the physical things we need: a home, a bed, a warm coat, food each day, etc. Even greater than this are eternal things like salvation, forgiveness, and hope. But of all the things God gives, one stands out ... the Holy Spirit. This is our helper, our advocate, the part of the Trinity that is with us always. Jesus says in John 16:7, “...it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”

As we are surrounded today by worldly gifts, I pray that we can pull aside and meditate on these verses in John 1 about the best gift. Jesus, the one who was with God in the beginning. Jesus, the Son of God, who came to show us the Father, full of grace and truth. Jesus, the one who makes our sonship possible. Jesus, the one in closest relationship with the Father. Jesus, the one who made the way for the Holy Spirit. May we know him as our greatest gift.

Prayer

God, help me to understand the greatness of your gift in Jesus. May I walk in the power of the Holy Spirit so that I may show others your character as Jesus did.

Amen



Salem-BC.org | info@salem-bc.org
1821 N. Salem Street | Apex, NC 27523
(919) 362-7327