

Look!



2009 Advent Devotional

Trinity Baptist Church

Madison, Alabama

Look!

Advent 2009

*Trinity Baptist Church
1088 Hughes Road
Madison, Alabama 35758
(256)837-9737*

www.trinitymadison.com

*"For God so loved the world,
that he gave His only begotten Son..."*

These devotions were written by the people of Trinity Baptist Church. They come from the heart. As you read each of these devotions this Advent season, it is our hope that God will speak to your heart, and that you will share the joy of Christmas with others.

~ Worship Committee
2009

Look!

Look Out!

<i>November 29</i>	<i>Luke 21: 5-19</i>	<i>Ronnie Brewer</i>
<i>November 30</i>	<i>Matthew 21: 1-11</i>	<i>Nate Adams</i>
<i>December 1</i>	<i>Matthew 21: 12-22</i>	<i>Julie Reyburn</i>
<i>December 2</i>	<i>Matthew 22: 23-32</i>	<i>Bruce Tucker</i>
<i>December 3</i>	<i>2 Peter 3: 11-18</i>	<i>Glenn Bowers</i>
<i>December 4</i>	<i>Jude 1-16</i>	<i>Yvonne Espy</i>
<i>December 5</i>	<i>Matthew 22: 15-22</i>	<i>Jody Bowhay</i>

Look Up!

<i>December 6</i>	<i>Luke 1: 57-68</i>	<i>Amy Hatchett</i>
<i>December 7</i>	<i>Revelation 1: 1-8</i>	<i>Ann Melton</i>
<i>December 8</i>	<i>Amos 7: 1-7</i>	<i>Michaela Morrissey</i>
<i>December 9</i>	<i>Matthew 23: 1-12</i>	<i>Kecia Pierce</i>
<i>December 10</i>	<i>Psalms 37: 1-18</i>	<i>Dave Ryder</i>
<i>December 11</i>	<i>Haggai 1: 1-15</i>	<i>Nan Denson</i>
<i>December 12</i>	<i>Revelation 3: 1-6</i>	<i>Dee Burner</i>

Look Around!

<i>December 13</i>	<i>John 5: 30-47</i>	<i>Steve Noojin</i>
<i>December 14</i>	<i>Psalms 44</i>	<i>Katie Colson</i>
<i>December 15</i>	<i>Zechariah 2: 1-13</i>	<i>Carolyn Hall</i>
<i>December 16</i>	<i>Psalms 119: 49-72</i>	<i>Eddi Vinson</i>
<i>December 17</i>	<i>Matthew 25: 1-13</i>	<i>Beth Francis</i>
<i>December 18</i>	<i>Psalms 51</i>	<i>Ralph Cobb</i>
<i>December 19</i>	<i>Psalms 138</i>	<i>Ann Delaney</i>

Look Down!

<i>December 20</i>	<i>John 3: 16-21</i>	<i>Teresa Bowers</i>
<i>December 21</i>	<i>Luke 1: 1-25</i>	<i>Joanne Brann</i>
<i>December 22</i>	<i>Luke 1: 26-38</i>	<i>Patrick Streeter</i>
<i>December 23</i>	<i>Luke 1: 39-56</i>	<i>Susan Spencer</i>
<i>December 24</i>	<i>Matthew 1: 18-35</i>	<i>Isaac Espy</i>
<i>December 25</i>	<i>Luke 2: 1-14</i>	<i>Ronnie Brewer</i>

Look Out!

November 29

Luke 21: 5-19

Look Out!

Many years ago it shocked me to learn that the church begins the Advent season not with good news, but the bad news that comes before the good news! The church begins each advent season by remembering that the world is in a mess, and that this savior, born in Bethlehem, comes to disrupt our misguided way of living and point us to a changed way of living.

This means change and confession, and in the advent message there is a clear warning of consequences if we won't change. Look Out! This is the first word the church proclaims at Advent. Not Sweet Little Jesus Boy, or Silent Night, or even Joy to the World. Look Out! The news about Jesus is good, but only if we recognize that there is bad news. There is sin, self centeredness, deceit, and violence in our world. There are promises we don't keep and people we don't love. There is a command to change; and Jesus comes to make that message clear.

Look Out! Things need to change and a revolution of the highest order has been put into place. Jesus comes to lead it and save us from our path of destruction. But for Him to save us we first have to recognize the need to change our ways, and follow the new born King.

Come Lord Jesus! We recognize that there is much bad news in our world. Come and change us, redeem us, save us from our wrongness.

Give us the wisdom to receive you as you are, not as we would imagine you to be. It is the Good News of your reign and kingdom that we seek and need. Amen.

~ Ronnie Brewer

Understanding Expectations

As I read the Matthew passage something struck me as both odd and unexpected. Jesus rode on a donkey, right? I am familiar with this story and I expected to see Jesus on the donkey, one donkey.

“The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.”

Why does Matthew have the two in his account? No one should say they know without doubt, but there is an interesting and theological traverse that one could take. The people of Jerusalem would have understood the donkey riding image. In the prophecy of Zechariah, there is an account of a ruler coming into Jerusalem on a donkey. The ruler establishes a large political domain. However, the ancient Hebrew was very poetic in nature and Matthew wants nothing lost to interpretation, this event was connecting Jesus to Zechariah’s book.

I am still uncomfortable with the two donkey ride, indeed, so much about this passage is not comfortable. While Jesus was looked upon as one sent to establish a political ruling, he would be hung on a crucifix in a few days. Moreover, Jerusalem itself would suffer destruction within two or three generations. Perhaps the children who saw Jesus that day would also see the destruction of Jerusalem’s Temple.

The Gospel writers all make it clear that the event was clouded in misunderstanding. The people do not understand Jesus’ identity and what kind of royalty he brought that day. They had expectations for a leader that would set Jerusalem free. Across centuries, misunderstanding is hung on certain expectations, even my expectations.

Why was Matthew so hung up on the Zechariah connection? Perhaps there is a better reason than to connect Jesus to “ruler.” Upon reading the passage in Zechariah it is clear the ruler comes to establish peace. I truly believe that is why Zechariah’s scripture is so important to Matthew.

We are meant to identify Jesus with peace. Jesus is coming and his motive is to establish peace. Jesus loves us, he was sent by God. In this season of Advent, take yourself beyond the city gate and look for Jesus. Don’t let your expectations gauge who Jesus really is. Jesus is coming and keeps coming into our lives in unexpected ways. Perhaps, riding two donkeys at the same time?

~ Nate Adams

Look Out!

December 1

Matthew 21: 12-22

Have You Seen Him?

“Believe” is a recurring theme during the Christmas season, especially since the release of the movie “The Polar Express” a few years ago. The story chronicles a boy’s journey to the North Pole where he wants proof that Santa Claus is real.

We don’t have to travel far to know God is real. I can take a few steps into my baby girl’s room and see Him. I can sit quietly in prayer at our dining room table and hear Him. I can travel a few miles to Trinity Baptist Church and feel Him.

Whether it’s the whimsy of Santa Claus and the North Pole or the serenity of a baby born in Bethlehem, we tend to look for and even count on miracles this time of year. Jesus’ power is not confined to a date on the calendar. Our faithful prayer is His partner in wondrous works throughout the year... if we just believe.

Heavenly Father, Help us to believe when our faith is small. Amen.

~ Julie Reyburn

Look Out for Tunnel Vision

How would you feel if Jesus himself spoke to you saying “*You are completely wrong! And you don’t know anything about the power of God.*”? Although I have not audibly heard Jesus speak these words so that I hear them with my ears, I wonder how often Jesus tries to speak to me to tell me that I really am completely wrong in God’s eyes.

The story told in Matthew 22:23-32 has a group of Sadducees trying to entrap Jesus by posing a paradoxical question about the rules for marriage on earth and in Heaven. The Sadducees were trying to put God in a little box built around their narrow rules. The Sadducees’ false pride and arrogance had given them tunnel vision, allowing them to see only their own distorted vision of God. When then tried to trap Jesus with what they no doubt thought was brilliant logic, Jesus shattered their delusions with the stinging words quoted in the previous paragraph from the Contemporary English Version of Matthew 22:29.

The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection. When they challenged Jesus about this, Jesus reminded them of the words audibly spoken by God to Moses (Exodus 3:6) from the burning bush. “*But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.*” {Matthew 22:31-32 New International Version} Even though the scholarly Sadducees would have studied these words in the Torah, they had missed the meaning. Jesus shattered another of their delusions by proclaiming that God is supreme over everything - alive and dead, Heaven and earth.

How often do we allow our own tunnel vision to put God in a tiny little box? Do we try to force God to obey our rules or do we submit to His authority? Can we even begin to comprehend the magnificence of God’s power? How often do we sincerely proclaim God as supreme?

Lord, I pray that my tunnel vision yields to a clearer vision of your magnificence. I am eternally grateful for your sacrifice for an undeserving sinner such as me.

~ Bruce Tucker

Letter to A Man in the Fire

After reading today's devotional passage, you may be asking the same thing I did when I read this for the first time:

"What does this have to do with Christmas?" "What does destruction, fire, and end time events have to do with the birth of Jesus?"

And, "What does it have to do with me?"

The passage from 2 Peter was originally written to the early Christian Church to encourage them during difficult times. This small group was feeling "under fire" by persons that were pointing out the delay in the return of Christ. The passage then points us towards trusting in His promise of a new heaven and a new earth.

Today's passage is for those who are currently "in the fire." Those of us who are experiencing the fire of loneliness, the fire of diminishing health, the fire of fear, the fire of financial problems, etc. Today's passage is for those who are hurting, feeling alone, and feeling hopeless during the holidays.

Reynolds Price wrote a book *Letter to a Man in the Fire*. In the book, Price answers two questions posed to him by a man dying of cancer. The questions were, "Does God care for us? And, "Where is God when we need him most?"

Price's response was, God cares for us so much he came in the form of a baby to live, eat, laugh and cry with us. And, when we need God most (when we are in the fire), he will always be with us. (Daniel 3:25)

Advent 2009 may not be a "happy" time for you. If you are going through the fire, remember you are never alone. Jesus is always with you!

We as believers await the celebration of Jesus coming to be with us in human form.

Julian of Norwich wrote:

"Jesus never said, You will not be troubled.

Jesus never said, You will not be belabored.

Jesus never said, You will not be afflicted.

Jesus said, You will not be overcome."

Amen

~ Glenn Bowers

Warning!

Warning! Watch Out! Not your typical message for advent, but let's ponder it a moment. Go ahead and read the passage if you haven't already. We could go in a couple of directions with this passage, A) doom of the ungodly or B) being a vigilant believer. Let's go with "B".

If we look deeply at the passage it is compelling us to be watchful, keen to what is going on around us. Pay attention; don't just go through the motions in life. Be aware of the evil that is around you. Recognize it for what it is. Be careful to not fall for the message of those that would "pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord."

How do we walk in that keenness of mind? By studying God's word, by praying earnestly and sincerely, by pondering what God has to say and allowing it to infiltrate our daily lives. As we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us we become wiser in the ways of God. We then are capable of recognizing his handiwork and thusly what isn't of God. Jesus said in John 10: 14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me".

God can supernaturally intervene like he did with Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, when the Angel of the Lord came to him in a dream to tell them to go to Egypt to escape the slaughter at the hand of Herod. It would be tempting to rely on this method alone, but it might be unwise considering all the scriptures in both Testaments that exhort us to prepare and be fit in a spiritual sense. Isaiah 55:6 states "Seek the Lord while he may be found".

As we look for Jesus, we will find him. Let us continue to pursue him as we would the dearest of friends. So that we may know him so deeply that when we are confronted by someone who would dare to lead us astray that we would immediately recognize the deception and reject it without hesitation. Then we should pray for them that God would have mercy.

Dear Lord, create a strong desire in me to know you and your word. Please help me to recognize your voice just as a sheep would recognize its shepherd's voice. Give me wisdom so that I can recognize evil and give me the strength to turn away from it. Please be merciful to those who would be used to deceive, open their eyes to the truth. In the powerful name of Jesus, Amen.

~ Yvonne Espy

Trapped

It amazes me when reading the gospel stories how the Pharisees were always trying to trap Jesus. I want to yell out. Watch out, Jesus! I can't wait to see how He is going to handle this one. I know that He is going to prevail but I still am surprised by how He does it each time. He just tells the truth. Wow! That seems so simple but only because we, humans, make it so complicated. I know this passage seems kind of funny for Christmas, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's", but it shows that Jesus can be found even when we feel trapped. Maybe we are feeling trapped by financial difficulties, sickness or by an extremely busy lifestyle. Maybe we have made grey the areas of our life that matter most and are having a hard time seeing how we can find Jesus this Christmas in the midst of our particular circumstances. Well it is as simple as Jesus telling the truth, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's". As I assess my planned activities and money to be spent this Christmas, I try to make sure the focus of it all is Jesus. If I don't have enough money or can't get out due to sickness, I can write cards or make phone calls to those I love. Those can mean more than any expensive gift. If I am able, I try to make my time spent be on activities that matter to God and not let myself get too crazy with activity that I rub off badly on those around me. Most of all, I make time for worship, to remember what Christ means to me and thank Him for getting me out of the traps that I have gotten myself in over the years. He can do it every time. It never ceases to amaze me.

Dear Lord, please help me this Christmas season to give to God what is God's with my attention, time, and money. Amen

~ Jody Bowhay

To Welcome and Name

The people of God had waited. They had waited on the Promised Messiah from God to break into their world and fix all that had gone wrong. The gospel of Jesus Christ is about to begin. Cue the lights...or...star, as the case may be.

We stop first, taking a short detour, to hear the story of Elizabeth and Zachariah, the elderly, devout, childless couple who were informed via heavenly messenger that they would not always be child-less. Their personal story mirrors both the dark pain of sadness and the barely-there echo of hope of the people of God.

Zachariah reacts to this news without faith, but more importantly, perhaps, he reacts without imagination. "How will I know this will happen? We are already old." But the angel was so sure, there was already a name picked out.

Nine silent months follow for Zachariah, during which his wife conceives and bears the child that had been promised to them. This promised child would show the way for the coming Promised Messiah. The great story of the Gospel is being played out on the local stage of their lives.

Enter the crowd of relatives and neighbors. They are surprised by the name given to "John;" they are ignorant of the purposes of God. Zachariah's praise has had nine months of its own gestational silence. The end of his speechlessness is punctuated by a song of praise for the marvelous work of God in the world and in his life. The crowd was amazed and bewildered about the things that were happening.

"Look up," we say to them. Look up, and see what's going on here! Part of the fulfillment of God's best and greatest promise happens, here, in your own living room!

Almighty God,

May we be faithful to "look up," to welcome and name the moments in our lives when you are at work. Teach us to be quiet enough to listen for the story you are writing in our world and in our lives. Amen

~ Amy Hatchett

Thoughts from Revelation

December 7th is a date in United States history that will forever be known as “A Day in Infamy.” History records that on December 7th, 1941, beautiful Pearl Harbor, Hawaii was attacked by planes from the Empire of Japan. Hundreds of military personnel and civilians lost their lives. The “Pearl” was a scene of brutal destruction. The surprise attack left wreckage that could hardly be imagined in the human mind.

What had begun as a calm Sunday morning became a day of suffering, death, and ruin. Who would have thought the morning skies would rain bombs that led to such devastation? Eyewitnesses could scarcely believe what they saw. The memories of that day would never be erased.

Persecution was rampant at the time John wrote Revelation. Hatred of Christians precipitated his exile to the Isle of Patmos. Even in that solitary place, the power of God was stronger than those doing evil.

An angel brought God’s message to John for the seven churches of Asia to be prepared for the future. John shared this revelation, and the congregations were encouraged to hear the prophecy and take it to heart. John instructed them that “the time is near” for the fulfillment of the message. In later passages of Revelation, we see the prophecy fulfilled.

The Advent journey reminds us to celebrate hope through the coming of Jesus Christ. Even when news in our lives is not all good news, we have the reassurance of God’s presence and power. The Holy Spirit is with us to guide and comfort. We can raise our eyes to focus on “...the ruler of the kings of the earth,” our Savior, Jesus Christ. Keep looking up in anticipation of His return!

Father, it is sometimes difficult during this time of year to keep our minds on what is most important. Help us not to be so busy that we minimize the true reason for celebration, the gift of Jesus our Savior. Thank you for your generous and sacrificial gift to us. Renew our hearts as we receive Him once again. Amen.

~ Ann Melton

Rights and Responsibilities

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

United States Declaration of Independence

I have always felt that while humans divide themselves by race and socioeconomic status, that God loves each one of us equally. I feel that the Lord loves us all with equal magnitude, and wishes for none to feel unworthy of his care. It seems that Thomas Jefferson shared a similar view. However, he fails to mention that with rights come responsibilities. These responsibilities include the worship and glorification of the Lord which is done by living by His word.

Even as Christians, we tend to get caught up in the secular world, especially around Christmas time. Stresses of finals, vacations, or Christmas preparations may take priority over time spent glorifying God, and result in quite a bit of sinning. Just like the Israelites in Amos, we may stray from God, leaving us face his divine judgment. When we forget to thank and worship the Lord, we become no better than those who reject him entirely. Christianity is not simply about admitting you love the Lord; it is about taking on the responsibilities that come with His grace, such as living by his word and spreading his love.

So, how are you doing this Christmas season? If God measured your holy life with a plumb-line, would he find it straight, or would it be crooked, like the lives of the Israelites? What can you do to fix your holy life this season? What can you do to enjoy the secular life, while still also glorifying God?

Dear Lord, thank you for your love and the graces that come with it. Please help us to remember that Christianity is more than just a word, it is a way of life. Help us to thrive in this world, while also thriving religiously. Help us to live by your law, and set an example for others in this world, so that they too can realize the wonder and happiness in a relationship with you. Amen.

~ Michaela Morrissey

"The Greatest Among You will be Your Servant"

I was a teenager the first time I really took notice of the ways and habits of both my grandmother and my mother. During meals, they always made sure that everyone was served and had enough to eat and drink before they would even consider sitting down themselves. During holidays, I watched them prepare food for days, as if a football team or small country were joining us for the holiday meal. And then once the meal was served, I watched everyone else devour the food, compliment the cooks, and then proceed to the family room sofa to watch football or visit with guests. My grandmother and mother would then proceed to clean up all the food, dishes, and mess the rest of us made. They were also there to help friends in need, whether to take food, help with something specific, or just visit. You see, my mother and my grandmother, they got that right a long time ago. And they have lived and continue to live a life that constantly puts the needs of others before themselves. And they never do it for show, they never do it for gratitude, and they never bring attention to the things they do. So, this Advent season and throughout the coming year, let's make the time to share our gifts, our touch, our hearts, our ears, and our abilities in order to make ourselves servants to others in the name of the Lord.

Our Heavenly Father, help us to constantly renew our minds, our bodies, and our souls so that we may sacrifice ourselves and use our spiritual gifts in the service of You, Dear Lord. Help us to reach out and make ourselves servants to those who need it. Help us to be humble in our work, so that all things may surely be done to glorify You. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

~ Kecia Pierce

Down to the Last Play

Nobody in my house likes to watch football with me. I get too excited. My fretting is twice as bad if my beloved Green Bay Packers are playing. I have been banned from watching live games for about five years now. If I want to view a game, I have to record it and play it back after I have learned the final score and everybody else has gone to bed – for the sake of the family and my heart.

Psalm 37 is an amazing little chapter. It illustrates the activity of the “saint” who is looking up, and the “ain’t” who is looking anywhere but up. “To the Lord” all are instructed to take the high road of trust, delight, commitment, patience, and a special rule for fans like me to not fret. For the one whose eyes are in the gutter there is a stern warning. No one is exempt from the rule that God keeps score, and does not need instant replay to make the right call. He also keeps the game clock and declares the winner at the end of the last quarter. For those who look up to His authority, there is peace with the outcomes. For those who do not, they will continue to look around or down to find a way to blame others (or even the referee) for all their misfortunes.

One beauty of Christianity is that God declares the winners before the end of the game. The victory is already won, and we can stop worrying about the score and concentrate on playing the game to our fullest. One beauty of Christmas is that it reminds us when Jesus said to His Father “Put me in, Coach”.

Lord, help your saints to look up, fret not, and walk the high road.

~Dave Ryder

Houses

Most people are intensely involved and interested in their houses. After all, realtors tell us it will probably be the most expensive purchase we ever make. In our nearly 50 years of marriage we've owned 10 houses. They've all had at least one item of charm and grace and several items that were less than charming. We have yet to discover the perfect house, but we keep trying. Also, our houses reflect our personalities. The minute you enter our house, you will see books, antiques, and lots of blue and white -- all favorite things of ours that we are happy to surround ourselves with.

Haggai is not a book that many Christians commonly read. It's just one of those small, short books that end the Old Testament which make memorizing the books of the Bible difficult. However, Haggai had a message from the Lord to the people who returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian Exile. In 586 BC Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and the people sent into exile. In 536 BC Cyrus, the king of Persia, decreed the Jews could return to their homeland. The first group to return began work on the temple, but after rebuilding the altar and laying the foundations for the rest of the temple, they grew discouraged and turned their attention toward their own needs. Sixteen years passed and they still were involved in their own affairs, even seeking luxuries in their lives while the temple was unfinished. Haggai had one message from the Lord and it was simple, to rebuild the Lord's House "which remains a ruin while each of you is busy with his own house." This simple message was effective and well-received. In less than a month work began again on the temple, and it was completed 4 years later.

What message does Haggai have for us 2,545 years later as we sit in our nice houses in affluent Madison? I've been accused of thinking too much about money, but I see a money message here. Trinity has been blessed to have built a new building this past year without incurring any additional debt. However, we have had to shelve our renovation plans for the education building because we lack the money to carry them out. During this Christmas season when we turn our thoughts to God's gift to us through Jesus, let's give a gift back to the Lord. Let's give enough extra gifts to the building fund that we can finish the Lord's House at 1088 Hughes Road.

Lord, make us aware that all we have is a gift from you, and help us not be selfish in our giving. Amen

~ Nan Denson

Which Way Did He Go?

You may be wondering after reading the scripture reference for today how this leads to Jesus at the manager – me too! Let's see if we can find out together.

Hectic schedules that are packed already made busier by the demands of the holiday season. Extra rehearsals – shopping – baking goodies – parties to attend – extra programs to go see – decorating – kids antsy for Christmas to get here – adults antsy for some extra days off - travel to see families – throw in unplanned illness – or something breaks and our stress level has just gone off the chart and this is supposed to be a season of joy and peace.

Where do we see Jesus in all this? Where do we find time to find Jesus in all this? For that matter has life made it easy to look for him all year?

In our scripture reference today Jesus warns not to become complacent in our walks. We must be diligent in ensuring that our walk is meaningful not just going through the motions. We are to remain ready and watching for His return. Jesus promises that if we are victorious we will be white on that day. I encourage you during this holiday season to take/make time to reflect on your walk and look to Jesus to renew your desire to seek him and find ways to make time for Him in your schedule each day.

Lord Jesus we confess that life gets in the way sometimes. We don't always look up like we should – we look down – we look around – everything but look up. Help us to look up more this next year. Renew our desire for you and a relationship that is intimate and all that you would have it to be. Help us to be diligent in making time with you, so that next year it is more natural for us to look up first.

~ Dee Burner

Look Around!

December 13

John 5: 30-47

Look Around for Signs of Jesus

Jesus tells us to look around and listen to the things that are told to us about him. Jesus mentions that John the Baptist, Moses and even God have told us about him and his greatness. He reminds us that we all have favorite messengers that we trust and tend to follow. Most of us have a specific local weatherman that we tune into when impending bad weather is coming. Their predictions and words comfort us or send us scurrying to the grocery store for bread and milk (not sure why those go the fastest). The generations before ours watched the sky and the animals for the evidence of impending weather. As we look around at all the wonderful acts Jesus has done and the acts done in his name how can we not see his greatness and count on his promises? I for one am so happy he has promised us salvation. Please look around this season for the evidence of Jesus and rejoice in his Glory.

Dear Lord: Please show us your greatness during this season. Let our hearts and minds see the signs and rejoice in them.

~ Steve Noojin

Don't Miss This!

We've all had times in our life when we get too caught up in our busy schedules, and it seems like our lives never slow down. Between work, school, sports, and everything else, we never seem to catch a break. Sometimes we fail to see the miracles right in front of us. Just take a second to stop and look around. Jesus is everywhere! We don't have to look far to realize how close he truly is, especially during this holiday season. The crackle of the fire, the sweet aroma of holiday cookies, or the gathering of loved ones, he is present in all we do and sometimes we just need to stop and look. He has done so much for us and through him we can do anything. "With your hand you drove out the nations and planted our fathers; you crushed the peoples and made our fathers flourish. It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arms bring them victory; it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them." Psalms 44: 2-3. So this holiday season I challenge you to take time out of your busy schedule to look around and I guarantee you'll find something you don't want to miss.

Dear Lord, we thank you for all you have done for us. Please help us to stop and look around and see the wonders of your world. Bless us and keep us from harm in this advent season. We love you and will praise your name forever. Amen

~ Katie Colson

A New Perspective

Have you ever looked around a room from a child's point of view? As new parents, my husband and I have had the privilege of carefully examining each room in our house, baby proofing as best we can, searching for uncovered electrical outlets, shelves of breakable items, and other such things. We have had to adopt a new perspective as we care for a growing daughter!

In this passage of Scripture, another "new perspective" is voiced. Here, the angel of the Lord explains that "Jerusalem will be a city without walls," a city that cannot be measured with a simple measuring line. It will be larger than imaginable and will house many nations. But, what could possibly make the Holy City accessible to these other nations? The answer is simple, and one on which we focus during the Christmas season; that is, Christ Jesus!

So, look around this Advent season! Re-examine your perspective of what it means to be a Christian. Does it need to be refreshed? Infused with renewed joy? As this Scripture also says, "Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion." Christ is our Salvation! He came, years ago, to bring us this hope, peace, and wholeness, and He will come, in His Glory, to live with us again.

Heavenly Father, thank you for this refreshing season of the year, where we can pause and reflect on the gifts You have given us - especially Christ and salvation through Him. Throughout Advent, please prepare in us hope, peace, thankfulness, and joy for the coming year. Amen.

~ Carolyn Hall

Stop, Look, and Listen!

This adage from my childhood still rings in my ears, and what's more, it rings truer than ever. The more years I live the more I understand the need to do just that - - - "stop, look and listen." In fact, one of the first things I remember about my childhood is that I had boundaries. There were very clear "do's" and don'ts" which were administered in a nurturing and loving manner, and which provided security and direction for me.

You may deduce from this opening paragraph that I was a pretty compliant child, and while I think I was, others might debate that. I do know, though, that I thrived on the feelings of safety and direction that those loving boundaries gave me, and, more, I believe there is a biblical parallel embodied in Psalm 119. It appears to me that the writer of Psalm 119 (probably David) says this same thing in different ways:

I will always obey your law, forever and ever; (vs. 44)

I remember your ancient laws, O Lord, and I find comfort in them; (vs. 52)

I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes; (vs. 59)

I keep your precepts with all my heart; (vs. 69)

The law from your mouth is more precious to than thousands of pieces of silver and gold. (vs. 72)

Key words sprinkled through Psalm 119 allude to the desire of the writer to adhere to God's way, to know God's teachings (*law, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, ordinances, word, way*), leading me to the conclusion that the Bible is telling us this is how we can form a solid base on which to grow our faith and live more godly lives.

God wants to be our Counselor as we journey in this world. As one commentator puts it, "However God has dealt with us, he has dealt with us better than we deserve; and all in love, and for our good." His laws, statutes, precepts, are clearly stated and offered out of a boundless love for each of us. Why else would God send His only Son as a ransom for our sin? As Christmas approaches, I encourage you to "stop, look and listen" for ways God is working as our Guide and Counselor. Delight in the law of the Lord, and find comfort and hope in His word.

Holy Father, give us open hearts to receive your truths, and lead us step by step to the manger to offer the gifts of adoration and praise. Thank you for your loving guidance in our lives. Amen.~ Eddi Vinson

Is Everything Ready?

I like to cook. I can spend all day in the kitchen. But I really, really don't enjoy cleaning house. I do get motivated to clean when I know we are going to have guests. Unfortunately, I get sidetracked pretty easily. Usually, I go full steam for an hour or two and then it's time to clean out the magazine rack. I do enjoy reading and I NEED to look through those magazines to make sure I don't need any of the articles in them before I recycle them. And an hour or two or three later, I will realize it's time for my guests and I have a lot more to do!

I wonder if that's what happened to the girls in this story. They were trying to get all their preparations done. They had great intentions. But then they got sidetracked. Maybe they couldn't decide on the best outfit for the celebration. Maybe they needed to talk to the other girls to find out what they were wearing.

Fortunately, when I get sidetracked from cleaning, I don't miss the visit. But I don't get as much out of it sometimes, because I'm busy worrying about whether the guests noticed that the floor wasn't clean, the desk was messy, These girls missed the entire celebration because of their unpreparedness. How sad!

Do we miss out on what God has for us sometimes because we aren't ready? Do we lose sight of the final goal and stop along the way for something of no great consequence? Let's make sure in this Christmas season with all of its busyness that we don't lose sight of what we are preparing to celebrate: the greatest gift ever given, Jesus.

Father, Help us focus on what is important this Christmas. May we be like Jesus who crept away from the busyness of everyday life to spend time with You. Help us prepare our hearts for your coming, Lord. Amen

~ Beth Francis

Psalm 51

At times we think we are moving toward God, but His Presence eludes us. We strain, but do not hear His voice. We feel that we are alone through our pain and suffering. We look around for God, but our vision is clouded. Then suddenly we become painfully aware of the unconfessed sin that has come between us. Just as David, we cry out for forgiveness. How is such forgiveness possible? Even for David, forgiveness was made possible through the Christ of which he prophesied. When God spoke to the world in the life of Jesus Christ, he spoke the same Word that he had spoken when he created the world. The same creative power cleanses our heart and renews our spirit. As we look for Jesus during this advent, remember that repentance is fundamental.

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit with me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. Amen

~Ralph Cobb

Psalm 138 of David

During worship we sing many hymns and enjoy the Choir's special music. The sound is harmonious and soothing to our World tired bodies. Let's look closer at these Christian works for inside this Hymn of Praise and Worship is a simple poem or prose. The author lifts the words from the Bible, the composer adds a simple melody, and with the voices added a hymn is created. The singers and musicians blend their notes and weave the authors' words to complete the work. Remember the center of that hymn? It is a simple poem or prose.

In a stable surrounded by Kings, loving parents, and beasts of burden we find Jesus. The Savior is the center of all. Love is here. We find hope, forgiveness, sympathy, compassion, and the strength to pray for our enemies. When we remove the problems, the anxiety, and uncertainty in our lives we find Him. We are at His right hand and His love endures forever.

What is the center of your life? I pray it is Jesus. Look inside your heart. Is He there?
"God will make a way when there seems to be no way. He works in ways we cannot see, He will make a way for me. He will be my guide, hold me closely to His side. With love and strength each new day, He will make a way. He will make a way. . .

"(*God Will Make a Way* words and music by Don Moen © Integrity Media, inc.)

Dear Heavenly Father,

Please be the center of my life forever. I ask that you build my life according to Your plan and not mine. I pray that You go before me in everything I do. Help me to walk confidently and when the opportunity arises, let me offer Your words of encouragement to others. In your precious name I pray, Amen.

~ Ann Delaney

Christmas and VBS

One of the first Bible verses I remember learning at church is John 3:16. It was during Vacation Bible School so I always picture VBS at the church of my childhood when I hear that verse. But I don't really associate John 3:16, and the verses following, with Christmas. The first few chapters of Matthew and Luke are the ones that come to my mind when I think of the Christmas story.

The devotionals for this coming week will actually be based on the birth narratives found in Matthew and Luke. These verses give us some of the details about Jesus' birth and also about the reactions of those most closely involved with him in his early years. These stories are very important as we see how God "came down" from heaven and became one of us in Jesus.

John doesn't include details or the "how" of Jesus' birth, but instead tells us the "why" – "For God so loved the world that he sent his only son...." Love is what prompts God to leave heaven, become human, and live among us. You've heard the phrase, "Jesus is the Reason for the Season" but John would probably add, "Love is the Reason for Jesus."

May the love that moved God to "look down" and join us in our struggles also move us to share that love with the people we encounter this Christmas season.

~ Teresa Bowers

Time

Do you know what time it is? There are clocks everywhere! We have watches, cell phones, computers, itouch devices, you name it. We always have time within our grasp, or do we? How many times have you heard, or even said, "There are just not enough hours in the day.?" In today's world we rush from here to there. We are stressed trying to fit everything in. When do we slow down? When do we take the "time" to really hear God speak to us?

Zechariah and Elizabeth had prayed for a child. They probably wondered why God would not bless them with this gift of life. As a priest, Zechariah entered the temple to burn incense to the Lord. This was something he would only get to do once in his life. When Gabriel appeared to him, he was frightened. Gabriel told him he would have a son and his name would be John. This baby would grow up to do many great things for his people. Zechariah, being an intelligent man, knew that both he and his wife, Elizabeth, were well past their child bearing years. His unbelief caused him to be struck mute. I imagine after that encounter, he had plenty of time on his hands to reflect on what the angel had said, and to listen more intently to God. You know the rest of the story; Elizabeth did become pregnant and bore a son, John the Baptist. But it was done in God's time, not Zechariah's and Elizabeth's.

I love our "Be Still and Know" expression of worship here at Trinity. We make a concentrated effort to take the time to clear our minds and open our hearts to the Lord and what He has to say to us during worship. We are to be quiet for just a little while, like Zechariah, and listen to that still small voice.

Are you praying for something in particular? Waiting on God to do something in your life? At times, we will experience trials so we can learn to trust in God. Look down, close your eyes, be still and know. Know that He is still a God on His throne. He is willing and able to help you through your trials. Answers will come, in His time, not ours.

Heavenly Father, at this busy time of year, help us slow down and know that you are a God who loves us and wants a close personal relationship with us. Help us trust You with everything in our lives. Thank you for your son Jesus, in His name, Amen.

~ Joanne Brann

Look Down!

December 22

Luke 1: 26-38

And Your Assignment Is...

I can just imagine what it must have looked like for an angel to appear before Mary. Mary was certainly scared and unsure of what this meant. This angel sent by God was telling Mary that she was going to do help with God's plan. We can relate to this story very well. God will show us in time his plan for us. When he does, we need to be ready to accept our assignment. It can be scary, and it may seem tough, but God has already planned for us to succeed if we trust in him. Just as Mary accepted her assignment, we must be ready to accept ours. May the Christmas time be a gentle reminder of what we have and what God has given us.

Pray today that you will be ready to accept your assignment from God and that you will have the strength to follow through with God's plan.

~ Patrick Streeter

Magnificat

Mary had some special news, and she wanted to share it with her close relative, Elizabeth. Mary was just like any of us when we have news and want to share it with our family and close friends. Mary had just had a visit from an angel who told her that she would be the mother of Jesus. The angel also told her that Elizabeth was pregnant, too. Since Mary was so young, I'm sure that she was just bursting to tell someone and who better than Elizabeth. The scripture doesn't say what their relationship was, but it is obvious that they were close. Elizabeth didn't know about Mary's condition, but when she walked in the door of their house, Elizabeth's baby leapt in her womb and she was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she knew that she was in the presence of the mother of her Lord.

Mary's song, known as the Magnificat, is one of the most beautiful songs of joy and worship in all of scripture. From her words, it is clear that Mary was very familiar with the Word of God. John MacArthur in his book, *Twelve Extraordinary Women*, states that, "God is the only One she magnified. Notice how she praised the glory and majesty of God while repeatedly acknowledging her own lowliness...The song is all about *God's* greatness, *His* glory, the strength of *His* arm, and *His* faithfulness across the generations."

As we approach the birth of Christ, we should strive to magnify God and realized that He alone provides for us.

Father, let us bask in Your magnificence during this Advent Season. You alone provide everything that we have and everything that we are. Let us be humbled before you. Amen

~ Susan Spencer

God's Intervention

Joseph was in a fix. On one hand, he's got Mary, who he is betrothed to. She is in a bad situation, because she is pregnant and he knows it is not his child. The traditions of the day required chastity before marriage. On the other hand, he had to retain his honor, so he compassionately decided to obtain a divorce quietly. This would perhaps have left her in a worse situation. God graciously looking down on this situation, intervened supernaturally by speaking to Joseph in a dream. In the dream, God called out his name and told him to not be afraid. He told him to take Mary home as his wife because what she had conceived in her was of the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and he should give him the name Jesus because he would save his people from their sins. This was the fulfillment of the prophecy from Isaiah.

Joseph had two choices: he could ignore the dream, or he could follow God's instructions. Although Joseph had the benefit of knowing exactly what he was supposed to do, it still wasn't an easy choice. But God knew that Joseph was a good man for an earthly father for Jesus, because of his compassion and his obedience.

We, as Christians, are the beneficiaries of Joseph's obedience, because Jesus could not have survived without him. And we cannot survive without Jesus.

Dear Lord, Thank you for intervening on Mary's behalf because this is a reminder for us that you are watching out for us. Help us to have hearts like Joseph that are open to obey you even with hard choices. Create a spirit of expectation in us as we celebrate the birth of our savior. Amen.

~ Isaac Espy

Look Down!

December 25

Luke 2: 1-14

Looking for Jesus

Garrison Keillor writes about life in Lake Wobegon and describes in one of his stories the town's yearly excitement about Christmas. He writes of pageants, special services, and multiple musicals and plays. He even admits that some are not always perfect and to an outsider may seem a bit odd or even goofy. Why would all of these ordinary people, who have very little training in acting and music, put so much energy in these Christmas events?

“Because, says Keillor, “it’s a great story and we just want to be a part of it.”

Today, we celebrate this great story, and we are a part of it! As you think and pray this morning remember the story by reading Luke 2: 1-14. Gather your “cast” around you and give thanks for one another and for the great plot God has created for each of us through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a great story and we are, thanks be to God, part of it.

Almighty God:

Thanks to you for your love, mercy, and care. We worship and adore you today, and every day, O Christ our Lord and Redeemer. Amen

~ Ronnie Brewer