



# Make a Way

An Advent Journey Through Isaiah



## **Background on Advent**

Welcome to Advent 2025. Each year, the Christian calendar immerses us in the narrative arc of how God holds all things together in Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:17). This storied calendar starts the year with Advent, building up to the excitement of Christmas Day. The story continues to unfold through other major events of Jesus' life: Epiphany (Jesus being revealed to the nations), Lent (preparation for Good Friday and Easter), Easter (Jesus' resurrection), Ascension Day, Pentecost (the sending of the Holy Spirit), and finally Ordinary Time.

Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas and goes through Christmas Eve. Because Christmas Day falls on a different day of the week each year, the length of Advent changes annually. As a result, Advent can be as short as 22 days and as long as 28 days. This year (2025), Advent is right in the middle, beginning on November 30 and extending for 25 days.

Traditionally, Advent has a mixture of confession and celebration woven together. We are invited to recognize our need for a Savior, even as we sing joyfully about God sending Jesus to save us from our sins. Throughout Church history, Advent celebrations also have held together remembering Jesus' birth and anticipating his second coming. Both of these paired emphases will surface in this devotional.

## **This Advent Devotional**

Rooted in the book of Isaiah, the reflections in this devotional loosely engage the traditional Advent themes of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love for each of the weeks of Advent. However, the primary emphasis throughout the devotional is on how God makes a way for us. That God would make a way for us is both a prayer and a promise in the Bible, often in the midst of difficult circumstances. Sometimes this theme will be stated directly. Other times, it is more subtle, which is quite often how many of us experience God's work in our lives.

Each devotional entry contains a scripture reading and a brief meditation. Following the meditation, four additional guiding practices are offered. They are intended to help deepen your experience of this Advent season:

- **Candle Lighting:** a short reading for those who would like to utilize an advent wreath and candles at home during this season.
- **Reflection:** a question or two to facilitate further engagement with ideas from the scripture passage or the meditation.
- **Prayer of Response:** a concluding prayer for those who would benefit from having a structured prayer.
- **Suggested Practice:** a short reference to a particular spiritual practice that could be beneficial for responding to the meditation.

As we journey through Isaiah, I pray that the Holy Spirit will move among us both to deepen our thankfulness for Jesus Christ's birth and to whet our appetite for Jesus Christ's return.

Grace and Peace, Chris



November 30, 2025

First Sunday of Advent – Hope

Isaiah 1:16-20

## Blunt

Blunt. It's a potentially confusing word. On the one hand, blunt refers to a dull object, like the worn-down tip of a pencil. While still useful for some general shading, a blunt pencil does not produce writing that others can easily read. On the other hand, blunt words are pointed and expressed to deliver a direct, often confrontational message. They name what we would rather not hear.

Isaiah begins with a blunt confrontation about how Israel's faith has become dull and ineffective in communicating God's righteous character. The practiced faith of God's people – and there can never be a faith that is not practiced – fails to communicate who God really is.

Isaiah pointedly declares that Israel actually looks like God's historic enemies, Sodom and Gomorrah. In their mistreatment of widows, orphans, immigrants, and the poor, God's people have refused to walk in God's ways. Their faith has become dull, so dull that their religious activities are no longer legible. God responds by rejecting Israel's religious actions – their offerings, worship, festivals, and even their prayers – as being hypocritical and empty.

Reading this passage today, I wonder how sharp our faith is. Is God's character legible in the way we engage with those who are vulnerable or grieving? How do our words and actions make it easier for others to see God as the One who is “gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love” when we engage with those who

- are caught up in layers of poverty
- face language or educational barriers
- are living with long term mental and physical health challenges
- are navigating ethnic, racial, and gender discrimination

For Isaiah, this reckoning before God is where the Advent anticipation of God's restorative work in us and in the world begins. Isaiah ushers us into a sit down intervention with God, who looks us in the eyes and bluntly says to us: “Your faith has become too dull for others to recognize me in you.” That's a blunt word in a season that we'd rather focus on the festive decorations and celebratory moments.

So what are we to do about this? How does our faith become sharp again?

After confronting them about their sinful treatment of others, God beckons Israel to “wash and make yourselves clean.” This one command exposes Israel's deeper problem and ours: we can't actually make ourselves clean. No amount of religious actions, offerings, or prayers can make us right with God or with the people we have harmed and failed to serve. The God of the



universe bluntly calls us to account and there is nothing we can do to make amends for the ways we have distorted God's character in our relationships with others, especially with those who have been marginalized.

As the reality of our helplessness sinks in, God's word of hope makes a way for us. "Come, let us settle the matter. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." Without denying the dullness of our faith or our helplessness to do anything about it, God extends hope that our current condition will not be the final chapter of our story. There is more that God wants to write in us and through us.

And so, we begin this Advent season by recognizing the dullness of our faith and our helplessness with overcoming the consequences of our sins. And it is here that God also graciously invites us to enter a journey into the wonder and hope of God's promised forgiveness and restoration, a journey that ultimately leads us to Jesus Christ.

## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of hope because of the forgiveness and restoration that God extends to us in Jesus Christ. Even now at the beginning of this Advent season, we hear God calling us to embrace God's character as our own way of life: "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow." (Isaiah 1:17) We commit to doing so in the hope that others will more easily recognize God's love for them through the way we practice our faith.



## **Reflection:**

- In what ways have our faith practices become dull and worn-down?
- What blunt word is God speaking to you personally? to us as God's people?
- What is one tangible way you can respond to Isaiah 1:17?



## **Prayer of Response:**

Almighty and Holy God, you know us full well, and all of our sins are plainly evident to you. Thank you for your blunt word that names our sins and invites us to live more fully within your character. Thank you for extending hope to us that you will make a way for us in Jesus Christ. Amen.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Confession – write down one sin that you know you need to stop doing; then write down one act of righteousness or justice that you have avoided doing. Offer both of these as a prayer of confession to God. Then throw the paper away to symbolize God taking away your sin and commit yourself to living in ways that more faithfully reveal God's character to those around you.



December 1, 2025

Advent: Week 1, Day 2 – Hope

Isaiah 2:1-5

## No Trivial Matter

Our family enjoys trivia. It's not uncommon for some of us to begin conversations with the phrase "Did you know..." Most of the time, those trivial facts seem to be little more than fun tidbits to feed our curiosity. But every now and then, one of the facts we share will reorient the way we understand the world around us.

I recall a few years ago that one of us shared how Oxford University began before the Aztec empire began. We had thought that the Aztec kingdom was much older than it was. In reading more about the Aztec empire's history, we encountered again the story of how some of the first Europeans to enter the Americas brutally slaughtered many of the Aztec people. Within a couple horribly violent years, 1519-1521, the Spanish conquistadors essentially wiped out the Aztec empire. That atrocity has often been overlooked in our Western account of history.

The Aztec's story reminds us that for centuries the primary perspective in the world has been that whoever has the most power can do what they want. European and eventually American political and church leaders embraced the Doctrine of Discovery, which they claimed gave them a divine right to rule lands and peoples that other Euro-centric countries did not control. That view of power over others who were not European has contributed to an environment of distrust and suspicion between many people groups and nations. Collectively, we have developed a tendency to perceive other people as threats and to see ourselves as justified in harming others before they can harm us.

But Advent beckons us to enter a different vision for the world. Isaiah provides a first glimpse of God's coming kingdom in today's passage. God stands at the center, inviting all nations to gather around. In this global kingdom, people are no longer at war with each other. "They will beat their swords into plowshares" until no one "will train for war anymore." Instead, the peoples of the earth gather with an eagerness to learn from God together.

In hearing Isaiah's description of God's coming kingdom of peace, we begin to see that Advent is not merely the promise of a personal salvation from our individual sins. Rather, Advent hopefully announces the arrival of God's kingdom and the coming renewal of the whole world. As Paul would later remark to the Colossian church, God was pleased to reconcile all things in heaven and earth to himself through Jesus Christ. And that is no trivial matter.

What's more, Isaiah ends this vision by urging us to enter God's coming kingdom of peace, that we might "walk in the light of the Lord."





As we remember and celebrate Jesus' birth this Advent season, how will we respond to Isaiah's invitation? Will we embrace the peaceable kingdom that Jesus came to establish as our own way of life?



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of hope to recognize that God's plan is to bring all people together in Jesus Christ. We commit ourselves to walking toward that unity in the light of Jesus Christ



## **Reflection:**

- When you imagine the fullness of God's coming kingdom, what does that kingdom look like? Who is part of that kingdom?
- What would need to change in order for your life/our world to look like the peaceable kingdom being described in Isaiah 2:1-5?
- What are we willing to let go of in order to receive the gift of being gathered with all people groups into God's coming kingdom of peace?



## **Prayer of Response:**

God of the whole earth, you rule over every nation and people group. You see our hatred and our wars. In your mercy, bring an end to our violence as you usher in your kingdom of peace. Help us to let go of distrust so that we might receive the full measure of hope and new life that is in your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Lament – pick one story from the news that breaks your heart because of the violence, tragedy, or brokenness conveyed in it. Spend time crying out to God about this specific situation and praying for God to intervene.



December 2, 2025

Advent: Week 1, Day 3 – Hope

Isaiah 4:2-6

## God's Personal Presence

As amazing as God's coming kingdom of peace sounds, the reality is that we have a difficult time imagining how that kingdom will ever become part of our reality. Our world seems too full of violence, too full of hatred, too full of everything that opposes God. If we cannot even make ourselves clean, as we talked about a couple days ago, what hope do we have of weathering the storms of evil that are in the world around us, or of ever transforming the world into something good?

Responding to the Spirit at work in him, Isaiah seems to anticipate this question. In today's passage, we hear God's promise to be with God's people along the way, even in the midst of the storms they are facing.

What's amazing is that God does not promise the people of Israel, or us, a comfortable life, free from trouble or worry, as we await the arrival of God's coming kingdom. Quite to the contrary, God is upfront with us that there will be troubles in the days ahead.

In the midst of trouble, Isaiah conveys God's promise to be with us through images from the Exodus and the dedication of the first tabernacle in the wilderness. God will be so present with us that it will be like a pillar of smoke in the middle of the day and a pillar of fire in the middle of the night. These pillars were visible signs of God's presence and deliverance in the middle of feeling vulnerable and threatened by the most powerful forces the Israelites could imagine: Pharaoh's army. (Exodus 14) More than that, Isaiah points to God's glory, which had filled the tabernacle to overflowing, reminding God's people that God was literally dwelling in the middle of their nation. (Exodus 40:34-38) Advent hope is rooted in the assurance that the glory of God – another way of saying, God's personal presence – will be with us.

While we wait for the arrival of God's peaceable kingdom, God promises to get into the middle of the mess with us. The hope that God extends to us is that he will be personally present with us in the midst of our circumstances, including those that threaten to overwhelm us.

And that is exactly what God did. In Jesus Christ, God personally made our struggles his own. Our reality of being born into a world of sin-triggered violence, suffering, and death became, by God's choice, God's reality, too. God entered our suffering, becoming a vulnerable, dependent baby, born to a teenager, in the back-country of a militarily occupied nation. As John would later write: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling [literally, "tabernacle"] among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of hope with the deep-rooted assurance that, in Jesus Christ, God had not left us alone. Rather, God personally entered our suffering with us with grace and truth.



## **Reflection:**

- In what ways can the Exodus and tabernacle images of God's personal presence be an encouragement to us today?
- How might the circumstances of Jesus' birth give us hope this Advent season?



## **Prayer of Response:**

Thank you, Jesus, for becoming one of us. Thank you for not abandoning us or walking away from us. We need you to strengthen us and give us hope as we wait for you to make all things new. In Christ Jesus, we pray. Amen.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Gratitude – write a poem, psalm, or short note of thanks to God for one way or time in which God has reminded you that God is with us.



December 3, 2025

Advent: Week 1, Day 4 – Hope

Isaiah 6

### Undoing

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote: “We have become so accustomed to divine love and of God’s coming at Christmas that we no longer feel the shiver of fear that God’s coming should arouse in us.” (Bonhoeffer, *God is in the Manger*)

Isaiah felt that shiver of fear. King Uzziah had died. For most of his rule, Uzziah had followed closely in the ways of the Lord. But then, he allowed his pride to get the better of him. Uzziah entered the temple and began to offer incense, something only the priests were allowed to do. When confronted, he lashed out at the priests in anger. While he was yelling at them, Uzziah became afflicted with leprosy. He lived the rest of his life in isolation, to the point that his legacy became only that “he had leprosy.” (2 Chronicles 26:16-21) Isaiah had seen the consequences of assuming one could simply do as they wanted in God’s presence.

It is little wonder then that when caught up into this vision of God’s glory with the heavenly creatures singing, Isaiah cries out “Woe to me! I am ruined!” (Isaiah 6:5) And why? Because in the fullness of the holiness of God’s presence, Isaiah becomes overwhelmed with how he personally participates in the cultural sins of his people. “I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips.” (Isaiah 6:5)

God’s presence became so tangible, so presently real, that Isaiah declared he had become undone – as if he had become uncreated. If a relatively good king like Uzziah died in isolation, covered in leprosy, because of his arrogance in the Temple, what chance did a man with unclean lips like Isaiah have in the fullness of God’s very real presence?

To be clear, God could have consumed Isaiah in that moment. God could have found Isaiah wanting and left him completely undone. But instead, God’s grace overflowed. God cleansed Isaiah with a coal from the altar and spoke with him. Though God sent Isaiah out with a heavy and hard message, God also told Isaiah about hope that was coming: “the holy seed will be the stump in the land.” God will bring new life into a people who have been cut off from God’s presence by their sins. God refines. God purifies. God brings new life into places marked by death.

We have entered a season during which we celebrate God’s presence among us in Jesus Christ. With our songs, our laughter, and our decorations, we will rejoice that the Lord has come. And that posture is good and right. As John writes: God did not send his son “to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:17)



Yet, God's people have long recognized that the call to confession is also woven throughout the Advent season. Isaiah's response of confessing his sins in the temple is a fitting response for us as well as we encounter God's presence in Jesus Christ.

As we walk through Advent, will we heed Isaiah's message to recognize the glory of God, turn to him in confession, and be healed? Will we behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus? Will we shiver in awe and reverence as we hear the praise of the angels announcing the presence of God-enfleshed as a baby in swaddling clothes? Will we kneel in humility as the God Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, draws near to us?



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of hope as a reminder of the overwhelming glory of God and as an invitation to trust that God has sent Jesus Christ not to condemn us but to save us from our sins.



## **Reflection:**

- What could help you recognize the glory of God in the face of Jesus this Advent season?
- In what ways do we take the story of Jesus' birth for granted?
- What personal and cultural sins do we need to confess as we remember and anticipate God's presence among us?



## **Prayer of Response:**

Almighty God, we confess that apart from your mercy in Jesus Christ, we would be completely undone. Please give us eyes to behold your glory in Jesus Christ during this Advent season. Amen.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Confession – acknowledge to God one sin in our broader culture that you see in your own life. If you are not sure what that might be, invite the Holy Spirit to “search you and know you,” showing you your sins and leading you into God's righteousness. (Psalm 139:23-24)

**December 4, 2025**

**Advent: Week 1, Day 5 – Hope**

**Isaiah 8:11-18**

### **Signs and Symbols**

Isaiah declares that God is hiding from Jacob's descendants. Not quite the cheery Advent message we like to hear. It seems that God's people have abandoned God's ways again. This time God has responded by hiding from them.

It's quite telling that Isaiah calls God's people the "descendants of Jacob." Jacob was the deceiver who conned his brother out of a blessing. Jacob was the manipulator who sought to breed his uncle's sheep so he would get more of their offspring for his own flock. Jacob feared retribution so he sent flocks and herds and servants to appease his brother. Jacob wrestled with God. These are Jacob's children, not the children of Israel, not the descendants of one who has been transformed by an encounter with the living God. The people to whom Isaiah has been sent act like Jacob – like they don't need God, like they don't know God. And God's response is to hide from them so that they might recognize their need for God.

But not all is lost. In the midst of hiding from Jacob's descendants, God calls out to Isaiah and his children. Instead of fearing and even dreading the military and economic enemies who are threatening to overthrow the king of Jerusalem, Isaiah's family is to give their full attention to God, the king of all nations. They are to assume a waiting posture, not in fear that their world is going to crumble, but in anticipation that the Lord will deliver them. In their attentive waiting, they become signs and symbols of God's faithful presence.

Isaiah and his children's posture of attentive waiting is at the heart of Advent. In this season, we are called to abandon our Jacob-like tendencies to be fearful, to be frantic, to try and save ourselves. As we let go of these patterns of distrust, we are invited to wait and watch for Jesus. His birth came in an unexpected time, in an insignificant village, and in less than ideal conditions. So much so that many people – including the trained religious leaders in his own day – failed to recognize him.

Advent provides us with a season to slow down before God. Our hope – and the hope of the whole world – is not found in our ability to control our lives. Rather, God beckons us to give our attention to the seemingly insignificant ways that God is at work: a baby, a manger, shepherds in Bethlehem. In a fretting, fearful culture that has lost sight of God and of its need for God, are we willing to wait attentively, watching for Jesus to move in our lives and in the world around us? Are we willing to be signs and symbols of God's steadfast presence in circumstances that no longer wait for or trust in God's presence?



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of hope as we wait attentively for Jesus to come and make all things new.



## **Reflection:**

- What situations or circumstances seem so overwhelming that you lose sight of God in the middle of them?
- How are you learning to recognize God's presence and wait for God to deliver you?



## **Prayer of Response:**

Lord God, you call us to be still before you. Help us to let go of our fears and to stop our attempts to save ourselves. Please grow in us a spirit that watches attentively for your deliverance during this Advent season. In Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Silence – set aside at least 30 minutes today where you turn off all media and you do not talk. Consider stepping outside, taking a walk in the woods or in a field, or even sitting quietly in a darker room in order to slow yourself down enough to be silent. During this time, listen for what God might be saying to you.

December 5, 2025

Advent: Week 1, Day 6 – Hope

Isaiah 8:19-9:7

### **Fixing Our Eyes on the Horizon**

I've not been there yet myself but I've had several friends and acquaintances describe this experience to me. Eager crowds descend on Acadia National Park in the early morning hours. They arrive there on the East Coast of Maine while it is still dark in order to stake out the perfect position from which to watch the sun rise over the Atlantic Ocean. The tourists come hoping to catch that moment when night gives way to day.

Today's passage points toward this human desire for a new light to break into the darkness of our lives. Isaiah describes how some people are so desperate to escape the darkness in their lives that they will even seek to consult the dead in an attempt to make sense of their lives. But these attempts only lead to a deeper darkness, where despair and distress soon cloak them in hopelessness. Though they search for life, they find themselves enveloped in gloom.

Isaiah's Advent message of hope bursts into this cultural gloom like a sunrise overcoming the dark of night. As the hopelessness of our own efforts to find God threatens to submerge us, God's light breaks into our world with the profound declaration: God has shattered the burden that oppresses us. The enemy is vanquished in the birth of a child. God's Messiah will establish a new government – a new structuring of our world – that will overflow with peace, justice, and righteousness.

What's more, our dead-end efforts to secure this future are not a necessary key to unlocking this light because God will bring the light: "The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this."

The Advent hope – not only in Jesus' birth, but also in his promised return – is that God will indeed bring light into the darkness of our lives. In Jesus, God has shattered the oppressive power of sin, and has promised to continue working until all of Christ's enemies, including death, are defeated. In that coming day, our hope will become sight as night is vanquished in the light of Christ. (Revelation 22:1-5)

As we wait in this time between the first light of Jesus' birth and the eternal day of Christ's return, we are beckoned into a hopeful, joyous praise: "When morning gilds the sky, my heart awakening cries: May Jesus Christ be praised!"

Today, and throughout Advent, we are invited to take hope: the light of Christ "shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:5) Jesus is coming. He is almost here.



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of hope as we remember Jesus' birth and as we watch for the light of his return.



## **Reflection:**

- In what ways are you searching in the darkness? Where do you need the light of Christ to break into your life?
- How can Jesus' birth, and the promise of his return, become beacons of hope for you?



## **Prayer of Response:**

Light of the World, shine your grace and truth in our hearts today. Strengthen our hope as we watch for your return. Even as you have overcome our sins, vanquish the darkness of death in our lives and throughout your creation. Come quickly, Lord Jesus, we pray. Amen.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Considering Creation – pick one morning in the next week or so, when the weather forecast says we will have clear skies. Set aside a few minutes to watch the sunrise. Consider God's faithfulness as you watch the skies.



**December 6, 2025**

**Advent: Week 1, Day 7 – Hope**

**Isaiah 11:1-9**

### **A Hopeful Stump**

A few summers ago, I visited 3 different butterfly and moth exhibits. The colors decorating these amazing creatures caused me to gasp and to pause, to point and to become incredibly still. The fluttering of their wings was so captivating I started to lose track of time.

Each exhibit had a separate case for housing their chrysalides. Each chrysalis was attached to a stick, carefully suspended behind the protective glass. Cocooned within their shells, the caterpillars go through a powerful transformation before emerging in their various adult forms. Because of how drastic and dramatic the changes are, we call this process a metamorphosis, which signifies a complete change from one thing into something different.

Isaiah points to an even more powerful metamorphosis in this passage. God begins with a stump. Occasionally, someone might use a stump as a decorative piece in a garden. Most of the time, however, stumps get torn out, chopped up, ground down, and discarded. And that's where God begins – with something that looks like it is good for nothing. In fact, most of us would see a stump as the inconvenient remains of a dead tree.

But God grows a branch out of the stump of his people. This branch is so different than who God's people had been. He is full of the Spirit, of wisdom, and delight in God's ways. This branch pursues justice with righteousness, defending the poor - those who have been torn out, chopped up, ground down, and discarded by the wicked. The character of this new branch is of an entirely different quality than the stump had been; the branch is covered in faithfulness.

When this branch emerges, Isaiah says the whole world will change – not just the stump of God's people. Wolf and lamb, cow and bear, infant and cobra will all be together with no threat of harm to each other. Even the waters of the sea, that ancient source of chaos, will participate in making known the greatness of God. All of creation will be transformed because of what God does through this one branch from the stump of God's people.

The Advent hope that God invites us to receive is a metamorphosis intended to transform us and all of God's creation. In Jesus Christ's birth, God takes the dead stumps of Israel, of our lives, and of all humanity, and transforms the whole of creation into something altogether new and beautiful. Through Jesus Christ, God is growing a forest-full of faithfulness that will cover the face of the earth. May we learn to marvel with Advent wonder at the miraculous metamorphosis God is bringing about before our very eyes.



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of hope in faith that God will transform the dead stumps of our lives into forests of faithfulness through Jesus Christ.



## **Reflection:**

- What areas of your life feel like a stump – like they are showing no signs of life?
- What is one way in which you have already experienced God transforming an area of your life?



## **Prayer of Response:**

Awesome and holy God, your vision for the world and the fullness of life that stretches beyond our imagination. You refuse to give up on us. Thank you for the transformative work you began in Jesus Christ's birth. Please continue to open our eyes with wonder and awe at the work you are doing to make all things new. Amen.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Reading Scripture – read Psalm 107 out loud, listening for the stories of God's faithfulness. Consider how you could tell your own story of God's faithfulness.

**December 7, 2025**

**Second Sunday of Advent – Peace**

**Isaiah 12**

### **In that Day**

“Where were you when...?” has become an unfortunately common question in which we share our personal experiences of communal suffering and brokenness. Each generation seems to have a singularly epic and often tragic moment that seals a particular “that day” into their collective memory.

Israel had enough tragic “that days” to make them forget the times when God had delivered them. Though they remembered how God had once led them out of Egypt with signs and wonders, those days of deliverance seemed almost legendary. Even the glory days of David and Solomon’s kingships were gone. For generations now, they had lived under the rule of wicked kings and under the nearly constant threat from Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt, not to mention, the frequent incursions from Philistia, Edom, and Moab.

God’s people had repeatedly refused to embrace God’s ways, and so in righteous anger, God disciplined them. God allowed their enemies to drag them away and scatter them across the nations.

Yet, the story of God’s interactions with God’s people does not end with angry punishment. Even in disciplining them, God has their salvation and restoration in view. And not only theirs, but God also has the reconciliation of the whole world in view. Isaiah describes a coming day when God will restore his people. In “that day” God’s anger gives way to God’s comfort and God’s people will experience peace with God and with the nations around them. Peace – God’s shalom – will fill the earth.

Advent ushers us into God’s response to all the “that day” experiences of the world. We remember and celebrate God’s faithfulness in the birth of Jesus Christ, who came to save God’s people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). The angels’ announcement on that particular day declared “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” In Jesus Christ’s birth, God enters our story in order to bring about a new day - a day when there will be no more crying, no more death. (Revelation 21:1-5)

During Advent, we remember Jesus’ birth and we anticipate Jesus’ second coming, when God’s peace will fill the whole earth. On “that day” the nations of the world will be gathered together in God’s presence (Revelation 7:9). No longer will they rage against God (Psalm 2) or threaten one another. On that day, the whole world will be at peace with God and at peace with each other. And, oh, what a day of rejoicing that will be!



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of peace with thanksgiving for the righteous love of God, who is at work even now making all things new to bring about an everlasting peace.



## **Reflection:**

- In what areas of your life do you long for God's salvation, restoration, and peace?
- In what ways do you long to see God's reconciling peace at work in the world?



## **Prayer of Response:**

Righteous and Faithful God, we confess that we have rebelled against you. Thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, to reconcile us to yourself and bring peace among the nations. Amen.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Intercession – identify one other person or family that you know is struggling or facing difficult circumstances right now. Spend time praying for God's kingdom of peace to come in tangible ways within their lives.

December 8, 2025

Advent: Week 2, Day 2 – Peace

Isaiah 25

### **Shrouded No More**

I'm not much of a fan of winter weather. I'll admit that the first snowfall of the year looks beautiful and there is something quite nostalgic about watching horse-drawn sleighs in the snow, while I sip on a cup of hot chocolate. But once the cold, a damp cold in the climates I've lived in, gets into my bones, it doesn't seem to let go until late March or early April most years.

As much as I dislike the winter cold, there is another type of weather that I find almost frightening. It's when the first warm Spring air begins to blow across the still mostly frozen ground, causing a dense fog to develop. There was a particular stretch of road, not too far from our old house, where the fog seemed to envelop everything, shrouding the landscape and road in a blanket of thick, soupy grey. One time, while driving through that section late at night, I came to an almost complete stop because I simply could not see the road in front of me anymore, even though I travelled those roads every day. The grey was everywhere.

Isaiah, seeing the vision of God's coming kingdom, describes the festive celebration that will take place, with this nearly unbelievable declaration: "On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever." Death, which shrouds the landscape of our lives; death, whose bitterness gets into our bones and doesn't let go – that unrelenting, all-consuming death will be no more.

Our Advent celebrations anticipate not only the forgiveness of our sins but also the full release from the consequences of our sins, including from our last great enemy, death. No more dying. No more grief and sorrow. On that great day, "the Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces." What we celebrate in Jesus' birth is the first ray of a new day penetrating the fog of death that shrouds us in fear and doubt. Death will not last. The Creator of life has come that we might have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10)

Even more so, in Advent, we see Jesus willingly enter into the fog of our sins and death. In this season, we are invited to start looking at all of our experiences through the lens of his birth, life, death, and resurrection. Jesus' manger, cross, and empty tomb become the lights by which we see through the fog of death, and can begin to see how God is making a way for us to enter the exuberant peace of God's coming kingdom.

### **Candle Lighting:**

We light this Advent candle of peace in the assurance that soon death will be no more and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes.



## Reflection:

- Much of our culture distracts us from death, selling us temporary comforts that cannot bring us lasting peace. What distractions and temporary comforts do we find ourselves chasing after?
- In our readings so far, Isaiah has described God's coming kingdom of peace several different ways. What aspects of God's peaceable kingdom are you looking forward to?



## Prayer of Response:

Resurrected Lord, lift the fog of death from our vision that we see clearly how to walk with you today as we anticipate your return with overflowing peace. Amen.



## Suggested Practice:

Feasting – plan a party with your friends or family to celebrate in anticipation of the day when God will set everything right.



**December 9, 2025**

**Advent: Week 2, Day 3 – Peace**

**Isaiah 35**

### **Wilderness**

Wild animals, sparse vegetation offering little shade, scarce access to water – the wilderness is not a hospitable environment. The harshness of the wilderness in which Israel literally found itself time and again came to symbolize their rebellion against God. Recounting Israel's wandering, the Psalms designate the wilderness as the place where God's people "gave in to their craving" and "put God to the test." (Ps. 106:14) In the wilderness, Israel experienced the emptiness of their sins and the absence of God's presence.

We sometimes use similar language when talking about our own relationships with God. We'll say, "I feel dry right now." Or, "I feel like I'm in a wilderness season." Or even, "Spiritually, I'm in a desert." Like the Israelites, we expect our church leaders to "feed us" and we want worship that "fills us up." All these expressions draw from Israel's wilderness experiences. In the wilderness, our deepest longings, our hunger and thirst for God, are exposed.

What's more, the witness of scripture shows that sometimes we are pushed into the wilderness spaces by the sins others commit against us, like Tamar was. (Genesis 38) At other times, like Job, we simply do not know and cannot comprehend why God has allowed us to enter a season where his presence seems scarce and his favor so distant (Job 9).

Yet, it is also in the wilderness where God brings deliverance and restores those who seek after God. Moses and the burning bush. (Exodus 3) Elijah being fed by the river. (1 Kings 19:1-9) John the Baptist crying out with his message of repentance. (Matthew 3:1-6) Jesus enduring the temptations of the wilderness before beginning his public ministry with his disciples. (Matthew 4:1-11)

Looking ahead to the day of God's redemption, Isaiah sees a day coming when all the empty and dry places of the world and of our lives will be transformed by God's overflowing presence. Blossoms will spring up in the barren places. Rivers teeming with life will flow through the parched landscape. Even the threat of wild animals will be removed in God's coming kingdom. God's transformation of the wilderness places will be so complete that "gladness and joy will overtake" God's people and "Sorrow and sighing will flee away."

Jesus Christ's birth is like that first flower blooming in our wilderness separation from God. His coming is like a fresh water spring bubbling up in the desert of our sins. Jesus' advent is God's declaration that the day is coming when we will hunger and thirst no more. It is of little wonder, then, that the angel cries out at Jesus' birth: "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news



that will cause great joy for all the people: Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11)



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of peace with confidence that, through Jesus Christ, God will cause the wilderness spaces of our lives to overflow with the abundant life of God’s presence.



## **Reflection:**

- When have you experienced time in the wilderness? In what ways have these times helped you to recognize your deep hunger or thirst for God?
- Where are you experiencing the foretaste of joy and gladness that God has promised in Jesus Christ? Similarly, in what ways are you experiencing sorrow and sighing fleeing away?



## **Prayer of Response:**

God of the promised land and of the wilderness spaces, thank you for sending Jesus Christ to quench our thirst and satisfy our hunger for you. Thank you for making a way in the wilderness. Help us to experience the glad tidings of Jesus’ birth in the wilderness and desert spaces of our lives. In Christ Jesus, we pray. Amen.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Fasting – as you are medically able to do so, restrain yourself from eating one type of food that you would normally eat or one meal during the day tomorrow. In place of this food, ask God to show you what it can look like to hunger and thirst for God’s coming kingdom. If you can’t give up food, skip one activity that you would normally do. In place of that activity, ask God to create in you a desire for the fullness of God’s coming kingdom.

December 10, 2025

Advent: Week 2, Day 4 – Peace

Isaiah 37:14-20

### Delivered

Most years, just by watching the road out our front window, I can tell that the Christmas holiday season is getting closer. Somewhere in late November, the delivery trucks start rolling down our street with increasing frequency. It's not uncommon to see multiple delivery trucks on the street at the same time or having trucks stop at each house on our little side street.

Delivery trucks and vehicles have become part of our consumption-oriented culture. From the convenience of our homes, we can place orders for all sorts of gadgets, gifts, and other goods and have them delivered to us. Through Uber, taxi, our other transit, we can even have ourselves delivered to some other place when necessary. Delivery *to* is not so difficult to imagine.

Delivery *from* something, however, is a different story. Hezekiah looked out and saw Assyria coming for God's people. They had a powerful army and had already devoured many other nations. Israel had no strength of its own to resist such a dominant enemy. Who would deliver them from Sennacherib? With such an all-consuming enemy at his gates, Hezekiah cries out to God: Deliver us!

And we, too, have an enemy at our gates. Worse yet, that enemy has infiltrated our hearts and minds and seeks to destroy us from the inside out. Through our own evil desires, as James says, we have given birth to sin. "And when sin is full grown, it gives birth to death." (James 1:15) Nothing we can do, nothing we can buy, and nothing we can have delivered *to* us can deliver us *from* our sins and the death that comes with them. "For they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands." In Hezekiah's plea, we hear our own cry: Deliver us!

In Jesus Christ, God has responded. God came to us in the flesh-and-blood birth of our Savior. He would be familiar with all our ways, including our temptations, but he would be without sin. God, in our flesh, with our bones, made our reality his own so that with his own blood he could deliver us from sin and death. The peace God delivers *to* us through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection is already evident in the manger. God has heard our cries and has sent his Son to deliver us *from* every evil that assails us, including from the sins that have penetrated our own hearts and desires.

### Candle Lighting:

We light the Advent candle of peace in the assurance that in Jesus Christ God will deliver us from all our enemies.



## Reflection:

- We don't often speak of enemies in our current North American context. We prefer to avoid such stark language. But in doing so, we also lose our capacity to recognize and resist those things that threaten us and our relationship with God. Spend a few moments, considering what enemies might be threatening to corrupt or destroy your relationship with God.
- This passage is ultimately about God delivering God's people from all their enemies. How could this emphasis on God's commitment to deliver us from our enemies impact the ways you will celebrate Advent and Christmas this year?



## Prayer of Response:

Incarnate God, thank you for taking on our flesh in order to deliver us from sin and death. Continue your work in us until our deliverance is fully realized in your return. Make a way for us to enjoy the full, abundant life you offer to us in Jesus Christ. Come quickly, Lord Jesus. Amen.



## Suggested Practice:

Intercession - spend time praying for your enemies and also for God to deliver you and the whole world from those things that get in the way of the abundant life that God offers in Jesus Christ.

**December 11, 2025**

**Advent: Week 2, Day 5 – Peace**

**Isaiah 40:1-11**

### **Hootin' and Hollerin'**

During high school, I went through a phase where I dropped the final “g” off my pronunciation of quite a few words. My friends and I would go out runnin', jumpin', playin', and definitely hootin' and hollerin'.

For those not familiar with the phrase, “hooting and hollering” describes rambunctious noises and energy, usually raised in joyful or playful excitement. That kind of activity is often looked down upon by well-meaning members of a community because of how the noise intrudes and distracts others. For example, until 2016, there was actually a law that said it was illegal to hoot and holler at any time of day in Bracebridge, ON. Their old bylaw makes me wonder how anyone ever celebrated a goal in pond hockey up there.

Isaiah 40 conveys a turning point for God's people. A messenger is sent: God is on the move; salvation is near at hand. The news is too good to merely whisper or calmly share. It's meant to abruptly break with prim and proper decorum. It's meant to intrude into the helplessness of our status quo. “You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid, say to the towns of Judah, “Here is your God!” In other words: “Raise your voice as loud as you can. Hoot and holler. God is here.”

And why? Why hoot and holler? Because the sins of God's people have been paid for in double. Because God comes with power and might to comfort, not to destroy. Because God has come to pick us up with tender compassion, like a shepherd carrying a lamb.

God has seen our suffering. God knows that we are like the grass of the field and that he could destroy us with one harsh word. And so, God comes, not to judge and condemn or destroy, but to level the ground we walk upon, and more so, to pick us up and carry us home.

With God on the way, the messengers are sent to make some noise, to run ahead, to playfully and joyfully shout - and yes, even to do some good old-fashioned hootin' and hollerin'. The angels would sing out over Bethlehem's fields. John the Baptist would cry out in the desert. And, full of the Spirit, the disciples would spill out into the streets of Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth with the good news of Jesus Christ.

As our Advent journey moves closer to the midway point and our anticipation of celebrating Christ's birth builds within us, we are invited to add our voices to all the hootin' and hollerin' about the good news: Jesus is coming! He's almost here!



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of peace with excitement as we prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth and as we eagerly anticipate Jesus' return.



## **Reflection:**

- It's sometimes easy for us to lose touch with the incredible relief and peace God's people experienced simply from hearing that God is on the way to deliver us. When you read this section of Isaiah 40, what good news do you hear? Why might this be good news worth shouting about in rambunctious excitement?
- How might celebrating Jesus' birth and anticipating his return help us to experience God's comfort and peace?



## **Prayer of Response:**

God, we are so excited to celebrate your son's birth again this year! We look forward to that day when Jesus comes back and we can party with Jesus in person. Please fill us to overflowing with the peace of his return, so that we can't help but hoot and holler about what you are doing.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Singing/Dancing – choose a high energy song to sing or dance to that helps you express God's comfort and peace





December 12, 2025

Advent: Week 2, Day 6 – Peace

Isaiah 41:8-10

## Do Not Be Afraid!

I have never been in a space as dark as when we were in Mammoth Cave. While we were on a guided tour several hundred feet below ground, in a fairly narrow part of the cave, the lights went out. We literally could not see our hands when we touched our noses. Some people talked loudly. But most of us stood quietly, if not a bit anxiously, while we waited for someone to turn the lights back on. It did not take long in that deep darkness to feel fear rising up within us. The questions crawled into our consciousness: “How long would the darkness last? How can we safely find a way out without getting lost or falling into a deeper part of the cave? Would we ever get out?” After a short couple of minutes, the lights came back on and our guide returned, telling us that the tour ahead of us had accidentally turned the lights off. We breathed a sigh of relief and continued on our way.

If only all our fears could be chased away by flicking on a light switch. Eight different times in Isaiah, God says to his people: “Do not be afraid.” When something is repeated that often, you know the situation is pretty significant: we are a fearful people. We fear powerful enemies. We fear falling. We fear getting lost. We are afraid of secret sins being exposed, of people learning about our pasts. We fear diseases in our bodies, losing our memories and our minds, and dying. We are prone to imagine what could go wrong and then inhabit those fears as if something had already gone wrong.

But here, God commands his people “Do not be afraid for I am with you.” This is God’s oft-repeated comfort. God is with us. He has not left us alone in the darkness of our sins. He has not abandoned us. Instead God has joined himself to us. “I have chosen you and have not rejected you.” The God of the whole universe, the one who holds the stars and planets of thousands upon thousands of galaxies, has pledged himself to us. “I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” And this message – that God is with us, therefore we need not be afraid – is a joy-filled reassurance that bears repeating. And so, we set aside time again this Advent and Christmas season to hear a message that has been told thousands and thousands of times before: A Savior has been born. He is Christ the Lord. Immanuel – God with us!

In Jesus Christ’s birth, God steps into the cave of our fears and doubts with us. God has chosen us and has not rejected us. God does not demand that we figure our own way out of the darkness or that we prove we are worth saving. Rather, Jesus comes to us in the midst of our fears and doubts to reassure us that God is with us here and now.



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of peace in the deep-rooted assurance that God has come to us in Jesus Christ and will never leave us nor forsake us.



## **Reflection:**

- Are there circumstances you are currently facing in which you need to hear the good news of Christmas: God is with us?
- The positive side of the command “Do not be afraid” is “Peace be with you.” Recall a time when you have experienced God’s peace showing up in challenging circumstances?



## **Prayer of Response:**

Almighty God and Everlasting Father, please fill us with your presence that we might experience the peace of Jesus Christ driving all our fears and doubts away.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Considering Creation – as you are able, take a walk outside, watching for the different ways that God cares for creation.

**December 13, 2025**

**Advent: Week 2, Day 7 – Peace**

**Isaiah 42:1-17**

### **Sing a New Song!**

I remember one Sunday evening when I was six standing on the back pew where my family had been sitting. As I belted out “Onward Christian Soldiers” with the rest of the congregation, I recall the surprised chuckle from the person in front of us, as he turned to say: “You sure love to sing.” I still have a lingering feeling that my pitch and rhythm did not match my exuberance that evening.

But that kind of exuberant praise is exactly the response Isaiah 42 calls for as God’s Messiah approaches. “Sing to the Lord a new song!” But not just in the sanctuary. The people by the sea and on the mountain tops are to spend their voices in praise. So to are those who live in the wilderness and in the towns. Resonating with some of the Psalms, this text even calls the sea creatures, the islands, and the wilderness to sing as God marches out to subdue his enemies. Singing a new song is not simply for trained musicians. In God’s kingdom, even the rocks cry out, and the mountains shout, and the trees of the field clap their hands at the signs of God’s coming.

God’s Messiah will bring justice across the face of the earth, so that those who are most vulnerable will not be harmed any longer. The blind will see. Captives will be set free. Those bound in the darkness of their own frailty or by the oppression of others will be released. Even more so, God, who has seemed so quiet in the face of injustice, will speak up and remain quiet no longer. Those who have trusted in idols, including the idol of their power, will be dismayed.

That’s what Mary sang about. When she was pregnant with Jesus and spending time with Elizabeth (John the Baptist’s mom), Mary sang out a new song that declared in part: “He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.” (Luke 1:53-53)

The Messiah is God’s response to the injustice that covers the earth. Jesus’ birth is about so much more than our personal sins being forgiven – that is too small a thing to describe the whole mission of God’s Messiah. In sending Jesus, God has in view the righting of all wrongs, the undoing of all injustice, and the ending of all idols among every people, tribe, and language. God’s salvation will be so extensive that even the wilderness, the islands, and the sea creatures will sing out new songs of praise. What a glorious day of peace and joy that will be!

As we see the day approaching – both this year’s celebration of Jesus’ birth and the day of his promised return – we are invited to sing. In this text, God’s messenger calls us to sing a new



song. We get to amplify and expand the songs of praise, by adding our own exuberant voices to the still unfolding musical of God's grace in Jesus Christ.



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of peace as a testimony to God's justice, which Jesus will soon establish across the face of the whole world.



## **Reflection:**

- The command to sing a new song appears multiple times in scripture. Singing both responds to and anticipates God's mighty works of salvation, especially on behalf of those who have experienced injustice. Where do you see God at work bringing hope, peace, and new life to those who have experienced injustice?



## **Prayer of Response:**

God of all righteousness, forgive us for the ways we have contributed to the suffering of others. Set our hearts on fire with exuberant praise as your Son comes to establish your justice and lasting peace. In Christ Jesus, we pray. Amen.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Singing/Dancing – make up your own song - or at least the lyrics for a song - that celebrates Jesus' birth or anticipates Jesus' return.

**December 14, 2025**

**Third Sunday of Advent – Joy**

**Isaiah 43:1-7**

### **Coming Home**

God's people had been in exile, far from home. They had lived among a people who did not know God or care for God. Their lives had been shaped by their absence from the Promised Land. The last time they had seen their homes, they had been marched away as captives. The sinking realization that their sins had finally caught up with them took hold of their hearts and their imaginations. Isaiah's message comes to them as they are far away from home and while they feel far away from God.

But now, building on the messages of comfort and peace, God calls out to his people: "It's time to come home!" More than that, God tells them that he has redeemed them. Redemption meant that all their debts had been cancelled. Redemption meant that their status had been transformed from slave to family member. Redemption meant that their time of exile was over and that they could finally come home again.

But coming home again had its own fears. What if they sinned again? What if they turned their backs on God like they did last time? What's to keep them from ending up in exile again? If this exile had shown them anything, it was that they could not keep their end of the covenant with God. They were prone to disobey God again and again and again. Going home meant setting themselves up to fail. Again.

Anticipating their fears and doubts, God compassionately assures them: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." God had redeemed them so completely that they would never face the threats and judgments of the covenant alone. God assures them that, in returning home, they would not be separated from God again.

This is the Christmas message as well. God has sent his son, Jesus Christ, to bring us home. In Jesus' birth, we hear the angels calling out to all God's sons and daughters that their Savior has been born. Through his death and resurrection, we hear God assuring us that nothing, not even our sins, can ever separate us from God again. "For God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Therefore, we need not be afraid of coming home to God. Rather, the Christmas story of God's love in Jesus Christ, assures us that God has made a way – the way – for us to come home. Never again will we be separated from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of joy because in Jesus Christ you have made the way for us to come home to you.



## **Reflection:**

- What gets in the way of us trusting God and God's promise that in Jesus Christ God welcomes us home as God's children?
- In what ways have you experienced joy through the Advent and Christmas stories?



## **Prayer of Response:**

Gracious and loving Father, thank you for sending Jesus to find us and bring us home. Please fill us with the joy of being welcomed home with you. Amen.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Gratitude - Set aside a few minutes today to jot down a list of the ways you have seen God care for you at different times in your life. Then give God thanks for the variety of people and circumstances that God has worked through to encourage you and extend God's love to you.



December 15, 2025

Advent: Week 3, Day 2 – Joy

Isaiah 49:5-7

### **Reach!**

Go ahead. Stretch your arms wide. Seriously. Set this devotional aside for a minute. Stand up. Give yourself some room, so that you don't accidentally bump someone else in the head or knock a lamp off a table. Then stretch your arms as wide as you can stretch them. See how far you can reach. Just be careful; the idea here isn't to reach so far that you topple over!

Okay. Great job. So, how far did you reach? Did you laugh? Perhaps, you felt a little silly? We're not accustomed to reaching out like this, especially when we don't even know what we're reaching for.

But when God reached out to us in Jesus Christ's birth, God knew exactly whom God was reaching for. "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." The gospel of John famously echoes this vision, declaring: "For God so loved the world that he sent his one and only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Unlike so many of our joys, Advent joy does not come at the expense of one people group over another. The joy of this season is not tied to how many gifts we give or how many presents we receive. In fact, our deepest joy is not dependent on how far we can stretch ourselves or on anything we can reach and take hold of. Rather, our Christmas celebrations bubble over with the joy of God reaching out to us when all hope of us reaching God by our own efforts is gone.

In celebrating Jesus Christ's birth, we rejoice that God has reached out in order that the whole world could be included in God's salvation. In Christ, "there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female." (Galatians 3:28) Neither is there "circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian" (Colossians 3:11). For in Jesus Christ, God continued stretching God's arms wide in order to secure salvation for everyone who would believe in Jesus.

We rejoice in the presence of such overwhelming love. We are filled to overflowing with awe that the things which so often are barriers for us – gender, nationality, ethnicity, economic class, etc. – do not get in the way of God's reach. As we hear the Christmas story again this year, let's marvel together at how God sent Jesus that the whole world might be saved through him.

### **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of joy because God is reaching out to bring the whole world close in Jesus Christ.



## Reflection:

- For a few minutes, reflect on your own faith journey. How has God reached out to include you? Who were some of the people and circumstances that God worked through to reach you?
- The Christmas story tells of God's love for the whole world. The book of Revelation describes people from all nations being gathered around God's throne. How might this vision of God's salvation reaching people from diverse communities and people groups shape the way we live as God's people here and now?



## Prayer of Response:

Abba, we delight in your generous and extravagant love for us. Thank you for stretching your arms wide enough to save all who would call upon Jesus Christ. Please extend our reach, that we might celebrate with everyone you are saving. Amen.



## Suggested Practice:

Hospitality/Service – invite someone over to your house or out for coffee. During your time together, ask two questions: Where are you experiencing joy right now? Are there places in your life where you are longing to experience joy?

**December 16, 2025**

**Advent: Week 3, Day 3 – Joy**

**Isaiah 51:1-8**

### **Joy for the Weary**

In the midst of the decorated and celebrated hustle and bustle so often associated with the Christmas season – at least with how we tend to celebrate it here in North America – there is another reality that many of us know far too well: weariness. About this time in the season, the pace of school exams and term papers, end of the year work projects, baking and cleaning for holiday get-togethers, Christmas concerts, and of course shopping for presents has started to wear on us. All good things, of course. But we can feel frazzled and frustrated. Our patience runs thin, and we become more prone to snapping, yelling, and crying.

And that's just from the pressures of this particular season. Were we to account for the other concerns (emotional and physical illness, strained and shattered relationships, grief) that often cloak our spirits, we begin to understand how some communities find it necessary to have Blue Christmas services – times of lament and sorrow, in the midst of what “ought” to be joyous celebration.

There is another weariness, too. It's the fatigue that often comes from doing right. That might sound odd at first. But the reality is that following God faithfully, serving others selflessly, and giving of ourselves generously can take a lot out of us. It can deplete us. We are finite, limited beings. In other words, we can't do everything. At times, even our best, well intentioned efforts end up hurting others. At other times, our attempts to be faithful are not always welcomed by others. Sometimes our efforts to work with integrity or to be kind toward others are met with skepticism and resistance. We can pour into relationships and communities and combat injustice for years without seeing much fruit. Weariness is, unfortunately, all-too-familiar to us, even when we are pursuing righteousness.

Through this passage, God gives those of us who are weary a word of encouragement. God and God's faithfulness will never wear out. Isaiah reminds the people how Abraham and Sarah were beyond hope of having children, and God made a nation from them. For a people weary from exile, whose houses and cities lay in ruins, they needed this reminder and the promise that God would rebuild their homes and restore their relationship with him. For a people tired of being threatened and overrun by nations who did not care for justice or righteousness, God would stretch out his arm and bring justice among the nations of the world.

The Christmas story is one of abundant and lavish grace. Jesus is born to road-weary Mary and Joseph, in a town so overcrowded that there is no room left for them. God shines heavenly glory on shepherds working the midnight shift to make ends meet. Jesus, born that night, would reach out to actually touch and heal weary outcasts. He would restore dignity to women used and discarded by men. He would even bring freedom to those oppressed by demonic spirits

that they nor we can comprehend. Most of all, Jesus would lift the heavy burden of our sins and carry them on his shoulders and in his body to the cross.

So, come to the manger, all you who are weary and heavy burdened. Fix your eyes upon Jesus, God's righteousness, who will not grow weary or fade away. Come to him, who carries all of our burdens, and let God restore you with the hope and comforting peace of our Savior. For here, with Jesus, rest, joy, and gladness will be found.

### **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of joy because in Jesus God gives rest to all those who are weary and heavy burdened.

### **Reflection:**

- What burdens are you carrying that you need God to lift from your shoulders and your spirit?
- In what ways have you experienced inviting you to find rest in your weariness?

### **Prayer of Response:**

Gracious and compassionate, Savior. Thank you for seeing our weariness and for comforting us with your love. Please make a way to refresh and restore all who are weary and heavy burdened. May all who call upon you find rest in you this Christmas season. Amen.

### **Suggested Practice:**

Rest – Set aside a night this week to turn off your email, screen-based activities, and work so that you can slow down more fully and receive the gift of rest from God.

**December 17, 2025**

**Advent: Week 3, Day 4 – Joy**

**Isaiah 52:13-53:12**

### **Cradle to Cross**

Theologian J. I. Packer once wrote, “The Christmas message is that there is hope for a ruined humanity—hope of pardon, hope of peace with God, hope of glory—because at the Father’s will Jesus became poor, and was born in a stable so that thirty years later He might hang on a cross.”

The well-manicured stables of our nativity scenes with smiling Joseph, prim and proper Mary, and adorably swaddled Jesus cannot handle the truth of why Jesus was born. “He was pierced for our transgressions.”

We keep our nativity scenes clean and sterile. But a stable, even the backroom stables of that time, would have been filled with stench from animal urine and excrement, as well as the anxious bleating and intrusive lowing of barnyard animals. Joseph and Mary would have been dirty and dingy from travelling. And there would have been blood: blood on Mary, on Joseph, on their clothes and the ground – and even on Jesus. What birth doesn’t have blood? The shepherds, who arrived later, would have smelled of sweat and grime from working and sleeping in the fields. They didn’t shower (and they certainly didn’t bathe their sheep!) before running to see this mysterious thing the angels had told them about. No, the stable of Jesus’ birth was not like a picturesque nativity scene by any means.

The stark reality of Jesus’ birth crashes into our Christmas celebrations, disturbing the warm fuzzy feelings we so often get from focusing on baby Jesus. Though it’s not considered polite conversation to talk about the mess of our lives or about sin and death – and that’s perhaps especially true during Christmas – the central message of Christmas is that Jesus Christ was born in a mess and was born to die.

Here we are confronted with God’s word through Isaiah: “For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.” Death on the cross was not something that just happened to Jesus. Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, Son of God the Father, purposefully was conceived and born and lived in order to die for our sins. As Jesus himself would later say, “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. . . No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” (John 10:14-15, 18).



As sobering and humbling as this reality is, Jesus' birth and his journey from cradle to cross is also one that is of great joy. For in uniting himself with us in his birth, Jesus made it possible for us to be united with him in his death. And "if we have been united with him in a death like his,

we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his." (Romans 6:5) Yes, Jesus was born in a mess and was born to die. But, even more, Jesus was born to conquer death so that, in him, we "no more may die."



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of joy because Jesus made a way through his birth and his death in order that we can have life with him forever.



## **Reflection:**

- How might you feel to encounter a messy Christmas / nativity scene? What smells would you expect? What do you think you would hear and see?
- What difference does it make to you that Jesus went through a real birth and died a real death?



## **Prayer of Response:**

Thank you, Jesus, for your faithfulness to the Father's will – even to the point of death on a cross. While we lament that our sin led to your death, we rejoice in the life you have lavished on us. Your generosity and grace are beyond our comprehension. Amen.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Gratitude – share with at least one other person an aspect of Jesus' story (think: birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, return) that you are particularly thankful for at this point in your life and why.

December 18, 2025

Advent: Week 3, Day 5 – Joy

Isaiah 54

### Getting Ready for the Impossible

Those who heard today's passage for the first time had to prepare for the impossible. "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back, lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities." But God's people were empty – and could barely be called a people. How could they enlarge their tents? They had been dragged into exile a generation ago and were now making their way back to a ruined land. Instead of a fruitful, thriving nation, ready to expand, they were beleaguered, torn apart, and empty.

But this was not a new experience for God's people. God often came to them when they had nothing left to offer. Each of the matriarchs of Israel had been barren. They felt their culture's shame of not bearing children, of feeling that they had somehow displeased God. Sarah was so old that she scoffed at God's declaration that she would have a child. It was impossible. She laughed as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?" (Genesis 18:12) Sarah could not imagine the fullness of life that God was promising her.

Just as God responded to Sarah with the impossible gift of a son, (whom they named "laughter") so God promises to bring a seemingly impossible joy among his people. God will remove their shame. God will restore and even deepen his relationship with them – "For your Maker is your husband." With compassion and covenantal vows, God sets his affection upon his people.

Centuries later, God would send an angel to visit a young woman named Mary. She was one of Sarah's great, great granddaughters. The angel came with the incredible greeting that Mary was highly favored by God. And if that salutation was not unbelievable, then the angel's next words certainly were: "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." (Luke 1:31-32) Though Mary had never been with a man, God promised the impossible: The Holy Spirit would overshadow her so that this child, her child, would be God's child. Mary would give birth to the Son of God, whose kingdom would never end.

Each time we remember Jesus' birth, we are celebrating the fulfillment of God's promise to do the impossible: That God would become one with us in order to bring a fullness of life that we cannot imagine. Because of God's faithfulness to us in Jesus Christ, we can rejoice today as we wait for the fullness of that new life in God's kingdom. For we know "that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of joy because in Jesus Christ God has compassion on us and has removed our shame from us forever.



## **Reflection:**

- We often find it impossible to praise God or to give him thanks when we are going through difficult times. Which of God's promises seem impossible to you right now?
- It is often when God's promises sound impossible that God calls his people to sing in anticipation of God's deliverance. What might it look like for you to sing with joy in anticipation of what God will yet do in Jesus Christ?



## **Prayer of Response:**

God, in Jesus Christ, you have already done more than we could ask or imagine. May you fill us with joy and wonder as we anticipate Jesus' return and fullness of his coming kingdom. Amen.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Write a thank you note or poem that reflects your gratitude for what God has done in Jesus Christ, especially in ways that God has done the seemingly impossible in your life.



**December 19, 2025**

**Advent: Week 3, Day 6 – Joy**

**Isaiah 55:6-13**

### **Come, Dance with Us**

Several months before our wedding, my soon-to-be inlaws called to inform us that at their own initiative they had booked a square dance caller for our wedding reception. While not initially the way we wanted to do things, we grew into the idea that a square dance could be a playful addition to our celebration. We started joking with our friends that they should come dance with us.

Well the wedding came, followed by pictures and dinner. After the fireworks (we got married on a national holiday), we gathered inside the reception hall to dance. The caller did a marvelous job drawing everyone into the celebratory mood of the moment. Even those who weren't dancing laughed and delighted in the spectacle. We left before the dancing finished, but later watched a video of our friends and family twirling and whirling and laughing as they danced around the room.

Here Isaiah turns our attention fully toward Jesus' second coming. It has a celebratory wedding-like feel to it. The description sounds almost like something out of Narnia or from some wooded realm in Tolkien's Middle Earth. "You shall go out with joy and be led forth in peace. The mountains and the hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the fields will clap their hands."

It's significant that Isaiah concludes by saying that the thornbushes and briers will be replaced with myrtles and junipers and as an everlasting sign for God's renown. One of the first consequences of the humanity's disobedience in the garden of Eden was that the ground would be cursed, so that "it will produce thorns and thistles for you." (Genesis 3:18) Through our sin, creation was subjected to suffering; so much so, that Paul describes creation as "groaning" for God's children to be revealed. By declaring that the thistles and briers would be replaced, Isaiah announces the joyous news that the garden of Eden will be fully restored and the original consequences of humanity's first sins will be undone when the Messiah returns.

So what leads into this joyous celebration? What brings about this great day of rejoicing? God's generous forgiveness of our sins. "Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."

In Jesus Christ's first Advent, God has forgiven our sins and has invited us to turn to him in repentance. When Jesus returns, not only will we experience the joy of God's salvation, but the



mountain, hills, and trees will also be set free from the consequences of our sin – so free that they will burst into song, clap their hands, and dance with us.



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of joy in anticipation of the day when Jesus Christ will remove all the consequences of our sins from all of creation.



## **Reflection:**

- Where do you see creation groaning under the weight of our sins?
- The forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ is intended to bring freedom to every part of creation that has been entangled within the consequences of our sin. How might God's mission to reconcile and restore all things in Christ Jesus impact the ways we celebrate Jesus' birth and anticipate his return?



## **Prayer of Response:**

Creator God, we confess that our sins have subjected your very good creation to suffering. We thank you for the forgiveness you have extended to us in Jesus Christ. We look forward to your return with joy, as we anticipate the day when all of creation will rejoice together.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Singing/Dancing – Choose a festive song to sing or to dance to as a way of celebrating God's goodness in Jesus Christ.

December 20, 2025

Advent: Week 3, Day 7 – Joy

Isaiah 56:1-8

### **God, Who Gathers Still Others**

Waiting is almost heretical in our culture. Companies spend enormous resources on improving customer satisfaction, which inevitably includes reducing wait times. Amazon caters to customers' delivery needs, including same day options. For an extra fee, amusement parks provide passes that allow attendees to jump to the front of the line. Movie theaters encourage online ordering so you "skip the line." We are immersed in a culture that trains us that waiting is almost immoral.

In this context, waiting for Jesus' second coming is almost inconceivable. What's God waiting for? Why hasn't God sent Jesus back to make all things new? The Bible doesn't give us a full response to that question. But Isaiah's message here does provide a glimpse of why God is waiting. "The Sovereign Lord declares—he who gathers the exiles of Israel: "I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered." God, it seems, is still at work, bringing more and more nations into his house. We don't understand the full scope of why God is taking so long with Jesus' return, but we do see that God is still working to bring his salvation to the ends of the earth.

This passage in Isaiah also gives us direction with how we are to wait for Jesus' return. "Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed." In other words, having been saved through the events of Jesus' first Advent, we are now called to join God in the work that will characterize his second Advent. Waiting for Christ's return, therefore, is active. God calls us to participate in the kingdom with him here and now, even as we wait for that kingdom to fully arrive.

The Good News of this already-here-but-not-yet-fully-realized kingdom is that this kingdom will be inclusive. The command to maintain justice wraps eunuchs into the center of God's kingdom. No longer as nameless servants, emasculated by those in power, they will be given everlasting names in God's presence. Immigrants, too, will be included as priests. No longer despised or vulnerable, they will have a home and a place of standing in the coming kingdom. Isaiah assures these vulnerable people that, in God's coming kingdom, they and the gifts they offer will be acceptable to the Lord and have a place of honor among God's people.

At the very least, Isaiah is implying that to maintain justice and to do what is right – to wait for the return of King Jesus – is to usher the oppressed and the marginalized into the center of God's kingdom, even now. As James writes, "Religion that God our Father considers pure and faultless is this: to look after the orphan and widow in their distress and to keep oneself from



being polluted by the world.” (James 1:26-27). In doing so, we as God’s people – the temple in which the Spirit dwells – will become “a house of prayer for all nations.”



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of joy because in Jesus God is making a way for justice and righteousness to fill the whole world.



## **Reflection:**

- God calls us to wait for Jesus’ return by joining God in the work of his kingdom. What acts of justice and righteousness is God inviting you to engage?
- Do you know anyone that is oppressed or vulnerable? How might you welcome them into the center of God’s kingdom?



## **Prayer of Response:**

Compassionate and hospitable God, we submit to your will for us. Thank you for including us in your salvation. Grant us the strength and wisdom to maintain justice and do what is right. In Christ Jesus, Amen.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Hospitality/Service – give away an article of clothing to someone in need or set up a time to volunteer with an agency that is working with people in vulnerable circumstances

**December 21, 2025**

**Fourth Sunday of Advent – Love**

**Isaiah 57:14-21**

### **Prepare the Road**

We've had a lot of road construction around us the past few years. Finding alternative routes around construction zones is pretty much a required life skill in Michigan. But as these projects have been closer to our home lately, including resurfacing streets in our neighborhood and replacing a bridge around the corner from us, I've been able to watch the construction crews work a bit more closely.

I am amazed at the layers that go into preparing a road, even for resurfacing. A crew comes through to mark buried utility lines, drain covers, and sprinkler heads next to the road. Another crew comes through with big machines to chew up the existing road, removing old asphalt by the truck load. Next, gravel and sand fill in holes. Then, heavy rollers make the underlayer compact and level, before the new asphalt is poured, followed by more heavy rollers to smooth the asphalt into place. Supervisors and inspectors come and go throughout the process, checking the quality of the work. It's quite an involved process that I regularly take for granted. And I'm sure those directly engaged in building the roads would tell me I'm missing a lot of steps along the way.

Today's reading begins with God saying "Build up, build up, prepare the road. Remove the obstacles out of the way of my people." God's people had been in exile, removed from the Promised Land on account of their idolatry and their mistreatment of those who were poor and vulnerable. They're feeling impossibly far away from God, like there was no way they could ever get back to God. They are living in a different country, under the authority of someone else's government and military. And in that context God offers this word of comfort to them: "Prepare the road. Remove the obstacles." In other words, God is making a way for them to return, not simply to the Land that they loved, but more importantly, into a good and right relationship with God.

What's beautiful in this promise from God is that it's not dependent on the people somehow suddenly becoming perfect or figuring out how to make a way to God. Rather, the new way that God is preparing removes the greatest obstacle God's people had faced: their own continued failure to walk in God's ways. This time God promises to revive them, not based on what they do, but on what God decides to do for them. "I have seen their ways, but I will heal them." God chooses to act according to God's love for them and not according to their inability to remain faithful. God's love for them makes a way where they could not.

That same love shapes the heart of the Advent story. God makes a way in Jesus Christ when our efforts to reach God on our own had fallen impossibly short. Our celebration this Advent



season is not simply about remembering that Jesus was born. Rather, we celebrate that in sending Jesus Christ, God's love made a way for us to be united with God. Christmas remembers what God has already done in Jesus Christ and anticipates the day when our journey in the way of Jesus Christ will be complete. Something we could not have imagined, discovered, or built on our own.

In doing so, God prepared a way that would never need to be resurfaced or replaced. The Apostle Paul, writing centuries later to the early church in Rome, declares: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)



### **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of love remembering that, because of God's great love for us, God has made a way for us to be united with God in Jesus Christ.



### **Reflection:**

- What obstacles tend to get in the way of you experiencing God's love?
- How would it feel to hear God say "Remove the obstacles out of the way of [your name] so that they can receive and experience my love?"



### **Prayer of Response:**

God, thank you for making a way for us in Jesus Christ. Your love is greater than what we can comprehend. Help us to live in the light of that love, not only during Advent and Christmas, but throughout the year. Amen.



### **Suggested Practice:**

Gratitude - Spend time thanking God that our circumstances and sins are not the final chapter in our stories. As you are able, be specific in naming ways that God has made a way for you to experience God's love and grace.

December 22, 2025

Advent: Week 4, Day 2 – Love

Isaiah 60

### **You've Got to See This!**

It's late August as I am writing this. Just yesterday, I had two different moments of shouting "You've got to see this!" As I sat on our back porch, I heard the kerfuffle of turkeys flapping their way over our fence into our backyard. Three younger ones landed on the canopy we have set up over our deck chairs. Then a couple adults landed on our fence railing as if they were advance scouts, looking for danger. They were quickly followed by even more flapping and gobbling sounds. Soon we had five adults and more than eight young turkeys casually pecking at insects and playfully chasing each other around our backyard. They paused long enough to notice me, before slowly making their way into the marsh area behind our neighbor's house. I couldn't help but call some family members to come outside and see this unexpected sight.

A little while later, as I checked on some of the plants that run along our front sidewalk, I saw a small humming bird, dipping in and out of the late summer flowers. We've occasionally seen hummingbirds here, but not one that small. And this one seemed to linger, taking time to check out several plants before making a wide sweeping turn around the corner of our house. I reached for my phone, but it left before I could get a clear picture. I wanted to send a group text to the rest of the family to say "you won't believe what I just saw out front!"

There is something about the unexpected and beyond the ordinary moments that catch our breath. From the mesmerizing beauty of the Northern Lights to a full-extended, one-handed catch in football to an inspiring speech or an enthralling story, we are drawn toward moments and actions that stretch our imaginations. So it is with God's promises in Isaiah 60.

God's light isn't deterred by the darkness that is over all people. God's light becomes an invitation to rise up, to see that the current experiences of oppression and suffering aren't the end of the story. Isaiah invites God's people to look down the road and anticipate the culmination of what God is up to - and that coming day stretches their imagination. The threat of war and violence and plunder is replaced with the lavish riches of the whole world coming into God's kingdom. Even more than that, Isaiah points to a day, when God will be so fully present with us that they won't even need the sun anymore.

As we draw close to our Christmas Day celebrations and the end of Advent 2025, we are invited to look ahead, to see Jesus' birth as a first glimpse of God's promises coming true. Our current circumstances are not the final word. Far from it, God is at work making all things new and is even now preparing for a day when "all your days of sorrow will end." It's as if Isaiah has caught a glimpse of that coming day and has shouted, not only to ancient Israel, but to all who follow Jesus today, "Quick! Come! Look! You've got to see this! You've got to see what God is about to do! This changes everything!"



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of love in joyful anticipation that one day soon God will make everything new.



## **Reflection:**

- Recall a time you wanted to shout “Come here, you’ve got to see this!” What was happening? What did you feel in that moment?
- How can catching a glimpse of the end of the story when “all your days of sorrow will end” impact the way you live today?



## **Prayer of Response:**

Lord God, thank you for sending Jesus Christ to assure us that you will be true to your promise to make all things new. In your loving kindness, please continue to give us glimpses of that coming day, renewing our hope, peace, and joy as we face both the good and the challenging circumstances of today. Amen.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Wonder - set aside some time to wonder about the love of God and how God is at work making all things new. Jot down some of God’s promises that have been particularly important to you. Allow yourself time to be curious about what you think you will notice first when God fulfills those promises for the new heavens and new earth?



December 23, 2025

Advent: Week 4, Day 3 – Love

Isaiah 61

### Will God Welcome Us Back?

I wonder what God's people expected as they returned from exile. I imagine the journey back to their home was not a pleasant one. Yes, they were leaving a foreign country and returning home. But they had been gone for 70 years. Some of those returning had been born in exile. They had never seen the previous glory of the temple or the splendor of Jerusalem. They had heard once-upon-a-time stories of how the nations used to bring tribute to Israel and how God had delivered their ancestors from all sorts of trouble. But by the time they started back to Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies, the Ark of the Covenant, and the altar would have felt like legends in an exaggerated myth to many of them.

And now they were going home to what? Rubble? Poverty? Everything that had once been great and awe-inspiring about the Promised Land, about Jerusalem, and about being God's chosen people had crumbled into ashes, mourning, and despair in the decades since Babylon had conquered them. I wonder what they expected God to say to them? How would God treat them? After all, so many of the prophets, like Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, had been telling them that it was because of their continued sinfulness that God had sent them into exile. And even as they took that dusty road back to the Promised Land, they had to wonder: would God really welcome them back?

I imagine many of us can relate to the feeling of wondering whether God will welcome us back. Perhaps we've chased after other priorities and put God on the back burner. Maybe, we've made some choices that we knew weren't right or good and it's been hard to talk with God since then. Or perhaps something has happened that we can't make sense of - and we find ourselves wondering if God cares or if God even notices us.

For all of us - God's people returning from exile and us today - part of God's reassuring response unfolds in this passage. For all those who grieve, God promises "to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair." Isaiah goes on to describe a coming time when the land will flourish and God's people will experience peace and abundance again. Even more, God declares that the people will be changed, too. Instead of becoming stubborn and stiff-necked again, they will be transformed into Oaks of Righteousness. God's lavish love overflows as Isaiah jumps from one description to the next, trying to convey the extent of the goodness that God had planned for them as they returned to the Promised Land and to God's ways.

What's even more amazing than this promised future is that Jesus chooses to read this text as he launches his earthly ministry. (Luke 7:18-23) Jesus is the One who fulfills God's promises to those in poverty, those who are brokenhearted, those who are in exile or captive, and those who



mourn. Jesus is the One who is at work even now interceding on our behalf (Romans 8:34) and making all things new (Revelation 21:5). In Jesus, God has made a way for us to return to God with hope, peace, and joy. In this way, Christmas isn't just about remembering that Jesus was born. Far more than that, Christmas is God's pledge and commitment to welcome us back with lavish generosity and overflowing love.



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of love in celebration of the God who makes a way for us to return to God and who welcomes us back with generous love in Jesus Christ.



## **Reflection:**

- How have you experienced God's lavish generosity and overflowing love?
- What would you say to someone who wonders if God will welcome them back?



## **Prayer of Response:**

God of deep and everlasting love, thank you for making a way for us to be at home with you. Please renew our sense of joy and wonder as we remember your lavish and overflowing love in sending Jesus. Amen.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Gratitude - write, draw, or create something that helps you express the ways you experience - or long to experience - God's generosity and love. As you can, give special attention to the gift of God's welcome that is seen in Jesus' birth.

**December 24, 2025**

**Advent: Week 4, Day 4 – Love**

**Isaiah 62**

### **Delight**

Navigating our emotions can be a tricky thing, especially when we find ourselves falling in love with another person. Within a couple months of when we started dating, on a romantic stroll down Homestead Drive in Mount Hope, ON – complete with a light Christmas snow falling – I told Hennie that I loved her and wanted us to get married someday. We had hinted at the possibility before then, but that was the first awkward moment of me laying all my cards on the table. My gushing emotions that night started a conversation that led to our formal engagement the following September and to our wedding the year after that.

In this passage, God lays all his cards on the table. God will take delight in his people. God desires such an intimate relationship with us that the only relationship that comes close to describing the intimacy is a marriage: “As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.” God doesn’t fumble over his words or hold back. God has set his affection upon his people and he is pledging himself to “Daughter Zion” forever.

Isaiah says that God has even set up watchmen to tell about God’s love until he brings his promised delight to fruition for Jerusalem – his beloved people. John embraces this marriage metaphor when describing the Advent of the new heavens and new earth: “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”

As we move through the evening tonight and into Christmas morning tomorrow, we will recall the story of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ. (We get to have birthday parties for Jesus!) We will be reminded of the angels bursting with joy and the shepherds running in amazement at the news of God’s love. We might even pause with Mary to ponder all these things in our hearts. How could we do anything else? For God has rejoiced over us with singing. He has lavished his affection upon us in Jesus Christ in ways that we still cannot fully comprehend 2000 years later. As we remember and celebrate the wonder of God’s affection in the coming day, we are also beckoned to anticipate the fullness of God’s love that we will experience in Jesus’ return. “Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.’” Jesus is coming. He’s almost here.

### **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Advent candle of love with wonder that in Jesus Christ the God of the whole universe is affectionate toward us and rejoices over us.



## Reflection:

- We don't often speak of God having affection for us, or of God taking delight in us. How does hearing that you are God's beloved impact you?



## Prayer of Response:

Loving God, thank you for lavishing your love on us through your son, Jesus Christ. Please continue to remind us of your affection for us, until we overflow with amazement at how good and faithful you are. Amen.



## Suggested Practice:

Celebration – as you are able, find a festive food to make and/or eat as a way of celebrating Jesus' birth.

December 25, 2025

Christmas Day

Isaiah 65:17-25

### Imagine

I have been a fan of C.S. Lewis' Narnia series for about as long as I can recall. Magical wardrobes and talking animals, a lamp post in the middle of a forest, an evil queen, and a self-sacrificing lion all drew me into the Narnian landscape and world. As much as I have loved *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, the final book in the series, *The Last Battle*, has probably had more of an impact on me.

Without giving away too many spoilers, *The Last Battle* is about the culmination of time within the Narnian world and the invitation for the primary characters to enter a new and bigger Narnia that's been recreated. There is an openness and freedom in the new Narnia. The threats, corruption, and distortions of the first Narnia are gone. Perhaps the part that resonates most with me is the joyous refrain of "Further up and further in!" they repeat as they explore the new Narnia that is a truer Narnia than they had ever imagined possible. As you read the story, you can feel the excitement beckoning them to explore and enjoy and find delight in this re-ordered world.

I have a similar feeling as I read these verses from Isaiah 65 today. They are an invitation not merely to a one-time celebration but to a whole new way of life in a newly recreated heaven and earth. The robust goodness of this new world is so much more than we can comprehend that God invites us to imagine a wolf and a lamb resting together or a lion eating grass just to give us a glimpse of how richly abundant and safe the new life God is preparing for us will be. Even more so, God promises to remove the causes for sorrow and mourning and to be so close to us, so accessible that "Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear."

Today, as we remember Jesus' birth, we are celebrating the God who is with us. Looking back on that moment in time is also an invitation to see God's character as the one who wants to be close to us forever. Christmas is about the God who makes a way to be accessible to us. Drawing on this text from Isaiah, the Apostle John writes: "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes.' There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:3-4). So, today, we celebrate the incredible gift of God in Jesus' birth and we also are invited to imagine what this new life in the new heaven and new earth will be like. As we continue on the way, may we live now with the confident and joyful anticipation of an abundant life with God that is truly more than we can imagine.



## **Candle Lighting:**

We light the Christ candle in celebration of Jesus' birth and in confident and joyful anticipation of the new heaven and new earth where all things, including us, will be made new.



## **Reflection:**

- What image or description from Isaiah 65 or Revelation 21 helps you imagine how abundantly good and different the new heaven and new earth will be?
- What seemingly impossible image or description would you come up with today to help describe God's goodness in making all things new in Jesus Christ?



## **Prayer of Response:**

God, thank you for lavishing your love on us in Jesus. As we remember and celebrate his birth today, will you give us a deep and overflowing joy and anticipation for the new heaven and new earth that you are opening up to us even now. Thank you that you are the God who makes a way to be with us both now and forevermore. Amen.



## **Suggested Practice:**

Celebration – as you are able, find a festive food to make, share, and eat as a way of celebrating Jesus' birth and anticipating the richness of the new heaven and new earth.