

All *Earth* Is Waiting

2025 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET

Pulaski Heights United
Methodist Church



FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT: NOVEMBER 30

Matthew 24:36-44

Advent is a time of waiting and watching with excitement as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, but what is readiness?

We often ask couples, like Mary and Joseph, if they are ready to welcome their child into the world. The answer is typically an unsure yet hopeful, "Ready as we will ever be!" No matter how much time has been spent nesting, planning, and preparing, parenting a newborn is a daunting and mostly unfamiliar task. Invariably, natural instincts kick in, and the family unit is born.

Actors, singers, and dancers spend weeks rehearsing, staging, and choreographing shows for scheduled, limited runs. Whether the show is a hit or a flop, the performer's contribution is finite. Once the curtain falls, energy is refocused on the next song or role.

Military groups, law enforcement officers, and first responders spend months training for potential missions and scenarios. They maintain a state of readiness to rise to the occasion and perform when called into action. Whether they are fighting fires daily or the mission is never actually executed, they still must be prepared to respond at a moment's notice.

Our Christian life is no different. We find it easy and natural to care for our families and close friends, but it requires extra effort to be ready to serve those less familiar to us. We may become quite adept at ministering and working within our weekly schedules and the friendly confines of our homes, workplaces, and churches. However, true readiness will provide us with the tools to be effective disciples outside of our comfort zones.

PRAYER: Gracious God, in this season of Advent, ready our hearts for the quiet coming of the Christ child. May we share Your message with everyone we meet, so that our witness might draw them closer to you. Amen.

-Ben & Sheri Gilbert

DECEMBER 1

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **4** I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, **5** for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— **6** just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— **7** so that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. **8** He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **9** God is faithful, by whom you were called into the partnership of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thanksgiving has passed and Christmas is quickly approaching. It's time to make lists, shop the sales, and wrap presents. So much of our focus—and if we're honest, our stress—during this season centers on buying gifts for those we love. But 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 reminds us that God loves us so deeply that he gives all his children the gift of grace in Christ Jesus. What better gift could we receive?

Through his grace, God also gives us spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12, we see spiritual gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, and more. No matter how old or young you are, God has given all of us spiritual gifts. What a wonderful gift to receive during Advent and throughout the entire year!

It's up to us to use these gifts to bless others and bring glory to God. No impact is too small, and every opportunity can reflect his goodness. How can you use your spiritual gifts today and throughout this Advent season?

PRAYER: In this season of Advent, we pause to thank You for the greatest gift of all—Your grace made known in Jesus Christ. As we wait for his coming, remind us that You have already blessed us with gifts to share: gifts of kindness, compassion, faith, and love. Strengthen us to use them joyfully so that others might see Your light through us. May all we do bring glory to You and reflect the hope we have in Christ. Amen.

-Ben, Megan, Benjamin, William, & Alexander Rugg

DECEMBER 2

Mark 13:33-37

33 Beware, keep alert, for you do not know when the time will come. **34** It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. **35** Therefore, keep awake, for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight or at cockcrow or at dawn, **36** or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. **37** And what I say to you I say to all: "Keep awake."

The meaning of Mark 13:33-37 may seem small and insignificant at first glance, but it holds so much more wisdom than what it seems. In this passage, Jesus tells us to be "watchful" and "alert," and then provides the example of a man who is traveling, but tells his servant to stay at the door and watch for "the lord of the house." Although in this scenario the lord of the house is the man who left, what Jesus wants us to understand is that the Lord is with us at any given time, even when we can't see him.

This holiday season, I challenge you to look for God in your daily life. It may be something as small as hearing Christmas music while shopping, or something as meaningful as seeing a family member you've missed or seeing that one gift you really wanted under the tree. As we near Christmas, try to take a moment, even if it's as brief as a car ride to Kroger or reading these devotionals, to look around, see everything God has given you, and be grateful. Be watchful for God and His works this season, stay alert for all that He does for you, and don't forget what a blessing He is.

PRAYER: God of every moment, open our eyes to see Your presence in the ordinary and the unexpected. Make us watchful and alert to the blessings You place before us each day. As we move toward Christmas, fill us with gratitude, wonder, and a renewed awareness of Your constant love. Amen.

-Maddie A. (10th Grade)

DECEMBER 3

John 1:1-5

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being **4** in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

Turning out all of the lights in our house just to experience the glow of the Christmas tree each evening is one of our favorite rituals! It's a wonderful feeling to see how much brighter the lights on the tree seem against the surrounding darkness. It also serves as a reminder to pause and focus on Christ this season, especially in the midst of the holiday chaos.

Whether attending the candlelight services or enjoying the Christmas lights in our neighborhoods, seeing the light reminds us of the promise that John describes in John 1:1-5. John says that "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Everybody has experienced and can recognize darkness. We spend our days in the hustle and bustle of life, at times stumbling along the way. However, through Jesus, we have an everlasting light to our path so we can see how to live! Sharing the light of Christ to others is the best way to remain focused on the importance of Advent and the gift of Jesus.

May the light of Christ shine upon you during this Advent season.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, Help us to shine your everlasting light to those around us. May we do our best to reflect your love and grace in this the world. Amen.

-Jill & Ted Penick

DECEMBER 4

John 1:6-9

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. **8** He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. **9** The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

Prophesized by Malachi and Isaiah, John was sent as a messenger by God. Matthew and Luke tell us that John was in the wilderness where the word of God came to him. He was sent to prepare the way for the Lord. John would bear witness of the Light, so that all would believe. The true Light was coming, a Light that would illuminate the entire world.

Advent is the beginning of the church year. It is the season in which we prepare for the coming of Christ. Advent is symbolic of John preparing for the coming of Christ. We prepare for the coming of Christ at Christmas, with Jesus' birth. We also prepare for the coming of Christ into the lives and hearts of all believers.

Just as John prepared the way for the light, during this Advent season we are called to prepare the way for the Light. Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church provides so many wonderful ways to be involved. Whether learning about the word of God through Bible study, attending Sunday services, participating in ministry or serving one of the many missions. Our church provides us with lots of ways to participate and prepare the way for the Light. There are many in the world that are in the darkness, and many more that lose their way and turn to sin. And for many of us, we also carry the responsibility of preparing our children for the Light. Just like John, we are not the Light. We can only tell others about the Light and make them curious to find the Light on their own journey through life. As Jesus and the disciples said, and Dr. Robbins likes to say, "Come and See". May the Light of Christ shine upon you during this Advent season.

PRAYER: As John prepared the way for Your Son, help us prepare our hearts to welcome Christ anew. Let Your light shine through us so others may see and believe. In all we do this season, may we reflect Your love and guide others toward Your grace. Amen.

-Lizzy, Patrick, Elizabeth, & Harvey Couch

DECEMBER 5

Jeremiah 33:14-16

14 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. **15** In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. **16** In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

This passage of Scripture speaks to the Davidic line. Jeremiah lived during a time of great upheaval and decline. King David had spoken from the Lord, saying that the Davidic reign would be restored despite the devastation. Jeremiah insists that Judah will be saved and that the people will live in safety.

Jeremiah is speaking to our condition today! We are living in a time of great upheaval! This is true not only in America but throughout the world! Here we see a promise reserved for the righteous, even in the midst of chaos and despair.

That is the message Jeremiah speaks to us during this Advent season. God's promise throughout Jeremiah serves as a source of spiritual and emotional fortitude for a world feeling abandoned, reminding us that a brighter future awaits.

Jeremiah beckons us to trust in God's promises and to embody His values in our lives during this holy season.

PRAYER: Come among us, O God, and hear our prayers; so that when your son Jesus comes among us with great might, and in manger mild, we might recognize his face and his voice, and come to adore him. Amen.

-Dr. F. Gladwin Connell

DECEMBER 6

Isaiah 6:7-10

1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty, and the hem of his robe filled the temple. **2** Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. **3** And one called to another and said, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." **4** The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. **5** And I said, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" **6** Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. **7** The seraph touched my mouth with it and said, "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." **8** Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" **9** And he said, "Go and say to this people: "Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand." **10** Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes and listen with their ears and comprehend with their minds and turn and be healed."

Isaiah 6 occurs during a time of national crisis following the death of King Uzziah, a long-reigning ruler of Judah who, at the end of his rule, became disconnected from God and arrogant. The nation faced uncertainty and political turmoil, while morally and spiritually it had declined. Against this backdrop of societal injustice and a crisis of leadership, Isaiah received his vision of God's heavenly glory, his subsequent cleansing, and his divine call to be a prophet. Yet, in the midst of this glorious vision, Isaiah is painfully aware of his flaws and says, "I'm not worthy." How many of us feel unworthy of the positions or things we are called to do? I know I have had several of those times. Isaiah is no different. He has been called upon by God and sees angels. His reaction? "I'm not worthy." The angel touches his lips and explains that he has been made clean. Then God calls, asking, "Whom shall I send?" Isaiah finds strength in His grace and says, "Send me."

During this Advent season, we are reminded that by the grace of God we have been made whole. Where we see flaws and insecurity, God sees potential for renewal. God calls us to be bold messengers of hope in a weary world—to speak light into darkness, to offer love where there is rejection, and to welcome the outcast just as Christ welcomes us.

PRAYER: Gracious God, grant me the strength to deliver Your message, even when it is unwelcome or seems unheard. Give me wisdom to speak Your words and not my own. Help me to show Your love in all circumstances, especially when it is difficult. Cleanse my heart, renew my spirit, and send me where You will. Amen.

-Michelle, Steve, Grace and Michael Rogers

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT: DECEMBER 7

Isaiah 11:1-10

Isaiah paints a wild picture. A shoot springs up from the stump of Jesse – life bursting from something that looked dead. Then he tells us about a world turned upside down: wolves hanging out with lambs, lions giving up steak for straw, and toddlers playing next to cobras like it's no big deal.

One only needs to look around to see why such a picture is so far-fetched. We live in a world that thrives on division. Every algorithm, every headline, every political ad is built to keep wolves and lambs snarling at each other. But Isaiah dares us to believe in a Messiah who smashes those walls, a Messiah who rewrites the rules instead of playing referee for the (Facebook) fight. In God's kingdom, conservatives break bread with liberals. Uncles and nephews who disagree on so much are seated at the same table with full hearts, not hatred. Put simply, according to Isaiah, in God's kingdom, rivals become family because grace rewires the heart.

That's not kumbaya sentimentality – it's spiritual insurgency against the easy comfort of "us versus them." Isaiah's vision is God saying, "I'm done with your echo chambers." The Spirit that rests on the Branch – the Spirit of wisdom, justice, and peace – doesn't make people nice. It makes them new.

The shoot from the stump isn't just ancient prophecy – it's what God is still doing in us. Every time we love across battle lines, forgive the unforgivable, or choose relationship over rage, another green shoot cracks the surface of our scorched earth. Isaiah saw a day when wolves nap next to lambs and no one's afraid anymore. That's not some distant heaven – it's the kind of world Jesus invites us to start building now.

PRAYER: Oh God of abundant grace, teach us to love across the lines of artificial division, to set longer tables instead of building higher fences. Make us bold enough to bless our enemies, patient enough to understand our neighbors, and faithful enough to believe that rivals can still share a meal.

-Sam McClelland & Megan Yonker

DECEMBER 8

Psalm 43:3-6

3 O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling. **4** Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God. **5** Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

As we march closer to Christmas, the days of December get shorter and darker. The nights get longer and colder, and it gets harder and harder to remember the warm, sunny days of spring and summer. We leave for work or school and the sun is just breaking over the horizon, and when we get in our cars to come home, the sun is already starting to set. Many people suffer from seasonal depression during this time of year because without the long days and sunrays of summertime, our bodies cannot produce enough Vitamin D to keep us feeling joyful. We were made for light. We need it. We can't find our joy without it. But we don't just need the sun's light, we need God's light.

During the dead of winter, I often feel like real sunshine will never come again. Have you ever experienced that feeling – there's been two weeks straight of cold, rainy, cloudy days, and you start to believe you'll never be warm or cheerful ever again? I imagine that the ancient Israelites may have felt a little like that during the period of time between the last prophet and the coming of the Messiah. They were waiting in silence and darkness, longing for God to speak and shine a light into the world, and they probably had times where they began to wonder if they would ever hear from God again.

And don't we all wonder that from time to time? When the world gets dark, sometimes it's hard to remember to hope in God.

It's no accident that we celebrate Christ's birth in December. God knows how dark and cold our world can be, and God's answer to the darkness is to enter into it with us. But God doesn't step into the darkness the way we expect. There's no parade (except for some shepherds), no fancy light display (except for a star), and no prime-time Christmas special (except for an angel chorus). God comes in to dwell with us in the quietest of ways – as one of us. In days of darkness, the light of the world breaks through in a manger. God sent down light and truth to guide us, and made God's dwelling place our dwelling place. We can give thanks, even in the darkest of days, knowing that the light has come to be among us.

PRAYER: Dear God, you are our light always. You sometimes answer things differently than what we think you will but it is always the best thing in your eyes. We celebrate your son Jesus Christ's birth because he came into the world to save and be with us and that is a big deal. Thank you, Lord, for your everlasting light that we can shine to others through you. Amen.

**-Devotional, Melanie Buchanan
Prayer, Willa B. (3rd Grade)**

DECEMBER 9

Psalm 27:1-4

1 The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold[of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? **2** When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh—my adversaries and foes—they shall stumble and fall. **3** Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident. **4** One thing I asked of the Lord; this I seek: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

When I was walking through a difficult season of uncertainty – my health fragile, and my prayers seemingly unanswered – I often felt surrounded by shadows. Fear and anxiety whispered to me daily, urging me to give into depression. While reading Psalm 27, the phrase “The Lord is the stronghold of my life”, seemed to speak to my soul. It was as though God was reminding me that when I am at my weakest, He is my strength. I knew that if I trusted God, He would give me the strength to endure or give me relief from my pain.

I was reminded, David’s confidence wasn’t rooted in his own strength but in the unshakable presence of God. Even when enemies closed in, he desired only one thing: to dwell in the house of the Lord, to gaze upon His beauty, and to seek Him in His temple. That longing—to remain close to God and lean on Him in my weakness – became my prayer as well.

In the days that followed, my circumstances didn’t change overnight, but my heart did. Each time pain rose up, I remembered, “The Lord is my stronghold – of whom/what shall I be afraid?” Slowly, my pain lessened, as did my anxiety. God’s light didn’t just illuminate my path – His strength restored my faith in His goodness.

Today, no matter the shadows that press around you, remember: God’s light still shines. Seek His presence above all else, and His peace will quiet your fears.

PRAYER: Loving God, thank You for being my light when I walk through darkness. Help me to seek Your presence above my fears and to rest in Your unfailing strength. Amen.

-Carrie Washburn

DECEMBER 10

Psalm 119:105-106

105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. **106** I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to observe your righteous ordinances.

You might have read this devotional booklet up until this point with glee and joy because you are in a fresh and amazing season with God. I am so glad!

But, if you have come to our devotional book with the tension of wanting to love Christmas and the joy of the season but you're having a hard season of loss, grief, or worry – welcome to the coziest corner of our devotional. Wrap up in a blanket, watch the steam roll off your warm tea.

Hear the good news:

Christmas arrives in the dark. Thank goodness.

God actually saw a whole world of people living in loss, grief, and worry. This human condition has such a wide range of experience. Yes, there are lights, gifts, Hallmark movies, and cookies—there's also all this other stuff that doesn't make the Christmas bingo card.

No one wants to place their bingo chips on terminal illness, empty chairs, divorce, regret, miscarriages, or loneliness for Christmas bingo. And while our whole society is infatuated with the former glitter, God is deeply drawn in by the latter.

Celebration might be far from you today, but God is not. God enters into our world just to be close to the brokenhearted. Jesus arrives not for a big party sold to the world in his honor, he arrives for the brokenhearted so they might have just enough strength and light to take the next right step and face what is next.

Christmas arrives in the dark. Thank goodness.

PRAYER: Draw close to us in this season – whether we come with joy or with heavy hearts. Meet us in the shadows, hold our worries and grief, and give us just enough hope for the next step. Thank You for coming to us in the dark and choosing to stay near.

-Rev. Ellen Rowland

DECEMBER 11

John 12:35-36

35 Jesus said to them, "The light is in you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. **36** While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light." After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

In the book of John, scripture is woven with symbolism including what we see in John 12 with Jesus being the "light of the world." As the light, Jesus exudes love, kindness, and mercy.

As we read this scripture, the song "It Only Takes a Spark" came to mind. The chorus reads, "it only takes a spark, to get a fire going and soon all those around can warm up to its glowing. That's how it is with God's love. Once you've experienced it. You share his love to everyone, you want to pass it on."

We live in a world that often feels dark, but the light of Christ is still shining through His Word, His Spirit, and His people. This scripture reminds us that he is the light to give us hope, reveal truth, and provide a path to righteousness. He also shares the importance of discipling others so that they can too experience the light and "warm up to his glowing."

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, We thank you for the light you have given us through your son, Jesus. Thank you for illuminating our paths so that we can seek you daily and walk in righteousness rather than darkness. We pray that a spark ignites in us so that we can pass on your light and love to others along the way. In Jesus' name, Amen.

-Stacey, Jake and Baylor Brabham

DECEMBER 12

Ephesians 5:6-14

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. **7** Therefore do not be associated with them, **8** for once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light, **9** for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. **10** Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. **11** Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness; rather, expose them. **12** For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly, **13** but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, **14** for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

This scripture passage instructs us to not be deceived by empty words and to seek out what pleases God.

During these unstable times this is not often easy to do. We are bombarded daily by 24/7 news and even in our churches there is division and uncertainty.

Our paths are not always clear. We question the actions and judgements of those that we once considered Christians and even find doubt in our own spiritual journeys. With so much instability in the world, how do we know how to think, feel, or act?

Years ago there was a popular trend of people wearing a wide rubber band on their wrists with the initials imprinted, WWJD - What Would Jesus Do?

It did not give the wearer of the bracelet answers to all moral questions but it was more of a reminder to stop and contemplate what behavior should be exhibited based on Jesus' teachings and actions, all of which had a foundation in Love. What if during this Advent season we attempt to focus our own personal decisions and actions on Love and not on empty words and promises. We may not be 100% successful, but we truly believe that any effort will be pleasing to God.

PRAYER: Help us to intentionally base our daily actions and decisions on Love. Amen.

-Debbie Benson

DECEMBER 13

1 Peter 2:5-9

5 Like living stones let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. **6** For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." **7** This honor, then, is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," **8** and "A stone that makes them stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. **9** But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

This scripture is Peter's vision of the church forming. They were no longer individual Christians. They were the church. This is one of the most meaningful interpretations of the church in the New Testament. All the terms referring to being a Christian are corporate terms. To be a Christian is to live within the community of God's people. What can we expect from this community at Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church? We heard so many times during our capital funds campaign that this place matters. We affirmed that with an overwhelmingly positive response on Legacy Sunday. This building is important to you and me, but there is something more important than this building. It's what this building represents. It gives us a place to get to know God and one another.

Your job is like that. Hopefully you really like your work. It lets you earn money to do things with family and friends. Your home is like that. You like the design of your home and you designed it so you could be with those you love. We all want relationships. We crave friends who know the real us and still like us because of who we are and in spite of who we are.

That's Jesus, he knows who we are and accepts us. Many of us don't expect God to be that gracious. We think we've been too bad for too long. We expect that God looks past our needs to the needs of others.

But to our surprise, because of our faith and who we are in our need, we can expect our Lord and our friends to stand by our side. God doesn't always prevent our problems but does give us the strength and perseverance to overcome them; sometimes by simply calling forth friends and neighbors to ease the burden and to fill the emptiness. Thanks to Peter for giving us this vision of the church - the community of caring.

PRAYER: Lord help us not to think of your coming as some distance event that took place once and has never been repeated. May we know that you are still here walking among us, by our side, whispering over our shoulders and smiling upon us when we need encouragement and help.

-Rev. George and Becky McCoy

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT: DECEMBER 14

Matthew 11:2-11

Growing up (and truthfully, still very much today), I would consider myself a perfectionist. I badly wanted approval from everyone -- teachers, friends, my parents, and the list goes on. In the eighth grade I got a 96 in English and cried because "it wasn't a higher A". I've always had an easy time setting high expectations for myself, but often have a hard time when I feel like I'm not doing enough. Have I been a good enough daughter, friend, sister, wife? What more can I be doing in church? Is it worth it to spend so much time trying to meet the expectations of others? What else should I be doing with my time? What if I'M not enough?

I can only imagine John the Baptist is in the same boat in some ways. Here we have a man that has spent all his time being Jesus's biggest cheerleader and working so hard to spread the Good News. But now he's in prison and likely knows he'll be put to death. And he's asking a very vulnerable question -- "was this worth it? Did all this work MEAN something? I know it's what I believe and have been preaching to others, but is it REALLY true that Jesus is the Messiah? Was this the right thing to do?" One of my favorite things about this passage is that Jesus doesn't scold John for asking this question and needing reassurance. In fact, if anyone understands how scary it is to be in John's position, it's Jesus. Instead, he sends disciples to reassure John that Jesus is the Messiah and John can be assured of that through the work and miracles Jesus has done. And then Jesus takes it a step further by telling this crowd of people that "among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist". He is THE example of how to spread the news that Jesus is the Messiah. He has been bold in his actions. He has dedicated his time and now his life in prison to go before Jesus and tell people who he is. He is the prophet of whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."

My other favorite thing about this passage is the last part of verse 11: "yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he". Even the lowest person in the kingdom of heaven is still greater than John the Baptist. Of course the work we do here on Earth to share God's love with others is worth it, but even when we don't feel like we live up to our own (or other people's) expectations, God sees our heart. And when God calls us God's own and welcomes us into the kingdom of heaven, we are all exalted. Regardless of class or creed, we are God's. And there is great hope in that. This Christmas season, I hope we can all remember who we are and whose we are. God calls us child. God calls us loved, even when we feel like we aren't enough.

PRAYER: God, in this season of waiting, help us to fix our eyes upon the manger. Let us be filled with peace in the midst of chaos, joy in the midst of strife, and hope in the midst of despair. And let us always remember that it is more than enough to be called beloved by You. Amen.

-Harper Curry

DECEMBER 15

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. **4** In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing clearly the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. **5** For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus's sake. **6** For it is the God who said, "Light will shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

I'll be honest: in recent years, I've had trouble finding the "Christmas Spirit." December has carried its share of work stress, family expectations, and lingering grief. The season that's supposed to be joyful and bright can feel crowded with noise, demands, and emotional weight. When that happens, it's easy to feel distant from the hope we're promised by the birth of Jesus.

Advent is supposed to redirect us. It's supposed to remind us that the light of Christ isn't something we manufacture or "get into." It's supposed to come to us – not through grand displays or perfect plans, but through humility, service, and small acts of love; like a candle in a dark room, or a sincere conversation that brings peace. Advent is supposed to ask us to loosen our grip on expectations and to make space for a Savior who enters quietly, choosing a manger instead of a throne. But sometimes, it may not feel like it.

And maybe that's where my journey for the true "Christmas spirit" lies. I can try to find simple, honest, holy moments where God moves among us – moments I might miss if I'm looking only at the spectacle. A breath of stillness. A prayer whispered in exhaustion. A reminder that light shines even when we only see the darkness. This season, let's try to trust that God is already moving quietly, gently lifting the veil of worry and weariness so that maybe we can glimpse the hope that the simple act of a savior being born can bring.

PRAYER: As we move closer to Christmas, may we be people who carry that light into the dim places of our world. May the face of Christ shape our words, our actions, and our witness, so that others might come to see the glory and love of God made known. Amen.

-Michael McMurray

DECEMBER 16

1 John 1:4-7

4 We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. **5** This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. **6** If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; **7** but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

We begin teaching children not to fear the dark at very young age. Nightlights, doors left open, stars that glow in the dark are all ways we help children to dispel fear of the things we cannot see. As adults, we grow to fear darkness in new ways. The news continually points out ways the world is in turmoil and those thoughts can quickly snuff out our joy. Confidence in the light of Christ working in the world seems lost. It takes practice and routine to look for the light in all the darkness. God is there but we must look for that proof and make it part of our daily routine. Take time to see the light that is working in the world and claim that joy for yourself.

'The soul takes on the color of its thoughts'- Marcus Aurelius

PRAYER: God, forgive us when we let the darkness consume our thoughts. Help us as we learn to look for you at work in the world. Fill us with the joy of your light. Amen .

-Pam Lentz

DECEMBER 17

John 3:16-21

16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. **17** "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. **18** Those who believe in him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. **19** And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. **20** For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. **21** But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

Advent reminds us that light still breaks through, even in the heaviest darkness. God didn't just love part of the world – He loved the whole world. Every person, every nation, every heart. That's the kind of love that heals divisions, welcomes the outsider, and reminds us that mercy is stronger than fear.

When Christ came, He didn't bring condemnation – He brought restoration. His light invites us to see one another with grace and courage, even when the world feels harsh or divided.

So as we wait for Christmas, let's carry that light into our communities – through kindness, justice, and compassion. The Light of Christ still shines, and it's bright enough for everyone.

PRAYER: Jesus, Light of the world, thank you for loving without limits. In these difficult times, help me reflect Your compassion and courage. Let Your love shine through me, bringing warmth and hope wherever it's needed most. Amen.

-Anna-Lee, Sam, and Robert McSpadden

DECEMBER 18

Isaiah 40:1-11

1 Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. **2** Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. **3** A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. **4** Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. **5** Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." **6** A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass; their constancy is like the flower of the field. **7** The grass withers; the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. **8** The grass withers; the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. **9** Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!' **10** See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him and his recompense before him. **11** He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom and gently lead the mother sheep.

Advent begins with a gentle whisper of comfort. Before angels sing or candles are lit, God softly speaks to a weary people: "Comfort, O comfort my people." These words are not for those at ease but for those in exile – displaced, discouraged, uncertain whether God still remembers them. To them, and to us, God says: I have not forgotten you. Your suffering is not the end of your story. Isaiah envisions a landscape renewed. Valleys lift, mountains bow, rough places become smooth. This is not the work of force but of grace – a quiet reshaping of creation that removes every obstacle to God's presence. Balance is restored, and the earth prepares to welcome its Creator. The hymn "Toda la Tierra / All Earth Is Waiting" echoes that longing: "All the world, bound and struggling, seeks true liberty." Advent calls us into that longing – to watch, to hope, to engage in the justice that is coming. Yet this waiting is not passive. It is the patient, faithful work of those who believe change is possible. When Isaiah says, "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord," he speaks to our own dry hearts and divided communities. God's people are called to make space – for mercy, for equity, for peace – to lift what is low and humble what is high.

"Get you up to a high mountain... say, 'Here is your God!'" The community of faith becomes the herald of good news, carrying hope into a weary world. We do not wait with folded hands; we lift our voices. We act, serve, speak, and love in ways that reveal God's nearness.

And when the Lord comes, His strength will not crush but redeem. The same voice that shapes the mountains also gathers the lambs and holds them close. Divine justice is compassion made visible – power that protects the vulnerable and heals the broken. So all the earth is waiting, and so are we—eyes open, hearts ready, trusting that God's dawn is near. As the light of Advent spreads across the horizon, may we become part of its glow – people whose lives proclaim, "Here is our God," until all creation sees His glory revealed.

PRAYER: God of light and justice, awaken our hearts to Your coming. Level our pride, lift our compassion, and make straight the paths of peace. Teach us to wait with courage and to work with love, until all the earth rejoices in the brightness of Your dawn. Amen.

DECEMBER 19

John 9:1-7

9 As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. **2** His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" **3** Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. **4** We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. **5** As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." **6** When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, **7** saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

As an avid golfer, I've come to realize that the common phrase, "I haven't played in a while," has different meanings. For some, it means I haven't picked up a club in a few years. For others, it means they haven't hit range balls twice that week or played that day. The latter know that putting in the work is necessary to succeed on the course. They make the time—even with busy schedules – to chip, putt, or play a few holes. They're constantly sharpening their skills.

That is precisely what Jesus calls us to do. We must put our faith into action. When someone asks us what we've done in the name of Jesus, and we reply, "I haven't done much lately," does that mean you haven't done anything in the past few years, or does that mean you've already done three things that week?

Life isn't always fair. Sometimes, the good guy finishes last while the bad guy finishes first. But the joy is in the effort. In John 9, we see Jesus practicing what he preaches and putting the work into healing the blind. He adds in John 9:5, "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Each of us has a unique set of experiences and gifts, given to us by God, to help others. Whether it is supporting the church financially, reading to kids at Wakefield, leading a Bible study, or simply stepping out of our comfort zone to greet someone new on Sunday, all these activities represent putting in the work – just like Jesus would want us to do. Jesus added in John 9:3, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."

It can feel like a daunting task to determine where we can put in the work to make the greatest impact. In a world of unlimited opportunities and information, where do we fit in best? The refreshing thing about a new season is that we get to choose where to devote our time and resources. Through all the obligations of life, we are the ones with the power to decide when – and where – to set aside time to keep our skills sharp. As Jesus shows us, it starts by showing up.

PRAYER: Lord: Please help me get to work like Jesus. Help me realize and prioritize opportunities where my skills can be useful. Please provide me with the wisdom, strength, and dedication to utilize my time wisely, avoid needless distractions, and help others.

-Lucy, Quinten, Hattie, and Hollis Whiteside

DECEMBER 20

Luke 3:1-6

3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, **2** during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. **3** He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, **4** as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight. **5** Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, **6** and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' "

In Luke 3:1-6 John the Baptist helps prepare people for when Jesus is to come. He travels around Jordan, preaching to people and telling them to get baptized and to abstain from further sin. John says he is "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" meaning he was a messenger spreading the word that the Lord is to come. He wants everyone to arrange their soul for Jesus, and not to just fix how we seem on the outside but how we seem on the inside.

This is similar to when we get busy in life we tend to forget to make time for God in our lives. John's sermon helps me realize that to follow Jesus is not just going to church, but to really let him make our lives better. When we repent, we're apologizing to God and choose to live through him instead of on our own.

John helped people prepare for Jesus then, so that we can prepare ourselves for Jesus today. We can spread his love by loving others, being kind, forgiving, and living faithfully.

PRAYER: Loving God, help us hear Your call in the midst of our busy lives. As John prepared the way for Jesus, prepare our hearts now. Smooth our rough places, quiet our distractions, and guide us to turn back to You. Teach us to live with kindness, forgiveness, and faithfulness, so Your love shines through us. Come, Lord Jesus – renew us from the inside out. Amen.

-Sam B. (9th Grade)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT: DECEMBER 21

Matthew 1:18-25

We are quickly approaching Christmas Day. Bells are ringing, decorated trees are on display, and people are shopping and preparing to give to others. Children and parents are excited and full of hope and anticipation. Christians around the world are preparing to celebrate the advent of Jesus. The Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ gives us reason to rejoice and be thankful. At the same time, we are called to be mindful of those for whom this distinctive season is stressful. People who are experiencing illness, broken relationships, loss, loneliness, or general hardships would really appreciate a visit, card, or phone call. In some cases, just a smile from you would be a precious gift.

Matthew 1:18-25 recounts the miraculous conception and birth of Jesus Christ. This passage highlights God's sovereign work in fulfilling God's promises, the unique identity of Jesus as the Savior, and the faithful obedience of Joseph. The passage begins by introducing the circumstances of Jesus' birth. Mary, a young woman engaged to Joseph, is found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. The virgin conception sets Jesus apart as uniquely divine, fulfilling God's redemptive plan. Joseph is described as "righteous," meaning he is righteous and committed to God's law. When he learns of Mary's pregnancy, he plans to divorce her quietly, which would spare her public disgrace.

An angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream. The angel reassures him, explaining that Mary's pregnancy is from the Holy Spirit. The angel calls Joseph "son of David," highlighting his royal lineage, which connects Jesus to King David and fulfills Messianic prophecy. Joseph is instructed to name the child "Jesus," because he will save his people from their sins. Matthew explains that these events fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, meaning "God with us." Joseph responds to the angel's message with faith and immediate obedience. He takes Mary as his wife, protecting her and her child, and refrains from marital relations with her until after Jesus is born, preserving the truth of the virgin birth. When the child is born, Joseph names him "Jesus." Joseph's faithful and obedient actions modeled preparation and trust in God's plan, even when it defies human understanding. Christmas preparation allows us to create space in our hearts and in our lives to receive the gifts of the season regardless of what we may be facing along life's journey. During this Advent, may faithful and obedient preparation for the gift of Christ guide your life and vocation.

PRAYER: God, forgive us when we let the darkness consume our thoughts. Help us as we learn to look for you at work in the world. Fill us with the joy of your light. Amen.

-Dr. Jeff Hampton

DECEMBER 22

Zephaniah 3:14-17

14 Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! **15** The Lord has taken away the judgments against you; he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. **16** On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. **17** The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing

It's the week of Christmas, and we're all putting finishing touches on decorations, wrapping those last few presents, and beginning to dream about the warmth and joy of friends and family gathered together to celebrate. We've put in all the effort because we want Christmas to be meaningful and magical for those we love. Most of the preparations are complete, now we just wait with expectation.

In the book of Zephaniah, the people of Israel are also waiting in expectation. The prophet has proclaimed that "the day of the Lord" is coming, and God's people have prepared by repenting of their sins and renewing their commitment to God. They've put in all the effort because they want their hearts and lives to be ready for the God they love. And now, the prophet says, God "will rejoice over you with gladness; he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing." It's time to celebrate, Zephaniah says! "Rejoice and exult with all your heart!"

So as you're checking your list twice, straightening the lights on the tree, and making that final grocery run, remember the good news of this Advent season: God is renewing you in love! We've put in the effort of focusing on God this Advent because we long for a meaningful relationship with the One who loves us enough to send his son, Jesus, into this world. And the message of Christmas is that Jesus will renew the whole world in love. So rejoice, and exult with all your heart!

PRAYER: God, thank you for renewing us in your love. As Christmas approaches, and we wait with expectation for the hymns and the presents and time with those we love, help us remember to sing and praise you for the ultimate gift of love - your son and our Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

-Rev. Katy Chambers

DECEMBER 23

Matthew 3:1-12

1 In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." 3 This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'" 4 Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan were going out to him, 6 and they were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Therefore, bear fruit worthy of repentance, 9 and do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 10 Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 "I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I, and I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Matthew 3:1-12 tells us of John the Baptist and his preaching. He spreads the word to the people in the wilderness of Judea. He tells them to "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him." For John knew something others did not; the Messiah was coming. He spent his life preparing the way for Him. People came from all around to confess their sins and be baptized by him. But when the Pharisees and the Sadducees came, he said to them "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance."

I see this in life more often than you would think. I have met my fair share of people who will call themselves Christian and go to church on Sunday, but never practice the Lord's word. Being a Christian is not a part-time job; you cannot just go to church or read the Bible. To be a true Christian you must follow his word throughout your life. While John knew the Pharisees and the Sadducees did not live by the Lord's word, he still baptized them. John knew that even though they had wronged God, He would forgive them. John knew this because he chose to live by God's word. He knew he must practice what he preaches to others.

You cannot tell others to do something that you wouldn't do yourself. So next time you find yourself faced with a hard decision, or having to forgive someone, think of God's teachings and truly practice his word.

PRAYER: Lord, teach us to prepare the way for You not just with our words, but with our lives. Give us courage to choose what is right, humility to repent, and hearts willing to forgive as You forgive us. Help us bear good fruit that reflects Your love in all we do. Amen.

-Edie W. (9th Grade)

CHRISTMAS EVE: DECEMBER 24

Luke 2:1-20

On Christmas Eve, our story for today begins: “In those days,” and we are transported to a time of divine silence and anticipation, when the world was longing for hope and salvation. The story of Jesus’ birth reminds us that God’s plan often unfolds quietly and humbly, in a manger surrounded by animals and under the cover of night, yet it changes the course of history forever. This night encourages us to reflect on God’s patience and faithfulness, trusting that His promises are always fulfilled in His perfect timing. As we celebrate the Savior’s arrival, let us also prepare our hearts to receive Him anew, embracing the hope, peace, and love that Jesus brings into our lives, knowing that God sending Jesus is the greatest gift of love ever given.

However, let’s tweak it and consider, “In these days.” “In these days” invites us to see the story of Jesus’ birth not just as a distant event from 2000 years ago but as a timeless truth that continues to resonate today. It reminds us that God’s divine plan for salvation was set in motion “in those days,” and that God’s love and hope remain relevant today. Jesus’ birth is an ongoing invitation for us to experience God’s presence, to find hope in the darkness, and to recognize that God’s promises are still being fulfilled in our lives today. Christmas is a sacred reminder that God’s love entered our world then, and it continues to transform and inspire our world now, making the story ever-present and alive in our hearts. The story goes on!

PRAYER: Holy God, as we gather on this sacred Christmas Eve, we thank You for sending Jesus into our world “in those days” and still we know that he is still present in our hearts today. Help us to remember that Your promises are eternal and that Your love is never-ending. May the story of this tiny baby continue to inspire hope, peace, and joy in our lives, not just tonight but every day. Fill us with gratitude for the gift of Jesus and empower us to live out His love in our words and actions. As we celebrate this holy night, draw us closer to You and to one another, and remind us that Your presence is with us always. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

-Rev. Jay, Karen, and Quin Clark

CHRISTMAS DAY: DECEMBER 25

Luke 2:25-33

I can only imagine what Simeon must have felt as he gazed into the eyes of a small newborn named Jesus. He had waited a lifetime for the realization of the coming of the Messiah. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Simeon encounters Joseph and Mary with their son, Jesus. However, he was no ordinary son. Simeon was seeing salvation in the flesh. All that he hoped for had come to fulfillment in this new life before him who was born of a virgin.

Like Simeon, there are times when we must wait on the promises of God to be realized. Scripture declares, "Every one of God's promises is a yes" (2 Corinthians 1:20). That means every promise God has made in Jesus Christ will come to pass. Like Simeon, our role is to wait, and guided by the Holy Spirit, we, too, will see what God intends for us to see.

As this year comes to an end, and the new year fast approaches, I hope you will have the eyes to see Christ as he comes to you. Simeon did not know how or when God's promise to him would come to pass, but it did. God's promises to you will be made known to you as well if you have the eyes to see and the ears to hear!

-Dr. John Robbins

Advent

@ PHUMC

NOVEMBER 30

Hanging of the Greens | Sanctuary | 4 PM

DECEMBER 7

Service of Hope & Healing | Sanctuary | 4 PM

DECEMBER 14

Service of Lessons & Carols | All Services | 9 & 11 AM

DECEMBER 18

Hendrix College Choir Candlelight Carol | Sanctuary | 7:30PM

DECEMBER 24

Classic Candlelight Communion | Sanctuary | 2, 6 (choir), 8 (choir) PM - Dr. Robbins preaching

Children & Family Service | Argue Great Hall (Gym) | 4 PM

Modern Candlelight Communion | Wesley Hall | 6 PM - Rev. Clark preaching

Classic Candlelight Communion | Sanctuary | 11PM - Rev. Clark preaching

DECEMBER 25 & 26

Office Closed

DECEMBER 28

Holiday Schedule

Classic Worship | Sanctuary | 9 AM | Rev. Chambers preaching

Modern Worship | Wesley Hall | 11 AM | Rev. Chambers preaching

DECEMBER 31-JANUARY 2

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