

The background of the cover is dark. On the left, a white candle sits on a silver-colored holder. In the foreground, a scroll of parchment is partially unrolled. The title is written in large, stylized, 3D letters. 'Amen.' is in blue, 'Come,' is in yellow, and 'Lord Jesus' is in blue. Below the title, the words 'ADVENT DEVOTIONS' are written in yellow on a black rectangular background.

**Amen.
Come,
Lord
Jesus**

ADVENT DEVOTIONS

By the Rev. Kevin Parviz

BURNING BUSH MINISTRIES



**BRINGING Y'SHUA TO JEWISH PEOPLE,
BRINGING Y'SHUA TO THE CHURCH!**

The vision of LIJE is two-fold.

- First, LIJE seeks to engage in intentional evangelism within every significant Jewish community in the United States, sharing Y'shua (Jesus) with all people and especially the Jewish people.
- Secondly, LIJE seeks to connect congregations for training in evangelism and to help our churches understand the Jewish roots of their faith.

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“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” (Rom 1:16, ESV)

Amen.
Come
Lord Jesus

ADVENT
MEDITATIONS

by the Rev. Kevin Parviz



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Foreword to the 2018 edition:

Much has changed in our ministry since this Advent devotional was published. So I thought I would take this opportunity to update the reader on what is going on in the LC-MS within Jewish missions.

In 1973, at the encouragement of Rev. Bruce Lieske, their pastor, St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Philadelphia submitted a memorial to the 1973 convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, titled "To Facilitate Gospel Proclamation among Jews." The synod ultimately referred this issue to an ad hoc committee, headed by Dr. Erwin J. Kolb then the Executive Director for Evangelism of the LC-MS. You can find these and related documents in Witnessing to Jewish People by Bruce J. Lieske on our website.

This beginning grew into what is now Lutherans in Jewish Evangelism (LIJE), founded in 1981. Rev. Lieske became its Founder and first Executive Director, and LIJE became the first mission society outreach of the LC-MS since World War II. There are 6,000,000 Jewish people in the United States, accounting for 45% of world Jewry.

To minister to this community, we help prepare congregations for ministry to Jewish people through preaching, teaching, writing and workshops while developing branches that are active and intentional in evangelism to the communities where God has placed them. We affirm and seek to be faithful to St. Paul's proclamation, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile" (Romans 1:16).

This booklet was first published by Lutheran Hour Ministries in 2001 following a series that I wrote including a Lenten Sermon series, "Walking in Y'shua's Footprints to..." published in Concordia Pulpit Resources, a LifeLight Foundations Study, "Bible Feasts," (both published by Concordia Publishing House) and a Lenten devotional, again published by Lutheran Hour Ministries, called "Ponder the Path" (Most, or all of these resources are available on our website.) At that time, the ministry here in St. Louis was young. I became involved in 1996, having begun my ministry with a Jewish outreach organization in Denver, CO, called Menorah Ministries where I was serving as a volunteer missionary on the campus at the University of Colorado. By 1996 I was attending Concordia Seminary and had not heard much about the existing Lutheran mission to the Jews when I met Steve Cohen. He was then the field counselor and advisor to LIJE. In 1996 he left Jews for Jesus and

came full-time with LIJE and moved to St. Louis. We worked together to found The Apple of His Eye Mission Society, which was ostensibly intended to be a missionary training center, working with LIJE. But it ended up effectively operating as a competing mission to the Jews, causing a lot of confusion within our church body. So Steve and Bruce decided to separate their work. Steve left the ministry of LIJE but continued to operate under LIJE's street name of "The Apple of His Eye."

Because of all this confusion, LIJE determined to open new mission branches under the name of "Burning Bush Ministries" to distinguish itself from Steve's new ministry, and in 1999, opened a new branch of mission in Detroit, MI, the first of "Burning Bush Ministries."

However, two branches of ministry were still open, St. Louis and New York, operating under the "Apple of His Eye" name. Both branches were attached to messianic-Lutheran congregations, Congregation Beth El in Queens, New York, and Congregation Chai v'Shalom in St. Louis, where I have the privilege of pastoring.

Congregation Chai v'Shalom was founded in 1998, celebrating its first worship service on April 18, 1998, about a year-and-a-half since beginning mission work in St. Louis. Then, in 2005, Bruce retired and LIJE called me to serve as its second Executive Director, and has moved its offices to St. Louis, MO, where it continues a variety of ministries under the structure of LIJE, such as The Apple of His Eye, Burning Bush Ministries, and Aish HaEmeth, our Center for Jewish-Christian studies.

Unfortunately, in 2008 our ministry and congregation in Queens, New York closed as the missionary there took a call to serve a traditional Lutheran congregation. But, we have opened new mission stations in Atlanta and S. Florida, and continue to minister in Detroit, St. Louis and Orlando, and work with partner ministries to serve in the Ukraine and in Israel. We are actively working with congregations in the New York metro area to reopen our New York branch. **LIJE continues as a faith-ministry of the LC--MS, and as such relies on the regular support of those to whom God has called to sustain it with their gifts and prayers.**

"Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved." (Romans 10:1).

--Rev. Kevin Parviz, Executive Director

Introduction

"'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

Saint John, the author of the book of Revelation, concludes his writing with this prayer. It is the prayer of the Church, our prayer, as we await the return of our Savior, Jesus.

This Advent season, as you anticipate celebrating the birth of the Christ child, these devotions will take you through history from the moment of creation, following God's faithfulness to His promise to save His people from the judgment of death. Christmas is the celebration of how He fulfilled that promise in the baby Jesus.

Even now, 2,000 years after the birth of Christ, we continue to anticipate God's final fulfillment of His promise. Jesus came to be our Immanuel, "God with us." There is no greater gift. After His resurrection from the dead, Jesus promised that He would return in judgment, taking all who believe in Him to the place He has prepared in heaven.

You and I live in the interim, sustained through all the troubles of this world by God's grace. We have seen the face of God in Jesus. We have the testimony of God's faithfulness throughout history, recorded in His Word. We have the gifts of God's presence in Baptism and the Lord's Supper. We have the joy of sharing the truth with those who do not yet know Jesus. We also have His promise to return, to usher in a new heaven and a new earth, where there will be no more tears or suffering.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

*Pastor Kevin Parviz
Congregation Chai v'Shalom
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First Sunday in Advent

God's Best

“God saw all that He had made, and it was very good” (Genesis 1:31).

At home my family keeps many beautiful gardens where we enjoy the beauty of God’s creation. I garden vegetables (I like to smell the herbs and eat vegetables fresh off the vine) and my wife is a flower gardener. We have a butterfly and hummingbird garden, rose gardens, and plenty of places to sit and enjoy the shade, the scents, the birds and butterflies.

But guess what: We seldom do that. I am constantly trying to save the tender shoots of new vegetables from choking weeds, grubs, and other pests. When our work allows us the luxury of sitting in the garden shade for a few minutes, we are usually driven away by heat, humidity, mosquitoes, and bees. Winter often feels like a backhanded relief from those stress-relieving hobbies!

When God created the earth, with Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden, all of it was good. But something has gone awry. Since then, all of history has been moving toward the restoration of that good creation. Can you imagine a place where we would actually enjoy our gardens— without the work of weeding and the constant annoyance of insects? That would be the best place ever!

Prayer: Thank You Lord, for creating all things and for loving me so much that You made a plan to restore Your good creation. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

As We Wait: Make a list of 10 things you are thankful for. Then thank God, Creator of everything, for all of them!

Monday following the First Sunday in Advent

Adam and Eve

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel” (Genesis 3:15).

When God created Adam and Eve, He gave them His best; all they would ever need. God gave them the freedom to enjoy everything He had made, except that He commanded them not to eat from one particular tree. They approached the one thing that was off limits and Satan

whispered, “Did God really say, ‘You must not...?’” (Genesis 3:1). They decided God’s best wasn’t good enough, and that choice disrupted the goodness of all God had made.

God gives us His best, too, but we want more. Satan whispers in our ears, “Did God really say...?” Then we take our eyes off of God and focus on ourselves. His best doesn’t seem good enough. Fortunately for us, God knows what is best and He will do it. In the Garden of Eden He made a promise: the seed of the woman will be bruised, but He will destroy the whisperer. We will hear the breath of God’s Spirit instead of Satan. For Adam and Eve, and hundreds of generations to follow, the wait for a Savior had begun.

Prayer: Lord, I’m sorry for lusting after my own desires. Help me listen to Your voice as I anticipate the birth of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

As We Wait: In the busyness of this season, remember that God kept the promise He made in the Garden. He sent His Son, Jesus, to be our Savior and to conquer Satan.

Tuesday following the First Sunday in Advent

Abram

“[God] took [Abram] outside and said, ‘Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.’ Then He said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be’” (Genesis 15:5).

When Eve bore her first son, Cain, she must have been excited as she remembered God’s promise that her offspring would conquer Satan. Perhaps she thought God would use Cain to restore them to the Garden. She could hardly have been more wrong! Cain also listened to Satan’s whisper, killed his brother, and was cursed by God. Two thousand years passed before God reminded us, through Abram, of His promise to send Messiah.

For 2,000 years humankind had been living on the earth, growing in number and working hard for food. Then God announced that through Abram “all peoples on earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). God chose Abram and his descendants, later known as the Jewish people, as the ones through whom Messiah would come. This nation would be enslaved and mistreated, but finally delivered to a land of her own. This nation is a picture of Messiah, bruised yet victorious over sin.

Prayer: Dear God, thank You for sustaining us through pain and blessing us through Your Spirit. Thank You for the eternal suffering You have spared us through the suffering of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

As We Wait: Life in Messiah Jesus is not free of pain. Yet, as we endure the hardship of this world, we are reminded of the promise that we, too, will be delivered, eternally blessed.

Wednesday following the First Sunday in Advent

Isaac

“Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about’” (Genesis 22:2).

Chapter twenty-two of Genesis tells the story of Abraham and his only son, Isaac. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac—to kill him as an offering to God. Abraham probably knew that his son was not the anticipated redeemer of the world. He had heard God’s promise, and it included 400 years of enslavement in a foreign land. Certainly this would not be accomplished in his son’s lifetime. Yet, Isaac, as his only son, was crucial to the promise. When God demanded his sacrifice, Abraham must have been perplexed. Perhaps he heard Satan’s whisper, “Did God really say...?”

But if Abraham heard the whisper, he quickly rebuked it as he proceeded in faith to sacrifice his son. Abraham knew that God keeps His promises. His faith spoke as he assured Isaac, “God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” (Genesis 22:8). Because of Abraham’s faith, Isaac was spared, a nation was born, and the promise of Messiah fulfilled.

Prayer: Thank You Father, for protecting my faith and providing the Lamb, Jesus, as the substitute for me. I rejoice in Him and await the kingdom to come. Amen.

As We Wait: Focus on God’s faithfulness today as you rebuke Satan’s tempting whispers and wait for God to fulfill His promise.

Thursday following the First Sunday in Advent

Jacob/Israel

“I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body” (Genesis 35:11).

Jacob is Isaac’s son and the third of the great patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). God gives Jacob a new name: “Israel,” which means “he struggles with God.” This is the name of the nation that comes from his descendants, and is an apt name for these people who stubbornly hold onto their sinful ways while God lovingly holds onto them as His children.

God reminds Israel of His promise to build a great nation through his descendants. In fact, a whole community of nations will come from the family of Israel, and he will be the father of kings. Here’s what we know about Messiah so far: He will come from the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; He will be born of a woman; He will be bruised by but defeat Satan; through His rule, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. Israel will struggle with God, and sometimes refuse to do His will, but through it all, God will stand fast and love His people.

Prayer: Thank You, Jesus, for bringing blessing to all the nations and leading me daily to forgiveness and Your promise of eternal blessing. Amen.

As We Wait: You and I struggle with God just like Jacob and his descendants. But God is patient to bring us back and keep forgiving us through Jesus. Today, remember God’s faithfulness to you.

Friday following the First Sunday in Advent

Joseph

“Now the Israelites settled in Egypt...” (Genesis 47:27).

Jacob and his children were living in the land God gave them, a place called Canaan, but were forced to move to Egypt because of a great famine. They had no food, but Jacob’s youngest son, Joseph, was the Egyptian pharaoh’s right-hand man and had stored enough food to sustain his nation and his family.

Remember what God told Abraham? “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years” (Genesis 15:13). Here is Abraham’s great-grandson, Joseph, leading his father and brothers into a country where they are strangers (and will become slaves). Joseph had probably heard his father tell this story about Abraham. But always, beyond the suffering, there is a promise of deliverance. “But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions” (Genesis 15:14).

Prayer: Our Lord God, take away the things that distract me from the joy of Your promise to be faithful. May I revel in the celebration of the birth of Your Son, Messiah Jesus. Amen.

As We Wait: If you feel like the Israelites this Christmas, a stranger in a foreign land, know that God is faithful and promises to save you. Afterward, you will come out with great possessions through Jesus.

Saturday following the First Sunday in Advent

A King from Judah

“The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until He comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is His” (Genesis 49:10).

After Jacob and his sons had lived in Egypt for almost two decades, Jacob knew he was going to die soon. So he gathered his twelve sons to bless them. He told each son about the nation that his descendants would become. Those twelve sons became the twelve tribes of Israel. One of them, Judah, was the father of the nation through whom Messiah would come.

Jacob said “the scepter will not depart from Judah...” A scepter is a token of kingship. This was a promise of a king! This prophecy was two-pronged. In about 900 years, David, a descendant of Judah, would become king and rule Judah with a godly heart. In about 2,000 years, Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of Judah and of David, would be born. He would rule in the hearts of all who believe in Him. Jacob’s sons did not know these details of how God would fulfill His promise, but they believed He would save His people. God’s promise through Jacob would sustain them through the difficult years ahead.

Prayer: Messiah Jesus, thank You for being faithful to Your promises. Help me to learn and remember them always. Amen.

As We Wait: Just as Israel relied on God’s promises to make it through difficult times, you can rely on God’s promises in seemingly hopeless days. Read Jesus’ promise to you in John 14:2-3.

Second Sunday in Advent

David and Abigail

“Please forgive your servant’s offense, for the LORD will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master, because he fights the LORD’s battles” (1 Samuel 25:28).

About 900 years had passed since Jacob blessed his sons. The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt, but escaped and returned to Canaan (their own land). Threatened by powerful armies to the east and west, they begged God for a king to rescue them. They chose a man named Saul, but he was more interested in personal glory than in serving God. Eventually, God rejected him because of his selfishness and disobedience.

Then God chose Israel’s second king, David. He was humble, devoted to God, and always aware that Israel’s victories were God’s doing. In all of these praiseworthy characteristics, David foreshadowed the Messiah to come. Israel even thought perhaps King David was the Messiah they awaited!

God revealed His plan to David through the words of a woman named Abigail. “The LORD will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master.” David would have a long (forty years) and successful reign as Israel’s earthly king, but Abigail’s words point much farther into the future: Jesus, the Messiah, would be a descendant of King David.

Prayer: “Not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39). Amen.

As We Wait: Have you ever begged God for something you needed, and been disappointed with what He gave you? Even when you make bad choices, God is faithful to love you and keep bringing you closer to Him.

Monday following the Second Sunday in Advent

From the Line of David

“Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before Me; your throne will be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16).

As we await the coming of Messiah, we can count a few promises that have already been fulfilled. As God promised Abraham, his people became a mighty nation. As God promised through Jacob, a king from Judah ruled all of Israel. Many probably believed the time was almost fulfilled and Messiah would come soon.

After centuries of constantly moving, King David and his people settled in their own land. With this new security, David wanted to build a house for God, a permanent structure worthy of the God of Israel, rather than the tent that had been His dwelling place. But God scoffed at the audacity of his offer. “Are you the one to build Me a house to dwell in?” (2 Samuel 7:5). God wanted only one thing from His people: their love, and the obedience it inspired. God didn’t need David to do anything for Him. Instead, God promised that David’s throne would endure forever—another promise that Messiah would come from David’s line, and His reign would never end.

Prayer: Thank You for bringing me into the everlasting house of Messiah Jesus. Help me remember the gift of salvation. Amen.

As We Wait: In prosperous times it’s easy to forget God’s promises to save you because you don’t think you need to be saved! Like David, you may think God needs you. Remember today that God delivers you daily from sin.

Tuesday following the Second Sunday in Advent

The Kingdom Is Divided

“I will build [Jeroboam] a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David and will give Israel to you. I will humble David’s descendants because of this, but not forever” (1 Kings 11:38-39).

Under David’s reign, God gave Israel victory over her enemies and many years of peace. Although this earthly peace and political strength is what Israel thought God meant when He told Abraham, “I will make you into a great nation” (Genesis 12:2), it wasn’t.

King David died after ruling Israel for forty years. He was succeeded by his son Solomon, who unrepentantly disobeyed God’s laws by worshipping other gods and allowing Israel to do so. God punished Israel for her sin by dividing her into two kingdoms: Israel in the north, ruled by kings not descended from faithful David, and Judah in the south, ruled by descendants of David. God humbled David’s descendants because of Solomon’s sin, “but not forever;” that is the promise of Messiah. God has promised that the Messiah will come through David’s descendants, from the tribe of Judah, and He will be faithful to keep that promise.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for keeping Your promise to save me. Keep me steadfast in my faith, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

As We Wait: Sometimes we become so blinded by our sin that we cannot see God’s faithfulness to keep His promises. But, even in your dark times, God will keep His promise to love and forgive you through Messiah Jesus.

Wednesday following the Second Sunday in Advent

God Preserves a Remnant

“Surely the eyes of the Sovereign LORD are on the sinful kingdom. I will destroy it from the face of the earth—yet I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob,” declares the LORD” (Amos 9:8).

Amos was a shepherd whom God called to be a prophet to His idolatrous, corrupt, immoral, and unfaithful people. Over and over God reminded His people that He is their God, their Deliverer from slavery in Egypt. Again and again, they had chosen to follow other gods. Less than 200 years before this, God took the drastic action of dividing Israel into two nations because of her unfaithfulness, but she had already forgotten that lesson.

God gave Amos a terrifying message of judgment: Israel will be exiled from her homeland and destroyed. With this judgment, God gave the promise that showed His faithfulness to all His previous promises: “Yet I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob.” God promised to send One who would save His unfaithful people. That is the Messiah we await. Because of His promise, God preserved a remnant of Israel through whom Messiah would someday come.

Prayer: Thank You, Jesus, for preserving my faith through Your Word and Your Spirit. Amen.

As We Wait: Do you ever compromise God’s Word for the sake of your own comfort or pleasure? Despite your unfaithfulness, God remains faithful and always welcomes those who repent.

Thursday following the Second Sunday in Advent

Jonah

“The LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights” (Jonah 1:17).

You remember the story of Jonah: God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, the capital of Israel’s sworn enemy Assyria, to proclaim God’s judgment upon them for their evil. Jonah refused because he was afraid the Ninevites would repent and God would spare them. He wanted them to be destroyed! So he ran away. Swallowed by a “great fish,” he spent three days in the depths of the sea and finally was spit up on dry land after he agreed to deliver God’s message. The Ninevites repented and God spared them.

Jonah epitomizes the reluctance of God’s people to obey His commands. He struggled with God the whole way! But God used Jonah’s reluctance to prophesy the death and resurrection of Messiah Jesus. “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth,” Jesus said (Matthew 12:40). Messiah would not be just an earthly, political ruler—He would conquer our greatest enemy, death itself.

Prayer: Dear God, by Your Spirit, help me overcome my reluctance to tell others of my hope in the Messiah who has come. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

As We Wait: Like Jonah, we are often reluctant to share the message God has given us: that Jesus is our hope! Look for an opportunity today to share your hope with someone else.

Friday following the Second Sunday in Advent

Micah Prophecies Messiah

“You, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old” (Micah 5:2).

Like Jonah, the prophet Micah called the people to repent because the judgment of God was at hand. Assyria would invade Israel and the entire northern kingdom would be conquered. Only the tribes of Judah and Levi, in the southern kingdom ruled by David’s descendants, would remain. Out of Judah, from the small clan of Bethlehem in the region of Ephrathah, God would raise up a king who would rule over Israel. Micah said this king would rule as a shepherd (gently leading his flock), not as a conqueror (taking charge by force).

The message of Micah was meant to bring hope. God had a plan to save His people, and He gave glimpses of what the coming Messiah would be like. But for the people of Israel, besieged and soon to be conquered by their enemies, this might have been a difficult prophecy. They needed a warrior king, not a shepherd! How could true peace come in such a strange way?

Prayer: May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.

As We Wait: We cannot understand God’s ways, but we can trust Him because He has kept all His promises. Ask God to empower you by His Spirit to trust His faithfulness.

Saturday following the Second Sunday in Advent

Isaiah Prophecies Messiah

“The LORD Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

By the time of Isaiah’s prophecy, the northern kingdom of Israel had been captured by Assyria. Judah, the southern kingdom, believed herself invincible. Rather than seek God’s protection, she relied on the strength of her own resources and earthly allies for protection from her invading enemy, Babylon. Isaiah had been sent to warn Judah that she would be conquered just as Israel was. But Isaiah didn’t just bring judgment; he also told God’s promise to restore His people. Judah clung to his hopeful message during captivity.

Isaiah said that Messiah would be born of a virgin and be Immanuel, which means “God with us.” This idea of Messiah being God among us was beyond comprehension for the Israelites. Among them, God dwelt only in the Most Holy Place of the temple, a room only the high priest could enter, and he only once a year on the Day of Atonement. When he did go in, he had to throw incense on the fire so the smoke would cover up the glorious presence of God. He would die if he saw God face to face. But when Messiah comes, God promises we will see Him up close. God’s best is yet to come!

Prayer: Thank You for giving us Your best in Your Son Jesus. In Him we pray. Amen.

As We Wait: Read Isaiah 53 to learn more of God’s promises about Messiah.

Third Sunday in Advent

Daniel Prophecies Messiah

“At that time...multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake; some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2).

Daniel was a Jewish man who lived in Judah when Babylon conquered and deported all of its citizens. God’s judgment had come just as Isaiah foretold: the walls of Jerusalem were breached and the temple destroyed. The people of Judah were scattered and those in bondage were relying on the promises God spoke by the prophets. Many were looking for Messiah to come and save them.

While captive in Babylon, Daniel had a vision of the future. He saw a great resurrection in which all who had died were raised up from their graves and judged: some to everlasting life and others to everlasting contempt. Daniel’s hearers must have asked, “How does God decide between life and contempt?” The answer was the only standard which God had given for fellowship with Him: “Keep all the commands He has given.” But no one can do that! Isaiah’s prophecy (Isaiah 53) was the only hope. A Messiah would come who is free from sin, and our failures would be laid upon Him. He is the difference between those who are raised to life and those who face everlasting contempt.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for the promise of resurrection and everlasting life through Messiah Jesus. In Him we pray. Amen.

As We Wait: Many people believe they can earn their way into heaven. Watch for an opportunity to share with someone today that Jesus is your hope for heaven.

Monday following the Third Sunday in Advent

Zechariah Prophecies Messiah

“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9).

After half a century as captives in Babylon, the exiles were allowed to return to Jerusalem and begin rebuilding the temple that was destroyed when they were captured. Zechariah, a priest who was born during the exile, returned to his family’s home to find it in ruins. God’s people were scattered throughout the known world and only a few had come home. To the devastated ones who faced the ruined Jerusalem, God’s message was “Rejoice!”

There didn’t seem to be much to rejoice about. They had been devastated and their homeland destroyed. But God was rebuilding His land, and Zechariah’s message was a promise for the future. A king was coming, riding on a donkey, righteous and having salvation. Zechariah also told God’s promise to restore Judah. The scattered nation would be brought home. “They will be as though I had not rejected them,” He says (Zechariah 10:6). God’s promise sustained His people as they began the work of rebuilding His temple and their lives. Rejoice!

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for sustaining me in this life and promising to restore me, with all Your saints, in heaven someday. Come quickly, Lord Jesus. Amen.

As We Wait: You can be an instrument of God’s grace to someone facing disappointment this Christmas season. Send a note of encouragement, celebrating the coming Messiah.

Tuesday following the Third Sunday in Advent

The Temple Is Rebuilt

“[The LORD] is good; His love to Israel endures forever.’ And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid” (Ezra 3:11).

Rebuilding the temple, the house of the Lord, began with laying the foundation. Once the foundation was laid, there was a great celebration as the once-exiled people sang praise and thanks to the Lord. The nation of Israel was on the path to complete restoration, a testimony of God’s faithfulness to His promises. Israel believed this was the temple for all generations; but like the one before it, this temple would not survive. Five hundred and eighty six years after its dedication, the temple was destroyed again, never to be rebuilt.

By then, a new foundation had been laid in Messiah Jesus. In Him a temple for God would be built that no one could destroy. Messiah is the cornerstone, God’s holy Word is the foundation, and you and I—believers in Messiah—are the stones for the temple walls. When this temple is finished, we will sing praise and thanks to the Lord without ceasing!

Prayer: I praise and thank You, Lord, for making me Your temple, a house for Your Spirit. Use me to build Your kingdom, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

As We Wait: Memorize this promise today: “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Wednesday following the Third Sunday in Advent

Jerusalem's Wall Rebuilt

“Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and we will no longer be in disgrace” (Nehemiah 2:17).

The temple had been rebuilt, but the city of Jerusalem was desolate and, because the city wall was destroyed, vulnerable to foreign invaders. Nehemiah, a faithful Jewish man who was captive in Babylon, heard about Jerusalem's devastation. He prayed for the city to be restored, and God sent Nehemiah back to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall.

On a recent trip to Jerusalem, I had the opportunity to have coffee on a balcony overlooking the old city and the wall. I thought of Nehemiah riding his horse around the ruined city and I felt his zeal for the rebuilding. God had promised that David's kingdom would be established forever, that Messiah would reign from his throne. But here lay Jerusalem, the City of David, in ruins. The city must be rebuilt to fulfill God's promise! Nehemiah saw that God would make it happen through him, and that the city wall would show other nations, and the Israelites still captive in Babylon, that God is faithful to His promise.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for resurrecting the ruins of my life into something beautiful. In Jesus' name. Amen.

As We Wait: Even when it looks like a situation is in ruins, God is faithful to His promise to “work for the good of those who love Him” (Romans 8:28). In what part of your life do you especially value that promise?

Thursday following the Third Sunday in Advent

Mordecai Confident of Messiah

“If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:13).

Esther is the only book of Hebrew Scripture that does not mention God’s name. Historically, that has offended some faithful Jews. But I treasure this book because of its beautiful prophecy of Messiah. Part of the exiled Jewish community in Persia in around 460 B.C., Esther was a wife of the Persian king and caught in the middle of a plot to destroy her people. Esther’s uncle, Mordecai, implored her to use her position to expose the genocidal plot to the king so he could protect them. Esther hesitated, fearing for her life. Mordecai remembered God’s promise of a Deliverer and told her: “If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish.”

Mordecai had faith in God’s promise to send a Messiah. No matter what Esther did, God would save His people. Mordecai also knew that God calls us to act now and puts us in just the right place to deliver His message.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for using me to accomplish Your will. Thank You for accomplishing Your will no matter what I do. Amen.

As We Wait: Christmas is a perfect time to share God’s gift of salvation. How does He want to use you in His plan?

Friday following the Third Sunday in Advent

Malachi Promises Return of Elijah

“For you who revere My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings....then you will trample down the wicked” (Malachi 4:2-3).

The temple rebuilt, the wall restored, the people of God had returned to Jerusalem. But they did not turn back to God. Their religious practice had become meaningless ritual, not heartfelt expression. God sent one last word to His people who continued to await victory through the promised Messiah. Malachi prophesied the “day of the Lord,” when God would judge the “evildoers” and “those who revere My name.” The one would be set on fire, and the other would find joy in salvation through the sun of righteousness.

For those who listened, that prophecy must have caused great concern, for no one among them was righteous according to God’s law. They were all evildoers! Malachi concluded his proclamation by saying that the prophet Elijah would return and lead the people to change their hearts. After that, God was silent for 400 years. He let His people remember all the promises of 4,000 years of waiting and begin to see that God is more interested in our hearts than in our actions.

Prayer: There are times Lord, when You seem silent. Awaken me to Your promises and Your Holy Spirit so my heart can hear You calling me to “prepare the way for the LORD” (Isaiah 40:3). Amen.

As We Wait: As you wait for Messiah to come, what is the attitude of your heart? Is your spiritual life a stale ritual, or a celebration of the joy of salvation?

Saturday following the Third Sunday in Advent

Waiting in Silence

God's prophets were silent, but His people were in turmoil. One foreign nation after another had ruled over Israel: Persia, Greece, Rome. All of Scripture promised a victorious king would come, so some expected a conquering king who would throw the foreigners out. But God's promise was different.

He promised a king born of a virgin in the lowly town of Bethlehem. The prophet Elijah would prepare the hearts of His people to receive Him. He would enter the seat of power, Jerusalem, riding on a donkey. No wrong would be found in Him. He would rule as a shepherd king. He would be Immanuel, "God with us." He would be rejected by His own people, killed, and then raised from the dead to defeat Satan, sin, and death. He would sit on the throne of David and rule forever, and the obedience of the nations would make atonement for all the sin of His land and His people, blessing all the nations. He would restore us to peace, to the Garden, to the world He meant for us.

If this had been written by one man, it would be easily dismissed as fiction or fantasy. But the promise of God came through the testimony of many people and all of them point to Messiah.

Prayer: Thank You for promising, and giving, me the salvation I cannot live without. Amen.

As We Wait: As you prepare to celebrate Messiah's birth, pray for those who still hear Satan's whisper, "Did God really say a Savior would come?"

NOTES

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Elijah Returns

“In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’” (Matthew 3:1-2).

Jesus will be born soon, but first we celebrate another promise-fulfilling birth: John the Baptist. The angel Gabriel announced he would be the Elijah that Malachi promised, the one God sent to prepare people’s hearts to receive Messiah (Matthew 3:1-17). John the Baptist did just that, preaching “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” John spoke of the One who would judge between the righteous and the wicked, and warned Abraham’s children not to rely upon their lineage for salvation, but upon God’s promise. No one would be found righteous except those who were redeemed by Messiah.

John’s message of repentance is not just for those who do not yet know the Messiah. It is also for us who already know Christ. By grace, God made us His children in Baptism. John the Baptist’s call to repentance reminds us that daily we renew God’s promise by confessing our sinfulness, remembering God’s promise to forgive, and being prepared again to do His work on earth.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for blessing me in my Baptism, forgiving my sins, and preparing me for Your good works. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

As We Wait: Mark your Baptism day on the calendar and make plans to especially celebrate God’s faithfulness to you on that day. Do the same for your spouse, children, and godchildren.

Note:

The Advent season begins on the Sunday nearest to the Feast of St. Andrew the Apostle, which falls on November 30 in the Church calendar.

Therefore, the season of Advent can begin as early as November 27, or as late as December 3 though, again, it always begins on a Sunday.

When this devotional was originally written in 2001, Christmas Eve fell on the Monday after the Fourth Sunday in Advent. However, given the differences in the calendar, Christmas Eve may fall on any given day of the week following the Fourth Sunday in Advent.

In an effort to make this devotional applicable to any year, I have included additional devotions to cover the maximum number of days in Advent, which would be 27. These devotions focus on the Feast of Dedication, or Chanukkah, which falls during Advent. Chanukkah is a wonderful Advent celebration as we wait with great anticipation for the coming of our Lord Jesus!

But, feel free to skip to Christmas Eve when that time comes!
Merry Christmas, Happy Chanukkah and blessings in Y'shua!

Pastor Kevin

Monday following the Fourth Sunday in Advent

The Temple is Dedicated--Chanukkah

“At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon” (John 10:22-23).

It’s a rather strange irony, isn’t it, that Jesus never celebrated Christmas? His “winter holiday” was Chanukkah. So let’s hop out of our timeline a bit and celebrate Chanukkah together. The Temple that is being rebuilt following Zechariah’s prophecy (Zechariah 9:9; 10:6) is finished. But it has been fought over, desecrated, and recovered, and now dedicated.

Though not a festival commanded by God in the Scripture, it is still a feast which Jesus attends. It is a time to remember God’s grace and protection of His people. Chanukkah is all about the promise of Messiah and the waiting for its fulfillment. It is a wonderful celebration during Advent and echoes Advent’s theme. God’s people have waited for 400 years for His promise to be revealed and today, He reveals Himself!

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for traditions and the value they have in remembering Your mercy for us. Help us to rededicate ourselves to You, especially today and during this season. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

As We Wait: What traditions do you use to celebrate this season? The Advent wreath, Christmas trees, and Advent calendars are useful traditions by which we remember the grace that God has shown us.

Tuesday following the Fourth Sunday in Advent

Are You the One?

“So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the [Messiah], tell us plainly.’” (John 10:24).

As Jesus walked in the temple, a crowd gathered around Him. Many had witnessed his miracles, and all were longing for a Messiah. Now they asked him to be clear: “Are you the Messiah or not?”

God’s people have waited a long time for the promised Messiah. This festival reminds them of the wait. Chanukkah commemorates the rededication of the temple in 167 B.C. The land of Israel had been conquered by Syria, and its king, Antiochus, declared himself to be god. He refused to allow the Jewish people to worship the true God, and he desecrated the temple. A man arose during this time who would help lead the Jews in a victory over the Syrians. His name was Judah (the name alone would evoke hope, because Jacob promised the Messiah would come through his son, Judah), and following a miraculous victory, many hailed him as the messiah. But Jesus is no mere human victor, but the Messiah who would save us eternally!

Prayer: My God, and my salvation, thank you for my faith. Renew and strengthen me today to answer with boldness, “Yes, Jesus is my Messiah.” In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

As We Wait: “Are you the Messiah?” is an appropriate question to ask Jesus in times of waiting. What answer do you hear? Listen as Jesus tells you, “Yes, it is as you say” (Matthew 26:64).

Wednesday following the Fourth Sunday in Advent

Yes, it is as you say...

“Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me’” (John 10:25).

Chanukkah is a time to remember miracles. It was certainly a miracle that the small army of Jewish soldiers were able to overcome the vast resources of the Syrian war machine, and it is a great miracle that Jewish people are still today seeking the Messiah in the miracle of Chanukkah.

For centuries, conquerors, kings and popes have sought to destroy the Jewish people. But God sustained them. During a dark time of the church, Spanish inquisitors tried hard to destroy the Jews in the name of God, forcing conversions at the point of a sword. But God’s miracles were remembered through a simple child’s game called Dreidle. The dreidle is a top inscribed with four Hebrew letters which are an acronym for “Nes Gadol Haya Sham,” “A Great Miracle Happened There.” Disallowed by the Church of that day to celebrate their festivals, Jewish people remembered the miracle of God’s deliverance in this game.

Today, the Church remembers God’s grace and love, and prays that the Jewish people would again be delivered, not by the point of a sword, but by the work of the true Messiah—Jesus.

Prayer: Dear God, remove from the Church those who would persecute Your people. Give us Your truth that Jesus is the Way for all people, including Your Jewish people. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

As We Wait: Has God placed any Jewish people along your path? Share this study with them and tell them about the Messiah.

Thursday following the Fourth Sunday in Advent

Yes, it is as you say...

“Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me’” (John 10:25).

It is the story of waiting. Malachi has spoken... “Surely the day is coming...” Elijah is coming, Messiah is coming, the Day of the Lord is coming. And while we wait, our land is taken over by pagans and a king who, knowing the prophecy, claims that mantle.

Daniel (chapter 11) has prophesied the rise of Antiochus, king of Syria, who calls himself Epiphanus, the manifestation. He forces God’s people to worship him, he profanes the Temple, he oppresses the people. So the people revolt. The High Priest, his sons and a small army flee to the hills above Jerusalem, and lead a revolt against the mighty Syrian army, driving them from Israel, taking back this same Temple and rededicating it to the service of God.

Sometimes waiting is hard to do. We look around at the darkness, the sin and the triumph of evil that seems to surround us, and perhaps we may doubt. But if we look closer, we see the works of the Church and God’s people that testify to Christ at work, doing the works in His Father’s name. Rejoice in that sure hope.

Prayer: Dear Lord, open my eyes to see the works that You are doing around me. Work through me too! Amen.

As We Wait: How is Jesus working in Your neighborhood? Rejoice in that work and remember His grace in your waiting.

Friday following the Fourth Sunday in Advent

The suspense is killing me!

"So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, 'How long will you keep us in suspense?'" (John 10:24a).

Often when there is a promise of a gift to come, especially when it is accompanied by hints and clues as to what it is, we might, in joyful anticipation, cry out, "The suspense is killing me!."

The incarnation is upon us, and the true gift has been hinted at for centuries by the prophets. For many though, the suspense has truly killed them, as they have given up the hope of salvation for the empty promise of earthly works.

The incarnation that we are preparing for is the building of a temple that can never be destroyed. The manmade Temple is gone, but the Temple that is Jesus (John 2) is eternal.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you so much for your eternal faithfulness and calling us to Your Temple, Jesus. Amen.

As We Wait: Jesus' death and resurrection paid the price for the sins of all mankind, even and especially those committed by men against one another. The history of the Jewish people is a history of oppression and hope. Marc Chagall's "White Crucifixion," begun on the heels of Kristallnacht, is a picture of hope, even amidst the oppression of the Jewish people. This Chanukkah, share the story, and especially the hope with someone you know.

December 24--Christmas Eve

Angel Speaks to Mary

“God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary” (Luke 1:26-27).

The moment is upon us. You can almost feel the world holding its breath in expectation. God’s promises are coming to pass. He sends His message with the angel Gabriel to a virgin pledged to be married to Joseph, a descendant of David. Gabriel’s message is that she will bear a child, born not of her union with Joseph, but by the Holy Spirit. It will be a miraculous birth that will testify to God’s promise. The child will be God dwelling among us, called the Son of God, and reign on the throne of David. His kingdom will never end. It’s hard to imagine that anyone could miss the importance of this miraculous event. Could God be any clearer?

Many churches celebrate the miracle of Christmas Eve with a candlelight service. I remember attending a candlelight service once before I knew Jesus, and I chose not to hold a candle. Sitting in the darkness, I realized something was missing in my life. I didn’t have all the answers. I needed the Light.

Prayer: Baby Jesus, come into the hearts of those who do not yet know that You are the King and Savior they await. Amen.

As We Wait: Tonight, as you sit in the warm glow of candlelight, rejoice that God has spoken to your heart through our King.

December 25--Christmas Day

Messiah Has Come!

“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world...[Joseph] went there to register with Mary” (Luke 2:1, 5).

The second chapter of Luke may be my favorite Christmas reading, largely because of the lone voice of a small boy named Linus. Surely you remember this young creation of cartoonist Charles Schulz standing alone on the stage with his blanket, reciting Luke’s Christmas story to explain the real meaning of the holiday. Before I even knew who Jesus was, I treasured these words and pondered them in my heart.

The circumstances of Jesus’ birth fulfill yet another of God’s promises. The emperor ordered that a census be taken, so Joseph took Mary from their home in Galilee and traveled “to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David” (Luke 2:4). And there Micah’s prophecy (see Dec. 14) came to pass. Out of the smallest clan of Judah, the birthplace of David, came the Messiah. Now Micah’s enigmatic words, that He is “one whose origins are from of old, from ancient times,” make sense. Jesus is the Son of God and has been King from the very beginning.

Prayer: Thank You, God, for the miracle of Christmas, the fulfillment of Your promise. Amen.

As We Wait: Happy Christmas! Today, join the shepherds who received the news of Messiah’s birth. Glorify and praise God for all the things you have heard and seen, which are just as you have been told.

December 26--Second Day of Christmas

Simeon Sees Salvation

“Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, His mother, ‘This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed’” (Luke 2:34-35).

Simeon knows about waiting. God promised Simeon that he would not die before seeing the Messiah. He is a devout man, living in Jerusalem, and God has filled him with the Holy Spirit so he will recognize the Savior. Here he is, worshipping in the temple when in walk these new parents with a little baby boy, prepared to be circumcised according to the custom of the Law. What joy must have flooded him that day as he took the baby Jesus into his arms! He held the baby and sang a song of praise to God, saying, “My eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the sight of all people” (Luke 2:30-31).

Simeon also gave an interesting prophecy: The name of Jesus will reveal the thoughts of the heart. Indeed it does! Some people praise His name, others are not moved by Jesus, and some well up with anger at the mention of Jesus’ name.

Prayer: Father, reveal my heart to those who live in darkness and ignorance of Your glory. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

As We Wait: Try it today. Ask someone you don’t know, “What do you think of Jesus?” Perhaps their response will give you an opportunity to share your hope in Jesus.

December 27--Third Day of Christmas

Messiah Not Known

“When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, ‘Who is this?’” (Matthew 21:10).

Jesus had been publicly ministering for three years by the time He made this triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He had called, taught, and empowered His disciples; He had performed miracles; He had preached to the multitudes; He had been recognized by some and scorned as a heretic by others.

Then, as the prophet Zechariah foretold (see Dec. 17), the shepherd King entered Jerusalem, gentle and riding on a donkey. Crowds of people welcomed Him enthusiastically, covering the road with palm branches and cloaks, proclaiming Him to be the Son of David (one of the key prophecies about the Messiah they await). But when some asked who He was, the crowd did not call Him Messiah. They said He was “Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.” True, He is a prophet, but He is so much more! There are many prophets, but only one Messiah.

Today, people of many faiths acknowledge that Jesus was a prophet but do not recognize that He is the Savior. God promised a king, a deliverer, and a Savior. He is Jesus.

Prayer: Jesus, reveal Yourself clearly to those who do not see that You are Messiah. Amen.

As We Wait: Pray for missionaries who share the Gospel with people who know Jesus only as a prophet. Call Lutherans in Jewish Evangelism (www.lije.org) or contact the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod World Mission (www.lcms.org/missionaries) to get the name of one in particular.

December 28--Fourth Day of Christmas

Messiah Dies

“When Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, He gave up His spirit” (Matthew 27:50).

Today’s Scripture passage tells about the fulfillment of the painful prophecies of Messiah, given first to Adam and Eve, and spelled out in detail by Isaiah. It was time for Jesus to “crush [the serpent’s] head” (Genesis 3:15). Jesus was rejected by His people and, without argument or defense, allowed Himself to be made the victim of Satan’s plot to destroy humankind. Scourged and hung on a tree, Jesus suffered the death and the abandonment by God that sin deserves. Maybe Satan celebrated this apparent victory, or maybe Satan remembered God’s promises and knew defeat was inevitable.

As Abraham promised his son, Isaac, when they climbed Mt. Moriah (see page 7), God provided the Lamb for the sacrifice. Jesus, the sinless Lamb of God, became sin for us that we might be spared God’s punishment. It was the final great sacrifice, modeled in the thousands of sacrifices the Jewish people made to atone for their sins before God. But Jesus’ sacrifice was sufficient for everyone, for every sin, forever. This was God’s plan all along, through 4,000 years of faithfulness to His unfaithful people. There was no victory for Satan in His death.

Prayer: Thank You, Jesus, for standing between me and Satan, sparing me from the death I deserve. In You I have true life and salvation. Amen.

As We Wait: Without Christ’s death and resurrection, His birth and life are meaningless. His teaching is just wise words with no power. Thank God today for His resurrection power.

December 29--Fifth Day of Christmas

Messiah in a Grave

“At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid... They laid Jesus there” (John 19:41-42).

After He was crucified, Jesus’ body was taken down from the cross. The guards ensured that He was dead, and to the watching disciples it probably looked like a hopeless situation. Despite what they saw, God was still in control. His promises were still being fulfilled. He said Messiah would be “assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death” (Isaiah 53:9). So He was: Jesus died a criminal’s death and was placed in the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb.

Waiting in this dark hour, we remember Jesus’ promise: “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (John 2:19). The death of the Promised One looks like a hopeless situation, but God’s promise says otherwise.

The same is true in our lives. Sometimes it looks like evil is winning, like all hope is lost, but we have God’s promise that He is working even when we cannot see it.

Prayer: Dear Lord, sometimes the wait seems long and I lose the expectation of what You are preparing for me. Help me trust You when I cannot see You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

As We Wait: When you feel like God has abandoned you, remember the desolation of Jesus’ death and put your hope in God’s promise of resurrection.

December 30--Sixth Day of Christmas

Resurrection Fulfills the Promise

“Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: ‘I have seen the Lord!’” (John 20:18).

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! We don't have to wait until Easter to give this glad tidings. Today we celebrate the resurrection, God's final victory over death and Satan. Isaiah's prophecy has come to pass. “After the suffering of His soul, He will see the light of life and be satisfied; by His knowledge My righteous servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities” (Isaiah 53:11).

The apostle Paul taught that without the resurrection, our faith in Christ would be in vain. Yet there are many who call themselves Christians, but deny the resurrection. Clearly, there is much work yet to be done. Satan may not have any dominion over us who are saved, but his whisper is still heard throughout the land. He knows he is defeated, that he will no longer rule. But he will take as many with him as he can.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for giving me faith that does not depend upon the evidence of my eyes, but only upon You and Your promise. Sustain me in my faith, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

As We Wait: God has not returned in final victory because there are still many who can be saved. Lutheran Hour Ministries (lhm.org) is one tool God uses to reach people around the world with His love. Consider supporting this Christ-centered ministry today.

December 31--Seventh Day of Christmas (New Year's Eve)

Share the Promise

“Israel has experienced a hardening of the heart in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in” (Romans 11:25).

God’s people act on God’s command. The obedience of the nations is Messiah’s (see page 9). All authority on heaven and earth has been given to Him (Matthew 28:18). At His command and with His authority, we go to people of all nations, fulfilling God’s promise to Abraham: “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3).

At Pentecost (the 40th day after Easter, when God sent the Holy Spirit), Jewish people from many lands came to the temple in Jerusalem and received the Holy Spirit. They returned to their homes proclaiming God’s glory in Messiah Jesus. As Jesus commanded, they spread the message from Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Though these first evangelists were Jewish, the sad irony is that soon the Jewish people became hardened to the name of Jesus, and fell away from faith in Messiah. Even today they struggle with God, refusing to hear His Word. But as God promised, a remnant of the Jewish people still believe in Messiah.

Prayer: Jesus, thank You for being “Immanuel,” God with us, as we serve Your gospel among Jews and Gentiles throughout the world. Amen.

As We Wait: Find out about Apple of His Eye-Missouri (www.ChaivShalom.com), a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod ministry to Jewish people who do not know Jesus is the Messiah they await.

January 1--Eighth Day of Christmas (New Year's Day)

When The Time Had Fully Come

“But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Galatians 4:4-5).

When I see bad things happening, knowing God can do good things, I often wonder, “What is God waiting for?” You see it, too: Christians persecuted for their faith, children dying of malnutrition, congregations suffering for lack of pastors. What is God waiting for? Surely Israel asked that question often during the 4,000 years of waiting for God to fulfill His promise. Paul answers this question with one simple sentence: “When the time had fully come, God sent His Son.”

By the time Jesus was born, Greece had influenced the entire known world and Greek had become a common language. In the last few centuries before Jesus’ birth, the Hebrew Scriptures had been translated into Greek and its promises made known throughout the world. The vast Roman empire had created a well-developed system of roads that provided for easy passage throughout their territory. The world was primed for God’s promise to unfold. What better time for the Savior to come?

Prayer: Lord, preserve me in my faith and show me how You want to use me to bless others in Jesus’ name. Amen.

As We Wait: As you wait for the Lord’s return, keep in mind that God knows when the time is right. Watch for the ways He wants to use you to bless others now.

January 2--Ninth Day of Christmas

Still, We Wait

“Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ’ and will deceive many” (Matthew 24:4-5).

What now? Jesus has been ascended to sit at His Father’s right hand in heaven. He has gone before us to prepare a place for us, but now it has been almost 2,000 years since His resurrection. It seems like some of the things He said must happen are being done: the Gospel of Christ has been preached to many, if not all, the nations. In the last hundred years more Jewish people have come to faith in Jesus than in the history of the church! There have been wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, and persecution of the Church (Matthew 24:6-14). What should I be doing while I wait for His return?

As popular movies and books about the end times have heightened our awareness of the signs of God’s plan, our call is to focus on and point others to Jesus. Many people who never considered spiritual things before are asking questions. The most important answer we can ever give to questions about the end times is that Jesus is the Way of salvation. He is the only Christ.

Prayer: Lord, use me to show Yourself to people who have questions about the end times. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

As We Wait: Ask a non-Christian friend what he or she believes the end of the world will be like. Be prepared to share your hope in Jesus, who is preparing a place in heaven for you.

January 3--Tenth Day of Christmas

When Is He Coming Back?

“No one knows about the day or the hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matthew 24:36).

For thousands of years, people have tried to predict the day of the Lord, the day of judgment. Prophets have spoken of it and visions about it have been interpreted. Today, Jesus’ promise that the end would come at a time only God knows, a promise given to reassure us of God’s power and redemptive grace, has instead divided the Church. Some Christians believe Jesus will be here soon; some believe there will be a long period of terror and tribulation before He comes; some believe tribulation will happen after Jesus takes all Christians to heaven.

It seems clear to me that Christ’s kingdom on earth has come and we are living in it. What else could explain the growth of the Church? Yet, it is also clear that the peace God has promised is not yet here. The Garden has yet to be restored. When will that happen? I think God’s answer would be, “When the time has fully come.”

Prayer: Dear God, help me to be ready for Your return every day. Preserve my faith in You and show me how to live for You. Amen.

As We Wait: No matter when Jesus returns and the world ends, remember that every day is judgment day for someone. Pray for an opportunity to share Jesus with someone who does not know Him yet.

January 4--Eleventh Day of Christmas

Waiting and Telling

“As you come to Him, the Living Stone...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:4-5).

What does it mean to be ready every day, every moment of the day? It means responding to Christ’s command to share your faith, and living as a person who is already redeemed. Peter says that you and I, because we believe in Jesus, are the living stones with which God is building His temple.

I met an Israeli believer in Jesus who told me that in Israel they call stones that have been cut or carved “living stones.” Dead stones are those which no hand has touched. To be a living stone means allowing God to shape you and form you according to His will. It means doing the good works God has prepared for you to do. Certainly your good works will never save you, but since you have been justified by Messiah, your good deeds glorify God. As you wait for Christ’s return, everything you do testifies to the glory of God and points others to Him.

Prayer: Precious Lord Jesus, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, use me to testify to Your glory. Thank You for shedding Your blood, redeeming me, and raising me up as a living stone. Amen.

As We Wait: How does your life testify to Christ living in you? Good works flow from the love of Christ and respond to the love He has already shown you.

January 5--Twelfth Day of Christmas

A Remnant Remains

“After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!” (Romans 11:24).

Peter said God made us living stones to build a temple. In this passage from Romans, Paul describes God’s work in us by pointing to the tree of Abraham, the root from which all of God’s promises have been fulfilled. Gentile Christians—people who believe in Jesus but are not descended from Abraham—are “wild olive branches,” which God prunes and grafts into the tree of Abraham. By faith in Messiah, these Gentiles are the adopted children of Abraham and are saved by the same promise God gave Abraham and his descendants.

God has not forgotten the natural sons of Abraham, the Jewish people. The wild branches do not replace the natural branches, but increase the fullness of the tree. Although Israel’s hard hearted disbelief caused many of them to be cut off, God will use your joyful life in Christ to make Israel envious for what they have forsaken. When they do believe, God will graft these natural branches back into the tree of Abraham.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for giving me faith. Show me how to live so that others will see Jesus. Amen.

As We Wait: God keeps His promises, to the children of Abraham and to you. Always live as His child, expecting the best from your Father!

January 6--Epiphany

Wise Men Still Worship

“Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him’” (Matthew 2:1-2).

Today we celebrate the Epiphany of Our Lord, the day that Magi from the east followed a star and came in search of Messiah. Not only were they students of astronomy, but also of God’s promises. Perhaps they had prepared for this time with those Hebrew Scriptures that were translated into Greek before Christ’s birth. No matter how they knew, God’s promises of a Messiah were clearly communicated to those outside of Israel. The Magi traveled to Jerusalem in search of the King, bringing Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. It was their way of worshipping this infant incarnation of God.

Like the Magi, you and I have been blessed with the opportunity to learn about God’s promises to send a Savior. God has given us faith to recognize that Jesus is the Promised One. Also like the Magi, God’s love in Jesus inspires us to worship Him. As you gather with other Christians today to worship Jesus, offer your most precious gift—yourself, committed anew to His mission.

Prayer: Bless us today, Lord, forgiving us all our sins, renewing us by the power of the Holy Spirit, and strengthening us for the world to come. In Jesus name. Amen.

As We Wait: In celebration of Christ’s revelation to all the world, set aside a gift today to support those in the mission field.

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THE APPLE OF HIS EYE--MISSOURI CONGREGATION CHAI V'SHALOM

Congregation Chai v'Shalom began in 1997 as a store-front office in Dogtown, St. Louis, MO. Rev. Kevin Parviz, a Jewish believer in Y'shua (Jesus), envisioned a congregation of Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Jesus, worshipping together in much the same fashion as the Church in the 1st century, the worship style patterned after a "second-temple model" of worship.

A congregation of the LCMS, we partner with Lutherans in Jewish Evangelism to bring the gospel to Jewish people in St. Louis, the United States and internationally.

We celebrate Divine Worship on Sunday mornings, also in the pattern of the 1st century Church, as we celebrate the resurrection of Messiah, Y'shua. Our services are at 10:00 a.m. with Bible study beginning at 9:00 a.m. Oneg Shabbat follows the service. We hope you will join us. Shalom!

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Amen. Come, Lord Jesus

ADVENT DEVOTIONS

Advent is a season to prepare for the celebration of the birth of Jesus, the Savior God had promised since the moment sin entered the world. As you anticipate His birth, these devotions will reveal how the promise unfolded through 4,000 years of waiting.

While we look forward to the celebration of Christ's birth, we also remember that we are still waiting. Jesus has promised to return in victory and take all who believe in Him to the place He has prepared in heaven. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

