



**COLLEGE HEIGHTS
BAPTIST CHURCH**

Proclaiming the King
(Advent 2021)

Daily Scripture Readings for
November 22 - December 26

THANKS-MAS? CHRIST-GIVING? ADVENT WEEK 1: PROPHETS

Monday, November 22 - Isaiah 9:1-7

We begin our Advent readings today before taking a break to resume Thanksgiving devotions on Wednesday and Thursday. That's why the heading is a mix up of Christmas and Thanksgiving. It can be a confusing week to prepare for Christmas before Thanksgiving, but that is how we proceed starting today.

Instead of the normal four weeks of hope, love, joy, and peace we will use alternate Advent themes of the Prophets, Angels, Shepherds, and Magi. This week, we focus on the Prophets and, in particular, the prophecies of Isaiah about Jesus. Isaiah lived 750 years before Jesus was born. Yet when you read these prophecies, it is as if he is reporting the news of what happened during Jesus' life. What a miracle to see the prophecies of Isaiah come to fruition in Jesus!

Verse 7 is a great promise to all people in search of leadership in this chaotic world. In the Kingdom of God, there is endless peace. There is a leader who supports justice and righteousness. There is God who will reign forever. On the day that this leader is born, this son will have authority. He will use this authority to break the rod of the oppressor and he will multiply the people.

In the days when Isaiah was prophesying, the outlook was bleak. The Northern Kingdom of Israel has already been conquered by the Assyrians and much of Isaiah's prophecy is toward the Southern Kingdom of Judah to warn them that their demise is next. People see a world which is spinning out of control and much of what Isaiah prophesies is that it is going to get worse. But then, there are passages of hope. It is not all doom and gloom. It's definitely going to get worse before it gets better Isaiah says, but if you look to the future, God will redeem and save.

Maybe this is the message you need to hear as well. In your life, you feel as if things are bad and they are only getting worse. Maybe that's so. However, if you look above the immediate path and look further into the distance, there is hope of peace. There is a land which is ruled with justice and righteousness.

There is a place where there is endless peace and tranquility. And there is a promise at the end of verse 7. “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.” God will take care of us. Even when the day is dark, God provides the light we need.

Tuesday, November 23 - Isaiah 11:1-3a

In today’s passage, Isaiah describes the character of the coming Messiah. First of all, he must come from Jesse, King David’s family. It has been prophesied since 2 Samuel 7 when David was king that his family would rule on the throne forever. Imagine the concern from the people of Israel when Assyria overtook the Northern Kingdom. Imagine the horror when Isaiah says the Southern Kingdom will also fall. The people wonder “did God lie when he said David’s lineage will rule forever?”

Isaiah quickly eases their concern. No, God didn’t lie. In the future, the Messiah will come from Jesse and he will reign on the throne forever. The spirit of the Lord will rest on him. From this spirit will come wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord. Is this not who Jesus is? He was wise when bombarded with questions from the Pharisees and understanding when speaking with the poor and needy. A counselor when the disciples have questions, and a mighty warrior when sacrificing himself on the cross. He was all-knowing, perceiving the thoughts of others, and he had fear of the Lord when he asked for the cup to be passed from him, but humbled himself to say “not my will, but yours be done.”

The Apostle Paul tells us in the New Testament to imitate Christ. Since these characteristics in Isaiah are the characteristics of Christ, we would do well to instill these characteristics into our lives. We are not seeking perfection, but we are seeking to be obedient to the command to follow Christ. Here’s the good part. The characteristics found in these verses are not found by hard work but by the spirit of the Lord resting on you. If you have the Holy Spirit in your life, which as a Christian you do, then you can live in this way by allowing the Holy Spirit to live

through you. Commit yourself to living this way for the remainder of the week. Remind yourself that it is not about what I can do but what Christ can do through me. The Holy Spirit lives inside of you; let Him be seen on the outside.

Wednesday, November 24 - Luke 24:1-5

There is no church tonight with Thanksgiving tomorrow. We transition today and tomorrow from focusing on Advent to Thanksgiving. We read the glorious passage of Jesus' resurrection today because I believe this event is the ultimate reason all of us can be thankful. I get chills almost every time I read "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" Our God is alive!

Do you worship a God who is dead or alive? Do you worship a God who can do amazing work or not? I believe in a God who is still active in this world and active in each and every one of us. I believe in a God who is not dead but alive! Put your trust in God, who is living and active. If you are looking for a reason to be thankful this Thanksgiving, this is your answer. Don't look for God among the dead. He is alive.

Thursday, November 25 - Psalm 100:1-5

Happy Thanksgiving everyone! I am thankful for all of you. I am thankful for allowing me into your lives over the past three years. I am thankful you have taken care of my family during that time as well. May you have a blessed day with family and friends today!

I am glad you are reading this devotion today. I don't know if it's before the chaos of family or after, but reflect on Psalm 100. How do you feel when you read this psalm? What emotions does it bring out? Meditate on this scripture throughout the day. Seven verbs govern our relationship with God in this psalm. Make a joyful noise, worship, come into his presence, know, enter, give thanks, and bless. Which of these actions is missing in your life? Give all of yourself to God today and live out this psalm because "the Lord is good...to all generations."

Friday, November 26 - Isaiah 11:10-12:6

We return to Advent readings today, even though you may still have the tryptophan hangover from yesterday. We gotta get ready for Sunday! Christmas is coming in 29 days!!! We read from Isaiah 11 on Tuesday reading about the character of the coming Messiah. Today, we read of what will happen because the Messiah arrives. The people of God return to His kingdom, Judah and Israel reconcile under the one messiah. When the people return to the one kingdom, they sing the songs recorded in Isaiah 12.

While the people of Israel assumed that this meant there would be a physical kingdom united once again under the Messiah, we know that this is not the type of nation which the prophecy speaks of. The Kingdom of God gathers all of God's people from all four corners of the earth into one people united under the lordship of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

As the people of God, we submit to God and allow Him to rule over us. One of the actions which Jesus commanded us to do was take the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is very symbolic. It is a time to remember what the Lord did for us by dying on the cross. The bread is his body and the cup is his blood. When we consume the bread and juice, we are symbolically consuming the person of Jesus. We believe that as Christians, Jesus lives inside of us. The Lord's Supper can be a time to symbolize that Jesus is truly inside of you and I.

During the four Sundays of Advent, we will be taking the Lord's Supper every Sunday. We will be very intentional in remembering the sacrifice Christ has made for us by coming to this earth and dying on the cross. Isaiah told the people that the Messiah was coming. He told them that he would unite the people of God once again. Jesus came and did exactly what God told Isaiah.

Saturday, November 27 - Isaiah 52:13-53:12

We close out the week of reading prophecy about Jesus by reading one of the Suffering Servant hymns in the latter half of Isaiah's prophecy. I am always

humbled when I read this passage. To think that the one who was with God and was God in the beginning is the one who humbled himself to become human, a poor human at that, live a mostly unassuming life, and then be executed as a criminal all for yours and my sake. It is simply amazing to think that God did that.

We will light the first advent candle tomorrow. Advent is a time of awaiting the arrival of our King Jesus. Let us anticipate the coming of the Messiah together in worship. Would you join us? Who do you know who you can invite to hear the message of the Savior during this Advent season? Call them today and invite them to experience Christmas with you at College Heights!

Sunday, November 28 - Luke 1:68-79

We've read about the prophecies from Isaiah this week. Read the rejoicing that Zechariah the priest, the father of John the Baptist, exudes when he is able to speak for the first time in months! Zechariah prophecies about Jesus (68-75) and John (76-79). Praise God that he has looked favorably upon his people!

ADVENT WEEK 2: SHEPHERDS

Monday, November 29 - Luke 2:15-16

The prophets proclaimed the coming of the Messiah hundreds of years before Jesus' birth. This week, we transition from looking at the proclaimers of the Messiah to the recipients of that message. This week, we look at the shepherds.

The shepherds had a choice to make on that night when the angels told them of Jesus' birth. Would they stay or would they go? They've heard the message from the angels and now what? What would you have done? You may immediately say "well of course I would have gone! After the angelic concert, how could I not?" It's true that would probably convince us, but let us also remember that the shepherds are in the fields, watching the flock. To go and see Jesus would be leaving their post, it would be walking off of the job, it would be

choosing to risk getting fired and losing the source of income for their family. That is a big decision. What would you have done? Gone at once? Go after work is over? Take your work with you? That's what I think the shepherds did. Took their sheep to be good shepherds who protect the flock.

We all have a choice to make when the voice of the Lord comes to us. Should I stay or should I go? The shepherds decided to go to the Lord. What choice will you make today? Will you stay in the comforts of the known or will you go to Jesus and risk everything?

Tuesday, November 30 - Luke 2:17-20

The shepherds went and they never stopped going! At first they heeded the call of the angels to go and see Jesus. Then they left and told everyone they could find about what they saw! I don't blame them for being excited. Wouldn't you share with everyone about encountering the Messiah, the Promised One? Wouldn't you share with everyone about the angelic chorus which proclaimed this message to you first? Of course the shepherds told everyone!

Typically speaking, it is not a miraculous or spell-binding, but we have the opportunity to encounter Christ on a daily basis. Matthew 18:20 tells us that "wherever two or three are gathered in [Jesus'] name, [He] is there among them." The presence of Christ is among us when we meet together. Let us not neglect "to meet together, as is the habit of some..." says the author of Hebrews (Heb. 10:25). Who are we sharing our experiences with God to? Who are we sharing our testimony to? Who are we telling our story of God's redeeming love to?

When the people heard the shepherds' story, they were amazed. What makes for an amazing story? Good content and excited storytellers. The shepherds had the content and their excitement exuded from their souls. Are you excited to tell the greatest story ever? Is that the part we are missing? We know the story. We have the encounter with Christ in worship. Are we missing the

excitement? Get excited today to share the story of Jesus. Be like the shepherds and tell everyone of the majesty and glory of God.

Wednesday, December 1 - Amos 5:18-27

In October, I was reading Amos for my morning devotional time. I get scared every time I read Amos. I read about what he is warning Israel and then I read the news and think “that’s what we are doing right now!” Amos 5:18-27 gets to the heart of the matter. The people were going to the Temple, making the right sacrifices, saying the right prayers, singing the right songs, but that was it. There was no change in their life; there was no mission which followed worship.

At Prayer Meeting this morning, we are going to talk about worship. How did we get to this place in Christianity? How can worship form the rest of our lives? What should worship be anyway? The sermon today stems from a presentation I gave in one of my classes during the Fall Semester. I hope you plan to come to pray and then learn about worship.

Thursday, December 2 - 1 Samuel 16:10-13

Why shepherds? Why were shepherds the first one’s told about Jesus? Was it because they were the ones up in the middle of the night? Possibly. God couldn’t wait to tell people about his baby boy, so he found people who were awake? Maybe that’s true. Or did God make a point by telling the shepherds first?

Shepherds were ritually unclean because of their work. They were ostracized from the community and kept at arm’s length. They were dirty, smelly, and thought of as unsavory characters. God chose them purposefully to show that Jesus came to be the Savior of all people, not just those deemed clean.

King David was a shepherd before being anointed by Samuel as king. David was the youngest of eight brothers, not important enough to be brought in to Samuel at first. He was not part of meeting Samuel, the representative of God,

because he was too small and someone had to take care of the sheep. God looked upon this young shepherd with favor, anointed him as king, and promised the throne of Israel to his family forever. Almost 1000 years later, God sends Jesus into the world to be King forever and fulfill his promise to David. And the first people he tells are shepherds like David.

God cares about shepherds and God cares about you as well. It doesn't matter what the world thinks of us, God thinks so highly of us that He sent his Son into the world to clean up the mess we made. God cares about all people, including shepherds and including you and I. Praise God for looking upon his lowly servants with favor!

Friday, December 3 - John 10:11-18

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The symbolism of the shepherds being told first should not be overlooked. These earthly shepherds were headed to visit the heavenly shepherd of the whole world. The heavenly shepherd gave up his life so that we, the sheep, might live. Jesus gave up his life in heaven to come live on earth. Jesus gave up his life on earth to take the punishment of sin. Jesus did this willingly and then he conquered death above all. The Good Shepherd does not run away from the adversary but fights against him head on. The hired hand (likely the Jewish leaders in this parable) runs from trouble. He is more concerned about his own life than the life of the flock. The Good Shepherd will give up his life for the flock. Not only does the Good Shepherd give up his life for this fold, but he has other sheep from other folds who listen to his voice. Those sheep will come to be with the shepherd as well and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

Jesus did not only come to rescue the people of Israel but came for all people. Jesus laid down his life for all people, not just a certain group. The Savior came to this earth as good news for all people. When the shepherds saw the birth, they returned glorifying and praising God. They told everyone of the glory

they had seen. Who are you reaching out to? What other sheep are you welcoming into the fold? Jesus is not just our Good Shepherd. He is everyone's Good Shepherd.

Saturday, December 4 - Amos 9:7-15

Amos was a shepherd from Tekoa. He was a wealthy man who was called out of the southern fields of Judah to prophesy to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Most of the book of Amos is the announcement of destruction upon Israel, Judah, and all of its neighbors for ungodliness. These last few verses, however, offer hope. The house of David will rise again. The fortunes of Israel will be renewed. Vineyards and gardens will be planted and never plucked up again. How can Amos prophesy that the nation of Israel will be restored and never overtaken again? How is that humanly possible? It's not.

The kingdom that will be reestablished is not a human kingdom but God's kingdom. The descendant of David will come to power again, not on a throne in Jerusalem, but will be born in a stable and then killed on a cross. This Kingdom will not have geographic boundaries, but will be a place for all people.

Have hope because the Lord Jesus has come! Have hope because the Kingdom of God will never fall. The house of David did rise again and this is good news of great joy for all people. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!

Sunday, December 5 - Hebrews 13:20-21

Pray this benediction a few times throughout the day as you take Sabbath and you set aside today to worship the Lord.

ADVENT WEEK 3: ANGELS

Monday, December 6 - Luke 1:5-20

Dumb questions get dumb answers. One time, when LeeAnn and I were on a cruise, during a show the cruise director shared the top ten dumb questions he

has been asked. One of the questions was “is the water in the toilet saltwater or freshwater? (Why does that matter?) The other question I remember was “does the crew sleep on the ship?” (No. They swim to the boat every day and then swim home) Another dumb question people use to ask at Disney World was “what time is the 3 o’clock parade?” (It’s at 1 pm.) See what I mean? Dumb questions get dumb answers.

Zechariah asks a dumb question in Luke 1:18. The angel Gabriel has come to him to tell him that his and Elizabeth’s prayers have been answered; they will have a son! Zechariah’s response “How will I know this is true?” A couple of things. One, there’s an angel telling you it is true. What do you mean you aren’t convinced? Zechariah knows it is an angel. He is terrified. The angel tells him everything and yet his question is, but how will I know you are real? Which leads to two, how will you know this is true Zechariah? Maybe because your wife is going to be pregnant?

Well, because Zechariah needs another sign apart from Elizabeth being pregnant and an angel being right in front of him, Gabriel makes Zechariah mute until John’s born. That’ll make Zechariah not ask anymore dumb questions; now, he can’t talk at all!

Let us not be like Zechariah. When God speaks to us, let us trust that the voice indeed is God’s. Let us not be surprised when God answers our prayers. When the earthly and the heavenly meet to show us that God is at work, let us not be hard-headed saying “yeah, but...”

Tuesday, December 7 - Luke 1:26-38

Unlike Zechariah, Mary has a much more valid question. Zechariah and Elizabeth have been praying for a child after many years of trying to have a child. Zechariah seems to be dumb-founded after Gabriel’s appearance. Mary also is dumb-founded; however, she (I assume) has not been praying to have a child, nor has been trying to have a baby. Because of the differences of position,

Gabriel is much more amenable to Mary's question and answers her. Mary responds with an affirmative "Here I am, the servant of the Lord."

Angels, the messengers of God, play an important role in the birth story of Jesus. Throughout the birth stories in Matthew and Luke, an angel appears to help the human characters understand what to do next. That is what God's messengers do. They help us to know what to do next. Several times in the Old Testament, the voice of God and a messenger of God are synonymous. God is speaking to you and I. Sometimes we are like Zechariah and don't believe it, even though we should. Other times (more rarely if we are honest), we believe God when He is speaking to us.

Do you believe that God really is speaking to you? Are you ready to say "here I am" to the voice of the Lord who is calling for you? Are you going to be more like Mary or Zechariah?

Wednesday, December 8 - Nahum

This week we take the opportunity to read the prophet Nahum. The premise of each Book of the Prophets is pretty similar. Judgment is coming against Israel and Judah and this judgment will come from foreign nations. In some prophetic books, such as Nahum, the message of judgment stretches to the foreign nation as well. The message of the prophecy of Nahum 2-3 is that God will use Babylon to overtake Nineveh, thus overtaking the Assyrian Empire.

There is this odd moment in Nahum 1 as well. It seems as if God is proclaiming judgment against Assyria for attacking God's people while we know that God used the Assyrians to punish Israel. Is that not contradictory? We can discuss that a little bit this morning.

No matter what is happening in the world, we have a God who is above it all. Nahum starts with the acknowledgment of a God who is an avenger. God is slow to anger but great in power. He is a God who makes all things right. Let's study how God acts justly in Nahum today!

Thursday, December 9 - Matthew 1:18-25

Today, it is Joseph's turn to be visited by an angel. We all have sympathy for Joseph right? What would you do if you were in Joseph's shoes? It's gonna be hard to believe Mary's story. Joseph was a good man. The Law gave him authority to stone Mary for being pregnant, but he wasn't going to do that. But he thought he had been betrayed. So he planned to annul the engagement, call off the wedding, and move on with his life. Then an angel came.

The voice of God comes to us when we need help. When we need straightening out, God's voice begins to speak to us. I am reminded of something a friend told me many years ago: when you "hear from God" and the voice always agrees with you, you better be sure it's actually God you are listening to. What is God telling you about your current situation? What are you wanting to do, but you get the sense that God is saying "not so fast"? Joseph listened to the angel and took Mary to be his wife. Are you going to do as God told you? Or what *you* think you should do?

Friday, December 10 - Luke 2:8-14

I mentioned in Tuesday's devotion that "an angel appears to help the human characters understand what to do next." So the question must be asked if that takes place when the angels appear before the shepherds on the night that Christ was born. On the surface, what the angels do is just make an announcement. "Hey, Jesus is born!" seems to be the message. But look closer. The angels tell the shepherds how they can find the baby. There seems to be an expectation that the shepherds will go to Bethlehem after the angels leave. There's another factor which makes it apparent (at least to me) that the angels are telling the shepherds what to do next. They are announcing the birth of the long awaited Messiah. The only reasonable response is to go and see the child.

When someone tells you about the Messiah, the only reasonable response is to go to Him. The Messiah is Jesus. This is good news of great joy for all

people! Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favors! Who do you know who needs to hear this message today? Who can you go to and be a messenger for God, a spokesperson to share the story of the love of God? I pray that when you go today, the other person makes the only reasonable response and sees the Messiah for themselves.

Saturday, December 11 - Matthew 2:13-15; 19-23

The most amazing thing happened a little over 9 years ago. It was on Sunday, August 26, 2012 that the hospital let LeeAnn and I take home a 3 day old baby. What on earth were they thinking?!? We didn't have to pass a test or anything. It was our kid, so as long as we had a car seat in the car, they just sent us on our way. There is nothing that can prepare you for this reality. You have to take care of a tiny human being who cannot do anything for themselves. They will die if you don't take care of them; they will die if you mess this up. There was much anxiety in my mind on that Sunday 9+ years ago. I've never driven so carefully in my life. How can we be trusted to take care of children? God help us.

An angel returns to Joseph thrice to tell him how to take care of his family. First, when they needed to escape from Herod; second, when it was time to go home, and third, when determining to settle in Nazareth. Joseph trusts God with his family. He doesn't question God, but just does what God says. Thrice this meant packing up and moving. The first time, they had to leave Israel abruptly, journey to Egypt and seek asylum from a brutal dictator. The second and third times, Joseph heard from an angel and trusted the angel on where to go in order to be safe. Even when you believe in God and trust in His providence, it's hard to pack up and move just because God said so.

When it comes to taking care of ourselves and our family, we must trust in God's help. We cannot take care of one another on our own. We must seek the Lord's advice and then listen for his response. We must be prepared like Joseph was: heed the voice of the Lord and go where he commands.

Sunday, December 12 - Luke 1:46-55

Read these wonder words from Scripture, praising God for the sending of his Son!

ADVENT WEEK 4: MAGI

Monday, December 13 - Matthew 2:1-6

I won't insult your intelligence by going into great detail explaining that the Magi were not at the birth of Jesus. They did not show up at the manger. The Magi showed up probably a year or 18 months later and go to Jerusalem. After all, future kings are born in palaces. They tell King Herod of what they seek and this terrifies all of the politicians. Let it not be lost on us that these wise men from Asia recognize more about what God is doing than the current King of Israel.

The wise men were astrologers. Stars were their focus of study, so they immediately noticed something new. Their Asian religion had a myth that when a new star appeared a king was born. An appearance in "the heavens" connected with an important event on earth. The Magi knew something important was happening in the West, so they traveled from the East at once. Just like the angels appeared to the shepherds to tell them something important was happening, God used this star to tell the Magi the same thing.

Isn't it wonderful that God meets us where we are? He speaks to us in a way that we can understand. The shepherds understood the importance of angels; the Magi understood stars. God spoke to them in ways they could understand. Isn't it great that God finds different ways to speak to all of us. When does it seem you receive the most clarity from God? For me, it's when I'm running. At least once a week, I'll go running without the headphones in and it is in those moments, where I have the most clarity about what it is God wants me to do next. There was one week not too long ago, when I did have headphones in, but then God started talking to me, so I had to take out the headphones to hear from God! At the end of that run, I jotted down some notes and basically had my

entire sermon written for the week! When do you receive the most clarity from God? For the Magi, it was looking at the stars. And this one particular star, led them to the Son of God.

Tuesday, December 14 - Matthew 2:7-11

How do you feel when you complete a project that has taken you a long time to work on? There is a surreal feeling when I come to the end of a semester of school. I proofread my last paper one more time, make sure it is formatted in the correct way, and then I hit send on the email. And then that part of the journey is over. When you work a long time on something, the moment when you arrive is a moment of overwhelming joy. There is exuberance and happiness. That is what the Magi are feeling as they reach their destination where the child was.

Do you remember the first time you realized that God loved you? Do you remember the first time you realized God wanted a relationship with you? Was there amazing joy in that moment? I'm sure there was! All the Magi wanted to do was to pay homage, Matthew says. Literally they wanted to be "prostrate before" the new king. They wanted to come and worship the King.

Let us remember the joy the Magi felt in this moment of worship. Let us remember the joy we felt the first time we paid homage to God. Let us remember and feel this joy every time we come before the king in worship.

Wednesday, December 15 - Habakkuk

Habakkuk, like Nahum last week, is a minor prophet because of length, not because of lack of depth. Nahum was written concerning the destruction of Assyria; Habakkuk was written concerning the destruction of Babylon. God is essentially saying to Habakkuk that yes, Babylon is going to overtake Jerusalem, but they will face judgment as well.

There is a beautiful psalm at the end of Habakkuk. It is a beautiful reminder of the steadfastness of God. It is a call to all of us to continue to worship God even when the crops fail and the animals are cut off. Even when the harvest doesn't come in, we will worship the Lord. Even when the paycheck is smaller than it needs to be, we will worship the Lord. Even when the troubles are great, we will worship the Lord.

Thursday, December 16 - Matthew 2:12

What if you had the honor of having an audience with the Queen of England? You traveled to Buckingham Palace where you were able to have afternoon tea with her. In this moment, Queen Elizabeth II asked you to do something for her. She knew where you were going next, so she asked you to return in a few days to tell her about your trip. What would have to happen for you to disobey the queen and travel home without returning to the palace?

We know that Herod has ulterior motives by requesting the Magi to return to Jerusalem after seeing Jesus but the Magi do not. The Magi are prepared to return to Herod and do what he requested. Except God intervenes. God speaks to the Magi in a dream. The Wise Men listen and they go home a different way.

There are times in this life when we must choose between listening to the powers and principalities of this earth or the voice of God. Tragic, violent events can happen when we disobey the powers of this earth. We will see that tomorrow. Nevertheless, we are called to obey the voice of God no matter what. These Magi, princes from the East, showed more trust in God and acknowledgment of who God is than King Herod. They knew who was really in charge. These Magi, astrologers who were likely not even followers of Yahweh after these events, obeyed God more fully than the Jewish leaders we will meet later in Matthew. The Magi, these foreigners, listened to God while the Jewish elite did not. Are you listening to the voice of God? Would you be willing to disobey the powers of this world?

Friday, December 17 - Matthew 2:16-18

Governments want one thing: power. All governments are part of the kingdom of this world which is ultimately ruled by Satan. If this was not true, then Satan could not offer Jesus the kingdoms of this world during Jesus' Temptations in the wilderness (The other side of this is of course that God uses these same authorities and allows them to rule (Romans 13:1-2), but this is not our main concern for today). The kingdoms of this world will do everything and anything to remain in control and typically violence of some kind is their weapon of choice.

This is what happens when the Wise Men leave. Herod, not knowing who the baby is, decides to kill all of the babies to protect his reign over Israel. Herod will get rid of the threat at all costs. Innocent people die when a ruler's power is threatened.

Matthew quotes Jeremiah 31:15 when mentioning Herod's massacre of the infants. What he doesn't mention are the two verses after. To those who knew Jeremiah 31, verse 15 would be a cliffhanger of sorts, leaving out the best part. The part that leaves hope. Verses 16 and 17 say:

Thus says the Lord:

Keep your voice from weeping,

and your eyes from tears;

for there is a reward for your work,

says the Lord:

they shall come back from the land of the enemy;

there is hope for your future,

says the Lord:

your children shall come back to their own country.

Even while there is a massacre going on, there is hope because the Messiah has come into this world. No, that won't take away the grief families feel because of the loss of their sons, but it does give hope for the future. The kingdoms of this

world do not have the final say; the Kingdom of God does. There is hope for the future and His name is Jesus.

Saturday, December 18 - Galatians 3:27-29

One thing that I have noticed this week concerning the story of the Magi is that these foreign, pagan men sacrificed their time, energy, and resources in order to come and worship Jesus. Jesus truly did come not just for the Jews but for all people. No matter if you were born into a Christian family or not, every person has the opportunity to have a relationship with God. The Magi saw a star and knew they needed to follow it. God speaks to all of us in ways we can understand.

When Jesus came to the earth, he broke down all barriers. None of the characteristics which we segregate ourselves by are important in the Kingdom of God. Race, ethnicity, gender, income, age, or religious background matter when you become a follower of Jesus. When you belong to Christ, you become part of the family of God no matter what you were before.

I don't know if the Magi ever became followers of God. I like to hope so, but we cannot be certain. God makes himself available to all people. We all have a choice to follow God or not. God treats us all equally. Let us do the same.

Sunday, December 19 - Revelation 7:9-17

To reemphasize the message of yesterday, the picture of heaven is clear in the worship scenes in Revelation. People from every nation, tribe, people, and language will stand before the throne and before the Lamb and worship. We come before God as one people who need a Savior and we proclaim that salvation belongs to our God!

ADVENT WEEK 5: CHRIST HAS COME

Monday, December 20 - Matthew 1:1-18

The week of Christmas has arrived. Are you ready for Saturday yet? Matthew prepares his readers for the birth of Jesus by giving Jesus' genealogy. It is important for his original readers (likely a mostly Jewish audience) to know that Jesus is part of King David's family. This prepares the reader to know that Jesus has the family lineage to be the Messiah that Matthew is asserting that he is.

Preparation for Christmas is important. The special day with family does not happen without preparation over the course of several months. We take the time to prepare our homes for guests, we buy food and presents, we make sure the stockings are hung by the chimney with care. Have you taken the time to prepare your heart for Christmas? What do you need to do this week so that your spirit is ready to celebrate Christmas? Christmas is about Jesus' birth. Will you be ready to celebrate Jesus on Saturday?

Tuesday, December 21 - Titus 3:4-7

This is the reason everyone. This is the message of hope and salvation that is ushered into the world because Jesus was born. We have been saved, not because of anything we have done, but because God has shown favor upon humanity. Because we have been baptized by water and the Spirit, the Holy Spirit is within us. All of this is possible because Jesus Christ came to this earth.

Consider this message as if you are considering it for the first time today: God left heaven to live in this world so that you and I can live in heaven one day. How does that make you feel? Meditate on this for several minutes right now. God left his throne so that you and I might become heirs with Jesus. How amazing is that!

Wednesday, December 22 - Mark 1:14-15

No church this morning as we take a few Wednesdays off around Christmas. Mark doesn't have time for details when he is writing his gospel. He can't bother himself with a birth story or telling about Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus. There are no shepherds or wise men. The gospel starts with Jesus and John the Baptist as adults. John is arrested fairly quickly and Jesus begins his ministry. The Kingdom of God is at hand!

This is the message we can proclaim to the world this Christmas. The King has come and deserves to be proclaimed. Repent and believe in the good news! Who can you tell about the good news of Jesus' birth to today? There is no time to waste!

Thursday, December 23 - John 1:14-18

John explains an important part of the birth of Jesus which Matthew and Luke do not include. John wants to make sure we know that Jesus was not simply born but he was transferred from heaven to earth. "The Word became flesh." The Son of God was not born but always has been. The Son of God is not subservient to God but is God.

It is important that we do not just consider Jesus as a little baby born in a stable but as the eternal God, the one who created the universe. This one, who is full of grace and truth, came to the earth He created. Became human because he loves us. This is the one who deserves our worship forever and ever.

The pomp and circumstance which surrounds the birth of a prince or princess in the United Kingdom is completely over-the-top. A herald waits outside the hospital to be able to announce the birth of the new royal. Citizens and media await for the family to leave the hospital. The mother has to look as if she did not just give birth for the pictures in the tabloids the next day. It's absolutely insane how bonkers people go over one of these births.

The birth of Jesus is so much more important and deserves any more celebration than a new prince or princess. The Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. Christmas is in two days. Pull out all the stops to celebrate Christmas. Celebrate the King coming to earth!

Friday, December 24 - John 1:29-34

“Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” We know the point of Jesus’ coming to earth. Because God is merciful and just. Christ must come and die in order to take away the sin of the world because God is just. God sends his Son to take away the sin of the world on our behalf because he is merciful. God is merciful and just.

Did you notice the singular form of sin in this passage? Jesus did not take away *sins* but *sin*. Why is that significant? Sin is not necessarily about what you do or don’t do, but it is about who you are. Likewise, salvation is not about what you do or don’t do, but about who you are as well. Don’t mishear me: there are sins which we individually commit, but sin is the condition of the heart and the world. Jesus came to take away the sin that is in your heart, not the sins which your body has committed. By taking away the sin, he has covered your sins.

At the end of the passage, John testifies that this indeed is the Son of God. On this Christmas Eve, who can you share your testimony with of seeing the Son of God. As of writing this, I do not know if we are having a Christmas Eve service, but if we do, who could you invite to celebrate the birth of Christ? Who can you tell “I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God?”

Saturday, December 25 - Luke 2:1-20

Merry Christmas everyone! Christ has come. God is with us. And let’s praise Jesus’ name today.

Sunday, December 26 - Romans 1:16

Let us not be ashamed of the gospel. Let us join together and proclaim the greatness and glory of God!