

# Advent Devotional Book Emmanuel 2017

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December 3

## Luke 1:5–25

Zachariah and Elizabeth were old. They had lost hope that they would ever have a child. As Zachariah burned incense in the Temple one day, an angel, a messenger from God, appeared. "Elizabeth will have a child. This child will prepare the way for the One God has promised to send to bring peace and hope to the world."

Zachariah couldn't believe his ears. "What? We are too old. Give me some proof that what you said will happen."

"I came from God to give you this message. Because you didn't believe, you will not be able to speak until it has happened." And immediately, Zachariah could not speak. Just like the angel said, Elizabeth became pregnant.

Even though Zachariah wasn't ready to believe, God fulfilled his deepest longing. What about you? What have you lost hope in? What do you think God might say to you about your hopes and dreams?

Debbie Barber

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December 4

## Experiencing Grace in Hope

The story of Zechariah and Elizabeth is a story about waiting, longing, hoping, and ultimately a story of God's grace. Zechariah and Elizabeth are faithful folks waiting for God to show up. God makes a barren couple surrounded by a faithless world bearers of John and a foreshadow of God's grace.

The plan for the Messiah's arrival begins to unfold. After generation and generation when God seemed to be silent, God was still there. What God promises, God will bring to fulfillment. As we journey to Bethlehem, and to give thanks for the birth of God's son, we are the people who now wait.

We wait for his return. And because it has been so long, we may start to think, maybe the LORD wont return.

We live in a time similar to the days of Zechariah. This story of reminds us that God always does what he says He will do. God always fulfills his promises. And so we wait. We wait expectantly for grace to show up.

David Anderson

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December 5

## Anticipation

*"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life."* Proverbs 13:2

God's people were hoping and waiting for the day that Jesus would come. They had deep longings to be rescued, restored, and recovered.

In this Proverb, hope is associated with a sickening feeling in the very core of our beings, our hearts. What do you hope for? What do you long for? How do hope and fulfillment play off of each other?

For Advent, we anticipate the coming of Jesus and the deep longings that are fulfilled upon his arrival. What does it mean for Jesus to be "a tree of life" to you?

David Anderson

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December 6

## A Thrill of Hope

One of our favorite destinations is Big Bear Lake—the place where we met more than four decades ago. A few years ago, we bought a cabin there and now head up the mountains whenever we can. No matter the season—sunny or snowy—we start our ascent on Highway 330 listening to our favorite Christmas carol, *O Holy Night*.

Yes, the music lifts our spirits—but the vision of that moment in a manger is breathtaking. *He appeared!* A waiting world, longing to be saved, experienced Emmanuel: God with us; divine and human. Jesus: tiny infant, King of Kings. As the song says,

*A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.*

May your advent days begin with "a new and glorious morn," celebrating the hope of new life in our savior—and the love, grace, peace and joy born that *O, Holy Night*.

Patti and Gary Yomantas

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December 7

## Hope in the Lord

*"O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love and with him is plentiful redemption."* Psalm 130:7

Dallas Willard defines hope as the "joyous anticipation of good that is not yet here or unseen." The scriptures encourage us to put our hope in the LORD. This season we put our hope in Jesus, knowing that he is able to redeem us.

What about your life do you want redeemed? Do you joyfully anticipate the good work Jesus will do or do you tend to impatiently agonize over his unseen redemption? What if God views our redemption through a lens of joyful anticipation rather than continuous scrutiny?

David Anderson

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December 8

## Music of Hope

As we look forward to the holiday season, *hope* for a wholesome and respectful time at the dinner table; there is always at least one relative who needs to vent their personal views. But what are we really hoping for? Have we set the bar too low when it comes to our 'hopeful' expectations for the holidays?

I suggest that we may be expecting 'holiday happiness' to come from plans we make and goals we achieve. Our view of the holidays may limit our scope of what to actually *hope* for this time of year.

The prophet Isaiah writes about the hope of Israel—the Lord God Almighty—who gives us a much more profound, all-encompassing sense of hope. I encourage you to spend some time with the scriptures this season, nurturing that indomitable hope we have in our Lord Jesus.

Lance Merrill

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December 9

## Caring Deeply

Sometimes it is easy to forget people in our community who aren't experiencing the same security and friendship that we are used to.

Deitrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "In community we are called to love people just as they are with their wounds and their gifts, not as we would want them to be." This includes not only those in our church who have differences of opinions, but it also applies to those we come into contact with in our jobs and neighborhoods.

Jesus came so that we might experience hope in Him, and pass it on to others. How can we care more deeply for people outside our church walls? What about inviting a neighbor over for a cup of coffee, or to share a meal together? OR, what about simply phoning someone and checking in on them? Taking the initiative to reach out to someone is risky because we may be turned down. May we remember what it feels like when we are cared deeply for, and then take the first step to reaching out to whoever God has placed on your heart.

Caroline Ross

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December 10

## Luke 1:26–38

A young woman named Mary was surprised with a unique encounter with God's messenger. She was going to have a child! Many people in Israel had been waiting for this child to be born. He had been promised long ago. He would be called "Son of David," the most beloved king Israel had ever known. And her Son would rule over Israel forever! If that was not enough, Mary's son would actually be God's very own son, but in a different way than the rest of us are considered children of God.

This was a startling event for Mary, and she was left with a lot of questions about how this would all happen. But her lasting words were those of peace. "I am the Lord's servant," she said. "Let it be with

me just as you have said" (Luke 1:38). Mary knew something deep in her bones that we would all do well to grasp: when God calls us into something, even though on the surface it might look scary and chaotic, it will result in our well-being and peace.

Jared Del Dosso

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December 11

## Experiencing Grace with Peace

Could you imagine for just a moment if you were Mary in this week's story? Imagine an angel appearing to you. Was it a bright light? What did Gabriel look like? Did it hover? How big are those wings? Was she visited in her sleep? While preparing for her day?

Then imagine being told you were going to give birth to God's son! Mary has some concerns. Wouldn't you? I think Mary handled it pretty well. I would have panicked. I would have become a mess all day! How would I tell my parents? How would I tell Joseph? Would they believe me? Was this all just made up in my mind?

The theme of this week is Peace. Do you see peace anywhere in this passage?! Notice Mary's response in verse 38. Despite the turmoil going on around her, she has a certain peace about her and a desire for the words to be fulfilled. Might we have peace knowing Jesus fulfills his words.

David Anderson

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December 12

## What's in a Name?

Have you ever heard the name *Pele-joez-el-gibbor-abi-ad-sar-shalom* before? Would you believe me if I said this was one of Jesus' earliest names?

*"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* Isaiah 9:6

If you haven't guessed already, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace translates into *Pele-joez-el-gibbor-abi-ad-sar-shalom*. Matthew, in the New Testament, says that Jesus fulfills this ancient prophecy. As we experience Advent this year, reflect on how Jesus has been all of these to you: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

David Anderson

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December 13

## Peaceful Tradition

"Peace" is not the word that comes to mind when I think of Christmas at our busy house! Then the image of our Christmas tree comes to mind—our wonderful, gaudily-decorated tree! Masses of lights, loads of ornaments that date back to our childhood. Plus all the ornaments added since—reminding us of family trips or childhood memories. We decorate, drink eggnog, and listen to Christmas music. Finally, we throw lots of tinsel on top of our masterpiece, and—voila, the gaudiest, most fantastic Christmas tree!

Then we turn off the lights and our living room starts glowing and twinkling and sparkling. We sit on the couch and quietly admire our beautiful creation. Ahhh, there's the Christmas Peace. A joyful, satisfied Peace full of love and memories.

But year-round, the best Peace we know of comes through prayer—laying our worries at God's feet. Realizing we don't have to handle problems alone. We encourage you to lay your burdens at His feet this Christmas, and receive the gift of real Peace.

Jim and Nancy Hicks

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December 14

## Rejoice Always

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.* Philippians 4:4–9

What does peace look like in the passage above? What does peace require of us?

David Anderson

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December 15

## Music of Peace

As we approach the holiday season with all its wonderful celebrations we also take time to reflect on God's peace, which He supplies to us without end. In these times, when there is so much division and tension among the people of the world, we must follow the teachings of Jesus and find the courage, the power, and the faith to work together in achieving peace among ourselves. As the scripture tells us:

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." John 14:27

And as an inspiration, while we reflect on this, I invite everyone to sing together in worship "Let there be Peace on Earth."

Daniel Manoiu

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December 16

## Bridging Differences

Amidst all of the ribbons and bows that accompany this holiday, something else happens—people engage in a truce to put down their agendas. What is it about Christmas that helps us see past our differences? As convincing as a jolly, old man in a red suit sounds, there is a deeper truth that is much more compelling. There is an unmistakable yearning for unity—a deep and irresistible unity that taps deep into the Christian faith and begets an equally deep and irresistible peace. A favorite quote of ours is that "peace is not the absence of conflict but the ability to handle conflict by a peaceful means," and it rings true for this church. We are not uniform, but we are unified—we bridge differences rather than let them divide us.

In this holiday season, may you be encouraged to know someone's story. And as you participate in the peace of Christ, remember that it is often not an easy peace, but that is exactly why it is worth the effort.

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December 17

## Luke 1:39–56

Mary hurried to Elizabeth, her relative. As they greeted one another, Elizabeth's baby leaped for joy in her womb. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth said, "Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" Through the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth recognized the amazing, joyful truth: Mary was carrying the One God had promised to bring His peace, love, and joy to the world!

Overcome with praise, Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

When we accept and pay attention to God's love, we can experience the same joy Mary and Elizabeth did in their unexpected pregnancies and their roles in paving the way for love and peace in the world. Our joy is fully expressed when we share God's love with the people around us.

Suzanne Luce

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December 18

## Experiencing Grace with Joy

Read Isaiah 55. Look back at Luke 1:39-56 as you do and compare Mary's witness to the words of Isaiah. What similarities are there?

One of my favorite Christmas songs is "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." The refrain is, "Peace on earth, good will to men." It is important along the way that we keep our eyes wide open and pay attention to the road signs about the work of God. Grace is all around us. Sometimes we're too busy on the 'getting through.' We need to lift our heads up just a little bit to see the graces from God, these gifts of life and love and joy that are all around us. When somebody unexpectedly shows kindness to us, that is a sign. If someone shares with us, that is a gift, a grace. It happens a lot more than we know. The response to grace is Joy (laughter, smiles, deep heartfelt goodness.) Name the grace. Express the Joy.

Craig Williams

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December 19

## Go Out in Joy

Isaiah 55 says, "For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."

This is a vision of the way things will be when God's rule comes into being. (So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.) God cares about the planet. God will be restoring our environment (the trees shall clap their hands!) People will be together not apart (nations that you do not know will run to you).

- Where does the Joy of Jesus need to shed light into the world around you?
- Where in your neighborhood do things need to be "made right?"

Note two or three things that you can take Joy to. See if it makes peace.

Craig Williams

December 20

## Joyful Tradition

When I was a child, our family lived within an hour's drive from two of our mother's sisters and their husbands. Our tradition was to gather for Christmas at the home of one of the three sisters on a rotating basis. After eating Christmas Eve dinner, we would all gather around a piano or electric organ to sing Christmas carols.

One of my great joys was standing alongside my sister, parents, aunts and uncles singing these familiar songs. Our Uncle Jake had a beautiful voice and he would sing "Oh Holy Night" solo; I never hear that song without remembering him. Our parents and Aunt Ilo studied Latin in high school and sang "*Adeste Fideles* (O Come All Ye Faithful)," while the rest of us tried to follow along. Of all the many carols we sang my favorite was "Silent Night."

To this day singing Christmas carols reminds me of the joy of having this family tradition.

Joyce Maxwell

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December 21

## The Magnificat

*"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name."* Luke 1:46-49

This is the beginning of a longer song. We have heard parts of it in cantatas, praise songs, in Christmas carols, and the like. The theme of the Gospel of Luke is "Witness." Here Mary is a witness to the work of God in her life and the life of Israel.

In this passage:

- What things does Mary witness about God?
- Have you witnessed similar things?
- What magnificent things do you long to witness?

Make a list and review it, giving thanks to God!

Craig Williams

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December 22

## Joy to the World, the Lord Is Come!

Did you know this song was not written for Christmas? Perhaps it was the line, "Let every heart, prepare Him room," that reminds everyone of Christmas. Maybe it the tune itself that seems Christmassy to Northern Europeans and North Americans. Isaac Watts who wrote the song is trying to convey the breadth of the life and work of Jesus. Often, I will include this in worship in the summer or another time of year, just so we can hear it differently and allow it to speak to us without all the wrappings and trappings of Christmas. I've arranged it for guitar and will often play it as a tune in non-Christmas environments.

It is worth considering music that is not Christmas music but speaks to us at this time of year. What is it for you? Is there a non-religious or non-Christmas tune that reminds you of this season? That reminds you of Jesus and his work? Sing it!

Craig Williams

December 23

## Joy Beyond Church

Churches are often identified by where they are or what they look like. Go ahead, think about it—how many times have you heard Emmanuel described as the ‘Church on Lynn?’

Rather than identifying a church based on its location, building, denomination, or types of service, thinking beyond church is defining a church based on what it does—for those in *and* out of the church. It requires us to think about and continually ask the question what exactly we are known for and who we are for. Simply put, it is thinking beyond ourselves.

Was Peter at church in Acts 11 when he was criticized by believers for sharing a meal with unclean men? The story concludes with Peter saying ‘who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?’ while reflecting on the availability of the gift of salvation, the source of true joy.

During this season of Advent, who could you put before yourself as you think beyond church? May we be a church known for acting beyond ourselves by not standing in God’s way.

Kevin and Brittney Lindsey

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December 24

## Luke 1:57–80

Elizabeth and Zechariah had a baby, and everyone shared in their joy at his birth. God had shown his great love to Elizabeth by mercifully giving her a son.

Before the baby was born, Zechariah had not been able to speak. On the eighth day after he was born, they had a celebration in which they would announce the baby’s name. Elizabeth declared that the baby’s name was John, rather than the name people expected: Zechariah, after his father. Zechariah made motions to show that he agreed with Elizabeth. Suddenly he was able to speak again!

Zechariah began praising God and God’s Spirit filled him. He spoke the truth that John would prepare the way for the Lord. He foretold about how through Jesus, God would make all things new. God made this wonderful plan to redeem us because of His deep love for us.

Rachel Del Dosso

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December 25

## Luke 2:1–21

Joseph and Mary had to travel to Bethlehem. When they finally arrived in Bethlehem, there were too many people! So Mary and Joseph stayed with the animals. And that night, baby Jesus was born! Mary wrapped Jesus in strips of cloth and laid Him in an animals’ feeding trough.

At the same time, there were shepherds out on the hillside watching the sheep. Suddenly they saw an angel! They were terrified! The angel said, “Do not be afraid. I have good news! Today a Savior has been born to you. You will find Him wrapped in cloths and laying in a manger.” Then the sky was filled with angels praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace toward men!” Then the angels were gone.

The shepherds were amazed! "Let's go and see what the angel told us about!" They ran to Bethlehem and found the baby just as the angels had said.

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December 26

## Be Silent and Sit Still

One of the things I like most on Christmas Eve, is to stay up later than everyone else and sit quietly. Maybe there is music, maybe not. Sometimes there is a choir on some PBS channel singing Christmas songs, once there was a bell choir from Chicago. W.H. Auden in his poem *Advent*, has Joseph and the angel Gabriel in a conversation:

Joseph –

"All I ask is one

Important and elegant proof

That what my Love had done

Was really at your will

And that your will is Love.

Gabriel –

"No, you must believe;

Be silent, and sit still."

What I lack is the ability to "be silent and sit still" long enough to see God's love at work around me. What I want to adopt is my Christmas Eve posture on the days after. Where has God surprisingly showed up this year. Can I savor the Love, like Mary did?

Craig Williams