



THE
Wonder
OF US

Advent Devotional 2017
Written by the people of
Gainesville First United
Methodist Church

Save the Date

Advent 2017 at a Glance

**Friday,
December 1**

Senior Adult Ministry
Christmas Gala
6pm. Reception Hall

**Saturday,
December 2**

Kids Ministry
Breakfast With Santa
First seating: 9am
Second seating: 10:30am

**Thursday,
December 7**

Weekday Preschool
Christmas Musical
7pm. Sanctuary

The Christmas Gathering
7:30pm. Chapel

**Saturday,
December 10**

Student Ministry
Reindeer games
5pm. Foundry

**Thursday,
December 14**

The Longest Night Service
6pm. Chapel

**Sunday,
December 17**

Christmas Festival Concerts
4 & 6:30pm. Sanctuary

**Sunday,
December 24**

Christmas Eve Services
11am, 5, 7 & 11pm
on campus

Advent...the Wonder of it All

In this season, we wait expectantly for the coming of our Savior into the world. We look for Him to come as a child. However, Jesus says that unless we turn and become like children, we will not even see, much less enter in the Kingdom of God. In this season that is usually filled with stress and hectic activity, we can find ourselves longing for a simpler time, a time when the world seemed to be filled with wonder and joy.

As we come together each Sunday to celebrate Advent, Pastor Scott and Pastor Jamey will lead us to rediscover what it means to experience this season with the eyes and heart of a child, so we can see the wonder of it all.

We compiled this devotion, a book to keep us in the spirit of awe and wonder throughout the week. You'll find a place to journal how God is speaking to you in worship, and you'll find daily devotions written by our congregation.

There are different ways to use this devotion book. Each day as you read the devotions, you'll be reading the Christmas story and hearing from those who authored the devotions about how these passages speak to their hearts. We invite you to spend time reading these devotions, then spend time quietly with God listening for His words for you.

If you're using these as a family devotion, allow time for the family to talk about how these words speak to each member, how they see the awe and wonder of Christmas in the scriptures and in their own lives.

Our prayer for you and your family this Advent season is that you indeed have the eyes and the hearts of a child as we prepare for the coming of King Jesus.

Blessings and prayers,



Rev. Liz Millar
Pastor of Discipleship

Dear Friends,

In this season of Advent, as we move toward the miracle of Christmas, let's proclaim our faith in the God of hope, peace, joy, and love. One way we will do this is by designating our Christmas Eve Offering to help vulnerable women and children in our community. Jesus makes it clear,

Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.

Matthew 25:40

The recipients of our Christmas Eve Offering are two organizations that are making a difference in the lives of women and children in our community. The Gateway House strives to provide a safe, healthy, and violence preventive space for victims of abuse. The vision of Gateway House is to meet the basic needs of domestic violence survivors in our community. In order to meet the future needs, Gateway is looking to relocate to a larger facility. The Christmas Eve Offering will go towards assisting Gateway in meeting their needs. In Atlanta, Georgia, about 200-300 girls are trafficked each month in this city. The goal of Sacred Roots Farm is to provide a specifically-designed home on a working sustainable farm for sexually exploited and trafficked women and their children, so they may discover the trust, the healing, and the hope that God has created for them. Sacred Roots Farm is based in Hall County. The goal is to be operational by January. The Christmas Eve Offering will go towards meeting the monthly demands of Sacred Roots Farm.

For more information on both of these organizations, check out their websites: gatewaydvcenter.org & sacredrootsfarm.org.

Will you begin praying now about what God would have you give, over and above your regular giving, to this Special Offering?

Please know that you and your family are in my prayers during this time, and I can't wait to worship Jesus with you this Advent/Christmas season!

Together in Mission,



Rev. Jamey Prickett, Associate Pastor
Gainesville First United Methodist Church

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:10-11

Sunday, December 3

First Sunday of Advent HOPE

My God is For Me

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

Luke 2:8-11

Sermon Notes:

How is my life different because God is for me?

Monday, December 4

God Speaks

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, 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. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Luke 1:26-28

It was November 20, 1968. The sun hid behind an overcast day. Two people's lives were about to change. Their lives were full of excitement, anticipating the birth of their first child. Little did they know that their expectations would be overshadowed by doubt and bewilderment.

My name is Trey. I was born with Spina Bifida.

My parents did not receive a "normal" child. They received a child that would face bad health, false perceptions, and discrimination.

What they also received was a boy who would change the stigma in many hearts in his years to come.

Over 2000 years ago, two people's lives were about to change. Mary was carrying the Creator of the universe, and the Savior of the world.

Little did they know that their expectations of a king would be vastly different than normal.

Jesus turned the world upside down. He was a culture changer. He broke the rules. He was God incarnate.

What started out as 2 people's lives changing over 2000 years ago, became the greatest movement in the history of mankind.

On November 20, 1968, two people's expectations were vastly different than what they anticipated when their unhealthy boy was born.

Over 2000 years the people's expectations were changed when the King of the universe entered this world through a birth canal.

How does the birth of Christ shape your expectation of those around you during this season?

-Trey Wilson

Tuesday, December 5

Astonishing News

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

Luke 1:29-33

Wow! Can you imagine God's angel speaking to you? Scripture says Mary was perplexed. I would be paralyzed. She pondered and was told "Do not be afraid." I would be in shock. Also, Mary had been found in favor with God. Here is a teenager who is perplexed, pondering, and having found favor with God. Now what? "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you will name him Jesus." O.K. What next! "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give to Him the throne of his ancestor David." Also He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his Kingdom there will be no end.

Wow! We know nothing about Mary's family. What was the standing of her father in society? What is society going to think? Remember she is engaged to Joseph. How is she going to handle all this? Are her parents going to throw her out? Is she going to be stoned?

There are three words that come to me: FAITH, TRUST, OBEDIENCE. God's grace is unbelievable. There is a blessing for those of us who have faith, who trust, and who are obedient. Yes, we may be perplexed, we may ponder (even doubt) and we may be afraid. But, there is a blessing for those of us who respond as Mary did with childlike FAITH, TRUST, and OBEDIENCE.

-Dick Williamson

Wednesday, December 6

God's Ways are not Our Ways

How will this be, Mary asked the angel, since I am a virgin.

Luke 1:34

In the Gospel of John the disciples asked Jesus, what we must do to perform the works of God. Jesus replied, this is the work of God, that you believe (trust) in him whom he had sent. How can we say, we believe Jesus and love God and hate our neighbor or a member of our family or our coworker, or people who look different than us.

We found out through the course of our lives, between moving from one state to the other, following our jobs and careers, living in different neighborhoods; that we easily can fall into judging, hating, and resenting people. What saved us from our self righteousness is God's love for us in spite of our sins and also being in a community of Christian believers did not hurt. Knowing God and believing in Jesus Christ changes how we treat and see people that we meet. We see them through the eyes of Jesus our model of how we should live and be (it's an ongoing process). The more we build our relationship with God the more we have satisfactory and happy relationships with others. The more we know God the more we accept his plans for us.

Dear Lord help us to trust in your word and your plans for us. Help us to obey even if your plan sounds strange to us.

-Lila & Russ Francis

Thursday, December 7

Awesome Power of God

The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:34-37

For all our modern day scientific knowledge, conception is still shrouded in great mystery. "Undiagnosed infertility" is in my medical record. And so is the record of two live births. In between is a time of great despair as I cried out "how can this be? It is the desire of my heart, O God, to bear and raise a child. Why is it not yours?" On the other hand, I have had friends who found themselves unexpectedly pregnant who also cried out in despair, "how can this be? Not a child at this time, or from this relationship, or because of this violence." And then there are those moments of joy, when those who want a child are able to announce to friends and family that a baby is on the way. For all that we know about barriers and aids to conception, for all the work of doctors in laboratories, there is still an element of the unknown, of the unknowable, in the process. And there is never a guarantee that those who wish to conceive will.

It is perhaps unfortunate that the Bible doesn't lift up and help us remember stories of women who remain barren; it only tells stories of women like Elizabeth or Sarah or Rachel who eventually have the longed for child. But surely there were other women who had stories too. Women who somehow found ways to move forward even when dreams had to find new direction. Women who were eventually able to say "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Because in today's world, I know those women too. Women who did not conceive or were unable to carry a child to term, but who have loved other children as if they were their own. Women who have focused their time and resources in other ways that served God. Women who with faith are still able to proclaim that nothing will be impossible with God even when their prayers were not answered as they desired.

Take time this Advent to pray for teenagers, like Mary, and other women and couples who find themselves facing unplanned pregnancies and for those wanting nothing more than to be pregnant. May they be filled with God's courage and peace as they face the days ahead until they, too, can say, "let it be with me according to your will."

-Rev. Carolyn Clifton

Friday, December 8

Responding to God

And Mary said, Yes, I see it all now: I'm the Lord's maid, ready to serve. Let it be with me just as you say. Then the angel left her.

Luke 1:38 from The Message

"Yes, I will" is such a tiny phrase, yet it can be one of the hardest to say. When we utter these words, it can be an act of surrender to our own will and fleshly desires and agreement to God's will for our lives. When we say "Yes, I will" to God it also means saying "no" to our desires that can demand our time and attention. Saying "Yes" to God isn't a one-time thing, sometimes it's a daily thing, sometimes it's an hourly thing, and on our hardest days it may be a minute by minute choice.

As parents to 5, we get a front seat view of how difficult it can be to say "Yes, I will" both for ourselves and for our children. As parents, we are given opportunities each and every day to saying "Yes, I will" in the ways that we raise our kids in the will of the Father. Sometimes those are in small situations that may not seem like they matter, but in the matter of the kingdom, A small "Yes" can be big. We also are given moments where we can see just how difficult surrender can be, in a tangible and very real way as you watch toddlers and small children learn to say "Yes, I will" to tough things like sharing a favorite snack or doing something they really don't want to do... like putting away their toys at bed time.

The important thing when it comes to our response to God is realizing that we aren't saying "Yes, I will" in our strength and resolve, we are saying "Yes" while trusting that God would not ask us to do something and then abandon us. He is asking us to say "Yes", and then continue to say "Yes" as we hold his hand and see his plan unfold in front of us. And pray our small moments of surrender are used in the bigger picture that God is painting, no matter how small or unworthy we may feel.

-Ashlie & Derrick Hogan

Saturday, December 9

This week our Scripture readings and devotions have focused upon relationship with God. We've read how the angels and the Holy Spirit announced to Mary that she was going to give birth and we've read her response. Reflect today on how you respond to God's announcements, God's messages for you in your life.

Sunday, December 10

Second Sunday of Advent Faith

My God is With Me

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

Matthew 1:22-23

Sermon Notes:

Spend time today thinking about, journaling or drawing a picture of how you experience God's presence in your life. Offer God a prayer of thanksgiving.

Monday December 11

Sharing

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Luke 1:39-41

Babies are needy. Have you ever seen a baby crying for milk? He appears desperate as he seeks out the one thing he knows can satisfy his hunger.

The Lord has blessed me with a friend who has shared her life with me. I have been in wonder over the years at how He has worked in her life. We attend a Wednesday night Bible study together, and last week a family conflict prevented her from attending. She is a full-time wife and mother and works a full-time job, but last night she carved out precious time to go to church and watch the study video, read her Bible and work on the week's homework. She texted me from church, "I'm desperate for His Word right now!" She was needy. She was hungry. And I found myself wanting what she had...

The busyness of the holiday season can steal our time, our attention and our hunger for God. I'm thankful that He puts people in our path that turn us back to Him. Do you have a friend or a family member who does this for you? Are your eyes open, your ears attuned to someone that the Holy Spirit might be using to cause you to realize that you've lost your hunger for the things of the Lord?

Like a baby, there is no shame in being needy and desperate; in fact, that's just where the Lord wants us to be. This Christmas, come to Him desperate, in search of the only thing that can satisfy our spiritual hunger... Himself.

-Stacey Terry

Tuesday, December 12

Blessings

In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

Luke 1:42-45

After Mary learns of her pregnancy, she's terrified. Being a young teenage girl, confused, scared, and worried for her own life, she runs to her sister in Judea. Both Mary and Elizabeth had been blessed with children. While Elizabeth was ecstatic about her own, she was humble. Calling Mary the "mother of my Lord", Elizabeth shows her support in a simple yet substantial way.

The relationship that Mary and Elizabeth have with each other is what makes Mary strong enough to carry the baby Jesus through such a time. Being unmarried, Mary could be stoned for adultery as only a young girl. Elizabeth gives her courage. As we read this passage and the one preceding, some people have trouble seeing the situation as Mary did. We read it and rejoice in our Savior's birth, as we should; however Mary didn't see it in this way at first.

Elizabeth helps her to see the glorious situation through the eyes of God when she says, "Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" The wonder and splendor we see today, was different in the moment. Without Elizabeth's love for her, Mary hadn't truly seen what was happening and what she was doing and how it was glorifying the Father in such a tremendous way.

The relationships we have with our friends and family need to be strong; like the love God has for us. Just as Elizabeth comforts and empowers Mary, we need to do the same of our brothers, sisters, parents, grandparents, and friends. Each person is a blessing to another, and you help them see the world as God intended - a beautiful and peaceful place.

When it comes to relationships, your strong faith can be a foothold for God in someone's life. As you go, empower and support every person you meet, in every walk of life.

-Emilie Green

Wednesday, December 13

Promises

Have you ever prayed and prayed to get something you wanted? Perhaps a gift that you wanted to receive, or relationship you wanted to be in, or even a good grade on a math test? God hears our prayers, and it's his decision whether he wants to give us what we want. Sometimes what we want is not always what we need. God loves us eternally, so he gives us what we need. When God promises us things, he always fulfills it, no matter how long it takes. When God promised Mary that she would give birth to a baby boy that would rule the heavens and the earth, she kept faith in God, and he fulfilled that promise.

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,"

Luke 1:46-48

Let me ask another question. Have you ever promised someone something, and not fulfilled it? Maybe you promised your parents you would work harder to get better grades, but instead you slacked off and watched TV. Or maybe you promised your friend you would keep their secret, but instead you spilled it to the whole school. Maybe you made a promise to God, that you would get closer to him, but you sat on your phone instead of doing your quiet time. Promises are supposed to be kept, not broken. It's hard to keep promises, but God keeps his promises. It's easy to break promises, but God doesn't break his promises. It's hard to be like God, but the only way we can be more like him is to pray, read his word, and spend time with him. I know, it's a hard thing to do, but if you make that promise to him, try hard to keep it. Because the only thing worse than breaking a promise, is breaking a promise to God.

He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised his ancestors.

Luke 1:54-55

A new year is coming up with New Year's resolutions, will you make a promise to God?

-Abbi Roush

Thursday, December 14

Preparing the Way

His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.

Luke 1:67, 76-77

It all started when he had his priestly duties in the sanctuary. Minding his own business and going through the motions of offering sacrifices on behalf of the people. An angel appears to inform him that he will have a son. He is to name his son "John." Zachariah responds, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man and my wife is getting on in years." The angel replies, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words you will be mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur." And his wife said, "Amen!" Not really, but she could have been thinking it.

Nine months later and he is holding his newborn in his arms. The crowd asked for a name. Elizabeth says, "John." The crowd doesn't understand since that is not a family name. Zechariah writes it on a tablet and his voice returns and he begins to praise the Lord. In amazement the crowd asks, "What then will this child become?" And John replies, "Child, you will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins."

The story of John the Baptist begins with a father who doubted his own son's birth. A story where doubts quickly turned into confidence that his son was born for greatness. It is amazing what God can do with nine months of silence. Maybe you have entered a season of doubt. Maybe you are questioning God's love. Maybe you are wondering if your prayers are being heard. I want to encourage you to find space to be silent and let the presence of God work in and through you this Christmas. Let the wonder of the season give birth to the miracle of new life in you. And then you may find yourself praying, "By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

-Rev. Jamey Prickett

Friday, December 15

The Journey

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born.

Luke 2:1-6

Most families, like Mary and Joseph in the text for today, go everywhere together even when they have to do things that aren't very fun...like take part in a census. Our family is a little different. We don't usually get to worship together on Sunday. It's not because we don't like each other or don't love Jesus, it's because Marshall goes one way (Antioch UMC in Nicholson where he is the pastor) and Katie, Caroline and Ella go another (Gainesville FUMC). We decided several years ago that the girls would benefit from having consistency in their church home rather than switching every few years to a new church where Marshall was serving. We end up talking after service about what we did and how things went. Sometimes there's a special church gathering during the week that we all attend, but that's the exception rather than the rule. To maintain our family bonds, we came up with the following Bruner Family Values (in no certain order): Being respectful, learning about God, service, helping each other, imitating Christ, unity/common goals, togetherness, kindness, personal responsibility, self-control and having fun. Are we perfect in living out these values? No. Do we have to work at it? All the time. Are we trying to strengthen our relationships? Yes! We have benefited from slowing down and thinking carefully about how we spend our time and what matters most. Our prayer for you and your family during this busy and often disconnected Advent season is that you will work together and, with God's help, strengthen your own family bonds.

-Katie & Marshall Bruner

Saturday, December 16

This week our Scripture readings and devotions have focused upon how others responded to Mary's news. We've read about Mary and Elizabeth, met Zachariah and celebrated the birth of John the Baptist. Reflect today on how you share with your family and friends how God is working in your life.

Sunday, December 17

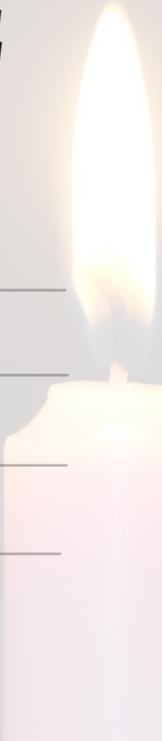
Third Sunday of Advent JOY

My God Forgives Me

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Matthew 1:20-21

Sermon Notes:



Monday, December 18

Drawn to See

And it came about when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us."

Luke 2:15

While enjoying a cup of coffee with a friend recently, the question, 'What would it look like for us to really follow Jesus?' somehow bubbled to the top of our conversation. More specifically, we began to speculate whether our lives would be any different- if we really believed Jesus. Would we spend our time differently? Should we, for example, stand on a street corner with a bullhorn, imploring passers-by to repent and believe? Or, should we sell everything, move to a foreign country, and serve as international missionaries for the rest of our lives?

And while the conversation was mostly lighthearted in nature, in the end, both of us were left feeling somewhat troubled and perplexed about what to do. We eventually concluded that if we really believed God, like the shepherds did, our lives would somehow be different; at the very least, we'd spend our time and money more wisely.

I find it fascinating that, upon learning that the Savior of the world had been born in Bethlehem, the shepherds went straight there to see for themselves. They didn't study the matter more intently, nor did they talk it over with a group of friends to come to a consensus. No, they acted on their belief!

Again, would our lives look any different if we really believed God? I think so. I know it made a difference for the shepherds. In fact, they did something radical which changed their lives forever!

Prayer:

Lord, expand my territory and give me even more opportunities to love creatively!

-David Lee

Tuesday, December 19

Sharing the Good News

When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told to them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

Luke 2:17-18

On the first Christmas, God blessed common shepherds on a very cosmic level. These favored shepherds got to interact with angels who were sent to them with a specific message. (By contrast, the invitation to the Wise Men was a mere star!) In addition, the shepherds got to be present for a super-big moment for any family, as any birth is an event worth celebrating. But the occasion of this celebration, the birth of the Messiah ushered in a new stage of human and cosmic history. God favored these shepherds with a custom invitation to be up-close-and-personal with angels and the baby Jesus, Himself. But why these ordinary people?

Certainly we've heard lots of possible explanations (of which many or all maybe true). We might guess:

Shepherds of that time were people capable of great wonder (and we know God rewards faith.)

Shepherds played a prophetic role, as Christ Himself would be likened to a shepherd. Shepherding required caring, responsibility, vigilance, self-denial, sacrifice and hard work in bad conditions; traits valued in that time or in any time. We might also estimate these shepherds as uncritical, earnest, honest, eager, bighearted and optimistic.

Shepherds may have been especially innocent to the worldliness and cynicism of the day. They were not scoffers. The Heavenly Host targeted shepherds knowing that these sincere people would turn around and share their experience to others.

Indeed, shepherds were likely to share with people similar to themselves who also had great capacity for wonder, kinsmen who, like they, were open, innocent, and eager people.

So why did God favor shepherds? It might have to do with how these shepherds would receive the message. And it may relate even more to what Heaven knew the shepherds would do with that message.

-Robert Cuttino

Wednesday, December 20

Spreading the Good News

At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God.

Luke 2:25-28

We may not be completely finished decorating and buying presents, but Christmas is only five days away! And although we get presents and gifts, it is crucial that we remember that Christmas is a time for rest, spending time with family we may see only a few times a year, and most importantly, to celebrate Jesus Christ's birthday.

Over 2,000 years ago, a young woman from the town of Nazareth was visited by an angel named Gabriel. He told the young woman, Mary, that she would have a son named Jesus and that he would be the Son of God. Obviously, she was overtaken with a feeling of blessing and joy, but then the Roman Emperor ordered all people to travel back to their hometown. So, after many days of traveling pregnant on a donkey, Mary and Joseph finally arrived in Bethlehem. The inns were packed full, so they had to stay in a stable. And right when they arrived to the stable, Mary exhausted and in pain, went into labor.

Mary gave birth to Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Messiah, in a manger. That night, an angel appeared to shepherds who were tending to their flock, proclaiming the good news of Jesus being born. The news quickly spread all through the nations and everyone was ecstatic! The birth of Jesus is a miracle and not just good news. It is but incredible news. The Bible tells us how overwhelmed Mary and Joseph must have been after traveling to Bethlehem and having to sleep in a stable, however, God was with them the entire time.

This story can relate to the same problem we face at Christmas time because the stress that overwhelms us during the season can lead to us forgetting the real reason for the season. Christmas is not about gifts or presents; but spending time with the ones we love, being thankful for everything we have, and remembering the good news of Jesus Christ and spreading it to all. Peace be with you!

-James Bennett

Thursday, December 21

Spreading the Good News

Simeon was an unexpected guest at Mary's purification ritual at the temple. He came upon Mary and Joseph with Jesus, and took Jesus in his arms and prayed a prayer of thanks that he was able to see the Christ child before he died. Anna the prophetess was also there, a daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher. She was by now a very old woman. She had been married seven years and a widow for eighty-four. She never left the temple area, worshiping night and day with her fastings and prayers. At the very time Simeon was praying, she showed up, broke into an anthem of praise to God, and talked about the child to all who were waiting expectantly for the freeing of Jerusalem.

Luke 2:36-38

Can you see and feel this passage of scripture? It makes my skin tingle. Two old people who have lived their lives in expectation are being rewarded by a visit from the Christ child! Simeon prays—Anna sings! In my 2017 vision, her first song is: "Come thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free!" Can you see her with her arms outspread and her eyes glowing, the tears running down her cheeks? Can you feel the passion in her voice? "Born thy people to deliver," she continues, and after Mary and Joseph and Jesus depart, she hurries into the "town square" where she shares her story of joy. Feel the "buzz" in the murmers of the crowd shopping the booths that day as Anna goes from person to person, from group to group! See how each time she tells her story she becomes more animated. She is not only using her voice and songs, but she is using her hands to emphasize the feelings in her heart!

During this Christmas Season are we gushing "Joy" as we tell our story? Are we using our hands to emphasize our emotional ardor? Are our hearts on fire with the story to share?

God, let our joy pour out in words and song so that "Every hearth is aflame as the beautiful sing in the homes of the nations that Jesus is King!"

-Anonymous

Friday, December 22

Call to Worship

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the new born king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him."

Matthew 2: 1-2

This Scripture does not offer us many details about our wise men coming to worship the newborn King of the Jews. The scholars help us fill in some of the missing details. These wise men may well have traveled over 1,000 miles, a journey that would have taken 25 to 30 days. These wise men knew the heavens and watched the stars. They knew there was something special about this star above Bethlehem.

What this Scriptures does tell us, is the most important part of the story. They tell us the wise men came to worship, to worship the newborn king of the Jews.

Brothers and sisters, we too are to worship the newborn King. The star we follow is the tug in our hearts placed there by God who desires that we know His love for us, a love so grand that He gave us His Son.

This tiny baby the wise men traveled to worship is the King of Kings and the Lord of all. He is our Savior, our Redeemer and the only One worthy of worship. As we make our final preparations to celebrate Christmas, remember that our finest celebration is our worship of Jesus.

May the wonder and the awe of this season overwhelm your heart so that your only response can be to worship.

A prayer for you to begin your day:

Loving Lord,

Let this be the day that I worship and adore you in all that I think, say and do. My heart is yours so may your praises flow from my lips. Amen.

-Rev. Liz Millar

Saturday, December 23

As we approach the end of Advent, we've read how the angels and the shepherds, Simeon and Anna, and the Wisemen couldn't wait to share the good news of the Christ child and to worship the King. Make a list of those with whom you need to share God's wonder and awe. Set a time and a place for those conversations.

Sunday, December 24

Fourth Sunday of Advent PEACE

My God Can Do Anything

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

Luke 1:34-35

Sermon Notes:

Celebrate the things you believed were impossible but with God are possible!

Sunday, December 25

God is With Us... The Wonder!

Have you ever extended an invitation to someone and their response was, "I can't make it but I'll be there in spirit." I'll confess, I've said that before. I remember Rick Warren saying, "You know what it means when someone says they'll be with you in spirit?" He continued, "It means nothing!" I don't say it anymore.

There is something about presence isn't there? I remember a senior couple coming to church one Sunday, and they were burnt to a crisp. I said, "Good Lord! What happened to you?!" He replied, "Our grandson had a baseball tournament in Florida, and we wouldn't miss it." They had sat out in the Florida sun at the baseball field fence for three days watching him play. Now what message do you think that grandson received? That he mattered. He was important. He was a priority. He was worth sacrificing for. I know these grandparents told him they loved him all the time, but it was expressed at a deeper level by their presence. He will never doubt he was important to them, because their presence told him so.

As Matthew announces the birth of Jesus, he reminds his audience of Isaiah's prophecy:

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel. (which means "God with us").

Matthew 1:23

Jesus is not only God, He is God with us. Jesus shows up. Why? Because you matter to Him. You're important. You're a priority. And let's remember the rest of the story; you're worth sacrificing for. Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. God demonstrates His love, at great cost.

Christianity is the only religion where God comes to humanity, in all others its humanity that moves.

What does it mean to you that your God shows up right in the middle of the reality of your life right now?

-Rev. Scott Hearn

My Advent 2017 Memories:



Gainesville First

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

2780 Thompson Bridge Rd. Gainesville Ga, 30506
770.536.2341 GFUMC.COM

