

An Advent Devotional
Treasure & Ponder



"Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart."

pon-der

1: to weigh in the mind, appraise

2: to think about, to reflect on

3: to think or consider especially quietly, soberly and deeply

Pastor Rich Knight
Trinitarian Congregational Church
North Andover, MA

*Many thanks to the Wednesday Morning Bible Study for their insights and faith.
We treasured & pondered these passages together.
Here's what we found.*



*"I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly."
-Jesus in John 10:10*

Wishing You a blessed and beautiful Christmas!

We begin with the prophecies, God preparing the people for the Messiah.

Week 1, Sunday, Dec. 2

A Prophecy

This passage occurs in the story of the Fall of Adam & Eve, as sin enters the world. It includes the earliest foreshadowing of God's plan of salvation through Christ. See if you can find it?

So the LORD God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

- Genesis 3:14-15

Jesus came to "crush" the head of the serpent, the personification of evil. He came to do battle with sin, evil, injustice and even death itself. He himself was "struck" - crucified. But through his resurrection we see God's power and ultimate victory.

Prayer: Thank You, God, for Christ's battle with evil and his victory on our behalf. Give us courage, hope and faith in the face of injustice. Amen.

Ponder: Christ came to earth with a mission and a purpose.

Week 1, Monday, Dec. 3

A Prophecy

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

- Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

Isaiah wrote some 700 years before Christ, literally "B.C." He wrote of the coming Messiah who will arrive as a child, a son. Notice that this child is called, "Mighty God, Everlasting Father."

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for Isaiah's prophecy and that you made his prediction come true in Jesus, the Light of the World, the Prince of Peace. Help us to trust in your promises and live in your peace. Amen.

Ponder: God's gift of peace.

Week 1, Tuesday, Dec. 4

A Prophecy

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

- *Isaiah 11:1-10*

The Messiah must come from "the root of Jesse." Jesse was King David's father. Thus the Gospels tell us it was crucial that Jesus, the Messiah, was from "the house and lineage of David." Isaiah's inspired poetry gives us a vision of the "peaceable kingdom."

Prayer: *Come with your peace, O God. Amen.*

Ponder: The day when "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD."

Week 1, Wednesday, Dec. 5

A Prophecy

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.

- *Micah 5:2-5*

Micah lived in the 8th Century BC. He prophesied that the Messiah would come from the "little town of Bethlehem." Jesus wasn't born in Rome, Babylon or even Jerusalem. He came to a small, little one-horse town, in order to share our common lives.

Prayer: *Thank You, God, for sharing our common lot and for your love for all people. Amen.*

Ponder: The humbleness of Christmas.

Week 1, Thursday, Dec. 6

*An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of **Abraham**. Abraham was the father of **Isaac**, and Isaac the father of **Jacob**, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and **Judah** the father of Perez and Zerah by **Tamar**, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of **King David**. And David was the father of **Solomon** by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.*

- Matthew 1:1-7a, 15-16

When you take a close look at it, Jesus' family tree is quite interesting. Abraham & Isaac lied to various kings about the identity of their wives in order to save their own necks. Jacob's 12 sons came from 4 different women. Judah & Tamar had twin sons, even though Judah was Tamar's father-in-law. David & Solomon committed adultery (even though they already had multiple wives. Yikes!).

Apparently Jesus' family includes a bunch of sinners. That's Good News for us!

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for your grace and forgiveness, and for your ability to use imperfect people like me. Amen.

Ponder: The Grace of God.

Week 1, Friday, Dec. 7

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

- Matthew 1:18

Mary was just a young girl, probably 15 or 16 years old. Imagine the fear and anxiety she must have felt when she discovered she was "with child." When the situation is bleak God is still at work. In fact, those are the times when God often does his best work.

Prayer: Loving God, help me to look for you, especially when life gets scary and confusing. Amen.

Ponder: God's care.



Week 1, Saturday, Dec. 8

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.

- Matthew 1:18-19

Joseph is often the forgotten man of Christmas. But scripture pays him quite a compliment, calling him a "righteous man." Notice that his righteousness was shown in kindness and compassion.

Prayer: *Lord, make me righteous like Joseph. Amen.*

Ponder: The beauty of kindness.



Week 2, Sunday, Dec. 9

Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

- Matthew 1:19-21

The name Jesus means, "God saves." The United Church of Christ Statement of Faith says, Christ "saves us from aimlessness and sin." He saves us from sin by offering us complete forgiveness for our sins - past, present and future. He saves us from aimlessness by making us his disciples. "Come, follow Me."

Prayer: *Thank You, Savior, for saving me. Amen.*

Ponder: What are we saved from and for?

Week 2, Monday, Dec. 10

All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

- Matthew 1:22-25

Matthew tells us that the Messiah has at least two names - Jesus ("God Saves") and Emmanuel, "God with us." Christ brings us into the presence of God. He's our Way to God. He's the Truth about God. He's the Life of God, come to earth and born into our hearts by faith.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, be my Emmanuel, this Christmas and always. Amen.*

Ponder: Emmanuel. God with us.

Week 2, Tuesday, Dec. 11

*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."
- Luke 1:26-28*

"Greetings, favored one!" Wouldn't that be a fun way to greet each other? And isn't it also true, that we all have found favor with God? Mary's Son taught us that. It reminds me of something the Christian singer/songwriter Rich Mullins once said, "It's not that Roman Catholics honor Mary too much; it's that we honor each other too little."

Remember, Favored One, the Lord is with You!

Prayer: *Loving God, teach me to live in your favor and to extend your blessing to others. Amen.*

Ponder: Living with God's favor.

Week 2, Wednesday, Dec. 12

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

- Luke 1:26-29

Mary pondered. We do well to do the same thing. Ponder this Christmas. Take it slow. Think. Reflect. Pray. Think some more. Reflect again. Then pray again. Think about every word in every carol you sing. Ponder the words and the wonder of Christmas.

Prayer: *Lord, teach me to ponder on spiritual things this Christmas. Amen.*

Ponder: What does it mean to spiritually ponder?

Week 2, Thursday, Dec. 13

The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High. - Luke 1:30-32a

"He will be great." People can argue the doctrines concerning Christ – the Incarnation, the Trinity, the Atonement, etc. But there's no denying one thing - the angel was right about his greatness. Maybe Christians should forget about arguing doctrine and just try to put into words how Jesus has been great for us?

How has Christ - his life, his teachings, his Cross & Resurrection, his living Presence - been great for you?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for your greatness. Amen.*

Ponder: The Greatness of Jesus Christ.

Week 2, Friday, Dec. 14

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 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. - Luke 1:34-35

God is the Father of Jesus. In other words, Jesus is what it looks like when one lives as a child of God.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help me to live as your child today. Amen*

Ponder: Living as a child of God.

Week 2, Saturday, Dec. 15

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 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." - Luke 1:34-37

Nothing is impossible with God. Some things are impossible for us, but not for God. Things like, salvation, atonement, reconciliation, joy amidst despair, hope for the hopeless, unconditional love for all people and much, much more.

Prayer: *Thank You, Eternal God, that you are even greater than my greatest thoughts about You. Amen.*

Ponder: Turning to God when life seems impossible.

Week 3, Sunday, Dec. 16

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 1:35-38

Question: Did Mary have a choice when it came to giving birth to the Messiah? We don't know, but one thing we do know is that she didn't hesitate. When God called Moses, he stalled and then suggested talking to his brother instead. When God called Jeremiah, Jeremiah said I'm too young, find someone else. But when God called Mary, she said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Wow!

Prayer: *Lord, make me quick to respond to your call. Amen.*

Ponder: How do I respond to God?

Week 3, Monday, Dec. 17

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

- Luke 1:39-45

I love this passage. Mary's already had an angel visitation. She knows she's been given a divine assignment, to bear the Messiah. The angel states that God can do impossible things, and to provide evidence of this truth the angel mentions that Mary's cousin Elizabeth is also with child, even though she's up there in years. Mary believes the angel but she wants to see for herself, ("Mary set out and went with haste") and you can't blame her for that. Trust but verify.

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for the reassurance that comes from others who share our faith and common bond in You. Amen.*

Ponder: With whom do I share and celebrate my faith?



Week 3, Tuesday, Dec. 18

And Mary said, "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. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

- Luke 1:46-55

This passage, the Song of Mary, is also called, "The Magnificat" ("my soul magnifies"). God's Spirit truly was magnified in Mary. And her vision of God and of the Kingdom was magnified as well. Filled with Old Testament references it demonstrates a great understanding of how God works. Many scholars feel that this was a poem or song from the earliest Christians, inserted into the Christmas story. Of course, it may have come from Mary herself, or at the very least it was reflective of her faith, magnified!

Prayer: Holy God, help me to understand your ways and your heart, like Mary. Amen.

Ponder: God is magnified through our praise.

Week 3, Wednesday, Dec. 19

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.
- Luke 2:1-2

Caesar Augustus was the founder of the Roman Empire. He ruled from 27 BC to 14 AD. Quirinius (his friends just called him "Q") was born in 51 BC and died in 21 AD. These were real people, figures in history. Luke mentions them as a way of saying, "This is not a once-upon-a-time story." God actually broke into human history in Jesus of Bethlehem.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, break into my life once again. And break into our world once again. Come with your peace and justice. Amen.

Ponder: What might God breaking into this world look like?



Week 3, Thursday, Dec. 20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. - Luke 2:1-7

Jesus, the King of Kings, wasn't born in a palace. He wasn't even born in a decent hotel. Apparently he was born in a stable, for his first bed was a feeding trough, a manger. For he came not to dominate us but to connect with us, to reconcile with us, to become one with us. The palace couldn't achieve that. It took a manger.

Prayer: *Holy and Loving God, help me to make room in the inn of my heart and life for You, this Christmas and always. Amen.*

Ponder: Making room for God.

(Notice the passage doesn't say that Jesus was born in a stable, just that he was placed in a manger. If it was a stable it was probably one of the caves around Bethlehem, used to house animals, thus the art on the front cover. The Bible also doesn't say that Mary rode on a donkey to Bethlehem. You'll also see that it doesn't say there were 3 wise men, only 3 gifts. I think there were probably 4 wise men and one of them forgot to bring a gift. After all, they were wise *men*.)

Week 3, Friday, Dec. 21

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see-I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

- Luke 2:8-11

Few verses sum up Christmas better than this one: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ (Messiah) the Lord."

Unto you. That's the important thing to understand. Christmas is for you. A famous preacher once said, "If you were the only person on earth, Jesus still would have been born for you."

Prayer: Thank You, Gracious God, for your perfect gift, Christ himself, given for me. Amen.

Ponder: How the Good News is for you.



Week 3, Saturday, Dec. 22

This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

- Luke 2:12-20

If First Century Israel had had a caste system shepherds would have been officially at the bottom. Not respected. Thought of as untrustworthy. Nobodies. And yet . . . the first birth announcement was sent from heaven just for them! Apparently God's love encompasses everyone. No one is left out. No one is out of reach. Not even you.

Prayer: *Thank You, God, that the Good News is for shepherds like me. Amen.*

Ponder: The pure joy of the shepherds.

Week 4, Sunday, Dec. 23

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."

- Matthew 2:1-8

From shepherds to wise men, the Good News is for all. The down and out, the up and in. They all need a Savior. And they all got one. (This passage also foreshadows the faith spreading beyond Israel to the Gentiles, as Magi from afar come to honor him.)

Prayer: *O God, make me wise to seek after You, for You promised that those who seek shall find. Amen.*

Ponder: How do I seek God?



Week 4, Christmas Eve, Dec. 24

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

- Matthew 2:9-11

One of the best parts of Christmas is getting someone just the right gift. The Wise Men did just that. Gold is a fitting gift for a king. Frankincense was used in the temple by the priests. And myrrh was used to embalm the dead, thus foreshadowing Christ's sacrifice. Perfect gifts for Jesus our King, Priest and Sacrifice.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I kneel before You and humbly offer You the gifts that I can give – my gratitude, my love, my life. Amen.

Ponder: Kneeling before the Christ Child.



Christmas Day, Dec. 25

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

- John 1:1-4, 9-14

Jesus Christ is God's Word *incarnate* ("made flesh"). Most Christians believe that he's not the only word on the subject of God, but he is the decisive Word for us. He speaks God's Truth. He embodies God's Love. He shines God's Light. The Light has come! Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Thank You, Lord Jesus, for your birth into the world and into my heart this day and always. In your precious and holy Name we pray. Amen and Amen.

Ponder: The sheer wonder of it all, when He who made everything that is and ever will be, became one of us.