



HOPE

“For there is born to you...”

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Devotions for the Advent Season

December 2015

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29

Luke 1:18-20 And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. "But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."

**PREPARING FOR THE COMING OF CHRIST
WITH HUMBLE SUBMISSION: ZACHARIAS (I)**

The priest, Zacharias, and his wife, Elizabeth, had been specially chosen by God to play an important role as the Savior Jesus was about to come into this world, born of His mother, Mary. They too were to have a child. Their child would not be the Savior, but he would be the designated forerunner for the Savior, who had been prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures. Their son would be John the Baptist and his preaching and ministry would prepare the way for the preaching and ministry of Jesus Himself.

Indeed, a high honor had been bestowed upon Zacharias and Elizabeth as they were chosen to be the parents of John the Baptist. However, they would not be your typical parents. They were very old; in fact, much too old to bear a son, according to natural human capabilities. Even Zacharias himself questioned if such a thing could actually be. Unfortunately, this question stemmed from a lack of trust in the Word of God that came to him through the angel. Because of this, God brought a submission of humility upon Zacharias. He would not be able to use his tongue for speech -- the tongue with which he questioned God -- until the time that John would be born.

Sometimes God brings things into the lives of His people to humble them before Him, especially when for a time they forget to humbly submit themselves to Him and His Word. He does not do this to hurt us, rather He does this because He loves us. He does this to bring us closer to him. He does this to prepare our hearts through humble submission -- as He comes to us to dwell with us.

*Dear Lord, in high compassion
Bend down with Advent grace.
My heart, I pray, refashion
With mercy from Your face.*

*Come from the thankless inn
To make my heart Your manger
That I, no more a stranger,
Eternal praise begin.*

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24

Luke 2:15-18 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

LET'S GO TO BETHLEHEM — WITH THE SHEPHERDS

It surely wasn't the first time they had gone to Bethlehem. No doubt these men, though most familiar with the fields, knew their way around the city of David. Just because they spent most of their time with the sheep doesn't mean they didn't also spend time with fellow human beings.

But their purpose in coming to town was far from ordinary that first Christmas Eve. They hadn't planned to make the trip. They weren't looking for feed for the sheep. They were following up on a Word of God. So, it was really God who sent them to town.

It wasn't that they doubted the word of the angels. Rather, they were certain that the event had come to pass, just as they had been told. To find the child they had only to follow the signs.

They did, and they found Him of whom the angels sang. But they didn't just head back out to the fields after they saw the Child Jesus. They made a point of telling others in Bethlehem (and beyond?) all the things they had been told about him. Their message wasn't merely about the angels, but about Him of whom the angels sang! And those who heard were amazed.

If the Shepherds, equipped with the simple Word, could be so bold, then so can we! There is more to be told than that He was born. He lived, and died and rose again to reconcile us to God. People today won't always be amazed; not everyone will be overcome by the Gospel of Christ. But that's not why we speak, is it? We direct people to Bethlehem, to Calvary and to Christ because He rules and reigns from the throne of our hearts. Let's go to Bethlehem and then tell others all about His birth -- and what happened afterward.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 23

Psalm 8:1 Jehovah our Lord, How majestic Your name in all the earth! Who set Your splendor upon the heavens!

THE MAJESTIC NAME

How wonderful the name of God is! How high, how lofty, how majestic it stands above all the earth. There is no other name that compares to it. Jehovah, the merciful God of promises fulfilled is His name. Come Advent and on Christmas Eve we especially retrace the countless promises of Jehovah and see in Jesus the fulfillment of them all. Not one promise made is left undone, unkept.

Who in all the earth, what name among all the names heralded as great and mighty can make such a claim? Who can demonstrate such faithfulness? How majestic, how splendid is that name to us.

In reflecting upon one's life, one's past and present, and looking to the days that yet may be, they are days filled with sin. Days that end with but one confession -- I am chief of sinners. Days wherein I know that even the very best of my righteousness is still a greasy filthy rag that I would dare not present to God as justification.

Yet because of Jehovah, the crimson sins, the scarlet sins, are white as wool, as pure as new fallen snow. Because His mercy fails not, His promises are "yea and amen" and always shall be.

There is the majesty of the name of Jehovah. There is the splendor that He has set upon the heavens above, Jesus who was slain, and is alive forever more, seated at the right hand of the Father. Jesus glory, His work, His righteousness, His death, His rising, His ascending, His living forever is given to me by faith. This I possess as mine. I am forgiven. How great, glorious, majestic and splendid is the name Jehovah, our Lord!



MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30

Luke 1:59-64 So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John." But they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name." So they made signs to his father -- what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God.

PREPARING FOR THE COMING OF CHRIST WITH HUMBLE SUBMISSION: ZACHARIAS (II)

We have heard how initially Zacharias doubted the Word of God in that he found it hard to believe that he and his wife, Elizabeth, could actually have a child in their old age. We have heard how, because Zacharias did not fully and humbly submit his own doubts to the sureness of God's promises, that God placed upon Zacharias a type of humbled submission, taking away his ability to speak.

Well, as we can see, throughout the course of Elizabeth's pregnancy, Zacharias was moved to humbly submit himself to God and His will. So much so, that He and Elizabeth were not afraid to make clear to those who questioned them about their son's name. It was to be John. The relatives and neighbors thought that was an odd choice, if not a bad one. After all, Zacharias had gone childless into his old age, and now was his chance to name the boy after himself.

That may have seemed like a good plan according to the ways of this world, but that was not God's plan. God said that the child would be named John, and after his initial doubts, Zacharias humbly submitted himself to God and His plan -- right down to the detail of the child's name. And God's plan for this child was more than just a name. God's plan for Zacharias, Elizabeth and John was intimately connected with the plan for the coming of His own Son into this world. Through the humble submission of faith, Zacharias and Elizabeth were being prepared to see the coming of the Christ into this world.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1

Luke 1:43-45 "But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord."

PREPARING FOR THE COMING OF CHRIST WITH HUMBLE SUBMISSION: ELIZABETH

I think it would be safe to say that Elizabeth and her husband, the priest Zacharias, were experiencing quite an exciting time in their lives. They had gone through their entire lives childless and had come into old age. Yet they had conceived a child when, by all earthly standards, that shouldn't have happened.

But it wasn't earthly standards that were determining the events that were unfolding in their lives -- it was the will of God, who can do anything, at any time He desires. His desire was to bless Zacharias and Elizabeth with a child in their old age.

After so many years of waiting for a child to call her own, it would have been easy for Elizabeth to think only about her own wonderful and unique situation, but as soon as Mary entered the her house for a visit, she and the baby in her womb were led by the Holy Spirit to understand that they must humbly defer and submit themselves to the One who was carried within the womb of Mary.

As we come into this Advent season, as always, may we place ourselves, and all things in our lives, in humble submission before the Christ Child.

*Christ
IS Coming!*

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22

Psalm 95:1 Oh come, Let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our Salvation!

SHOUTING FOR JOY TO THE LORD!

When are you most likely to shout for joy? This is not that difficult of a question to answer. We shout for joy when we are happiest, when we have received some unexpected gift, some unexpected good news or have done something extra-ordinary.

Those times may be far and few between or seem so to us. After all for the most part our days are days of hum drum routine and the daily routine of getting up, going to school, work or if you are retired getting up to do what? This hardly seems like something to get excited about, much more reason to shout for joy so that your neighbors peek out their doors and windows to see what it is that has caused you such joy.

Looking at our daily routines from a completely different point of view we find every reason to rise in the morning, step outside and let loose a joyous shout in praise of our Lord. We are the created; He is the Creator not the other way around no matter how much we might like to beg to differ. The world does not revolve around us; it revolves because of the mercy and grace of our Lord. What we have of goods and friends and work and life in all aspects of it is not owed us, it is given to us as a gift from our Father in heaven. When we understand this, that even the smallest of things in our life is a gift, our hearts fill up with happiness and our lips open and we give voice to a joyful cry to our Lord, as we go on in life.

*Heaven
and Nature
Sing*

MONDAY, DECEMBER 21

*Jeremiah 23:6 In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety.
This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.*

A HELPER JUST HE COMES TO THEE

Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Flash, Green Lantern, Aquaman are all members of what outfit? Your answer depends on your age and your reading/viewing habits as a youngster. They were all in the Justice League of America, a crime-fighting creation of DC Comics. And, of course, before that on radio and TV The Lone Ranger "fought for justice in the American West."

We humans do have a preoccupation with justice, don't we? And since none of us sinners are just, one might wonder if the popularity of such fictional characters doesn't reflect fallen man's yearning for what was lost in Eden.

The hitch, of course, is that we want justice for Hitler and serial killers but not for gossips or greedy folks like ourselves. For we agree with David of old: "If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" (Psalm 130:3).

But our King IS just -- and we welcome His coming. For not only does He rule with fairness and impartiality, He places His utterly just, completely righteous self on the line for us, "the just for the unjust, the He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

King Jesus is exactly the kind of King we need, as the prophet of old proclaimed, "Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9).

*A Helper just He comes to thee,
A Helper just He comes to thee,
His chariot is humility,
His kingly crown is holiness,
His scepter, pity in distress,
The end of all our woe He brings;
Wherefore the earth is glad and sings:
We praise Thee, Savior, now,
Mighty in deed art Thou!
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 73:2)*

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2

Matthew 1:19-20, 24 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife.

PREPARING FOR THE COMING OF CHRIST WITH HUMBLE SUBMISSION: JOSEPH

According to God's plan, Mary was to be the mother of the Christ Child, who would be God's own Son. Also, according to God's plan, Joseph was the man chosen to fulfill the role of father as the Boy grew up. God had planned that Joseph would be Jesus' stepfather, so to speak.

From the Scriptures, we don't know much about this man, but from what we do hear about him, I think we begin to see why God was intent upon this man being the earthly father figure in His Son's life. From the Scripture reading above, we see that Joseph was a decent and caring man. Even when it appeared that the woman who was to become his wife had betrayed him, he was ultimately thinking of her well-being. He did not want her to become a public example to be shunned and ridiculed. More importantly, it would seem that God wanted Joseph to be the stepfather of His own Son because Joseph was a man that listened to the things that God told him.

When an angel came to Joseph in a dream and told him that Mary had not been unfaithful to him, but that she was pregnant as a result of being chosen for the special purpose of being the mother of the Son of God, Joseph humbly laid aside his own reason, logic, and probably even hurt feelings, submitting to God and His Word.

As we prepare for the coming of our Savior, Jesus, may God grant us humble submission to hear and believe His Word.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3

Luke 1:30-31, 38 Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS." ... Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

PREPARING FOR THE COMING OF CHRIST WITH HUMBLE SUBMISSION: MARY

Of all those people preparing for the coming of Christ into this world, Mary was the most intimately connected to His coming in the flesh. After all, it would be her flesh that He would take on (except without sin), as she would be His biological mother.

We often hear about what a great blessing this was for Mary -- and it was; in the Bible she herself attests to this. But also what an overwhelming responsibility! After all, Mary was an ordinary, sinful human like the rest of us. As she prepared for the coming of Christ, she not only carried her son, she also carried her own Savior and the Savior of the world.

Furthermore, from an outward perspective, there would be those who would not know or believe the miraculous circumstances surrounding Mary's divinely arranged pregnancy. Most likely there would be those who would see Mary and think of her as one who failed to respect the institution of marriage. From an outward perspective, these things that Mary was being asked to do could have seemed quite difficult and inconvenient. However, according to His plan, God would ask Mary to humbly submit to Him and to trust Him as He brought His Christ to the world in this way. And submit she did, saying, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word."

During this time of year, sometimes preparing for the coming of Christ gets to be "inconvenient" with everything else that is going on. May the Holy Spirit bless us with an attitude like that of Mary. May we humbly submit to God and His Word as we prepare this Advent season for the coming of Christ.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20

Matthew 14:14 And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick.

HIS SCEPTER, PITY IN DISTRESS

When Prince Charles of Great Britain finally becomes king there will be a ceremony of investiture. With great formality He will receive the royal robes, the gem-encrusted crown and the scepter that symbolizes the power of England's monarch.

When Roman soldiers mocked Jesus after Pilate sentenced Him to death by crucifixion, they "crowned" Him with thorns and thrust a stick into His bound hands. They considered the "non-crown" fitting for one who was no king and the fake scepter appropriate for one who clearly had no royal authority.

Wrong. And wrong again.

Jesus had come into this world a king (John 18:37) and throughout His ministry the outward evidence of His royal power was symbolized in a way far more observable than any scepter of wood, silver, gold and gems. The hymn-writer (Georg Weissel, TLH 73:2) has it right. Jesus' scepter, the symbol of His kingship, is His pity for those in distress.

When disciples of the imprisoned John the Baptizer came asking Jesus for evidence that He was indeed the coming King, He told them to observe how the prophet's words were being fulfilled, "The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matthew 11:5).

King Jesus continues to come to needy sinners with his scepter of pity. We know that first-hand. He has had pity on us in our distress, whether family distresses, physical distress or economic distress. And above all, he has had pity on us in the distress of our sin. For Christ our King carried that scepter all the way from the manger to the cross of Calvary.

Luke 1:35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."

HIS KINGLY CROWN IS HOLINESS

The Holy Spirit has enabled us to "overhear" the earth-shaking announcement that the angel Gabriel made to the future mother of the promised Savior. In fact, we've heard it so often that what Mary heard from the angel doesn't always strike us with the force it ought to and we pass right over things that should have us shaking our heads in wonder or breaking into spontaneous praise.

"I mean," Mary says, "How can I possibly give birth to a child since Joseph and I are not married and have not been 'pretending' we are?" And Gabriel tells her not to worry, she will become pregnant by a miracle of God and her firstborn will be holy, the eternal Son of God come into human flesh!

This is supposed to ease her mind? Doesn't this just present more problems? How is Mary ever going to explain this!? (And, as it turned out, this did become a "sticking point" for Joseph. cp. Mt 1:18-20). And how about the "holy" part? We can talk about the fact that our Savior had to be sinless from the start if we sinners were to be rescued, but Mary gets to ponder raising a child who literally does no wrong.

Truth be told, Mary would probably tell us that Jesus being holy -- being everything a loving Creator intended a loving human being to be -- was far from a problem in their home. That this, in fact, was at the heart of what set her Son apart from others from the start. (Isn't "set apart" the root meaning of holy?) Jesus' holiness was more like the crowning virtue that made His kindness, goodness, fairness and love shine like jewels in a royal diadem.

The King who is coming is just the king we poor sinners need (Heb 7:26) and "His kingly crown is holiness" (TLH 73:2).

Luke 2:1-7 And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

PREPARING FOR THE COMING OF CHRIST WITH HUMBLE SUBMISSION: THE SON OF GOD HIMSELF

This week we have looked at Zacharias, Elizabeth, Joseph, and Mary. We have seen them prepare for the coming Christ through humble submission to God and His Word. However, as they did this they were not accomplishing righteousness for themselves or anyone else. In fact, they were all sinners who prepared themselves for the coming of the Christ because of their great need for Him, their Savior from sin.

Yes, it is the humble submission of Jesus Himself that brings blessings to mankind. He humbled Himself by laying aside the full use of His divine glory.

He did this by God's design. He did this because this was the way that we sinners could be helped. He humbled Himself and the Son of God willingly submitted to His Father's will so that we would not be eternally lost. He lived a perfect human life in place of all people, and eventually He died the death and suffered the punishment of hell that every one of us deserves. This was not a fun or easy task. The work of our salvation was the hardest work of all, and yet the Son of God descended from on high and humbled Himself so that we might be saved.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5

Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.

AN ADVENT MESSAGE TO: ADAM AND EVE

We begin this week's advent meditations at the beginning -- 6,000 years ago in the Garden of Eden where our text records for us the very first promise of a coming Savior. Adam and Eve gave in to the temptation of the serpent and disobeyed the LORD, bringing sin and death upon God's perfect creation.

The key word in this Advent promise is "enmity." Enmity is deep rooted hatred. Enmity is the feeling one has for someone who is an enemy. In this case, God Himself will bring about enmity. The LORD says, "I will put enmity between . . ."

First the LORD says, "I will put enmity between you and the woman." Remember how the serpent had come to Eve under the guise of being her friend? He started by building a relationship with Eve, telling her that eating of the tree would be good for her and she would become like God. This "friendship" between Eve and the serpent would be done away with by God; it would be replaced with enmity between the two.

Next, "I will put enmity . . . between your seed and her Seed." This enmity would continue for quite a while. This enmity, which here started between Satan and Eve, would continue on through succeeding generations. Not only does this refer to the enmity between human beings and Satan but also between believers and unbelievers (John 8:44).

Finally, the LORD would put enmity between the Seed of the woman and Satan Himself. The Seed of the woman would come and would crush the head of Satan, who had led Adam and Eve into sin and brought death into God's perfect world.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18

Isaiah 40:3-4 In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

HIS CHARIOT IS HUMILITY

"Be Prepared to Meet Him" -- so say the hangings newly placed on pulpit and lectern in our church. And their color, of course, is purple. Let there be no mistake about it, the one coming is a king. And not just any king either. For when the ancient prophet pictures far-flung villages making preparations to meet and greet him, they are urged by his herald to ready the road in extraordinary ways: "Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain" (Isaiah 40:4).

After all, this king for whose coming we also prepare -- prepare even our hearts -- is the very King of kings. And the roadway we make ready is "the way for the LORD . . . a highway for our God." So the purple is surely in order -- and trumpets too -- along with proclamations and banners and hymns of praise: "Hail to the Lord's Anointed, Great David's greater Son! Hail, in the time appointed, His reign on earth begun!" (Lutheran Hymnal, 59:1)

But our King is not born in the capital city of the nation where He makes His arrival, not in Jerusalem but in little Bethlehem. And as we in our homes unpack the historic scenes that depict His royal coming, we look in vain for a kingly carriage. There are bright lights. There are angels making glad announcement. There are peasants bowing before Him. But they kneel before a manger, a feed trough in a stable. What kind of royal chariot is this?

It is the one He chose. For our King has not come to lord it over us but to walk among us -- indeed, to be one of us; to finally be treated as the least of us, dying the death Rome reserved for rebellious slaves. And it is for us whom sin has enslaved so terribly that heaven's high King comes so humbly, comes to lay down His life to set us free.

"The King of kings is drawing near, The Savior of the world is here. A Helper just He comes to thee, His chariot is humility, We praise Thee, Savior, now, Mighty in deed art Thou!" (TLH, 73:1-2)

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17

Psalm 24:9-10 Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty -- he is the King of glory.

THE KING OF GLORY WAITS

In 1642 Georg Weissel based his Advent hymn "Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates" on Psalm 24:7-10. While the event which originally occasioned the Psalm was the return of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (1 Samuel 5:6ff), Weissel well understood that the same LORD of Hosts came into our world of sinners in Bethlehem. Furthermore, he recognized that true Advent preparation is all about readying the heart for Jesus' entrance and rule there.

The Psalm dramatically pictures the LORD drawing near to the entrance of a fortified city, to a portal closed by both gates and doors. The gates of the main entrance to an ancient city were the iron latticework (portcullis) that was slotted in the walls and let down on either side of the huge wooden doors.

Because of sin we humans all too often close our hearts to Christ our King. Advent urges us to deal with this terrible tendency. What bars the way of Christ coming into your heart and taking His rightful place of rule there? What unconfessed sin? What selfish habit? What false concern?

Remember how your King came to you through His Bethlehem birth -- came so He might destroy the power of those sins which would keep Him from entering your heart and ruling there. Yes, it's the Lord Almighty, the King of Glory Himself who waits at the door to your heart and who enables you to open it wide to Him.

*Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates,
Behold the King of glory waits;
The King of kings is drawing near,
The Savior of the world is here;
Life and salvation He doth bring,
Wherefore rejoice and gladly sing.
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 73:1)*

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6

Genesis 12:3 *And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*

AN ADVENT MESSAGE TO: ABRAHAM

This morning we consider another promise of the coming Savior to another who would be an ancestor of that Savior: Abram.

This is the recorded call of Abram, when the LORD called Abram to leave his home in Ur, trusting that the LORD would provide something even better for him. Notice that the LORD actually makes four promises to Abram, and as we become familiar with the book of Genesis, we realize that the LORD repeats these promises to him throughout his life.

The first promise that the LORD gives to Abram is a land promise: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you." As we go on in Genesis, we will hear this promise of land being repeated over and over again from Genesis 12-22.

The second promise is a promise of descendants: "I will make you a great nation." We should note the greatness of this promise, remembering that Abram's wife Sarai was unable to bear children (Genesis 11:30).

The third promise is a blessing promise: "I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you." This is another promise that is repeated to Abraham throughout the coming pages of Genesis, though not as often as the land and descendant promises.

Then, finally we come the promise of the Savior: "And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." This part of the LORD's promise was not just speaking about how great of a person Abram would be, or how many people he would have as descendants, or even the great land that he would possess later on. Here, in the LORD's promise to Abram He is speaking of the blessing of the coming Savior and Head-crusher, Who would be a descendant of Abram, and Who would be the Savior for all people!

Genesis 49:9-10 Judah is a lions whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.

AN ADVENT MESSAGE TO: JUDAH

The words spoken by Jacob were prophetic words of the LORD, as once again the promised Savior is described. Judah (whose descendants would play a key role in the history of the LORD's people over the next 1500 years) is described as a lion. We often refer to the lion as "the king of the jungle." The lion attacks and devours his prey, and there is none who can challenge him. What a descriptive picture of our Savior, reminding us that His power is sure, and His victory certain! (Consider Revelation 5:5.)

It was Satan whom the Savior came to destroy and gain the victory over. But no matter what Satan tried to do, he could not derail God's deliverance through Jesus. That victory was won by His life, death and resurrection on the third day -- bringing us eternal rest!

The rest that our Savior would bring is also promised in our text. The promise about the Savior continues: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people." This part of the promise gives a different description of the coming Savior. Here the Savior is described as a ruler who would come from the tribe of Judah. The scepter was something that symbolized rule or power. From the time of David until the time of the Babylonian captivity, a descendant of Judah continuously sat on the throne. But this promise looks ahead to a greater king who would rule in a much greater sense.

This Ruler is the same Savior who was promised to Adam and Eve, to Abram, and is now described as the Rest Giver to Judah. Jesus is our long-promised and powerful Savior, the "Lion of the tribe of Judah," and He is Shiloh, the one Who has destroyed the power of Satan, bringing us eternal rest!

Luke 1:54-55 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.

MARY'S "AMEN"

*Let the earth now praise the Lord,
Who hath truly kept His word
And the sinners' Help and Friend
Now at last to us doth send.*

Does God ever make a promise that is not kept? Does He ever forget what He has said or neglect to perform a task He has set out to perform? When He promised a Savior to Adam and Eve in the garden and later to Abraham, was that Savior not born?

*Abram's promised great Reward,
Zion's Helper, Jacob's Lord --
Him of twofold race behold --
Truly came, as long foretold.*

When He promised to Mary that she would be the mother of the Son of God who would save His people from their sins, He kept that promise too. Now Mary rejoices with a triumphant "Amen!" Truly, truly, so shall it be. He has remembered to be merciful, even as He said!

*Welcome, O my Savior, now!
Hail! My Portion, Lord, art Thou
Here, too, in my heart, I pray,
Oh, prepare Thyself a way!*

Come, Lord Jesus. Help us to glorify your holy name this coming Christmas season. Finally also fulfill your promise to appear again in glory, for this too shall come to pass. Come again with the trumpet call of God that we may sing anew our glad triumphal song to the Lamb!

*And when Thou dost come again
As a glorious King to reign,
I with joy may see Thy face,
Freely ransomed by Thy grace.
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 91:1, 3-4, 9)*

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15

Luke 1:50 His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

CONTINUING MERCY

Psalms 136 says, "His love endures forever." Mary echoed that truth when she spoke of God's mercy extending from generation to generation.

Sometimes in our weakness we feel sorry for ourselves, thinking that others have enjoyed the mercy and favor of God so much more than we have. We might see and understand that God was merciful toward Abraham, Mary, and the Apostle Paul. We might know how God has been merciful to our grandparents or parents -- but we do not always act like that mercy extends also to us. We have doubts and fears, especially when trouble strikes, that perhaps God doesn't love us as He has loved others.

But does a grandfather love his grandchildren or great-grandchildren any less than he loves his own children? If our frail, human mercy can extend from generation to generation, how much more does God's mercy extend from generation to generation in His spiritual family! The same love, care, forgiveness, peace, and joy that the Almighty showered on His children in years past is poured out on you as well.

The Christ Child means blessing for you as much as He meant blessing for the prophets of old. His suffering, death, and resurrection means eternal life for you even as it meant the same for Abraham, Mary, and Paul. Even now you have the very treasure that Abraham had: peace with God through your Lord Jesus Christ.

His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation!



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8

1 Chronicles 17:12-14 He shall build Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son; and I will not take My mercy away from him, as I took it from him who was before you. And I will establish him in My house and in My kingdom forever; and his throne shall be established forever.

AN ADVENT MESSAGE TO: DAVID

David wanted to build a house for the LORD, but we are told that the LORD sent Nathan the prophet to David saying, "You shall not build Me a house to dwell in" (1 Chronicles 17:4). Furthermore, Nathan continues, "I tell you that the LORD will build you a house" (1 Chronicles 17:10). The LORD was not going to let David build a house for Him, but instead, the LORD says that He is going to build a house for David!

At first reading, most people think that the person referred to by the LORD in these verses is Solomon, the son of David who built a beautiful temple for the LORD after the death of his father. But the book of Chronicles was not written during the reign of David, nor was it written during the reign of Solomon, but after the kingdom of Judah had been destroyed by the Babylonians. So at the time that this was written, Solomon's glorious temple had been destroyed and there was no longer a son of David and Solomon in authority over the people of Judah. The kingdom of David and Solomon was only a memory now. These verses were recorded by Ezra in order to direct the returning captives to the future fulfillment of this promise in the coming Savior.

Look at the words of the LORD's promise again. One of David's descendants would build the LORD a house and would have a kingdom which would endure forever. This descendant would be the Son of God and He would remain in that house and in God's kingdom forever. It's helpful if we notice that the LORD in these verses is speaking about His kingdom, not David's kingdom. Jesus was the "Son of David" who also remained the Son of God. Through Jesus, the Son of David, the LORD has established an everlasting house -- the Holy Christian Church -- and His kingdom will have no end.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

AN ADVENT MESSAGE TO: AHAZ

During his reign over Judah, Ahaz was very unfaithful to the LORD, and led the people of Judah away from the worship of the true God. In fact, of all of Judah's kings, Ahaz was by far the most godless. Because of his unfaithfulness, the LORD allowed the King of Israel and the King of Syria to wage war on Judah and Jerusalem. King Ahaz and the people of Judah had seen what these two kings were capable of and were afraid of what they would do to them.

But the LORD sent the prophet Isaiah to King Ahaz to assure him that He would not allow Israel and Syria to terrorize Judah. Instead of being thankful, king Ahaz was arrogant enough to say that he did not want or need the help of the LORD.

The LORD had promised to deliver Judah from the hand of Israel and Syria, and even though Ahaz and the people had rejected that promise, it would remain true. Ahaz had his chance and now, whether he wanted it or not, the LORD would give him a sign. But the sign would not be for proof of their deliverance from Israel and Syria; it would be a sign of a much greater deliverance.

This deliverance would come through one who would be different than any other person who has ever lived. The difference would be that this Savior would be both True Man, and also True God. God had promised Adam and Eve, Abraham, Judah, and even king David that the Savior of the world would come from their descendants. This coming king would be from the line of kings following David, but this King would come to bring spiritual peace to earth through His work on the cross.

This Son of the virgin was Jesus -- Immanuel or "God with us." The LORD was referring not to the Child's actual name, but to what He would be. Jesus would be true man and also true God. In Jesus, God and man were brought together in one person for our deliverance.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 14

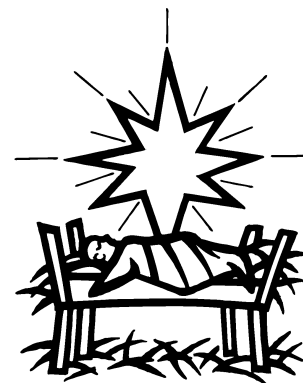
Luke 1:48b-49 From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me -- holy is his name.

GREAT THINGS

Surely we would agree that God did great things for Mary. He chose her to be the mother of His only Son. He took this poor, ordinary girl and bestowed upon her favor such that people from all generations since call her blessed. Not only that, but Mary also saw in faith that through this Child all the nations of the earth would find salvation. He was the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham (Genesis 22:18a).

Sometimes, however, we lose sight of the "great things" God has done for us in the sending of His Son. Perhaps we have heard the Christmas story so often that it has become "old news" to us and we don't appreciate it as much as we could. Maybe we have let the cares and troubles of this life drown out our meditation on the great things that happened that first Christmas. Could we benefit from spending more time with the word of God this season -- seeing and understanding what has been done for us at Bethlehem?

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Therefore Mary isn't the only one who can say, "The Mighty One has done great things for me!" We can all say it.



R E M E M B E R
THE CHILD

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13

Luke 1:48 For he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

IN HIS THOUGHTS

Do you ever feel as though you are too small and insignificant to be noticed by God? Do you ever feel as though your sins are so great that nobody as holy as the LORD would ever take the time to trouble Himself with you?

Maybe that is why Mary was chosen to be the mother of the Christ Child and not some woman great fame or power -- to remind us that God does not forget those who appear to be nothing in the eyes of the world.

Mary was but a humble servant of the Lord. She was a mere girl engaged to a carpenter. She was a plain, ordinary woman marrying a plain, ordinary man. Yet the Holy Spirit came upon her not only to place the Child Jesus into her womb, but also to strengthen her faith and trust in this same Son of God.

Likewise our God is mindful of us. He knows our every weakness. He sees our doubts and fears. Although we are but one on a planet of billions, He has us in mind, numbering even the very hairs on our heads. Never are we out of His thoughts, for we are His children and He remembers us who are but dust. He sent His Son into the world -- and He moved your heart to trust in that Son. Two great miracles!



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10

Luke 2:10-11 Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

AN ADVENT MESSAGE TO: YOU

Have you ever been called something other than your given name? Maybe you have been given a "pet name" by a loved one, or had a nickname that was given to you by your classmates when you were in school. Many people have nicknames they are given that stick with them for the rest of their lives. We are also known by our jobs, dividing us from others who may have the same name but a different occupation. There are many different ways that we can describe one another without using our personal names, and we do that more often than we may realize. These additional descriptions or titles add to our knowledge of who a person is.

In the past week we have been studying Old Testament promises of the coming Savior. These promises were also descriptions of who and what the Savior would be. In many prophecies of the Savior, we may at times have a difficult time understanding who is being spoken of because they don't ever use the name of the Savior we are so familiar with: Jesus. But even though the name "Jesus" is not used in ANY Old Testament promises of the Savior, we can be sure that He is the one who is being spoken of by how He is described.

We have seen Jesus described as the Head-crusher of Satan, the One through whom all people would be blessed, and the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the king Who would be the Son of God, and the Savior who would be true man and true God. Not once have we seen the name of Jesus, yet as we compare these descriptions to the New Testament (where we do find the name of Jesus) we see that these were promises of Jesus who would finally come for us. For you!

Like Adam and Eve, Abram, Judah, David and many others, you too can place your trust and our confidence in the LORD who has brought about your eternal deliverance from the serpent through the work of Jesus, Your Savior!

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11

Luke 1:46 And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord."

PRAISE HIM, PRAISE HIM

Psalms 92 says: "It is good to praise the LORD . . ." Thus Mary did well when she glorified the name of God upon greeting her relative Elizabeth in the hill country of Judea.

What does it mean to glorify God? It means to hold His name up for all to see. It means to point to Him and say, "Look! See what He has done! See that He is the great King above all!" On this occasion, Mary's praise reflected what God had done for her in sending His only Son into her own womb. Surely this was cause to declare to others His greatness -- for nobody else could do such a thing. The Father was now sending forth the Redeemer, the One who would save His people from their sins, and He would be called Jesus! Mary was to deliver the very One who would deliver her.

So she praised Him. She held His name in highest honor before Elizabeth, earnestly glorifying her God in the presence of another.

Part of our Christmas preparation involves praise. May we also glorify the name of the Lord in front of others, sharing with them the great things He has done for us. Is there someone you know before whom you can praise Him this very day? How can we contain ourselves? After all, this Child is not just born to Mary, but unto us a Son is given.

*With
Ceaseless
Praise!*

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12

Luke 1:47 And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior

MY SPIRIT REJOICES

There is so much sadness around us. Because of sin in the world there is destruction and famine, pain and sorrow. Two thousand years ago it was not any better, and yet we find Mary saying, "My spirit rejoices . . ."

The other day I caught a newspaper headline speaking about the "underground" Christian churches in China. The author of the article was simply amazed that those people could be singing "Joy to the World" while they suffered such persecution and terror from a nation so hostile to Christianity. "How can they be joyful?" the writer wondered.

The writer didn't understand that the Christians' joy does not come from within themselves, nor does it come from their surroundings. It is found in the same place Mary found it -- in God the Savior.

The Christ becomes our brother, taking on human flesh so that He can die and rise again to win for us eternal life. Looking to this everlasting joy, our spirits too are filled with rejoicing.

*Light and life to all He brings,
Ris'n with healing in His wings.
Mild He leaves His throne on high,
Born that man no more may die;
Born to raise the sons of earth;
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 94:3)*

**Rejoice!
Rejoice!
Rejoice!**