

A Journey Into

Joy



2023 Advent
Devotional



"The Manger" (cover) and
"The Annunciation"
by Mike Moyers
MikeMoyersFineArt.com

A Journey into Joy

Welcome to the season of Advent or “arrival,” in which the Church remembers the entrance of Christ into the world and looks with hope to his return. The four weeks of Advent beginning on December 3 will coincide with Pastor Alf’s sermon series from Philippians, *Joy on the Journey*. This devotional is meant to guide us as we travel—individually and collectively— toward the celebration of Christ-with-us that we call Christmas.

At the center of the Christmas story is a journey from Nazareth, the home of Mary and Joseph, to Bethlehem, the city of Jesus’s birth. That physical journey covered some 70 miles or more “as the crow flies,” but the story contains other journeys, too. Use this devotional to center each week on key Biblical characters and their internal journeys of faith as they experience the coming of Christ.

There are Bible readings, quotes, artwork, and music for each week. Use the QR codes to access playlists to accompany your Advent journey. Read the scriptures together as a family or in your personal times of devotion. Use the images for centering prayer, or simply as reminders of the beauty of the Biblical story. Each week, a video will be available at advent.mdpc.org to lead you through the lighting of an Advent wreath or candle in your own home, or with neighbors and friends. And of course, you and your family can visit the MDPC campus throughout the season for special holiday events, and enjoy drop-in moments together with others in The Nook.

“As we prepare our [homes] for the coming Christmas season, we would also prepare our hearts for the returning Christ. You came once for your people, O Lord, and you will come for us again. We would prepare you room here in our hearts...Lord Christ. Amen!”

‘From “A Liturgy to Mark the Start of The Christmas Season,”
Every Moment Holy, Vol. 1

Week 1 • Dec 3-9

Isaiah's Journey: From Valley to Vision

By the prophet Isaiah's day, Israel hardly resembled a light for the nations. The kingdom was split in two, subservient to foreign powers, and moving toward certain judgment. The people no longer trusted the promises of God but aligned themselves instead with the gods and rulers of other kingdoms. Isaiah's charge was to call the people of God to repentance, and to announce that from their valley of sin, syncretism and slavery, hope would arise.

Isaiah declared the vision that, in spite of Israel's failure to keep God's commands, God would keep His promises: a light would shine out of deep darkness, their yoke of slavery would be broken, and their oppressors would be defeated—through a child, a son, a counselor, father and prince whose reign of peace would never end!

Spotify playlist



[Week One](#)

Walking With Isaiah

Be On the Lookout/Caroline Cobb
Oh, Righteous Branch/Caroline Cobb
The Isaiah Song/All Nations Worship Assembly, Atlanta
The Lord is Coming/Scott Mulvahill
O Come, O Come Emmanuel/JJ Heller
Amaryllis/Christy Nockels
Dona Nobis Pacem/Yo-Yo Ma

Read **Isaiah 9:2-7 NLT**

- ² The people who walk in darkness
will see a great light.
For those who live in a land of deep darkness,
a light will shine.
- ³ You will enlarge the nation of Israel,
and its people will rejoice.
They will rejoice before You as people rejoice at the harvest
and like warriors dividing the plunder.
- ⁴ For You will break the yoke of their slavery
and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders.
You will break the oppressor's rod, just as You did
when You destroyed the army of Midian.

- ⁵ The boots of the warrior and the uniforms bloodstained by war will all
be burned. They will be fuel for the fire.
- ⁶ For a Child is born to us, a Son is given to us.
The government will rest on His shoulders.
And He will be called:
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
- ⁷ His government and its peace will never end.
He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of His ancestor
David for all eternity.
The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies
will make this happen!

Read **Isaiah 53; 1-12, RSV**

- ¹ Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
- ² For He grew up before Him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
He had no form or comeliness that we should look at Him,
and no beauty that we should desire Him.
- ³ He was despised and rejected by men;
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.
- ⁴ Surely He has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed Him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
- ⁵ But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole,
and with His stripes we are healed.
- ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned every one to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on Him
the iniquity of us all.
- ⁷ He was oppressed, and He was afflicted,
yet He opened not His mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb,
so He opened not His mouth.

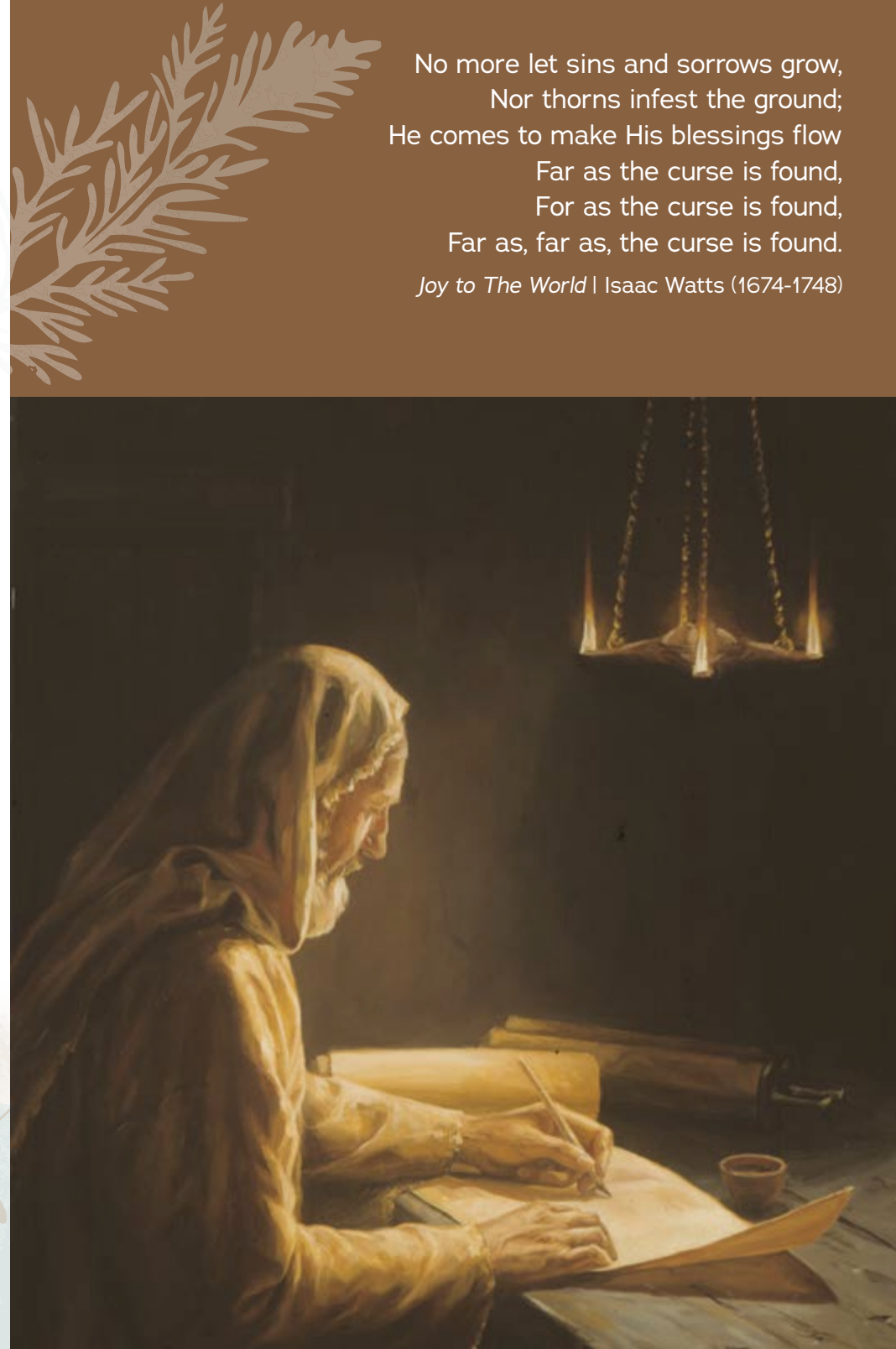
- ⁸ By oppression and judgment He was taken away;
and as for His generation, who considered
that He was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?
- ⁹ And they made His grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in His death,
although He had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in His mouth.
- ¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise Him;
He has put Him to grief;
when He makes Himself an offering for sin,
He shall see His offspring, He shall prolong His days;
the will of the Lord shall prosper in His hand;
- ¹¹ He shall see the fruit of the travail of His soul and be satisfied;
by His knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous;
and He shall bear their iniquities.
- ¹² Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,
and He shall divide the spoil with the strong;
because He poured out His soul to death,
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet He bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

Prayer:

Father, lift our eyes beyond the valleys in our lives to the vision of
Your precious Son's power, love, and grace. Thank You for keeping Your
promises to us, even when our faith is weak. You are the God who saves!
Thank You for seeing our great need and for sending us Your Son. Amen.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
For as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

Joy to The World | Isaac Watts (1674-1748)



Week 2 • Dec 10-16

Zechariah & Elizabeth's Journey: From Emptiness to Expectancy

Zechariah and Elizabeth were a faithful, aging Jewish couple, a priest, and the daughter of a priest, who lived in the time of Herod, King of Judah. They were childless, but always longed for children. One day an angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah in the temple to say that his prayers had been heard. He and Elizabeth would become parents. Very old parents. "Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son," the angel said, "and you shall call his name John...and he will be great before the Lord."

"How shall I know this," Zechariah asked the angel. (He understood the natural odds were not in his favor!) The angel told Zechariah that he had been sent from God to bring this good news...and that until the baby was born, Zechariah would be unable to speak. Somehow, in the nine months until the baby's birth, Zechariah and Elizabeth's silent emptiness grew into hopeful expectancy. Their boy John, whose father was struck dumb, would become "a voice crying in the wilderness," and would one day announce of his cousin Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

Walking With Zechariah and Elizabeth

Elizabeth/Keith & Kristyn Getty, Ellie Holcombe

The Song of Zechariah/Alabaster Co.

How Long, O Lord, How Long/Sovereign Grace

A Child Will Lead Us All/Drew Miller

Great Rejoicing/Sandra McCracken

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus/Wilder Adkins



[Week Two](#)

Spotify playlist

Read **Luke 1:5-25, 39-45, 57-79** RSV

⁵ In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. ⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

⁸ Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, ⁹ according to the custom of the priesthood, it fell to him by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. ¹¹ And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness,

and many will rejoice at his birth;

¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord,

and he shall drink no wine nor strong drink,

and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit,

even from his mother's womb.

¹⁶ And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God,

¹⁷ and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah,

to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,

and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,

to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

¹⁸ And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." ¹⁹ And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. ²⁰ And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." ²¹ And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they wondered at his delay in the temple. ²² And when he came out, he could not speak to them, and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he made signs to them and remained dumb. ²³ And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

²⁴ After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she hid herself, saying, ²⁵ "Thus the Lord has done to me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men."

³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted me, that

Prayer:

God, You fill what is empty with life. In Your presence there is fullness of joy. You do what we cannot, and You always keep Your promises. You bring “light to those who are in darkness” and You “guide our feet into the way of peace.” Thank You for John, whose appearance prepared the way for Jesus, our Prince of Peace. Amen.

God's salvation liberates us
to become who we were meant to be:
A kingdom of people who serve Him
as He redeems every corner of our world
until the end of the age.

—Bette Dickson



the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to be delivered, and she gave birth to a son. ⁵⁸ And her neighbors and kinsfolk heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹ And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they would have named him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰ but his mother said, “Not so; he shall be called John.” ⁶¹ And they said to her, “None of your kindred is called by this name.” ⁶² And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he would have him called. ⁶³ And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all marveled. ⁶⁴ And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. ⁶⁵ And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea; ⁶⁶ and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.

⁶⁷ And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying,

⁶⁸ “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people,

⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of His servant David,

⁷⁰ as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old,

⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies,
and from the hand of all who hate us;

⁷² to perform the mercy promised to our fathers,
and to remember His holy covenant,

⁷³ the oath which He swore to our father Abraham,

⁷⁴ to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve Him without fear,

⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.

⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways,

⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to His people
in the forgiveness of their sins,

⁷⁸ through the tender mercy of our God,
when the day shall dawn upon us from on high

⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Week 3 • Dec 17-23

Mary and Joseph's Journey: From Promise to Presence

Mary and Joseph were an ordinary, soon-to-be-married young Galilean couple...until they weren't. Until both were visited by angels with news that felt deeply personal, but was in fact, world-changing. God made great promises to these two, but they kept the news to themselves, waiting quietly for God to reveal what only they were told.

For them, Jesus's birth changed everything. The course of their own lives and the course of history. Nothing would ever be the same. "He who is mighty has done great things for me," Mary said, "and holy is His name." How has the presence of Jesus changed you? What great things has He done for you?

Spotify playlist



[Week Three](#)

Walking With Mary and Joseph

Mary Did You Know/Pentatonix

Breath of Heaven/Amy Grant

Labor of Love/Jill Phillips

And it Came to Pass/Andy Gullahorn

Joseph's Lullaby/Mercy Me

Mary and Joseph/David Barnes

Go Tell It on the Mountain/Jason Gray

Read **Luke 1: 26-38, 46-55, RSV**

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus.

³² 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 father David,

³³ and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" ³⁵ And 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 called holy, the Son of God.

³⁶ And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For with God nothing will be impossible." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

⁴⁶ And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden.

For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.

⁵⁰ And his mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with His arm, He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,

⁵² He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree;

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.

⁵⁴ He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy,

⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to His posterity forever."

Read **Matthew 1: 18-25, RSV**

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; ¹⁹ and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; ²¹ she will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He

will save His people from their sins.”²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel” (which means, God with us).

²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called His name Jesus.

Prayer:

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, thank You for the promise of deliverance that came true in the presence of this One who is both Son of God and Son of Man. In You, Jesus, all the promises of God are “yes” and “amen.” Your arrival changed everything. Because of You we can be reconciled to God, and adopted into His family as fellow-heirs of a kingdom that never ends. So with the angels we say, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” Amen.

O Lord, you are the musician,
and we are all your instruments.
You breathe, and we come to life.
You pluck the strings of our hearts,
and we become a psalm.
You come, and we must sing.

—Walter Wangerin, Jr.



“The Journey to Bethlehem”
by Mike Moyers • MikeMoyersFineArt.com

Week 4 • Dec 24-30

Simeon & Anna's Journey: From Longing to Lasting Joy

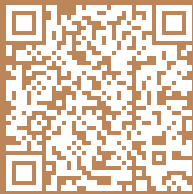
When you know, you know. When Simeon saw eight-day-old Jesus in the temple with his parents, he knew. So did the prophetess, Anna. This child was the salvation of God, a light to the gentiles, and glory to Israel. The Messiah. The promised one. Can you imagine Simeon's joy as he held the child? How he must have felt knowing that the baby in his arms would both divide and deliver his people?

Both Simeon and Anna had longed for this moment for years...and one day, it arrived! Their longing was turned to lasting joy in the presence of Jesus, the Christ, the only begotten Son of God.

Walking With Simeon & Anna

Song of St. Simeon/

St. Vladimir Seminary Women's Sextet
Joy to the World/Francesca Battistelli
Emmanuel God With Us/Chris Tomlin, Anne Wilson
Today is the Savior's Day/Rend Collective
Your Praise Goes On/Crowder
Oh, for Joy/Folk Hymnal
Lord, Now Let Your Servant Depart in Peace/
The Gospel Coalition
There Will Be a Day/Caroline Cobb



Week Four

Spotify playlist

Read **Luke 2: 25-38, RSV**

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

²⁹ "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word;

³⁰ for mine eyes have seen thy salvation

³¹ which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel."

³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; ³⁴ and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

³⁶ And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, ³⁷ and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we long for You. You've come once, and we know You are coming again. Our hearts long to see you in your glory but until we do, we are grateful for Your Spirit who dwells in us and points us every day to You. Our eyes have seen Your salvation. You are our King. Even so, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.



O holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in,
Be born in us to-day.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell:
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel.

O Little Town of Bethlehem I
Bishop Phillips Brooks

Advent in the Nook

Throughout
December!



All are Welcome!

- Make a Christmas ornament
- Read the Christmas Story
- Enjoy a Cookie
- Celebrate the Advent Wreath
- Color a Picture
- Read a Kid's book

For all things holiday, visit holiday.mdpc.org.



Christmas Eve Services

good news of great joy for all people

Candlelight Service • 9:45am • Sanctuary

Contemporary worship style and Pastor Alf's Christmas Eve message.
Attend early to make room for guests at the evening services!

Spanish-language Service • 11:15am • Sanctuary

A Christmas Eve celebration with our Hispanic congregation

Family Service • 4:00pm • Sanctuary

Energetic, kid-friendly, and interactive!

Candlelight Services • 5:30, 7:00, 8:30pm

Traditional worship with choir, organ, and a chamber orchestra

Portuguese-language Service • 5:30pm • Chapel

A Christmas Eve celebration with our Brazilian congregation



This Devotional was created by Leigh McLeroy
Teacher and Writer-in-Residence
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