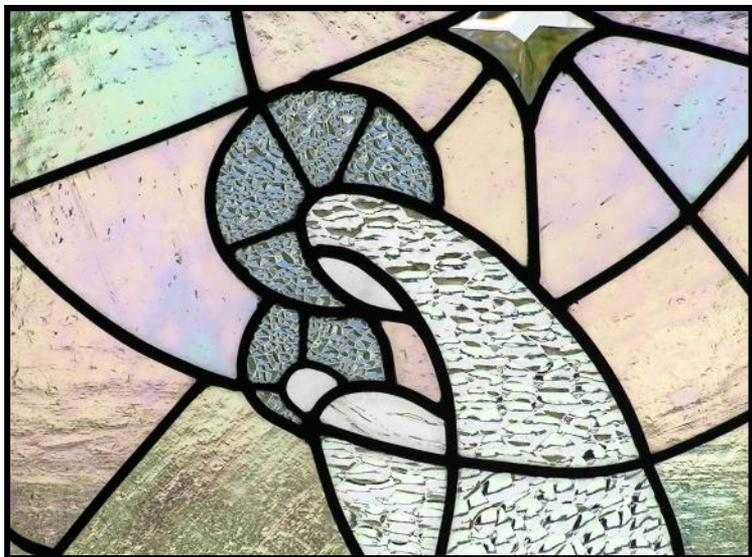


Libertyville Covenant Church

Advent Devotional

2015



Mary's

Christmas Journey

Welcome to our Advent devotional book for the 2015 Advent season. Here you will find writings from many of our people about Advent, from Old Testament prophecies to the New Testament fulfillment. But ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit working through this booklet that will make this anything more than interesting reading. So use this as you are led, whether for your personal devotions or as a family or small group.

There are ponderings for every weekday in Advent. On Saturdays, we have given you a picture by Nicholas Martell to ponder – for some of us pictures can be even more devotional than words. And we have left Sundays for your own ponderings. After church, take some time to write your own thoughts and prayers.

We hope this will be an aid to your worship this Advent season.

Pastor Steve



November 29 1st Sunday of Advent

Mary's Christmas Journey: The Angel

Monday, November 30

John 1:1-5

“A Rose Has Sprung Up”

*Lo, how a rose e'er blooming,
From tender stem hath sprung.
Of Jesse's lineage coming,
As men of old have sung.*

We often sing this Christmas carol during Advent without remembering that it is a prophecy of Isaiah's as well as a remembrance of Jesus's birth. But after all, the Christmas story always carries with it a message that goes well beyond the baby in a manger.

The first idea in “Lo, How a Rose” comes from verse 1 of our text, but it's verse 2 makes this larger point: “The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord.”

If you look, you can find a hint of that in the third stanza that we sing, though – like almost all third stanzas of almost all hymns – we don't know it as well. A literal translation from the German says,

*“The flower that smells so sweet to us
With its clear light dispels the darkness:
True man and true God!
He helps us from all trouble,
Saves us from sin and death.”*

Our delight in God's gift to us in Bethlehem can't stop with our wonder at Jesus's arrival . . . because his larger gift, of eternal life, “springs up” from the same root and blossoms as we share in the “knowledge and fear of the Lord.”

- Owen Youngman

Tuesday, December 1

John 1:14

“The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.” (v6)

Wolves and lambs, leopards and goats, calves and lions; natural enemies all, living together in peace and harmony. In our increasingly violent world, Isaiah’s poetical vision of peace in the Kingdom of God seems so far away, so impossible to imagine, so ridiculously naïve; and yet, we long for it still. It is indeed a vision that Christians have hoped and prayed for over the centuries. The world has often sought peace through power, peace through force, developing ever more sophisticated and efficient ways to destroy each other. The result is nothing but more grief, more sorrow, more hatred.

Isaiah’s vision is foolishness to the world, but as Paul tells us, while the message of the cross may be foolishness to those who are perishing, it is the power of God to those who are being saved. And so we hold fast to our hope, waiting in patient expectation during the Advent season for the arrival of the little child who will lead us to a world where the cobra no longer bites, where harm and destruction are no more, and where “the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

- Dennis Dieball

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

So begins the wondrous Christmas story we love to hear again and again. A deep and joyful story that can never be completely drowned out by the commercialization and the shallow happiness of busy people in our modern culture. A story of God's incarnation in the child born to Mary and Joseph in the little town of Bethlehem that first Christmas long ago. A story that has changed our whole world and divided history into before and after. What a privilege is ours in these days of Advent to wait with anticipation and prayer, with joyful song and peace in our hearts as we proclaim the true message of God with us, Emmanuel.

There is an old Sunday School song that starts, *"Into my heart, into my heart, come into my heart, Lord Jesus..."* In this special days let us proclaim that God continues to come to us, to offer joy, hope and peace by his grace. We welcome him again into our hearts by faith.

- Bruce Thorson

Thursday, December 3

Matthew 1:20-21

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,^[a] because he will save his people from their sins.”

During this first week of Advent we think about waiting, waiting for the birth of the Christ that we know is coming. To wait with expectation, we engage our senses—we are peering into the darkness, expecting the Light of the world to break through; we are listening to the Word of God, expecting to hear something that brings life to each of us.

Joseph also was watching, listening, pondering what to do with this situation that he and Mary faced. It turns out Joseph even listened to his dreams, where he heard the voice of God speak to him. The Lord appeared to him to reassure him and to give a promise about the Child who was coming. He reassured Joseph that he and Mary were part of his plan; the Child was part of his plan. The Holy Spirit was at work in what was happening.

Then the Lord gave Joseph a promise within a set of instructions. Mary, Joseph, and the Child each had a job to do. Mary’s was to give birth to a son. Joseph’s was to give him the name Jesus. And the Child’s job? He was to save his people from their sins! What a promise. The Advent of Jesus into the world was part of God’s glorious plan to offer salvation to people in a darkened world. The Light is coming! Our job is to watch, listen, rejoice!

- Linda Youngman

Friday, December 4

Matthew 1:22-25
Isaiah 7:14

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you^[a] a sign: The virgin^[b] will conceive and give birth to a son, and^[c] will call him Immanuel.^[d]

The angel has not only given Joseph instructions, he has also told Joseph what to expect in the coming days, weeks, and months. There are promises made specifically to Joseph, and we are also reminded that these events will fulfill the prophecies from Isaiah--promises for all people.

It must have been difficult for Joseph to fully understand what was about to happen in his life. Talk about mind blown! It must have been uncomfortable for Joseph as he obediently walked the journey God set before him. One's fiancé is not supposed to be pregnant. It must have been pure joy and amazement when Jesus was born, and God's promises were fulfilled (both to Joseph and to all people) before their eyes in that manger. The Savior of the world laid in their arms.

As incredible as the angel's instructions must have seemed, Joseph obeyed. He did just what the angel told him to do. The Christian life is at times difficult, and uncomfortable. We may feel the Holy Spirit nudging (or maybe shoving!) us to do things that are hard to understand or believe. But when we obey, we get the opportunity to glimpse the person He has created us to be. Let us be like Joseph, and wake up and do what God asks us to do.

- Julie Dahlberg

Saturday, December 5

Isaiah 11:1-9
Matthew 1:18-24

Picture to Ponder



December 6 *2nd Sunday of Advent*

Mary's Christmas Journey: Joseph

Monday, December 7

Malachi 3:1

Two Messengers

"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

The writings of the prophet Malachi came on the heels of those of Ezra and Nehemiah, his contemporaries. They were written to the remnant of the Jews that had returned to Palestine to rebuild the temple and renew their identity as the chosen people of God. Malachi was the last literary prophet. Biblical scholars refer to the 400-year period between his prophecy and the New Testament as the great "Period of Silence." But Malachi's words were not muted, for they were words of the Lord Almighty himself, the will of God that could not be impeded. They resounded through the 400-year silence and beyond; the gospel writers tell us that Jesus invoked this very passage to confirm to his disciples, to the crowds that followed him, and to the religious leaders of his day, that John the Baptist was the foretold messenger who had been sent to call the people to repentance and spiritual renewal. John was the first messenger, sent ahead like a herald that a ruler of the day might have dispatched to announce his coming and prepare the crowds to hear his decrees.

When Jesus invoked this passage, he also claimed the title of the "Messenger of the Covenant" as his own. Jesus, the second messenger, was the Lord himself, returning to dwell among his people. Unknown to his followers then, Jesus would soon fulfill the Old Testament covenant through his own sacrifice and establish a new covenant that would extend to all peoples and nations.

It is fitting that during Advent, we look forward to Jesus arrival as a baby in Bethlehem. But we should take care not to forget that this baby is the King of heaven and earth who lays claim to this world and to us. We are his, though we are not always ready to hear and serve him. Jesus has come to cleanse and sanctify us. It's time for us to prepare our hearts through repentance and renewing our commitment to Immanuel, God with us.

- Art Nikkel

Tuesday, December 8

Malachi 3:2-4

“A Refiner’s Fire”

“*Who can stand when he appears?*” Hey, wait a minute! Why is Malachi trying to scare us?

If you know Handel’s *Messiah*, you may recall that this text shows up really early in that famous piece – before the prophecy of Christ’s birth, let alone the “Hallelujah Chorus.” When the prophet Malachi looked around at the end of Old Testament times, he saw a real and pressing need for judgment in Israel. Many centuries later, Handel used his words to make the same point to his listeners, preparing them for the meaning of the Messiah’s birth, life, suffering, and resurrection..

In *Messiah*, the bass soloist first tells us that God is going to “shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land” before singing these verses from Malachi word for word. The music does make it sound pretty scary!

Actually, though, both Malachi and Handel want us to be reassured. What will be the result of this literal trial by fire? Our offerings – as we read elsewhere in Scripture, subject to rejection by God because of who we are and how we gave them – will now be brought “in righteousness . . . and be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by.”

In the Gospels, it’s put another way: “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:17). For us to “stand when he appears,” we have to be refined and ready to believe, purified and ready to serve. Christmas gives us an opportunity to rededicate ourselves in just this way.

- Owen Youngman

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit

Do we leap for joy at the coming of Advent? Most of us certainly did as children – the joy of anticipation was one of the most magical parts of Christmas. I remember as a child being so excited the night before Christmas that I could hardly sleep! But somewhere in the process of growing up, we might have lost our Advent joy. The Greek word Luke uses in verse 41 for “leapt” actually connotes the skipping and frisking of young animals. John’s prophetic leaping in Elizabeth’s womb was the joyful jumping and frolicking of a child anticipating the very first Advent. Often we see Advent as a time to look back and remember the birth of Jesus. We remember the day that salvation came to the world in the body of a tiny human baby. How often though do we see Advent not as a time to simply remember, but as a time to look forward and anticipate with joy the coming of our Lord to complete the restoring, redemptive work God began that first Christmas night? Are we leaping for joy in giddy anticipation of the return of Jesus or getting so caught up in the hustle and bustle of the holiday season that we forget the true meaning of Advent? This season, let us be fully present in activities and festivities of Advent while also holding onto that eager anticipation we all embodied as children. Let us anticipate the return of our Lord in our hearts as we join in celebration and in our hands as we participate in the work of furthering God’s kingdom.

- Alicia Reese

⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy.

Mary is declared to be blessed among women. She is so not only because the fruit of her womb that she bears is our Lord Jesus Christ, but she is called blessed because of her abiding faith in God. Mary heard, believed, and obeyed the word of God. She had faith in the God who, through her womb, was inaugurating God's kingdom and coming in human form to save God's people. The Jewish people were in an occupied land, oppressed by Roman rule, and long awaiting the coming of Messiah to save them. Most of their ideas of Messiah did not look like a helpless baby borne of a lowly handmaid. It would have been easy for Mary to dismiss the angel's announcement that she would bear Israel's Messiah. But Mary heard, believed, and obeyed. It is not enough to simply hear and believe: we must also obey. For what is faith without obedience? Later in Luke 11:28 Jesus says "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!" The very first disciple of Jesus' to this teaching was his own mother, who heard the word of God and obeyed it. Because of her faith and obedience she is presented as a model of faith for all of us. This Advent, let us hear the Word of God, obey Him, and leap for joy that the Messiah who inaugurated God's kingdom is returning to complete it.

Friday, December 11

Luke 1:45

⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

What a great ending to Elizabeth's song to Mary! Mary was blessed because of her faith. She simply believed that the Lord would do what He said He would do (NLT), that every word He said would come true (MSG), that what the Lord said to her would be accomplished (NIV).

Parenting of regular, not Son-of-God children is no easy task. How much more pressure must Mary have felt to get it right? Did she watch her diet during her pregnancy; get plenty of folic acid and iron? Did she never exasperate Jesus? Many times in my mothering adventures I've felt like there are so many opportunities to mess things up, or to undo God's doings in my kids' hearts. I can't even imagine the doubts Mary must have had.

Maybe she had doubts, maybe she didn't. It is clear here that she got the most important thing right: she believed God would do what He said He would do. The Bible tells us of other believing heroes, such as Abraham and Sarah, who also believed God would give them a son. Let us "major on the majors and not the minors" during this season of waiting, and believe that every word He said will come true.

- Julie Dahlberg

Saturday, December 12

Malachi 3:1-4
Luke 1:39-45

Picture to Ponder



December 13 *3rd Sunday of Advent*

Mary's Christmas Journey: Elizabeth

Monday, December 14

Micah 5:2-5

2 “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

More than seven centuries before the birth of Jesus, Micah predicted the arrival of the Messiah – to Bethlehem, the birthplace of King David. People of that day pictured a rich King, wearing glorious robes, riding in on a magnificent camel to rule over Israel. Of course today we know better – we know that Jesus came as a tiny babe, to a poor family, in a small poor town, with no place to sleep but a hay filled manger. And yet He did, as Micah predicted, ultimately rule, not just over Israel, but over the whole world.

But are we today any more enlightened than the people of Micah’s day? We celebrate the arrival of the King with feasting and partying and the bestowing of wonderful, often very expensive, gifts. Could we not celebrate the birth of our Lord in a way more fitting with the way in which he arrived on this Earth?

When I was a young teenager, my family had hit a bad spot financially, and (with the gentle urging of our parents) we all (my parents, my sisters aged 8 and 11, and I) decided that our Christmas that year would consist of gifts that did not cost a cent – things that we made, things of ours that we treasured but now would give to someone else in the family, things that we made or gave with love in our hearts, as God gives to us.

We went to work enthusiastically, deciding what we would give, making things, choosing what we would give to each person. When Christmas came we were all full of excitement about the gifts we were giving (not, as so often happens, what we were getting). And the gifts were wonderful – my 11 year old sister gave my mother a set of covers for small kitchen appliances that she had made and delicately embroidered herself, my father gave me his treasured stamp collection, and on and on.

Monday, December 14 (cont.)

But then came the mystery. For each person there was one special gift that clearly had been purchased and was wrapped with love. We all immediately started accusing each other of being the “Secret Santa” but everyone, quite convincingly, denied having anything to do with it. The mystery persisted for years and every Christmas we would revisit the event, trying to get the guilty party to confess. Eventually, after many years, the truth came out. The youngest of us all, my 8 year old sister, had taken the allowance she had been carefully saving since she was 3 and purchased a gift for each of us (including one for herself so as not to give away the secret). My mother had helped her shop (and, I suspect, contributed a little money of her own) – it was the only secret she ever managed to keep for very long.

Whenever I think of that very special Christmas I am reminded of how God gave us His most precious possession, His own Son, not expecting any great celebrating or gifts in return – just our love and caring for Him and for all mankind.

- Valerie Makkai

Tuesday, December 15

Luke 1:46-48

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

I have been trying to walk with Mary through part of her life’s journey. Are you as amazed as I am of her response to the visit by the angel? My mind floods with thoughts. Mary grew up in an insignificant town in the area of Galilee: Nazareth. She seems to be a normal young girl. As was the custom of the times she was early betrothed — a most solemn and binding commitment. But what about all the years between her birth and this time of preparation and waiting for marriage?

I think of her home life and particularly the influence of her mother. Women had a significant role — they were homemakers. It is easy to think of the many duties which filled the hours and days. There were, and are, numerous physical chores to keep a home running smoothly. These were times of work and instruction for the children. However, there was more. The mother shaped the values of her children. Often school was not available especially for girls along with skills and crafts taught there was opportunity to pass on their Jewish heritage, beliefs and customs. Every week the Friday night Sabbath meal was lovingly prepared for the family. I wonder as Mary’s mom went about these tasks, did she sing the hymns of praise which were part of the retelling of the story of Israel? Did Mary hear her mother’s heart of trust? Did the Holy Spirit use this mom in preparing a young girl for the holy, awesome responsibility that would be hers? In my mind I hear this mother signing Hannah’s song.

My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high — there is no one holy like the Lord. 1 Sam. 2

Or was it Miriam’s song from Ez. 15 —

Sing to the Lord for he is highly exalted. The horse and rider he hurled into the sea.

Tuesday, December 15 (cont.)

And so when the angel appeared to Mary, her heart was ready to yield to the news — “you will give birth to a Son.” No doubt there were some troubling moments: what would Joseph say? How would the community react? Is this truly possible? Mary’s response was of surrender to the Lord, not for her young dreams and will to be realized, but for God’s will to be done. Her heart and voice praised God for choosing her to share in His great plan of redemption.

Let us join with Mary in worship and praise. Today we have experienced the result of this birth in our salvation and unique relationship with the baby who is our Savior and Lord.

- Janis Carlson

Wednesday, December 16

Luke 1:49-50

Mary's Song Continues: Holy is His Name

"...for the Mighty One has done great things for me — Holy is His name. His mercy extends to those who fear Him, From generation to generation."

A personal Advent tradition of mine has been to listen to a CD recording of the Magnificat (Prelude of Faith/ Holy is His Name). The instrumental opening exudes a quiet, lilting softness, meditative and gentle. Mary's song enters, reflecting her reverence and worship of our mighty God, her humble acceptance of the miracle God is bestowing on her.

Mary continues: "Holy, holy, holy is His name," pausing, then repeating this chorus as if her being cannot contain all the wonder, majesty, awe and reverence she's experiencing.

What a wonder-filled example for us as we worship and celebrate this Advent season!

Holy and precious Lord, please help us to pause and be quiet this Advent season. May we be filled with gratitude, awe, wonder, and worship at your mercy and transformation of not only Mary's life, but even now, generations later of our individual lives as you provide, sustain, and work miracles that go beyond our understanding.

Holy, holy, holy is Your name,
Amen.

- Carol Dieball

Thursday, December 17

Luke 1:51-52

*He has performed mighty deeds with his arm,
he has scattered those who are proud
in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down
rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the
humble. New International Version (NIV)*

In the season of Advent we experience a time of waiting and anticipation of the coming of the Christ child born in Bethlehem. Its a wonderful time of preparation and expectancy that is in many ways a model for the life of faith. Preparing our hearts, waiting and expectant of how God will work in and through us in all of life.

But, did you know there are really two Advents? The first coming will come to its fullness and reach its culmination in the second Advent, when Christ will come in power and glory as he has promised. Christian hope is future oriented. Past and present are important, of course, but our strong conviction is that something more is yet to come. God is faithful and we look forward even now not just to Christmas day - but to a day we know not when Christ will return and God will reign and the kingdom of God will finally and fully be established. As the hymn writer has said, "O what a day that will be!" This is truly a word of hope and a call to live faithfully between the 'now' and the 'not yet'.

- Bruce Thorson

Friday, December 18

Luke 1:53

*"He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty."*

As Mary's words echo in our minds at this time of year, I'm reminded that there are many hungry in our region. Sadly one sees too many people in the Loop wanting a handout. I'm usually in a rush to catch a train, so I rarely stop. I should make more of an effort to be a Good Samaritan, although I do offer bars of various kinds when available. It seems prudent to avoid giving cash, but bars can be bartered as well as eaten. Anyway, one evening this fall I had gone by several persons sitting against lampposts and looking for help, when I passed a guy that didn't look any different. However, he had a bicycle on the ground next to him, and I didn't see a sign. He had just opened a cardboard box and pulled out the base of a German Christmas pyramid! As I passed by, I saw him set it near the curb and pondered what might have led to this odd sight. Then I snapped back to my life as a commuter, waiting for a delayed train and sitting in my sanctuary of metal on the way home.

Thinking of this incident, I wonder how often God provides "good things" that seem out of place in our busy lives, as we hunger for spiritual food. At this time of year I look forward to sharing the good food of a Swedish Julbord on Christmas Eve with family. Yet, the busy pace of life and the distractions of modern life too often deflect my full attention from the needs of others, as well those of my heart. Advent, in part through the Magnificat's verses, offers us much that is good to nourish our souls, if only we take the time to accept God's goodness.

Sadly I think that the latter part of the verse also should weigh on our hearts and minds. Living in the U.S. and Lake County offers us all amazing opportunities for riches. We have comforts that much of the world only dreams about. We spend a much smaller portion of our income (on average) for food than most of the citizens of earth. Still we waste an incredible amount of food, although there has been progress made in getting leftover food to those in need. Moreover, we use a much larger share of the earth's resources to sustain our lifestyle. So, how do we avoid being sent away empty?

- David Oppedahl

Saturday, December 19

1 Samuel 2:1-10
Luke 1:46-55

Picture to Ponder



December 20 *4th Sunday of Advent*

Mary's Christmas Journey: The Song

Monday, December 21

Isaiah 9:1-2

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” (v2)

Light. The thing we long for in the dark days of winter and perhaps the dark days of our souls. An age-old symbol of direction, wisdom, and goodness; *God saw that the light was good and he separated the light from the darkness* (Gen, 1:4). Whatever darkness we may find ourselves walking in these days, the good news is, we have a light – “a great light” Isaiah tells us, in the birth of Jesus. Like the mustard seed or yeast in the dough, it may at times be small, seemingly insignificant, but it is always there, burning brightly for those who seek it. It is the love of God made manifest in the birth of our Savior. It shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Even in the shadow of death, the light is there.

This Advent season, may we find our paths and our hearts warmly lit by the One who said “I am the light of the world.”

-Dennis Dieball

Tuesday, December 22

Isaiah 9:6-7

““To Us a Son is Given”

*“And his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God,
the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.”*

One of the most common and insistent questions that expectant parents get is, “Have you decided on a name yet?”

Narrowing down the list to just the right one (or two or three, depending on the number of “middle names”) is a pretty big job, and of course everyone in the family has an opinion.

Jesus, on the other hand, can’t be confined to a single name, and we get one list of them here. It’s such a good list that it shows up in one of the most famous, hardest-to-sing choruses in Handel’s *Messiah*, “For Unto Us a Child Is Born.” (And it doesn’t get any easier once we give him all these names, since “the government will be on his shoulders” – a pretty tall order at any time of history, right?)

Of course, the list of names for Jesus is much longer than those in this Old Testament text; in the New Testament, we add plenty of others, Son of God, Son of Man, Son of David, Light of the World ... you can undoubtedly think of many more.

Just as long as we don’t lose sight of how important the name “Jesus” itself is, as we read earlier this month: “You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). As Christmas dawns later this week, let’s give thanks again for the inexpressible gift that we have spent the month reading and singing about.

- Owen Youngman

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,

The season of Advent is drawing to a close, the waiting, anticipation and expectation are all building up. The time for the baby to be born wasn't coming anymore, it was here, it came! God's plan and timing are perfect. Even when we believe and obey--which Joseph and Mary did faithfully--circumstances don't always *feel* perfect. The road is not always easy peasey.

While it was prophesied in the Old Testament that the Messiah would be born into the family line of David, we don't see that the angels who visited Mary and Joseph mentioned a census. Requiring a long trip to Bethlehem. At the end of the pregnancy. When there's no room available at the village inn. Might they have been wondering if God was still paying attention to the details?

But He was, because Jesus was born at exactly the time God had planned, in exactly the place He had planned. The stars pointed to it, and the prophecies were fulfilled completely. Let us rest in the knowledge that God's plans for us are perfect, and that our obedience and faith don't always guarantee comfort and ease.

- Julie Dahlberg



Christmas

