

A close-up photograph of holly leaves and berries. The leaves are a mix of green and vibrant red, with some showing signs of aging or damage. The berries are bright red and glossy. The background is blurred, showing more of the same foliage.

WONDERFUL COUNSELOR

CORNERSTONE CHURCH

ADVENT 2021

Welcome To Advent and A Season of Supernatural Healing

The English word “advent” comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means “coming” or “visit.” The season of Advent is a time when Christians focus on the coming of Christ, whose birth we celebrate throughout the four Sundays before, and up to, Christmas. It is our time to remember who Jesus really is and welcome Him into our hearts in new ways.

If you’ve been around church for some time, at some point you have heard this scripture mentioned at Christmas:

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.

– Isaiah 9.6

I’ve heard these words from Isaiah for many years. It dawned on me just the other day that I’m not quite sure what it means to call Jesus “Wonderful Counselor,” and that’s what this devotional and our Advent services will be all about.

“*Wonderful*” does not refer to Jesus being a “really good” counselor. The Hebrew word “*pala*” refers to something that is outside the realm of human explanation. The same Hebrew word is used in Psalm 139.6, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it.” It describes something miraculous, something that fills us with awe and wonder. Something supernatural that is only from God!

“*Counselor*” originally referred to a king giving his people wise advice and guidance. When Isaiah refers to the Messiah as “Counselor” he means that this King will lead and guide people on pathways that honor God and bless those who travel them.

So, among other things, the message of Christmas is that we have been given an unending and supernatural source of guidance and healing if we will simply open our hearts to Jesus, the Messiah. In a season where people can struggle with depression and discouragement in greater ways, opening up your heart to the Wonderful Counselor can make this the most unforgettable Christmas ever.

As our church family walks you through Isaiah 9.1-9 in this devotional, and as you join us each Sunday morning (see the last page for service times and advent events), may the Wonderful Counselor *come* and *visit* you and give you greater peace than you have ever known. I pray you will not just have a “Merry Christmas” but a “Miraculous Christmas!”

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pastor Sam". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

**The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.**

**You have enlarged the nation
and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice
when dividing the plunder.**

**For as in the day of Midian's defeat,
you have shattered
the yoke that burdens them,
the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor.**

**Every warrior's boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.**

**For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.**

**And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

**Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.**

**He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.**

**The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.**

(Isaiah 9.2-7)



“The Messianic King”
Ruby Coaker (age 14)

Monday, November 29

THE ALL-EMBRACING KING

Brett Deal

“Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, ...without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” (Ephesians 2.12-13)

For most of my life, I've lived like a stranger in whatever culture was around me. I looked foreign to those I feel closest to, while ironically looking most like people who see the world very differently than I do. This is the case for most children of immigrants. We are adopted into the culture of our new country while still carrying the appearance of our parents' homeland. The question, “Where are you from?” is a constant reminder we don't quite look like we belong.

Surely, this was how the early Gentile followers of Jesus felt at times. They had embraced the good news of the Messiah but they didn't look Jewish, they didn't sound Jewish, they didn't even know or understand the whole story of Israel in the Old Testament. They felt beloved in Christ, but foreign in the gathering of believers – strangers in their own homes.

The early church struggled to be a unified gathering where every other person had the 'answer' to how the non-Jews in their midst should be appropriately grafted into the community. More circumcision! Practice the law! All the systems and traditions weighed on the shoulders of the Gentile believers.

Then Paul stands up and reminds them of where they came from, separated from Christ, lost and far away. Surely this set off painful alarm bells in their hearts, “Hey, you! You're not from around here...” But then Paul continues, speaking to the racially divided church in Ephesus, “in Christ you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ!” The King himself has brought you near, the Lord of all creation has made room for you at His table. All peoples, all nations, all tribes are made into one great kaleidoscopic people in Jesus (Galatians 3.28)!

*Father, thank you that in your Son I am made a citizen of your Kingdom.
Show me how to love others like my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.*



"God Provides"
Claudia Rees

Tuesday, November 30

THE FUTURE OF MY PAST TENSE WORLD

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light”
(Isaiah 9.2a)

Time is such a strange thing. People say “time is money” and “time waits for no man,” but with the same breath, will turn and say “time heals all wounds.” All these diverse—and potentially paradoxical views of time—can be dizzying. Can they all be right? Are they all wrong?

Perhaps being made in the image of God has fostered this strange relationship we have with time. We don't just live moment to moment, only able to focus on the foot of time in front of us. We carry with us the countless memories of the past in the rucksack of our minds, mixed and mingling with our aspirations and hopes for the future. Unlike God, however, we do not stand outside of space and time. We are confined within her, and chaff at her constraints. We see through time like a glass darkened by age, seeking to make sense of our past pain, realistically hold our dreams of the future, while juggling the responsibilities of today.

It's encouraging to see this struggle in the lives of the great women and men of the Bible. Elijah, the great prophet, who stands shoulder to shoulder with Moses was no stranger to this tension. He prophesied to the King of drought and watched as God withheld rain from the land (1 Kings 17). The people of Israel were walking in darkness, lost in the murky clouds of idolatry, and speaking God's word against the King was dangerous. Even still, Elijah choose to trust God with time.

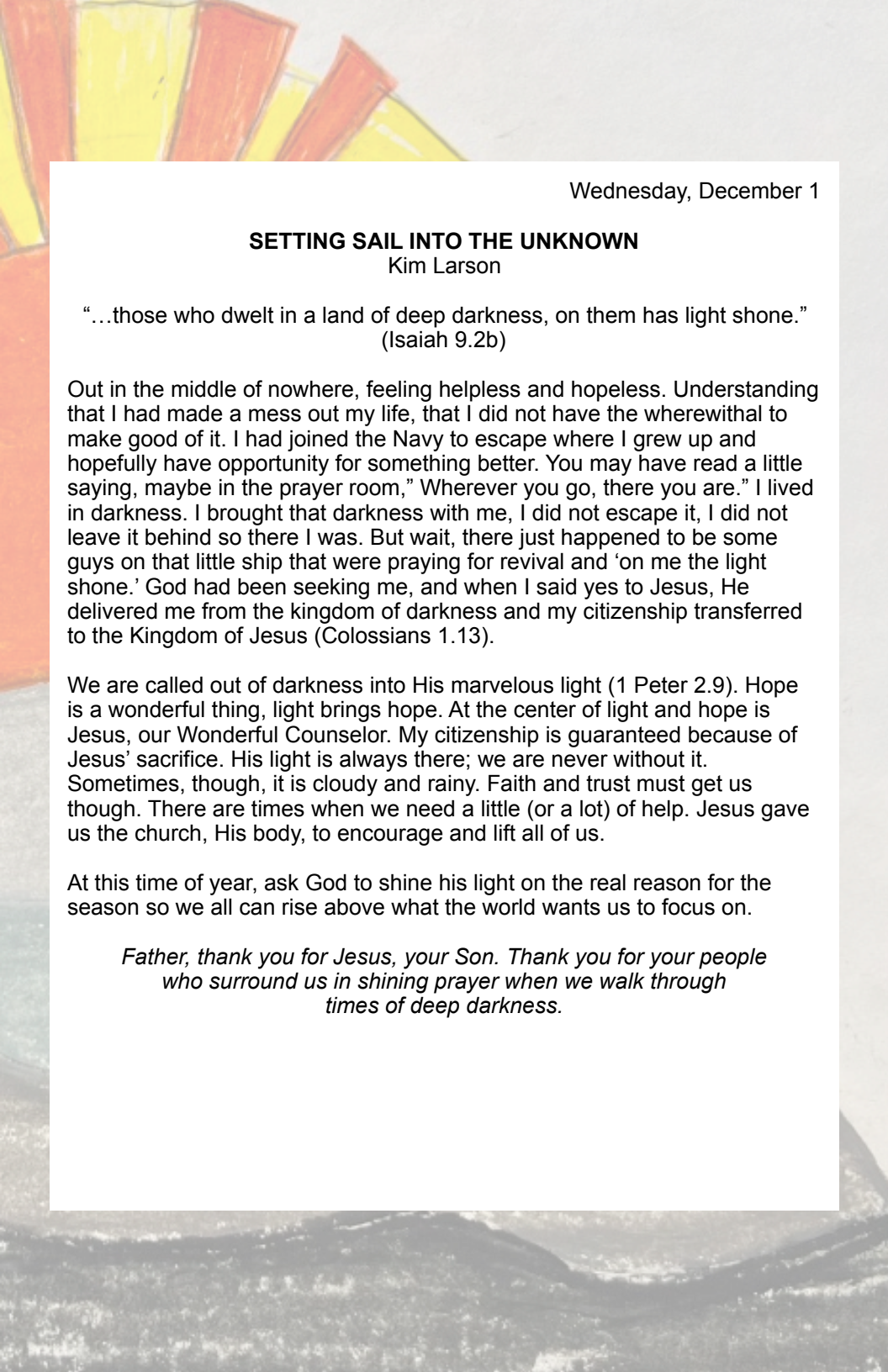
Centuries later, the prophet Isaiah would show God's supremacy over time. He proclaims the prophetic future in the past tenses as if it has already happened: the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light! With Isaiah we see God's already-not yet kingdom. We walk in the promise, surrounded by our fears and failures, believing for the dawn.

Perhaps the truest statement of time is that it is a tool in the hands of God. May God's faithfulness ignite our hope, even in the midst of our darkest nights, like a struck match. Deep in the shadows of our sorrow, where our only solace was pain to pierce the numbness, let us begin to rejoice that Jesus' light has already begun to shine!

*Father, thank you for using time for my good and for your glory.
Show me how to trust Jesus with my past pain,
current situations and future hopes.*



"A Light Has Shown"
Alexa & Adalyn Velasco (ages 10 & 8)



Wednesday, December 1

SETTING SAIL INTO THE UNKNOWN

Kim Larson

“...those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.”
(Isaiah 9.2b)

Out in the middle of nowhere, feeling helpless and hopeless. Understanding that I had made a mess out of my life, that I did not have the wherewithal to make good of it. I had joined the Navy to escape where I grew up and hopefully have opportunity for something better. You may have read a little saying, maybe in the prayer room, “Wherever you go, there you are.” I lived in darkness. I brought that darkness with me, I did not escape it, I did not leave it behind so there I was. But wait, there just happened to be some guys on that little ship that were praying for revival and ‘on me the light shone.’ God had been seeking me, and when I said yes to Jesus, He delivered me from the kingdom of darkness and my citizenship transferred to the Kingdom of Jesus (Colossians 1.13).

We are called out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2.9). Hope is a wonderful thing, light brings hope. At the center of light and hope is Jesus, our Wonderful Counselor. My citizenship is guaranteed because of Jesus’ sacrifice. His light is always there; we are never without it. Sometimes, though, it is cloudy and rainy. Faith and trust must get us through. There are times when we need a little (or a lot) of help. Jesus gave us the church, His body, to encourage and lift all of us.

At this time of year, ask God to shine his light on the real reason for the season so we all can rise above what the world wants us to focus on.

Father, thank you for Jesus, your Son. Thank you for your people who surround us in shining prayer when we walk through times of deep darkness.

Thursday, December 2

GOD DELIVERS ON HIS PROMISES

Jane Abbate

“You have multiplied the nation”
(Isaiah 9.3a)

God promised Abraham the impossible – having a son in his old age and that his family would grow for generations, more than the stars in the sky and countless as sand on the beach. Fast forward thousands of years, and Isaiah confirms in verse 9.3 that God made good on that promise. Abraham’s descendants multiplied into the nation of Israel, despite famine, plagues, persecution, sin, and war.

Fast forward another 700 years, and we witness that what began as an unbelievable promise was ultimately completed in the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God! God’s faithfulness confirms His character, proving that He can be trusted.

Would you rather base your decisions and future on the advice of other people, the influence of social media, and your own limited understanding? The promises of God are not possibilities but certainties on which we can base our lives. The Advent season is the perfect time to grow your knowledge about His promises.

Father God, as we study these few verses in Isaiah chapter 9, help me spend less time worrying about my problems and instead focus on Your promises to help me. You know all my needs. Show me in Your Word a promise I can cling to in this season of my life.

Friday, December 3

ONLY GOD

Matt Coffin

“you have increased its joy”
(Isaiah 9.3b)

We, in our weak estates, are constantly looking for the next great king, leader or man-made solution for life's problems. Often, we find ourselves thinking or saying, if only I could..., I had..., I knew... We're spiritual amnesiacs each day. So quickly we forget that the “the Who” should always come before “the how,” as Pastor Shawn reminded us this fall. Isaiah reminds here that only God can enlarge and increase us and our territory.

Only God can produce the harvest that brings a victorious warrior-like level of rejoicing. Only God can bring the joy of Psalm 4.7, which is the joy of David's confidence. Job 12.23 clarifies this passage in reminding us that only God makes nations great and destroys them, enlarges and disperses them. The Psalmist writes of the exceeding joy only God can provide – a joy that is not unlike the one whose pantry is overflowing, whose vineyards produce an abundance of wine-grapes. Only God can cure our hunger and forever nourish the emptiness. Only God can produce a thirst-quenching harvest of new wine and living water from a well that never runs dry.

If only, if only, if only... Let us consider who is on the throne of your “if only” season. Who has your increase, your victory, your joy? What will nourish your emptiness and quench your dry and thirsty soul? It is only God – through His son Jesus Christ, our bread and living water.

Father, only you can increase my joy, setting all the ‘what-ifs’ and ‘if-onlys’ to rest. Only you can still my heart and lead me into the peace of your salvation.



“A Child is Born”

Monday, December 6

JOY ON THE WIRE

Julianah Anderson

“they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.”
(Isaiah 9.3c)

How many of us feel like we are holding on for dear life? We feel like we are clutching the rope of sanity over the chasm of the swirling chaos over everyday life below. Life is like a trapeze act and we've stumbled, holding on the wire for dear life!

But take heart! The Bible tells us that anywhere the gospel is preached, it brings light to the darkest soul and joys with it! When we have joy in our lives, we must expect to go through some difficulties too. The truth is that, unless we go through challenging times, we can never appreciate that joy. It's like a farmer who must work hard in his garden, and when the harvest comes, there is great reward!

The gift of Jesus is a gift of love:

- That keeps giving.
- That keeps saving.
- That keeps providing.
- That keeps healing.
- That keeps turning darkness into light.

It is that love, the love of Jesus Christ, that is telling you today, “let go of the rope, I will catch you.”

Father, thank you for the gift of Jesus, your gift of love. I rejoice in the joy of the harvest, knowing there will be challenging days ahead. I trust that You will catch me when I fall.



"Joy at the Harvest"
Eden Weber (age 9)

Tuesday, December 7

VALLEY DAYS

“For as in the day of Midian’s defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.”
(Isaiah 9.4)

It’s easy to understand why the people of Israel were depressed. The Assyrian armies had begun to take over their land. As they swept across Israel, they took control of important land. From the Jezreel Valley to the foot of Mount Hermon was the breadbasket of the Northern Kingdom. Their occupation of that space meant certain famine in the days to come. Likewise, according to Bible scholar John Oswalt, the Assyrians also overtook the ‘way of the sea,’ the famed trade route that connected the great commerce of Mesopotamia and Egypt (Isaiah 9.1). All the hopes and securities the people of Israel had built their lives on were vanishing before their very eyes. In the early days of an economic depression and food crisis, the people had lost all hope.

Isaiah reminds those willing to listen of another time the Jezreel valley was overtaken. The people of the Northern tribes of Israel were hiding in mountain caves, trying to harvest and hide away their food supply only to have Midianite raiding parties rage into the land, trampling their crops and slaughtering their flocks (Judges 7). Isaiah’s audience would have immediately recognized he was retelling the story of Gideon. In the same place generations before, God proved His might over the 120,000 soldiers with a ragtag group of 300 men holding torches.

The Assyrians may be in the Valley and controlling the way of the Sea, but God’s promise to His people remains true. Their stay in the land will come to an end, the yoke of their oppression will be broken and the terror of the enemy will be shattered. God will take his glory and all peoples will see his promised blessing to come.

Father, I trust you. Even though the situations in my life feel out of control, you are the one who is in absolute control. I believe that you have begun a good work in my life and are faithful to bring it to fullness in your time.

Wednesday, December 8

THE DESTINY OF BLOODY BOOTS

“For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment
rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.”
(Isaiah 9.5)

War is exhausting. It takes an emotional and debilitating toll on warriors and the family standing behind them. But unless we are missing a loved one far away fighting for freedom in distant lands, we can forget the silent suffering of the warriors and their families. The weight of war is heavy on all their shoulders. Yes, on the soldier's shoulders fatigued and yet pressing forward; but also the family members whose pictures are hidden in helmets and tucked next to unsent letters home.

This heaviness is especially felt in those holidays and special family days, missed anniversaries and unlit birthday candles. These are the days we sing “I'll be home for Christmas,” and fight back tears. Kim Gannon and Walter Kent wrote that simple tune in 1943 to honor American soldiers laying down their lives in distant theaters of war. The gentle lilt of the song belies the heartache of distance, the melancholy and loneliness of war.

This advent season, with all the lights strung on snow-covered trees, we remember our sons and daughters far from home. We also remember the loved ones gathering here with empty seats around the dinner table. And with you, we also set our eyes toward the day when fatigues stained in battle and boots muddy by war will be consigned to the fire for we have no more use for them.

But until then, we wait, hearts laden with the joys of the season and the burden of absences.

*Father, please be with our families waiting for the end of war,
the battles that take our loved ones to far off shores.
Watch over our sons and daughters fighting for freedom,
and for those who wait for their safe return.*

Thursday, December 9

PERFECT TIMING

Delis Vicente

“For to us a child is born”
(Isaiah 9.6a)

My sister and I had dinner at our favorite pizza place one Saturday evening with our kids. Funds were tight between the two of us, but we agreed we would split the bill. The kids always enjoyed the food there and would be able to order and eat their favorite meals without fussing. We had a wonderful time talking about life, our families, and going down memory lane.

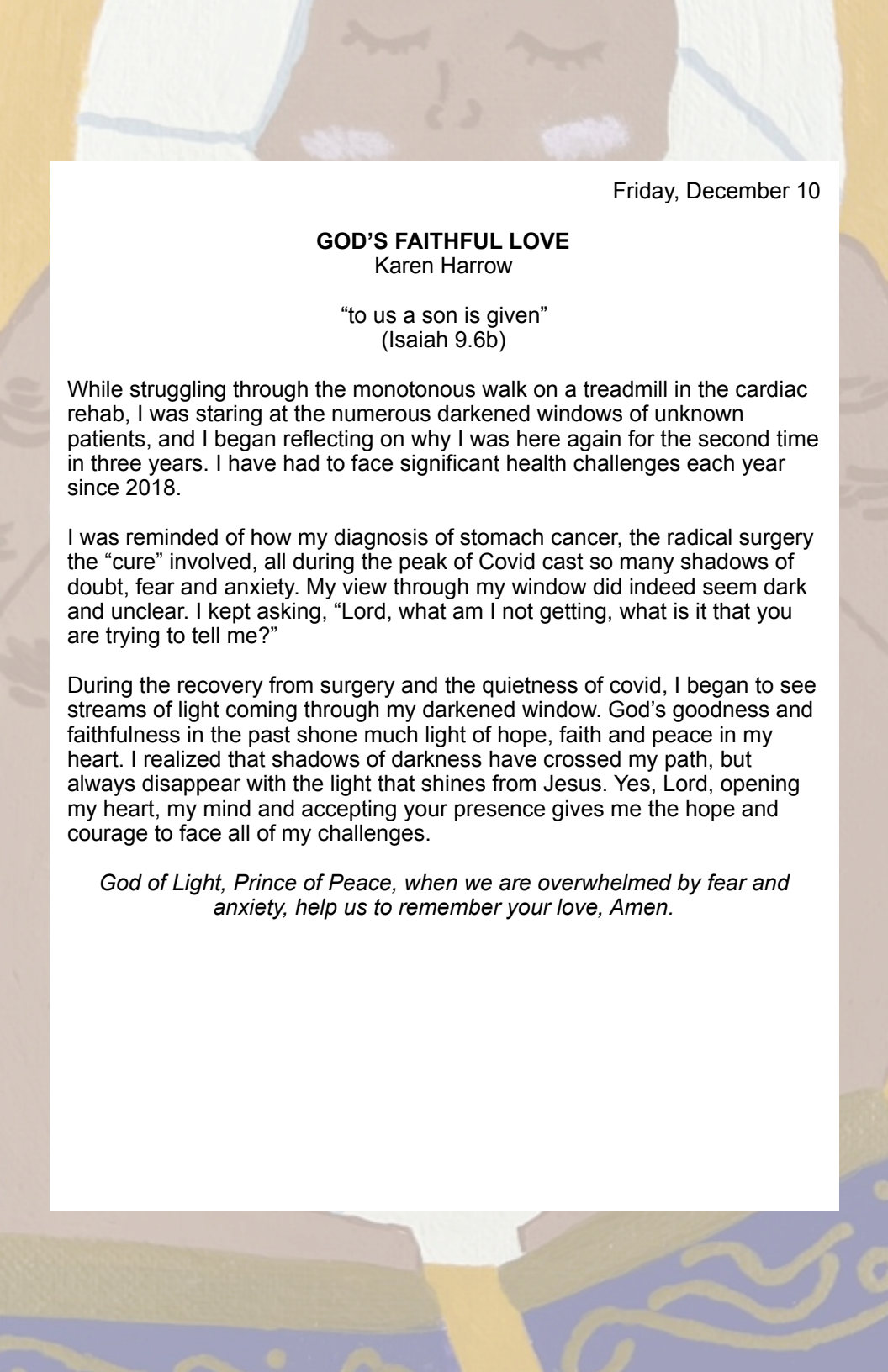
After we finished dinner, our table was cleared and beverages were refilled. We continued talking as we waited for the check. I noticed the waitress had not been to our table for a while, so I flagged her down and asked for the check. She let us know that someone had paid the bill for us. We were in shock. That kind of stuff had never happened to us! We couldn't believe it. It was just what we needed to remind us of the good that is still out there. At that moment, we received a blessing that we didn't know we needed until it was given. It brought us hope and peace.

“To us a child is born,” is a message of hope. The announcement of the beginning of life. Jesus' birth is a blessing for the entire world. God paid the bill for all of us by giving us his one and only son so that we may receive the gift of salvation.

Father, during this season may we remember the gift of your son in our everyday lives, the gift of hope during trials and tribulations.



"A Son is Given"
Madyson Riley (age 13)



Friday, December 10

GOD'S FAITHFUL LOVE

Karen Harrow

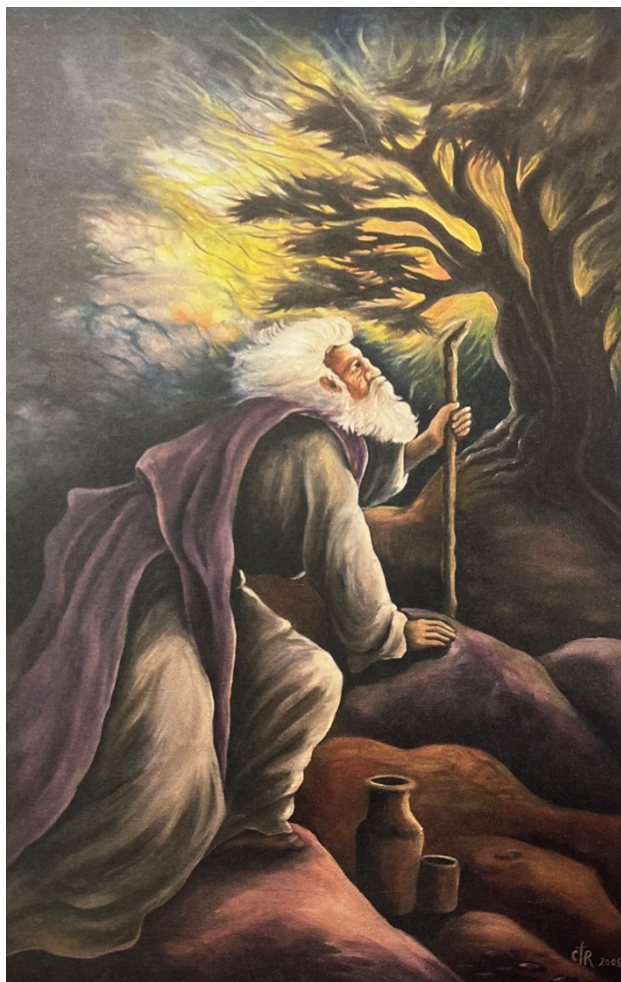
“to us a son is given”
(Isaiah 9.6b)

While struggling through the monotonous walk on a treadmill in the cardiac rehab, I was staring at the numerous darkened windows of unknown patients, and I began reflecting on why I was here again for the second time in three years. I have had to face significant health challenges each year since 2018.

I was reminded of how my diagnosis of stomach cancer, the radical surgery the “cure” involved, all during the peak of Covid cast so many shadows of doubt, fear and anxiety. My view through my window did indeed seem dark and unclear. I kept asking, “Lord, what am I not getting, what is it that you are trying to tell me?”

During the recovery from surgery and the quietness of covid, I began to see streams of light coming through my darkened window. God's goodness and faithfulness in the past shone much light of hope, faith and peace in my heart. I realized that shadows of darkness have crossed my path, but always disappear with the light that shines from Jesus. Yes, Lord, opening my heart, my mind and accepting your presence gives me the hope and courage to face all of my challenges.

God of Light, Prince of Peace, when we are overwhelmed by fear and anxiety, help us to remember your love, Amen.



"Holy Ground"
Claudia Rees

Monday, December 13

OUR GOD WHO GOVERNS ALL

Winston Rodriguez

“and the government shall be upon his shoulder”
(Isaiah 9.6c)

Are you happy with the current government in our world? Your answer may be ‘no’ and that’s okay due to the current times we are living in. We can’t control the governments of the world, but that isn’t our job. There will always be disagreement with government decisions – and let’s face it – no government is perfect. Well, not just yet.

The Bible speaks of a time when Jesus Christ will rule the earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, greater than in the days of David or the time of Moses. Isaiah 9.6 says “the government shall be upon his shoulder.” What might such a government look like? You may ask, how can this be possible? How can we ever believe the “government will be upon His shoulders”?

This government Isaiah wrote about is still to come but we can still see the government...upon His shoulder in many ways today. When I see missionaries live and teach in distant lands because they love the people who have not heard, I know they are governed by God. Whenever I see someone who miraculously leaves a life of drugs or alcohol and is restored to his or her family and work, I can see that government of Jesus Christ.

With this in mind, can I ask again: Are you happy with the current government in our world? My prayer is that your answer is a big “YES!” because we can be and are – by choice – governed by God. So, indeed, God’s government is alive and working today. Amen!

Father, I believe you are in control. Although the governments of this world sow much division and confusion, I lift them up before you in prayer. May we see Jesus our everlasting King!



"Government Shall Be On His Shoulders"
Jonah Davis (age17)



Tuesday, December 14

WALKING TOGETHER

Jamal Riley

“and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor”
(Isaiah 9.6d)

When I was a child, I remember being around my cousins. We would play games together, we would stay overnight at one another's homes, and get in trouble with our parents. We were very close, and nothing could separate our family bond of unconditional love. At random times, we would make vows to one another to keep a promise or keep something in confidence. Most of the time those promises were honored, yet in some instances for whatever reason those promises were not kept. I am certain that I am not alone, and that we've all encountered times our actions didn't align with our intentions when promises weren't kept.

Let's be glad we serve the all-mighty and sovereign God who is not like us to break promises. Isaiah 9.2-7 shares to those who believe in the promise of a child being born to us who will rule and reign over all of our lives, our trials/tribulations, and will provide peace, justice, and righteousness. During this season, we remember and encourage others that even during joy and celebration, there are those who feel loss and pain. As believers, we can walk alongside one another to be the hands and feet of the Holy Spirit to help our families and neighbors remember God's promise.

*Father God, thank you for your promise to us that you will be with us
in the face of adversity and trials and that we have you to help us
to help others see you.*

Wednesday, December 15

BEYOND CARTOON HEROES

Anedra Butler

When I was little, I didn't watch many cartoons, but during that time, 43 years ago, Superman was the superhero cartoon everyone watched. So, as a little girl, I would imagine what it would be like to encounter this superhero. I imagined that he would be so big he would take my breath away, so strong that there was nothing he couldn't handle. And if I were ever in trouble, he would come in, save the day, and rescue me from danger.

Though this Christmas season is a season that many enjoy, we must recognize that this is also a season that some may find themselves in a difficult place.

As I reflect on this beautiful gift, Jesus Christ, that we get to celebrate this Christmas season, the Bible tells us in Isaiah 9.6 that His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God. "Mighty" is a translation of the Hebrew word "gibbor," which is defined as "strength, power, hero and warrior." Isaiah tells us that He, Jesus Christ, is El Gibbor, the God of strength, the God of power, God our hero, and God our warrior.

Father, thank you for being more than our imagination of a hero! You are the Almighty God, ready to step into our every situation. Show me how to lean on your strength in the hard times.

Thursday, December 16

A GOOD FATHER

Valerie Fuqua

“and His name shall be called...Everlasting Father”
(Isaiah 9.6f)

What does a good father look like? Some of us were raised with amazing fathers who taught us important life skills like how to drive or how to fish. Some of us were raised by a father who, instead of teaching us how to DO things, wrote the book of how NOT to do things. Maybe this father refused to utter “I love you” and “I’m proud of you,” or maybe this father just never seemed to show up.

What we know about earthly fathers directly affects how we view our heavenly one. However, unlike your earthly father, your heavenly Father is perfect in His love for you. With God as our everlasting Father, He is patient with us in our joy or hurting. He does not boast when we mess up or full of pride when we crumble at his feet. He is not easily angered by us, nor does He keep a list of the things we do wrong. Instead, God seeks to do things in our favor, and rejoices in declaring truth to us. He did so in that He sent his only Son to die for us, so we might know the truth that He has never left us – no matter the doubt, the questions, the depression or anxiety, or the fear. God knew our pain before we ever experienced it. Just like a good Father, God is moved by our hurt and weeps with us, and invites us to rest in Him this season (Jeremiah 9.10, John 11.35).

Father, forgive me for when I have inflicted the pain of earthly fathers onto you. God, you are kind, and patient. Thank you for your unconditional love and that you love me because I am your child, not for what I can do or be.



"Prince of Peace"

Garrett and Peyton Dowler (ages 9)

Friday, December 17

SHALOM
Steve Velasco

“and His name shall be called...Prince of Peace”
(Isaiah 9.6g)

In a world of pandemic, wars, strife, division and hurt, people are crying out for peace and looking for peace in the wrong places. *Shalom* is a Hebrew word meaning peace, harmony and wholeness. *Shalom* can also be used to mean both hello and goodbye. It is a very special word.

Jesus showed this kind of *Shalom* peace on the night before He died, AND He promised to give the peace that He experienced to us. He said, “I am leaving you with a gift – peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid” (John 14.27).

This real peace can only come through our relationship with Jesus Christ. He is our peace offering. Apart from Him, there is no peace. We have the wonderful gift of peace of God available in all circumstances. *Shalom*.

*Lord, thank You for the gift of Shalom peace to us.
Please guide us to live in this gift.*



"Peace"
Dioman

Monday, December 20

THE KING JESUS GOSPEL

Sulema Mejia

“Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end”
(Isaiah 9.7a)

What goes through your mind when we mention the word Christmas? I'll give you a minute to think about it. You probably thought of gifts, parties, a delicious turkey, family. All of this is true, but Christmas is so much more! At Christmas we celebrate of the arrival of King Jesus. He came to reign among us. In Isaiah 9.7 he tells us, “The expansion of his empire and peace will have no limit, on the throne of David and on his kingdom, disposing and trusting him in judgment and justice from now on and forever.”

It is surprising that the Lord of armies would raise up a child, a newborn to liberate his People and establish their peace, justice, and virtue. From the Old Testament we see that Isaiah was announcing this prophecy about this Savior, about this child who was going to come to bring peace and hope to humanity. The length of his empire and his Peace will have no limit! King Jesus will reign forever!

Hear with fresh ears the five characteristics of King Jesus' reign, this baby boy placed in a manger: 1) He reigns with all authority, 2) offering endless peace 3) and justice. In His Kingdom, there will be justice, fair treatment for everyone regardless of the social status they have! 4) He is a virtuous King, who protects the weakest, 5) now and forever!

This Christmas, really celebrate Jesus our King, bringing gifts of honor and praise to His name. He is the reason for Christmas. His government is peace, it will never end.

Father, thank you for the great gift of Jesus Christ my Lord. Help me shine your light everywhere I go to see true peace and justice to free those around me.



"King David's Throne and Kingdom"
Gabby Best (age 8)

Tuesday, December 21

A SAVIOR CALLING NEAR AND FAR

Margo Rees

“on the throne of David and over his kingdom”
(Isaiah 9.7b)

Part of what makes the gospel of Jesus our Messiah such good news is that it is so personal – it comes so close to us, and meets us where we are. God was bringing His own perfect will and the endless peace that only He can give, but He chose to begin with one small tribe of one obscure nation. Out of His relationship with the Jews, God would expand his Kingdom of eternal peace to include “peoples of every nation and tongue.”

Isaiah’s prophecy reminds us that through God’s personal relationship with one, many more are saved. In the same way, this advent season we remember that through the humble devotion of one young woman and her family, the Holy Spirit brought Jesus into this world – to take on flesh and dwell among us. And the expectant prayers of the few in the Judean hillside were answered in Jesus, who brought salvation and eternal life for anyone who would call on the name of the Lord – even to the “uttermost parts of the earth.”

In this season of remembrance, let us consider how the love of our Savior has been both near and far-reaching. Even as Jesus came for you and for me as individuals, He was the “consolation of Israel” who became the “light of the nations.”

*Father, thank you for the great gift of Jesus Christ my Lord. You are drawing us all together, embraced in your mercy and transformed in your grace.
Lead me near and far with your glorious light.*



“Justice”

Daphne Deal (age 13)

Wednesday, December 22

A GIFT BORN OF JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

Sabrina Gissendanner

“to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore”
(Isaiah 9.7c)

God is Just and Right. It is part of His character. He cannot be unjust or wrong, and He defines and sets the standard for Justice and Righteousness. Therefore, pursuing biblical Justice means we look to Scripture for the definition and follow God's way to make right that which is wrong.

We do not have to look far to see that Jesus is our standard for Righteousness and Justice. Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life, died a sacrificial death and rose again to make right that which was wrong. It is because of Jesus and His work on the Cross that we can be justified and made right with God.

One of the greatest injustices we fall victim to individually is self-righteousness, the belief that we do not need Jesus, we are just, good and right apart from Him. We often fail to see that Jesus is the way to Justice and Righteousness. In vain, we seek other sources.

Only when we get over ourselves and cling to Jesus will we participate in His work of restoration in the church, our communities and our own lives. We need Christ Jesus. We, the Church, are called to live in the light of Jesus and His power of Justice and Righteousness.

And that baby Jesus, born in a manger, is God's gift to us.

*Father, thank you for the great gift of Jesus Christ my Lord.
I pray your Holy Spirit would continue to reveal those areas where
my self-righteousness is blocking the light of your justice in my life.*

Thursday, December 23

A COMMITTED GIFT

King Goldman

“The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”
(Isaiah 9.7d)

Birthdays, weddings, graduations and some holidays are the times that invoke the notion of giving something to someone.

When givers feels like they have done an amazing job with gift selection, they are both determined and eager to ensure that the gift arrives unblemished to the designated recipient. In addition, givers have considered most obstacles that could arise to prevent the delivery of the gift. So they more than likely have insulated themselves to circumvent every considerable obstacle such as leave on time, order early enough, placement of the gift, etc. It is commonly said that “it’s the thought that matters,” but not to the giver. The giver is committed to getting that gift into the possession of the recipient.

And so it is with God. God has been invested in our experiencing the gift of being (in the image of God) since the beginning. From the time God deemed us good according to Genesis 1.31, He has been vested in our well-being. We see the first gift (Gen 2.18-23) presented to man by God was intimately connected to God’s desire for humanity to be complete, lacking nothing.

I submit for your consideration that a gift is intimately connected to who you are, and a present is giving you accessibility to what you like. The Lord our God is and has always been eager to deliver the gift of abundant life into our custody; for the Lord of Host has and will accomplish this via Jesus, the Anointed One.

*Father, thank you for the gift Jesus Christ my Lord.
Show me how to receive your great gift of redemption and restoration.
Lead me in sharing that beautiful gift with others.*

Friday, December 24

CLAY POTS AT DAWN

“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.”
(2 Corinthians 4.6)

The holidays can be difficult for everyone. All the twinkling lights, the merry jingling songs and Hollywood smiles can make us feel like a Charlie Brown special. Right when we feel the greatest need for family and community, we find ourselves more isolated and alone than ever before. For Christians, the stigma of emotional distress may be even more acute! “Should I be happier at this time of year?” At times like this, it helps to remember that the phrase “It’s always darkest before the dawn” was coined by Thomas Fuller, a sixteenth century pastor. Just because we know Jesus doesn’t mean we don’t have ups and downs.

The Apostle Paul echoes the light breaking out at creation (Genesis 1.3) and the Messianic promise of the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 9.2). But even while He celebrates the light shining in the darkness, he does not forget that we are still human. He says we have this ministry, this calling to share the good news of Jesus, through God’s mercy. We can take heart that He loves us, and it is His loving mercy that invites us to push back the darkness in our lives and the lives of others.

We carry the most powerful, profound and important news within us! But this doesn’t mean we are made of some indestructible stone or unbreakable steel. We carry the treasure of Jesus in jars of clay, breakable pots of earth. How wonderful that this is where the Holy Spirit chooses to reside! Not in palaces of marble or a house of shatterproof wonder, but in you, in me, in our temporary and frail bodies.

As we celebrate this Christmas, remember how Jesus chose to make His dwelling among us. He came as a helpless baby, and through His infant cries and his mother’s embrace, he displayed the glory of God.

*Father, show me how to invite others into my home, even into my pain,
so that they can meet with you in my vulnerable witness.
Thank you for Jesus.*

Special Notes

Special Notes

Special Notes

Special Thanks

Thank you to all our writers and artists, oldest to youngest (and everyone in between). Our church is blessed with many gifted artists and wordsmiths. Also, special thanks to Shirley Fox who faithfully edited every devotion and Steven Allen who fervently worked to print this book. We thank you for all your contributions to this shared celebration of Jesus, our wonderful counselor!

Scriptures

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Special Calendar for Advent

First Sunday of Advent, November 28th

Services at 8:45, 10:00 & 11:15 a.m.

Second Sunday of Advent, December 5th

Services at 8:45, 10:00 & 11:15 a.m.

Third Sunday of Advent, December 12th

Children's Christmas Play

(During First and Third Services)

Services at 8:45, 10:00 & 11:15 a.m.

Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 19th

Services at 8:15, 9:15, 10:15 & 11:15 a.m.

Christmas Eve, December 24th

Services at 4:00 & 6:00 p.m.

Special Christmas Celebration, December 26th

Services at 9:15 & 11:15 a.m.

New Years Service, January 2nd

Services at 9:15 & 11:15 a.m.



cornerstone

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