

Introduction

Advent comes from the Latin word which means “coming or arrival” and began as far back as the sixth century. The focus of the Advent season is on the incarnation (or God taking on flesh) of Christ and dwelling among His people. Advent is a time of preparation and as Christians await Christ’s second coming even as we celebrate the Christmas story once again. We are called to prepare our hearts to hear Jesus’ birth story again even as we prepare for Christ’s second coming. Christmas is a time where we are challenged to recommit our lives to growing in faith and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Jesse Tree tradition originated in the medieval church in the form of carvings, stained glass windows or illuminated manuscripts to illustrate the Isaiah 11:1 which states: “A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse and a branch shall grow out of his roots.” The symbols used in the Jesse tree described to an illiterate people the coming of Christ. The Jesse Tree devotional walks through the spiritual family tree of Jesus Christ while retelling many of the Bible stories that led to Christ’ birth. Jesse was the father of King David who was the second King of Israel after God rejected its first King, King Saul. The prophet Samuel was sent by God to Jesse’s family to anoint the next king who was David- the youngest of the sons. David became a great King and it was in his line, the Jesse line that Jesus Christ was born a thousand years later in the fulfillment of the prophecies.

Each day there is a Bible passage provided, a devotional thought, a prayer and a symbol that represents the day’s Biblical person. *Take time to create a Jesse Tree of your own. Gather some branches, tie them together and place them in a vase and each day take the given symbol that will be provided, cut it out, color it, punch a hole in the paper and use some string to tie it to your tree. Or take the pictures and clue them on a “tree” you have drawn on some paper. Use the symbols and create ornaments using objects around your house, allow yourself to be inspired this year in a new way. Be creative.* If you don’t wish to make a tree use this time to look at the symbol, think of the meaning of the passage and create your own image. Reflect, write, study, pray—do what you feel called to do by the Holy Spirit. If you wish to keep the ornaments for the future, make sure to write the order in which the ornament was created (day 1, day 2, etc. with the scripture passage reference on the back side of the paper); then wrap each ornament for next year and as you journey through the season of advent each day unwrap an ornament like you would an advent calendar, read the corresponding scripture passage and once again reflect on the meaning of Christ. Make this Advent journey your own. May this journey inspire you to new depths of joy, worship, prayer and praise of our almighty God and Savior, Jesus Christ. A special thanks to www.TheColor.com for many of the images used in this document.

November 30, 2014
1st Sunday in Advent
Jesse Tree: Genealogy 101

Scripture Reading: *Isaiah 11:1-2 & 1 Samuel 16:1-13*

Devotional Reading:

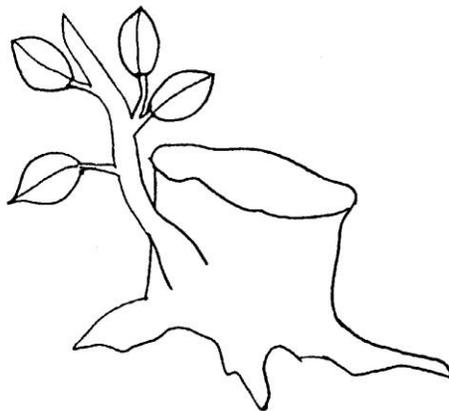
It is from the Samuel scripture passage for today that the “Jesse Tree” is derived. Jesse was the father of David who was anointed as the second King of Israel. It was through David’s line that a royal family was to be established. Jesus was the fulfillment of this promise by God to his people long before he was born. In fact when God established a covenant relationship with Abraham, God told Abraham that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars in the heavens and through his family lineage a great nation would be born (see Genesis 12:1-3 for more reading). We believe as Christians that Jesus is part of that great line of people and of course that Christ is the fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy.

We can learn a lot about ourselves through our family history. Think of your own family of origin. What traits did you inherit from a family member? What are some of your passions: do they come from someone in your family? What heartache have you had to overcome with your family or what trials and tribulations did your family members suffer to help you become the person you are today? Families are important for many reasons. It is often because of our parents, grandparents, an aunt or uncle that we came to know and love Jesus Christ. It is because of our families that we can learn to overcome adversity by knowing our own history and how our family members survived and even thrived in difficult seasons of their lives. How much more important is it then to know our Christian family tree? Our Christian story?

How far back can you trace your family tree? What are some stories that you know that have shaped who you are today? Who shared Jesus with you? Give thanks to God for you family (even if you are at odds with your family). Pray for you family, pray for healing and reconciliation if there is brokenness; pray for wisdom for guidance; pray for health and healing; give thanks for those family members who have passed away.

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we thank you for our family. Help us as a family and church family to prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas with new energy and with a deep desire to dive into your word and discover maybe for the first time, or rediscover our Christian family heritage. As we think about Jesus' family, may we grow to love him and our own family more. Oh, come, strong branch of Jesse once again to our world and save the whole family of humankind. Merciful Lord, hear our prayers today for our own families as we lift them up to you... *(spend time thinking of your family members, what are their needs, how do they need God's love to touch them today)*. Amen



Monday
December 1st
“The Creation of the World”

Scripture Reading: *Genesis 1*

Devotional Reflections:

What does God say about His human creation? We are created in His likeness or image of our creator. No other animal, plant, planetary object, the heavens, the earth, the waters, etc. is said to be created in the image of our creator! WOW. What does that say to you? We are created differently than all other living things. We were created to think, reflect, and show mercy and forgiveness, compassion, sympathy, to know our own self-worth and to love one another. We are given special abilities and responsibilities. We were/are called to be good stewards of God’s great creation, to manage His gift of creation in ways that are honoring to Him and to one another. We are called to care for the land, the animals, the birds, and everything that creeps upon the earth. From the beginning we have had a special relationship with our creator, we are God’s beautiful works given minds and wills to use for God’s glory or to reject Him.

In a season of increasing darkness, when the world seems to go into hiding as the days are shorter and colder, it is harder for us to look around and see the beauty and majesty in God’s creation. And yet it is in this quiet season of change that all the mysteries of God’s enduring creation continues. When the trees are barren and seem dead, there is life brewing beneath the surface. When it feels like our faith is barren and we wonder when God will return again there is life bubbling underneath it all. In this season of winter the earth takes a breath and rests before the song of spring bursts forth. For Christians in this waiting period between Christ’s first appearance and his eventual return it often feels as if we are in a barren wilderness waiting for things to burst forth and shout with praises that Christ is still alive and at work in our midst. We are called in this season and always to not sit idly by disregarding the works of God simply because we cannot see them; rather we are called to look to the beauty of God’s creation in all seasons and see that everything around us is teeming with life and to trust that just below the surface God’s kingdom work is alive and well. In this season of waiting we are called to look towards the heavens and reflect on our faith and on who Christ is in our lives.

What can you do to take better care of our earth, our church family, of one another?

Closing Prayer:

O, Heavenly creator we thank you for creating this marvelous world and for all that is in it. Merciful creator, we praise you for the beauty of your creation around us that still sings your praise even in the midst of the barrenness of winter. Merciful Lord we know that you are ever present and always at work even when we have turned our eyes away from you. In this season of increasing darkness help us Lord to know the light of Christ in a deep and real way; renew in our hearts the mystery of your love and grace that we might worship you every day. Help us to find bold strength today and always to sing your praises. (*Spend time in prayer asking God to reveal the ways in which you can better care for our earth, family, church, one another*). Amen



Tuesday
December 2nd
Adam & Eve: Sin and Sadness

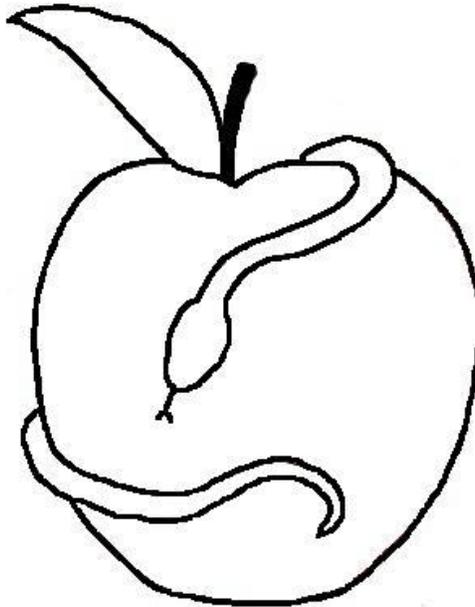
Scripture Reading: *Genesis 3*

Devotional Reflections:

God's great love story starts with Adam and Eve. In our attempt to "be like God, knowing good and evil" we fell from a wonderful and perfect relationship with our creator. Our pride, our selfish desire and the desire to be god broke that harmonious relationship between humanity and its creator. From that pivotal moment in the Garden we have been in desperate need of mending that which separates us from our Creator. Sin is anything that we think or do that separates us from God and one another. At the root of sin is humanities attempt to exert their own will over God's will. We use our "free will" to hurt others intentionally or unintentionally. How would you define sin? What are the sins we commit today? Although it broke God's heart that His creation rebelled against His commandment to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; he did not leave us in that fallen state. Throughout the history of God's people, God was working out his redemptive plan to save us, culminating in the gift of His one and only son, our Lord, Jesus Christ as the offering for that broken relationship.

Closing Prayer:

Merciful Lord, look upon your people who through our foolish thoughts and desires have: spoken in haste hurting others with our words; have failed in our self-control; have desired more money, more power, more stuff; and who have forgotten to care for the lost, the lonely and the unsaved; forgive us. Lord, we know that we are not perfect and despite every good intention we fall short daily to live out your high calling. Forgive us Lord for all the ways we allow our pride, our sin, our selfish desires to interfere with our relationship with you and with others. (*Spend time in reflection and personal confession*)... Amen



Wednesday
December 3rd
Noah: Promise & Covenant

Daily Scripture Reading: Genesis 6:5-21 & 9:8-17

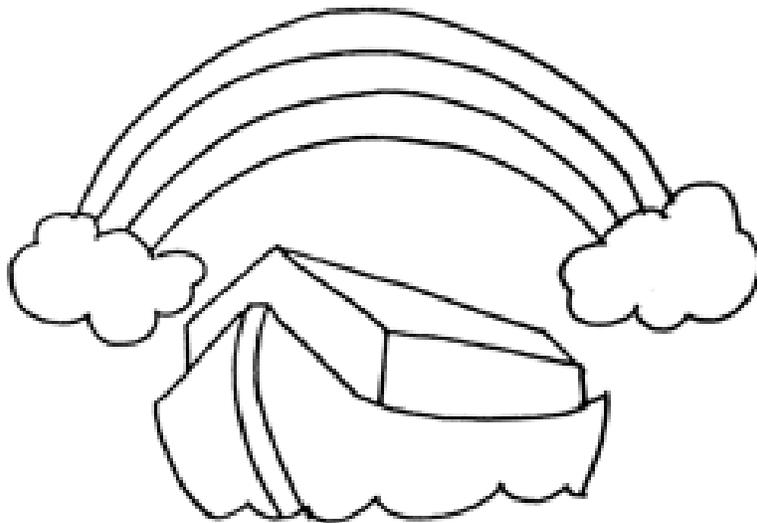
Daily Devotional:

In the story of Noah we read that the world has become so sinful that God regrets ever making the human race. God decides to destroy all the people living at that time and to start over again. But then God sees Noah's faithfulness and decides to save Noah and his family and to start over with his creation. God instructs Noah to build an Ark that was to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and with three decks. Noah and his family were to bring two of every kind of animal living on the earth into the ark.

After the flood waters receded God made a promise to never flood the earth again. The rainbow in the sky was to be a visible reminder of the covenant that God made with Noah, and with us. What seems like a horrible story of God's anger and wrath against the evilness of the people living during Noah's day was ultimately a story of hope and promise that even in our worse moments, in our sin, in our separation from God-- God would ultimately create a new way of salvation and hope, one that didn't require the destruction of the created order. We are reminded of this promise each time we look to the sky and see a rainbow. It reminds us that God loved his creation enough to give it a new start and at the same time it reminds us that God will never take the same drastic measure to bring His creation into salvation. We too, are given a new start every time we turn to God because of Christ's own sacrifice. We are ushered into the covenant promise and hope that God began with Noah and his family!

Closing Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, do not give up on us even when we forget you. Help us to remember your promises and faithfulness throughout the generations each time we see a rainbow in the sky. Help us to remember that you are working out your salvation plan even today among your people. Help us repent of those sinful things that keep us from living out your calling each and every day and thank you for loving us enough to give us a new start each day. *(Spend time praying for those whom don't know Christ yet, pray for the ways we can be out in our community living out our faith).* Amen



Thursday
December 4th
Abraham & Sarah: Faithfulness & Answered prayers

Daily Scripture Reading: *Genesis 12:1-7, Genesis 18:1-15; Genesis 21:1-7 & Hebrews 11: 8*

Daily Devotional:

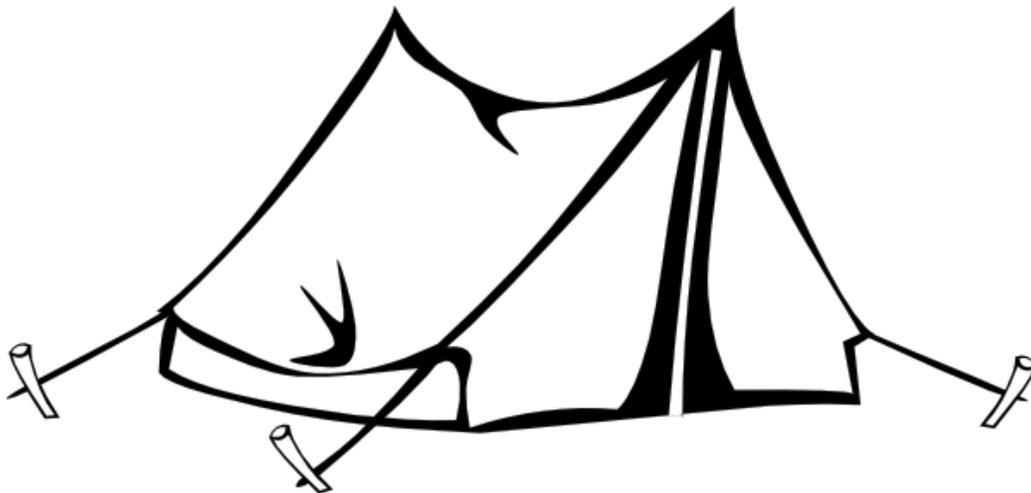
The history of God's chosen people really begins with Abraham and Sarah. God calls Abraham from his home, his country and moves him to the land of Canaan. In faith and obedience, despite the unknown, Abraham picks up everything and moves. Abraham was obedient to God's call to go, leaving everything he knew to go where God had called him to go. Abraham believed in God's promise to him that through him a great nation would be born and he would be blessed. Not only would Abraham and Sarah be blessed, but they would be a blessing to others and from them God would create a family far numerous than the stars in the heavens.

How would this transpire when for years Abraham and Sarah were barren? They had to trust that no matter what God would provide, God would be faithful, God would hear their prayers. Of course they were human and often attempted to take matters into their own hands. God did provide and God did hear their prayers. Their story of faith and trust is a model for us as Christians today. God is still faithful, still answers prayers and still provides for his people.

As God promised his presence and guidance to Abraham and Sarah, so he promises it to us. How are you putting your trust and faith in God? How are you withholding your trust? In what areas are you filled with doubt? Where do you need God's hand to guide you?

Closing Prayers

In those areas of doubt, worry, or concern come before the Lord in prayer and repentance. Then spend time in prayer asking God to: be merciful, to help you with trusting His provisions. Then close with "Help me to go out each day in faith and trust that you are walking with me. Help me serve you wherever I am being called to go and erase any doubt or fear that I may have that you are not at work in my life and in the life of those around me. Open my heart and spirit to receive your message of hope today and may I be faithful to you wherever I go. Amen."



Friday
December 5th
Isaac: God's Provision

Daily Scripture Reading: *Genesis 22:1-19*

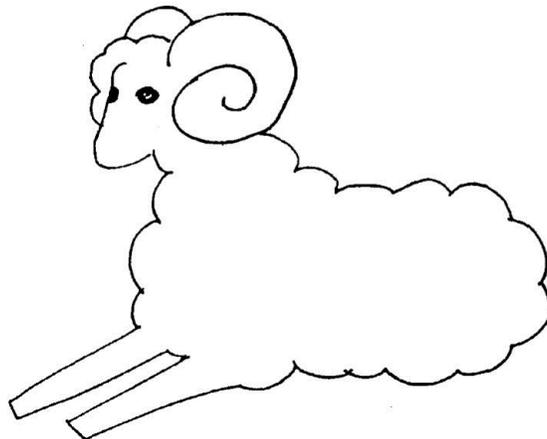
Daily Devotional:

When Abraham and Sarah were told that they were expecting a child, Sarah laughed! They were “too old” to have children! And yet, God fulfilled his promise to provide a son and a genealogy through Abraham and Sarah. When their son was born they called him Isaac—which means “he laughed;” a play on words from the moment they laughed when they learned that God was going to provide them with a son through Sarah. After the birth of Isaac, when he was a young boy God asked Abraham to do the impossible- to take his only son by Sarah and sacrifice him. What a horrible thought! How could God ask him to do such a thing? What was God thinking? God had promised Abraham a son to fulfill the promise that Abraham’s lineage would become a great nation. God tells Abraham to take his son and offer him as a sacrifice! Abraham loved God and his son what was his choice: obey or walk away? Do the unthinkable, or ignore God? What would you have done? Abraham trusted God. He took his son as an act of trust and faithfulness and walked that lonely walk to what must have been a heart wrenching moment in his life. As Abraham goes through the preparation for the sacrifice I am sure his heart was pounding, his mind and pulse racing, his throat dry and unresponsive to the inquisitiveness of his son Isaac as he chattered away without any understanding of what was about to take place. In the last minute God provided his protection—a ram to take Isaac’s place. I can’t imagine the relief that Abraham must have felt in that moment when God provided the ram. This moment is symbolic of the moment in which Christ becomes the sacrifice in place of all sacrifices. It is Christ who becomes the perfect lamb for us. Out of love for us, God gave up his one and only Son Jesus Christ for us!

What are you sacrificing for Christ today? Where do you need to sacrifice so that others might come to know who Jesus is? What is God asking you to give up today and this season of Advent so that your heart may be prepared to receive Christ’s message of hope?

Closing Prayer:

Thank you, O Lord, for being the great provider for all who put their faith in you. Help me today to see anew all those ways in which you do continue to provide for your good creation. Help me to live with a spirit of gratitude for all the ways you provide for your great family. I pray for those who are not yet in the family of faith and for those who don’t know Christ personally. Bring your spirit upon them that they might see your truth revealed. Thank you for your great gift and for loving us so much that you gave your only Son, Jesus Christ to live and to die for us. (*Spend time in prayer for those areas in which you see God at work.*) Amen.



Saturday
December 6th
Rebekah: An Initiator

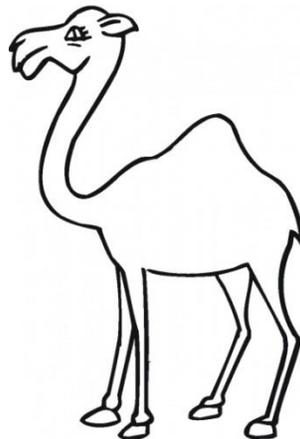
Daily Scripture Reading: *Genesis 24:1-27 & 67 & Genesis 25: 19-34*

Daily Devotional:

Some people are initiators; they take the bull by the horns and never let go. Rebekah was one of those people. Her life was characterized by initiative. She took action even when action was not always the right thing to do. She loved Jacob more than Esau and when it came time for Esau to inherit his birth right, Rebekah schemed to help Jacob secure the blessing from Isaac. She knew what her ailing husband liked and used it to hers and Jacob's advantage. Ultimately this was a house divided. She knew the prophecy that was proclaimed at the children's birth and she helped solidify the fulfillment of that prophecy. And while her actions were not the godliest in nature, God still used her selfish motives to bring about good and a greater plan. God wants his people to be initiators- to be listening to his word and going out and striving to be people who bring God's word to the world around them. The good news--- when we mess up, when it becomes about our humanness and our will (which is sometimes greater than Christ that is within us); God can and does redeem our selfishness and often provides a greater outcome than we can conjure up or imagine. Does God want us to strive to live faith-filled lives that are Christ centered, that strive to bring goodness in darkness? Of course! Can we always do it perfectly, without selfish motives and with pure hearts? No! The good news is that despite ourselves, God is always at work bringing his redemptive hope to the world around us. God can and does take the things that we do and redeems them for his glory, his purpose, his will! Our actions need to be guided by God's holy word- the scriptures but when we get in the way, we can turn to God, confess and seek forgiveness. Rebekah may have gone about doing things in her own selfish way, forgetting to seek God's wisdom and plan and yet God still worked despite her! Rebekah is a model for us to go out and serve God, to trust that through our initiation, through our faithfulness to God, God is always at work and can and does make the best out of what we offer. God makes use even of our mistakes, so what do we have to fear? Nothing!

Closing Prayer: Merciful Lord we thank you that you give us different gifts, passions and ways to serve you. We pray for the church universal and the members in it- may all of us be seeking your face and the ways in which we can serve you today and always. Help us to be people who, led by the Holy Spirit go out in your name unafraid to speak the truth and when we make a mistake help redeem that moment to bring you glory. (Spend time in prayer seeking the Holy Spirit's wisdom- where is God calling you to go? What is God asking you to do today to serve him? How can you take some initiation in your spiritual life?)

Merciful Lord, help us to be unafraid to be your people and live as a witness to the good news of Jesus Christ. Amen.



Sunday
December 7th
Second Sunday in Advent
Jacob: God is Always with Us

Daily Scripture Reading: *Genesis 25: 22-26 & Genesis 28: 1-22*

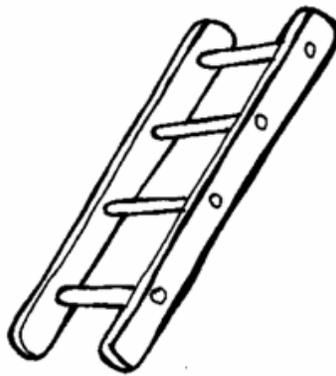
Daily Devotional:

Jacob and Esau were twins. The struggle between them began in the womb and continued into adulthood as they vied for power and leadership in Isaac's clan. Ultimately they were vying for the birth right and blessing from Isaac and in the end it is Jacob, through trickery and deceitfulness that wins both titles despite being the younger son. Jacob has to leave his family home because he has wronged his brother Esau. In fact he has to flee from the family for fear of his brother's wrath and threat of revenge. As he is leaving the family he has this dream where God passes the promise He gave to Abraham and Isaac now to Jacob- it is through his family (and eventually his 12 sons) that this promise is to be fulfilled. Jacob discovers that God is with him. Dreams were a way that God sometimes spoke to this people. In his dream, Jacob saw a ladder stretching from earth to heaven and God tells Jacob that the land he is laying on is the hope and promise to Jacob and his offspring.

Despite God's promise to Jacob it is clear that Jacob often tried to take matters into his own hands, forgetting that God was in control and at work in his life. Ultimately Jacob must face his past by meeting the brother that he cheated and must come to terms with God's plan in his life. Jacob loses his beloved Rachel and favorite son Joseph, and died in a foreign land. Jacob had to go through many trials and tribulations and through it all God kept his promise- he was always with Jacob. Even when Jacob forgot to seek God's face, God was seeking after him. God continued to reach down to Jacob and remind Jacob that He is faithful even when Jacob was not! God continued to speak to him throughout his life and continues to speak to us today. Jacob's story is one of hope and promise, of redemption and grace. Jacob was a liar, a cheat, mischievous and conniving and yet never forgotten by God. God was always with him! We often allow the noise of the world around us to interfere with the still small voice of God. How might God be trying to speak to you today? How do you need to be listening? In what areas of your life do you need to be seeking the wisdom of God's Holy Spirit?

Closing Prayer:

Gracious Lord I thank you that you still speak to us today. Help me Lord to listen. Still any noise in my heart and spirit that I might hear you speak more clearly. *(Spend time in quiet meditation, turn off any noise that may be around you and spend time listening. If you can't hear anything, try another time, just take time to breath in and out and be still and see if God is speaking to you. If it doesn't work, keep trying each day to make time to quietly listen to God).* Amen.



Monday
December 8th
Rachel: Loyalty

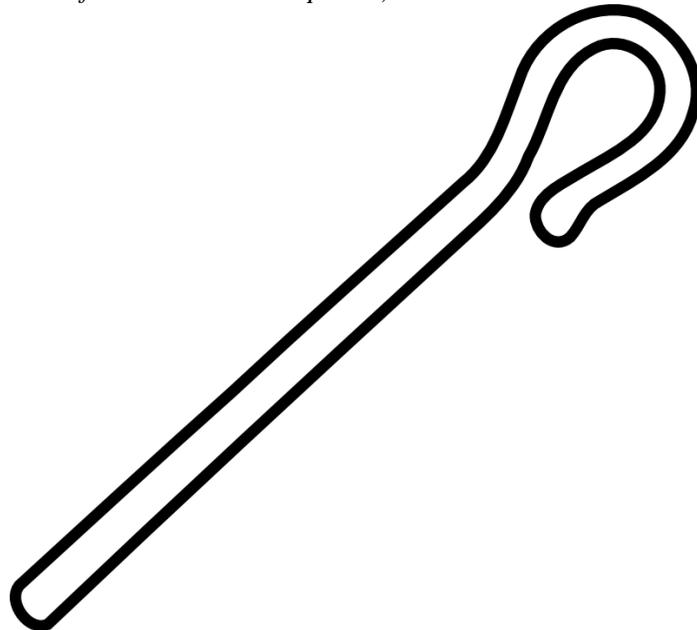
Daily Scripture Reading: *Genesis 29:1-30*

Daily Devotional

Jacob loved Rachel! Jacob's love for Rachel required great patience as he waited seven years to be her husband and then when he was tricked into marrying Leah, Jacob had to be persistent in his pursuit of Rachel. Jacob's commitment to Rachel kindled a strong sense of loyalty between the two of them. Rachel was a strong woman and was loyal to her future husband even when married Leah unwillingly and then had to wait another seven years before they could set off on their own to start their family. Jacob proved that he loved Rachel as he had to work for his father in law for another seven years before he could take his growing family with Leah and Rachel and their children and create their own family together. Despite Jacob's persistent love and devotion towards her, Rachel often tried to take matters into her own hands to show her loyalty towards her husband by doing things that weren't always the best for her or the family. Through it all she and Jacob showed their loyalty to each other and to God. And despite being barren for many years, she finally gave birth to two sons- Joseph and Benjamin. What does loyalty mean to you? What does loyalty look like? Has anyone ever broken your trust or were unfaithful in their promise to you? How did you feel? What did you do? Despite our intentions to be loyal and faithful in our commitment to God, we fall short all the time. The wonderful news is that the story of Jesus reminds us how faithful, loving and loyal God is to his people despite what we do!

Closing Prayer

Merciful Lord we praise you for your unfailing love, kindness and loyalty to us, even when we are not loyal to you. We praise you for your commitment to help us restore our broken relationship with you through your son Jesus Christ. Help us in this season to think about all the ways you have been faithful to us and how we can respond to you as individuals, as a church family and as a nation. Help us to confess those things that we have done that have kept us from being faithful to you and restore us to your side. (*Spend some time in confession and then in praise*). Amen



Tuesday
December 9th
Joseph: Forgiveness

Daily Scripture Reading: *Genesis 37:1-36 & 45:4-15*

Daily Devotional:

Joseph was the favorite son of Jacob and Rachel. Jacob gave Joseph presents (like a beautiful coat of many colors), let him work at home instead of shepherding with his brothers, and doted on him above the rest of his sons. This special relationship between father and son created jealousy among the brothers. It didn't help that Joseph was a dreamer who saw in a dream the day when his family would fall down before him and worship him and instead of keeping the dreams to himself, Joseph would inform his brothers of these special revelations he received from God. Of course this didn't help the strained relationship between Joseph and his brothers; in fact the brothers were so angry that they plotted to get rid of Joseph. At first they wanted to kill him but chose at the last minute to sell him into slavery. This one act of betrayal would play out in a way that no one at the outset could have predicted or orchestrated. What was meant for evil God intended for good. This story shows how God used the failures and wrongs of people for good. During a famine in the land of Israel, Jacob and his sons and their wives and children, 70 people in all, came to live in Egypt where Joseph had stored plenty of food. The anger, betrayal, jealousy and hurt was wiped away when the family was reunited. What they (the brothers) intended for evil God used for good. Joseph could have held on to his anger: withheld food from his family, thrown his brothers into jail on trumped up charges; kept his identity hidden; instead, he forgave his brothers and welcomed them back into his life. What a great story for us to think about in this season. Who are those people you need to forgive? Seek forgiveness from them. Is there something that has happened in your life that seemed bad but then turned out for good? What is it? How was God involved in taking that moment that seemed horrible and turned it into something holy? What is God teaching you today?

Closing Prayer:

O God, help me to live together in peace. As we look for good in situations that seem hopeless, show me that you are working things out for our good. Lord reveal to me those situations in my life that I need to hand over to you and trust that you are at work. Reveal those names of people whom I need to forgive and help me reconcile those relationships. Merciful Lord, help me look at the Joseph story and see what you are teaching me today through Joseph's example. (*Spend time in quiet listening to God*). Amen



Wednesday
December 10th
Moses: God's Calling

Daily Scripture: *Exodus 1:1-0 & Exodus 20:1-17*

Daily Devotional:

After Joseph died, the people of Israel became slaves in Egypt. For many years the people struggled under a leader who hadn't known Joseph and the relationship that was between the Pharaoh and the Hebrew people. The people cried out under the weight of their suffering year after year until God heard their cries and called Moses (who became the son of the daughter of the Pharaoh: Exodus 2:1-10) to go and deliver the people from their slavery. This story of deliverance, salvation and freedom is one of the most well-known stories in scripture and possibly in the world. This great movement of the people of God out of Egypt and back to the Promised Land is called the Exodus. Moses was called by God despite his own insecurities to lead God's people into this Promised Land. After the people escaped from Egypt Moses is given the Ten Commandments. These commandments were laws for the people to follow so that they would live in a way that pleased God. Throughout the journey of the Israelites from Egypt until they finally entered the Promised Land, God was guiding Moses throughout it all. God's calling to Moses was to listen and obey, to follow his guidance and to trust that God was in control. Moses didn't always get it right, he had a temper, he stuttered; he was full of doubt; he had to learn to let others help him, he broke the first set of tablets and ultimately never entered the land that God had promised to him (that was for another leader). Yet through it all he trusted that God was faithful and that God was there with him.

Closing Prayer:

O Lord, we thank you for your commandments, your faithfulness and your calling on my life all of which shows me your will and reminds me of my need for Jesus Christ as my Savior. Forgive me for those commandments that I have broken today, yesterday or even months ago. Help me learn to seek you first so that I am strong against the temptations of the world. May Christ have first place in my life today and always (spend time thinking of and praying for ways to put Christ first in your life today). For it is in the name of Christ that I pray. Amen.



Thursday
December 11th
Miriam: Songs of Praise

Daily Scripture Reading: *Exodus 15: 1-21*

Daily Devotional:

When the people of Israel escaped from the hand of Pharaoh they did so just barely. They crossed the Red Sea with Pharaoh's chariots close behind them. When they were safely across the Red Sea and the fear of danger was gone; Miriam and Moses led the people in a song of praise. While this song is often attributed to Moses, many scholars believe that it was in fact Miriam's song of praise. The only response to God's gracious salvation from the hand of the Pharaoh was to sing; sing a song of thanksgiving and praise. Miriam's song recounts God's provision throughout the Israelite's long journey and God's mighty hand of protection for the people. When God works in your life, do you "sing" a song of praise? Do you recognize the goodness of our Lord and say thank you or do you "want more." The people of Israel got the greatest gift- their freedom. We have the greatest gift: the freedom in Christ to have a relationship with our creator, freedom to receive grace and mercy, freedom to become new "creations" in Christ, freedom to hope, freedom to live a different life, freedom to receive salvation. Does that not stop and cause you to give thanks? Of course! What is your response? To Sing? To complain? To say thank you? To want more? Spend time in reflection, read the song again and ask yourself- what am I doing today to say thank you and to sing God's praises.

Closing Prayer:

Merciful Lord, thank you! I thank you for all that you have done for me! Today I sing a song of praise and gratitude for all that you have done. (Spend time in thanksgiving and praise). Amen.



Friday
December 12th
Deborah: A Unique Leader

Daily Scripture Reading: Judges 4:1-5:31

Daily Devotional

Deborah is a wonderful character and story in the Old Testament. She is the fourth and only female judge of Israel serving to help lead Israel out of the hands of their enemies before Israel has their first king. She had leadership skills that allowed her to be a mediator, counselor and prophetess. Most importantly she had a remarkable relationship with God in which she gave glory and praise to always. She is a remarkably wise woman who can see the bigger picture and enlists folks to help in Israel's defense. She gives all credit back to God her source of wisdom, grace, strength and power! Her story shows us that she was not power hungry and that she wanted to serve God in all circumstances. She didn't deny or resist her God given abilities and gifts nor was she hindered by being a woman and a wife in her service to God in a predominately male driven culture.

Deborah's story reminds us of the need to be available both to God and to others. She encourages us to spend our efforts on what we can do rather than on worrying about what we can't do. She challenges us to be wise leaders, making choices with God's help and not solely on our own. She shows us what a person can accomplish when God is in control and teaches us that the glory always needs to be given back to our creator. Her story shows us that God can and does accomplish great things through people who are willing to be led by Him.

What is God calling you towards? What is holding you back from serving Him? Have you been living in a spirit of gratitude giving thanks to God for all the ways he blesses you? Do you rely solely on your own power and strength? What if you asked God to be the source of your strength and hope? How would your life be different?

Closing Prayer: spend time in prayer praising God for all your gifts, abilities, unique qualities. Then seek God in prayer asking God to fill your heart with wisdom and grace so that you may know what God is calling your towards. Seek his voice through the whisper of the Holy Spirit that you might have insight to the ways God is leading you today and in to the future.



Saturday
December 13th
Third Sunday in Advent
Ruth: God Takes Care of Us

Daily Scripture Reading: *Ruth 1:1-18*

Daily Devotional:

If you have time, I suggest that you read the whole book of Ruth! Ruth is a wonderful story of faithfulness and God's provision. Ruth, a Moabite, married an Israelite (read a foreigner marrying one of God's chosen people). When her husband died she had an important decision to make: to leave her mother-in-law and return to her own people, or to go with Naomi and move to a foreign land. This is big decision for Ruth for women in Biblical times had few options if they had no husband or son to care for them. Often women who had no male relatives were left to live in poverty; relying solely on the generosity of farmers who were supposed to leave a portion of their fields for the "widow, orphan and foreigner" to pick from at harvest time. Women were literally at the mercy of others, so when Ruth voluntarily decides to leave her country and travel to a foreign land she did so leaving behind her family of origin to go to a place where she was unprotected, most likely live in poverty, and have a meager existence. Ruth could have left her mother-in-law and found a future among her own people and yet out of love and respect for her mother in law she left every security behind to be with and care for this woman whom she had grown to love. Ruth remained faithful to God and to Naomi. As the story goes, God does take care of Ruth and Naomi. Upon returning to her homeland Naomi remembers a relative on her husband's side of the family named Boaz. Ruth goes to Boaz's farm and picks the grain that he has left in the field. In the course of her gathering, Boaz learns of her faithfulness to Naomi and eventually falls in love with Ruth, marries her and together they have a son named Obed who is the father of Jesse who is the father of King David! God is faithful! From this story we learn that no one is excluded from God's love or God's plan. It also shows us that God uses people we wouldn't expect him to use to accomplish his purposes. Ruth was not an Israelite, she was not part of the "chosen" people- and yet she became part of God's greater story because of her faithfulness and because God's plans are always bigger than ours!

Closing Prayer:

Dear Jesus, we thank you that you came to save all people. Move us to reach out in love to those people who are different from us. Help us realize that you use all people to reveal your glory and truth. Help us to not be narrow minded or judgmental towards those who are different than us. Help us to remember to pray for all nations, all people, that all might experience your love and grace. Amen.



wheat

Sunday
December 14th
Samuel: God has A Plan for Us

Daily Scripture Reading: *1 Samuel 3: 1-13*

Daily Devotional:

Samuel was a prophet called by God to help Israel become a nation. Samuel was chosen by God to anoint the first two kings of Israel- Saul and then David. Samuel's life was set apart from the beginning. His mother Hannah had longed to have a son and after many years of praying and being barren Hannah finally gave birth to a son, Samuel whom she then dedicated to God's service. From the moment Samuel was born he was set apart to do God's work.

Samuel helped Israel become a nation under the rule of a King (like all of their surrounding neighbors). Prior to the anointing of Saul as the Israel's first King, Israel was led by judges, many who helped deliver Israel from the hands of their enemies. When anointing a person it is the pouring of oil on their head that becomes a sign and symbol that God favors that person and wants to use him/her in a special way. At first Saul was a good king. But when he became disobedient to God and refused to listen to Samuel's advice, God rejected him as king. Samuel was then charged to anoint a new king and ultimately God's plan for salvation was revealed through King David's line, not Saul's.

In a way we are anointed at our Baptism through the waters of baptism. When water is poured on our head and a cross is made on our forehead it is a sign that we are united with Jesus Christ and are now members of his body, set aside to be the people of God. God's plan for us is salvation through Jesus Christ and just as God called Samuel when he was a young boy; God still calls us by our names: beloved, worthy, child of God, loved, holy and righteous. God called Samuel to be his servant. God calls us still today to serve him above every other thing.

Closing Prayer:

Thank you Heavenly Father, for the gift of Baptism, which is a sign for us today that we are your people. Help us to be a people who serve you at home, at school, at work or wherever we find ourselves today. Open our hearts to see that you do have a plan for each of us and that you still call us by name to go out into the world to live as your chosen people. *(Think of this community, lift this community up in prayer today, how does this community need God? Pray that God's Holy Spirit would come upon this community and help bring people to faith. Pray that we might have open hearts to be his witnesses everyday)*



Monday
December 15th
King David: Listening to God's Calling

Daily Scripture Reading: *1 Samuel 16:1-13*

Daily Devotional:

After King Saul forgot to remain faithful to God's calling; God put into action a plan to anoint a new King- King David. David was the youngest of Jesse's sons from a small tribe and a relatively unknown family. As the youngest son his life would have been pretty spelled out for him- a life of shepherding and without a lot of other prospects. And yet God called him to be king. Even Samuel, when he went to "anoint" the new king was surprised that David was the one God had called to lead God's people. David proved worthy of the title of king. He served for 40 years after Saul died, seven years in Hebron and 33 years in Jerusalem. He was a great king because he trusted in God and tried to obey God's commandment. Even when he messed up, he sought God's forgiveness and guidance. David is said to be a "man after God's own heart." Through David's leadership Israel became a strong nation. David's life is a model for us. He was called to do God's work, even when he and others never would have guessed that David was chosen to this important calling. God's calling for us is the same. We may feel like we have nothing to offer, that we aren't the first born child, or gifted or skilled, or worthy of God's calling. God's calling though is for everyone. Each of us has gifts to contribute to God's kingdom work. We limit God by being fearful, by doubting God's word, by forgetting that God is in control. David made some serious mistakes in his leadership and instead of allowing those mistakes to cripple him, to keep him from his calling; he asked God for forgiveness, admitted he had messed up and continued to trust that God would be faithful to him even though he made mistakes. Our mistakes, our mess ups shouldn't keep us from trusting that if we come with repentant hearts that Jesus will forgive us.

Closing Prayer:

Dear Jesus we thank you for kings, presidents, leaders and rulers of our world today. Help all our leaders to be humble, teachable and thoughtful. May the decisions they make on behalf of others be decisions that will best encourage and foster hope for all people. We pray for those countries in our world where there are corrupt leaders- bring those leaders to their knees in prayer and confession that they might seek to do what is right by their people. Help our leaders to be selfless in their attempt to lead our community, state and nation. (*Pray for specific leaders/situations that you know of*). Amen



Tuesday
December 16th
King Solomon: A Wise King

Daily Scripture Readings: *1 Kings 3:3-28 & 1 Kings 5:1-6*

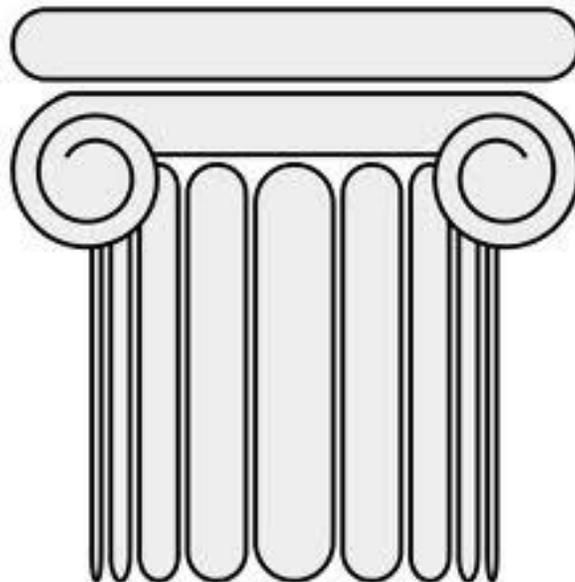
Daily Devotional:

Solomon followed his father David as king of Israel. He is remembered for his great wisdom (*the Proverbs for example are saying attributed to Solomon and his great wisdom*) and for the beautiful temple he built for God in Jerusalem. By building a temple Solomon helped move the worship of God from a tent to a building. Prior to the temple's construction the 10 commandments were housed in the Ark of the Covenant which would move as the people moved. The people of Israel believed that God resided where the ark was kept. The construction of the temple made a "permanent" home for the worship of God and it served as the central place of worship for over 350 years.

Worship continues to have a central place in the lives of God's people. Worship should be a time of gathering, of living out our faith in and among other Christians, a place where we can find hope and meaning for our lives as we give our thanks and praise to God. Solomon in sense was giving thanks to God for all that he had done for David and Israel. He was worshipping God by constructing a place of worship for God's people. In our church, we gather together as the people of God to hear the good news of Jesus Christ and to worship our Savior. Worship is not about us! It is about God and our response to the goodness of Jesus' love for all who put their faith and trust in him. Is worship a central part of your life? Why or why not? What should your response to God's goodness be? How can you change your heart, your attitude and make worship a priority?

Closing Prayer:

Merciful Lord we thank you for our church and for all the churches in the world where the name of Christ is proclaimed. We thank you for the opportunities we have to come and worship you, to come and seek your face and be filled with your glory. Help us to remember that worship is about YOU, not us. Help us to remember that we are called to come and worship you, to give you thanks and praise. Help us in those moments when all we want to do is complain to come to you and seek a change of heart and attitude. Help us make worship a priority in our lives each and every day. (*Spend time in prayer*)



Wednesday
December 17th
Elijah: Prophet

Daily Scripture Reading: *1 Kings 18:16-39*

Daily Devotional:

The prophet Elijah lived 900 years before Jesus during a time of famine and drought in Israel. It did not rain and the crops did not grow. The people of Israel were worshipping idols (Baal in particular)-not God. Elijah's role as the prophet was to speak truth to a people who had turned their backs and their worship on God. Elijah remembered God's promises and tried to tell the people about the one true God. He stood up against King Ahab who wanted to divert the people's attention from God to that of worshipping false gods. To prove that only the Lord was God, Elijah entered into a contest with the priests of Baal, an idol god. As we read in our scripture reading today, God sent fire down upon a soaked altar to prove that he was the one true God. All the people witnessing this miracle bowed down and shouted "the Lord, he is God!" Even the king's heart was changed.

Sometimes we forget God or make idols out of stuff. We stay at home from worship on Sundays; we think if we just have more money or more things we will be "okay;" we forget to seek God's wisdom for our lives; we judge other people by what they have or don't have; and we listen to the lies that money, power, and stuff is what gets you ahead in life. When we do that we grow away from God and begin to worship idols. We begin to trust in the material world around us instead of our great and merciful Lord. How can we be more like Elijah trusting in God first and foremost? How can we have unshakable faith in our Lord? Spend time in quiet reflection seeking to understand who God is and ask him how your faith and trust in God can be renewed.

Closing Prayer:

Merciful Jesus, forgive me for serving idols instead of you. Forgive me for making excuses for the reasons why I can't go to church or why I need the latest greatest thing that doesn't bring you glory. Spark in me a desire to keep you first in my life today and always. Help me to be faithful to your calling to trust in you in all circumstances. Help me be faithful in my worship of you today and always (*spend time in confession and then thanksgiving*). Amen



Thursday
December 18th
Hezekiah- Remembering God's Covenant

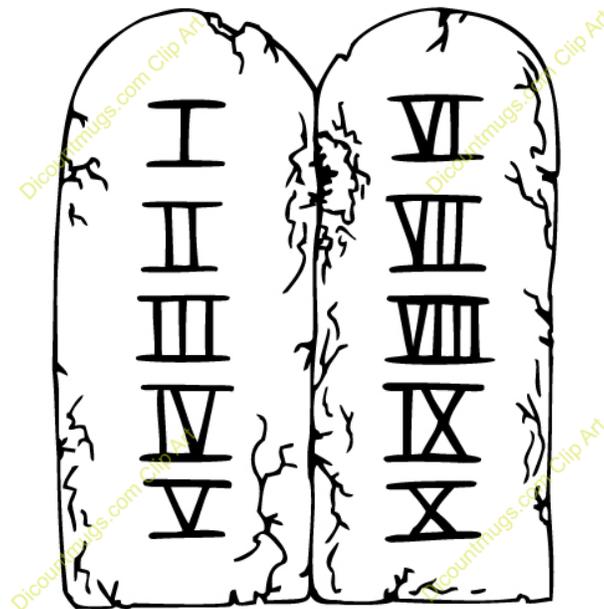
Daily Scripture Reading: *2 Kings 18:1-7*

Daily Devotional:

For many years Israel was ruled by leaders who had turned away from God. These leaders' worshipped false gods, turned their backs on the commandments given to Moses and allowed things to happen that were against God's will for His chosen people. Unlike the Kings before him Hezekiah "held fast to the Lord" and "did not depart from following him but kept the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses." Hezekiah removed all of the idols from the cities, he sought God's word for his rule, and he listened to the prophet Isaiah who lived during his reign. Hezekiah attempted to restore proper worship in Israel however his sons did not follow his guidance and instruction, leading Israel once again in idol worship and away from God's law. Even though I am sure that there were many temptations around Hezekiah to rule by his own standards and desires, he chose to follow God's law instead. What temptations are you struggling with in your life? What areas are of your life do you struggle to hand over to God? How would your life be if you chose to follow the world's standards instead of God's? Spend some time thinking about what God wants for you, your friends, your family, this community. What can you begin to do today to make this place a better place for all people?

Closing Prayer:

Loving King I come today in prayer giving you thanks for your Holy word, your commandments and your instructions for living. Help me today to look to your word to find guidance, encouragement and strength. Reveal to me those areas in my life where I am stumbling and falling short of your glory. Help me to seek to do your will. Reveal those places in my heart and mind that need to be changed. Help me have your wisdom, your vision, your love for the world around me. Help me be strong in the face of temptation. (*Spend time lifting up in prayer those things you thought about in your devotional time*).
Amen



Friday
December 19th
Josiah: Living the Covenant

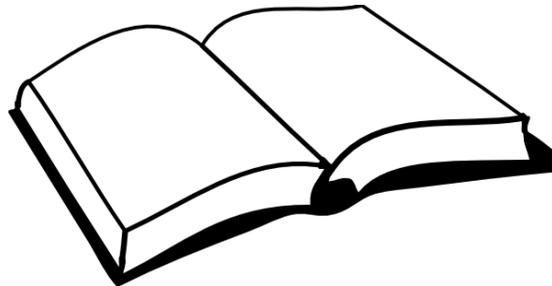
Daily Scripture Reading: *2 Kings 22: 1-13; 23:1-3*

Daily Devotional:

Between the time of Hezekiah and Josiah many rulers "did what was evil in the sight of the Lord." The story of Josiah is a wonderful story of change. Josiah "did what was right in the sight of the Lord and walked in all the way of his father David (meaning King David who would have lived centuries before him-- here is an indication that he is of the blood line of David). While Josiah was a good king doing what was "right" in the sight of God he didn't "know" the laws of God because the leaders before him had forgotten God's laws. When the priest Hilkiah finds the book of the law- (we assume that it in reference to the Torah) and when the Torah is read Josiah realizes that the people were FAR from God's holiness. The people and their leaders had been walking in their own ways for so long they didn't even recognize the truth of the scriptures anymore. They were living by their own standards instead of relying on God's rule. When Josiah hears the words of scripture he makes a promise to God with all his heart and soul to live by God's holy word. He stands before God and the people and makes a promise to live into his covenant with God and to "perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book." All the people joined in the covenant as well. In some ways we are a people much like those who were living under Josiah's early rule-- we have lost our understanding of the scriptures. We "think" we are living by God's standards, and yet somehow we have no working memory of the truth of the scriptures. There are many in our communities whose "understanding" of the Bible comes from what they see on TV in reality shows, from Hollywood's perspective, or from a politician's "statements" and the reality is more often than not what they are preaching is NOT Christianity. We think because someone who claims to have authority "says that it is what God's word is telling us" then it must be gospel truth. The fact of the matter is, more often than not we have no clue as to what God's word is really saying to us. It is almost as if the truth of the scriptures has been "buried" for decades and is waiting for a priest like Hilkiah to bring the "book of the law" to our communities once again so that we can rediscover what is truth. How are you doing with your study of God's word? Where do you find your understanding about Christianity, about Jesus, about God's Holy word-- through TV, Hollywood, the twitter feeds- or is it from the scriptures themselves? Take a step out in faith and read the scriptures for yourselves, be like Josiah and rediscover the glorious message of Jesus Christ through his holy word.

Closing Prayer:

Gracious Lord forgive us! Forgive us for trusting "others" to tell us about Christianity instead of desiring to discover for ourselves what your word has to say to us. Forgive us for being a people who just rely on the messages we hear around us to inform us about who you are. Lord, send your Holy Spirit upon us so that your word may be fresh and new, exciting and revealing in such a way that we are inspired once again to be a people who long to drink for your sacred word. Fill us with a hunger for your word that fills our spirits and creates in us a longing to know more of you. Amen.



Saturday
December 20th
Isaiah: A Call to Action

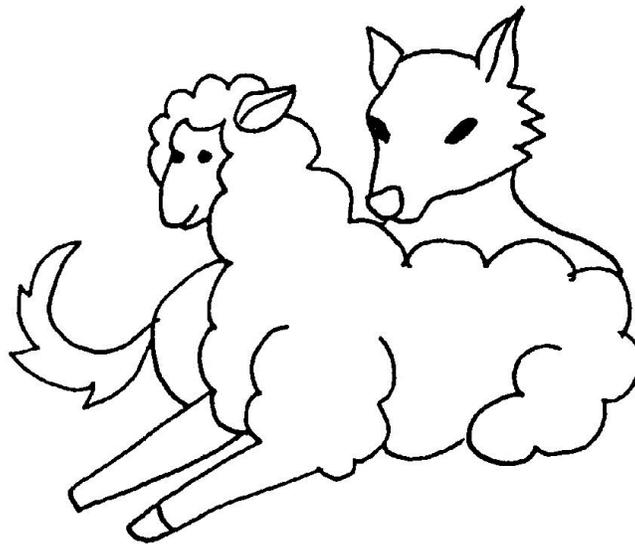
Daily Scripture Reading: *Isaiah 1:1, 6:1-8 & 9:6-7 & Isaiah 11:1-9*

Daily Devotion:

Isaiah was one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament. He lived near the city of Jerusalem about 700 years before Christ. His prophecies brought hope to the people of Israel because he foresaw God's plan to save their nation. Throughout Isaiah the story of Christ is foretold as a child who would be called Immanuel, "God with us." For a nation in turmoil, the idea of one who was to bring the people of comfort and hope in the midst of a rather hard time was reassuring that God had not forgotten His covenant promise to Israel. This child would be a new branch on the Jesse family tree and that child was Jesus Christ. It would be several more centuries before Christ's coming was fulfilled. The book of Isaiah was already centuries old when Jesus quoted from it in his sermon at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-23). Generations of Christians have found comfort and hope in its prophecies of the Messiah. The book of Isaiah speaks to human need and to the hope that we have in the one who is Immanuel—God with us.

Closing Prayer:

O Lord, my God, I come today proclaiming in my heart the good news that you are indeed Immanuel- God with us. May the child that Isaiah prophesied about be received in my heart once again today and always. Help me to fully experience the wonder and the truth that you are a God who is always with your people. I pray O Lord that your love would be revealed once again to your people and to your creation that people's hearts and minds would be opened to your Holy Spirit and that you would breathe new life into our world. *(Spend time praying for this community, for people in our community to be open to God's movement, that people would have visions of what a better community might look like, that all people would be welcomed and treated equally; that our youth would find a place where they are loved and cared for and that people's lives would be changed).* Amen



Sunday
December 21st
Fourth Sunday in Advent
Daniel: Trusting God in All Circumstances

Daily Scripture Reading: *Daniel 6:1-24*

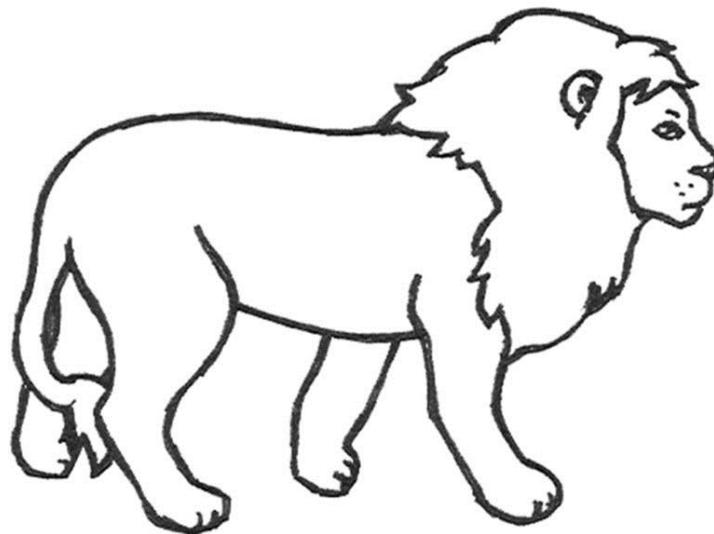
Daily Devotional:

In the year 598 B.C.E, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered Jerusalem. Daniel was among the people of God who were captured and brought back to Babylon. In Babylon, Daniel became a favorite advisor of the king and as a result, some officials became jealous and tried to get rid of Daniel. They knew that Daniel was a Jew and would only pray to God. The jealous advisors convinced the King to make a law that no one could pray to any "idol" or person, except the King for 30 days. Anyone found doing so would be thrown into a den of lions. Of course Daniel was a man of faith. Even though he served the King, he was loyal to YHWH first and foremost. Daniel was caught praying to YHWH and thrown into the den of lions. What happened? He was protected by God. Daniel trusted in God in all circumstances. Would you have trusted God in that way?

No doubt, this story has been told many times to encourage the people of Israel to trust God even when their situation looked bad. Daniel reminds us that if God's people are faithful to God and never stop praying to him, they can overcome anything. In the New Testament we are reminded to have faith even the size of a mustard seed and if we pray to God we can tell mountains to move and they will. What Daniel's story reminds us to do, is to be a people of prayer and trust- to trust that in all things God is with us. How do you need to trust God today? In what ways can you begin to pray more?

Closing Prayer:

Dear Lord, I want to be faithful to you. Help me have the courage even in the tough moments of life to be like Daniel, who seeks you first in prayer. Help me put my faith and trust in you in all circumstances, even when I don't understand what is happening in the world around me. Help me to have faith in those times when all seems hopeless. Help me to see that you are always with me. Amen.



Monday
December 22nd
Elizabeth & Zechariah: Faithfully Doubtful

Daily Scripture Reading: *Luke 1:1-25 and Luke 1:39-45*

Daily Devotional:

Elizabeth and Zechariah play an important role in the Christmas story as they are the parents of John the Baptist, the last known prophet who was called by God to prepare the way for Jesus Christ. Of course like most stories in the Bible there was a twist. Elizabeth and Zechariah have no children and are now older so when an angel came to Zechariah to announce the good news, Zechariah could scarce believe the information. In fact it seemed so good that it must have been “too good to be true.” Children were considered to be a great blessing. Would/could this prayer truly be answered? In his moment of doubt, when he questioned the angel he became mute until the birth of his son—in essence because he was afraid, God showed Zechariah his power over all things by taking away Zechariah’s power to speak.

God promises to hear our prayers and to answer them in his way, in his will, in his time. We don’t get the privilege of understanding God’s mind. We don’t often understand how or why God answers our prayers on in the manner in which he answers them. I am sure that Zechariah and Elizabeth who were said to be advanced in years, who longed for a child for years were confused when the impossible became possible. I am sure they questioned whether God heard their cries. I am sure they wondered if God really cared for their concerns. And I am sure that their doubt was a response to the years of silence for the unanswered requests for a child. We don’t always get what we pray for in life for we don’t understand the mind of God. The one thing we can be certain of is that God hears our prayers. An answer to a prayer may be yes, no, or later. What is truly important is our willingness to surrender our heart and our lives to Christ and his will, to trust that he knows far more than we do and what we may want may not be what is best for us. It also means trusting that God is in control even when it feels as if our world is falling apart. How do you need to trust God more today? What prayers are on your heart and how can you surrender them to Christ? How is God asking you to trust him today?

Closing Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we thank you for the reminder that you are a God who loves us deeply, who cares about our concerns and who knows what is best for us. Merciful Lord, help us as individuals and as a people of faith to be a people in prayer, trusting that you are always at work in our lives. Help us to find our strength and refuge in you in the good times and in the trials of life. Help us to trust you more each day. Thank you for the ways in which we can communicate with you through worship, prayer and study. Increase our desire as a people to worship and pray to you each day. Amen



Tuesday
December 23rd
John the Baptist: Preparation

Daily Scripture: *Matthew 3:1-12*

Daily Devotional:

About six months before Jesus was born, a son was born to Elizabeth and Zechariah (Jesus' cousin). They named him John. John was known as John the Baptist, the last of the great prophets of Israel. His message was to herald the coming of the savior. His "job" was to prepare the people of Israel to hear the good news that was breaking forth- to prepare their hearts to receive the message that Christ would offer to the people, and to help them repent in readiness for receiving God's grace. John the Baptist preached that people should repent of their sins and be baptized. He baptized hundreds of people including Jesus Christ. But his baptism was not exactly like ours today, he was baptizing to prepare people's hearts for the message of Jesus and the redemption that would soon follow. He wanted people to repent (or say sorry) for what they were doing so that they could have free hearts to receive Christ's grace and forgiveness. Today our baptism is our symbol of the grace that Christ freely gives to people. It is our outward symbol of God's Spirit working in our hearts. The shell with three water drops is a symbol often for baptism: the three water drops symbolizing the Father, Son and Holy Spirit into which Christians are baptized. The shell often represents John the Baptist because John was the one who baptized Christ and was often a means for pouring water over the head of one being baptized. For Christians, baptism is in a sense like your spiritual birthday. When were you baptized? Do you celebrate your baptism? What does baptism mean to you?

Closing Prayer:

Thank you, Jesus, for the gift of baptism. As we live each day as your children may we like John the Baptist prepare the way for Christ to come into the lives of others. Help us to be a people who go out into all corners of the earth preaching a message of hope, making disciples of all people and baptizing them in your name. Amen.



Wednesday
December 24th
Mary & the Angel Gabriel: Faith

Daily Scripture Reading: *Luke 1:26-45*

Daily Devotional:

It is almost Christmas. Soon we will celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. In these last few moments there will be presents to buy and wrap, family coming or going, dinners to prepare for, worship services to attend and more. I wonder sometimes though if we crowd out the message of Christ's birth with all the "stuff" of Christmas. Have we forgotten that so long ago God came to a young woman named Mary and announced that she would be the mother of our Lord and Savior? Have we forgotten that Christmas is really about Christ and not "stuff?" Can you imagine what Mary must of have felt or thought when the angel came to her? The angel said, "do not be afraid, Mary, for you have pleased God. And he will cause you to have a baby son, and you shall call his name, Jesus." I can only begin to imagine what Mary must have felt: fear, wonder, confusion, doubt? Mary is at first scared and then she ends this encounter with a song of joy because even though this was a life changing event for her, she was about to embark on a journey that required faith, trust and hope that God would do what he said he would do.

How surprising are God's ways. Through a poor, young woman from the town of Nazareth, God was going to come to his people and usher in his salvation hope in a final act of redemption through Jesus. Mary was faithful to God's calling. How are you being faithful today in the midst of the busyness of this season? How are you seeking what God wants of you when you are surrounded by so many pressures to "appear" to be like everyone else? On this last day before Christmas morning take some time to reflect on the meaning of Christmas to you, on Mary and what she must have endured to be the mother of our Savior? What things is Christ asking you to give up today so that you can draw closer to him?

Closing Prayer:

Merciful Lord, we thank you for Mary and her faithfulness even in the midst of such a great request. We thank you for her selfless example of following your will. May we the people of God have the same willingness to give up everything in your name so that others might come to know the glorious news of Jesus Christ. Help us to be a people who strive to be living examples of your love and grace. Today, more than any help us to be focused on your first and foremost that we might remember the true meaning of Christmas and this wonderful holy season. Help us to see beyond the Christmas lights, beyond the presents under the tree, beyond the stress of putting on the perfect feast and see you and all you have to offer us. Remind us once again who it is we celebrate today, tomorrow and each day. For it is in the name of Christ that we pray. Amen.



Thursday
December 25th
Christmas Morning!
Jesus: Our Savior

Daily Scripture Reading: *Luke 2:1-7*

Daily Devotional:

Sing: "Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King; Let every heart, prepare him room and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and heaven and nature sing."

Today we finally celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Hallelujah the light of the world has come into the world to save the world. For too long, the people of God lived in darkness but now we live in the light of Christ who is our savior. Jesus is our long awaited King, the descendant of Jesse of the line of King David. Christ was no ordinary baby. He was born in a manger years ago to bring about the fulfillment of God's plan to redeem a broken and hurting world. Christ's birth was the beginning of a new relationship, a new covenant, a new promise between God and his creation, his people-us! God became a human being just like us so that he could know and understand what we deal with each and every day. Christ experienced the beauty of a sunset and the heartache of losing someone he dearly loved. Christ suffered in every way that we suffer and knew that it would be worth it in the end to experience our humanity so that he could not only bring redemption, he could enter our lives in a real and deep way. Christ became like us so that we could become like him. Oh how he loves us! Christ loves us to the ends of the earth. Let all of earth sing his praises. Let us worship him and keep him forever in our hearts.

Closing Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we are filled with wonder and joy today because of your great love for us. Thank you for coming to our earth as the Promised One to be our Lord and Savior. Help us in the midst of the wrapping paper, in the joy of family, in the smells of the Christmas season to remember that without you we would not have a reason to celebrate today. Help us to take time today to focus on you and your holy word. We pray for the many in our world who do not as of yet know your good news. Help us to remember to pray for them. We pray that your Holy Spirit would come and bring your hope to our world. We offer our praises, our life and our hearts to you. In Christ's holy name we praise you, Amen.

