

Prayerful Reflections



A Daily Devotional for Advent

Read, Reflect, Respond and Rest in the Love of God

Edited by Rev. Julia Styles

About Prayerful Reflections

Prayerful Reflections is a daily resource for connecting with God and the broader Christian community during Advent and Christmas day (November 27–December 25, 2025). Each day, a different author will reflect on the daily scripture from the [Revised Common Lectionary](#). Through the spiritual practice of *Lectio Divina*, or sacred listening, each author invites us to **Read** the Bible, **Reflect** on its message, **Respond** to what we hear, and **Rest** in God's love.

Launched in 2021, this online devotional fosters global connection and aims to share reflections on God's Word, amplified by the voices of women theologians, pastors, chaplains, teachers, and community leaders from diverse backgrounds. We encourage the entire Church, no matter their gender, to read and listen to female theologians and pastors. Reading *Prayerful Reflections* during Advent and Lent is one way to expand your theological influences.

The insights within *Prayerful Reflections* are rooted in faith and Scripture and inspired by the Holy Spirit. Reflections are posted daily at www.spiritualdirectionwithjulia.com/blog, where you can comment and engage. Feel free to share this free resource with others — you can download the PDF version for free at www.prayerfulreflections.com.

If you enjoy the rhythm of *lectio divina* and are curious about how to create sacred space in your daily life, consider trying a free introduction to Spiritual Direction with Julia Styles at www.spiritualdirectionwithjulia.com.

About the Cover Art



The cover art is an acrylic painting by artist and pastor Julie Jane Capel, produced in December 2021, titled "Simple is Powerful"

Follow [jjcpaintings](#) on instagram to see more of Julie's inspirational artworks.

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The Pursuit of Shalom

A Reflection for Thursday, November 27 by Rev. Bronwyn Leigh Murphy

Lectionary reading for 11/27/2025: [Psalm 122](#); [Daniel 9:15-19](#); [James 4:1-10](#); Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 122

Read

Psalm 122 *NIV*

¹ I rejoiced with those who said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD.”

² Our feet are standing
in your gates, Jerusalem.

³ Jerusalem is built like a city
that is closely compacted together.

⁴ That is where the tribes go up—
the tribes of the LORD—
to praise the name of the LORD
according to the statute given to Israel.

⁵ There stand the thrones for judgment,
the thrones of the house of David.

⁶ Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
“May those who love you be secure.

⁷ May there be peace within your walls
and security within your citadels.”

⁸ For the sake of my family and friends,
I will say, “Peace be within you.”

⁹ For the sake of the house of the LORD
OUR God,
I will seek your prosperity.

Reflect

One of the best parts of going on vacation is the excitement of getting to where you are going. We eagerly pack our cars, check in to airport gates, and board trains full of joyful anticipation. Along the way, we think of all of the fun and amazing things we will do when we arrive at our destination and all the goodness our trip will bring. Perhaps we can hardly sleep the night before thinking about all the wonderful adventures that await us. There is a palatable excitement that bubbles up inside of us as we move ever closer to our destination. I can't help but wonder if this is similar to how David felt in writing about the ascent to Jerusalem. Here they are- eager pilgrims, excitedly preparing to enter the place of the Lord. The anticipation almost leaps off the page. Their hope and expectation for the journey ahead: peace. The word appears three consecutive times in verses 6-8, suggesting that peace was a central motivation for the pilgrims' ascent to the holy city. While peace is certainly a worthy pursuit, if we read “peace” solely as we understand in 2025 terms, we miss the profound depth of the term in the Hebrew, the original language of Psalm 122. In this Psalm, David is not just praying for security, calm, and

prosperity; he is praying for *shalom*. Shalom is peace that does not just indicate the absence of war or conflict, but a peace reflects a sense of well being. Shalom is peace that stretches wider than our presenting circumstances. Shalom is peace that goes deep within. This is David's prayer, that after a joyfully anticipated journey, there would be a transformative peace that reaches the soul. As we begin Advent anew, let us be pilgrims in pursuit and expectation of *shalom*.

Respond

What does shalom look like in your life? How can you pursue shalom in your context? This Advent, open your head and heart to the pursuit of shalom, a peace that transcends and transforms.

Rest

God, thank you for this Advent season and the opportunity to wait in joyful expectation. Give us the strength as pilgrims on the journey to pursue shalom. May we trust that you are interested in our well being, inside and out.

About the Author



Rev. Bronwyn Leigh Murphy is an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Covenant Church. She currently services as both a hospital chaplain resident and a preschool teacher at an ability inclusive preschool near Sacramento, CA. Bronwyn serves on several denominational leadership teams serving and advocating for the marginalized. She has been married to her husband for over 20 years, where they both, along with their 3 children and 2 dogs, have been enthusiastically and faithfully cheering on the Los Angeles Dodgers for many years.

By Faith, We Drive On

A Reflection for Friday, November 28 by Rev. Alicia Vela Anderson

Lectionary reading for 011/28/2025: [Psalm 122](#); [Genesis 6:1-10](#); [Hebrews 11:1-7](#); Selected passage for reflection: Hebrews 11:1-7

Read

Hebrews 11:1-7 CEB (Common English Bible)

Faith is the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don't see. The elders in the past were approved because they showed faith.

By faith we understand that the universe has been created by a word from God so that the visible came into existence from the invisible.

By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice to God than Cain, which showed that he was righteous, since God gave approval to him for his gift. Though he died, he's still speaking through faith.

By faith Enoch was taken up so that he didn't see death, and *he wasn't found because God took him up*. He was given approval for having pleased God before he was taken up. It's impossible to please God without faith because the one who draws near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards people who try to find him.

By faith Noah responded with godly fear when he was warned about events he hadn't seen yet. He built an ark to deliver his household. With his faith, he criticized the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes from faith.

Reflect

In my late teen/young adult years, when I was confused about the world around me, I would go for a drive. I'd jump into my '94 Jeep Grand Cherokee, roll all the windows down, put on a mixed CD that I had made or had been made for me, and I'd drive the dark roads along the foothills of the Rockies. Those were the moments where I felt the presence of God most tangibly. I felt the Spirit in the wind flowing in and out of the windows. I would imagine how the disciples felt when they could sit across the table from Jesus, talking through whatever they needed to talk through.

It was a season of life that was chaotic and filled with the unknown. I laugh now at the ways that young woman thought she needed to have it all figured out. I'd get into the car so determined that once I pulled back into the driveway, I would have figured it all out. More times than not what I found wasn't answers or a plan but rather the warm assurance that I was not alone. I was learning so much about God in that time but on those drives I was learning the feeling of God. The head knowledge was becoming heart knowledge.

As I've moved away from my mountains, after my dad sold my beloved Jeep, as my technology has been upgraded to have any song at my finger tips, I tend to long for those dark nights along the foothills - the pureness of what I felt in that car. It feels more complicated now, my changing feelings about who God is and how they interact with our messy, chaotic world. Sometimes I expect that familiar feeling in the midst of my busy and loud life.

Advent is a time when I try to slow it down, when I try to tune back into the intentionality of those car rides. I'm trying to recapture those moments when I tuned into the ways the divine was breaking into my day to day. To record them like my own little Hall of Faith like Hebrews 11. Just like the imperfect elders of this faith story, I am writing out the places where I have found my faith. Recording the places and spaces where the invisible has been made visible to me.

By faith, Alicia took to the dark roads. She put on that one song that reminded her to be bold. She rolled down the windows, turned up the heat, and poured her angsty heart out to the one who created the mountains on her left.

Respond

Where is one space where you find the warm assurance of God's presence? If you're not sure, try to remember a time where you've felt calm, that peace that didn't make sense but washed over you. Take some time to write about that space. Describe, in detail, what it was like to be in that space. What was the smell? What types of materials touched your skin? What sounds are associated with it? Journal about that time.

Rest

Creator God, meet us in these times. Flood our existence with your Spirit. Grant us moments of undeniable presence, peace, and love. As we journey with you this season of Advent, fulfill our expectations in new ways. May we allow ourselves to be open and expectant of your presence.

About the Author

Rev. Alicia Vela Anderson is a Spiritual Formation Coach and Writer living in Chicago. After serving the local church for 20 years, she is shifting her focus and hoping to provide a space where youth can explore the big topics of faith, life, and how to thrive imperfectly in a crazy world. You can find her on social media @revaliciavelaanderson



Our God the Faithful God

A Reflection for Saturday, November 29 by Jessica deLinde Dyckman

Lectionary reading for 11/29/2025: [Psalm 122](#); [Genesis 6:11-22](#); [Matthew 24:1-22](#);

Selected passage for reflection: **Genesis 6:9-22, Genesis 9:11-17**

Read

Genesis 6:9-22 (NLT): *“This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, the only blameless person living on earth at the time, and he walked in close fellowship with God. Noah was the father of three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Now God saw that the earth had become corrupt and was filled with violence. God observed all this corruption in the world, for everyone on earth was corrupt. So God said to Noah, “I have decided to destroy all living creatures, for they have filled the earth with violence. Yes, I will wipe them all out along with the earth! “Build a large boat from cypress wood and waterproof it with tar, inside and out. Then construct decks and stalls throughout its interior. Make the boat 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. Leave an 18-inch opening below the roof all the way around the boat. Put the door on the side, and build three decks inside the boat—lower, middle, and upper. “Look! I am about to cover the earth with a flood that will destroy every living thing that breathes. Everything on earth will die. But I will confirm my covenant with you. So enter the boat—you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring a pair of every kind of animal—a male and a female—into the boat with you to keep them alive during the flood. Pairs of every kind of bird, and every kind of animal, and every kind of small animal that scurries along the ground, will come to you to be kept alive. And be sure to take on board enough food for your family and for all the animals.” So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him.”*

Reflect

Our God is a mighty and holy God. He is right and just, all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-present. He is our God full of awe and wonder, might and mercy, always faithful and loving.

When we read passages like these, it is sometimes difficult to understand or comprehend why the Lord does what He does - whether that is in the ancient times of the Bible or even the times of today. How could suffering and sovereignty coexist?

Scripture says the Lord's ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts (*Isaiah 55:8-9*). He *Is and Was, and Is to Come* (*Revelations 1:8*). He is the *Holy of holies* (*Isaiah 6:3*) and is a faithful and good God (*Psalm 136*).

We may not know why God allows suffering, but we do know that He works all things - both good and bad - together for His glory and ultimate purpose (*Romans 8:28*). He is a God who keeps His promises (*Deuteronomy 7:9*) and we continue to see that truth throughout the Bible as His covenant love ultimately came through Jesus Christ our Messiah and Savior (*Hebrews 1:1-4*).

The account of Noah and the Ark is an early example of God's holiness, faithfulness, justice, mercy, and love. Noah believed God to be good and gracious, despite the destruction and unknown that was before him. He trusted God and obeyed Him, even when it was hard to make sense of what was to come. And yet through it all, God proved to be a faithful, loving, and merciful God. We are here today because we are long descendants of Noah and his family.

Genesis 9:11-17 (NLT): *"Yes, I am confirming my covenant with you. Never again will floodwaters kill all living creatures; never again will a flood destroy the earth." Then God said, "I am giving you a sign of my covenant with you and with all living creatures, for all generations to come. I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my covenant with you and with all the earth. When I send clouds over the earth, the rainbow will appear in the clouds, and I will remember my covenant with you and with all living creatures. Never again will the floodwaters destroy all life. When I see the rainbow in the clouds, I will remember the eternal covenant between God and every living creature on earth." Then God said to Noah, "Yes, this rainbow is the sign of the covenant I am confirming with all the creatures on earth.""*

Even in the year 2025, we can still visibly see God's faithful promise to Noah in a rainbow after the flood.

Whatever this Advent season brings, take a moment to look around for God's faithfulness. It is there in the mess and mixup, the good and glory, and smallest of moments. God is near and He can be trusted to keep His promises. Jesus Christ, our Messiah and Savior, is coming back again. Today, we prepare our hearts to celebrate His birth.

Respond

- Like a rainbow in the sky, what are some visual reminders in your life of God's faithfulness?
- How is God calling you to be faithfully obedient in this Advent and Christmas season?
- Is there someone that you could encourage with your own story of God's faithfulness?

Rest

Dear Lord, thank you for the visual reminders of your covenant love and faithfulness throughout the earth and within a rainbow after the storm. We ask that in this Advent season, you will prepare our hearts to hear from you. Give us courage to obey your commands, give us a boldness to share the Good News of Advent, give us a joy to celebrate what is ahead, and a steadfastness to walk in hard seasons. Help us to look for you in all of it! We trust you with our daily lives and all that you provide. Please show us your love and glory in the days leading up to the celebration of the birth of Christ Jesus, your ultimate display of faithfulness. To you be the glory! Amen!

About the Author



Jessica deLinde Dyckman is the founding editor of “*The Courageous & Kind Project*” a digital media project dedicated to empowering women to live out their God-given purpose. She and her husband live in Atlanta, Georgia, with their son and daughter. Jessica is involved in her community with the Mom Community at Oak Grove, Main Street Church in Tucker and Main Street Christian School, Breathe Strong Cystic Fibrosis, and the Junior League of Atlanta.

Find Jessica on *The Courageous & Kind Project* podcast on any major streaming platform or follow C&K on social media [@TheCourageousandKindProject](https://www.instagram.com/TheCourageousandKindProject) or www.courageousandkind.org.

When will Jesus Return?

A Reflection for the first Sunday of Advent by Rev. Julia Styles

Lectionary reading for 11/30/2025: [Isaiah 2:1-5](#), [Psalm 122](#), [Romans 13:11-14](#), [Matthew 24:36-44](#); Selected passage for reflection: Matthew 24:36-44

Read

Matthew 24:36-44 NIV

The Day and Hour Unknown

36 “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son,[a] but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

42 “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Reflect

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. The lectionary passages for today—Isaiah 2:1-5, Romans 13:11-14, and Matthew 24:36-44—focus on the theme of the “last days.” I find it interesting that the Advent liturgy begins by reflecting on the end times and the last days, and then, by the last Sunday of Advent, it culminates with the birth of Jesus. In a sense, Advent starts at the end and gradually moves toward the beginning. We begin with hope and ultimately conclude with love.

To give context to Matthew 24:36-44, it’s important to know that Jesus has already told the disciples that he will soon be killed. His disciples, upon hearing this, were likely filled with questions and uncertainty. They wondered what would come next—what they should do without him, when he would return, and how they could be prepared for his coming.

In Matthew 24, Jesus discusses wars, earthquakes, plagues, displacement, and persecution. It’s a sobering message. Jesus warns, “for nation will rise against nation, and kingdoms against kingdoms” (Matthew 24:7), and that “such things must happen, but the end is still to come” (Matthew 24:6). He tells them that “because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12). It’s a picture of chaos and suffering—that things will worsen before

they get better, and warns that “many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and deceive many” (Matthew 24:5).

But the big question remains: When will you come back, Jesus? When will God make all this suffering end? When will violence cease? When will nations turn swords into plowshares (Isaiah 2:4)? When will people forsake idolatry and worship the true God of Jacob? The disciples, familiar with the prophets like Isaiah, longed for God’s reign—a reign that would bring peace and justice. Isaiah envisions this hope vividly: “In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains... and many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord...’” (Isaiah 2:2-3). This kingdom of peace and righteousness is something they yearn for, especially when Jesus’ first coming didn’t fully establish God’s reign on earth. If not now, then when?

Jesus responds with a mystery: “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matthew 24:36). He instructs, “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come” (Matthew 24:42), emphasizing the need for vigilance. “You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (Matthew 24:44).

This question—When?—is not only the concern of the disciples 2,000 years ago but also of many Christians today. We ache for the suffering to end, for love to reign, for justice to prevail, and for God’s kingdom to come fully here on earth. So, what are we to do with this uncertainty? What are we to do when violence, injustice, and greed seem to dominate our world?

Jesus’ instruction is clear: Stay awake, be alert, and follow his teachings. As Micah 6:8 reminds us, “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Our ignorance about God’s timing calls us to this way of living—seeking righteousness, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God—rather than asserting power over others or giving up in despair.

In this season of anticipation, let us stay vigilant, trusting that our faithful work in love and justice aligns us with God’s ongoing work in the world. And in the midst of waiting and uncertainty, may we cling to the hope that Christ’s coming will ultimately usher in the fullness of God’s kingdom—a hope that sustains and renews us, guiding us toward love, peace, and justice.

Respond

There’s a lot we don’t know, but even in the shroud of mystery we can cling to hope. This week, focus on HOPE and pray that God would show you glimpses of hope in your daily life.

What do you hope for this Advent season? Is it a deeper connection with God or your family? Is it a solution to a current problem weighing you (or your community) down? Is it a hope for healing from a past hurt or current wound? Whatever your hope is for this season, lift it up to the Lord in prayer.

Rest

Take some time to engage in prayerful imagination with God, envisioning what heaven on earth will be like.

God, there is so much suffering and turmoil happening in the world right now. As we face personal struggles and feel the collective pain of injustice, help us to remember that Christ is victorious. We confess that at times, waiting and uncertainty can feel hopeless. Fill us with hope and remind us of the eternity we have with you, our loving God, so that we may find strength to overcome our present trials and tribulations.

Help us cling to the promise that one day, all that is broken will be made new. We long for the day when heaven is here on earth, and your reign covers the entire world. Then wars will cease, wounds will be healed, and disease and hunger will disappear. We yearn to see your justice flow like a mighty river, your love reign supreme, and all of creation restored to its intended glory.

Give us a clear vision of your Good News! Strengthen our faith to share it boldly, and fill our hearts with hope and love. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

About the Author

Rev. Julia Styles is a [spiritual director](#), leadership coach and retreat facilitator based out of Atlanta, GA. For over five years she has edited [Prayerful Reflections](#), bringing together some of her favorite theologians, pastors, writers and friends from around the globe. She is a mom to two little kids, Jakob and Zoe, step-mom to two young adults, Marianna and Reese, and wife to Derek. She finds joy in community, and treasures her time with others in her local MomCo (Mom Community), church and neighborhood. When Julia and her family aren't in Atlanta, they are probably enjoying the mountains of southern Appalachia.



The Waiting Game

A Reflection for Monday, December 1 by Samantha Wade

Lectionary reading for 12/01/2025: [Psalm 124](#); [Genesis 8:1-19](#); [Romans 6:1-11](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Genesis 8:1-19

Read

Book Chapter: Genesis 8:4-17 CSB

⁴The ark came to rest in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat.

⁵The water continued to recede until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were visible. ⁶After forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made, ⁷and he sent out a raven. It went back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth. ⁸Then he sent out a dove to see whether the water on the earth's surface had gone down, ⁹but the dove found no resting place for its foot. It returned to him in the ark because water covered the surface of the whole earth. He reached out and brought it into the ark to himself. ¹⁰So Noah waited seven more days and sent out the dove from the ark again. ¹¹When the dove came to him at evening, there was a plucked olive leaf in its beak. So Noah knew that the water on the earth's surface had gone down. ¹²After he had waited another seven days, he sent out the dove, but it did not return to him again. ¹³In the six hundred first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the water that had covered the earth was dried up. Then Noah removed the ark's cover and saw that the surface of the ground was drying. ¹⁴By the twenty-seventh day of the second month, the earth was dry.

¹⁵Then God spoke to Noah, ¹⁶"Come out of the ark, you, your wife, your sons, and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁷Bring out all the living creatures that are with you—birds, livestock, those that crawl on the earth—and they will spread over the earth and be fruitful and multiply on the earth."

Reflect

I have never used the lectionary in my personal Bible reading, nor have I ever attended a church that preached from the lectionary. Thanks be to God for the different ways Christian engage with scripture because I would have never made the connection between Noah and advent. Noah's story has primarily been a children's story to me. One that is often presented as a stand alone story to illustrate how God keeps his promises but without a grand canonical connection.

Recent circumstances helped me to make the connection between the receding of the flood and the coming of Christ. At the time of writing this devotional, I am 38 weeks pregnant. I spend my days looking for signs that this new life I carry will be born. I can feel the baby moving and I can

feel my body preparing for the process of birth. Yet I continue to wait day after day unsure when this new life will ultimately arrive.

Thankfully I know how long pregnancies usually last and there are medical interventions just in case my body does not naturally go into labor. But my heart goes out to Noah, there is no way of knowing how long it takes the earth to dry out after 40 days and 40 nights of rain. There was nothing that he could do to intervene and help the process along. All he could do was wait on the Lord while looking for signs of life.

God bringing life into places which are barren is a recurring theme throughout scripture. Reflecting on the story of Noah, an image that stood out to me was the ark floating on top of the water depths of the lifeless land. God had a plan, just like in Genesis 1, to bring newness of life to a place devoid of it. Scripture is abundantly clear that sin has brought about death, much like in the story of Noah. Unlike the story of Noah, the advent story is about God bringing life by extending an opportunity to humanity to receive grace upon grace (John 1:16). God's response to this land devoid of life by sin is to send his son Christ Jesus to be the light and life of men (John 1:4). The beauty of God's intervention through Jesus is that he brought life to a virgin, ex nihilo. He alone is the only creator and sustainer of life.

The story of Noah is a testament of God's faithfulness to bring to life that which has died to sin. The first coming of Jesus brought life and light and that is what we celebrate and remember during Advent. We are also anticipating Christ's second coming when we can once and for all declare, "death where is your sting (1 Corinthians 15:55)!" We, like Noah, are waiting for God's intervening hand. Let us faithfully seek for signs of life, even if none seems present, and respond in faith when we see it.

Respond

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18 aloud. Declare the truth of scripture and live in its truth.

Rest

Almighty God, giver and sustainer of life, we wait here for you. We wait but not as people without hope. Sustain our faith to continue to look for signs of life. Give us the strength to respond and take part in the work you are doing. Holy Spirit, comfort us in our distress, reassure us in our doubt, encourage us in the waiting. May this advent season bring us and our neighbor hope. All to the glory of the Father, in Christ Jesus name I pray, Amen.



About the Author

Samantha Wade is currently a stay at home mom caring for her three young boys with a little girl on the

way. Samatha received a Masters of Divinity from Denver Seminary in 2018 and was a battalion chaplain in the Army Reserves. As a military wife and mother to young children, life is in constant transition for Samantha, so she strives to do ministry wherever the Lord may take her. Samantha and her family currently reside in Seaside, CA.

Imperfect and Redeemed

A Reflection for Tuesday, December 2 by Seanna Wong

Lectionary reading for 12/02/2025: [Psalm 124](#); [Genesis 9:1-17](#); [Hebrews 11:32-40](#); Selected passage for reflection: Hebrews 11:32-40

Read

Hebrews 11:32-40, NIV

32 *And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. 35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. 36 Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were put to death by stoning;[a] they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— 38 the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.*

39 *These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, 40 since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.*

Reflect

Hebrews 11:32-40 lists familiar figures of the faith: Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. I love how the author begins almost exasperatedly: “*And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about...*” – as if a single lifetime, let alone these letters, could ever suffice to recount the mercies of God shown through faith.

Take note of the people discussed. These were men of valor, remembered for courage, leadership, and victories. Yet each was deeply human and flawed. Gideon needed repeated persuasion and handholding to step into God’s calling. Barak could not go to war without Deborah’s guidance. Jephthah won battles but faced the lifelong consequences of a foolish vow that affected his daughter. David, favored by God, wrestled with lust, sin, and moral failure. Even the strongest among them experienced fear, doubt, countless mistakes, and hidden struggles.

The author’s point is profound: God often chooses the deeply flawed to demonstrate the power of faith. He works through timid hearts, scattered minds, and past failures to accomplish

His purposes. One might even say God seeks out these things to prove He is the ultimate author, redeemer, and friend of our hearts. In this scripture, we see that faith, no matter its size, is stronger than unbelief, and it is through God's power alone that weakness is transformed into victory.

This text challenges the way we may conceptualize faith and success. It's easy to read these biblical narratives and compare ourselves to the "heroes of the faith," thinking they were bold, perfect, or supernaturally favored. But Hebrews reminds us that faith is not measured by perfection; it is measured by trust. The victories listed—subduing kingdoms, administering justice, shutting the mouths of lions, escaping death, and receiving strength in weakness—are not just historical accounts. They are promises available to us today through Christ.

The world has never been friendly to people of faith. In our trials, temptations, struggles, fears, and failures, God uses us. Our timidity, doubts, and past mistakes are not disqualifying; they become the framework for God's glory.

Comparison, however, finds its place in the final verses. Those who came before Christ clung to hope and faith, often until bitter and tortuous endings on earth. Unlike them, we live with the revealed promise of the Messiah, intimate knowledge of God's presence, and assurance of a resurrection of life, not condemnation. Faith is our conduit to God's victory, even when circumstances seem bleak, uncertain, or impossible.

How much more faith can we exhibit with our knowledge of Christ's coming, His death, resurrection, and promised return?

God's choice of flawed people reminds us that no one is beyond redemption. He can take a hesitant, imperfect, or broken heart and transform it into a testimony of triumph. Whether your faith is bold and flowing or small and trembling, God can use it to accomplish His will, a will perfected by the blood of Jesus.

Respond

Faith comes in seasons. Sometimes it's as beautiful and steady as a spring day; other times it's bristling and hard to hold, as if in winter. Yet the God of biblical victories is the same God working in us today. He restores faith, redeems failures, and fulfills promises long doubted.

Ask yourself:

- Where in my life do I feel my faith is too small?
- How might God use my fear, doubt, or past mistakes for His glory?
- In what areas do I need to cling to the promises of Christ more fully?
- How can I step forward in faith today, even in small ways?

Our scripture reminds us that "God has planned something better for us...", a restoring of

faith, a redeeming of mistakes, fulfilling promises, and so much more.

Rest

Lord, increase my faith where it feels small. Help me trust Your promises even when I stumble. Teach me to see Your strength in my weakness, and to live boldly, knowing You are faithful. Amen.

About the Author



Seanna Wong is an MBA graduate, TEDx speaker, and sometime-y chef from Miami, Florida. When she's not reading or leading worship, she's writing about Christian life or restaurant-hopping around her city.

The Fruit Will Tell: Identifying the Messiah's True Prophets

A Reflection for Wednesday, December 3 by Rev. Madison Jones McAleese

Lectionary reading for 12/3/2025: [Psalm 124](#); [Isaiah 54:1-10](#); [Matthew 24:23-35](#); Selected Passage: Matthew 24: 23-35

Read

Matthew: 24:23-35

At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you ahead of time.

"So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the wilderness,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.

"Immediately after the distress of those days

“the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’

"Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Reflect

There are preachers all over the world sharing their version of the gospel. They stand on stages in every city, preaching about a God that many of us cannot identify with. How do we know who

to listen to? How do we know who is truly pointing us to the Messiah? Where is God in the sermon?

In this passage, Jesus is warning us. He's telling us that in our lifetime, there will be many people who claim to know the Christ, that even claim to know when He is coming, and how we should act in preparation. And yet, Jesus tells us, pay them no heed. False prophets will come and go, but the word of the Lord is forever.

Instead of listening to voices who seek to stoke the fire of fear within our bellies, perhaps we should instead focus inward. Listen to God's voice. Reflect on what he is calling us to do. And then, we discern.

The spirit of discernment is powerful. Discernment is the spiritual discipline of assessment. It is imperative in this chaotic time to discern for ourselves who the false prophets are, whether the messages we are receiving are from God or not.

How do we do this? If I am trying to figure out whether a pastor or faith leader is speaking truth, I always look to the fruit. What fruit is this person producing? Is this preacher producing the fruit of kindness, compassion, love, and justice? Or the fruit of fear, discontent, division, and anger?

The fruit will point us toward the truth.

And Jesus tells us that eventually, the fruit tree will let us know when Jesus is coming. Summer is near. Christ is at the door.

So, in the meantime, how do we prepare for the coming of the New Kingdom? We tend to our garden here, on earth. We treat others well, we fight for the dignity of all people, we see the Christ in the face of our neighbor.

We bear good fruit.

Respond

Let's practice the spiritual discipline of discernment. Sitting quietly, close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths. Ask yourself, what type of fruit is important to me? What fruit do I personally want to bear? The fruit of love, forgiveness, gentleness, compassion? When heaven and earth pass away, what fruits will be left standing?

Now, consider the faith leaders you follow. Do they bear the same fruit?

Rest

God of love, strengthen within us the spirit of discernment. Help us to bear good fruit, and in turn, recognize the faith leaders and clergy who also bear good fruit. Let us not grow weary in doing good work for others, help us not feel fear for the coming of your Kingdom. Instead, stoke within us your wisdom, your compassion, your love, and your justice. Turn us away from false prophets and those who seek to do harm unto others and instead, help us to build a grove of fruit trees that grow through faith and love, so that we may be ready when you come upon the clouds. Amen.

About the Author



Rev. Madison Jones McAleese is a priest, social impact leader, and nonprofit executive director. She is an ordained priest through the Catholic Apostolic Church in North America and presides at her local Dignity Chapter. She has a Master's in Christian Studies and is completing her dissertation for her Doctorate in Social Transformation. Rev. Madison is also the Executive Director of FCM (Federation of Christian Ministries). She lives with her wife and dog, Bubbles, in Burbank, CA.

A Wise Ruler

A Reflection for Thursday, December 4 by Pastor Joy Fishler

Lectionary reading for 12/04/2025: [Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Isaiah 4:2-6; Acts 1:12-17, 21-26](#); Selected passage for reflection: Hebrews 11:32-40

Read

Psalm 72:1-7 MSG

Give the gift of wise rule to the king, O God,
the gift of just rule to the crown prince.
May he judge your people rightly,
be honorable to your meek and lowly.
Let the mountains give exuberant witness;
shape the hills with the contours of right
living.
Please stand up for the poor,
help the children of the needy,
come down hard on the cruel tyrants.

Outlast the sun, outlive the moon—
age after age after age.
Be rainfall on cut grass,
earth-refreshing rain showers.
Let righteousness burst into blossom
and peace abound until the moon fades
to nothing.
Rule from sea to sea,
from the River to the Rim.

Reflect

I can get upended over injustice. Living in a world where relationships and circumstances aren't what they could be is not easy to navigate these days. Verse 1, I stared at it and read it over and over. "Give the gift of wise rule to the king, O God." What happens when the king isn't wise? What happens when the husband, the wife, the teacher, the supervisor or the police officer "rules" in an unjust and unwise manner? What then? We can all answer that question to some degree or another.

Lately I find myself being a judge. I'm deciding what is wise and what isn't. I'm often critical these days and honestly, with good reason. Yet, last I checked, I am indeed not a judge. Jesus isn't on "my side." I have to remind myself of that lately more times than I care to admit. And sure, perhaps we can point out the foolishness in those in places of authority, but let's examine our own first.

Psalm 72 is a prayer for God's justice, fair judgment for the poor, protection for the weak, peace for the land and prosperity and abundance. Where am I placed and trusted to have authority? Who do I "rule" over? Is my leadership a reflection of Jesus? Am I seeking justice in my family and in my community? Am I taking care of the weak and the poor in my own neighborhood and city? Am I sowing peace?

Respond

This psalm was either written by David for his son, Solomon or Solomon wrote it in his early years of being king. It is written as a prayer or a blessing. Read this Scripture again and this time, personalize it and pray it back to the Lord: Jesus please grant me the gift of wisdom. May I be honorable and meek (and so forth - keep going).

Pray it again and this time pray it over a leader of your choice. I can judge or I can pray. There is power in praying Scripture and may we be a people who seek Jesus in all we do and say.

Rest

Jesus, how patient you are with me. How patient you are with our leaders. We ask for your justice in our land. We ask for wisdom and ask that we would be humble and meek. A people who are all about doing what you do and going where you lead. Our city needs you. Our country needs you. Our world needs you and we need you to help us look more like you. Have your way in us and through us, in Jesus Name. Amen.

About the Author



Joy Fishler is an Ordained Minister in the Evangelical Covenant Church. She currently resides with her family in the Sacramento Area and is the Pastor of Adult Ministry at Life Community Church. She loves Jesus, loves people and absolutely loves raising her teenage girls. She has a passion for preaching and leading people to the heart of the Father. She truly believes that there is nothing better than Jesus and following Him is the only life worth living.
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We Will Weep No More

A Reflection for Friday, December 5 by Sandra Zamblé

Lectionary reading for 12/8/2025: [Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Isaiah 30:19-26; Acts 13:16-25;](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Isaiah 30:19-26

Read

Isaiah 30:19-26

19 People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. 20 Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. 21 Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." 22 Then you will desecrate your idols overlaid with silver and your images covered with gold; you will throw them away like a menstrual cloth and say to them, "Away with you!"

23 He will also send you rain for the seed you sow in the ground, and the food that comes from the land will be rich and plentiful. On that day, your cattle will graze in broad meadows. 24 The oxen and donkeys that work the soil will eat fodder and mash, spread out with fork and shovel. 25 In the day of great slaughter, when the towers fall, streams of water will flow on every high mountain and every lofty hill. 26 The moon will shine like the sun, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days, when the Lord binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted.

Reflect

Have you ever cried so hard, or felt so discouraged that you wondered if the feeling of deep, deep sadness would ever go away? Maybe you thought that you would just never be able to stop crying, for the pain was so deep. As children, the comforting arms of a parent or a caring adult can help to steady us and reassure us that even if we didn't feel okay, we would be okay eventually. As adults, a touch on the shoulder, a gentle squeeze of a hand over the hand, a shoulder to lean on or arms outstretched to offer comfort can do wonders to provide compassion and a safe place to weep, grieve, and lament. In these uncertain times, we are in no less need of reassurance that things will be okay.

As we approach Advent, many of us are experiencing a mixture of emotions. Some are excited, but many are fearful of the future, grieving losses of relationships and special loved ones. Some of us are facing very challenging circumstances and/or are suffering and in deep emotional and/or physical pain. We may feel desolate, disappointed, and disillusioned. We look for help, and people are unavailable or dismissive. Against the backdrop of the exciting news of the

Savior, born to bring light to a dark world, some of us harbor the additional feeling of guilt on top of sadness. We say to ourselves, “How can I feel this way? The Lord is come! And yet...I feel so sad and broken in this broken world. Where do I find relief? BUT, the Word of God comes to us as a ray of light into dark thoughts and circumstances. He reminds us that He sees our sadness, He hears our cry, He is a witness to the desolation in our lives and the need for provision and direction, comfort, consolation, and peace. Jesus, the Light of the World proclaims through His birth that joy and peace, that only come from Him, is within our reach. When we “cry for help,” He will be gracious, He will answer our prayers, and give direction: “THIS is the way, walk in it.” No more confusion! No more weeping! We receive the promise! Hallelujah!

Respond

As you read this passage, read it three times and open your heart to whatever longings, fears, or desires you have. Let the thoughts and feelings come forth in safety, and trust, utter them aloud, and/or in a journal. Write out a line or two: Lord, I trust you, or I desire to trust you. Help me when I am feeling _____.”

Rest

Lord, I come to you now, in full honesty of where I am with you. Your promise to me is that one day, I will weep no more. You will heal my wounds and bruises. I surrender my wounds and lay them at your feet. Help me to lean upon you. Lord, and receive the comfort only you can give. In your most Holy Name. Amen.

About the Author



Sandra Zamble is a certified Spiritual Director. Sandra works full-time as an elementary ESL Resource teacher. Sandra serves in her church as an intercessor and lay soul-care provider. Sandra is the wife of an elder and has three young adult children. Sandra loves creative outlets such as singing, drama, and poetry. She is passionate about God’s justice and compassion and is humbled and joyful about holding space for those seeking to enter into spiritual conversations of that nature and listening with them, for the ever-present movement of God.

Listen to the Voice

A Reflection for Saturday, December 6 by Sheli Sloterbeek

Lectionary reading for 12/06/2025: [Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Isaiah 40:1-11; John 1:19-28](#); Selected passage for reflection: Isaiah 40:1-11

Read

Isaiah 40:1-11 *NLT*

“Comfort, comfort my people,”
says your God.

2 “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem.
Tell her that her sad days are gone
and her sins are pardoned.
Yes, the LORD has punished her twice
over
for all her sins.”

3 Listen! It’s the voice of someone
shouting,
“Clear the way through the wilderness
for the LORD!
Make a straight highway through the
wasteland
for our God!

4 Fill in the valleys,
and level the mountains and hills.
Straighten the curves,
and smooth out the rough places.

5 Then the glory of the LORD will be
revealed,
and all people will see it together.
The LORD has spoken!”

6 A voice said, “Shout!”
I asked, “What should I shout?”

“Shout that people are like the grass.
Their beauty fades as quickly
as the flowers in a field.

7 The grass withers and the flowers fade
beneath the breath of the LORD.
And so it is with people.

8 The grass withers and the flowers fade,
but the word of our God stands
forever.”

9 O Zion, messenger of good news,
shout from the mountaintops!
Shout it louder, O Jerusalem.[b]
Shout, and do not be afraid.
Tell the towns of Judah,
“Your God is coming!”

10 Yes, the Sovereign LORD is coming in
power.

He will rule with a powerful arm.
See, he brings his reward with him as
he comes.

11 He will feed his flock like a shepherd.
He will carry the lambs in his arms,
holding them close to his heart.

He will gently lead the mother sheep
with their young.

Reflect & Respond

Today I invite you to read this passage of scripture slowly and aloud and in small sections. Perhaps you can imagine yourself in the place of the author. Imagine yourself sitting somewhere with a pen and parchment and you and God having this conversation. Perhaps you even write this passage of scripture out with your own pen and paper and then read it out loud.

As you read through verses 1 & 2 slowly, notice the instructions given to the writer. God is asking the author to comfort the people. The writer has been given instructions to speak tenderly to the people. This is a message of hope. It begins gently and tenderly.

What words of tenderness does God have for you today?

As you continue reading slowly the volume of exchange begins to increase through verses 3-5. There's excitement about what's coming. It's a call to prepare for the journey ahead, anticipating the proclamation of something wonderful.

Advent is a time of preparation for the joyful coming of Christ. How will you prepare your heart, your internal and external journey for the goodness that is to come?

Verse 6 A voice said, "Shout!"

I asked, "What should I shout?"

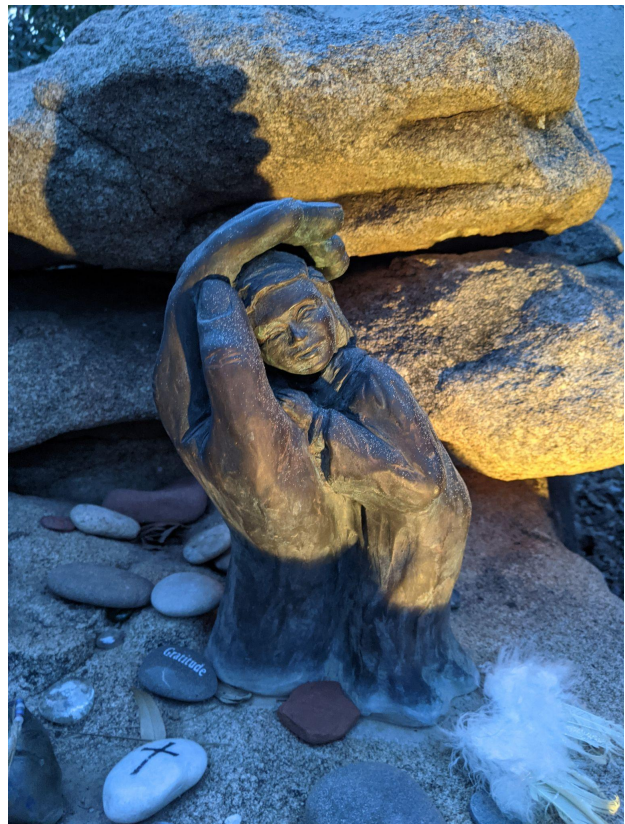
The author hears the invitation from God and then asks for clarification.

Is there an invitation waiting for you in your own life? Do you need clarification? It's okay to ask.

Verses 6-9 are the author gaining clarification and shouting in excitement and freedom of the promises of God being offered.

What are the promises being offered to you today? Place your hand on your heart or chest and speak the promises out loud. Shout them!

Take a deep breath. Bring the volume of your voice back down to a regular speaking voice. Enter into the last two verses as you began, with gentleness and tenderness.



Imagine yourself as the sheep. Imagine being carried in the arms of Christ - being held close to heart.

What do you feel as you're being held gently and tenderly close to the heart of Christ? What might God have to whisper in your soft ear and say to you as you're being carried? If you're feeling some resistance to being carried - know God is still with you - perhaps you can enter into a conversation about the resistance with Christ.

Rest

Rest in prayer with the words of Charles Wesley.

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
look upon a little child,
pity my simplicity,
suffer me to come to thee.

Loving Jesus, gentle Lamb,
in thy gracious hands I am;

make me, Saviour, what thou art,
live thyself within my heart.

I shall then show forth thy praise,
serve thee all my happy days;
then the world shall always see
Christ, the holy Child, in me.

About the Author



Sheli Sloterbeek is a trained spiritual director, yoga teacher, writer, speaker and retreat leader. She is passionate about living wholly – spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically. She lives just outside Lancaster, Pennsylvania with her husband, John, daughter and a darling mini-schnoodle who keep life entertaining. You can find her online at www.aslowjourney.com or reach out to her at sheli@aslowjourney.com.

Lions and Leopards and Bears, Oh my!

A Reflection for the Second Sunday of Advent by Pastor Corenna Rae

Lectionary reading for 12/07/2025: [Isaiah 11:1-10](#); [Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19](#); [Romans 15:4-13](#); [Matthew 3:1-12](#) Selected passage for reflection: Isaiah 11:1-10

Read

Isaiah 11:1-10 CEB

1 A shoot will grow up from the stump of Jesse;
a branch will sprout from his roots.

2 The LORD's spirit will rest upon him,
a spirit of wisdom and understanding,
a spirit of planning and strength,
a spirit of knowledge and fear of the LORD.

3 He will delight in fearing the LORD.
He won't judge by appearances,
nor decide by hearsay.

4 He will judge the needy with
righteousness,
and decide with equity for those who
suffer in the land.
He will strike the violent with the rod of his
mouth;
by the breath of his lips he will kill the
wicked.

5 Righteousness will be the belt around
his hips,
and faithfulness the belt around his
waist.

6 The wolf will live with the lamb,
and the leopard will lie down with the
young goat;
the calf and the young lion will feed
together,
and a little child will lead them.

7 The cow and the bear will graze.
Their young will lie down together,
and a lion will eat straw like an ox.

8 A nursing child will play over the
snake's hole;
toddlers will reach right over the
serpent's den.

9 They won't harm or destroy anywhere
on my holy mountain.
The earth will surely be filled with the
knowledge of the LORD,
just as the water covers the sea.

10 On that day, the root of Jesse will stand
as a signal to the peoples. The nations will
seek him out, and his dwelling will be
glorious.

Reflect

Perhaps you have seen reels of a tiger nursing piglets or a sea lion hugging a penguin. We are fascinated with such things because they are so rare. If every tiger took care of piglets, it would not be news. In the same way, the parade of animal friends in Isaiah is remarkable because of its oddity: wolf and lamb, leopard with kid, calf with lion, even children who play without fear because snakes don't bite. Peace, Isaiah tells us, is possible when inconceivable, not only for odd animal friendships but in our lives.

In fact, this vision grows out of something that appears finished, lifeless, and discarded. The sign of new life to come begins with a stump.

There may be times when we look around and think our relationships are finished or that the world is more divided than ever. Yet generations before us, facing similar fear, violence and apprehension, have chosen to say "yes" to the invitation to move toward righteousness and reconciliation, as Isaiah envisioned here. Like the stump, this invitation has deep roots. We are reminded of the history of God's people and God's transforming presence in our world. This ancient text recalls the reality of the human condition and its possibilities. In so doing, it encourages us to remove any barriers to equity, to transformation, and to honoring our collective humanity. Friends, there is life here and new possibilities every day!

Respond

Take some time to read this poetic passage prayerfully. It tells us that prey will no longer fear their predators. The vulnerable will be protected. All of creation will be filled with the wisdom of God.

- Where do you see glimpses of this vision coming to life? Write it down. Celebrate it!
- What actions can you take today to help bring this prophecy into fruition for the generations that come after us? Perhaps it is an apology, a note of encouragement, or a visit to someplace outside your normative places.
- Ask God to show you the good that is yours to do today.

Rest

Creator God, as we seek to be led in worship by the Christ Child this Advent season, we recall Isaiah's vision led by a young child. May we examine how we can say "yes" to this invitation to radical equity, righteousness, and peace. When we feel like dead and discarded stumps, remind us of our deep roots by streams of living water, so that we may experience the whole and abundant life you created us for.

About the Author



Coreenna Rae lives in Rhode Island with her sons, Braden and Levi, who are involved together in mission, martial arts, music, and outdoor activities. She has been a vocational minister for more than 25 years, serving in a wide variety of contexts. She loves speaking, preaching, building community, coaching, as well as equipping and visioning ministries. She would tell you she continues to learn how to listen well and walk vulnerably as she endeavors to empower people to become confident, vulnerable, generous, Christ-like leaders. These fuel her lifetime passion for ministries of justice, reconciliation, restoration, and healing. corennarae44@gmail.com

The Birth of Nonviolence

A Reflection for Monday, December 8 by Pastor Judy Howard Peterson

Lectionary reading for 12/08//2025: [Psalm 21; Isaiah 24:1-16a; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12](#)
Selected passage for reflection: Judy encourages you to read all three passages

Read

Psalm 21:8-12

8 Your hand will lay hold on all your enemies;
your right hand will seize your foes.
9 When you appear for battle,
you will burn them up as in a blazing furnace.
The LORD will swallow them up in his wrath,
and his fire will consume them.
10 You will destroy their descendants from the earth,
their posterity from mankind.
11 Though they plot evil against you
and devise wicked schemes, they cannot succeed.
12 You will make them turn their backs
when you aim at them with drawn bow.

Isaiah 24: 1-3

1 See, the LORD is going to lay waste the earth
and devastate it;
he will ruin its face
and scatter its inhabitants—
2 it will be the same
for priest as for people,
for the master as for his servant,
for the mistress as for her servant,
for seller as for buyer,
for borrower as for lender,
for debtor as for creditor.
3 The earth will be completely laid waste
and totally plundered.
The LORD has spoken this word.

1 Thessalonians 4:6, 9-12

...No one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.[b] The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before...

9 Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. **10** And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more, **11** and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, **12** so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

Reflect

Having watched a live-streamed genocide carried out by those who believe themselves chosen by God, who quote their scriptures to back them up and who invoke a divine mandate as they raze whole communities to the ground. It's now impossible for me to read the scriptures in the way I used to read them.

God on our side. God will lay waste to our enemies. God will give us the land.

Now I understand these sentiments roll off the tongue of the oppressed in a different way than they do the oppressor. They come as a promise of tides turning, of oppression ending, of the evil doer being held to account and the faithful finally finding vindication.

But at some point, we're going to have to contend with the fact that the thoughtless consumption of these texts is what has allowed Christianity to be quite easily taken over by bad actors. The KKK took up their crosses. The Nazis had their hymnody. Churches shamelessly display the Stars and Stripes next to the altar. A genocidal country finds its biggest backers among Christians.

While I don't know how the blessings and punishments of God ultimately play out. If Jesus truly is the full revelation of God and the cross the summation of his mission, it seems clear to me that worldly conquest and the smiting of enemies is off the table and a non-violent life laying down love must be taken up.

And if our blessing truly is contingent upon pleasing the God we proclaim is seen most clearly in and through the person of Jesus, then as it says in our reading today, let's live in a way that is holy and honorable. Which I believe is summed up in our passage by two phrases, "no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister" (1 Thes 4:6) and "love each other all the more" (1 Thes 4:10).

Respond

What parts of your theology allow for you to justify violence against someone else? In light of Christ, how do you make sense of this? Would you consider letting go of any justification for violence?

Rest

God, we confess we prefer the easy formula of blessings and curses; obey and be blessed, disobey and be cursed. Such a belief saves us from the complexity and discipline of believing in a God who so loves the whole of the world, all of it and the repair of it .

And we confess when we fall short we find comfort in the idea of being a chosen people, where our inconsistent attempts at obedience are deserving of grace and blessing and our enemies' inconsistencies deserving of judgment and curses.

Reveal to us a love beyond our easy formulas. Help us be brave enough to trust your love. Empower us to live in a way that does no wrong to any of our neighbors and that loves all the more.

About the Author



Judy Howard Peterson splits time between Marinette, Wisconsin, and Chicago, Illinois. A pastor by vocation she currently spends the bulk of her time shepherding those whom she affectionately calls, "the feral children of God," those who find themselves outside the traditional confines of the church. 5 years ago she founded the non-profit Haecceitas Inc to support this work, the foundation of which is believing that each and every person is a once-in-eternity, irreplaceable, unrepeatable revelation of God. Happily married to Jeff, dog-mom to Arlo and making a reasonable run at trying to stay in step with Jesus.

Lord help us

A Reflection for Tuesday, December 9 by Mary Rodriguez

Lectionary reading for 12/09/2025: [Psalm 21](#); [Isaiah 41:14-20](#); [Romans 15:14-21](#);

Selected passage for reflection: Isaiah 41:14-20

Read

Isaiah 41:14-20 *New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised*

14 Do not fear, you worm Jacob,
you insect Israel!
I will help you, says the Lord;
your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.

15 Now, I will make of you a
threshing-sledge,
sharp, new, and having teeth;
you shall thresh the mountains and crush
them,

and you shall make the hills like chaff.
16 You shall winnow them and the wind
shall carry them away,
and the tempest shall scatter them.
Then you shall rejoice in the Lord;
in the Holy One of Israel you shall glory.

17 When the poor and needy seek water,

and there is none,
and their tongue is parched with thirst,
I the Lord will answer them,
I the God of Israel will not forsake them.
18 I will open rivers on the bare heights,[b]
and fountains in the midst of the valleys;
I will make the wilderness a pool of water,
and the dry land springs of water.
19 I will put in the wilderness the cedar,
the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive;
I will set in the desert the cypress,
the plane and the pine together,
20 so that all may see and know,
all may consider and understand,
that the hand of the Lord has done this,
the Holy One of Israel has created it.

Reflect

Sometimes we feel as vulnerable as a worm, easily trampled underfoot by systems and people who abuse their power to steal, kill and destroy. Worms burrow and work dirt slowly and bits at a time. If God's help and redemption means to transform those who are vulnerable like worms or insects into sharp threshing sledges that can turn the harvest and earth more efficiently and even move mountains, surely this message of redemption is really empowerment.

God promises that when the poor and needy are in need, and if there are no abundant resources to provide, God will intervene and provide, and not forsake them. Surely this message of God's power and provision shows us that God cares for the poor and the needy and would restore a balance of resources.

How are we to respond then, when we see the poor and needy, and know that there are resources enough, but either out of reach or specifically withheld from them? Like government officials delaying, decreasing or discontinuing needed funding for SNAP, food pantries, foreign

aid, and social service agencies... Or the same for housing, healthcare, and education, as it is all connected to individuals, families, and communities either thriving or suffering... or being made to feel vulnerable and demoralized by fear tactics that look more and more like authoritarian rule and not like government for the people... or when we see neighbors kidnapped and communities terrorized?

How do we respond, when we have more than we need, but we don't think it will make a lasting difference if we give or share what we have?

Is it just too dark for any small light to make a difference?

What if it is still true that even if we feel vulnerable like a worm, but keep working the soil in front of us, that God may empower and transform our efforts to look more like a powerful tool? What if what we can do, can effect change? What if what we can say, can effect change? What if what we can share or the way we do respond, will collectively effect change?

Advent teaches us that God does still show up, albeit vulnerably, even in the darkest of seasons and always in the neediest of places. What is powerful is the way we will learn from Jesus to live more like people - connected, united and not to be divided. We can participate in the restoration of a balance of resources so that all may collectively thrive.

Respond

What small act of resistance and restoration can you do today? Go for it. Do it. Though it may feel vulnerable or like it's not enough, trust that God will empower and transform the work to bless others. Connect, unite, and march forward together.

Rest

On Going to Work

Give me, dear Lord, a pure heart and a wise mind, That I may carry out my work according to your will.

*Save me from all false desires, From pride, greed, envy, and anger,
And let me accept joyfully every task you set before me.*

Let me seek to serve the poor

The sad and those unable to work.

Help me to discern honestly my own gifts

That I may do the things of which I am capable, And happily and humbly leave the rest to others.

Above all, remind me constantly that I have Nothing except what you give me,

And can do nothing except what you enable me to do. - By Jakob Boehme, 17th C

About the Author



Mary Rodriguez provides case management, working in health advocacy. She lives in Chicago with her wife. The majestic beauty of creation is like a salve, and they are so grateful to live in a Great City, by one of the world's Great Lakes.

What Will You Give Me?

A Reflection for Wednesday, December 10 by Lauren St. Martin

Lectionary reading for 12/10/2025: [Psalm 21](#); [Genesis 15:1-18](#); [Matthew 12:33-37](#); Selected passage for reflection: Isaiah 41:14-20

Read

Genesis 15:1-18 *NRSV*

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." ² But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." ⁴ But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." ⁵ He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." ⁶ And he believed the LORD, and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

⁷ Then he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." ⁸ But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" ⁹ He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰ He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other, but he did not cut the birds in two. ¹¹ And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

¹² As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. ¹³ Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years, ¹⁴ but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. ¹⁶ And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

¹⁷ When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. ¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates..."

Reflect

Abraham and Sarah were old by this point. It had been years since God had called them away from their home in Haran. They had traveled far; they had accumulated great wealth. Life was good. But still, there was something missing. Abraham and Sarah didn't have children of their own. They were barren. And yet, God had promised that Abraham would become a great nation, that his descendants would be like the dust of the earth—uncountable, immeasurable. God had promised, and yet, they remained barren.

Theologian Walter Brueggemann talks about barrenness in the Bible as a metaphor. There's the literal sense of it—that Abraham and Sarah had no progeny. But then there's the metaphorical sense that children, especially in that culture, represent hope for the future. Through progeny, you are remembered, your work is continued, your legacy lives on. Barrenness, on the other hand, leaves you without a future. So, barrenness in the larger sense is status-quo, stagnation. It's the feeling that things will never change, that we're trapped—and it can lead to despair.

So, when God comes again to Abraham in a vision and says, "Don't be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great," Abraham is a bit exasperated. "*What* will you give me?" None of it matters if I don't have children—if I don't have a future—he seems to say. Where is the fulfillment of your word, God?

If you or someone you love has experienced infertility, you know how painful barrenness can be. Something that simply happens by accident for some takes years of trying and planning and hoping—not to mention thousands of dollars—for others. But there are other types of barrenness, too. We all have times when we ask, "*Where are you* in what I'm experiencing, God? In what I'm witnessing others experience? You promised to be with us, you promised that you had a plan for our future, and yet, life feels barren...hopeless."

Abraham's question to God, "what will you give me?" is an honest and pained plea. It's not the nagging of a spoiled child or the plotting of a swindler. Abraham isn't trying to make a deal here; he's holding out his bleeding heart to God. And God responds.

God takes Abraham out under the night sky, tells Abraham to raise his eyes toward the vast heavens: "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then God says, "So shall your descendants be." The barrenness you feel is not the end of the story; you have a future, a bright and beautiful future.

If you've ever been out in the middle of the desert or deep in the woods late at night, you know how awe-inspiring the sky can be. Abraham looked up, and that sign, the majesty of the stars above, it gave Abraham the encouragement he needed. He believed that God would make good on God's promises. He received the encouragement he needed to take the next faithful step forward. "He believed the LORD, and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness."

As we journey through another Advent, another season of waiting, may we emulate Abraham. May we feel empowered to bring our whole selves before God—especially our doubts and fears and yearning and heartbreak. Especially our barrenness. And as we offer that to God, may we expect a response.

Even if God doesn't give you the stars, may God give you exactly what you need to meet this moment, to wait for the fulfillment of God's promises to you and to all.

Respond

What feels barren in your own life or in the world around you? Where do you see and feel stagnation? As Abraham did, take a moment to ask God the question burning in your heart. Then ask God to give you exactly what you need in this moment, expecting God to respond.

Rest

God of Abraham, God of our forebears in faith, you promise to be with your children, you promise that you have a plan. Hear our questions, accept our doubts, and lead us toward the open sky where we may see the light of your promises shining down upon us. Give us exactly what we need to meet this moment with faith and hope. Amen.

About the Author



Lauren St. Martin is Associate Pastor of Children, Youth, & Families at First Covenant Church in Seattle, WA. Lauren has an MA in Theology from Fuller Seminary and an editing certificate from the University of Washington. She and her husband love playing RPG tabletop games with friends and walking their two dogs.

It's More Bitter for Me Than for You

A Reflection for Thursday, December 11 by Riane Hallsten

Lectionary reading for 12/11/2025: [Psalm 146:5–10](#); [Ruth 1:6–18](#); [2 Peter 3:1–10](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Ruth 1:6–18

Read

Ruth 1:6–18 *ESV* Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food. 7 So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. 8 But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. 9 The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. 10 And they said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” 11 But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, 13 would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.” 14 Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

15 And she said, “See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” 16 But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.” 18 And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

Reflect

Recently, my husband was laid off from his job. A couple of months before he was let go, his employer announced that they were potentially going bankrupt due to a financial scandal. The layoff was practically written in the stars.

No matter where you live, being laid off is an incredibly hard change. Currently, my husband and I live in the UK, where every change is met with additional layers of difficulty. If you understand unemployment in the US, try understanding unemployment in the UK—I say jokingly, because there is no unemployment for visa holders.

Recently, I was chatting with a few friends who are well-employed in the US. They receive livable paychecks, pay their bills, travel, and also face struggles. However, we were discussing financial hardship, and I was astounded by the things they were complaining about. I thought, “Can you go to the grocery store? Do you worry about uprooting your life and moving in with your parents?” The struggles that my husband and I were facing seemed insurmountable. Yet, when I listened to my friends discuss their financial hardships, I bitterly thought, “You have no idea what financial hardship is like.”

Whether my husband and I had the harder situation isn’t the point. In that moment, my perspective shaped my response. I didn’t care if my friends had financial hardships, because they were “nothing” in comparison to my own. Maybe you’ve had a moment like that—a moment where your own circumstances controlled your perspective.

The story of Naomi and Ruth is compelling. After uprooting her entire life, Naomi, her husband, and her two sons move from Bethlehem to Moab. Upon arriving in Moab, they settle into a new life—Elimelech finds wives for his sons, and they marry. Just when it seems that a new life is emerging, Elimelech and Naomi’s two sons die. At the beginning of Ruth 1:6, we find Naomi and her two daughters-in-law alone. When Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem, her daughters-in-law beg to go with her. Even after Naomi’s first rejection, the daughters press even harder, “No, we will return with you to your people!” (v. 11). The daughters-in-law make a bold claim. Not only are they willing to travel with Naomi, but they are willing to forsake their families, their religion, and their land to return with Naomi—an incredibly sacrificial gesture.

However, Naomi is not phased. Finally, she convincingly explains, “I am too old to have a husband... even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown?... No, my daughters, it is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has turned against me!” (NIV). Naomi’s perspective is shaped by her grief and her belief that she would be condemning her daughters-in-law to an even greater tragedy—living indefinitely as widows, without family or protection.

Perhaps you know how the story ends? Ruth, despite all odds, follows her mother-in-law, and they return to Bethlehem. Naomi’s bitterness continues to dominate her perspective. She calls herself *Mara* (meaning bitter), instead of Naomi, to accentuate her bitterness. Naomi’s perspective does not change until halfway through the story, when she believes that Ruth will find a family kin to marry.

Oh boy, doesn’t that seem true? Our perspectives start to change when our circumstances shift. The past few months of unemployment in our family have been met with confusion, anger, and silent prayers towards God (you know, the prayer where words feel meaningless?). Suddenly, when things start to turn around—a good job interview, a potential employer, an offer, etc—we start to feel God’s provision again. This is perhaps the tangible part of Naomi’s story—sometimes our circumstances govern our faith. This isn’t to say that Naomi—or I—am right; simply, we are human. However, Naomi’s honest story reflects a true human reality. In the moments when all hope seems lost and it feels as though God’s hand is against us, perhaps a shift in perspective could help us glimpse His greater plan.

Respond

Reflecting on Naomi's circumstances, can you think of a time (perhaps now or a previous time) when circumstances felt/feel out of your control? Write that moment down in the center of a piece of paper. Draw a circle around the moment/circumstance. Then, surrounding that moment, brainstorm counter-narratives where God has been at work. These "counter-narratives" are moments when you have seen God emerge during that season. For my husband and me, we wrote down provisions (fiscal, emotional, and spiritual) that we saw God give us. Sometimes those provisions were through other people, random (or seemingly random) circumstances, or ways we personally managed our circumstances.

Rest

God, sometimes my circumstances feel out of my control. No matter how hard I try to think myself out of my reality, this circumstance does not change. Whether you are going to change this circumstance or not, help me see your perspective. Help me to find your still voice amidst the chaos. Help me to rest in the abounding provisions you have given me. No matter what lies ahead, Lord help me rest in the arms of a mighty God who knows my anxious heart.

About the Author



Hi everyone—my name is Riane. I live in Scotland, UK, where I am wrapping up my PhD in the Old Testament at the University of St Andrews. I am passionate about teaching the Old Testament in church contexts and bringing these scriptures to life. My current research is in biblical law (yup, the boring stuff in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy!), and I absolutely love it! Thank you for spending a few moments reading this reflection.

Growing in Grace and Knowledge

A Reflection for Friday, December 12 by Melanie Myatt

Lectionary reading for 12/12/2025: [Psalm 146: 5-10; Ruth 4.13-17; 2 Peter 3.11-18](#)

Selected passage for reflection: 2 Peter 3.11-18

Read

2 Peter 3.11-18 *NTFE*

11 Since everything is going to dissolve in this way, what sort of people should you be? You should live lives that are holy and godly, **12** as you look for God's day to appear, and indeed hurry it on its way—the day because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the elements will melt with heat. **13** But we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which justice will be at home. That is what he has promised.

14 So, my dear family, as you wait for these things, be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, in peace. **15** And when our Lord waits patiently to act, see that for what it is—salvation! Our beloved brother Paul has written to you about all this, according to the wisdom that has been given him, **16** speaking about these things as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them which are difficult to understand. Untaught and unstable people twist his words to their own destruction, as they do with the other scriptures.

17 But as for you, my dear family, be on your guard, since you have been warned in advance. That way you won't be led astray through the error of lawless people and fall away from your own solid grounding. **18** Instead, grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus the Messiah. To him be glory both now and in the day when God's new age dawns. Amen.

Reflect

Sometimes I try to look back and reflect on when I first felt like chaos was winning. I remember at the end of 2016, someone said that nothing good happened in 2016. But they forgot about the miraculous World Series win for the Chicago Cubs. That was a really big deal! I attended the parade downtown and the joy and camaraderie of the masses of people was contagious. For me, the Cubs win seemed to be the one redeeming event of 2016. Nothing seemed to get better from there, both in our world and in my personal life.

Here we are, 10 years later, and it still feels like chaos is winning. I know we are all trying to do our part to accomplish good things in our world, but sometimes it feels like moving the deck chairs while the Titanic continues to sink. Thankfully Peter expected this day would come and has given us instructions for such a time as this.

This second letter of Peter is all about patience: patience as we deal with one another, patience with God while we wait for God's return, now Peter speaks about God's own patience. We often talk about our own struggles with patience, but, if we are really being honest, how often are we feeling impatient about God's own patience?

Peter tells us to view God's patience with us and with the world appropriately: it is salvation. God's patience with us is the opportunity we need (and should really desire). While we wait for God to bring about justice, we can be working to accomplish God's justice in the here and now.

How do we know what to do to accomplish God's justice? Peter has two instructions for us. First he tells us to be on our guard. Too many people are willing to tell us what it takes to carry out God's justice. They can speak smoothly and glibly about what justice looks like. But Peter tells us to be on our guard. Which leads to the second thing Peter wants us to do: be grounded in grace and knowledge of our Savior, Jesus Christ. I think it is significant that Peter tells us to grow in grace as well as knowledge. We know smarty-pants people who use their knowledge to judge and to harm. That isn't what Peter describes here. As we grow in knowledge of Jesus, Peter is clear that we will also find ourselves growing in grace.

Respond

In many ways, this passage seems written for our current cultural climate. Today, spend some time reflecting on Luke 6.20-26. What does Jesus reveal to you about the work of Jesus' kingdom in this passage? Then, consider one act of grace that you can show someone today. What does it feel like to put your faith into action in this way?

Rest

Jesus, we so quickly and easily lose sight of the kind of people you want us to be amongst the noisy voices of our world. Everyone has an idea about who we are to be and what we are to do if we are serious about following you. Today help us to hear your voice above the noise and clamor. Still our hearts, our souls, our minds, to hear from you. Amen.

About the Author

Melanie Myatt lives in Chicago and works as a Hospice Chaplain, and as program assistant for the C. John Weborg Center for Spiritual direction. She is a spiritual director, writer, mom of four, and a consummate procrastinator. When she isn't procrastinating, she writes a daily Bible study on [Substack](#).



God's Words, New Each Day

A Reflection for Saturday, December 13 by Ruth Zschoche

Lectionary reading for 12/13/2025: [Psalm 146:5-10](#); [1 Samuel 2:1-8](#); [Luke 3:1-18](#);

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 146:5-10 New Living Translation

Read

Psalm 146:5-10

⁵ But joyful are those who have the God of Israel^[a] as their helper,

whose hope is in the LORD their God.

⁶ He made heaven and earth,
the sea, and everything in them.

He keeps every promise forever.

⁷ He gives justice to the oppressed
and food to the hungry.

The LORD frees the prisoners.

⁸ The LORD opens the eyes of the blind.

The LORD lifts up those who are weighed

down.

The LORD loves the godly.

⁹ The LORD protects the foreigners among
us.

He cares for the orphans and widows,
but he frustrates the plans of the wicked.

¹⁰ The LORD will reign forever.

He will be your God, O

Jerusalem,^[b] throughout the generations.

Praise the LORD

Reflect

A few years ago while studying the Psalms, I decided to write out each Psalm in a similar manner to how Eugene Peterson wrote The Message. Each day I wrote a different Psalm in my own words. My intention was to write out all 150 Psalms, but for some reason I stopped. I loved how doing this spoke to me in a new way every day. By studying each Psalm this way, the Psalms became new and fresh to me.

As I began to read Psalm 146:5-10 and reflect on it in order to write this devotional, I was having difficulty writing. It seemed that nothing was coming to me until I decided to once again write the Psalm out in my own words, words that the Holy Spirit was speaking to me. The words in this Psalm began to come alive as I imagined each verse and what it was saying to me.

*I can find joy every day because the same God who helped Israel is MY helper,
and I can put my hope in Him.*

*He made the amazing heavens and beautiful earth, the fish and unknown
creatures in the oceans and stars in the skies. Every promise He makes to me,
He keeps.*

He gives justice to me through His mercy and grace, even if I don't understand

His ways. He fills my hunger physically and spiritually. I am freed of my prisons because of His great love for me.

He opens my eyes, which are often blind, to His wonders. When I am sad, disappointed, disillusioned and weighed down, He lifts me up. He loves me at all times even when I don't love Him as I should.

I am a foreigner in this world, journeying to a new country, but I am protected by the Lord. He cares for me as one no longer with living parents and even if I am left without a husband, He is my parent and husband.

I will be with Him as He reigns forever. He will be my God and the God of the generations who follow me.

Praise the Lord!

Respond

As you read and reflect on this Psalm how might you be invited by the Spirit to write this Psalm in your own words? What would it look like to make a plan for the coming year to write out a different Psalm each day, or each week, until you have written your own Psalms?

Rest

“Hallelujah! O my soul, praise God! All my life long I'll praise God, Singing songs to my God as long as I live.” ([The Message](#), Psalm 146:1)

About the Author



Ruth loves her calling as a Spiritual Director. She delights in holding space and walking alongside those who are listening for God's movement in their lives. She is mom to one son, a daughter-in-love and Omi to two beautiful granddaughters. She loves to travel with her husband who recently retired. She enjoys hiking, biking, swimming, reading, playing the piano and praising God in the beautiful Colorado mountains.

Praise be to God

A Reflection for the third Sunday of Advent by Pastor Katherine Mayer

Lectionary reading for 12/14/25: [Isaiah 35:1-10](#); [Psalm 146:5-10](#); [Luke 1:46b-55](#); [James 5:7-10](#); [Matthew 11:2-11](#); Selected passage for reflection: Luke 1:46b-55 (NRSVUE)

Read

Luke 1:46b-55 (NRSVUE)

Mary's Song

46 And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name.

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

51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud of their inmost thoughts.

52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

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

54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful

55 to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.

Reflect

Mary's song is found after Mary not only is told that she will become pregnant with Jesus but after she has visited Elizabeth. Mary is taking time to praise God for what God has done not only for her but for His people. This sweet girl has just been told that she will give birth to the Messiah and instead of becoming filled with pride or ego, she is humbled. She takes time to praise God. In a moment when Elizabeth is spotlighting her and the favor she has found, Mary takes the spotlight to put it back on God. Once again, Mary is reminding Elizabeth and those to come of all that God has done. She is showing that this is just another beautiful moment where God has given his people what they need.

For some of us this season might not feel filled with hope, love or joy but instead we are filled with anxiety, stress and worry. For others of us this season might be a mixture of both. Regardless of where you find yourself this Advent season, may we reflect on what God has done. May we take time like Mary to look at how God has fought for us. May we take time to look at how God has provided for us not just as individuals but as a community, as a country.

May we take time to remember that God has fought for us and continues to fight for us. That justice will be found in the name of the Lord. This is good news.

In moments when we feel as though God has forgotten us or those around us, may we remember that could not be further from the truth. May we take the time to pause and spotlight what God has done. In a time when ego and pride is surrounding us, may we be sure to be focusing on bringing praise to God. How has God shown up for you? Where can we give God praise today?

Today I give God praise for the fact that I am not alone. I give God praise for how he not only loves me but loves everyone. I give God praise for how he sees those in need. Today I praise God for how he will continue to make his presence known. May we find ways to give God praise as Mary did. May we hold onto the ways Mary gives God praise and see that her words ring true today. Go forward in Advent knowing that you have a God who loves you deeply and that alone is worth giving God praise.

Respond

Pause and take a deep breath. Take a moment to reflect on how God has shown up for you this Advent season. What can you give God praise for? Now take what comes to the surface and write either a song, poem, letter or simply the words. Keep them close and in moments of stress reflect on how you can give God praise this Advent season.

Rest

May we rest in the knowledge that we are loved. May we take a moment to breathe in the breath of life. This Advent season may we cling to the fact that we know God is good. May we hold firm to the reminder that God is fighting for us. May we give God praise even when it is hard.

About the Author

Katherine Mayer is a pastor, wife, mom and Spiritual Director. Last fall she stepped down from her position at her church serving as an Associate Pastor so that she could focus on raising her kids and her own health. Being called out of her position was not something she expected but it has been an unexpected gift from the Lord.



God's Word, my drink in the desert

A Reflection for Monday, December 15 by Rev. Dawn Lauber

Lectionary reading for 12/15/2025: [Psalm 42](#); [Isaiah 29:17-24](#); [Acts 5:12-16](#); Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 42

Read

Psalm 42 (NIV)

For the director of music. A maskil^[a] of the Sons of Korah.

¹ As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.
² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?
³ My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”
⁴ These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the Mighty One^[a]
with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng.
⁵ Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.
⁶ My soul is downcast within me;
therefore I will remember you
from the land of the Jordan,

the heights of Hermon—from Mount
Mizar.
⁷ Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me.
⁸ By day the Lord directs his love,
at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.
⁹ I say to God my Rock,
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?”
¹⁰ My bones suffer mortal agony
as my foes taunt me,
saying to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”
¹¹ Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.

Reflect

There was a time in my life when I despaired. A loved one was in serious trouble. Each day felt uncertain, each hour changeable. Tears were the most consistent thing of the day. Tears were like my food, day and night. I was like that deer, aching for the presence of God. I was almost out of breath with longing to know that God was near and that I was not alone; a primal longing

for the God of the universe to be close to me in my grief. I knew God was with me and with us. But that did not take away the pain; it just took away the loneliness of a painful season.

Walking through the valley of the shadow of death, I discovered that the antidote for my tears as food was being in God's word. *Scripture* became my food in the desert, my drink in a drought. It both sustained and nourished me and gave me hope. I had offered hope and peace from God's word to others before – when they were in a dark place – and here I was learning from my own words. It was true. No longer an objective truth, but a lived truth. God's word was the balm to my soul.

I am in a doctoral program right now and back in all those biblical and theological classes we all took in seminary – albeit in a new location and with new professors and readings and with a lot more of my own life experience. Here is the psalm exercise we recently had for “Old Testament and Christian Leadership” with Ellen Davis. I am sure I could try to improve on it, but here is what I thought and how I felt at the moment. It reflects some of my experience in the valley.

I wake with Your Name already on my lips.
Lord, Lord! How can that be?
I wrestled with shadows all night long.

Yet You, dear Lord,
are just, merciful
and everlasting in love.

No sign of you anywhere.
Were you asleep in the corner or out for a
walk?
You felt so far from me.

So I will wait for light
to overwhelm the dark again –
And I will wait for tears to be a memory.

How long to wait in the dark –
How long to weep and wonder -
How long to wish for even a sliver of light.

And while I wait, let me wake with
Your Name already on my lips.
Your Name already on my lips.

Respond

Perhaps you too are in an uncertain or despairing season. I encourage you to sit with the psalms in prayer and meditation. Let the words wash over you. You may even want to try and write your own psalm.

Rest

Holy and Almighty God, thank you for Your word that brings us peace and comfort and heals our very souls. We believe in You. We give thanks for You. We know that we are not alone. In Jesus' name, Amen.

About the Author

Dawn Holt Lauber is a pastor and poet, singer and songwriter. Her original sacred jazz, as well as jazz arrangements of favorite hymns, can be found at www.dawnholtlauber.com Dawn is an ordained minister with the Evangelical Covenant Church and serves as Associate Pastor of Congregational Life at Glen Ellyn Covenant Church in Illinois.



Keeping and Being Kept

A Reflection for Tuesday, December 16 by Dr. Erika “Erie” C. Burt

Lectionary reading for 12/16/2025: [Psalm 42](#); [Ezekiel 47:1-12](#); [Jude 1:17-25](#); Selected passage for reflection: Jude 1:17-25

Read

Jude 1:17-25 The New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁷ But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ,¹⁸ that they were saying to you, “In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.”

¹⁹ These are the ones who cause divisions, ^[a]worldly-minded, ^[b]devoid of the Spirit.

²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, looking forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.

²² And have mercy on some who are doubting; ²³ save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

²⁴ Now to Him who is able to protect you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, *be* glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time and now and ^[c]forever. Amen.

Reflect

“Don’t you be surprised...they said that this would happen.” Jude, one of the Lord’s half-brothers, wrote this to believers to help them be discerning and cautious in the *Sitz im Leben* (social and cultural context) in which they were living. In verses 17 - 19, Jude points out the ways deception and chaos were running rampant: he saw it happening live and in living color. About six decades after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, folks had lost sight of the truth. Not only was faith under attack from outside pressures but also from those claiming to know Christ. Scoffers, mockers, and pleasure-seekers spread false teachings, lived fake lives, and led others to focus, selfishly, on sensual pleasure rather than godly purpose. Sounds familiar, doesn’t it?

In our context, we also face the dangers that sometimes come from those claiming to be religious. Families are ripped apart by inhumane policies, people suffer from hunger as resources are removed, and massive job loss impacts certain populations. Even in our churches, at times we hear about untrustworthy ministers, harmful teachings steeped in ungodly political ideologies, and a lack of love. It can feel like scoffers, mockers, and selfish sensual seekers are still on the loose today.

But just as Jude called the believers of his day to persevere in the faith and to be discerning, his letter calls us to do the same and also tells us how. In verses 20 - 23, Jude says we are to build ourselves up in the faith and to pray in the Holy Spirit. We do this by spending time in God's Word, with believers, and in prayer and meditation. These practices raise our spiritual antennas and help us discern truth from lies as we seek to follow God's leading and direction. As my mother used to say, God will tell us "what to do, when to do it, how long to do it for, and who to do it with."

Along with keeping ourselves in faith, Jude encourages us to keep ourselves in the love of God. We do this by remembering that God's love for us allows Him to pour out His mercy on us. That is what is literally keeping us day in and day out as we live between the now and not yet. Jude calls us to extend that same mercy to those who may be struggling in the faith and to others who need to be saved from destructive paths. With tenderness and truth, we walk alongside those who need a lighter touch, and with others, trapped in sin, we are to be bolder. In fact, Jude says it's like we are snatching (ἀρπάζοντες) them out of a fire (πυρρός). Though he likely meant flames of judgment, the imagery of snatching someone out of a fire surely indicates rescue. Both tender touches and snatching rescues are actions rooted in love.

In verses 24 - 25, we see Jude end his letter with a burst of praise, a doxology, as he recalls God's ability to keep us through it all. He reminds believers that not only is God able, but God uses His complete majesty and power to help us navigate the murky waters of our days and to present us as blameless before Him. He makes the guilty guiltless just as He ensures the blameless are proclaimed innocent. Surely, remembering this is enough to make anyone burst into praise.

Respond

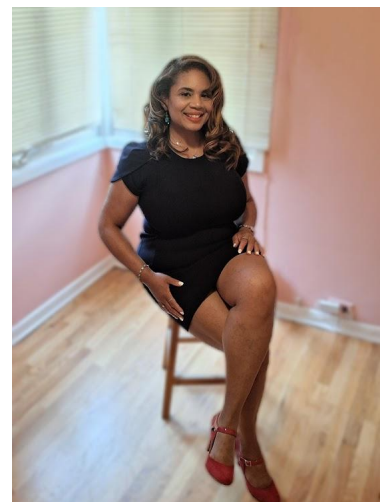
Join me in praising God as we listen to [He's a Keepa](#) (by Rodnie Bryant and the Christian Community Mass Choir).

Rest

Pause and take a slow, deep breath in, then release it gently, trusting that God is keeping you. Do this a few times, letting His peace fill every part of you.

About the Author

Dr. Erika C. Burt is the CEO of Burt and Morgan, LLC, where she seeks to help nonprofit organizations and educational institutions pursue mission-aligned growth and become high-tech, high-touch, high-impact centers of excellence. She also serves as an Assistant Dean at a technology-focused research university, leading efforts that expand educational equity and access across technology fields. In addition to her work in higher education, Erika has served in a variety



of ministry leadership roles focused on teaching, counseling, and strengthening spiritual formation and community care. She is a thought leader, speaker, and published author whose work appears in research publications, theological journals and magazines, and online platforms. Erika is a proud South Side Chicago native and a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated.

Seeing Others as We are Seen; Loving as We are Loved

A Reflection for Wednesday, December 17 by Rev. Eva Sullivan-Knoff

Lectionary reading for 12/15/25: [Psalm 42](#); [Zechariah 8:1-17](#); [Matthew 8:14-17, 28-34](#); Selected passage for reflection: Luke 1:46b-55 (NRSVUE)

Read

Luke 1:46b-55 (NRSVUE)

“When Jesus entered Peter’s house, he saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever; he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him. That evening they brought to him many who were possessed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.”

Reflect

We will engage with this passage through imaginative prayer, not to add or take away from the scripture, but in order to take it in more fully, trusting the Holy Spirit to guide us. As you read each sentence pause to allow the story to unfold.

I invite you to slowly read through this passage again to take it in.

Now I invite you to enter the scene as an observer. Through your mind’s eye, let the story unfold before you, taking in it through your senses... As you look upon the scene, look around the room to notice who is there... See Peter’s mother-in-law lying down, her brow sick with fever. Her skin damp with perspiration. Does a cloth dampen her head to cool her skin? What do you hear as you look upon her? Does she utter anything? Is she aware of what is going on around her or does her sickness consume her? What do you smell? Can you detect the scent of any oils used upon her skin to bring relief? Now, observe the way that Jesus looks upon Peter’s mother-in-law. What expression is on his face? What do you see in his eyes? See the way he touches her hand, and the way relief is immediate. What do you hear her exclaim as she rises?

She rises to serve Jesus, busying herself in the kitchen to bring food and wine to him. As the afternoon turns to evening, there seems to be a parade of people who come to the house, so many who are sick, so many come to seek Jesus’ healing touch. The house is filled with noise now, conversations, questions, and requests. Can you hear them? The disciples are trying to order the chaos. Look at each face and how they come, the friends who brought them with hope in their eyes, the sick who come with longing in theirs. What do you see as Jesus looks each one in the eyes? What do you see in each person as Jesus heals them?

What if Jesus were to look you in the eyes now. What would he see in yours? What longing do you hold within you? What do you long to hear? Can you share your heart with him? Do you hear him speak to your longing? Remain with Him there imagining his eyes fixed on yours for as long as you need.

Respond

As you move throughout the day, be aware that the Spirit dwells within you. Notice each person you encounter as Jesus did with each one in the room. See each one through His eyes, so deeply loved and cared for. Say a prayer for them in your heart.

Rest

Gracious One, thank you for the loving way in which you look upon each one of us. Thank you for seeing the whole of all we are and for the depth of the way in which you care. Grant us the eyes to look upon others as you do and to respond with love. Amen.

About the Author



Eva Sullivan-Knoff has been in ministry for 40 years in a variety of roles. Her greatest joy has been training others in the ministry of spiritual direction and helping people to awaken to the radical hospitality of God, and that each person embodies God's divine image. Eva is a wife and mom and treasures her family.

Dressed to Impress

A Reflection for Thursday, December 18 by Rev. Pamela Hogewoning

Lectionary reading for 12/18/2025: [Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 2 Samuel 7:1-17; Galatians 3:23-29](#);
Selected passage for reflection: Galatians 3.23-29

Read

Galatians 3:23-29 NLT

Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed.

Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.

For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.

Reflect

There are two elements that stick out to me from this familiar passage in Galatians. The first is the law and how its role has shifted from the time before Christ to the time after Christ's coming. The law was a guard, a guide, a means of keeping one on track. In a way, it was the tutor, giving insight and direction. In this idea, the very intent of the law was for it to be there only for a particular period of time. Every successful tutor and guardian eventually works it way out of a job. This is why Paul says, "And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian" (v 25).

The second element is that through faith we are one in Christ and there are no distinctions, not Jew or Gentile, not slave nor free, not male nor female (v 28). There is a oneness in the mystical body of Christ that is beyond individual identifiers. This oneness comes through clothing ourselves in Christ and Christ alone.

These two elements are sobering reminders. They confront me with the reality that it is neither my adherence to the law and all that entails nor what uniquely identifies me as me that brings me into the inheritance of faith. To state it plainly, it is not who I am or what I do that finds me a place in the family of God and a recipient of the promises of God. This reality, in a healthy way,

offends my pride and it reveals my insecurity. The purpose of which is not to tear my efforts down or disparage who I am, but to bring deeper healing and deliverance, by recognizing that they are not the means of gaining spiritual inheritance.

Instead, faith in Christ is what ushers me into the family and identifies me as a child of God and heir of God's promise. Being identified with Christ, baptized in him, proclaiming him as Lord and Saviour, has poured out a new identifier upon me. I am clothed, not with myself, but with Jesus. When I live out my life in this manner, clothed in Jesus, I do not live in the limitations of who I am or what I can do, but live in the infinite grace and richness of Christ Jesus.

Respond

In this last week before Christmas, as you wrap your gifts, as you finish projects or preparations, and as you dress in your holiday best for Christmas parties and gatherings, consider with what you are clothed? With what have you been dressing yourself? Is it your own efforts and attempts? Have you fallen back into the default of self reliance? Allow the Spirit to identify any area in your heart or mind that is clothed in something other than Christ. Do this, so that you can lay it down and receive the presence of the person of Jesus Christ and find the inheritance He has for you.

Rest

We thank you, Lord, for your Son. As we move throughout this next week, may we first clothe ourselves in the one who has come, is coming, and will come. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.



About the Author

Rev. Pamela Hogewoning is an ordained minister currently serving as Chaplain at the Thunder Bay Correctional Centre. For the past five years and counting, Pamela daily serves incarcerated men and women who are walking out their own spiritual journey. She is the Northern Region Representative for the Provincial Chaplains Supervisor Advisory Committee and continues to guest preach in local congregations. Her and her husband, Nick, have recently launched High Dwelling Ministries, where they provide healing and deliverance ministry and focus on supporting the health of local churches. They live on the outskirts of Thunder Bay, Ontario with their three children enjoying the typical activities of a busy family, the wildlife surrounding them, and the occasional black bear poking around their home.

The Blessing of Restoration

A Reflection for Friday, December 19 by Jeanne Barnes

Lectionary reading for 12/19/2025: [Psalm 80:1-7,17-19](#); [2Samuel 7:18-22](#); [Galatians 1:1-7](#);
Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 80:1-7,17-19 (NRSV)

Read

Psalm 80:1-7,17-19 (NRSV)

Give ear, O shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might and come to save us!

Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure. You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves.

Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you make strong for yourself. Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name.

Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Reflect

As I read this passage and notice how often the word "restore" appears, I'm reminded of our area's experience after Hurricane Ivan. It's been over 20 years, but the memories are still vivid. After seeing our homes, churches and schools – essentially all of our community- in rubble, all we wanted was restoration. We wanted everything, including our hearts, to be just as they were before the storm. We cried over the present and pined for the past. We were unable to look to the future.

But as you might expect, our world was never the same. It was rebuilt, not as before, but as even better. Our houses were stronger, our churches more beautiful, and our schools more functional. Our community was restored, too. We bonded over Red Cross food and local water stations. Neighbors who had previously only waved to one another, now became friends who truly cared for one another. Restoring meant more than returning to the past; it meant revitalizing. It signaled a new life. We had recovered from a curse with a much greater blessing than we could have imagined.

That blessing was what the psalmist wanted for his people and what we still want for our world. We aren't facing the same dark times of the Jewish people, but we're living in a time that needs the same light they needed. Our darkness hangs just as heavy. Their song becomes our song.

In Psalm 80, the writer starts out by invoking the shepherd. Most of us have probably never seen an actual shepherd, but don't we sometimes yearn for that metaphorical figure? We dream of a day or two with no responsibilities, no decisions and no planning. We just want to be led. And in our fractured world, isn't the scene of the shepherd leading a whole flock inviting? No yelling, no division, no violence. And if one sheep wanders off, we know the shepherd will bring it back. The flock will move forward as one.

But harmony is not enough. After the psalmist asks for the shepherd's attention, his plea turns to "let your face shine" upon us, and to the ultimate request: "save us." Once again, their song becomes our song. We, too, want to find favor with God. We, too, need the light of grace to fall upon us so that we may be saved.

After the pleading, the passage turns to questions. When will the suffering end? When will the tears dry up and the enemies stop ridiculing? Our modern-day prophets ask the same questions. When will our world change? We've had enough of the food of hate and the drink of malice. We, too, want to be restored.

Finally, as we hear the longing of Israel for the third time, we hear our pleading for the light of God's face to illuminate our lives. And so, like the Psalmist, with humility and contrition we beg for peace and salvation not once but three times. Restore us, O Lord. With your grace, rebuild us even better.

Respond

As we near Christmas 2025, let the song of our hearts be a plea for restoration. Let our lives be a ray of renewed light. And let our carols be sung with the fire of hope and the flame of faith.

Rest

O God who loves your people, let your hand bless us, your light guide us and your grace restore us. Be our shepherd.

About the Author

Jeanne Barnes is a retired English teacher living in the small coastal town of Gulf Breeze, Florida. There she has been instrumental in organizing a weekly faith-sharing group for over 30 years. She is also co-chair of the Foster Family Support Ministry, an organization that advocates for safe and loving placement of foster children as well as providing support and respite care for the foster families.



I don't want to hear this

A Reflection for Saturday, December 20 by Rev. Dr. Laura Truax

Lectionary reading for 12/20/2025: [Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 2 Samuel 7:23-29; John 3:31-36](#); Selected passage for reflection: John 3:25 – 26, 31-32

Read

John 3:25 – 26, 31-32

²⁵ An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. ²⁶ They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him... The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. ³² He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony.

Reflect

I just don't want to hear this, my friend said, carefully folding the Walter Wink column before placing it on top of her Bible.

Yeah. I agree, said another. *I'm going to have to really sit with this*.

We were at Condo Church – a loose gathering of unaffiliated Christians who gather monthly to eat, talk about God, ourselves and the world. In anticipation of Christ the King Sunday, and against the ICE raids in Chicago, we were discussing nonviolence as a form of resistance, "Jesus' third way" as Wink described it:

Love of enemies has, for our time, become the litmus test of authentic Christian faith. Commitment to justice, liberation, or the overthrow of oppression is not enough, for all too often the means used have brought in their wake new injustices and oppressions... When we demonize our enemies, calling them names and identifying them with absolute evil, we deny that they have God within them, and that transformation is possible. Instead, we play God. We write them out of the Book of Life.

Love of enemies...the litmus test of authentic Christian faith.

The speaker in today's reading is not Jesus, but the prophet John the Baptist. John's comments emerge from a longer dialogue on how his disciples perceive Jesus to be a threat to their movement. Jesus and co. are also baptizing, and they are doing it *close by*, (3:26) The nerve of the upstart Jesus. The tribalism of Baptist's disciples.

After telling his followers to get over it, the Baptist begins a longer thought on just how hard it is to not follow the ways of the world. Jesus comes from God, and he speaks with divine – otherworldly—wisdom. Jesus sees, hears, walks, with a *way of knowing* that isn't modeled in the synagogue or practiced by his neighbors. *Jesus, John says, testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his [testimony](#).* In other words, we don't want to hear it.

I'm aware of just how much I pick and choose what I *want* to follow in Christian teachings. I comfortably and securely tell my conservative family members of how Jesus embraces all – no exclusions. I readily expand the meaning of marriage covenant to include all lovers – gay & straight without exception. I find easy justification for why our government at every level must be a force for justice, equality and equity. Yet. Invite me into a deeper understanding of loving my enemy; demand that I take seriously a proactive stance of compassion toward those who are discarding those whom Jesus highlighted – immigrants for instance – and I too, want to fold up my paper, responding, *I don't want to hear this.*

Soon the Chicago winters will descend. Federal cuts in critical housing programs for the poor begin in December. The particular cruelty of denying food, shelter and medical services to the most vulnerable at a time of such great prosperity is without a modern-day precedent. I will double down on my duty to be where Jesus is – food pantries, community centers and warming shelters. But my *real test*, my litmus test of authentic Christian faith, will not be in whether I'm in the shelter, but in how I love those in power who put them there.

Respond

What do you pick and choose from Jesus? Where do you sense Jesus might be inviting you into a deeper relationship with him? Consider what those changes might be and how they may be actualized.

Rest

Jesus, have your way in us. We ask your love to so saturate us that it will change how we experience this world and all people in it. Tell us the things we don't want to hear so that we may live.

About the Author

Rev. Dr. Laura Sumner Truax, is engaged with spiritual direction, church and pastoral consulting and teaching while leading an active daily meditation group. She is the author of *Undone: When coming apart puts you back together*, and the co-author of *Love Let Go: Radical Generosity for the Real World*. Laura lives in Chicago, Illinois. Find her on Facebook or @FreeRangeChristian



The Sign of Immanuel

A Reflection for the fourth Sunday of Advent by Reverend
Charlene Rotvold

Lectionary reading for 12/21/2025: [Isaiah 7:10-16](#); [Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19](#); [Romans 1:1-7](#); [Matthew 1:18-25](#); Selected passage for reflection: John 3:25 – 26, 31-32

Read

Isaiah 7:10-16

¹⁰ Later, the LORD sent this message to King Ahaz: ¹¹ “Ask the LORD your God for a sign of confirmation, Ahaz. Make it as difficult as you want—as high as heaven or as deep as the place of the dead.”

¹² But the king refused. “No,” he said, “I will not test the LORD like that.”

¹³ Then Isaiah said, “Listen well, you royal family of David! Isn’t it enough to exhaust human patience? Must you exhaust the patience of my God as well? ¹⁴ All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. **Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’).** ¹⁵ By the time this child is old enough to choose what is right and reject what is wrong, he will be eating yogurt and honey. ¹⁶ For before the child is that old, the lands of the two kings you fear so much will both be deserted.

Reflect

How many refrigerator magnets quote these words: ***Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’).***
Isaiah 7:14

If only we could begin and end with this. No context. No dual message. No political climate. As if this sweet little verse, written 700 years before the birth of Jesus, was *only* about the future birth of the Messiah (whose *name* is Jesus and *whose* nature is Immanuel). We’re so familiar with these twenty-five words in isolation that it throws everything off kilter when we read them in context, right?

Although it’s one of the most well-known passages foretelling the Christ child, I’ve long wrestled as I’ve read it in context. Because its context forces me to consider some complicated conundrums. Evil king Ahab (who’s yet listed in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus). His seemingly righteous refusal to put God to the test by demanding a sign (even though Yahweh told him to do so). Isaiah’s questionable exasperation (isn’t it *virtuous* to refuse to put God to the test?). An odd verse about the foretold child choosing right, rejecting wrong and eating yogurt and honey. And a politically-charged closing statement referencing the political climate of the day.

What in the world is going on here? What on earth do these surrounding verses have to do with sweet baby Jesus, God with us, Savior of the world, Christmas carols and eggnog, for heaven's sake?

The answers to these involve much more than we have time for today. But know this. We don't read one verse alone. Ever. Just like we don't read one Testament alone (there are two). Or one book alone (there are sixty six). And as we read, we ask "What *did* these words mean to those who lived when they were written?" **and** "What *do* these words mean to me today?" Both are valid. Both essential. One narrative arc, revealing itself through the 1500 years it took to write our Book (Genesis to Revelation).

How then *do* we read? How *do* we find meaning? By engaging. Wrestling – honestly. Asking questions. Embracing dissonance. Inviting the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to reveal. And relaxing and resting in the truth of God, which is far beyond our ability to understand.

Does this passage foretell the coming Christ child? Yes. Does this passage address its current political climate? *Also* yes. Are we wise to refuse to test God? Yes. Did God command King Ahaz to put God to the test? *Also* yes. Come, Holy Spirit. Come.

Respond

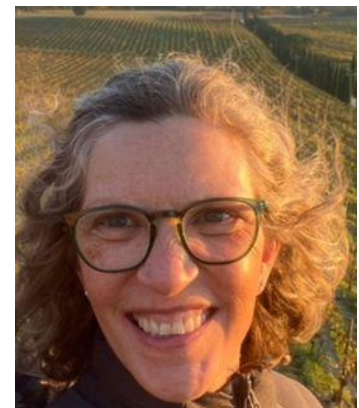
What do we do when faced with confusing, complicated messages (in this passage and countless others)? Invite the Holy Spirit to illuminate truth. Read in context. Read again. Pay attention to what rises to the surface, demanding attention and prayer. Lean into resistance, refusing to skip over the odd parts and focus only on the magnet-worthy words. Read again. Trust God's truth, even if it doesn't make sense. And in today's passage, receive the gift of prophecy, remembering that this isn't the only time Isaiah foretells the coming Messiah.

Rest

Creator God, revealing Spirit, Immanuel... Be with us today as you were with the Israelites ages ago. Be with us in our stumbling, bumbling, disorienting, joy-pursuing pursuits. Be with us in our longing for understanding. Be with us in our grieving and rejoicing. Be with us as we mark time, one day after another, God-ward. Be with us. Be. With. Us. God and gift. Savior and friend. Forgiver and Messiah. Immanuel.

About the Author

Char serves as the Care & Connect Pastor at Faith Covenant Church in Burnsville, MN. She's married to Kirk, mom to Kyle & Erika, and mom-in-law to Emma. Aside from pastoring, Char is a trained coach and spiritual director within the ECC. In her free time, she's often found with her nose in a book, outside running or cross country skiing, camping in the BWCA, or enjoying time with her family and friends.



What Mary Knew

A Reflection for Monday, December 22 by Sarah Roquemore Day

Lectionary reading for 12/22/2025: [Luke 1:46b-55](#); [Isaiah 33:17-22](#); [Revelation 22:6-7, 18-20](#);

Selected passage for reflection: Luke 1:46b-55

Read

Luke 1:46b-55

Mary's Song of Praise: The Magnificat

46 And Mary said,
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 for he has looked on the humble estate
of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations
will call me blessed;
49 for he who is mighty has done great
things for me,
and holy is his name.
50 And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

51 He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the
thoughts of their hearts;
52 he has brought down the mighty from
their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
53 he has filled the hungry with good
things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
54 He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
55 as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring
forever."

Reflect

If, like me, you grew up evangelical in the 90's, you're probably familiar with the CCM holiday hit ["Mary Did You Know?"](#) Even if you weren't raised in the church, I'm sure you've heard one of the many covers of the popular holiday ballad. Melodically, the tune has become iconic: after Michael English laid the original track in 1991, the song has been covered by everyone from Mary J. Blige to Dolly Parton, to Pentatonix.

Theologically, however, the song loses the plot. It dwells on the future, wondering exactly how much Mary could predict about her son's life, death, and resurrection. But whether Mary knew Jesus would walk on water or heal the blind is irrelevant. Mary didn't need to know the future. She experienced God's presence in the moment and was empowered because of it.

Mary's song is declarative and powerful. Like Hagar and Hannah before her, she has met with a God who sees her. She is not, as "Mary Did You Know?" seems to imply a naive young mother, ignorant of the holy power growing in her womb. Though her gender and age would have given her little earthly power or agency, the Creator of the Universe "looked upon her" and chose her

to carry the gift of restoration, healing, and hope for the whole world. Empowered by this blessing, Mary's voice rises with the authority of a prophet, boldly declaring the arrival of a God whose way would upend the unjust systems of the earth.

Years before Jesus feeds the five thousand, sends the rich young ruler away without answers, or rebukes the pride of the Pharisees, Mary celebrates God's mercy, care for the poor and hungry, and rejection of the rich and prideful. Mary may not have known every detail of her son's life and ministry, but she knew his nature and proclaimed his power to transform the world.

Respond

Take a moment to meditate on verse 48: "He has looked on the humble estate of his servant."

Mary's confident declaration is rooted in the encounter she has had with God. How does knowing that God saw and blessed Mary in her "humble estate" transform your perception of who God is and how they see you?

More questions to consider:

- When have you experienced being "looked on" by God?
- Are there any areas of your life in which you feel small or unseen?
- What humble spaces in your life can you invite God to see you in?
- What would it look like for you to rejoice and have confidence in God's presence today?

Rest

God of Mary, Hannah, Hagar, and every woman who longs to be seen and known.

You are El Roi, the God who sees. You see us when we feel small and insignificant, when our labor goes unnoticed, when we feel unseen & undervalued, powerless in the face of oppressive systems.

Where the world fights for power, you offer mercy. Where the world exalts cruelty, you give grace.

May our hearts be humble and open to your leading today.

May our spirits rejoice in your compassion.

May our souls magnify your holy presence.

Free us from the pull towards pride and worldly power, and work within us to bring your upside down Kingdom to life on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen

About the Author

Sarah Roquemore Day is a middle school drama teacher who sometimes writes, too. Growing up, she drove Sunday school teachers and youth pastors crazy with her constant questions and need for further information. Today, she continues to be curious about the complex nuances of scripture and theology, reading the Bible critically while staying open to the mystery and wonder of the Holy Spirit. Sarah lives in Atlanta, Georgia with her husband Bob. She has recently entered her auntie era and loves doting on her precious nieces, Kellyn and Kai-Ling.



Changing our Posture

A Reflection for Tuesday, December 23 by Kim Delp

Lectionary reading for 12/23/2025: [Luke 1:46b-55; 2 Samuel 7:18, 23-29; Galatians 3:6-14](#);
Selected passage for reflection: 2 Samuel 7: 18, 23-29

Read

2 Samuel 7: 18, 23-29, *The Message*

King David went in, took his place before God, and prayed: “Who am I, my Master God, and what is my family, that you have brought me to this place in life?”

And who is like your people, like Israel, a nation unique in the earth, whom God set out to redeem for himself (and became most famous for it), performing great and fearsome acts, throwing out nations and their gods left and right as you saved your people from Egypt? You established for yourself a people—your very own Israel!—your people permanently. And you, God, became their God.

²⁵⁻²⁷ “So now, great God, this word that you have spoken to me and my family, guarantee it permanently! Do exactly what you’ve promised! Then your reputation will flourish always as people exclaim, ‘The God-of-the-Angel-Armies is God over Israel!’ And the house of your servant David will remain sure and solid in your watchful presence. For you, God-of-the-Angel-Armies, Israel’s God, told me plainly, ‘I will build you a house.’ That’s how I was able to find the courage to pray this prayer to you.

²⁸⁻²⁹ “And now, Master God, being the God you are, speaking sure words as you do, and having just said this wonderful thing to me, please, just one more thing: Bless my family; keep your eye on them always. You’ve already as much as said that you would, Master God! Oh, may your blessing be on my family permanently!”

Reflect

I have a bit of a love/hate relationship sometimes with David. I grew up with Sunday School stories and sermons learning about how great he was just to realize when I was older that he was a rapist and murderer, abuser of power, sub-par dad, among other things. In recent years when I read about David, in my head I roll my eyes and try to skip over learning anything from him. Yes, that’s honest and true, maybe not very holy, but true. I have thought through this recently and have concluded that maybe it is because I see more of myself in him than I would like to admit. Not because I am the things mentioned above (at least I hope I’m not), but because I am a miserable sinner just like him and through God’s grace have been given mercy to somehow be used in a small way in the bigger God kingdom, not because I deserve it at all. So how beautiful and redemptive of God to allow me to study this passage in Samuel to see a

side of David that really gives insight into some of his thoughts. David shows us a posture of humility.

In the previous verses in Chapter 7, King David has just been told by God through Nathan *“Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”*

David’s response to this is where we pick up in verse 18 and continue with a humble expression of praise, not because he was deserving, but because it was inspired by God’s grace. David realized his position; asking “who am I”, but then exalted who Jesus is naming Him: “you are God”. David knew his place, and he knew God’s place and realized this moment was less about him and all about God.

I imagine David staring off into space and just imagining what the future looks like for his descendants. I imagine myself in his position and thinking about all my mistakes and failures and thinking how could this be possible? As badly as I have messed up, knowing my descendants will too. How shocking would that news be? To know that no matter how much failure is to come, the redemption of knowing that there was nothing that could take away the throne?

But as much as this could be focused on David, he realizes it is bigger than him and we need to realize this too. Although it may not have been fully clear at the time, the revelation of the everlasting kingdom of God Himself has just been given to David. This promised covenant would be raised up through a king, in David, but it points to THE King! We can understand this prophetic promise and imagine even more how this relates to us. So many times we read the Bible and don’t imagine ourselves in it, we don’t let it penetrate to the point of belief and how it is alive and changing us. This is one of those moments where the promise given to King David and his descendants is also for us!

God has brought you here, to this place and this time, just as he did with David in His mercy. Through Jesus and this covenant established with David, not just his descendants, but WE have access to God Himself. We don’t need the ark or the temple or sacrifice; the veil has been torn for us to move in close. We can approach without fear the throne of the creator and he welcomes us. He invites us in to experience His love, His peace, His presence. We don’t have to focus or be held back by the past, our failures or our current situation. We have access to the changing power of God Himself. Don’t let it pass you by.

Respond

When we reflect on Advent it is almost impossible to imagine it without also thinking of the cross. Our Jesus was born to die. To carry both those things is heavy. But through both the birth and death of Jesus, we are given access to the God of angel armies! We are invited, not because we are deserving, but because we, like David, are all redeemed by the saving power of Jesus. Reflect on this “who am I” in verse 18. I encourage you to start using this as a place to start in prayer. It isn’t to put ourselves down or to make ourselves less, but it puts us in a place of humility, a posture of praise with complete access. It is a good place to enter into prayer, realizing and acknowledging who WE are and who GOD is, it’s a posture change.

Go a little deeper listening to these two songs:

- *Born to Die* by Shane and Shane <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4UKFKk4Pq4>
- *You Said I Am (Behold and Believe)* | Shane & Shane <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8KNe0ZJjHE>

Rest

Try this Meditation from Catholic Priest Richard Rohr:

¹Await God's presence, not as you expect, hope, or imagine, but just as it is in this moment.

Allow a sense of God's presence (or not) to come and be what it is, without meeting your expectations.

Accept as a gift whatever comes or does not come.

Accept that you are not in charge.

Accept the infinity of God's presence, present whether you are aware.

*Attend to what you are called to, actions that God invites you to from this stance of openness.
Amen*

About the Author

Kim Delp has been a missionary for the last 15 years in Ecuador and recently moved back to the U.S. with her family. She has been married to Joel for almost 24 years and their kids, Simeon, Esther and Ephraim as well as their dog, Manchaz are all learning together what life in the U.S. looks like. Learning what this word “home” means has made for some very interesting dinner conversations over this last year based on what we are experiencing around us. Kim currently works as a Family Nurse Practitioner at Lawndale Christian Health Center in Chicago, continues working and empowering church and project leadership in Ecuador as well as writing and preaching here in the States. To learn more and partner in Ecuador check out the website at <https://www.santiagopartnership.org/>



¹ From “Rest: Body Prayer” by Richard Rohr, in [“Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditation,”](#) quoted in [“Await, Allow, Accept, Attend: An Advent ‘Body’ Prayer Inspired by Julian of Norwich”](#) by Your Friends at the Episcopal Mental & Spiritual Health Crisis Ministry, Episcopal Diocese of Newark website

Darkness → Light

A Reflection for Christmas Eve by Rev. Julie Jane Capel

Lectionary reading for 12/24/2025: [Isaiah 9:2-7, Psalm 96, Titus 2:11-14, Luke 2:1-14 \(15-20\)](#)

Selected passage: Isaiah 9:2-7

Read

Isaiah 9: 2-7 TNIV

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 soldiers 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 the oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for the 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 increase 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.



Reflect

Dawn is a splitting of dark and light.

Dawn is a grace that sometimes sneaks up on you and sometimes is a clear moment of color streaked over the gray skies. In this Isaiah text there is mention of people who have moved through (walked) the darkness and some that have been stuck in that darkness (dwelt).

Verse 2 in the ESV: “The people who have walked in the darkness have seen a great light; and those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them the light has shown.”

As I think of the dawns in our lives I think of the symbol ☐. Both merely and miraculously, a direction that points beyond what is currently experienced individually and corporately.

Darkness → Light

Defeat → Predictable peace that puts back what has been divided

Physical Pain → Becomes memories and scars

Burdens → Not being alone in heaviness

Despair → Joy

Loss → Abundance

Captivity → Freedom for and freedom from

Separation → Integration

Falsehood → Justice

Consistent Disappointment → Hope

Mere and miraculous, simple and sacred, the great light is the grace and zeal of the Lord Almighty accomplishing → in our lives.

Respond

Today, be mindful of the → while driving by holiday lights, attending Christmas Eve services, participating in Advent devotionals and viewing nativity scenes, look for the physical juxtaposition of light and dark. Which one are you personally identifying with?

Have you experienced a season of swift guidance by a pillar of spiritual fire leading you along the way (Exodus 13:21)?

Have you recently walked or crawled through a murky spiritual time?

Have you experienced a season of being stranded or stuck in deep darkness?

No matter where we land in the ☐ this Christmas eve, may at least a sliver of hope shine through the sky in your life.

Rest

Lord, as prophetically spoke through Zechariah by the power of the Holy Spirit: We ask that because of your tender mercy - by which the dawn will come to us - that you will shine on those of us living in darkness to guide all of our feet into the path of peace. Amen

About the Author



Rev. Julie Jane Capel is an ordained minister who loves pastoring but also is a woman who has vocationally paused that call to pursue motherhood through IVF (with her husband Danny). Even so, Julie continues to provide pulpit supply, pre-marital counseling, etc. while focusing on her thriving painting career. @jjcpaintings

On this day, Ponder this!

A Reflection for Christmas Day by Rev. Dr. Cynthia P. Stewart

Lectionary reading for 12/25/2025 [Isaiah 62:6-12](#), [Psalm 97](#), [Titus 3:4-7](#), [Luke 2:\(1-7\), 8-20](#);

Selected passage for reflection: Luke 2 (1-7), 8-20

Read

Book Chapter: Luke 2: (1-7), 8-20 - NRSV

The Birth of Jesus

2 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. **2** This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. **3** All went to their own towns to be registered. **4** Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. **5** He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. **6** While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. **7** And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.[a]

The Shepherds and the Angels

8 Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. **10** But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: **11** to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,[b] the Lord. **12** This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,[c] praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"[d]

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." **16** So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. **17** When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, **18** and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, **19** and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. **20** The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.

Reflect

Take a moment with your journal, in a quiet space, maybe with instrumental music playing in the background and consider which character resonates the most with you. Is it the Shepherds? Is it Mary? Is it Joseph? Is it the Angels? Within this passage, we read the words over and over again: “they went”; “they found”; “they saw”; “they heard”; and “they were terrified”. There is a lot of action taking place within this passage. As we are nearing the end of 2025, reflect on one or all of these words.

This year I have gone through a lot of transitions, one being I made the hard decision to leave one university and start at a new one. Yes, I was **terrified** of starting something new, but I **heard** God tell me at the beginning of the year, “this is the year of New Beginnings.” So I **saw** and **found** one job posting and after 3 months of interviewing, I **went** from one university to another. In this passage, I resonate the most with Mary, because in Luke 1:28-35, I was reminded how this was not the first time that an Angel had come and spoken to her. I recognized that Mary pondered in Luke: 1:29 and in Luke 2:19. Many times we want to do things quickly and not take the time to sit with God, check our heart, and ask God for wisdom. But this is what Mary did, she pondered, she did it afraid, even when the Angels told her, “fear not” (v.30). Sometimes we have to step out on faith, with fear, but trusting God.

A promise was spoken to Mary and that God’s favor was with her. But the best part is verse 37 that states, “nothing is impossible with God.” We have to believe this in our heart, the word “nothing” is key. God is calling us to a place of trust in the words He has spoken to us. We are to respond like Mary, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” This means, we are saying “Yes” to what God has promised us. On this Christmas day, we can see the manifestation of Mary’s “yes” to God. It is not about gifts under a tree, which will come and go, but the gift of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

Respond

How have you taken the time this year to “ponder” “to reflect” “to consider” “to meditate”? On this Christmas Day, consider how we are celebrating the life of our King and Saviour who was spoken into the world by his Father. Who had a mother who was obedient to the promise that was spoken to her. Reflect on what God has spoken to you. What are promises you heard that you have not started? What are changes that you have pondered in your heart, but have not made the decision? Consider these things as we are nearing the end of 2025. How will you celebrate the life of Jesus? Respond by writing down all the things that you are grateful for that have happened this year. How has God shown himself that “nothing is impossible”?

Rest

Father in the Name of Jesus, I lift each person who is reading this devotion today. As we celebrate the birth of your Son Jesus on this day, may we consider all the promises you have spoken over our lives. May we give you thanks today for the gift of a Saviour who never leaves us or forsakes, who shed His blood for us, that we may have life and life more abundantly. God I ask that as they ponder, they will hear your voice, and like Mary may they find favor with you. In Jesus Name, Amen. Now sit quietly and ponder what God has for you in 2026.

About the Author



Rev. Dr. Cynthia P. Stewart is an ordained minister at New Life Covenant Church Southeast in Chicago, IL. She is a certified Spiritual Director, has a weekly Wednesday 5am women's only prayer call, and she facilitates spiritual retreats. She lives in Indiana, but works in Chicago, which allows her quality time with God during her commute. The things that bring her joy are sitting still by water, tennis, the arts, and eating good food.