

*Family  
Advent  
Devotional*

# instructions

**Join us in expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of Christ on Christmas Day!**

**Instructions:**

Start with the introduction on the first Sunday of Advent. Then, each devotional is labeled with a day of the week. You will read and reflect as a family about HOPE, JOY, PEACE, and LOVE. We encourage you to gather as a family and enjoy sweet age-appropriate conversation. On the back of each card is a coloring page for your kids to enjoy. Hang up the cards in order, 5 rows of 5, and you will end up with a special Christmas scene to remind you of the beautiful elements of Christmas. We would love to see the end results! Include us in the fun with #gccadvent2023.



*Week  
One*

# HOPE

## **A Little History about Advent**

Historians cannot determine exactly when and where Advent was first celebrated in the Christian Church. Studies show it was introduced as early as the 4th century. Advent has traditionally included the four Sundays leading up to Christmas Day ending just before the vigil on Christmas Eve. Originally, it was a 40-day season of fasting and prayer, and it was a time for Christ followers to prepare for Jesus in two ways. First, the church was directed to remember and focus on Jesus as Savior – the incarnate God of love, and second, to realize and prepare for the Second Coming of Christ when He will come as Judge.

## **The Advent Wreath**

We are encouraging you and your family to assemble your own Christmas wreath this year. Here is what you will need: One evergreen wreath, 3 purple candles, 1 rose (or pink) candle, and 1 white candle. The circle of the wreath represents God's mercy – it has no beginning and no end. The four colored candles should be placed in the wreath, and the white candle is placed in the center. Each colored candle represents one century symbolizing the 400 years from the prophet Malachi to the birth of Christ.

## **Reflection** (You can do this section with family or on your own.)

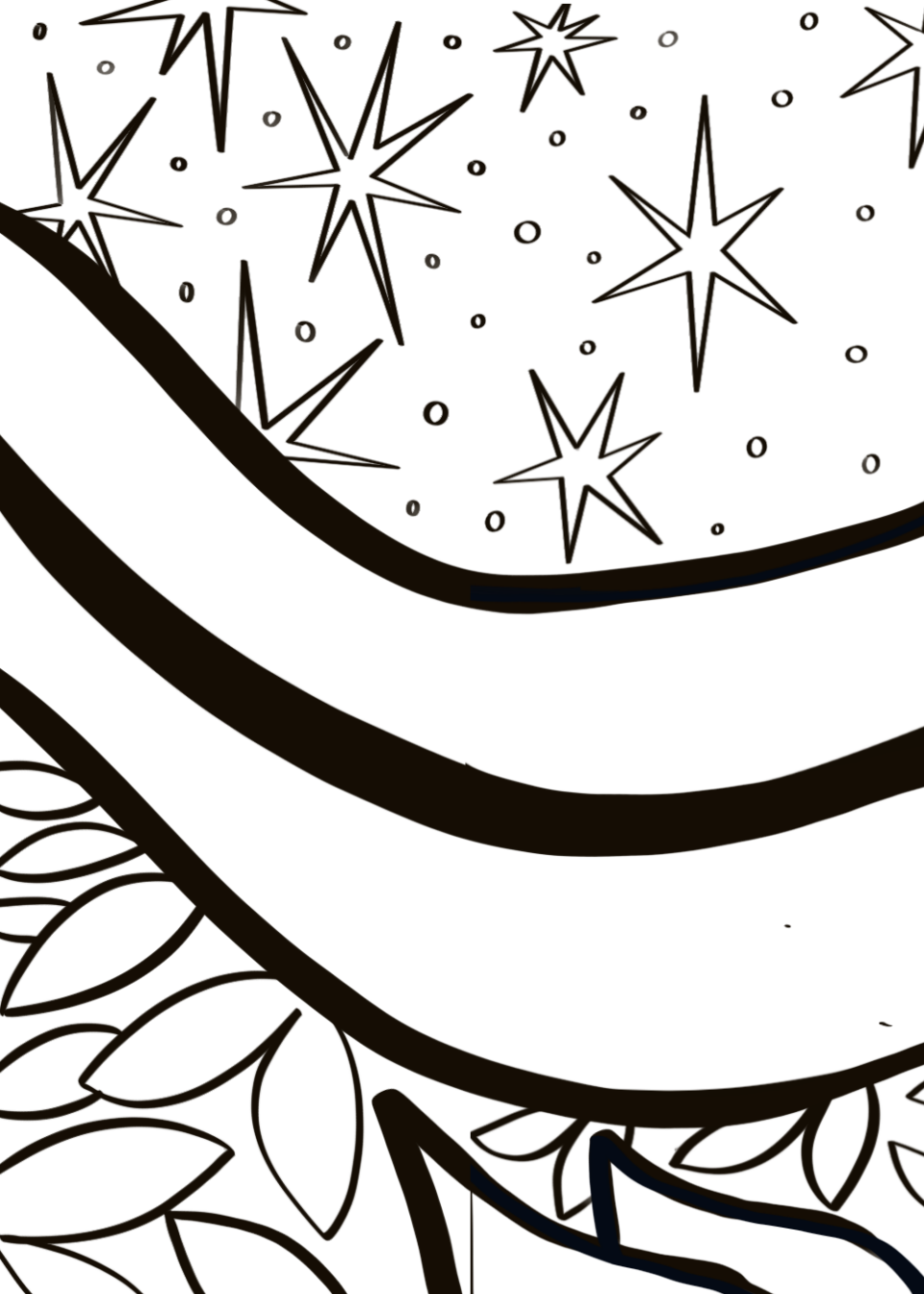
Read Isaiah 9:2-6.

- Can you imagine how depressing and hard life would be without light? Think of ways light helps us on an ordinary day.
- Why does Isaiah use darkness and light to help illustrate the coming of this “child”?
- Of the names given this “child” in vs. 6, which one means the most to you? Why?
- Can you think of any Christmas songs we get from this section of Scripture?

**- Jon Jenz**

**Grace Community Church Pastor**

*First Sunday*



# Why hope?

Isaiah 9:2-7

The first week of Advent explores the HOPE we have because of the coming birth of Christ.

*Why hope?* Through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God gave us hope embodied in flesh. Before the arrival of this child, the world was a place of darkness. Jesus literally brought and embodied the love of God the Father. Jesus brought hope.

For many years, mostly in the '90s, I managed several events at Walt Disney World in Florida. Three of these events specifically revolved around the Christian faith and were full-on efforts to celebrate our Savior. One event at EPCOT Center was called, "Holidays Around the World" and included something called, "The Candlelight Processional." This processional became a mainstay at Disney from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day with three sold-out shows a night. Astounding!

The production was a very moving experience. It told of the birth of Jesus so effectively using celebrity narrators and a 450-voice choir with people from all over the country. Through this fantastic display of pageantry and storytelling, thousands and thousands of people were exposed to the HOPE that is found only in Jesus.

Most of us at Grace believe that Jesus exists and is ready for each of us to call upon Him. Yet, events during the season of Advent can have a profound reach to those who do not believe. Through these kinds of events, people will experience HOPE through the telling of the arrival of Jesus. For in this arrival, Jesus showers humanity with His grace, joy, love, and forgiveness.

Please take time today to pray for all of the events that will happen at Grace Community Church this Advent. Pray that those who do not have hope in Jesus would find it.

**- Anne Selin**  
**Grace Community Church Staff**

*First Monday*



# Why *hope* ?

Isaiah 9:2-7

What better way to start the Advent season than with hope? The first coming of Jesus is all about our hope of redemption, salvation, and eternal life. The world waited so long for the Messiah. It was 42 generations from the time Adam and Eve sinned in the garden to when Jesus came as a baby. I imagine how hard it would have been to hold on to hope.

When the Fall happened in Genesis 3, there seemed to be no hope at all as Adam and Eve hid from God and were sent from the garden. Adam was told that the ground wouldn't yield its fruit easily anymore and that work would be hard because of sin. Eve was told by God that having children would be more painful than before and that she would struggle under the leadership of her husband. I feel sad typing this.

But God had a plan all along. Even as he was telling Adam and Eve the consequences of their disobedience and how sin would affect the world, God also told them that there would be a Redeemer. In the middle of darkness, God gave them hope. The hope of Jesus.

That is why the first week of Advent is all about hope. We look back at the hope the birth of Christ brought, and we look forward with great hope to His return.

**- Katie Rapp**  
**Grace Student Ministry Volunteer**

*First Tuesday*





# Why hope?

Luke 1:67-79

In this passage, Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, was filled with the Holy Spirit. He shares how God has made a way and is going to purchase our freedom. He tells us that we are rescued from all our enemies and those who hate us. Light will come to the darkness, and our sins will be forgiven. Of course, Zechariah is prophesying about Jesus.

In this passage, we learn why we are able to have hope. We have hope because of our salvation. Through God's kindness, we now have a way out of darkness and away from sin! Hope can fill our life, and we can now walk with God.

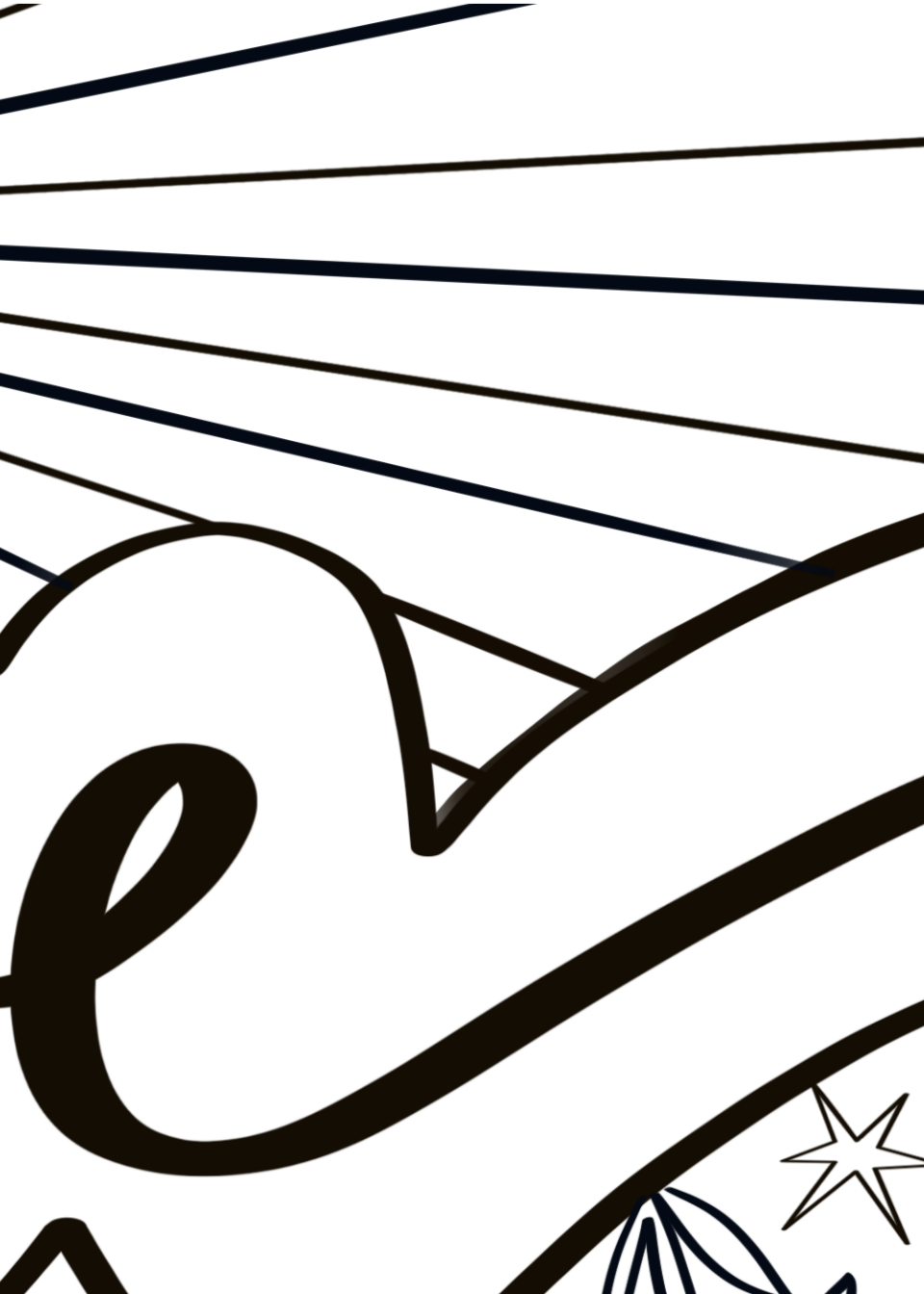
Every day, we are filled with hope that we will one day be with Jesus in Heaven. Hope is the promised blessings of righteousness that come to us through Jesus. We find hope because God has given us promises of freedom from sin. Every day, we need to decide to put our hope in Jesus. We cannot put our hope in worldly things because they will fail us, but Jesus will never fail us. By putting our hope in Jesus, we are confidently confirming that God is faithful. Our hope is tested when we experience hard things. True hope is when we continue to trust in the Lord even when times are hard.

*Dear Lord,*

*Thank you for being tender and caring! Thank you for saving us from our sins so we can have hope in you. Lord, I pray that I will have true hope that trusts you no matter what is happening around me. Amen.*

**- Kate Glenney  
Grace Community Student**

*First Wednesday*



# Why hope?

Luke 1:67-79

Hope is an interesting thing to me. Hope is something that keeps people moving and provides motivation, and hope is something that all Christians possess. Hope, simply put, is the confident expectation of what God has promised, and hope's strength is in God's faithfulness. But where does this hope come from?

As I look at this question, I think about the time before Jesus was born. There were promises that the Jewish people knew from the Old Testament. They were proclamations of what was to come. These promises that were made by God provided hope to his people. When Jesus came, he fulfilled these promises and became hope embodied.

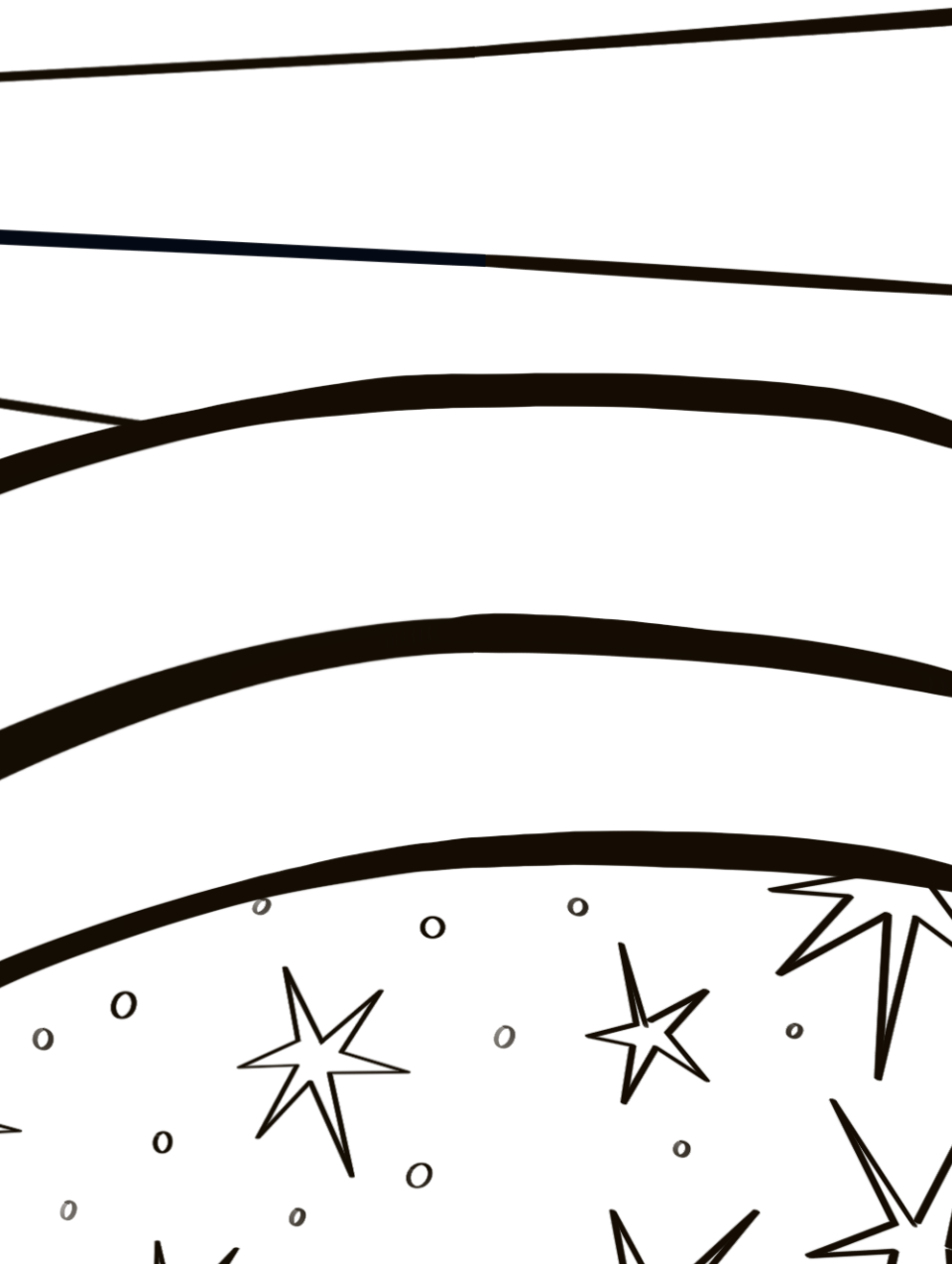
As I reflect on this, I am reminded of how this hope came into the world. This hope entered the world as a baby – one of the smallest and most vulnerable states. Hope in that moment looked like something small, something weak.

This is the same hope that we have today. We have hope in who Jesus is. We have hope that God will keep his promises. We have hope that, because of the work of Jesus on the cross, we can be forgiven. And when Jesus left this earth, we had a promise that He would return. So now we wait expectantly for this day, and that provides us hope for tomorrow.

Dabo Swinney, Clemson football coach, says, *"Sometimes that's all you've got – hope. If you've got hope, you've got power in the present."* Hope is something that can give you the motivation to push on, but we have to acknowledge where our hope started. It began with a promise that entered the world as a baby in a manger.

**- Dalton Baker**  
**Grace Community Church Staff**

*First Thursday*



# Why *hope* ?

Luke 1:67-79

Luke 1:67-79 is a powerful passage that tells the story of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, who is filled with the Holy Spirit and prophecies about the coming of the Messiah. Zechariah speaks boldly about the hope that the Messiah will bring to the world. He says that the Messiah will bring salvation to his people and will rescue them from their enemies. He speaks of the mercy and grace that God will show to his people, and how the Messiah will guide them in the way of peace.

Hope is a powerful gift that can sustain us in even the darkest of times. It is the belief that things can get better, that there is a brighter future ahead, and that God is faithful. Without hope, we can easily become discouraged, overwhelmed, and lost.

As we reflect on this passage, we can be reminded that our hope is not in ourselves or in our circumstances but in Jesus. We can trust that He has a plan for our lives and that he is working all things together for our good. We can also have hope that one day Christ will return and make all things new, bringing an end to pain, suffering, and death.

The message of hope that Zechariah speaks of is a powerful reminder of the importance of hope in our lives. Why hope? Our lives depend on it! Hope is God's provision for us through His Son, Jesus. May we cling to this hope and trust in His forgiveness, goodness, and faithfulness. May we trust that Jesus will sustain us through even the darkest of times and beyond.

**- John Ray Morales**  
**Grace Church Community Staff**

*First Friday*



Week  
two

# PEACE

As we learned last week, Advent is a Latin word meaning “coming.” We are preparing ourselves for the coming of Jesus to this world. I had a friend say to me the other day, “I wish I knew the day Jesus was returning. I would live with more intention toward serving Him.” This was such an honest comment, and it has caused me to think about how I, too, would live differently if I KNEW Jesus was returning next week or next month.

I believe this is exactly what Advent is all about at its core. We are to prepare for the coming of the King, both as a baby who would save the world, but also for His return as Judge. Let’s prepare with great intention this season.

**Read:**

Micah 5:2 and Luke 2:1-7.

Discuss all the things that might have been going on in and around Bethlehem because of the census and the crowded conditions.

**Reflection:**

Bethlehem literally means “House of Bread.” How might this meaning be significant in light of it being the city where Christ was born?

Like Bethlehem, our community means a great deal to God as well. In what ways are you and your family seeing God move in East Texas and at Grace?

**Song:** (Discuss and/or sing this classic hymn.)

*O little town of Bethlehem  
How still we see thee lie  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
The everlasting Light  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight*  
[Phillips Brooks]

- Jon Jenz

Grace Community Church Pastor

Second Sunday





# Why peace?

Advent is the celebration of the Lord's coming. When someone is coming, there is the obvious implication that someone else is waiting. Waiting is never done in a vacuum. As one waits, life and all that it entails continues its onward march. Waiting for Jesus' coming, whether it was for the first coming 2000 years ago or waiting now for his second coming, is always done while having to navigate the pain, trial, fear, and struggle of humanity.

What most everyone wishes is that in "the wait" they would have a life free of fear, conflict, and insecurity. Everyone wants a life of peace, and most believe that if events, people, or circumstances that bring fear, conflict, and insecurity were removed, peace would be their state. The truth is that events, people, and circumstances are not the determiner of peace. The one we wait for is the one who brings peace.

Micah 5:5 says, *"And He shall be their peace."* The prophet proclaims that Jesus is the peace for his people. He came and provides, through his death and resurrection, peace between God and those who place their faith in Christ for forgiveness of sin. Our eternal security is set. The one who is to come, Jesus, is our security, our rest, and our way maker. But here is what is so cool – all of that is not just for the future. It is for right now. It is for *"the waiting."*

In John 14:27 we read, *"Peace I leave you; my peace I give you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."* How is this peace different? Jesus' offering of peace is founded upon the love of God. It is a peace that comes from the identity of one made in his image. The peace Jesus brings is the fulfillment of us living out our real purpose of bringing Glory to God. His peace is grounded on the *"once for all"* work of forgiveness that puts to rest any striving.

His peace to us is Himself. He offers himself to us through all seasons and circumstances of life. As we wait in Him for Him, our hearts need not be troubled nor do we need to be afraid. This Advent, will you truly let Jesus be your peace?

- Doug Clark  
Grace Community Church Senior Pastor

*Second Monday*



# Why peace?

Luke 1:46-55

This portion of scripture is a beautiful song of praise from the heart of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She is with child and surrenders her heart and her will to God. I imagine her flesh was shocked, and her gut reaction was probably fear of being used by God in such an incredible, historic, and profound way, but she chose to praise the Lord and rejoice in God her Savior rather than sit in fear of the unknown.

In her praise, she declares that the Mighty One is holy. She tells us He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him. She reminds us and herself that His mighty arm has done tremendous things. He has scattered foes, brought down princes, exalted the humble, filled the hungry, and remembered to be merciful, for He made a promise to our ancestors forever. I think Mary was finding her peace in the truth of who God is.

Often, when I feel freaked out and anxious, I do as Mary did, and I remind myself of who God is and what his character is like. I bring to mind the things I have seen him do in my life and the lives of others, and my heart is strengthened and encouraged, and I find peace. I can't always change my circumstances to find peace; I have to find my peace despite the circumstances.

Many years ago, during a very stressful financial challenge, I made a long list of very specific ways we had seen the Lord provide for us over the years. Then, I piled up rocks as a memorial to the faithfulness of the Lord. That pile of God's faithfulness brought me incredible peace. It helped me wait for him in peace, yet again, even though I didn't have assurance of what he would do. I have assurance of who He is. In all circumstances, and I want to do as Mary did and focus on the holiness, the power, and the mercy of my Savior.

Are you struggling to find peace? Meditate on Jesus and who the Word says he is, and may I suggest that you start a list of how you have seen God display his glory in your life?

**- Molly Pontius**  
**Grace Community Church Staff**

*Second Tuesday*



# Why peace?

Micah 5:2-5

In this passage, the Lord is revealing to the Ephrathah people that a great ruler will come out of their lineage. He will be a shepherd for his flock, and he will be our peace. The Lord is talking about Jesus. Jesus defeated the enemy through death on the cross and then he rose from the dead. He paid the ultimate sacrifice so that we can rest in his peace. In life, we should look to him for peace. We should put our trust in him and trust that his way is the best way. When you are feeling anxious, pray that the Lord will give you his peace.

No matter what decision you have to make, test you have to take, or experience you have to go through, the Lord is in control. If you completely trust and believe that the Lord is good, then his peace will fill you. When experiencing hard things, it can be challenging to trust in the Lord. It is hard to understand why we suffer, but the Lord has never failed, and he won't fail you now! He is a good God, and he will fill you with His peace.

In my own life, I have clearly experienced the Lord's peace in hard situations, but it took me fully trusting in God and knowing that his will for me is good to allow myself to experience that peace.

*Dear Lord,*

*Thank you for sending your Son! Thank you that we get to experience your peace when going through hard situations. I pray that I will fully trust you and allow myself to receive your peace. Thank you for giving us the gift of your peace. I love you, Lord. Amen.*

**- Kate Glenney  
Grace Community Student**

*Second Wednesday*



# Why peace?

Micah 5:2-5

Peace is something that we all desire in our lives. By standard definition, it is the absence of conflict and turmoil and the presence of calmness, harmony, and well-being. However, peace is often elusive in our world as we see violence, injustice, and discord all around us. So how can we really have peace on this earth? Why even bother pursuing peace? Micah 5:2-5 can help us find some answers.

This is a prophetic passage about the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. Micah speaks of the peace that the Messiah will bring to the world. He says the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem, a humble and insignificant town. Yet, he will become a great ruler over Israel. Micah also speaks of the Messiah's role as a shepherd who will lead his people with love and compassion.

It seems that God's people were also struggling and longing for real peace during Micah's time, and God provided an answer, a hope through the coming of the Messiah. And guess what? The Messiah came! Jesus came! I know what you are thinking – Jesus' days on earth did not seem peaceful at all, and even after so many years, we live in a world filled with violence, hatred, and injustice. We see wars and conflicts that tear families and communities apart and individuals struggling with mental health, addictions, and other issues that rob them of peace. Yes, that sounds about right, but here's the good news! If we put our faith and trust in Jesus, the promise is that *"he will be our peace"* (Micah 5:5) in this broken world and also our only way for eternal peace when he comes back, *"for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth."* (Micah 5:4)

Why peace? Because Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

As we reflect on this passage, we can be reminded that true peace can only come through Christ, who brought reconciliation between God and humanity and established a new kingdom of peace and justice on earth. As we surrender our lives to him, we can experience the peace that surpasses all understanding and become ambassadors of peace in our communities and the world.

**- John Ray Morales  
Grace Community Church Staff**

*Second Thursday*





# Why peace?

Micah 5:2-5

*"Then his people will live there undisturbed,  
for he will be highly honored around the world.  
And he will be the source of peace."*

This was a prophecy hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, and the time period when it was written was anything but peaceful. Israel had once again strayed from walking with the Lord, and God used his prophet Micah to tell them that his judgment was coming in the form of war and exile.

But true to who God is, he promised restoration. He promised a way back. And not just a quick fix, but a once and for all fix. The object of his plan would be our source of peace – Jesus.

If we look at our world today, things aren't peaceful now either. We experience disunity, strife, war . . . sin. We desperately need a Savior. We need Jesus.

Jesus entered our world as a baby, he grew in wisdom and favor with God, and he modeled how we should be disciples who make disciples. Then he died and rose from the dead, defeating death and the grave and giving us eternal life. The Bible says he ascended into heaven, but he has promised to return again. Now we are in a period of waiting.

Jesus came for all who would believe that he is the son of God and take up their own cross and follow him. God, being patient and merciful, is giving mankind time to hear about the good news of Jesus so that they might have access to the true source of peace. For those of us who believe, we have the opportunity to tell our friends and family about how Jesus loves them and longs to redeem them by forgiving them of their sins so they can have eternal life.

God is faithful to keep his promises, so we know that Jesus is going to come back again dealing the final blow to sin and death. But while we wait, we have access to the peace that Christ gives because he came as a baby. That is why we talk about peace at Christmas. Jesus is our source of peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

**- Katie Rapp  
Grace Student Ministry Volunteer**

*Second Friday*



# Week three JOY

Today is the third Sunday of Advent, and we will light the pink candle. This candle is traditionally called the Angel's Candle. Each colored candle represents one century symbolizing the 400 years from the prophet Malachi to the birth of Christ. This third Sunday is historically referred to as "Gaudete Sunday." Gaudete is the Latin word for "rejoice." We light this pink candle rejoicing that our period of waiting is almost over – Christ has almost come!

## **Read:**

Luke 2:8-14. How did the shepherds feel when they first saw the angel? How would you feel if you had an encounter like the shepherds did?

From these verses, what astounds you the most? What amazes you as you read of this encounter?

## **Reflection:**

There are many Christmas songs written based on these verses. Perhaps you can try to name a few of them . . . without using Google. Below is a carol penned by Charles Wesley, one of our greatest hymn writers, around the year 1739. This carol must be quite exceptional if it has been around for over 250 years! Please reflect on the lyric and see how it relates to the scripture in Luke 2. I encourage you to sing it or listen to your favorite recording of this glorious hymn.

*Hark! the herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the newborn King,  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled!"  
Joyful, all ye nations rise,  
Join the triumph of the skies;  
With the angelic host proclaim,  
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"  
Hark! the herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the newborn King!"*

- Jon Jenz  
Grace Community Church Pastor

*Third Sunday*



# Why Joy?

Luke 2:17-20

Can I tell you a secret? Joy has always been hard for me to understand. I have always thought of it as happiness, but I'm not always happy, so does that mean I'm not joyful? Do I not have the fruit of the spirit of joy because sometimes I'm sad or my feelings are hurt? No! That isn't what that means because biblical joy, or *chara* doesn't just mean surface-level happiness.

Real joy, the joy that Jesus brought when he entered the world as a baby to redeem us, is a deep-seeded, inner gladness that is rooted in the promises of God. So why do we spend a whole week on joy during the Advent season? Because God was faithful to keep his promise to send "a man" to redeem us. Remember in Genesis after Adam and Eve sinned? Do you remember how they had to leave the garden, but God said, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring, he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel?"*

God made a promise that there would be a way out, a Redeemer, that the woman who brought sin into the world would also be the vessel from which our Messiah would come. Eve didn't understand that it would be a long time before the Redeemer came, so when she gave birth to Cain she said, *"I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord."* She thought Cain would bring redemption. But he didn't.

It would be 42 generations before Jesus came to redeem the world. So it was joyful when he came. There was rejoicing among the shepherds and the angels. Joy came through Jesus – a promise kept by our God is where joy comes from. He keeps his word, and we can anchor on his promises because he never fails. That is worth rejoicing over even when things seem hard and sad. So let's be full of joy and rejoicing as we remember the first arrival of Jesus and wait for his second coming!

- Katie Rapp  
Grace Student Ministry Volunteer

Third Monday



# Why Joy?

Luke 2:8-20

In Luke 2:8-20, we read about the joy the shepherds experienced upon hearing the news of Jesus' birth. The angel appeared to them and announced that a Savior had been born in Bethlehem. The shepherds immediately went to see the baby and were filled with joy and awe.

The joy that the shepherds experienced is a reminder of the joy that comes from knowing Jesus. When we put our faith in Jesus as our Savior, we share joy beyond anything the world can offer. It is a joy that comes from knowing that God loves and forgives us.

This joy is not dependent on our circumstances. The shepherds were not wealthy or influential people. They were out in the fields, tending their sheep. Their joy was not based on their circumstances. It was based on the fact that they had heard the good news of Jesus' birth.

Similarly, we can experience joy during difficult circumstances. We can have joy even when we are facing trials and challenges. This is because our joy is not based on our circumstances but on our relationship with Jesus.

Furthermore, the joy that comes from knowing Jesus is a joy that can be shared. The shepherds went and told others about what they had seen and heard. They shared their joy with others.

As Christians, we have the opportunity to share our joy with others. We can tell others about Jesus and the joy of knowing Him. We can be a source of joy and encouragement to those around us.

Why joy? Who wants to live in sadness? There's no other way to live an extraordinary life than living it with and for Jesus – the only unshakable source of joy.

**- John Ray Morales**  
**Grace Community Church Staff**

*Third Tuesday*





# Why Joy?

Luke 2:8-20

Have you ever met someone who is so excited about something they cannot stop talking about it? When something makes you happy, it is hard not to make every conversation be about it. It's natural to want to share with everyone we meet. In Luke 2, we get a picture of an angel appearing to shepherds. These angels are singing praises to God and proclaiming the Savior of the world is born. The shepherds were amazed and rushed to see this Savior. They were overcome with joy. Their joy compelled them to tell everyone they could the Good News – the Savior is born!

Joy can be defined as, *“a lasting emotion that comes from the choice to trust that God will fulfill his promises.”* I can imagine these shepherds exuding joy as they told people about the Savior of the world being born. As we look at the shepherds' joy, we get to have the same joy in knowing that Jesus was born, lived a perfect life, and died for us. Our joy comes from knowing our Savior, and this joy should be radiating from us in the same way in which I am sure it poured out of those shepherds on that joyful night.

**- Dalton Baker**  
**Grace Community Church Staff**

*Third Wednesday*



# Why Joy?

Luke 2:8-20

In this reading, we learn why we are able to have joy! Joy is a lasting emotion that comes from the choice to trust that God will fulfill his promises. The shepherds were some of the first to hear about the good news that would bring joy to everyone. The angels revealed that this gift was a baby, born that very night in a manger.

Immediately, the shepherds decided to leave and see Jesus. We are able to have joy because of Jesus. As Christians, Jesus should be our source of joy. If we choose daily to trust God, we will be filled with joy from Jesus! Every day, we are given the opportunity to choose to trust in God and fully experience his joy. During trials or hard times, it can be really difficult to trust that His plan is good, but we can trust that He will fulfill his promises to us.

God has given us the greatest source of joy, Jesus. We can have joy because we know Jesus' story! We know that he was born in a manger fully human, grew up just like us, died on the cross, and then rose from the grave. Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice so that we can be saved and cling to his joy while we are living on earth. I challenge you to put your trust in Jesus every morning and experience joy from God!

*Dear Lord,*

*Thank you for sending your son to earth so that we can experience true joy from the Lord. I fully trust you and pray that you will take away any doubts. I pray to experience your true joy every day because I trust in you. Amen.*

**- Kate Glenney  
Grace Community Student**

*Third Thursday*



# Why Joy?

Luke 2:17-20

In our family, Christmas has become a time of eager and heightened anticipation. In mid-December, we start wondering how *it* is going to happen. And when *it* is going to happen. And if *it* is going to happen. The "*it*" is a prank! In the past 15 years, our 5 kids (and now their spouses) have surprised us BIG time with everything from an upside-down Christmas tree hanging from a lag bolt they screwed into our ceiling to an invasion of 100 Elf on the Shelves. They even covered the entire exterior of our house in 3,500 square feet of cardboard to replicate a giant gingerbread house! Each prank somehow catches us completely off guard, is more and more elaborate, and even though it is unnerving, expensive, and risky on their part, in the end, it brings our whole family, our extended family, and so many of our friends an immense amount of joy.

We get so many texts on Christmas day asking us if our kids did anything this year. People are dying to know how they pulled off the big surprise and how they kept us from discovering the elaborate and complicated shenanigans. They want to hear all about it, and it brings us so much joy to relay every fun detail over and over again throughout the holiday.

In the scripture reading for today, we see the shepherds, who actually saw Jesus with their very own eyes, going around and telling everyone what had happened and what the angel had said. They had firsthand information! They actually SAW baby Jesus, and they were bursting with joy to tell everyone that what they had hoped for and what the angel said about this child REALLY did happen. The Bible says that all who heard the shepherd's story were astonished (greatly surprised and impressed, amazed!).

The shepherds went back to their flocks, their regular day jobs, glorifying (giving credit to God) and praising God for all they had heard and seen. IT WAS JUST AS THE ANGEL HAD TOLD THEM!

Joy at Christmas comes from knowing we can trust God to do what he says. If we open our eyes, we all can see God working in our lives. And then our joy comes from telling everyone the good news, the things we have seen with our very own eyes that Jesus has done for us and will do for all who believe in him. Who do you need to call today to tell about how real Jesus is?

- Molly Pontius  
Grace Community Church Staff

Third Friday

one



in

# Week Four

# LOVE

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent. Now we light the first and second purple candles, the pink candle, and the last purple candle. This third purple candle is referred to as the LOVE candle, for LOVE has come into the world in the form of a baby.

## **Read:**

John 3:16-17. *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."*

## **Reflection:**

Think for a moment about what you love. What person or thing in your life gets your deepest devotion? What do you give to this object of your love? This can be a very insightful exercise about how we spend our time and energy.

In transparency, I love to exercise. And so I give a lot of time to my physical fitness. But this love BEGAN out of a love for food. I loved food so much that I was willing to work my body hard . . . so I could eat more. My love for food has diminished somewhat over the years, but I continue to give my time and energy to staying physically fit.

God loved. And so He gave. These verses astound my heart and mind even though I have known them deeply for years. We love things OTHER than Him. Sure, we love people, but we also love our flesh. We love our sin. We love ourselves. Yet, knowing this about us, God didn't give to us in order to condemn us and punish us. God gave out of a deep, beautiful, and holy love for you and for me.

Then there's His gift. He could have given us anything, yet He knew only one gift would truly redeem and represent the depth of His love – the gift of His only Son.

## **Sing:**

*O holy night! the stars are brightly shining;  
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth.  
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,  
Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.  
A thrill of hope – the weary world rejoices,  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!  
Fall on your knees!  
O hear the angel voices!  
O night divine, O night when Christ was born!  
O night, O holy night, O night divine!  
[Placide Cappeau]*

- Jon Jenz

Grace Community Church Pastor

Fourth Sunday





# Why love?

Revelation 7:9-12

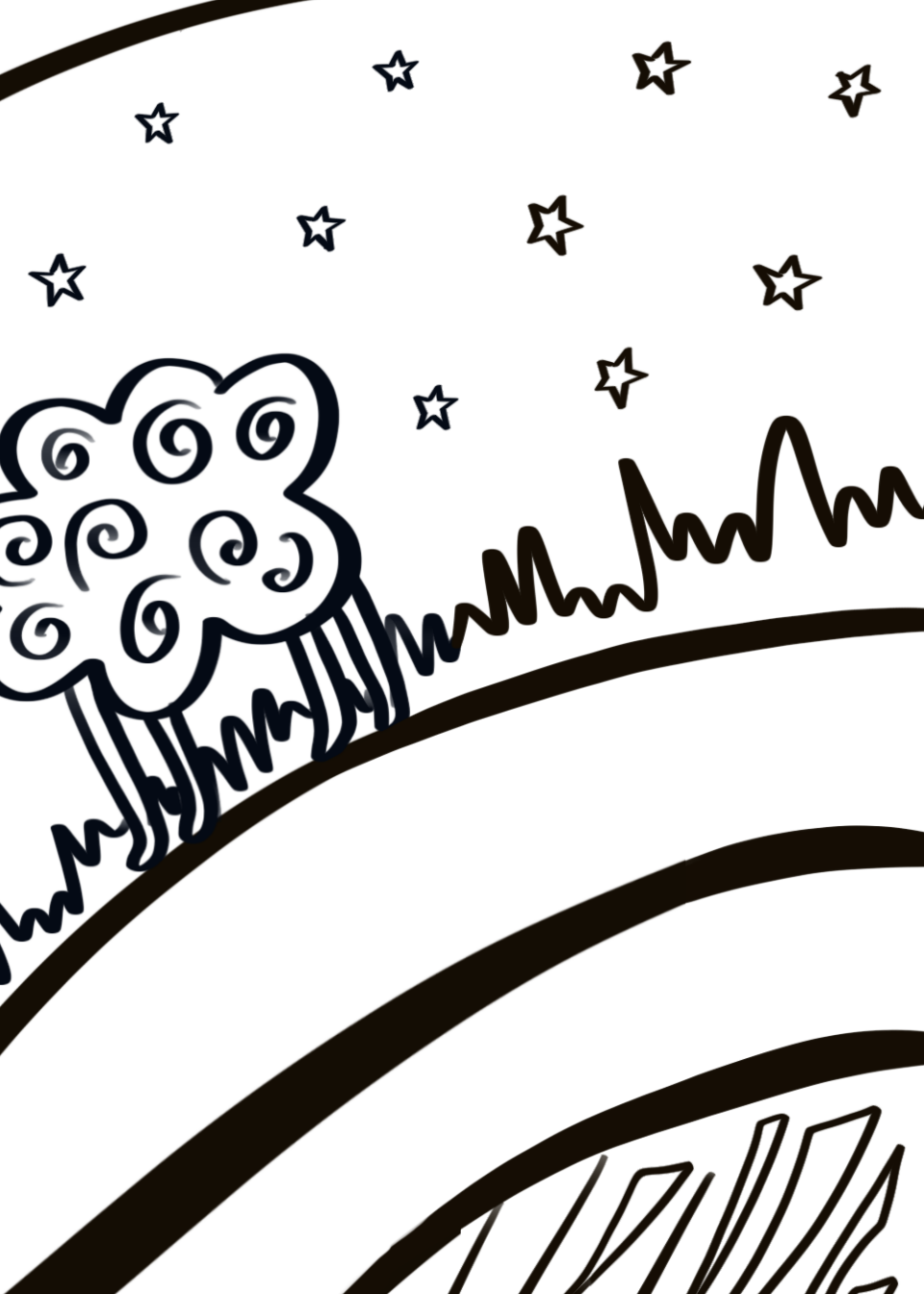
I often sit and think about the eternity I get to have because of Jesus. Because Jesus left his home and became a human being, I am going to get to be with him forever in the new heaven and new earth. Why did he do this? Why didn't God just start over and forget all about the people he had planned since the foundations of the earth?

Love. He already knew when sin entered the world how he would weave his redemption story so we would end up with today's text. People from every tribe, tongue, and nation gathered in the new heaven and new earth joining together and worshiping our King, God, Savior, and Father. He knew that it was worth it. I have never been loved like God loves me, not even by my earthly parents who love me very much. Their love falls so short of the perfect love that manifested in Jesus coming as a sacrifice for my sin.

I want to encourage you to read today's text and really take it in. Sit and wonder at this scene and what an amazing time this will be when eternity begins. What do you think and feel as you ponder this passage?

**- Katie Rapp**  
**Grace Student Ministry Volunteer**

*Fourth Monday*



# Why love?

Luke 2:22-35

It seems silly to even ask this question. Why do we talk about love during the Advent season? How could we not talk about love during the Advent season?

Imagine this – a really rich guy who lives in a giant palace, has tons of servants, all of the delicious food he could want, a SUPER comfortable bed, and nice clothes. I mean, he has EVERYTHING. But he saw people suffering. He saw the pain, the death, the sadness, the bad people ruining everything, and it looked like a hopeless situation. But he could do something about it. He could fix it. It just meant giving up all of his really nice stuff, servants, and comfortable bed to be homeless, a servant himself, hated by people, and to start over as a baby.

Would you do that? Can you even think about living in another part of the world to help end the suffering of the people who live there? Would you give up toys, clothes, or video games to rescue others from their bad choices?

Jesus did that. Jesus is the one who left Heaven to be a baby born in a barn to grow up to be homeless and disliked by those he came to save. That's love. He gave up not only heaven, but in the end, he gave up his life for us and took all of the wrath God had toward sin on himself to redeem us. There is no greater love than that.

**- Katie Rapp**  
**Grace Student Ministry Volunteer**

*Fourth Tuesday*



# Why love?

Luke 2:22-35

Remember me telling you how our family feels all warm and fuzzy and loved by Christmas pranks? You could say that pranks are our Christmas love language. We show each other deep love by messing with each other's minds!

God's love language is Jesus. And at Christmas we look back and remember how God orchestrated an elaborate plan to demonstrate how much he loves all he has created.

At first, he created the world and people, and he hung out with them all the time, and they enjoyed each other immensely. But then, the first people, Adam and Eve, decided they didn't want to do what God said. They wanted to be in charge. That first sin ruined things and brought separation between God and man. It didn't seem fixable.

But God had a big rescue plan, and one day, God the Son came to live with us as a person – that's Jesus! God wanted to save us from being separated from him forever, so Jesus came. He lived here and taught us many things, and then he took the punishment for OUR sin, and he died on the cross. If we believe that God loved us that much and gave Jesus as our rescue plan, then we can live with him forever.

Do you feel loved by what God did to save you? Do you believe in the story of the Gospel that you just read? Grab coffee with a trusted friend if you have questions and want to hear more about who this Jesus of love is.

**- Molly Pontius**  
**Grace Community Church Staff**

*Fourth Wednesday*



# Why love?

Revelation 7:9-12

This passage describes a vision of heaven, where John sees a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne of God, worshiping God and the Lamb, Jesus. This passage shows a picture of love that transcends all barriers of race, ethnicity, language, and culture.

Why love? Love is a central theme of the Christian faith. It is the greatest commandment that Jesus gave to his followers, to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:28-31). Love is also the defining characteristic of God's nature, as John writes, "*God is love*" (1 John 4:8).

We live in a world that is often divided by many things. We see conflicts and tensions arising from our differences, and we struggle to find common ground and understanding with those who are different from us. Revelation shows the opposite picture.

In this passage, we see the power of love to unite people from all corners of the earth. We see a vision of a diverse and multicultural community, standing together in worship and adoration of God. They are not divided by their differences but united by their love for God and their shared identity as children of God.

As we reflect on this passage, we can be reminded that God's saving grace overcomes our differences and unites us in a common purpose of worshiping and giving glory to our Creator and King. Authentic Christians seek to love others as God loves us, with a love that is unconditional, sacrificial, and transformative.

May we seek to love God with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves, and may our love for God and others bring us closer together and draw us into deeper communion with Christ.

**- John Ray Morales  
Grace Community Church Staff**

*Fourth Thursday*





# Why love?

Revelation 7:9-12

This passage is reflecting on future events. It reveals a picture of when Jesus returns again. It describes how people from all over the world will meet and praise the Lord. In this passage, the people described are very different because they speak different languages, have been raised differently, and are from different places. But, they have one thing in common – they all are connected through their love for the Father. They all have chosen to love and believe in God. In their lives, they chose what can sometimes be the hard road but is the road that leads to salvation. Now, they get to worship the Lord in front of his throne! This love binds all Christians together.

Every day, you should live life with love! Not only should you love the Lord, but you should show love to everyone around you. God has created every person around you, and they are all children of God. If you choose not to love them by making fun of them or being mean to them, then you are personally hurting God in the process. This is represented in 1 John 4:8, “*Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*” You should choose love because God has chosen to love you and sacrifice his only son on the cross for you!

*Dear Lord,*

*Thank you for sacrificing your son and showing us what true love is. I pray that every day I will choose to love others around me. I pray that my actions will represent the love that the Father has shown me. Thank you again for loving me!*

**- Kate Glenney  
Grace Community Student**

*Fourth Friday*



# MERRY Christmas

Tonight, we light the four colored candles along with the fifth candle—the Christ Candle – celebrating God redeeming His people. And, of course, reading Luke 2:1-20 will likely be a highlight for us all.

Have you ever paid much attention to how the Apostle Paul opens many of his letters to the churches? He often says something like, “*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God*” (e.g. Col. 1:1). Can you imagine writing a letter to our church declaring you are an apostle of Jesus Christ? This is bold and confident on Paul’s part. While it is clear from reading Paul’s letters that he is completely dependent on God, there is clearly an ownership of the responsibility God has entrusted to him.

In the same way, this is true for you and me. We, too, have been called by God and have a part to play. We need to be constantly aware that God has a purpose for us and that purpose will always involve growing His Kingdom. Who do you know that needs to hear the amazing story of Advent this year? How might you tell them? Perhaps a gift? A card? Dinner together during the holidays? As with the Shepherds, we are to “*go and tell*” of what God has made known to us.

The story we celebrate tomorrow is not for us to hoard. This story is to be shared and passed along. Jesus came. Everything is different now. Who can you share this story with? Don’t over analyze the answer to the question because EVERYONE needs to hear it.

May you have a Merry Christmas, friends. As we head into 2024, here is a prayer I believe we can all pray together:

*God of love, Father of all,  
the darkness that covered the earth  
has given way to the bright dawn of your Word made flesh.  
Make us a people of this light.  
Make us faithful to your Word  
that we may bring your life to the waiting world.  
Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

- Jon Jenz  
Grace Community Church Pastor

*Fourth Sunday*

