

# Advent Devotional 2024



Covenant Presbyterian reflects on

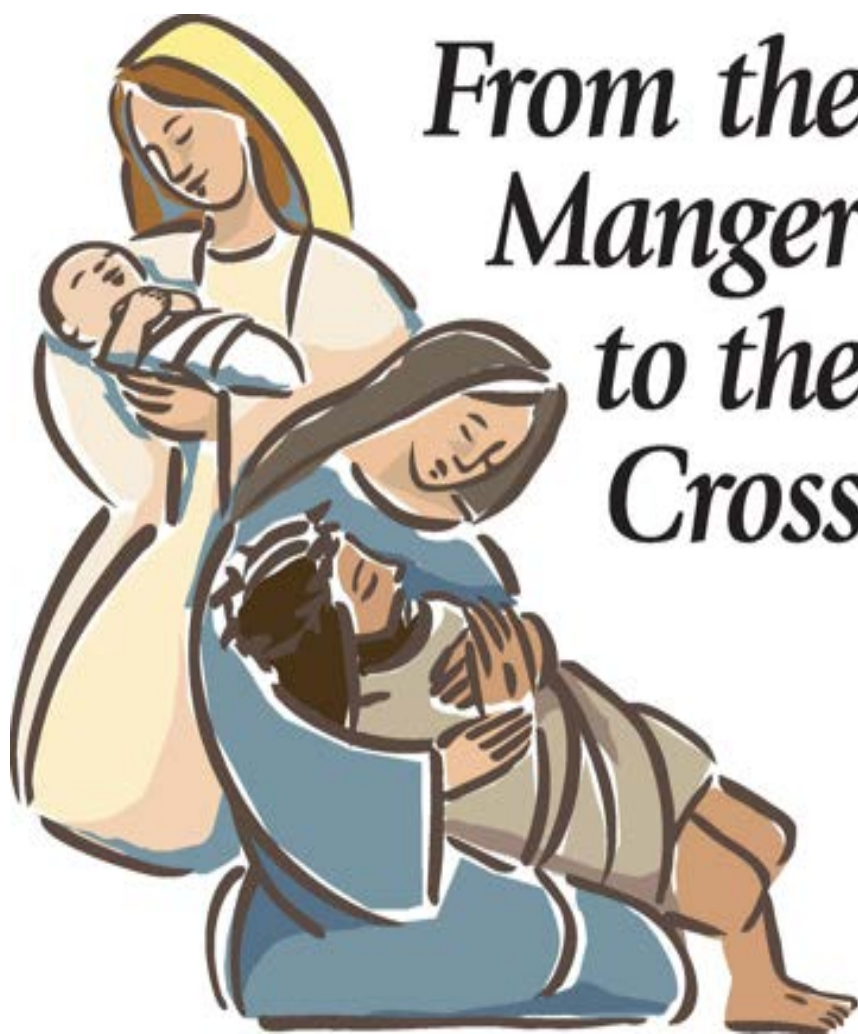
***Not a Silent Night:***

*Mary Looks Back to Bethlehem*

by

Adam Hamilton

*From the  
Manger  
to the  
Cross*





Dear Friend,

This year, we revisit a Covenant devotional published in 2014. Ten years later, the words continue to speak to us. The devotional approaches Advent from a different perspective as we view the meaning of Jesus through the eyes of Mary his mother. We will be preparing our hearts and souls to see and treasure the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as never before.

So come to receive the gift of Jesus on “not a silent night”.

Adam Hamilton writes,

*As Mary learned, God doesn't promise a perfect, peaceful life or a silent, holy night. She was blessed, God-favored, and grace-filled, yet her troubles did not end. That's how life was for Mary, and that's how life is for us. Life doesn't go according to our plans. Sometimes it's hard and painful and scary. Yet, in the messiness of life, God is at work, bringing blessing out of pain. That's the message of Christmas.*

May your Advent Season be enriched by the reflections and passages in this devotional.

Adele



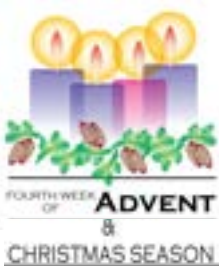
**December 1<sup>st</sup> –7<sup>th</sup>**  
*Beginning with the End*



**December 8<sup>th</sup> –14<sup>th</sup>**  
*The Piercing of Mary's Soul*



**December 15<sup>th</sup> –21<sup>st</sup>**  
*Amazed, Astounded and Astonished*



**December 22<sup>nd</sup> –28<sup>th</sup>**  
*Mary, Full of Grace*



**December 29<sup>th</sup> – January 4<sup>th</sup>**  
Christmas Season Bonus:  
*Not a Silent Night*



**First Week of Advent**  
**December 1<sup>st</sup> — 7<sup>th</sup>**  
Reflecting on  
*Beginning with the End*

Traditionally, churches choose to focus on John the Baptist, the prophets, or the stories surrounding Jesus' birth to help prepare us for the celebration of our Savior's birth. In his book, "Not a Silent Night", Adam Hamilton invites his readers to celebrate Advent through the eyes of Jesus' mother, Mary. As a mother who overcame the threat of being a societal outcast while only a young teen, and as a mother who witnessed the rise and heartbreaking fall of her firstborn child, she offers a unique perspective on Jesus' life, death, resurrection and second coming. She is also our witness of Jesus' respect for and inclusion of women as both disciples and proclaimers.

In the gospel of Luke, Mary offers a hymn of praise as a response to God's choosing her to be the mother of His son. Mary's song immediately proclaims the greatness of Yahweh and recognizes Yahweh as her Savior. The theme of salvation is present at the onset of Mary's realization of the role she was chosen to fulfill. It resonates with a joyous anticipation of what is to come.

Mary, like mothers who came before her and mothers who will come after her, certainly loved and found delight in all her children. But it was Jesus in whom she knew her world would be determined. The fate of the entire world rested upon the Messiah she was blessed to carry and care for. As deep as the joy she had when she bore her son, so was her agony and sorrow at the hour of his death and all the days thereafter. Just as parents today ask why they must bury their own children, undoubtedly so did Mary.

We imagine her mourning for her son, and in despair. We wonder whether she questioned how Jesus could truly have been the Messiah if he was crucified and died. We envision a woman whose hope, faith and conviction were all at once ripped away from her. Yet, hope's door is opened with Jesus' resurrection.

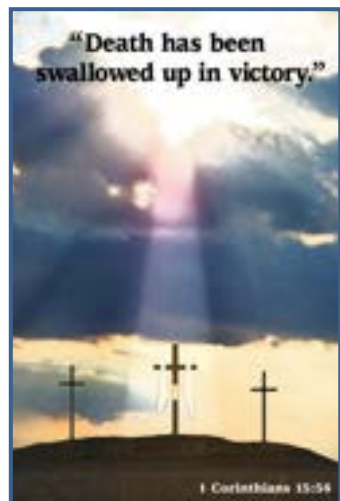
His ascension—taken up to heaven before the apostles’ very eyes—gives way to a joyous expectation that one day she will see her son again.

Indeed the greatest gift God gives us from Christmas is that “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54). For those who follow and love Jesus Christ, Christmas and Easter are inextricable. We continue to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ more than two thousand years later in light of the resurrection. His birth points us to the hope and salvation to come for all. In this Advent season, let us renew our passionate desire for Christ’s second coming by sharing in the preparation for his first coming. Let us join together just like the apostles, along with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers, constantly in prayer (Acts 1:14).

Let us make present the ancient expectancy of the Messiah, and unite ourselves in hope and John’s desire: “He must become greater, I must become less.” (John 3:30). David Hamilton wrote, “Our mission at Christmas is not to get stuff for people to open on Christmas morning. It is to be people of hope who let Jesus’ light shine through them.”

— Desiree Ocampo

- December 1    Luke 1:46-49
- December 2    Luke 1:50-55
- December 3    John 11:25-26a
- December 4    1 Corinthians 15:50-58
- December 5    Acts 1:6-11
- December 6    Acts 1:12-14
- December 7    Romans 13:11-14





**Second Week of Advent**  
**December 8<sup>th</sup> — 14<sup>th</sup>**  
Reflecting on  
*The Piercing of Mary's Soul*

A mother's love for her child has a depth that is bottomless in many respects. If a mother loses a child, young or mature in age, the impact produces a deep, hurtful sorrow, often accompanied by soul searching and dwelling on memories. In the case of Mary, mother of Jesus, she sorrowfully sought to find understanding of why the terrible, soul piercing loss of her son, seemingly tragic and unexpected, had occurred.

When a difficult, perhaps tragic event befalls us, we may examine, in our time of suffering, our memories to look for clues or reasons that led to the event. We may shout out to God, "Why?" Our search may go back to "day one" and move forward in time. "Day one" may have seemed so promising. We may consider people, events, and circumstances that help make sense of the event and our sufferings. We want to discover clues, to understand the "why" and the implications for the future.

Quoting a devotional statement by Charles Ringma, "A sad or difficult experience is never without some value. For the difficult experiences, we need to find the grace of God. Difficulties need to be transformed."

In Mary's case, the past was rich with clues. It was an astonishing past; angels, adoring shepherds and magi, a prophet, disciples, marvelous teachings and miraculous events were part of the fabric of her memories. She, along with others, examined this "fabric", seeking to understand the "why", the meaning of the cross.

Humanity's nature made the cross a necessity. The cross paradoxically represents deep guilt on the part of humanity, but wonderfully accompanied by God's offer of freedom, a reconciliation, without punishment for our guilt — atonement for sin which was familiar and retrospectively meaningful to the Jews living through that first "Good Friday".



The cross is about a love of infinite depth; God the Father's gracious love and Jesus' love so deep that he endured the cross on our behalf. "What does Good Friday and the cross have to do with Advent and Christmas? The child to be born would be the Savior of the world." - A. Hamilton

— Dave Magaña

December 8 Matthew 1:18-21

December 9 Luke 2:33-35

December 10 Isaiah 53:3-5

December 11 John 19:14-27

December 12 Romans 5:1-5

December 13 Romans 5:6-8

December 14 1 Timothy 4:6-10

*She will  
bear a son,  
and you are  
to name him  
Jesus, for he  
will save his  
people from  
their sins.*

Matthew 1:21, NRSV







## Third Week of Advent December 15<sup>th</sup> — 21<sup>st</sup>

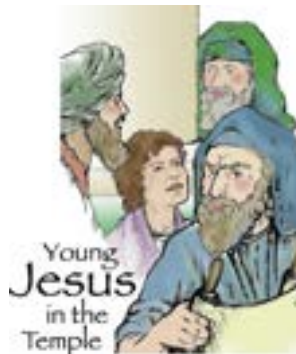
Reflecting on  
*Amazed, Astounded and Astonished*

My proudest accomplishment is to have helped raise two energetic boys, each with an unquenchable urge to wander. I completely empathize with Mary and Joseph's torment in this Bible passage (Luke 2:41-47) as they searched for their lost child.

I know so well that mixture of terror and confusion that envelops you when you turn around to talk to your child who has suddenly vanished with a trace. After that first jolt of emotion comes a sweeping wave of guilt: Why am I so careless? Why did I ever think I could raise a child? The terror returns, followed by the guilt, spiraling out of control.

When I recall the frenzied searches I underwent in countless parks, beaches and shopping malls across Southern California, I shudder to imagine how Mary and Joseph endured the anguish for three days before they found their lost son. The Bible says that they were astonished when they found him, but I have no doubt that this just scratches the surface of what they felt.

When I caught up with one of my missing sons after a nightmarish goose chase, more often than not, as with Jesus and his parents, he would not be upset at all. He would look up calmly with no idea what had turned his mother into the wild-eyed creature standing before him.



Even Mary, most blessed of mothers, had some words of reproach for her wandering son: “Child, why have you treated us like this?” My tender words went more along the lines of: “You’re grounded for life!” After a few minutes of ranting, though, came the beautiful part. I would reach out and receive the precious gift of my child’s embrace and look into the clear forgiveness of his shining eyes.

I’m sure some of you are wondering by now how I got caught up in this spin cycle of emotions if my sons wandered off so many times. I would have to say that, like most of us, I got distracted by the details of the moment and overlooked the big picture. Like Mary and Joseph in the Luke 2:48-51 passage, I did not understand Jesus’ words — that through the grace of God, I can always find comfort in my Father’s house.

I still forget, whether I’m brooding over the dream job that got away or worrying about making the next house payment, that God’s hand is there to guide me if I only reach for it. As it says in Psalm 139, it’s impossible to flee from the presence of God who knit me together in my mother’s womb.

In the hectic Christmas season, it can be so easy to get caught up in petty details. Let’s take time to look into the shining eyes of that awesome young man in the temple who was not lost at all. As promised in the first chapter of John, those who believe in Him have power to become the children of God.

— Vivian Reed

December 15 John 1:1-4, 10-14

December 16 Luke 2:41-47

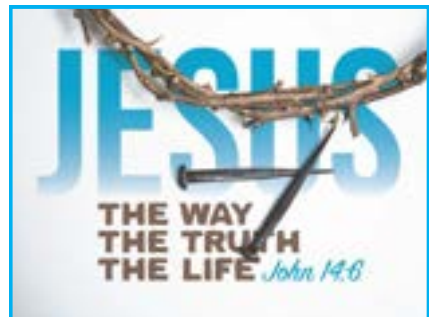
December 17 Luke 2:48-51

December 18 Psalm 139:7-14a

December 19 Luke 9:18-25

December 20 John 13:12-17

December 21 John 14:6-7





**Fourth Week of Advent &  
Christmas Season**  
**December 22<sup>nd</sup> — 28<sup>th</sup>**  
Reflecting on  
*Mary, Full of Grace*

God comes to us when we least expect it, doesn't he? Imagine that day when the angel Gabriel came to Mary and told her that she would bear "the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David." That startling announcement was completely unexpected. And even that is an understatement. Mary must have been overwhelmed. Here she was a young servant girl going about her normal daily business when this strange man appears at her door. Even stranger was the news he revealed.

How could this be that she, a virgin thirteen or fourteen years old, a lowly servant girl living in an obscure little town in a remote part of the great Roman Empire, be chosen to bear God's son? "Could this really be happening?" Mary must have thought. The news must have sent her reeling.

But wait. This announcement was also a call, a direct call from God, a call to be the mother of Jesus. God was not forcing Mary to bear his son. He was asking her to do his will. Still, what would saying "yes" to this call mean?



Mary, though, had no time to puzzle through all of this surprising news, let alone think about the implications of being the mother of the Son of the Most High. She had no time to ponder how, if she did God's will, her life would be completely, utterly, dramatically, changed forever. She had gotten out of bed that morning and had just begun going about her routine chores, just another ordinary day, really. But now? Now, suddenly, she was being called upon

by God to take on the most important role any human being could take on in the history of the world. The angel Gabriel’s puzzling words not only overwhelmed her but surely pierced her to the core of her being. She surely perceived that in saying “yes” to this call, her life would be profoundly changed from here on, changed in ways she could not possibly understand at this pivotal moment.

Mary had to be frightened. How could she not be? Yet, the angel Gabriel, who had to sense her fear, reassured her and told her not to be afraid. These are words that God has been telling all of us throughout the Bible: to fear not. It is the most frequent command we hear from God, his angels, his prophets, his Son Jesus and his apostles: to fear not, to not be afraid. In an act of complete faith, then, Mary, without giving this call from God any more thought, without trying to bargain with him to ask for more time to consider this mind-boggling request, or to ask for more time for the angel to explain to her the consequences of what she was getting into, simply acquiesced. Mary agreed, she obeyed God’s will. She said, “Yes.”

— Mark Wiley

- December 22 Luke 1:26-33
- December 23 Luke 1:39-45
- December 24 1 Samuel 2:1-10
- December 25 1 Peter 5:5-6
- December 26 Philippians 2:3-5, 8
- December 27 Ephesians 2:5-10
- December 28 Philippians 3:7-14





## **Christmas Season** **December 29<sup>th</sup> — January 4<sup>th</sup>**

### Reflecting on *It Was Not a Silent Night*

*Silent Night, Holy Night* is perhaps the most loved of all Christmas carols—and deservedly so. Besides the gorgeous music, the theology it conveys is true and deep in its celebration of the “Son of God, love’s pure light”, whose face beams “with the dawn of redeeming grace”.

Yet, in depicting a scene where “all is calm, all is bright”, the carol substitutes an imaginary idealization for a reality that was cold, bloody and hard.

Mary and Joseph were alone and scared. They didn’t know what to do, and there was no one to guide and help them. They must have been worried sick.

The silence of the night was often punctured with Mary’s screams of pain. That unsanitary, drafty, dark delivery room was crowded with animals, and stank of barnyard droppings. The closest thing the couple could come up with for a crib was a feeding trough filled with straw soaked in the slobber of donkeys and sheep.

That night was a time of trial and trouble, like many of ours!

The good news is that in the midst of all their struggles and suffering, God was doing something wonderful. On a night we date close to the day with the least amount of sunshine, the light of life was entering the world. At a time when Mary and Joseph were scared to death they’d lose their baby, God was by that baby joining the human race in a effort to save every member of it.

God often does not deliver us from our difficulties, but Jesus - the One who is Emmanuel, “God with us” — is our constant, caring companion through thick and thin, come hell or high water, in order to work for good in all the twists and turns of life, and in order to see us through them all to an end that is infinitely and eternally good. A friend of mine used to say, “I can summarize

my theology in one simple compound sentence: ‘Life is hard, and God is good!’”

At Christmas, God showed how committed He was to plunge into all the hardness of our life and, by His own loving suffering, to make His good and loving will triumph over all the evil of our benighted world.

His will shall be fulfilled at our resurrection in Christ: but, as St. Teresa of Avila used to say, “All the way to heaven can be a bit of heaven itself.” Indeed, the joy of knowing Jesus lifts up our hearts in glad gratitude through all the hardships of our life.

So, let us step into 2025 with a holy intention to know Jesus better and to make Him better known. Let us hold Him in our hearts as Mary once held Him to her breast, and let us share Him with the world as she had to do in loving obedience as “the servant of the Lord”.

Then, though trials and troubles surround us, our souls will be “calm” and our lives “bright” with His “redeeming grace”!

— Rob Langworthy

December 29 Luke 2:1-7

December 30 John 1:3b-5

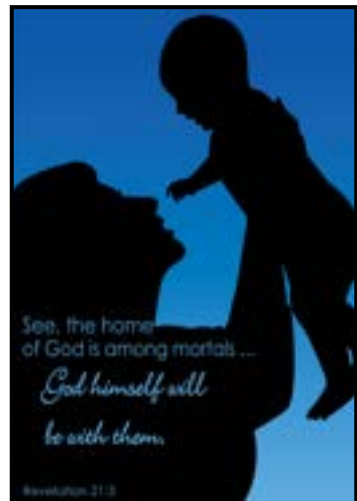
December 31 2 Corinthians 4:7-11

January 1 Romans 8:35-37

January 2 Romans 8:28-30

January 3 John 11:25-26

January 4 Revelation 21:1-5a



*You are invited to write a letter to God, expressing your holy intention  
to know Jesus better and to make Him better known in 2025.*

*Dear God,*

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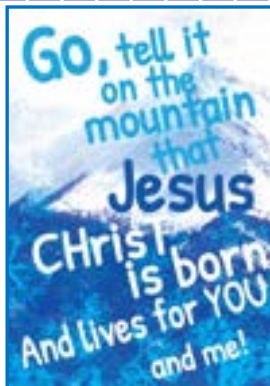
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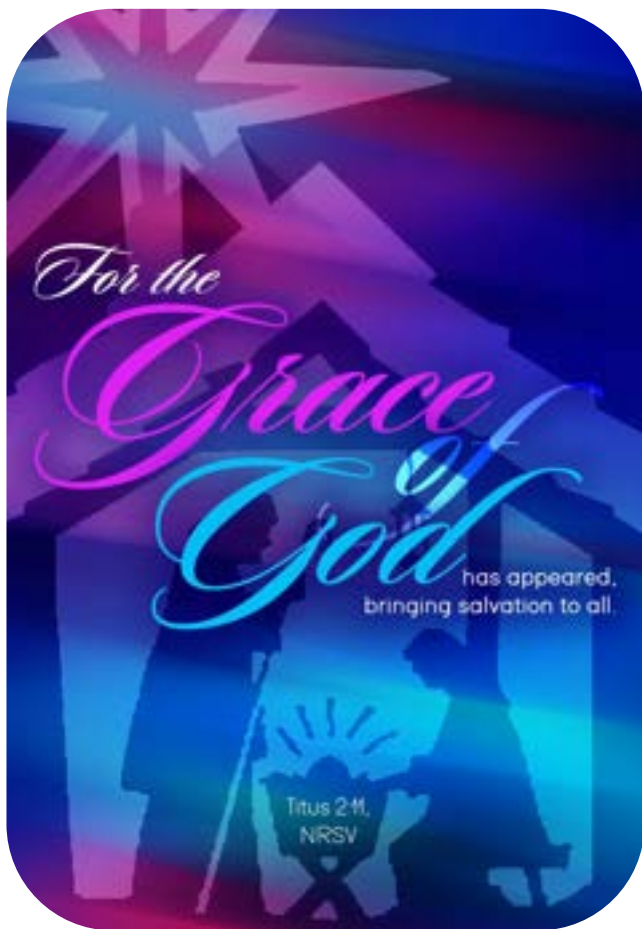
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