

Immanuel Baptist Church, Wiesbaden

Advent Devotionals 2017

HE WILL BE CALLED



Advent Devotionals written by the Immanuel family past and present

December 1

LIGHT OF THE WORLD

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12

As a photographer, the most crucial factor I need to fulfil my work is light. If I go to someone's house, I ask them prior to our session for a text message with an image of the room where I will be photographing. I need to see how well the rooms are lit. Without it, I cannot work. I have an incredibly strong and powerful camera but not even that camera can work in darkness. Without light I cannot achieve the work I am paid to do and I am just simply lost.

Just like in our daily walk with or without Christ. Without light we are lost. No well paying job, no government, no money, no fame and not even the best partner can help you if you are in the dark. We are then just tapping along the walls trying to find our way. Somehow. To somewhere.

God gave us His son who became the LIGHT OF THIS WORLD. He knew that we are just simply lost tapping along the walls of life without light.

When Jesus was born, a new light came into this world. A light that would break through all darkness. Christ became light to give us direction, a sense of security, hope, and eternal life.

Don't try to live life tapping on the walls searching for happiness. Receive the Light that was given to us. Fulfil the work you are here to do! And most of all rejoice in this message today and every day! Wake up with light in your heart knowing that Jesus is there!

*Bogi Huwe (2011 - present)
Taunusstein, Germany*

December 2

DELIVERER

“And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

1 Thess.1:10

It's hard to escape the upcoming season. Whether here in Evans, Georgia, or there in Wiesbaden, Germany, kids from around the world are ramping up in anticipation of impending "deliveries." And yet most of them don't find out until later that neither Santa Claus nor St. Nikolas is responsible for bringing them gifts. For those Christians who take the time to purchase and offer presents, they feel good knowing that the "deliveries" honor the first gifts given to our Lord two thousand years ago.

Immanuel Baptist Church, itself, is no stranger to playing a part in deliveries. Pastor Nick has come to call IBC a "sending" church and this couldn't be truer. Its history is built upon those members who came from around the world to serve and worship the Lord before moving on to the next place on the path He chose for them. I think it's fair to say that Immanuel could just as easily be described as a "delivering" church. While at IBC, our family enjoyed seeing others off onto their next stops along His path; we hope those still in Wiesbaden appreciate how much of an important role it is.

But these kinds of deliveries, as important as they might be, pale in comparison to the one our Deliverer, Jesus, made for us. For without His sacrifice we would all fall short of His glory and redemption. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 tells us “And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” We should all be very happy to know that He delivered us from our sin! His sacrifice will redeem us on the Day of Judgment and saves us from eternal suffering. The Deliverer's coming wrath against the world is justified; without him, all are lost. Our only salvation comes through His love and longing to be with us.

For those that are still in Wiesbaden, we want to say that we miss you and encourage you to enjoy your time there. Because before you know it, you'll be wrapped up and made ready for delivery to the next location of His choosing.

Merry Christmas from the Gibbs Family (2013-2015)
Evans, Georgia

December 3

BRIDEGROOM

"And Jesus said to them, 'Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.'" Matthew 9:15

This has always been a difficult passage for me. I understand in principal the bridegroom and what it mean, but many times I read right over it without realizing the impact of what Jesus is saying. Hosea 2:19 says "I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and will betroth you to Me in Faithfulness, and you shall know the LORD." Jesus is claiming here in Matthew 9 to be the one and only Jehovah! Almighty God! He is the bridegroom! What friend would attend a wedding and wish that they were, in fact, at the wedding? What people would wait for a moment pointed to by scripture and when that moment arrives stick to tradition rather than join the celebration? He is asking why would friends of the Bridegroom mourn when the greatest moment of joy for their friend has arrived? Why would you fast to humble yourself to become closer to GOD when GOD is standing right before YOU?!?! It seems crazy, right?

But what is the message for us?

Jesus isn't saying that you shouldn't fast. Quite the contrary, in fact. Jesus goes on to say, "The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast." You and I live in those times... We are the church, and we are the bride! Do you fast? Do you long for the return of the bridegroom? Or, like me, do you have difficulty understanding what that even means? We as the church are given a very important job, and that is to be a light unto the world, the salt of the earth. There are many ways that we can do this, but chief among them is to build a strong and enduring relationship with GOD (Acts 20:24) and to share his gospel throughout the earth (Matthew 28:18-20).

Matthew 25:1-13 tells a related story of ten virgins who are given the task of going out to meet the bridegroom and lighting his way to the wedding feast. Five are wise and bring extra oil but 5 are foolish and do not, so when the bridegroom is delayed the 5 foolish women don't have enough oil to keep their lamps lit until the bridegroom arrives. When they go back to town to get more oil and the bridegroom arrives and the 5 wise women light the way to the wedding feast, the 5 foolish women are not recognized by the bridegroom and are turned away. Is it a coincidence that the "Bridegroom" is used here? Absolutely not! I believe the 5 wise women are an example of how we should live our lives in relationship with God. We will not know the time that Jesus will return but we know he will, so we must always be prepared. How do we do that? We know God, and we fast and pray. These two things MUST be a regular part of our lives.

1. Fast as an act of humility to take your eyes off of the things that you think you need to survive and to focus on the one thing you truly NEED to survive, an enduring relationship with GOD.

2. Pray in a way that seeks to know GOD through relationship, the way you would come to know your own husband or wife, through conversation.

Ensuring that these two parts of your spiritual life are practiced regularly will keep your lamps full and lit to provide light for the Bridegroom when he arrives.

Jason Hayes (2015-Present)
Wiesbaden, Germany

December 4

THE TRUTH

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" (John 14:6 NKJV)

Truth is not a principle. Truth is a person: Jesus Christ. This is what separates Jesus Christ from every other leader of every other faith. Other leaders have said, "I'm looking for the truth" or "I'm teaching the truth" or "I point to the truth" or "I'm a prophet of truth." Jesus comes and says to us, "I am the truth."

Truth is rooted in the eternal God who's all powerful and unchangeable. As imperfect people, we change our minds often, but God never changes. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is Truth" (John 17:17). Truth is far more than facts. It's not just something we act upon, truth acts upon us. We can't change the truth, but the truth can change us. It sanctifies (sets us apart) from the falsehoods woven into our sin natures. As Christ the living Word is truth, so His written word is truth. Though heaven and earth will pass away, God's truth never will.

As followers of Christ, we are to walk in the truth (3 John 1:3), love the truth, and believe the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12) and we're to speak the truth "in love" (Ephesians 4:32). So let's embrace the ultimate truth this Christmas, the unchanging truth of Jesus Christ who is both fully man and fully God and who is, by grace through faith alone, the only way to everlasting life in heaven. He is the ultimate reason for the season and He loves us so much that it is beyond our understanding. Merry Christmas and Many Blessings in Christ Jesus.

*Erik Neumann (2016-present)
Wiesbaden, Germany*

December 5

LION OF THE TRIBE OF JUDAH

"Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

Revelation 5:5 (NKJV)

"Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him?" Genesis 49:8-9 (NKJV)

Our family recently read C.S. Lewis's "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" from the Chronicles of Narnia series. There is a moment in the book when Lucy, a young girl, is learning about Aslan. In the fictional story, Aslan is a symbol for Jesus and His significance in our lives.

"Aslan is a lion- the Lion, the great Lion."

"Ooh," said Susan. "I thought he was a man. Is he - quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

When I think of a lion, I picture a fierce king of the land who is powerful and who rules over what's around him. I think of an animal worthy of praise because he can conquer enemies and demands the other creatures to bow to his strength and dignity. I see a lion who sleeps soundly because no creature would dare rouse him. Much like the lion described in Genesis 49, a lion can bring me to a sense of awe.

While it's true that a lion is mighty and fearsome, it is also dependent upon God. Without having a God-given purpose and place in the world, a lion could just as well be any other big animal. Why, then, did Jacob (Israel) choose a lion as the symbol for his son Judah? Why was a lion the picture of Judah's tribe?

We know now that Judah would be the tribe whose lineage would lead us eventually to Jesus. Jesus on earth was commanding and powerful, One who defended and protected- but also who was completely dependent upon God for His purpose. Just as a lion does not choose its place in the food chain or provide its own meals or shelter, Jesus- described in Revelation as the conqueror over all sin- depended upon the Father for His purpose, strength, guidance and timing while He was on earth.

As you continue in this advent season, consider that Jesus was born both a strong conqueror and submissive God-follower. He does have power and will use it in our lives when we call upon Him. We don't need a Savior who leaves us alone to carry on our safe and happy lives. We have a Savior who calls us to be dependent on Him, but also to be bold, to be an example for the believers, to be strong and courageous.

Pray today that God would reveal an answer to the questions: Among all the names for Christ, why consider that He is the Lion? Where in my life do I need Jesus show up boldly in my heart and mind so that it's not safe there? In what ways do I want God to meddle with my comfortable daily life and instead let me hear God say, "Of course He's not safe, but He's good. He's the King, I tell you."

Natalie Hayes (2015 - present)
Wiesbaden, Germany

December 6

GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. Hebrews 4:14

The role and directions given to Aaron and the priesthood included specific duties. 1) To oversee the responsibilities of the subordinate priests; 2) To offer a sin offering for himself as well as the people and 3) To enter the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat to atone for the sins of himself and the people for the year. This is the way it was always done in order to have your sins forgiven and to receive God's mercy and grace.

This ritual was followed without question or afterthought because this direction came directly from God (Lev. 10:8-11). As this did last for generations to come it did have its drawbacks. Levitical priests were born into the position and the high priest were appointed into service to God for the people. They came with their own baggage of sins as well as the piety of the birthright.

Jesus was called by God, not of the line of Aaron thus, starting a New Covenant. Jesus does not need to provide an offering for his sins. He was tempted as we are and he did not sin. He remains sinless, he lives forever and can enter the presence of God and is our mediator to God (Heb 8:6-10). Jesus served as the sin offering of the people and covers us in His blood (Heb 9:12), an offering to God to that allows us to enter His presence.

We can celebrate this season knowing that we have an intercessor that will never leave us nor forsake us. The Great High Priest Jesus, is keeper of the New Covenant. All who call on Him will receive the promise of eternal life, free from sins of their life and enter the Glory of the Father.

"No one shall get to the Father, except through me."

*Angela and Ladd Gregerson (2012-2015)
Columbus, Wisconsin*

December 7

REDEEMER

"And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth." Job 19:25

As we consider the names of Christ during this Christmas season, most of us will reflect that Jesus is the Redeemer of our soul. But do we really consider what that means? It means He redeemed us for himself. We are redeemed from the power and penalty of sin. Jesus has redeemed us by paying the only acceptable ransom, which was His very life. According to Donald English in *The Message of Mark*, a ransom was the "price paid to liberate a slave, prisoner of war, or a condemned person. We are all condemned until Jesus redeems us. And we cannot redeem ourselves; only the finished work of the cross can pay our ransom. Once we are redeemed, we are set free. In John 8:34-36, Jesus told His Jewish followers, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." When Jesus redeems us, we are free to live for Him and to live a life of obedience by the power of the Holy Spirit. This freedom is worthy of our thanksgiving during this Advent season.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for redeeming my soul and saving me. I could not redeem myself and I acknowledge that You are the only One who could redeem, Out of your love and mercy I am saved. My soul rejoices in my freedom and looks to the manger and cross in gratitude.

In Your Precious Name,
Amen

Todd Clark (2015–present)
Wiesbaden, Germany

December 8

KING OF KINGS

"These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful." Rev. 17:14

We are often captured by the tyranny of the present. We are easily distracted. We fixate on the latest thing. As a teenager, I knew all the video game systems, the release date of the next game, and its price. As a parent, we think that our kids will be in diapers forever. Then one day you wake up and they're teenagers or college students. We think that our car will always start because it always has. But one day, usually before an important appointment, it doesn't start. We are trapped in so many ways to our current life, our current season. We assume that it will always be that way, because it has always been that way.

Christmas is the season of the Messiah's birth. We picture a baby born in a stable, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. We are trapped again by the tyranny of the present into thinking of Jesus only as a baby. We easily forget that 30 years later this baby will die for our sins on a Roman cross. On the third day, this baby will rise from the grave and then ascend into heaven to sit at the Father's right hand. Remember Christ's words to us in John 14, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

As Christians we cannot just be tied to the present. We are reminded over and over again of this in the last book of the Bible. Revelation describes how Jesus Christ will return not as a lamb to be slaughtered, but as a lion to judge and devour. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. This is why John wrote "these will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of Kings." During Christmas, celebrate the birth of our Savior, but also remember that the baby lying in a manger will return as a conquering king.

Nate and Nicole Davies (2014-2017)
Gunpowder, Maryland

December 9

ONE WHO SETS FREE

"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." John 8:36

There are a lot of different kinds of prisons. There are prisons which are beyond imagination in their cruelty and neglect, while others are clean and merciful in their treatment. Some prisons are those of our own making, while others are created out of steel and stone. Imprisonment may be caused by our own misconduct, but there are also those who have been imprisoned through no fault of their own.

Regardless of the kind of prison or how we got there, two things are always true:

- Prison limits our freedom
- We want release

So it is that John's title for Jesus as the one who sets us free is immediately of great interest. The truth is, all of us find ourselves in a prison of some sort. For the majority of people, the prison which limits their freedom is not a physical prison with bars and guards, but rather the prison of our rebellion against God. And this prison is far worse than any physical prison. It is a prison out of which all other prisons are born. For this prison causes us to lose hope. It causes us to have disdain for our fellow man and treat them as objects to be used, rather than as those who are precious in the sight of their creator. This prison pushes us to violence and abuse. It is a cycle rooted in the earliest moments of humanity when we sought to place ourselves on the King's throne. Condemned, each of us repeats this cycle of rebellion and imprisonment.

AND

The one who stands as the righteous judge, against whom we have rebelled, comes with the offer of freedom. It is an offer unlike any we have ever encountered. It fully acknowledges our crime, yet offers a grace we do not deserve. Amazingly, the judge offers Himself in our stead. Through His sacrifice we have the chance to experience what is otherwise eternally beyond our reach; true and everlasting freedom living in relationship with Him.

This Advent season let us be reminded of the greatest gift we could possibly imagine: Freedom!

Nick Howard (2015 - present)
Wiesbaden, Germany

December 10

I AM

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was, I am" John 8: 58

Jesus has been healing, sometimes on the Sabbath. That's not allowed. The leaders don't like that. Now the Jews are starting to put their trust in Jesus and the leaders, with their top credentials as sons of Abraham and their obvious-to-anyone rightness in all matters concerning the Law, confront him. Question mark as to who his father is or was, implied.

Jesus settles the matter with five words: Before Abraham was, I am.

What kind of a combination of tenses is that? The teacher in me is reaching for the red pen. If something was before something else in the past, it would have to be even further back in the past, wouldn't it?

Actually He says: I AM - YHWH "being". All the time. Past, present, future. In fact, outside of, free from our time continuum.

I AM WHO I AM, we sometimes translate it. God shared this name with Moses when He told him to lead His people out of Egypt. (That's tantamount to telling the Premier of a western country that from today there will be no more oil or internet - the economy would collapse. Not.Goin.G.To Happen.)

It was a daunting task for Moses and he needed to know who was going with him. It was I AM WHO I AM. No limitations. And lead them out he did.

And so we see Jesus applying the same name to himself. I AM, the being one, long before Abraham ever was, in fact slain before the foundation of the world, the one through whom all things were created and in whom all things hold together, living to intercede for His people, seated on the throne and reigning forever. Son of the Father. And doing His works to fulfill the promise to Abraham.

Christmas - The eternal and almighty God comes to say: I AM *here* with you *now*.

Janet Yachoua (1992 - present)
Wiesbaden, Germany

December 11

SUPREME CREATOR OVER ALL

"By him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together...."
Isaiah 7:14

Have you ever found yourself looking up at the night sky, it's width consumed by an endless stretch of stars beyond counting? Or marveled at the complexity of design and function in the human body? Both demonstrate the vast glory and beauty, from the heavens to our hearts, of the loving fingerprint of the Almighty God and supreme Creator of everything.

It is estimated that our own Milky Way galaxy contains some 300 billion stars, and that there are more than 100 billion galaxies in the observable universe. From the amazing Sombrero Galaxy to the nearby Andromeda with its one trillion stars, each fixture in the night sky is a testament to His power and majesty over everything He has made. And yet with such breathtaking power and beauty, God's word describes this endless wonder in Gen 1:14 with six simple words, "And He made the stars also." Talk about humility.

If the wonders beyond our comprehension were not enough, God has also demonstrated His creative power and handiwork right inside each of us. Did you know that the DNA stored within one cell of your body contains roughly the equivalent of 1.5 Gigabytes of data. And you have an estimated 100 trillion cells! That's over 150 Zettabytes (whatever those are), or 10^{21} ! One 3 billion-pair sequence of DNA in each cell, if stretched out, would measure six feet in length. Stretching out all the information from all 100 trillion cells and you could travel the distance from the earth to the sun and back again. 600 times! It is no wonder Paul writes to the Romans regarding God's invisible attributes as being clear for all to see and that man is without excuse when it comes to God's creation and power (Rom 1:20).

But what is even more amazing is that despite the immense scale and diversity in the heavens or the complexity and purposeful design in our bodies, God is never far removed from each of us (Psalm 145:18; Jer 23:23). Despite His power and position of Lord over all things, His truest desire is that we seek Him in all things (Acts 17:27) and in so doing, we discover that He is very near indeed. May you seek out and experience the loving presence and touch of your Creator this Advent season.

Craig & Debbie Pennuto (2012 - 2015)
Kapolei, Hawaii

December 12

THE BREAD OF LIFE

"Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'" John 6:35

Jesus emphatically declares: "I am the bread of life..." To the ears of his early followers this declaration was as remarkable as it is to us today.

In earlier passages Jesus demonstrates His power and Lordship over creation, as well as his continue care for those who trust in him. Before feeding the five thousand, Jesus had healed them with many signs and wonders. Concomitantly, He not only healed those afflicted but also provided care and sustenance for those who, while not needing physical healing, needed God's continued provision. Yet, provision and healing is not only what a true follower of Christ needs.

Jesus' disciples and followers have seen all kind of miracles and wonders, yet they have not acknowledged Him as their Lord and Savior, the sustainer, supporter, and maintainer of their existence. The bread that came from Heaven to sustain our fragile physical bodies, was about to be broken in the cross for the forgiven of our sins. In Antiquity to "break a bread", or to "cut a meal", was the equivalent as to make a covenant. Jesus is saying that He is ultimate sacrifice for the sustenance of our existence, He is the mediator between us and the Father, a salvation that cannot be bought, but only given. He is not only providing us with what we need, He is giving Himself to us and for us.

I encourage you this day, that you may search for God not only for the things that we constantly need, but also that you search Him and recognize Him, today, as the Lord over your life, the salvation from the desolation of sin. As you acknowledge Him, recognize Him over those places in your life where you need to trust His merciful grace and surrender your all to Him.

Jesus is the one that provides for our needs. He is the one that heals our bodies. He is the one that cleans our sins. He is the Savior and the Lord of our lives. Let's praise Him not only for what He gives us, but lets praise Him for who He is to us: our Bread of Life, the sustenance of our lives and souls.

*David J. Jimenez (2017-present)
Mainz, Germany*

December 13

ADVOCATE

"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father---Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." 1 John 2:1

What a great comfort we have been given! Maybe you are like me and wonder why God would even allow me to be a part of His family in the first place...I am not worthy. I can't make it out the back door of Immanuel Baptist after the last "Amen" of the service without messing up in some way.

Yet He still wants a relationship with me! What? Can that be? That's truly amazing. Here are a few thoughts that I am learning.

John just wrote in the first chapter of this letter a wonderful statement. "If we confess our sins, God is faithful to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Let that sink in. That is enough, right? Yes. Absolutely. That is enough!

...then I sin again...

What is wrong with me? John handles me with great care. He calls me a dear child. Then he states his purpose in this letter. What is that purpose? That I won't sin. If it ended right there, I'd be in such trouble. However, he goes on to state the obvious..."if anybody DOES sin (me), then we have an advocate with the Father."

What is an advocate? It is actually a legal term. It is the person who pleads the case for someone in a court of law.

So basically Jesus, the One who went to the cross BECAUSE of my sin, now DEFENDS me when I sin. That is truly mind-boggling. Why would He do this? What could possibly be the explanation?

I think it must be the purest form of love there is, because it is a totally unselfish love. I am overwhelmed by the love of my Savior, my Advocate.

The only response that is fitting is to fall before Him in worship, and sing,

O come, let us adore Him!
O come, let us adore Him!
O come, let us adore Him!
Christ the Lord!

Susan Howard (2015 - present)
Wiesbaden, Germany

December 14

THE WORD

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."
John 1:1*

Jesus is the living form of the word - our Bible. The more we know the word the more we know God and His ways. The more we know God the more we trust in Him. We cannot trust someone more than we know them. How much do we know God?

The thing that amazes me the most about Christianity is that we as Christians get to be in a relationship with God. He wants to fellowship with us. Who am I that God – the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords would want to fellowship with me and yet He does. It's amazing isn't it? We fellowship with God by reading His Word. The more we spend time with His word, His thoughts become our thoughts. By doing so, our minds get renewed and transformed into the person God has purposed us to be.

Faith begins where the will of God is known. When we renew our minds with His word, our thoughts and desires get aligned to God's will and plan. I am reminded of the verse where Jesus says 'I am the good shepherd, I know my sheep and I am known of mine.' I encourage you to spend time reading the Bible just as you would spend time reading a letter from your loved ones. The word brings life. Strengthen yourself in the word and be established in the faith.

*Annie Sriramachandran (2015-present)
Wiesbaden, Germany*

December 15

OUR HOPE

"...Christ Jesus our hope." 1 Tim. 1:1

A few years ago, my wife, Debi, and I were driving back to Stuttgart from Rothenburg ob der Tauber. The sun was starting to set on what had been a beautiful day filled with fun, food, and beautiful sites. We were about 2 km from home when we saw flashing lights quickly approaching as a Polizei vehicle pulled up behind us. As it turns out, my tail lights were not working. Our beautiful day was over, and we began to hope that the Polizei would not give us a fine or have our vehicle towed away. As you might imagine, our hope in the Polizei did not provide us with any peace or joy as we waited for him to decide our fate. We only had anxiety.

Fortunately, when Christ Jesus is our hope, we do not have to live a life of anxiety wondering what our ultimate fate will be. When we put our faith in Christ, we are given the gift of hope because our souls are securely and firmly anchored in Christ, so we cannot drift away (Heb. 6:19); we have hope because Jesus is representing us to the Father, and the Father is seeing Jesus' sacrifice instead of our sins; we have hope because we are now a child of God, and that enables us to live a life of peace and joy knowing our fate is to spend eternity with Him.¹

Is Christ Jesus your hope? Do not let this season of hope pass you by without knowing for sure. The ending to the story above is that the Polizei had mercy on us and escorted us the rest of the way home. If Christ Jesus is not your hope, do not wait. Accept the best Christmas gift of all today by anchoring your soul to Him and letting Him escort you home to the Heavenly Father.

*Dan and Debi Zerby (2015-2017)
Middletown, Rhode Island*

¹ Many of the thoughts and ideas for this paragraph came from the John MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Hebrews.

December 16

THE WAY

I am the Way, the Truth and the Life no one comes to the Father but by me. John 14:6

I am a little confused these days with our navigation systems do we always know the way or are we always lost.

When we first moved to Germany 20 years ago we always had a map, a big map, an ugly map that we could never get folded back correctly. One of the first things about traveling in Germany we learned was you did not just need to know where you were going but you needed to know the towns between where you started and your destination. It was a new experience without the road signs stating North, South, East, and West. We knew where we were headed but we really didn't know our direction.

This may have been a little of what the first followers of Jesus were experiencing. Jesus told them "Go and make Disciples" but didn't necessarily tell them how. It is a little ironic that the early followers of Jesus were called "The Way". They were in many ways working without a map. This Holy Spirit navigation system took some getting used to. The Jews had so many rules you were rarely in doubt. These new followers had to learn to follow and to listen for God's voice. The Way was a totally new way of thinking about God and following God.

Who would ever imagine that God's way would start with a human baby, a Step Father and a young girl that was probably the age of one of our youth?

During this Holiday season it is easy to lose "The Way" with Christmas Markets, parties, presents, travel, songs and the craziness of the season. Hopefully we can take time to go back to Bethlehem. To a manger, to a Step Father picked by God who had idea how to be the Father of the Messiah, to a brave young girl the age of one of our youth, and God as a human baby.

The Shepherds received directions for Angels, the Magi had a star, and we have the Holy Spirit all leading us to that baby in the manger.

"I am The Way, The Truth, and The Life, no one comes to the Father but by me."

*Buddy Bagwell (1997-present)
Wiesbaden, Germany*

December 17

TRUE VINE

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser." John 15:1

Are there days when you feel lost? Days when you have felt that nothing is going your way. That feeling of being lost can be overwhelming at times. The feeling taking over your whole being and placing you in a place of darkness. This verse is the one I always turn to.

If you look through my journals, then you will easily find this verse and a vine doodled around a lot of the edges of pages. Perhaps this verse has stuck with me since I was younger. I can recall singing a song at church.....

*I am the one vine growing, come make your home in me.
I am the river flowing, gently to the sea.
Shalom! Come make your home in me.
Come make your home in me.*

However, what does it all actually mean? That is the question, I would have asked myself a few years ago. That is the question many of us ask ourselves on a daily basis. Even now when I know my Heavenly Father is there for me, there are those days that I worry, I stress, and I try to handle life all on my own. But then I turn to my journal and this verse creeps into my mind. Come make your HOME in me.

Jesus is that TRUE VINE. The vine we are nourished from. The vine that grows freely through our lives. And it is through Him that we will find peace in our darkest moments or distressing days. The wonderful thing about a vine is that even after years of neglect, it continues to grow steadily and will choke out all the weeds around it. Jesus is that steady vine growing through our lives, choking out the bad times and bringing us peace and comfort. He is that firmly fixed vine throughout our lives that does not waver.

In those times when life seems to be running you over like a locomotive on a train track, step back and trust the vine. Lean on the vine for support and trust that He will give you exactly what you need. For it is through that *true vine* that you will feel most at home. Your true home, in your loving Father's embrace of comfort and solace, of peace and tranquility. They say that Home is where the heart is....I say that Home is where His heart is!

*Michelle House (2015-2017)
Johnston, Iowa*

December 18

CHIEF CORNERSTONE

"The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." Ps. 118:22

A cornerstone is the first stone set in the building of a stone or brick foundation. It is measured, it is square, and it is flawless. Why? Because any flaws in the stone will be reflected and exaggerated in the foundation of the wall or structure. The foundation stone or corner stone is not just important in biblical references, but throughout the world great ceremony is taken when the cornerstone is laid. In ancient times, they would bury a sacrifice of grain or pour oil over the cornerstone. In ancient Japan, legends say that virgins were buried alive under the cornerstone. In current day Greece, a lamb or rooster may be slain and its blood poured over the cornerstone, or the height or shadow of the mason will be measured and the measuring rod buried under the cornerstone. Suffice to say, the cornerstone is important- very important! One of the things that makes a cornerstone so unique is that it bears a tremendous amount of force from multiple directions, and a mason would select a stone that APPEARED perfect with no weaknesses that might cause it to fail or fracture.

It's very interesting that Paul uses this description of Jesus because the very reason that he was rejected was that He did not come with the appearance of strength and power that the people of Israel expected. The people of Israel (the builders) believed that the Messiah would come as a perfect king that would exact vengeance for their suffering and conquer the world. But as 1 Corinthians 1:27 says, "God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong." God chose to come to earth as a suffering servant... hardly the warrior king the Israelites expected. When God says in Isaiah 28:16 - "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic". He was speaking of Jesus. His people rejected him, though, because He did not appear to fit their preconceived notions of what GOD would provide for them.

Why do you suppose this happened? I believe that it had much to do with the fact that our values are not in line with God's. Our image of strength is not the strength that GOD values in us. Our view of strength and power tends to mean the ability to overpower or dominate, while Jesus's strength came in humility and service. Our view of a precious cornerstone is one of silver, gold or something of exquisite monetary value. God's view of precious is a heart that loves Him above all else and loves a neighbor as oneself. I implore you not to reject the cornerstone just because it doesn't look like you think it should look or act like you think it should act. Serve in humility and love with a heart of God. The surest foundation that God has provided for us was one that served, loved, and ultimately laid down his life for all of humanity. Do the actions and perceptions in your life reflect the values of our cornerstone? Do you need to reexamine the things that you value in this world in reference to what is important to GOD?

*Jason Hayes (2015-Present)
Wiesbaden, Germany*

December 19

GOOD SHEPHERD

*"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."
John 10:11*

Jesus gave His life so that we might have life in abundance. A life living in a relationship with God and thereby giving us access to God. Because of what Jesus did, we can call him 'Daddy' and he calls us his sons and daughters.

It fascinates me that, God quiet often chooses the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep to describe his relationship with his people. It's worthwhile to look into the attributes or the daily duties of a shepherd. A shepherd in the eastern culture took a count of his flock in the morning and led them to a pasture to feed them and by the end of the day, he would check if he has brought all his flock safe into the sheepfold. If he found that 1 was missing, he would look for that lost sheep until he had found it. After bringing the sheep into the fold at night, he would sleep at the entrance of the fold so that no wild animals could enter into the fold ensuring the safety of the sheep. The wild animals will have to get past the shepherd to get to the sheep. I am reminded of David fighting the lion and the wild beast to save and protect his sheep while he was mending his flocks. If a worldly shepherd would take such good care of his sheep how much more would our heavenly father do to protect us? Its mind blowing isn't it? Of course we all know this and yet when we face a crisis, how much of it do we remember and act on? We tend to forget God's character and his nature and question all that we 'believe'. I have been there. Lets face it we have all been there haven't we?

Have you noticed God clearly telling us 'Do not fear' or 'Don't be afraid' over and over again in the bible? He doesn't tell us to 'try' not being afraid. Instead, it's more like a command. I encourage you to trust in Him as our Good shepherd who supplies all our needs, the one who protects us, the one who never slumbers or lets His hold off of us and the one who lays a table before us in the midst of our enemies.

*Annie Sriramachandran (2015-present)
Wiesbaden, Germany*

December 20

INDESCRIBABLE GIFT

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift. 2 Corinthians 9:15

If you look up the word “indescribable” in the dictionary you will find that it means: too unusual, extreme or indefinite to be adequately described. So what is this gift that we can find no words to describe it. When reading over this verse, the first thing I thought of was that it was the gift of grace or unconditional love or the gift of Jesus. However, after further thought, reflection and prayer I have come to the conclusion that it might be all three combined.

Grace, God’s Love and the gift of His Son can all be described as indescribable because we cannot fathom that these things were given without cause or without restrictions. It is difficult to believe that we have to do absolutely nothing to receive these gifts. Yet here we stand. Loved by our Lord. Showered in His Grace, And Forgiven because of His Son. How blessed we truly are!

So as we think about this verse we need to turn our mind to the fact that even though these things are indescribable we still have them and we still should use them to grow His kingdom. I am in awe of the depth of God’s love for us. Who are we that God would even consider us worthy of receiving these gifts? Every time I try to understand or explain this “indescribable gift” that God has poured out to me, I am at a loss for words. But we must choose to accept it and believe faithfully in it. Two thousand years ago God offered this gift and freely gives it to all of us.

Have you heard God calling you to receive this gift? Have you heard Him pulling at your heart to accept it and not worry? As the Holy Season approaches this is the perfect time to reflect on our own lives and thank our Lord for this Indescribable gift. Thank Him and spread His word to those around you. Accept His gift and feel His peace.

*Michelle House (2015-2017)
Johnston, Iowa*

December 21

WONDERFUL COUNSELOR

*“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.” Isaiah 9:6*

One of the most beautiful pieces of music ever written is Handel’s Messiah. It was written by Handel in 1741 and is an “oratorio” telling the story of Jesus Christ. It is an incredible piece of music and well worth the investment of time to listen to the full oratorio (the complete work takes about 2 hours). Over the years it has become tied closely to the Christmas season with songs taken primarily from the first third of the work (dealing with the prophecies of Christ’ birth, along with the amazing “Hallelujah Chorus”. But my favorite piece of the entire work is titled “For Unto Us a Child is Born” and is a musical setting of Isaiah 9:6.

If you have never heard it, a wonderful version by the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus can be found at: <https://goo.gl/bpevmu>.

Isaiah contains a number of prophecies of Jesus the Messiah, but in this verse we find four titles for Jesus which – when taken together – form an incredible picture of who Jesus really is. So, over the next four days, we will camp right here.

Wonderful counselor!! When you read that, it may seem that Jesus is the one to whom we can turn with our problems and concerns. While that is certainly true, it has little to do with what Isaiah is telling us. In Hebrew, the word “wonderful” really means extraordinary to the point that it is beyond the realm of normal human experience. The second word, “counselor” is used to describe a wise king, who is able to guide his people in the way they should go. When combined, Isaiah is describing the coming Messiah as the King of the Universe, who rules and guides His people with amazing wisdom and compassion.

Who do you turn to when you need guidance? When life is challenging and the way ahead a maze of choices and possibilities? Turn to the “Wonderful Counselor” as the one who can guide you in the way you should go. As the wise King, you can trust Him to direct your path.

*Nick Howard (2015 - present)
Wiesbaden, Germany*

December 22

MIGHTY GOD

*"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." Isaiah 9:6*

If you are a new parent planning on having your baby dedicated, would you mind skipping down to the next paragraph? OK, you skipped down, right? Now I can make a confession. I am scared to death every time we have a baby dedication. Don't get me wrong, I love each of these incredible gifts of God, but they seem so... fragile. And when I take those precious gifts into my arms I am holding my breath the entire time.

The fact that Isaiah writes about a baby being born in the same verse in which he calls this same child, "Mighty God" is nothing short of astounding. How can a baby be "mighty"? Yet this is no normal child. He is *El Gibbor*, the God who is strong and mighty! The word also implies a character of courage and action. Yesterday we learned that this babe born in Bethlehem was actually a great, wise King of glory. Today we see that not only can He guide our paths, but He stands beside us as the God who is MIGHTY to save!

Our God is a God for whom nothing is impossible. He stands ready and able to do battle with His people. How often do we read in the Old Testament of God going before His people in battle? Today we tend to shy away from any speech which sounds too aggressive or war-like. Yet, the truth is that we are very much engaged in a spiritual battle! A battle for our very eternity. In those dark days in Israel's history, it seemed like the enemy had won. And then, from (of all places) a food trough in Bethlehem, comes a battle cry. *El Gibbor* has Himself come to our aid. He, our Mighty God, walks with us each and every day and we can draw courage and strength from Him, no matter what we face in this Advent season and beyond.

Nick Howard (2015 - present)
Wiesbaden, Germany

December 23

EVERLASTING FATHER

*"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." Isaiah 9:6*

Over the last couple of days, we have seen the babe in Bethlehem described as a wise King who can direct our paths with the assurance that following His guidance will bring us safely home. We have seen Him as the Mighty God, ready to do battle against the forces of evil which are determined to do us harm. Both of these pictures are an amazing encouragement and assure us that there is nothing we might encounter which will ever be beyond God's capacity to lead and to rescue.

But today the tone is a very different one. He is not just King and Warrior, He is our Father. I don't believe Isaiah is trying to make a statement about the trinity, although there are those who use this verse to discuss that aspect of God's nature. Rather, I think he is showing us a different aspect of God's character. He is the Father who will never leave us. He is everlasting.

One of the most popular praise songs of our day is "Good, Good Father." The song strikes a chord with most of us. I have thought about why that might be. Perhaps it is because, in our minds, we have a picture of what a father should be like. Admittedly, that is a picture that no human could ever live up to. At some point we must admit that, no matter how terrific our earthly father might be, he is still a human being with human frailties. That realization is amplified when the father in question is physically or emotionally absent. We long for a perfect Father.

Perhaps that longing can be explained by the fact that each of us were created with a need for a connection with our everlasting, perfect Father, with whom we will share eternity. How amazing that God doesn't just want to relate to us as our King (which He is) or as the Mighty God who does battle for our eternal destiny, but as our Father who loves us. In fact, He loves us enough that He willingly came as a babe in a manger. He truly *is* a good, good Father.

*Nick Howard (2015 - present)
Wiesbaden, Germany*

December 24

PRINCE OF PEACE

*"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.**" Isaiah 9:6*

I had the privilege to become a godmother of the little baby boy of my friends. At the table where we sat and celebrated together, I noticed that when he was feeling tired, upset or anxious the pacifier was looked for. This little invention was a great help for him to become calm, it lasted however not for long. Many different arms came to the rescue, trying to hold him but it was not until his mother arms were wrapped lovingly around him that he felt at peace and could let go of the discomfort that he experienced.

During the Christmas and new year season one of the mostly desired wish for others is peace. Often, they wish peace on earth with no war or peace for their lives. I believe what is meant is a good, prosperous, harmonious life without problems. This is in itself not wrong, I think all should pursue such a life but it has, compared to the peace what Jesus offers the same effect as a pacifier.

More than 400 years before Christ birth in Isaiah 9:6 The coming of Jesus is announced. He is referred to as the Prince of peace. What does this name of Him imply? He was born to fulfill a purpose which would bring peace to us. Peace in the Hebrew language is *shulam* or *shalom* which means translated "fully paid for." You can say He paid with his life on the cross, stretched out forgiveness to us and points us to eternity. To accept it in our heart brings peace with God and ourselves, we are made complete.

It is like the little baby, he experiences a temporary discomfort but when he looks for his mom and she holds him in her arms, he soon let go and is at peace. Like the mother who cares, protects and loves, we also can be at peace when we stretch out our hands to Jesus and trust Him. Jesus said in John 14:27 "peace I leave you not as the world gives...." The verse doesn't imply that no problems or heartache will occur, it is more an instruction to us, to continue to trust Him also when life gets hard. When we surrender to His authority as the Creator and Owner of His creation. Peace can come to our spirit and soul, we can rest and are raised above our hardship.

*Flora Daniel (1991 - present)
Wiesbaden, Germany*

December 25

IMMANUEL

*"...She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel, which means 'God with us.'"
Isaiah 7:14*

If you want to know what God is like in one word, look no further. *"Immanuel"* says it all! Does it seem strange that Jesus was never called by that name? His family and friends called him "Jesus," and "Christ" was his title. Yet a person with only those names could never save us. Salvation required *"Immanuel" (God with us)!* *"Immanuel"* showed up in the form of a child. God showed himself through his son, Jesus, hoping that individuals could see his love, compassion, and forgiveness and choose a relationship with him. He came so we could know what *"God with us"* really means.

"Immanuel" became a favorite, household word in 1992 when my husband became pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church. Knowing that the word *"Immanuel"* meant *"God with us,"* it became our rallying cry. The American military was downsizing, and IBC leadership stared at an uncertain future. Would the church survive the drastic change? *"God with us"* carried the church through those difficult years as it transitioned from primarily an American military congregation to a wonderful, strong international fellowship.

When we know *"Immanuel,"* we know all we need to know about God...He lives in us; He walks alongside us; We never confront anything alone; His spirit gives us direction and purpose; He offers forgiveness of sins. *"Immanuel"* is our power for living and our hope for the future.

What will be the best part of your Christmas ...presents, beautiful music, nativity scenes, decorations, Christmas markets, family gatherings, or holiday food? Or will the best part of this season be *"Immanuel, God with us?"* What a wonderful gift....His presence in us! And, accompanying His presence come gifts of love, joy, and peace...and it is absolutely free!

Mary Bess (1992-2002)
Athens, Texas

December 26

SAVIOR

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:11

In Germany, we have a "Second Christmas Day" which we celebrate today. For many, the celebration on the 25th is a time with the family. Visits are made to Oma and Opa, brothers and sisters come together and cousins play with the new toys they received the night before. The second "Christmas Day" is the time for friends. If there is a bit of obligation connected with whom one spends the 25th, the 26th is spent with those with whom you have a special connection or bond beyond the family connection. There is a special joy to the celebrations on the second Christmas Day.

I think the second Christmas Day points us to something very special and very important. First, Christ came, not out of obligation, but out of love. That is not to imply that time spent with family is only done out of obligation, quite the contrary. But those to whom you *choose* to go Christmastime are special. Christ chose to come to us, His beloved. He loves us with a love which passes understanding, but is clearly shown in His willingness to step down from heaven.

Not only that, but we are told that He came as Savior. He came as a babe in a manger, but He came to die on a cross in order that we might have life! Every person you have ever met is in need of a Savior. Each of us has fallen short of what is necessary to live in perfect relationship with God. In fact, it is something we could never accomplish on our own. We need a Savior. If His coming is a reflection of His unending love for us, how do we share our love with others?

By sharing the best news that ever was told, *"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*

We hope this Advent devotional guide has been a blessing to you. We wish you a very Merry Christmas as you spend time with friends and family. May you experience the love of Christ in a very special way in these days and into the New Year.

Nick Howard (2015 - present)
Wiesbaden, Germany