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# Christmas Playlist

STEREO XL250123	
RPM 33 $\frac{1}{3}$	

HIGH FIDELITY  
SIDE ONE

**ADVENT DEVOTIONAL**  
DECEMBER 3 - 25, 2017

**HPUMC**  
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DALLAS, TX 75205  
[HPUMC.ORG/CHRISTMAS-PLAYLIST](http://HPUMC.ORG/CHRISTMAS-PLAYLIST)

WELCOME TO  
**Advent**





What is Advent?

Advent is a word that means “coming” or “visit.” In the Christian season of Advent, we prepare for the “advent” of Christ’s birth. The season of Advent lasts for four Sundays leading up to Christmas. During this time, the church looks back upon Christ’s coming in celebration while at the same time looking forward in eager anticipation to the return of Christ and the full reign of his kingdom. Advent is both a season of remembrance and anticipation.

This Advent...

There are four songs in the gospel of Luke that are sung in response to the news that a Messiah will be born. They each have become famous in their own ways and have their own special titles in church history. They are the songs of Mary, Zechariah, the angels, and Simeon. They are also known by their opening Latin words: Magnificat, Benedictus, Gloria, and Nunc dimittis. These songs are unique in the gospel text, because they’re surrounded by prose. They are meant to interrupt our reading, and they call us to pay attention. This Advent, we’ll explore each of these songs, both in remembrance of Christ’s birth and in anticipation of his return. We’ll ask ourselves: what do each of these songs have to teach us and how can we learn to sing them ourselves?

Utilize this devotional by yourself, with a small group, or with your whole family. And as you journey toward Christmas, may you learn to sing your own song of praise in response to the good news of Christ’s birth and Christ’s return.

<b>ICONS</b>	 A SCRIPTURE READING	 QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION	<b>ADVENT</b>
	 A REFLECTION	 A SHORT PRAYER	
	<b>2017</b>		

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2017

Day One

# The Song of Mary

(THE MAGNIFICAT)

And Mary said,  
“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

WEEK ONE | LUKE 1:46-55



In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her. - **Luke 1:26-35, 38**



Mary's song is full of humility and merciful benevolence. Mary was the most unlikely person to be chosen to carry the Son of God. She was young, poor, and unmarried. Yet God looked upon her with favor and said, "I choose you." Pay attention to her story and song, and notice that Christ's coming is about a reversal of fortunes - that which we think is not of value is in the sight of God. The good news of Christ evoked in Mary a song of gratitude and acknowledgement for God's benevolence. For all those who feel unlikely or unworthy this Advent season, Christ comes bearing good news.



1. Where have you neglected to see value in yourself? Do you believe that God has also chosen you to help fulfill God's purposes on earth?
2. How can you embrace Mary's spirit of humility this Advent?



**Gracious God, teach me to see value in the things and people I might otherwise neglect. Thank you for looking upon me with favor in the same way you looked upon your servant, Mary. May my spirit also rejoice in you, my Savior. Amen.**



MONDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2017

## Day Two



When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. - **Luke 4:16-20**



Jesus understood his mission was to fulfill the words of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus came to bring good news to the poor, to release captives, to recover the sight of the blind, and to let the oppressed go free. Mary's song foreshadowed Christ's mission: to lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with good things. Often times we celebrate Christ's birth because of the hope it gives us after life. But Christ understood his mission as one for the here and now. The gospel is good news for us after death, but it's also good news for us in this life, particularly for the poor, the hungry, and the marginalized. Jesus came to inaugurate a new type of kingdom where those who were previously overlooked would be valued, and their needs would be fulfilled.



1. How do you understand the good news of Christ for the here and now?
2. How can you participate in Christ's mission this Advent – bringing good news to the poor and filling the hungry?



*God, thank you for the gift of Christ. Thank you that Christ came not just to provide hope after death but to give us hope for today. Help us to continue his work in bringing good news to the poor and helping the oppressed go free. Amen.*



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2017

## Day Three



Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea." - **Exodus 15:20-21**



When first century Jews read Mary's song, they were likely reminded of other songs that had been sung in response to God's saving action. One of those songs was the song of Miriam. The song Miriam sang was offered in response to God's saving work in delivering the people of Israel from the land of Egypt. The Israelites were held in bondage; they were made to be slaves, and they worked and toiled tirelessly. Through Moses, God delivered the people of Israel and destroyed the Egyptian cavalry in the Red Sea. The destruction of the Egyptians reminds us that there are always consequences for economies built on forced labor, exploitation, and domination. As is true through Christ, God is always working to dismantle the evil forces of greed, corruption, and empire. The good news of the gospel is that Christ has come to continue the liberating work of God, and as Mary sang, "to bring down the powerful from their thrones."



1. How do you understand the liberating work of God?
2. Where have you seen God's saving action at work?



*All-powerful God, thank you for always working to liberate your people. Thank you for caring about those who are suffering at the hands of greed and corruption. Help us this Advent to be your agents of liberation. Amen.*



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2017

## Day Four



Then he looked up at his disciples and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. - **Luke 6:20-23**



This famous scripture in the gospel of Luke is known as part of the Beatitudes. These words are the first words Jesus spoke after calling his disciples. They are the beginning of Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Plain. In the Beatitudes, Jesus proclaims that those who are poor, hungry, and weeping are blessed, but we often wonder what that means. It’s important to remember that part of Jesus’ mission was to inaugurate a new kingdom on earth, and after calling his disciples, he turns to them and tells them what this new kingdom will look like. It will be one in which the poor will be given an inheritance, the hungry will be filled, and those who weep will laugh. John Wesley (the founder of Methodism) said that the gospel is a social gospel. As we see clearly in Mary’s song and in the Beatitudes, Jesus cares deeply about the social needs of all people.



1. What do the Beatitudes mean to you?
2. In what ways do you find hope in Christ’s message here?



***Most benevolent God, you look with mercy upon your people. Thank you for creating a new world in which the needs of your people will be fulfilled. Thank you for your concern for me – in my hunger and in my despair. Help me to care for others in the same way. Amen.***



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2017

## Day Five



Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. - **Philippians 2:3-11**



Mary begins her song rejoicing that God has looked down upon her with favor. She humbles herself and gives all the praise to God for choosing her as the bearer of Christ’s life. She models for us the spirit of humility that the apostle Paul encouraged us to keep. We are to always regard others as better than ourselves, looking to the interests of others more than our own. How often during the Christmas season do we forget this command and think selfishly about our own wants and desires? Yet Christ came to model a new way of being in the world. Like Mary, Christ humbled himself – even to the point of death. This is the kind of humility we are to embody.



1. How can you humble yourself today?
2. Whose needs have you overlooked that you should see as greater than your own?



***God, help me to humble myself like your servant, Mary. Teach me to have the same mind as Christ, regarding others’ needs as more important than my own. Amen.***



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2017  
**Day Six**



When pride comes, then comes disgrace; but wisdom is with the humble. - **Proverbs 11:2**



This short proverb parallels Mary’s song in many ways. Mary proclaimed that God scatters the proud, brings down the powerful, and sends the rich away empty. This form of disgrace is the inevitable consequence of those who are proud, who assume that what they want is theirs for the taking. God’s mercy, Mary sings, is reserved for those who fear him. Notice how Mary proclaims that God has done great things for her. How often do we give God the glory and praise for the things we have in life? It seems more often than not, we are prone to applaud ourselves for our accomplishments, and we come to God only when we are in need. As you reflect on this week’s devotions and on the song of Mary, consider all that her song has to teach you. Is her song one that parallels your own attitude toward God?



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1. How can you give God praise today without supplication?
  2. What does “wisdom is with the humble” mean to you?
  3. How can you sing the song of Mary?



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***God of grace and glory, teach my soul to magnify you. Teach my Spirit to rejoice in you. Tune my heart to sing thy grace.***



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2017  
**Day Seven**



Reread Mary’s song and the different scriptures from this week. What is your response to God’s benevolence? How do you see God at work among the lowly? And how might you craft your own song of humility? Use this space to articulate your own song.

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# The Song of Zechariah

(THE BENEDICTUS)

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.  
He has raised up a mighty savior for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
that we would be saved from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us.

Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,  
and has remembered his holy covenant,  
the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,  
to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,  
might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness  
before him all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
For you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
by the forgiveness of their sins.  
By the tender mercy of our God,  
the dawn from on high will break upon us,  
to give light to those who sit in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

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WEEK TWO | LUKE 1: 68-79

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2017

Day Eight



Zechariah said to the angel, “How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.” The angel replied, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.” . . . Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said, “What then will this child become?” For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him. - Luke 1:18-20, 57-58, 62-66



Zechariah couldn't believe the good news the angel brought to him that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a son, so the angel made him mute. When his son was born, he wrote on a tablet that his name was to be John. Immediately his tongue was freed, and he began praising God. “The Benedictus” is the song Zechariah sang right after his tongue was set free. After months of being mute, Zechariah sang a song of God's faithfulness and redemptive purpose. He sang a song of imagination, one that envisioned a future in which the light would come to those who sit in darkness. He sang a song of a time to come when all would be saved from their enemies, when there would be no more fear. Perhaps in making him mute, God allowed him to stop doing and start imagining. The Advent season is full of bustle. We are so busy we fail to envision what Christ's coming is all about. Perhaps we, too, need to be made mute, so we can stop and focus on the meaning of Advent and Christmas.



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1. How can you slow down today and pay attention to the meaning of Advent?
  2. What kinds of things are now made possible given the birth of Christ?
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*God, help me to silence the busyness of my own life so that my imagination might be sparked. Help me to envision all that has been made possible through Christ. Amen.*



MONDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2017

## Day Nine



Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her." - **Luke 10:38-42**



When Jesus visited the house of Mary and Martha, he taught them and us that worship precedes work. Before anything else, Jesus says that our praise and worship to God should be the priority. After nine-plus months of enforced silence, notice the first words out of Zechariah's mouth. He rightly offers praise to God. "Blessed" – "Benedictus," which is where the name of this week's song comes from. But look carefully at Zechariah's next words. Is he praising God for John, the son whose name he just confirmed in writing? No. His first words are praise for the coming Messiah, the "mighty Savior." This time, Zechariah, like Mary, gets things in the right order. When God gives him his tongue back, Zechariah not only praises God, he also allows himself to be used as a mouthpiece to prophesy for God.



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1. What tasks are distracting you today?
  2. How can you get things in the right order this Advent season?
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*God, blessed are you. As so many needs and to-dos arise this season, teach me, God, to keep my priorities in line. May my tongue always sing your praises first before anything else. Amen.*



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2017

## Day Ten



For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." - **Galations 5:13-14**



Zechariah's song reminds us that we should respond to God's love and grace through service. Because God has remembered Israel, Zechariah points out the responsibilities that now fall on the other side of the covenant: "serve... without fear, in holiness and righteousness." The apostle Paul also reminds us that we were called to freedom, but not for freedom's sake alone. We were called to use our freedom as an opportunity for love and service to one another. Everything is summed up in the commandment: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." As you read the song of Zechariah, notice the call to service. Our songs of praise should prompt us to serve. Advent is about singing our praises to God for the good news of Christ, but it's also about responding to that good news in humble service to one another. Love of God should always illicit a love for God's people. It should therefore be natural for us, as Christians, to respond to God's grace in service to one another.



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1. How can you serve others this Advent season? *Consider the many opportunities for service at HPUMC.*
  2. Does your love of God illicit a love for God's people? Why or why not?
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*Gracious God, through Christ we have gained freedom. Teach me to use this freedom in Christ to serve others. Open my eyes to the needs of my neighbor and make me eager to love them as myself. Amen.*



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2017  
**Day Eleven**



The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.  
- Psalm 23



Toward the end of his song, Zechariah sings of “the tender mercy of our God.” The Greek word *splanchna* is translated here as “tender.” It is elsewhere translated as “intestines,” “bowels,” or “very heart.” Though the imagery is graphic, it is also intimate. Zechariah sings of the mercy and compassion that pours out from the most intimate and vulnerable spaces of God.

The poetic words of Psalm 23 speak similarly, though less graphically, about God's care. Zechariah echoes the Psalmists when he speaks of God's protection from enemies, guidance to restoration and salvation, and presence in the midst of pain. We have no need to fear, for even in our darkest valleys, God's comforting light breaks forth illumining the shadow of death. The masterful words of both the Psalmist and Zechariah declare that in the midst of our most intimate and vulnerable times, God reveals the innate nurture of God's nature. It is this *tender* mercy we celebrate during Advent.



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1. What is your reaction to the word “vulnerability”? Have you ever considered vulnerability as one of the characteristics of God? Why or why not?
  2. How have you experienced the “tender mercy of our God”?



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***God of tender mercy, we thank you for meeting us in our times of vulnerability. Transform our weakness into strength so we may extend the compassion you have shown us to the rest of your creation. Amen.***



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2017  
**Day Twelve**



He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away. - Revelation 21:4



For nine months, Zechariah was unable to speak a word. When his speech returns, he beautifully sings of a new world that he's now able to imagine. Reread the words of his song, and pay close attention to his prophecy: “the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” Isn't it beautiful? Advent is about the coming of Christ's birth, but it's also about the return of Christ. Notice in Revelation a similar prophecy of hope: “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” Advent is a time of great hope, where messages like this burn within us. Because Christ came, and will come again, all things are and will be made new.



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1. What hope does Zechariah's song, and the words from Revelation offer to you?
  2. Where in your life do you need light to break upon you?



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***God, thank you for the hope that is found in the Advent season. Thank you that because of Christ, there is light in the darkness, there is promise for peace, and there is hope that crying and pain will cease to be. Amen.***



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2017  
**Day Thirteen**



Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few. - **Ecclesiastes 5:2**



Conventional wisdom warns us that, “the babbling of a fool brings ruin near,” while the “prudent are restrained in speech,” (Prov. 10:14, 19). Likewise, the teacher in Ecclesiastes 5 offers us similar advice. When the angel Gabriel told Zechariah, “Your wife Elizabeth will bear a son,” Zechariah was not “rash” with his mouth, but the news so overwhelmed his heart that he was foolish and “quick to utter a word before God.” As an old man receiving unbelievable news, we can hardly blame him for such a response. What did Gabriel expect? However, Zechariah, a priest well versed in the Wisdom Literature (which includes the book of Ecclesiastes), ignored the scripture’s warning to, “let your words be few,” which resulted in him becoming mute. But nine months of silence turned out to be a blessing as his foolish babbling transformed into a glorious song of praise. Similarly, Advent offers a time of transformation if you are willing to receive the good news and simply, “let your words be few.”



1. Listen and do not speak. Let the silence become uncomfortable for you. What is God saying to you?
2. How can you embrace the same gift of silence that Zechariah did? How might it transform you?
3. How can you sing the song of Zechariah?



*God of Wisdom, there are times your good news overwhelms us to the point of foolish response. May our words be few, so you might transform our babbling into joyous praise. And when in doubt, may we join the unending chorus, simply singing, “Holy, Holy, Holy.” Amen.*



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2017  
**Day Fourteen**



As you reflect back on Zechariah’s song and this week’s devotions, what is your response to what you believe God can do? How might you craft your own song of hope and imagination? Use this space to articulate your own song.

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# The Song of the Angels

(THE GLORIA)

And suddenly there was with the angel  
a multitude of the heavenly host,  
praising God and saying,  
“Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

WEEK THREE | LUKE 2:13-14



In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” - **Luke 2:8-14**



It's important to notice two things in the encounter between the shepherds and the angels. First, the news of Jesus' birth went not to the elite and powerful, but to the lowly. Shepherding was a despised occupation in Jesus' day. In the first century, shepherds were scorned as dishonest, shiftless people. The angels chose to send the news of the Messiah to the outcast first, to those we wouldn't think would have the privilege of knowing first. Also, the titles given to Jesus – Savior and Lord – were titles that had been given to the emperor as well. In linking Jesus with the titles given to Augustus, Luke is portraying Jesus as the **true** bringer of peace – one that will be greater than any earthly king. He is not like any ruler before or any to come. This is meant to capture our attention.



1. Who are the modern day shepherds in our world? Who would we be quick to scorn or outcast?
2. Do you believe that Jesus is the true bringer of peace?



*Loving God, thank you for the good news of Christ's birth. Thank you that it's a gospel for all people, not just the powerful and privileged. Teach me, Lord, to sing your praises just as the angels did so long ago. Amen.*



MONDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2017  
**Day Sixteen**



Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." - **Luke 1:26-28**



The very word angel in Greek means messenger. Angels understand themselves to be messengers of God to human beings, and they consider themselves less important than the God they serve or the message they bring. Notice how the angel Gabriel was sent from God to Mary to deliver a message. This is their primary function. And in the Gloria, we see that in response to the good news of Christ, the angels sing a song of glory, praise, and adoration to the people. While we may not be angels, we can certainly identify with their mission to be messengers on earth. To be faithful to the Advent season is to sing God's praises, to be a witness (a messenger) to the world of Christ's coming. The message isn't just for us individually. It's for us to share corporately with all the world.



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1. Do you consider yourself a messenger or witness to the world?
  2. How can you share the good news of Christ this Advent?
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***Holy One, thank you for the angels who you created to be messengers for us in this world. Help me to identify with their mission, to also see myself as a witness to those in need of your truth. Give me courage to speak your lifegiving words of truth and salvation. Amen.***



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2017  
**Day Seventeen**



You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. - **Matthew 5:13-16**



Just as the angels were sent by God to deliver a message to the shepherds, so are we asked to be messengers and light bearers to those around us. We are a people that have seen and experienced the grace and mercy and love of God. When we can receive the love of God that is so graciously poured out upon us, we are then inspired and invited to be bearers of love and light to our friends, our family, and to our world. As people who love Jesus, we must strive to be present to the quiet invitations we receive from the Holy One to give of his love freely. When we can slow down and truly be aware of both God's holiness and the holiness of those around us, our response is to love others well and to extend a kind word or a gentle hand to each person we encounter.



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1. How can you be a light bringer to those around you that find themselves immersed in darkness?
  2. When was a time a friend or a stranger acted as a messenger of the Lord to you?
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***Gracious God, may I be a person who shines brightly today. May I bear witness to your love by being a messenger of peace and of grace to all those whom I encounter today. Help me to be more aware of you and the opportunities that I have daily to love others well in your name. Amen.***



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2017  
**Day Eighteen**



I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. - **John 14:25-27**



Peace is a theme that runs throughout the gospels. This is intriguing because often times when we read through the scriptures, we see situations that are anything but peaceful. And yet, the angels in Luke sing of “Glory to God and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” And in the gospel of John, Jesus speaks of the peace that he leaves with us and the peace he gives us. His peace is different than what the world offers us; it is a peace that passes all understanding. Jesus weathered so many hardships, and yet he was at peace. The disciples went through jail sentences and lived as outcasts, and yet they were at peace. That peace sustained them through tragedy and loss, and it is that peace that enabled them to forgive enemies and love those who hated them. The peace of Jesus is a gift that is freely given. We need only accept it and embrace it as the beautiful, life-changing gift that it is.



1. Is there anything in your life that is prohibiting you from accepting God's peace?
2. When was a time you tangibly felt God's peace upon you? What did that feel like?



*Gracious God, help me recognize the areas in my life that are anything but peaceful. May I surrender my need to control so that I may be more accepting of your peace and kindness. When the world feels as if it may crumble around me may I remember to look to you and open my heart to the love you pour out upon me. Amen.*



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2017  
**Day Nineteen**



And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. - **Colossians 3:15-17**



We live in a time that is very divisive. Our country, our faith, even our own denomination seems torn apart by our differences. When we read of Jesus and of his love for those who were different than him, when we see his ability to bring people together through focusing on each person's common humanity, we are reminded that there is hope for reconciliation for us all. Jesus invites us to see each person as a child of God and as a sacred and holy individual. During this season of Advent, how can you interact with people who are different? How can you show kindness to those who believe in different things than you? What opportunities do you have to bring about unity in your neighborhood, in our city, and in this world? As people who love Jesus, let us work toward uniting with all of humanity. May we be messengers of peace as were the angels who first sang the Gloria.



1. What tangible way can you offer peace and a spirit of unity to those in our community?
2. Is there someone you need to reconcile with? How can you reach out and offer love to them?



*Prince of Peace, may I be open to receiving peace. May I be a conduit of your peace to each person that I meet. As I seek to love people who are different than me in your name, remind me of the mercy and kindness that you have for all of creation. Amen.*



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2017  
**Day Twenty**



I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness. They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness, and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made. All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your faithful shall bless you. They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. - Psalm 145 1:1-12



Psalm 145 is one of the most famous songs of praise in all the book of Psalms. We are struck by this psalm, because if you look closely, there is no request. There's no supplication or bargaining. The psalmist is simply acknowledging the goodness of God. The author is full of joyful noise for the Lord - acknowledging God's splendor, righteousness, goodness, compassion, glory, and steadfast love. It is often hard for us to utter praises and prayers such as this one. Yes, God hears our needs and requests, but how often do we just approach the throne of grace with a mouth full of praise? It's a difficult thing to do, and as it turns out, it's something we have to train our tongues to do. It's not always natural for us, but it should be. We should be quick to adapt the song of the psalmist and the song of the angels, to make it our own, because if Advent is about anything, it's about praise.



1. When was the last time you just offered praises to God?
2. What praises might you offer now, in this moment?
3. How can you sing the song of angels?



***God of glory, teach me to sing your praises. Indeed you are full of love, splendor, righteousness, goodness, compassion, and more. May my lips be quick to utter your praises. Amen.***



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2017  
**Day Twenty-one**

As you reflect back on the song of the angels and this week's devotions, what praise might you offer God? How might you craft your own song of worship and admiration?

Use this space to articulate your own song.

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# The Song of Simeon

(THE NUNC DIMITTIS)

Guided by the Spirit,  
Simeon came into the temple;  
And when the parents brought in the child Jesus,  
to do for him what was customary under the law,  
Simeon took him in his arms  
and praised God, saying,  
“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,  
according to your word;  
for my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles  
and for glory to your people Israel.”

WEEK FOUR | LUKE 2:27-32



Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms, and praised God, saying, “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” - **Luke 2: 27-32**



When Jesus was just a few months old, he was taken to the temple in Jerusalem to be dedicated to the Lord. The old priest, Simeon, took Jesus and sang a song of salvation. After beholding the child, he sang to God that he could be dismissed in peace because his eyes had actually seen salvation. It's as if Simeon said, “Okay, Lord, I can die now. I can die in peace now, because I can see that everything I had hoped for and waited for is going to take place after all.” Many of us are troubled about the future, wondering about whether we'll live to see enough to assure us that we can, at last, lie down in peace. To sing the song of Simeon, we need to practice his watchful waiting. All is not yet right with the world, and even our own hearts are often unsettled. Simeon knew that he was getting older, and what God promised to do through Israel seemed impossible. But when he laid eyes upon Jesus, he decided to keep his hope alive.



1. When you lay your eyes upon Jesus, is your hope kept alive?
2. How can you sing the song of Simeon?



*God, teach me to be like Simeon. May the hope of Christmas transform my heart and bring me peace. May I know that though there is much to be troubled by, there is hope that all will be well. Amen.*



MONDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2017  
**Day Twenty-three**



And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. - **John 1:14**



It's here, Christmas day. The day we celebrate the truth that Christ became flesh and lived among us. We have seen Christ's glory in the fullness of all its grace and truth. The day we have been preparing our hearts for has arrived. Christ the Savior is born. And yet, **Christmas is a beginning not an ending.** The first Christmas was the day a new kingdom was established. It was the day that promised a new kind of future for all of creation. It was the day that light broke forth promising to fill all the dark places in due time. The gift of Christ is salvation, but not just from death. It's salvation from all evil, darkness, and oppression. We praise Christ this morning, but we also acknowledge that Christ has asked for our help. Christ has asked us, like the first disciples, to help him continue the establishment of this new kingdom, and to bring the good news to all people. So this morning we sing the song of Mary, acknowledging that God came to help the lowly and the outcast. We sing the song of Zechariah, acknowledging that light has broken forth and everything is now imaginable. We sing the song of the angels, acknowledging the praise that God deserves. And we sing the song of Simeon, acknowledging the hope that is Christmas. Praise be to Christ!



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1. How will you make this Christmas day different from ones in the past?
  2. How do you see Christmas as a beginning and not an ending?
- 



**Gracious God, teach me to sing the songs of Mary, Zechariah, the angels, and Simeon. Teach me the fullness of what Christmas means. Help me, God, to be an agent of establishing the new kingdom that was inaugurated on the day of Christ's birth. All praise and glory and honor is yours. Amen.**



MONDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2017  
**Day Twenty-three**



As you reflect back on Simeon's song and the birth of Jesus Christ, what is your response? How might you craft your own song of hope?

Use this space to articulate your own response.

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## **TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19**

**Traditional Candlelight Travelers' Service\*** (Childcare Provided)

7:00 pm, Sanctuary • Rev. Paul Rasmussen

## **WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20**

**Traditional Candlelight Travelers' Service\*** (Childcare Provided)

7:00 pm, Sanctuary • Rev. Paul Rasmussen

## **THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21**

**Cornerstone Candlelight Travelers' Service\*** (Childcare Provided)

7:00 pm, Wesley Hall • Rev. Paul Rasmussen

*No Cornerstone Saturday Night held on December 23*

## **SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24**

**Fourth Sunday in Advent Service**

8:30 am, Cox Chapel • Rev. Victoria Robb Powers

**Family Nativity Service\***

11:00 am, Wesley Hall • Rev. Matt Tuggle

**Traditional Candlelight Services\***

11:00 am, 1:00, & 2:30 pm, Sanctuary • Rev. Paul Rasmussen

4:00 & 5:30 pm, Sanctuary • Rev. Matt Tuggle

8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 pm, Sanctuary • Dr. John Fiedler

**The Feast**

1:00 pm, Room 120 • Rev. Ramsey Patton

**Carols, Communion, & Candlelight Services**

2:30, 3:30, 4:30, & 5:30 pm, Cox Chapel • Rev. Walt Marcum

**Cornerstone Contemporary Candlelight Services\***

3:30 pm, Wesley Hall • Hannah Buchanan

5:00 & 6:30 pm, Wesley Hall • Rev. Paul Rasmussen

\*Services will be streamed at: [hpumconline.org](http://hpumconline.org)

2017

**Christmas  
Worship**



**HIGHLAND PARK  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

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