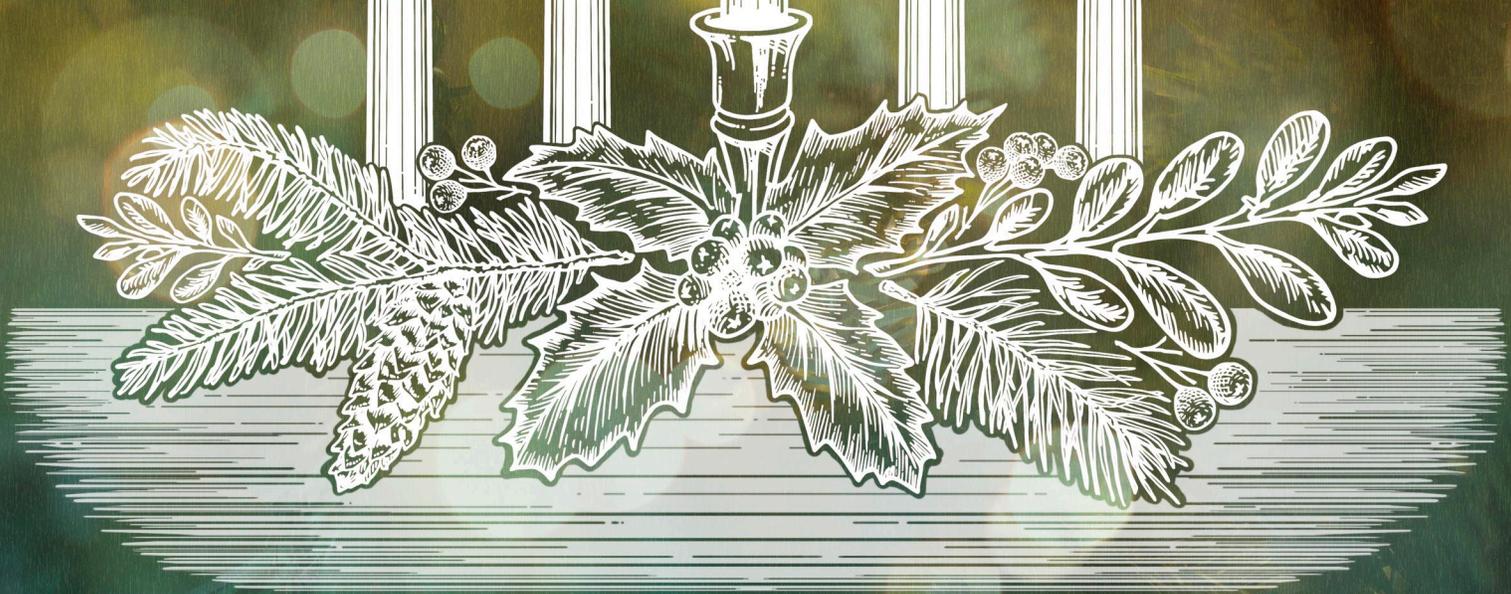


ADVENT

A SEASON OF EXPECTATION



2021 ADVENT READER
WEEK 2: PEACE

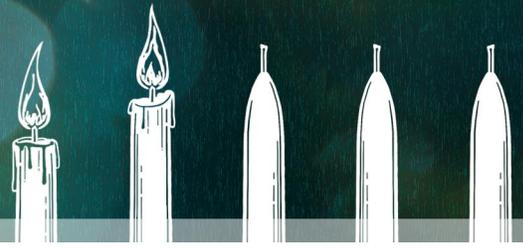


PEACE

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 5

HOME

BY: VICKI LEE



READING: Ezekiel 37:24-28

When I read this passage the theme of "home" and making a home with Jesus resonated with me. Have a look!

"My servant David will be their king, and they will have only one shepherd. They will obey my regulations and be careful to keep my decrees. They will live in the land I gave my servant Jacob, the land where their ancestors lived. They and their children and their grandchildren after them *will live there forever*, generation after generation. And my servant David will be their prince forever. And I will make a covenant of peace with them, an *everlasting* covenant. I will give them their land and increase their numbers, and *I will put my Temple {home} among them forever*. **I will make my home among them.** I will be their God, and they will be **my people**. And when my Temple {home} is among them forever, the nations will know that I am the Lord, who makes Israel holy." (Ezekiel 37:24-28 NLT **{Home} added for effect.)

Come Back to the Home in My Heart

The home in my heart is empty

Jesus where are you?

Would you come to the home in my heart?

The home in my heart is empty and dark, there hasn't been a visitor for months,
the lights are out and the fire is cold.

There's dust and the air is grey. But would you come back to visit me?

Come to the home in my heart!

I turn on the lights the warm soft yellow glow, and light the fire to feel the warmth that's been
long forgotten.

Like the comfort of the hum of a heater in winter, curled in bed at my mom's house, the sound of
the express way dimly humming a few streets over. It's dark and i know the winter sun won't be
up for hours but I'm comforted

Come back to the home in my heart!

You could sit with me, we could have hot chocolate or a really nice coffee. There would be warm
scones and butter. You could hold my hand and I'd look into your kind eyes and you would tell me
stories.

Of the people you've met.

Why you like them.

What you've seen in them.

The joy you've heard and your laugh.

We could laugh together and I would feel okay.

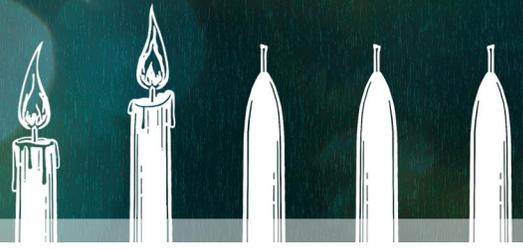
Lord you are the best guest! We can talk like old friends. For hours. At ease. I confide in you, and
you in my.

Come back to the home in my heart.

By Vicki Lee

PEACE

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 5
HOME (CONTINUED)
BY: VICKI LEE



ACTIVITY: Imagination game for adults and kids

Imagine the home in your heart. What does it look like? You're there and so is Jesus. What colours do you see? What smells do you smell? Is there art? A fire place? A couch? Food? Take a moment quietly and let your mind be steady. Ask Jesus what the home in your heart with him looks like then paint, draw or colour everything you see!

PRAYER: Jesus let this home be peace, peace in the name of the one who is love. As love resides, let me know more fully its embrace of me. Reveal for me more of the beauty you hold Lord! We ask this with joy, amen!

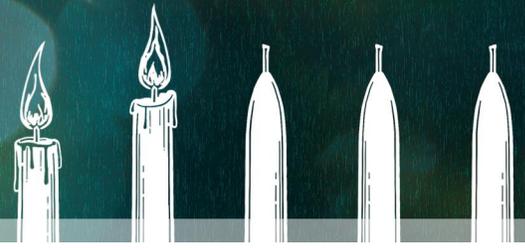


PEACE

MONDAY, DECEMBER 6

ETERNAL GOD ARRIVES IN BETHLEHEM

ORLANDO UNRUH



READING: Micah 5:2

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past. (Micah 5:2)

This verse, which was written centuries before the Messiah came, clearly predicted that the eternal God would burst into time at the tiny village of Bethlehem. The scribes and Jewish leadership correctly quoted this verse to King Herod in Matthew 2, when he asked them for the birthplace of the Messiah. The Magi had come seeking the newborn King, and based on this verse, Herod sent them to Bethlehem. It is mind boggling to think that everyone in Jerusalem received the correct information about the Messiah's arrival, but few cared enough to be bothered to seek Him. People have not changed very much in that regard in almost 2000 years.

When Micah foretold the birthplace of Jesus, he emphasized how insignificant the small town was to the rest of the world. Jesus was not born in a politically, commercially, culturally, educationally, or socially significant city. Nor was He born into a house of royalty, riches, or celebrity. The One who would be called "The Bread of Life" was born in a tiny village called Bethlehem, which means "The House of Bread".

Jerome, an early church father who was part of translating the Bible from Greek into Latin, the language of the people of his day, lived part of his life in Bethlehem. One night he had a dream that Jesus visited him. He tried to give Jesus all his money, but Jesus said, "I do not want your money." Next he tried to give Jesus all his possessions, but Jesus said, "I don't want your things." "Then what can I give you, Jesus? What do you want?" Jerome asked the Lord. "Give me your sins," Jesus answered. "I came to take away your sins. Give them to me." Jesus wants to give us the gift of eternal life in exchange for our sins. Now that is an offer no sane person can refuse.

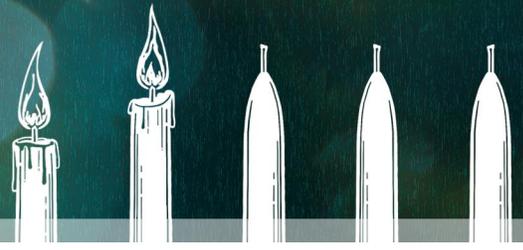
PRAYER: Thank You, LORD, for coming and dying in the great exchange of Your life for ours. Please use us for Your Kingdom this day.

PEACE

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 7

THE GOD OF PEACE BE WITH YOU

BY: LAURA MERRET



READING: Philippians 4:4-9

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:4-9)

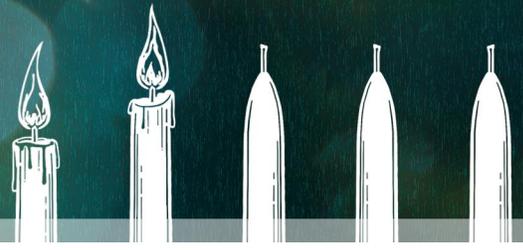
"Do not be anxious about anything" – show of hands, who here thinks they could go a week without worrying about anything? A day? A solid hour? Maybe some of you could, but I definitely could not, especially as we seem to keep finding new "unprecedented times" to work through. Anxiety can feel like a song turned up so loud you can't hear yourself think about anything else. Sometimes we hear the message that the tool to fight anxiety is aggressive positivity – drown out your anxiety with a louder, happy song.

The only problem is, it doesn't matter which song it is – if your music is too loud, you're not going to hear a still, small voice.

One thing I appreciate about this passage is that Paul encourages us to think about the things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy...while at the same time telling us to bring our requests to God. There is no pretence that thinking about good things will somehow eliminate the bad things or take away our problems. But we also need to be reminded sometimes that at our lowest lows, the good things still persist.

PEACE

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 8
OUTSIDERS, RETURN TO ME!
BY: STEPHEN LEE



READING: Malachi 3:1-7a

¹"Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

²"But who will be able to endure it when he comes? Who will be able to stand and face him when he appears? For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal, or like a strong soap that bleaches clothes. ³ He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver, so that they may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the Lord. ⁴ Then once more the Lord will accept the offerings brought to him by the people of Judah and Jerusalem, as he did in the past.

⁵"At that time I will put you on trial. I am eager to witness against all sorcerers and adulterers and liars. I will speak against those who cheat employees of their wages, who oppress widows and orphans, or who deprive the foreigners living among you of justice, for these people do not fear me," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

⁶"I am the Lord, and I do not change. That is why you descendants of Jacob are not already destroyed. ⁷ Ever since the days of your ancestors, you have scorned my decrees and failed to obey them. Now return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. (Malachi 3:1-7a)

REFLECTION: When I read this I am drawn to the verses about a God eager to witness, eager for justice. A message of discomfort for liars, oppressors, and those who cheat employees is at the same time a message of comfort for those who are lied about, those who are cheated and oppressed or deprived of justice. God makes clear that the people I consider foreign, not deserving justice, or someone I would cheat are the very people that he will defend. Outsiders to me are insiders to God.

And God declares that he does not change. Later in the Bible (Acts 10), God gives Peter a vision of all the despicable, unclean creatures that Peter was supposed to avoid as a good religious person. God tells Peter "Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean." Outsiders are made insiders by God. The God of peace continues to expand the boundaries of inclusion throughout the Bible.

I think at different times and in different spaces we are sometimes the insider and sometimes the outsider. Wherever we are, God is ready to engage with us. Oppressors, liars.. return to me! Outsiders, oppressed, those lied about and cheated.. God is with us!

PRAYER: Jesus, thank you for witnessing the ways I have been excluded and for being eager to stand up for me. Please help me to see in what ways I can reconcile, move closer, or return to those often deprived of justice, cheated or oppressed by me and others.

PEACE

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9

GOD'S PLAN

BY: JANE BORN



READING: Luke 1:1-25

Our story begins with an elderly couple, described as “advanced in years” and childless. They are visited by a messenger of the Lord, who promises them a son. One reacts with skepticism and doubt to this angelic visitation, while the other responds with quiet faith.

Although this story is drawn from the opening chapter of the Gospel of Luke, you may have thought that I was referring to the story of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis. After all, the two narratives bear a striking resemblance to one another—a resemblance that extends beyond the details outlined above. You see, each of these stories is inextricably bound up with God’s covenant to Israel and the nations.

When God promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son, He announced His intention to bless all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:2-3; Genesis 17:1-8). The miraculous birth of Isaac was a sign of this covenant, as well as the beginning of its fulfillment. The ultimate fulfillment was announced by John the Baptist, a prophet whose own miraculous birth served as a sign to the nation of Israel: “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29).

As I consider these stories side by side, it makes me wonder: Why did God choose to announce His covenant in such an unusual way—not once, but twice? He could have descended in flames on Mount Sinai with the announcement inscribed on another tablet of stone. Instead, He decided to show up in the lives of two couples, in the midst of the grief and helplessness that accompanies experiences of infertility. Why?

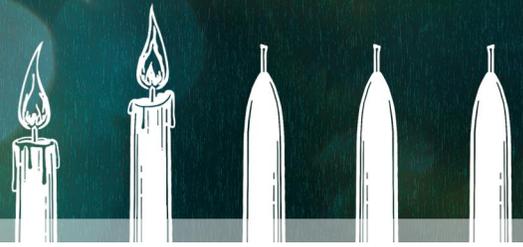
I don’t know the definitive answer to this question, but here are a few of the reflections it sparks in me. As you read, I invite you to bring your own questions and reflections before the Lord.

- God’s plan of redemption is cosmic in scope, spanning human history and encompassing all of creation. Yet He announced this plan, this covenant, through the deeply intimate and personal experiences of pregnancy and birth. This suggests to me that God cares about the details of our hearts and lives as much as He cares about the redemption of creation. Nothing is too big or too small for His loving attention.
- These stories of miraculous pregnancies after years of infertility remind me that our God is a God of restoration, bringing new life and joy where there has been loss and hopelessness.
- Sarah and Zechariah both had a hard time believing and trusting in God’s plan. This was not an obstacle for God, however. His faithfulness was greater than their doubts, disappointments, and fears—and it is greater than ours, too.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, today we remember that You not only hold the world in Your hands; You also hold the details of our lives and the desires of our hearts. Would Your life and joy encounter us in the places where we are experiencing loss and hopelessness. Help us to see the wonder of Your covenant with fresh eyes and strengthen our hearts with the knowledge of Your faithfulness. Amen.

PEACE

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 10
PEACE IN THE UNEXPECTED
BY: LYDIA HARDER



READING: Luke 1:26-38

About 20 years ago as Christmas was approaching, I pondered yet again the "why" of all our fuss to celebrate Christmas. As I pondered I was filled once again with a holy awe of all the amazing events that preceded and accompanied Jesus birth. It was then that I decided to express my feelings in a poem.

What! Your God-life poured into
Mary's - genetic code
Producing a babe in
Womb - not yet touched by man.
What!! A virgin willing to be put to
Shame, wiling to bear a child
For greater glory
Later.
What!! A child heralded by angels, born
And laid in a manger? Mankind not yet
Aware – of Glory shining within!!!
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus
God in flesh You are!

Lydia Harder

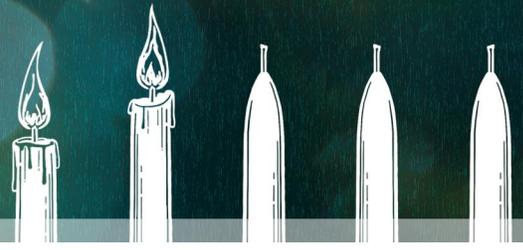
We all have our hopes and dreams. While Mary had an expectation of a Messiah or Deliverer coming how did she respond when her hopes and dreams were totally upended with the angel's announcement of her involvement? How have you responded by an unexpected event which might change how your hopes and dreams are fulfilled?

Mary responded with amazing peace and willingness. "Then Mary responded, saying, Yes' I will be a mother for the Lord! As his servant , I accept whatever he has for me. May everything you have told me come to pass' and the angel left her." (Luke 1:38, passion translation)and v:46 begins her beautiful song of praise!

PRAYER: Lord God, when our lives are upended with power outages, floods, and disease, grant us peace to accept all things from your hand and trust you to work a good plan in our lives as you have promised! Our hope is in You!!

PEACE

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 11
GOD'S PEACE SHOWS UP
BY: ANDREW HAAK



READING: Luke 1:39-56

The Christmas story and the prologue that precedes it remind us that God makes a habit of showing up in the most surprising ways. Seen another way, God's presence and work in the midst of our misfortunes often means peace shows up where you would least expect to find it. Mary and Elizabeth, brought together by the shared experience of the unlikely pregnancies, find encouragement in each other as they both face a new future in the light of an unexpected blessing.

"... and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit."

It's easy to overlook Elizabeth in the buildup to the Christmas story. Like Sarah many generations before her, she was elderly and childless. What would have been a source of great shame and grief both personally and socially alike in turn became the space for unfathomable wonder and excitement. Peace replaced the anguish and shame she would have carried all her adult years. If that weren't enough, her child-to-be would have a special role in establishing the future of Israel! And then, to top it all off, this woman who formerly would have been at the margins of society now has the honour of being the first person in the Christmas story to be filled with the Holy Spirit and speak by the Spirit.

"... lifted up the humble ... filled the hungry ... helped his servant Israel."

In response to Elizabeth's blessing Mary spontaneously praises God through song, drawing from her people's history to highlight the mercy and way of God. Whereas Elizabeth's pregnancy brought an end to her shame and grief, Mary's pregnancy birthed newfound shame and problems. And yet Mary was confident that what God had done for others in the past he would also do for her. As she indicated earlier in this chapter, the news that the angel brought troubled her; nonetheless, she was empowered by Elizabeth's words to see how her story and future was safe in God's hands. By first looking backward she was able to gain confidence and peace to face an uncertain future with God by her side.

While we wish it weren't this way, hardship and misfortune is often the womb in which God's peace is formed. We can't control how and when God will show up powerfully in our lives. But we can be confident that God is always with us, so that when life takes an unexpected turn God's peace is there to accompany us along the way.

- Looking around, who could benefit from a timely Spirit-led word so that they can be at peace?
- Looking back, how can seeing God's activity in the past help you find peace for the future?

PRAYER: God of peace, we pray that your peace may light up our darkness and put an end to the troubles we face.