



In the Night

MY HOPE LIVES ON

an advent guide from the storytellers of pleasant valley

Contents

December 1	Dawn of Hope
December 2	The Promise in the Dark
December 3	Peace Within
December 4	It Was Not a Silent Night
December 5	Light in the Shadows
December 6	Living Hope
December 7	The Night's Bright Star
December 8	A Flicker of Faith
December 9	Longing for the Light
December 10	Heaven's Silent Plan
December 11	Hope Beyond the Horizon
December 12	The Night Watch
December 13	Embracing the Mystery
December 14	In the Stillness, Joy
December 15	Hope's Guiding Star
December 16	Faith in the Night
December 17	The Unseen Miracle
December 18	Our Consolation
December 19	Songs of Silent Joy
December 20	The Night of Promise
December 21	Glory in the Darkness
December 22	Hope's Gentle Whisper
December 23	A Savior in the Night
December 24	Eternal Light, Endless Hope
December 25	Christmas

About the Project

In the night, my hope lives on.

What an incredible truth for the Christian. In all our waiting and in all our longing, hope lives on. You might resonate with many of us who wrote this devotional guide: weary sojourners, yearning for more of Christ in a season of waiting. Or perhaps you find yourself caught in the same rhythms of the year, striving to connect with the life of Christ.

In either case, we pray these devotionals—crafted by six writers from our Storytellers team at Pleasant Valley—bring nourishment to your soul this season. This project was inspired by a song from Andrew Peterson titled “In the Night.” In the final verse of the song, Andrew writes:

*And I can see the Son of Man descending
And the sword He swings is brighter than the dawn
And the gates of hell will never stand against Him
So in the night, my hope lives on*

While we look back this Christmas season to remember, we also look forward to a second Advent—a day J.R.R. Tolkien describes so beautifully: “The birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus means that one day everything sad will come untrue.” As we wait for that blessed day, we endure the long, cold nights with hope. Join us this Advent season as we wait together for Christ to come and make all things new.

In the night, our hope lives on.

Writers Editors Artists

Elizabeth Watt
Avery Burke
Lisa Benton
Ben Hoak
Wini Moran
Josh Reimann

Elizabeth Watt
Josh Reimann

Sarah Garrison (Living Hope, The Night Watch, Faith in the Night, Eternal Light, Endless Hope)

Kelly McClelland (A Savior in the Night, Glory in the Darkness, Embracing the Mystery, A Flicker of Faith, Light in the Shadows, The Nights Bright Star)

Front Cover Design by Melanie Greenwood (Pixel Painters)



December 1: Dawn of Hope

by *Elizabeth Watt*

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6

An archipelago of islands between Norway and the North Pole undergoes almost three months each year when the sun never rises. Researchers have found that despite the months-long darkness, residents of Svalbard experience one of the lowest rates of seasonal depression in the world. One citizen says, “This darkness is complete, so you have to sort of live with that and you have to see the beauty in that.” They have lovingly dubbed the period, “The Polar Night.”¹

When Isaiah prophesied hope to God’s people, they were in a period of a long night. They were lost and felt alienated from their Holy Father. God spoke through Isaiah and told his children that they would see the light of dawn again. That dawn would come with the arrival of a child, a son who would carry the weight of the world’s brokenness and bring hope and redemption. Isaiah 9:6 not only promises the arrival of this child, but it bestows names that represent who he is and what he will bring to the world:

- **Wonderful Counselor:** This speaks to the wisdom and guidance that Jesus offers. In times of confusion and uncertainty, he is the one who provides clarity and direction, comforting us with his understanding.
- **Mighty God:** Christ was born fully human, as a helpless infant, but he was also born fully God, full of the divine power of our Holy Father.
- **Everlasting Father:** This name reflects the eternal and unchanging nature of Christ’s love and care. Unlike earthly fathers who are limited by time and circumstance, Jesus is a Father who remains constant, offering an everlasting embrace.
- **Prince of Peace:** The final title given to Jesus reveals the peace that Jesus brings—a peace that surpasses all understanding, soothing troubled hearts and reconciling us with God.

As we begin the season of advent, let us reflect on these names and remember that in every struggle, in every moment of despair, this period of darkness is not forever if we put our hope in Jesus Christ. The hope promised in Isaiah is not just a distant promise but a present reality for those who embrace Him.

¹ Murashima, Claire. “People here live in complete darkness for 2.5 months. Here’s how they do it.” NPR. November 13, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2022/11/11/1135994636/polar-night-winter-darkness-tips>.

Like the citizens of Svalbard, we can see beauty in the darkness by embracing the coming dawn of hope, and we can find comfort in knowing that our Wonderful Counselor is guiding us, our Mighty God is fortifying us, our Everlasting Father is sustaining us, and our Prince of Peace is calming our hearts.

So in the night, my hope lives on.

Recommended Listening: His Name Shall Be by Middlebrook Music

For Reflection:

Which of these names given to Jesus brings you the most joy or hope this season?



December 2

The Promise in the Dark

by Josh Reimann

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

Isaiah 9:2

If we're going to understand why we needed Christ to come in the first place, we must first recognize our own history of darkness. In the Old Testament, we see how God's people constantly chased after the next thing. They were never satisfied with what God provided, turning away from Him and toward idols. And, if we're honest, not much has changed even after all these centuries.

Nearly every dark chapter in human history—every dark moment in your life and mine, every act of rebellion against a holy God—can be traced back to an eternal void in our hearts. As fallen people, we strive to fill that void with temporary things, forcing them into the tank of life, hoping they'll make everything run smoothly. But, as the writer of Ecclesiastes puts it, "The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing."

Into this madness, a child is born. Into this chaos, a Son is given.

We needed Christ to be born into our chaos because we live in a "land of deep darkness." You don't have to look far to see the brokenness in our world. It's on our TV screens, in our music, and often staring back at us as we reach for our phones each morning to catch up on what we missed while we slept. Yet, if only we'd lift our distracted heads, we'd see that Christ has come to interrupt the chaos. When He does, as Isaiah 9:2 says, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light." His light awakens hearts, strengthens weak knees, and lifts the spirits of believers.

Jesus didn't just come to solve the problem of eternity; He came to address the chaos in our lives now. He could have arrived as a mighty wind, a tidal wave, or a roaring ocean to sweep us off our feet. I often wonder, "Jesus, why didn't You come riding a big white horse to save the day?" But He didn't.

Instead, He came as a baby. A King. Born in a manger. No fanfare. No dramatic entrance. Why? So that in the fragile reality of life, we might discover His promises shining through our darkness.

In the night, my hope lives on.

Recommended Listening: O Come, O Come Emmanuel (hymn), Come Thou Long Expected Jesus by Shane and Shane, Winter Snow by Shane and Shane



December 3

Peace Within

by Wini Moran

I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.

John 16:33

When painting *Peace in the Midst of the Storm*, Jack E. Dawson remembered a story he had heard years before in a revival about a competition among artists trying to paint “peace.” Many of the submissions depicted beautiful sunsets, tranquil lakes, and swaying palm trees. But the winning picture involved a small bird, protected and secure in a cleft of a cliff amid a raging storm. That recollection challenged Dawson to create his own message of contrast: a stormy, foreboding painting that reminded him of the storms of life; but one that also reflected God’s blessings we receive amidst all the suffering. In his painting, Dawson created an iconic profile of a face in the cliff that reminded him of Christ. This Rock was facing stormy winds and lightning and a crushing waterfall, what we can see as the total turmoil of our earthly lives, and juxtaposed it with the calm peace of the dove on its nest, secure in the cleft of the rock. (<https://jackdawson.com/bgshop/about/>)

At the moment Jesus was born, I imagine a tiny light of peace arriving in the stable in Bethlehem. Into this dark, stormy, sinful world, the Light had come. As He grew, and people came to follow Him, that Light spread. Today, the Light has come to us! Jesus’ life, like ours, was not free from trials, temptations, and suffering. But in the midst of all of these, Jesus had peace. He offers the same peace to us. Our world often feels out of control, in turmoil and difficult. The light of peace Jesus gives doesn’t stop that—He gives us peace in the middle of it. He is our cleft in the rock, our hiding place, our refuge and our shelter. In Him we can find a peace that has nothing to do with the world around us, but comes from Jesus in us.

How can we have this peace? Because Jesus has overcome the world! The Greek word for overcome is *nikaō*, and it means to conquer or to have victory. This world was not Jesus’ home, and it’s not ours. He returned to His kingdom in heaven, and one day He is returning—not as a baby, but as a mighty, glorious King. Everything here that seemed like defeat, loss, death will be conquered, and His Light will fill the earth! Jesus knew this when He was on earth, and it gave Him peace. We can know this, and it can give us peace, too. In the storms and in the night, we can have hope!

So in the night, my hope lives on.

Recommended Listening: Peace by Bethel Music, featuring We the Kingdom

For Reflection:

When you look at the picture above, what are the storms raging in your life right now?

How does it help you to know that Jesus has already overcome those things, if not now, when He returns?

Where do you experience the peace of that little bird in the safe shelter of the cliff in the middle of the storm?



December 4

It Was Not a Silent Night

by Josh Reimann

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

Luke 2:11

I'll never forget the day our first child, Lily, was born. Katie had spent nine long months preparing for this sweet baby to enter the world, and I had assembled every toy and baby bed possible in anticipation of the big day. We arrived at the hospital, walked Katie into the maternity waiting room to check in, and that's when it hit me: no one was as excited about our baby's arrival as we were. The maintenance man continued fixing a broken light fixture. The nurses stayed seated behind the check-in desk, unfazed by our anxious excitement. People in the waiting room scrolled on their phones, completely unaware of the life-changing moment we were experiencing.

When we read Luke 2, it's clear that Jesus had a very different reception. His arrival was heralded by a divine welcoming committee. An angel proclaimed to the shepherds that Jesus was born, and it wasn't just a few bystanders who made the announcement—it was a multitude of angels! Jesus, the one foretold throughout all the Scriptures, had finally come to make all sad things untrue, and it was as if all of Heaven descended to share the news. But suffice it to say, not only was there an angelic celebration, Mary also gave birth to Jesus...it was not a silent night. Jill Phillips and Andrew Peterson describe the night wonderfully in their song *Labor of Love*:

*It was not a silent night
There was blood on the ground
You could hear a woman cry
In the alleyways that night
On the streets of David's town
And the stable was not clean
And the cobblestones were cold
And little Mary full of grace
With the tears upon her face
Had no mother's hand to hold
It was a labor of pain
It was a cold sky above
But for the girl on the ground in the dark
Every beat of her beautiful heart
Was a labor of love*

I love how this song imagines Mary that night—a young girl with tears on her face and no mother’s hand to hold. I can’t begin to imagine what was running through her mind. Maybe today you find yourself caught up in anxious toil, wondering if the chaos in your life will ever make sense. Take heart, because God sent His Son, Jesus, to bear the sins of humanity. He will take the longings of your heart and mine and fully satisfy every desire. Much like the promise in Psalm 56, God bottles up all our tears—none are wasted.

We may not have a multitude of angels in the labor and delivery room, but rest assured: because Christ has come, He announces loudly in the heart of every believer that His presence is our ultimate good. And if His presence is our good, then fear not, dear believer...

In the night, your hope lives on.

Recommended Listening: Labor of Love by Andrew Peterson, featuring Jill Phillips, O Holy Night by Lauren Daigle, Hark! The Herald Angels Sing by Paul Baloche, It Came Upon the Midnight Clear by Shane and Shane



December 5

Light in the Shadows

by Josh Reimann

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:5

After church planting out west for a number of years, we made a move to Owensboro, Kentucky in 2022. One of the hardest adjustments for our kids was the change in the weather. We went from a state that rarely experienced any kind of severe thunderstorm to a state that experienced a thunderstorm, what felt like, weekly. I remember our first tornado warning sending my oldest son into a panic as the sirens by our home went off. The only thing he wanted in his hand that night was a flashlight. He wanted to be able to see just in case we lost our power. In a new house he was still trying to navigate and a new place to live that was unfamiliar, that flashlight was with him all of the time.

If that flashlight promised us anything in the midst of fear, it was that it would help shine in the darkness so that we could see where we were headed. John describes Jesus in John 1:5 as a light that can not be overcome by darkness. No matter how dark a room gets, light will always penetrate the darkness. And when we apply that same truth to our world, we see that Jesus came to be something much brighter than a \$10 flashlight at Walmart. He came to shine His light into the darkness of the whole world. He came to expose the realities of what's lurking in the darkness. He came to be the light of hope to all who would believe. No more stumbling around in the dark to find your way. Jesus became a light so that all might see, hear, and believe.

The Christmas season is filled with lights and excitement. However, those lights pale in comparison to the glory of light that emerges from Christ Himself. "The light of the world" really means the entire world and Jesus is going to offer us a promise: that He will never let the darkness overcome His light.

Two years later and we still have that same flashlight (and a few more). The irrational fear of storms has shifted some for our kids but we still carry those flashlights around just in case. They don't light up the entire house, but they do let us see just enough to have hope that we'll find where we're going. And when it comes to that kind of hope, our kids rest a little better.

Rest in this truth today: In the night, your hope lives on.

Recommended Listening: Silent Night (hymn), Light of the World by Lauren Daigle



December 6

Living Hope

by Elizabeth Watt

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Romans 15:13

In an episode of the Open Door Podcast, Matt Scheuneman shared a thought that struck me deeply: anxiety often stems from a lack of faith, while depression is often the lack of hope.¹ I don't know about you, but I have certainly experienced some hopeless days, particularly around Christmas. If this is supposed to be "the most wonderful time of the year," why do we sometimes feel the opposite—overwhelmed, weary, or even desolate?

The apostle Paul understood feeling hopeless. He wrote to the church in Corinth, "So we do not lose heart. [...] For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Corinthians 4:16-17). Paul, who had endured suffering and trials beyond anything we could imagine, acknowledged that life's trials are temporary. They are fleeting. And yet, they are not without purpose—the hard things we experience are shaping us for an eternal weight of glory that will far outweigh anything we face here.

This brings us to an important question in this season of Advent: Where are you sourcing your hope?

It's easy to look to others or to things to provide the peace and joy we crave, especially this time of year. We may think, "If only my spouse helped more with the kids, I would be happy." Or, "If only my friends gave me more attention, I would feel more at peace." Perhaps we even long for someone—anyone—to fill the emptiness we feel. Sometimes we try to fill the voids in our lives with possessions, thinking that a new car, the latest phone, or a trendy wardrobe will somehow bring the joy we're seeking. If only I had what they have. If only I looked like her or had as many followers as he does on social media. We can become fixated on what we lack, rather than remembering what we already have in Christ.

¹ Pinker, Greg (Host), "Anxiety and Depression - What Is Depression?", Open Door, S1E3, September 23, 2020, <https://opendoor.transistor.fm/episodes/anxiety-and-depression-what-is-depression>.

Maybe this year has brought a particularly heavy burden: a difficult diagnosis, the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, or financial struggles that leave you wondering how you'll make it through. In the face of these challenges, it can feel nearly impossible to find hope.

But here's the good news: hope is not based on our circumstances. In our opening verse, Paul writes to the Roman church, urging them to allow God—the God of all hope—to fill them with joy and peace, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit they may abound in hope. This hope isn't something we conjure up within ourselves. It's a gift from God, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, which overflows in a way that is beyond our own understanding.

Jesus also promises that those who believe in Him will experience this kind of hope. In John 7:38, He says, "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Jesus is the living water that sustains us, refreshes us, and fills us to overflowing with hope. This is the kind of hope that doesn't dry up when the circumstances are difficult or the future is uncertain. It's the hope that only comes from a relationship with Christ—hope that is rooted in His promises.

So today, I want to encourage you to ask yourself: Do I believe that Jesus came to give me eternal life? Do I trust God to keep His promises to me, even when life feels uncertain or broken?

If you're struggling to answer "yes" to these questions, you're not alone. The good news is that our faith doesn't have to be perfect, but it does have to be placed in the right person—Jesus Christ. As you reflect on this Advent season, I invite you to bring your doubts, your struggles, and your pain before Him. Ask God to help you see the hope that is available to you in Christ—hope that is not dependent on your circumstances, but on the unchanging promises of God.

In a world that often feels dark and full of despair, let us remember that our hope is anchored in something far greater than anything this world can offer. The God of hope desires to fill you with joy and peace, and by His Spirit, He will help you to abound in hope, no matter what your circumstances may be. This is the hope we celebrate this Advent season, and it is the hope that will carry us through every challenge life brings.

May you experience this living hope today, and may it overflow into every area of your life, so that you too may become a beacon of hope to those around you.

"For in this hope we were saved" (Romans 8:24). So in the night, my hope lives on.



December 7

The Night's Bright Star

by Elizabeth Watt

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

Matthew 2:10

If Christmastime is the most wonderful time of the year, March Madness is a close second. After thirty to forty hard-fought games, NCAA teams from across the country hit the hardwood to determine who will emerge as the season's champion. My favorite part? The upsets. There's always a low-seeded team that knocks off a top contender, and the pure, unfiltered joy on the faces of players, coaches, and fans alike strikes a chord in my heart every time. Years of hard work and dedication pay off in one shining moment of glory, and every team begins the tournament with a glimmer of hope: This could be the year.

The Bible doesn't tell us much about the wise men, but we do know they recognized an extraordinary star as a sign of the Messiah's arrival, as foretold in Numbers 24:17. Like a team united by a common goal, these men journeyed together across vast distances, following the star until it led them directly to Jesus.

Can you imagine their excitement? This was the culmination of everything they had studied and longed for their entire lives. Picture their faces, lit with anticipation. Hear their voices, trembling with joy as they prepared to meet the child King. Matthew tells us they "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy" when they found him. This wasn't just a polite nod of approval or a quiet moment of satisfaction—it was an all-out, victory-dance, trophy-hoisting kind of celebration.

When was the last time you felt that kind of joy? When was the last time something made you shout, lift your arms, and overflow with awe and wonder?

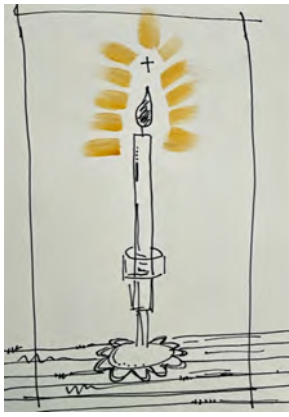
It's worth remembering that when Jesus was born, the wise men lived under the oppressive rule of King Herod, a man notorious for his cruelty and paranoia. Yet, in the face of uncertainty and fear, these men traveled far—both literally and figuratively—to pursue hope.

No matter what you're facing today, even if it feels like you've had more losses than wins lately, you have a reason to celebrate! You've already won the greatest prize in human history: a place in God's eternal family. Through Jesus, you've been given victory over sin, death, and the weight of this world.

If the wise men rejoiced so greatly at the promise of the Messiah, how much more should we rejoice, knowing the promise has been fulfilled? Jesus has come. He has lived, died, and risen again to secure our freedom forever, and the bright star that led the wise men beckons us to him still.

In the night, my hope lives on.

Recommended Listening: When They Saw the Star by Mountain View Baptist Church



December 8

A Flicker of Faith

by Ben Hoak

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'"

Matthew 1:20-21

Before he went to bed that night, Joseph's heart was heavy. He had just found out his fiancée, Mary, was pregnant — and he wasn't the father. He decided to end the relationship quietly to save face for her, but it was still an ending. His dream of having a family and building a life together was gone, just like the dust he shook off his sandals.

This latest broken promise brought up other unrealized promises that were weighing on the whole nation of Israel. They had been told a Messiah would come, and for so long they had waited. But all they got in return was silence. The promised hope fell on an empty soul that night. Joseph would sleep as best he could and deal with things tomorrow.

And then, an angel appeared. He said the baby in Mary's womb was from the Holy Spirit. Even more incredibly, he said this baby would be the one to save his people from their sins. Joseph knew his genealogy and could trace his ancestors directly back to David, the shepherd king—he was the one through whom God had said he would send a deliverer.

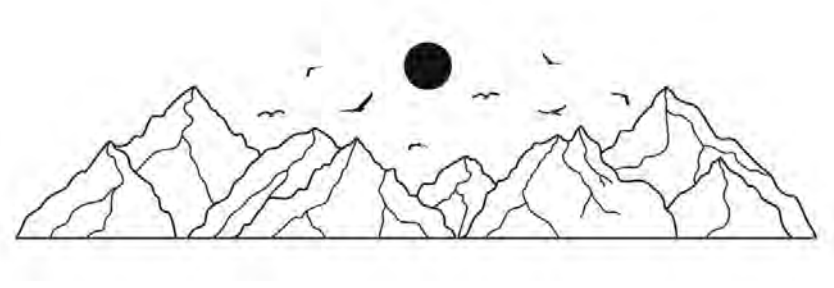
Could it be? Was he actually part of that promise? Still, it seemed crazy. The baby was from the Holy Spirit? How would he explain that? How would he raise the son of God as his own? But that name... Jesus.

At just the sound of the name, Joseph felt peace wash over him. His restlessness stilled as he thought about Jesus coming, not just as a baby, but as a Savior for desperate people who had no other hope. As the first light of morning began to creep through his window, Joseph's dread from the night before disappeared, replaced by a spark of joy he hadn't felt in a very long time. He would go to Mary; he would take her as his wife; he would be a father to the Son of God; and that son would one day rise from the dead to save his people from their sins.

Maybe you've been going to bed with a heavy heart, too. Maybe you've been lying awake in the darkness, your mind working overtime, your anxiety spiking. The wayward child, the diagnosis, the bills, the laundry, the mental health, the unrealized dreams. The fire of your faith has almost burned out.

And yet, it's still flickering. So take courage; take comfort; and take hope: Joseph's dream came true. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection don't magically take your problems away, but they do tell you he loves you, he's with you, and he will return one day to make all things new.

As Joseph swung his feet out of bed after the dream that changed everything, one thought probably flooded his mind: In the night, my hope lives on.



December 9

Longing for the Light

by Josh Reimann

Because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Luke 1:78-79

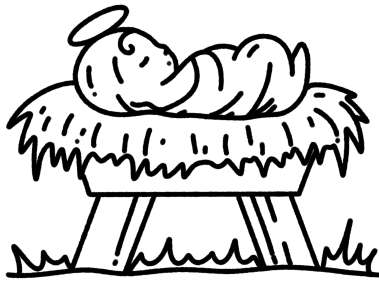
One of my favorite places on earth is Salt Lake City, Utah. Not only are you surrounded by majestic mountains that offer a sense of safety, but it also boasts the most stunning sunrises and sunsets in the world (at least by my standards). The sun takes its time to rise over the Wasatch Mountains, except in a growing city on the far southwest edge of the valley called Daybreak. Rumor has it the name comes from the fact that it's the first place in the Salt Lake Valley to catch the sunlight each morning.

Zechariah prophesied about a day when the sun (that is, Jesus) would rise to give light to those sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. When that light shines into dark places, it guides people to the way of peace. To fully grasp this, we have to work backwards through the passage. For God to give up His one and only Son to save us by dying on a cross for our sins, He first had to send Him to us—because there was no way for us to reach Him on our own. But why would God do something so incredible? The answer lies in the beginning of verse 78: “Because of the tender mercy of our God...”

It's crucial to understand that God's mercies, as described in Lamentations, are new every morning. His great faithfulness sustains us in our times of trouble. Because God has shown us mercy, we can experience the fullness of His grace. The light of His grace is what carries us through life's twists and turns.

You may not see the light shining yet, but much like Daybreak, Utah, it's already reaching the ground. If you're exploring Christianity or wrestling with doubt, let yourself long for the light. Long to be found in it. The promise of being found in the light is that we get Jesus and His tender mercies.

In the night, my hope lives on.



December 10

Heaven's Silent Plan

by Ben Hoak

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law.

Galatians 4:4

What are you waiting for? Waiting to hear from someone you love? Waiting for a promise to come to pass? Waiting for progress when it feels like there's no progress at all? Try waiting for 400 years. Four. Hundred. Years. That's how long God's people didn't hear from him during that blank space in your Bible between the Old and New Testaments. He told them he would deliver them through a Messiah and then... nothing. For four centuries, the heavens were silent.

Until one night the skies blazed with light and the angels proclaimed the good news above a tiny town in the middle of nowhere. The fullness of time had finally come—and so had Jesus. God didn't send him before he was ready. He didn't send him early or late. He sent him when the fullness of time had come, at the exact right moment. The plan was according to God's timing, not ours.

For this plan to work, Jesus had to be born of a woman under the same conditions as any other human: under the law of God, which requires perfection or punishment. Jesus knew we could never reach perfection, so he did. And then, even though he deserved the opposite, he took our punishment: death on a cross, slain for our sins.

The future looked dark then, but the plan wasn't complete. Three days later, Jesus rose from the grave, defeating death and accomplishing our redemption, making us God's sons and daughters. Talk about a good plan.

Today might not be your fullness of time, or mine. Tomorrow or the next day might not either. You may have to wait a while. But if you're a child of God, called according to his purpose and redeemed by the baby-who-became-a-Savior, God is doing more than you know in your life, and at the exact moment he is ready, he will put your plan into motion.

In the meantime, while things may feel dark, know that hope is never dead. Hope isn't some blind optimism that things will just kind of work out eventually. It's an assurance of things unseen, a conviction that even though the heavens may be silent again, God will keep his word to us as well.

There's another promise that will come true in the fullness of time, and it too centers on Jesus coming to Earth. In this case, though, he'll come not as a baby, but as a conquering king who will gather his children to himself, end Satan once and for all, and banish death and pain and sorrow - forever and ever.

For now, the waiting is still hard. But:
In the night, my hope lives on.



December 11

Hope Beyond the Horizon

by Josh Reimann

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

Revelation 21:4

Many of us face the Christmas season with a sense of dread. Whether it's the loss of a friend or family member, "the most wonderful time of the year" often feels anything but wonderful. My sweet mother-in-law passed away in the early spring of 2021, and we remember her in many little moments throughout the year—but none more than at Christmas, when we bring out some of the decorations she used to put up in the home where my wife grew up.

Much of our nostalgia this time of year is wrapped up in memories of loved ones who won't share another Christmas morning with us. We feel the weight and tension in Mr. Tumnus's words from *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, when he tells young Lucy, "It's always winter, but never Christmas." Oftentimes, this season feels easier to endure if we simply hurry through it, avoiding the hard realities of a friend or mother who has passed from this world.

And yet, this Advent season isn't just about looking back and reminiscing. Of course, we look back and remember, because it's part of the human experience. But we're also called to lift our eyes upward and forward—to the hope that is to come (Psalm 121). A day, as John writes, when God will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and crying and pain will be no more. It's hard to imagine that day when our grief runs so deep. Yet, it's in these moments that the Holy Spirit shapes us, testing whether our delight is truly in knowing Christ and Him crucified, or if the trajectory of our hope is pointed elsewhere.

I encourage you to rest in Revelation 21:4 this Christmas season. Spend time mourning your loss, but don't remain there. I am confident that Jesus wants to teach you something even in your waiting, as you long to see your loved one again. Perhaps, in our waiting, we're learning to patiently trust the One who holds everything in the palm of His hands. So that...

In the night, our hope lives on.

Recommended listening: I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day (hymn)



December 12

The Night Watch

by Avery Burke

My soul waits for the Lord,
More than watchmen for the morning,
More than watchmen for the morning.

Psalm 130:6

The practice of waiting is so ingrained into the walk of the Christian life, this verse should speak deeply to our souls. Because we live after the first coming of Jesus Christ, we know the tension of living in the “already, not yet.” Jesus has already come once, to redeem and justify those who would believe. Right now His Spirit is at work in this world, sanctifying the saints and doing work to build His Kingdom. And yet, we wait for His second coming, when He will make all things new, and He will move from justification and sanctification to glorification.

The practice of waiting on the Lord is not a passive stance. The act of waiting on the Lord is a way of living. It is the heartbeat of the Christian life. Waiting on the Lord is the posture a Christian holds as they navigate work, sabbath, relationships, and everything else that our lives may hold. Waiting on the Lord does not require us to be in a season of work, a season of rest, or even a season of waiting. Waiting on the Lord is the undercurrent that carries us through every season.

Waiting on the Lord requires us to take the posture of the trees. As trees extend their limbs to the sky, so we are to extend our hands in praise to God, whether these branches are full from a season of fruitfulness or bare from a season of weariness. Because waiting on the Lord is the act of submitting every effort and outcome to His perfect will.

Not only is the practice of waiting on the Lord, a continual one, but it is also an expectant one. The Psalmist repeats twice the phrase “more than watchmen in the morning.” Night watchmen, as you can probably imagine, wait in the night. A time of darkness, when enemies strike. A time to be wary and watchful. And yet they wait knowing that the sun will indeed rise. Night watchmen do not wait for a possibility. They wait with certainty, and expectancy, confidence.

The psalmist is so confident in the Lord’s deliverance that he repeats a phrase that already indicates certainty. It is confidence two fold.

“Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1). Just because we don’t yet see the sun on the horizon, doesn’t mean we doubt that it will.

And so we, the people of God, wait out this time in which darkness still has dominion over the earth. We purposely live our lives with our gaze ever lifted high. And we wait knowing “the Sun of righteousness will rise” (Malachi 4:2).

In the night, my hope lives on.

A Liturgy for The Night Watch

Oh Father, there is brokenness in the world that serves as a constant reminder that we inhabit enemy territory.

Remind us once again that though the war is won,

A battle still rages.

We are a people so heavily ruled by our sight,

And what we see can be so discouraging.

When we are tempted to say

“Surely the darkness will hide me, and the light around me will be night”

Remind us that ‘even darkness is not dark to You.’ (Psalm 139)

Remind us that You are a God who is sovereign over superlatives.

You have promised Your Presence for every high and every low and every moment in between.

Teach us to live with the posture of the trees.

Whether these hands be full or empty, may they always reach heavenward to You in praise.

Forgive us for forgetting to look to the horizon with expectancy.

Instead we question your character and doubt Your Word.

We thank You that You have invited us into a season that reminds us to trust your divine timing, design, and authorship.

Teach us to say with confidence and in every season;

“My soul waits for the Lord,

More than watchmen for the morning,

More than watchmen for the morning.”



December 13

Embracing the Mystery

by Elizabeth Watt

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."
1 Timothy 3:16

In the September 21, 1897 edition of *The Sun* in New York, editor Francis Pharcellus Church answered eight-year-old Virginia O'Hanlon's letter which begged the truth: "Is there a Santa Claus?"¹ Church's response, which garnered nationwide attention and inspired books and movies, stated in part:

You may tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real?³

Church emphatically declared, "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus," and this season all of us believe, at least want to believe, in the wonder and the mystery of an entity who can supernaturally bring joy and love into our homes each Christmas Eve.

This season, you may ask yourself, "Is it all real?" How can it be that there is a grand creator who spoke light and earth into existence and formed man from the dust of that earth and breathed life into him? How can it be that there is a divine son who descended from the heavenly realms to be born to a teenage mother and placed in a trough? How can it be that there is a spirit unseen who lives inside my body and speaks truth from the Father and the Son and guides and protects me?

How can it be that all three are the same but separate? And how, how could that Son agree to bear the justifying wrath of my sins and suffer and die so that I could live again with the Father?

Yes, my friends, there is a Savior.

¹"Yes Virginia, there is a Santa Claus: Topics in Chronicling America." Library of Congress Research Guides. <https://guides.loc.gov/chronicling-america-yes-virginia>

²Church, F. (1897, September 21). "Is There a Santa Claus?" *The Sun*. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030272/1897-09-21/ed-1/seq-6/>

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples, and when Thomas had doubts of who he was, Jesus asked him to touch his wounded hands and side, which convinced Thomas that Jesus was who he said he was. Jesus responds, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29 ESV).

We can't physically touch the wounds in our Savior's hands, and we can't see the face of God. But if we have asked Jesus to enter our hearts, we can feel the Holy Spirit working in us, and we can hear God guiding us to truth and life. “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible” (Hebrews 11:3).

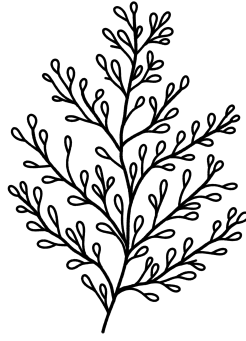
We may not understand the mystery of godliness, but we can believe in it and embrace it in our lives. We can believe and know there is a supernatural entity who delivers hope, joy, and love every day of our lives, who watches over us, not with a naughty or nice list, but with a true desire to have a relationship with us.

So in the night, my hope lives on.

Recommended Listening: Never Lose the Wonder by Middlebrook Music, featuring Emily McCoy

For Reflection:

How has your faith changed since you were young? Are you a believer or a skeptic? Do you embrace the mystery of godliness?



December 14

In the Stillness, Joy

by Avery Burke

The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty One who will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness;
He will quiet you by his love;
He will exult over you with loud singing.

Zephaniah 3:17

Disney Pixar film, *Finding Nemo*, follows the story of a father and son, estranged by the vast ocean. The movie depicts a frantic father who faces many challenges in the effort to find his son. One thing that is evident throughout the film is that there is a shift in the son's perception of his father. There is a critical moment in the film, when one of the characters is talking with Nemo and says, "You are lucky you have someone out there looking for you." Nemo replies despondently saying, "No one is looking for me." Nemo has a perception of his father that reveals a disbelief that his father would even try to look for him.

Jesus tells a similar story. In Luke 15:11-38, Jesus depicts the story of a father and son estranged. You may be familiar with the parable of the "prodigal son". And if you are, you may remember that when the wayward son finally decides to return home, it is with his head low. The son trudges home expecting to be met with scorn, that would be justly deserved.

Do you ever find yourself holding this limited and skewed view of your Father?

Maybe it is the weight that holds you back from prayer, because you just don't feel fixed up enough to enter the Lord's presence.

Maybe it is the trepidation that holds you back from attending church on Sunday because you have messed up... again.

Maybe it is the fear that if you pick up your Bible, you will only find a list of "do's" and "don'ts".

Zephaniah is inviting us to pick up a not so new perspective of our Father in heaven. One that may feel alien or scandalous at first glance.

Let me take you back to that Disney film. Later on in the movie, there is a moment when Nemo is hearing about all the trials his father has faced in efforts to cross the ocean and find him. Upon first hearing these outlandish stories, Nemo says that it can't possibly be his dad, and upon finding out it is, there is much celebrating.

We call the passage of Luke 15:11-38 the parable of the prodigal son. The original audience called it the parable of the good father.¹

¹Mclelland, K. (2022). *Jesus and Women: The First Century and Now*. Lifeway Press.

Because, the good father was the one who when he saw his son from a distance, he *went running after him*. And He welcomed his son back home. Hearing passages like Zephaniah will leave us sometimes feeling like Nemo. We scratch our heads and say, “are you sure?” Much of our pain comes from forgetting who our Father is. My dear friend, remember this: He is a God who pursues.

In the passage of Zephaniah, there are some “He will...” statements. Any time I find “I will” or “He will” statements in the Bible, I get so excited. Because they remind me that the God of the Bible is a God who acts, who pursues, who promises, and who saves.

This is why in stillness we can find joy.

Because even when I am still, He is a God who moves.

Because when I raise my eyes I see my Father, not casually walking, but running. Running eagerly to meet me and welcome me home.

God moves toward us by sending His perfect Son to become Man.

His posture is to pursue.

In the night, my hope lives on.

A liturgy for In the Stillness, Joy

Lord, through your Word, you have been gracious to reveal Yourself to us.

You reveal Your character when you declare the way in which you plan to move toward us with redemption and healing carved in your outreached palms.

It is your declaration of peace over us that causes us to be still in awe.

Forgive us for our addiction to our fast paced, inward focused lives.

In our striving and straining we have forgotten our first love.

Teach us how to find a rhythm that recognizes the blessing of work and yet allows us to pause and receive the gift of your love.

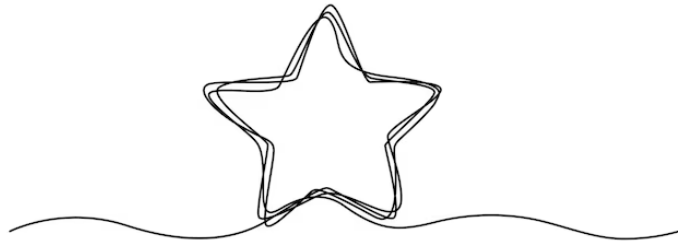
Remind us that more is gained from a moment of stillness with You than can be gained in months of labor lacking your presence.

Quiet our worried souls.

For this is what You have declared You will do,

Renew our delight in You.

Recommended Listening: Joy to the World (Joyful, Joyful) (acoustic sessions) - Phil Wickham, Heart Won't Stop - John Mark McMillan, Sarah McMillan



December 15

Hope's Guiding Star

by Avery Burke

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.

Numbers 24:17

I was talking with some friends at church a few Sundays ago. They just happened to be members of Pleasant Valley Community Church from its beginning. We were discussing God's faithfulness, specifically how it is expressed in the growth of our local church. They were telling me about how Paula Horn had a vision around 15 years ago that the small church would be filled with the masses. My friend stated that he had felt disbelief at the time, but now fifteen years later he was looking at the said "masses" and knew that he was looking at something only God could bring about.

This conversation had me thinking about how what we see of our stories in the moment (which happens to be a very limited amount) can sometimes be incredibly discouraging. Thankfully, our hope is not in what is seen, rather "faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen." (Hebrews 11:1).

Despite the source of our faith being an unseen one, some brothers and sisters just live life wearing lenses of hope and expectation. In fact, there is probably someone in your life you can think of right now who lives open to the possibility that God could do something amazing at any given moment. However, most of us living in our day-to-day moments aren't thinking about the possibility of a bigger picture. And the truth is that what we can see is often discouraging to say the least.

This could be said for just about every person mentioned in the Bible, especially God's people. There are true horrors and darkness weaved into human history. And yet, through every stage of God's word the one thing that remains true is the promises of God. In Numbers 24, the People of God had seen victory after victory and they are met with a beautiful promise that "a star will come from Jacob and a scepter will arise from Israel." But when Israel is met with failure after failure, leading to their exile, God's promise remains the same that He will "bring my Servant, the Branch.... And I will take away the iniquity of this land in a single day." (Zechariah 3:8-9).

Let this be a sweet reminder to you, that no matter what season of life you find yourself in, God's promises are true. In Brandon Lake's song *Fear is Not My Future*, he sings;

*He's not done with what He's started,
He's not done until it's good.*

So, if you are discouraged by the shattered pieces of your life this Christmas season, know this, that if it is not good, then God is not done yet. Take hope in the fact that the story is not over. "Being confident in this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6).

In the night, my hope lives on.

A Liturgy for Hope's Guiding Star

Lord, we pray that you would forgive us for assigning limits on Your power
based on our own lack of sight.

We confess that many of us encounter heart break and suffering in our day-to-day lives
and we need to be reminded of the hope we have in You.

Would you teach us the art of leaving room for the possibility that you could turn these
fractured fables into testimonies of truth and redemption.

Give us eyes to look past what is and live with hopeful expectation of what could be.

Holy Spirit, would you give us a vision of hope, even if that hope is a mere
pinprick of light in a dark night.

Let that light guide us in and embolden us through every season and every chapter of this story.

Help us to trust that You are a God who is working behind the scenes, You are a God who moves, wills,
and works whether we have eyes to see it or not.

Recommended Songs: Altogether Good: Anchor Hymns, Paul Baloche, Lucy Grimble

Passages for further study and meditation: Isaiah 60:1-3, 19-22



December 16

Faith in the Night

by Lisa Benton

I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me
may not remain in darkness.

John 12:46

Look at the weight of our verse today. “Jesus is the light in the darkness for whoever believes.” Don’t rush through the verse. Take time to meditate on the power of the word. Think of the names of those you love who need the power of this verse. Jesus, please come as the light of the world, so that (you fill in the name) may believe and not remain in darkness.

That is what advent is about: Jesus bringing the light of his love into the darkness of sin. I have lost family members who I long to be brought out of the darkness into God’s light. They are so lost in their darkness of mind and heart. Simply put, “They need Jesus.” But I too need Jesus with deeper depth. We each need to see our continual need for our beloved Jesus.

I am a parent whose heart is praying for the soul of their lost child. It is a deep crying brought to the feet of precious Jesus. Many of you share the same heart cry for your loved ones. The heart cry of Lord Have Mercy. Please hear our cry for your light in the darkness of those we deeply love.

The best gift this Christmas would be for my family members to know Jesus. I am quite sure you feel the same. I want them to see their need for a Savior, to encounter Jesus Christ the Lord. How I pray for the light of salvation and forgiveness to fill their lives with eternal life, bringing them out of the darkness of sin.

Jesus, will you please come this Christmas with your light into the hearts who desperately need you? Have mercy, Oh God, on those who are lost. Jesus, you came just for that reason, the lost and broken. I too am lost and broken and need your salvation daily. Please visit your presence in my dear loved one’s hearts. Call them out of the darkness into your glorious light this Christmas season. Help us to not give up praying. Please hear our prayer in Jesus’ name. Amen.

In the night, my hope lives on.



December 17

The Unseen Miracle

by Ben Hoak

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

You know the words by heart. You don't even have to look them up. But how often do we stop to think about what those words really mean? Here's the quick version:

God created a world that was very good. He designed every part of it to function in a particular way and bring him glory.

But we messed it up. We sinned, we broke his law, we did what he said not to do. Our sin broke the beauty of the world God designed, but more than that, it broke our relationship with him. He's so holy, so just, so true and right that our sin - even just one transgression - is enough to separate us from him forever. Without hope and help, we would perish (fourth part of the verse) and spend an eternity in hell, apart from him.

That's the bad news.

But here's the good news, right in the first part of the verse: God loved the world. He loved us with a love so strong, so steadfast, so deep, that purely out of his own good pleasure, he sent us that hope and help we so desperately needed.

Here's how (second part of the verse): he gave us his only Son. Jesus came to earth, lived a life without sin and died in our place, taking the punishment for our sins upon himself. This is the unseen miracle - that when we believe in Jesus (third part of the verse), his perfect righteousness is transferred to us so our relationship with God is restored and we can live with him for eternity (last part of the verse) in a new earth with no sin, suffering, or death. Let's go back for a second to that phrase "he gave his only son." This is what we're celebrating at Christmas: that God demonstrated his love for us by sending the only son he had to earth.

The Father gave his only Son to save us - but Jesus had to get here somehow. So God chose a teenage girl to be Jesus' mom, a carpenter to be his dad, and a manger to be his birthplace. The one who upholds the universe by the word of his power wiggled in Mary's arms. He laughed at Joseph. He played with his brothers and sisters. And then he died and rose on the third day, securing eternal life for all who believe.

God gave Jesus to us because he loved us.

God gave Jesus to us to hold all things together.

God gave Jesus to us for our endurance, patience, and joy.

God gave Jesus to us because there was no other way.

God gave Jesus to us so that when the darkness seems deepest, when perishing seems like the only option, when we come to the end of ourselves, we can say, "In the night, my hope lives on."



December 18

Our Consolation

by Wini Moran

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him...

Luke 2:25-32

Maybe Simeon had heard about the miraculous birth of John the Baptist? It had only been eight days since Jesus' birth, maybe he had heard the excited shouts of the shepherds sharing all they had seen and heard? But it was the urging of the Holy Spirit that led him to the temple that day. And it was the assurance of the Holy Spirit that the young couple and the tiny baby he saw was not just any family.

Jesus had been brought to be circumcised, and I can imagine that He didn't enjoy that experience and may have been fussy. Old Simeon, with his knobby knuckles and wrinkled hands, deeply lined face and wise eyes, took that fussy baby into his arms and gazed on him with such love and adoration. The cries stopped as the baby stared back at him with wide eyes. As Simeon gently stroked the baby's soft hair, tiny eyes drifted closed. He comforted the baby, that would be the ultimate comforter. Perhaps with tears trailing down his cheeks, he spoke these words in soft awe and reverence, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all the people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." With tears glistening in his eyes, he gently handed the sleeping baby back to his mother.

I'm fascinated by the phrase, "consolation of Israel." According to the Cambridge Dictionary (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/consolation>), consolation means, "Something that makes someone who is sad or disappointed feel better." We love comfort, don't we? A soft hoodie, warm blanket, cozy bed, favorite comfort foods, an overstuffed couch, a gently swaying hammock: we all have those places and things that are so comforting! But there is something different about consolation. When we are sad, disappointed, crushed; when life has taken the hardest turn, to what or to whom do we turn?

This world we live in can be so hard, losses so deep, hurts so painful. We don't have to look far to see how bad things are. When we are overcome, overwhelmed by the sin and challenges of this world, where do we find comfort? I would imagine that in Simeon's life he had faced loss and hurt, grief and pain. But after watching and waiting, when he held that baby in his arms in the temple that day, he experienced the joy of knowing God had remembered His people and His promises-and the long awaited Messiah had come! And that knowledge filled Simeon with praise!

God still keeps His promises today! While we know Jesus is the Messiah, we wait expectantly for His return. We still live in a world filled with hurt, loss, sin, grief and we look for comfort. In the night, my hope lives on. When we turn our eyes to Jesus and remember that He will return again and establish His kingdom here forever, we can have joy and hope! Jesus is our consolation!

Song: Come Thou Long Expected Jesus by Shane & Shane

For Reflection:

How do you remind yourself that Jesus is returning someday?

When you are sad or overwhelmed by the world, how do you find comfort in Jesus?



December 19

Birth Announcement of a KING!

by Wini Moran

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.'

Luke 2:13-14

A few years ago, a co-teacher explained to our class how angels are described in the Bible, and the image she described is both memorable and terrifying: How many of you were angels in a Christmas play as a child? Many of us were. But the Bible doesn't portray angels as cute little children. According to Isaiah's vision in Isaiah 6:2, "Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew."

We can find other angels in the Bible. Two named angels are Gabriel and Michael. Gabriel first appears to explain a vision to Daniel (Daniel 8:16). About 500 years later, Gabriel tells Zacharias about the coming of John the Baptist (Luke 1:19). Gabriel also tells Mary about the coming of Jesus (Luke 1:26). In all these encounters, the people are afraid.

We don't know exactly what angels look like. Vivian Bricker writes that "angels normally look like men [...]. Despite appearing as human men, they are said to be mighty, awe-inspiring, and normally leave the person feeling fearful. Since those whom angels visit usually fall down in worship or awe, we can imagine how wonderful yet fearful-looking they are [...]. Therefore, angels have been misinterpreted in the modern day. As Christians, it is important for us to educate ourselves on the appearance of angels in order for us to know what angels are and what is not. While the angels in drawings and artwork may appear cute, real angels don't look this way." ("Biblically Accurate Angels: Bible Verses and Illustrations." <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-are-biblically-accurate-angels.html>. 6 June 2024.)

The angels in our opening verses are described as "a vast host" and "the armies of heaven." This is not a cute little choir of childlike angels; this is an army of warrior angels who have come to announce the arrival of their King! Think William Wallace and the brave Scottish soldiers in Braveheart, banging shields with their swords, war paint coloring their faces—less pretty choir music and more battle cry shouts! These guards were protecting, watching over, and declaring the arrival of their King!

Don't forget, these angels were appearing to shepherds. Biblical shepherds were tough men who fought bears and wolves to protect their sheep in all types of weather, more fierce than the illustrations of shepherds you may find in your Bible. And as soon as the angels left, the shepherds obeyed and went to Bethlehem to find the baby. After seeing Jesus, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. They went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.

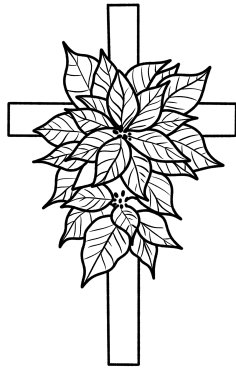
One day Jesus will return, not as a tiny baby, but as a mighty King! These same angels will serve their King again, not just announcing His arrival, but declaring His kingdom and establishing His eternal reign! Let this give you hope when the night seems long!

Recommended Listening: Angels From the Realms of Glory

For Reflection:

What has your image been of angels? Does this idea change it? Why or why not?

Just like the angels announced Jesus to the shepherds, who can you share Jesus with this advent season?



December 20

The Night of Promise

by Josh Reimann

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:14

Immanuel, God with us. Even centuries before Christ's birth, Isaiah gave God's people a picture of the King who was to come. He would be born of a virgin, bear a son, and they would call him Immanuel. Probably not the kind of King they expected to free them from their enemies. Upon hearing this prophecy, I can imagine questions like, "Why won't He come with the largest army the world has ever seen? Or as a crafty speaker who can negotiate?" But He didn't come in those ways. He came as a baby—fragile like any other newborn. He didn't bear a sword or arrive with a host of armies. Bob Kaufflin captures this beautifully:

"The infinite became an infant. The all-knowing One became a babbling baby. As one song puts it, "The author climbed inside the page." God came to us because we never would have come to him. We never could have come to him. But God didn't just come to us. He became one of us. Jesus was not only Emmanuel, "God with us." He was us. God was made low. So he could raise us up to eternal life and infinite joys."¹

It's kind of comical if you think about it. Part of God's great rescue plan was to send...a baby? And that's exactly what God did. As Philippians reminds us, God gave Him the name above every name, so that at the very name of Jesus, every knee would bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

Wait...so a baby would have the kind of authority that every knee would bow to this King?

My kids love the Paw Patrol movie that came out in 2021. The opening scene features a truck driver whose truck is hanging off the side of a bridge. He calls for help, and here comes the Paw Patrol. The truck driver looks at the dog rescuing him and says, "A dog!" Chase, the German Shepherd police dog, corrects him, replying, "Actually, sir, I'm a puppy." Flabbergasted, the man exclaims, "A baby dog! That's even worse!" Chase calmly responds, "You're in shock, so I'm not going to take that personally." That's the exact reaction I imagine the people Isaiah wrote to might have had.

Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 3:19, "For the wisdom of this world is folly with God." Whatever we think of ourselves as wise, God is Wisdom. When we reflect on this wild story of a King who comes as a baby lying in a manger, and view it from this side of the resurrection, we see that God's ways are always perfect and wise.

¹Kaufflin, Bob. "He Held the Stars in Place." *Desiring God*. December 16, 2018. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/he-held-the-stars-in-place#sleeping-and-sovereign>

Jesus grew to be a man who, at the appointed time, would die for the ungodly. He bore the punishment of sin on His shoulders, carrying it to the grave. But three days later, He rose victoriously. Before ascending into heaven, Jesus does something amazing in Matthew 28. He commissions His disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But He also leaves them with a reminder of an old, sweet promise from Isaiah 7: “Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Immanuel, God with us.

In the night, my hope lives on.

Recommended Listening: What Child is This



December 21

Glory in the Darkness

by Elizabeth Watts

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

For all the gamers out there, think about how you choose your characters when you start a game. I'm a simple gal, so I always went for the most feminine avatar: Princess Peach in Mario Kart, Kitana in Mortal Kombat, Jill Valentine in Resident Evil, Lara Croft (of course). Usually when you choose your "fighter," you pick the character you feel is most like you, or maybe the best version of yourself.

When God sent Jesus to earth, He could have sent him in any form He wanted. We already know God is capable of creating anything from nothing, and Jesus, who was with God and was God from the beginning, could have appeared with all his miraculous power and glory blazing around him as he flexed muscles and wielded weapons.

Instead, Jesus was sent to the womb of a young woman, knitted and shaped just like we were as little beings in our mothers. Jesus experienced the violence of childbirth, just like us, erupting from his mother's body completely vulnerable and dependent on others' care, an act that even today could result in death. Jesus, the embodiment of God's life and breath, took his first breath on earth just like you and me and most likely screamed just as we did after we were born. What does this choice say about God's character?

At his birth, Jesus did not cease being God; he took on humanity, living as both God and man, thus taking on all the fragilities of life while possessing all the qualities of his Father. This choice reveals so much about God's love and His desire to meet us where we are. By becoming flesh, Jesus entered the full reality of the human experience—not just the beautiful or glorious parts of life, but also its brokenness, pain, and darkness. He didn't come to us in a form that was untouchable or incomprehensible. He came to us in the most relatable way possible, from the cries of infancy to the tears shed in suffering, even into death.

This glory in the darkness—the Word becoming flesh—is a profound reminder that God doesn't avoid our struggles; He steps into them. He chose to come close to us, to be with us in the messiness of life, showing us that His love is not distant or unattainable but tangible and present.

So in the night, my hope lives on.

Recommended Listening: Winter Snow by Audrey Assad



December 22

Hope's Gentle Whisper

by Avery Burke

He will not cry out or shout or make his voice heard in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed, and he will not put out a smoldering wick; He will faithfully bring justice.

Isaiah 42:2-3

One of my favorite passages in scripture is 1 Kings 19:9-13. This passage depicts an interaction between God and His prophet Elijah. I do not have time to recap the whole story, but what you need to know is that at this point in time in the story, Elijah is at his wits end. You can almost hear the desperation in his voice when he cries out, "I alone am left, and they're" (the enemies of God) "looking for me to take my life." (vs. 10 & 19). Elijah is so desperate, he repeats his story twice. In a few verses prior, Elijah asked God to take his life.

Elijah is facing his darkest moment. He has nowhere to run. So he seeks out the One in whom he has placed all his faith.

I don't know about you, but I am so grateful that the Bible includes moments like these. If you are feeling like you are at the end of your rope, just know that when you approach God's Word, you are in good company. In our darkest and loneliest moments, let us remember that many saints have walked this path before us, and we can find strength from their testimonies. But more importantly, the true Hero of the faith, Jesus Christ knew what it was to be utterly and completely alone and abandoned.

When God appears to Elijah, He first sends a great wind. Then He sends an earthquake. After the earthquake He sent a fire, In none of these great signs did the Lord send forth His presence. Instead, the Lord's presence came to Elijah as "a voice, a soft whisper."

God could have met Elijah with wrath and glory and instead He chose gentleness.

In this story, Elijah was the bruised reed, the smoldering wick.

It seemed as if Elijah was a flame about to flicker out.

But that's the thing about hope. It doesn't need a forest fire to burn. All it needs is a gentle whisper. A reminder to keep burning even if it is the smallest of flames.

And doesn't that describe nativity?

The Savior of the world did not come first as a Warrior, but as a refugee child. Even from infancy, Jesus faced opposition at every turn. As an adult He gently met with people who knew what it was to be a bruised reed, a smoldering wick. In fact those were the kinds of people He spent most of His time with. The broken and the needy. The people who had been cast aside. And during His ministry, He became one of them. He was the cornerstone rejected, abandoned, and alone.

We have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15). Our high priest not only partook in weakness, but He has made a promise: "He will faithfully bring justice." (Isaiah 42:3)

In the night, my hope lives on.

A Liturgy for Hope's Gentle Whisper

Oh Father in heaven, thank you for the brutal blessing of being brought to the end of ourselves.

Truly it is here in these dark nights of the soul,
that we have no choice but to rely on You to be made whole.

For some of us, Lord, we come to this season of advent dragging all our broken pieces, shattered by the
year we leave behind us.

For some, we enter this season of light shrouded in the darkness of night.

For those hearts, bruised and broken, remind us now of who You are.

Remind us that you are a God of healing, restoration, and renewal.

Remind us that you are a God who sees, who meets with us in these dark places.

You are not afraid to move in where You see brokenness.

But You will certainly not leave us there.

For those whose hope feels like a smoldering wick,

Draw near.

Whisper Your sweet promises in their ear.

Recommended Listening: The Last Frontier by Andrew Peterson, So Close by Brandon Lake, Constellations by Ellie Holcomb, Wasteland by Needtobreathe



December 23

A Savior in the Night

by Lisa Benton

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

Luke 2:8-9

It is nighttime. The shepherds are doing shepherding work. An angel and then a host, or an immense number, of angels appear. God's glory is all around them. The Message Bible says, God's glory BLAZED around them. I like that word "blazed" as it paints an intense picture of what God was doing. God was "showing out" his Glory.

The angel told the fearful shepherds that a Savior, who is Christ the Lord, is BORN! Christ's birth, His coming, is displayed in the darkness. God wanted those shepherds to see what majestic glory was taking place in their fear and darkness. God became real and present to the shepherds. I wonder if the angels had appeared in the daytime, would God's glory have been as noticeable? Anything in the dark is going to be more prominent if it is brighter than the dark. Here we have God's glory just BLAZING as bright as can be, stunning the shepherds and moving them to respond after the encounter.

That's what God does best. He wraps His glory, His very presence over the darkness that can pervade your life. He becomes real and present. He comes to restore and to be present in your circumstance of darkness. Family, health, financial worries, brokenness, apathy: the list is endless. You name it, God wants to be there. His deep love was displayed for us by coming in the birth of Christ, and He continues to come to us by the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. God came, and God comes. Jesus is ready to display His glory and His presence in your darkness. Right in the here and now.

Dear Father, please come. We desperately need you. We need your real presence. Bring your light into the dark places. Display your glory with blazing power that we may be restored with your presence. Awe us with your love of glory. Thank you for coming. Thank you for coming into the now. Thank you so much that you will return to take us home. Bless your Holy Name. Amen.

In the night, my hope lives on.



December 24

Eternal Light, Endless Hope

by Elizabeth Watt

There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

Revelation 22:5

From the very first day of creation, God spoke light into existence, declaring it good and separating it from darkness (Genesis 1:4). On the fourth day, He established a greater light for the day and a lesser light for the night, ensuring His creation would never be shrouded in total darkness (Genesis 1:14-19).

Throughout scripture, light symbolizes God's presence. In Exodus, He provides light to the Israelites as they journey through the wilderness. The arrival of Jesus is heralded by a bright star, a beacon of hope. John writes, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:4-5). Jesus calls His followers the light of the world, urging us to "let [our] light shine before others, so that they may see [our] good works and give glory to the Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Have you felt the warmth of God's presence? Or perhaps you've felt the weight of darkness pressing in, threatening to extinguish your light. As Christians, we navigate a paradox: we are chosen heirs of the kingdom (Ephesians 1:11), seated in heavenly places with Christ (Ephesians 2:6), and filled with the Holy Spirit (John 14:26); yet, some days, it can feel as if God's light has dimmed.

Our opening verse promises a future free from darkness, where we will eternally bask in God's glory. As we celebrate the birth of our Savior, let's also remember His death—the key to eradicating darkness now and forever.

Today, I challenge you to reflect on the light of God within you. Are you a blazing bonfire visible from miles away, or a gentle nightlight offering comfort in the dark? Are you high-beam headlights cutting through a winding road, or a flickering candle lifting spirits in a choir of "Silent Night"? Regardless of how brightly you feel you shine, we all carry the Lord's light and are called to let it illuminate the world around us.

Together, our lights can guide others out of darkness, leading them to the eternal hope found in Christ. Your light—however faint or fierce—can spark hope in someone struggling in the shadows, encouraging them to step into the everlasting light and endless hope of salvation.

So in the night, my hope lives on.

Recommended Listening: There Came a Light by Chris Renzema, No Body by Elevation Worship, featuring Jonsal Barrientes, We Are by Kari Jobe

For Reflection:

When you have experienced dark periods in your life, who has been a light to help guide you out of the darkness?

How can you build the fire in your heart for God?



December 25

Christmas

Luke 2:1-21

The Birth of Jesus Christ

1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The Shepherds and the Angels

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

21 And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.