Advent Continues Through Us…

Love God, Love Our Neighbors, and Serve Others: Our identity at FBC. We are centered on being the Church Christ has called us to be. As a small piece of the Body of Christ, we are moving towards fulfilling God’s plan for the Church in the city of Sweetwater, as well as the world. All of us, from children to adults, have a special role to fulfill in the Body of Christ. Join us in the New Year as we seek to Love God, Love Our Neighbors, and Serve Others.

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First Baptist Church

Advent Devotional

“The Chorus of Advent”



December 7, 2014

- to -

December 27, 2014

















What is This?

 The Advent Season (Four Sundays before Christmas through Christmas Day) comes around only once a year. Advent marks the beginning of the Christian Calendar and builds towards the celebration of the birth of Jesus; God’s incarnation into human history. Too often, we miss out on Christmas because we allow the hustle and bustle of the season to take over our lives. The Season of Advent helps us to slow down and prepare our hearts, our lives and our families to truly celebrate the birth of Jesus, our Messiah.

 Here at First Baptist Church, we have many talented people who love God and use their gifts to glorify God. In this devotional booklet, we have just a sampling of those here at FBC who live out their lives in a way that reflects the life of Jesus. The authors range from Youth to Senior Adults encompassing the fullness of diversity at FBC. May God use their writing to bring Advent into a focus and priority of celebration in your life this year.

 For each devotional, read the scripture passage in your favorite translation. Then read the devotional for that day. Finally, the author has provided a short prayer at the end of the devotional as a guide.

 This is the 5th Anniversary of the Advent Devotional, so we have included some devotionals from previous years to celebrate the history of the publication.

 Thank you for all that you mean to us as a staff here at First Baptist Church of Sweetwater!

**God’s Vessel (From 2010)**

December 27: Acts 28:23-31

 No matter where we are; in another country or our own backyard, we have encountered people that were convinced of the truth and some that have disagreed with the truth. Did you continue to share or get discouraged and quit?

 Even though Paul was under guard, he continued to share God’s word. Paul chose to hear, see and understand, and then be the vessel God called him to be.

 No matter what your circumstances might be, the Gospel is meant for all. May you be the vessel God has called you to be.

*Lord, help me to have ears that hear, eyes that see, and a heart that understands so that I might be a chosen vessel to share your love, peace and grace with your people.*

--Dee Anna Lay--

**Love (From 2012)**

December 26: Matthew 28:16-20

 In our daily lives, we have seen the love of Jesus in so many ways. Just a few months ago, my oldest son, Mason, has become eager and ready to know and learn more and more about Jesus. I know that because of the love Jesus has for us, my son has been a great influence on myself and the rest of our family.

 In Matthew, Jesus is telling the disciples to go and preach to all the nations and teach them how to be Christians. Jesus assures them that no matter where they go, He is with them always. The disciples did exactly what was commanded of them and went and preached and taught the nations to obey Jesus’ commands.

 The disciples clearly had such a great love for Jesus that they obeyed his every command. As we live our lives, we should live them the way disciples did and preach to the nations of today just as the disciples did. We also need to have the knowledge to not only go and preach, but also to listen and know how to recognize the signs that God gives us. Ho awesome it is to know that Jesus loves us so much! He promises to be with us until the very end of the age. I want to have that same love for Jesus that the disciples did.

*Dear Jesus, I want to thank you for the love that you have shown to us. I ask that you give me the guidance to go and be able to talk to others about you. Jesus, I love you and ask that you give me the knowledge to know when to listen and when to talk.*

--Joshua Silva--

**The Comfort of Hope**

December 7: Isaiah 40:1-5

It has been said that a person can live for about a month without food, a week without water, 10 minutes without air, but not a moment without hope. For the Jews in exile in Persia, hope was exactly what they needed. So God instructed Isaiah to speak comfort to his people, reassuring them that their past sins were paid for. The hope of leaving exile, and returning to Jerusalem to rebuild will soon be realized.

Historically, when eastern kings marched their armies through the desert, the way was prepared for them, and hindrances were removed so the army could march through quickly. Can you imagine an army trying to march with intimidating force but having to stop every few minutes to move tree branches or go around objects in the road? No, these armies had a team going before them to clear the way.

Isaiah 40:3 starts, “a voice of one calling, in the desert prepare the way for the Lord”. This sounds familiar because these are the words the John the Baptist spoke of himself, preparing the way for Jesus. John the Baptist baptized people with water, calling them to repentance of their sins and preparing them for Jesus, who would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

May the Lord prepare our hearts and remove the hindrances of sin, doubt, and pride through the teaching of His word and conviction of His Spirit. May the high, prideful thoughts be brought down, good desires planted, crooked and rugged tempers made straight and softened. May he remove every inhibition so that we will be ready for His will on earth and prepared for his heavenly kingdom.

*Lord, prepare my heart right now, because I want to know you better this advent season. I want to serve you more and see your mighty hand at work in my life, and in the lives of those around me. In Christ’s name I pray, Amen.*

--Robert Eaker--

**My Hope and Stay**

December 8: Micah 5:1-4

 Many Christians can easily finish this statement from a beautiful old hymn: “My hope is built on nothing less than \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”. Our ultimate hope is spend eternity with Jesus. But we also have hopes that are less eternal – I hope it rains; I hope it doesn’t rain; I hope my team wins; I hope I get a raise. We realize these kinds of hopes are unpredictable. We may be disappointed by the outcome.

 Micah’s audience must have been thoroughly confused. The idea of a Messiah or a Savior was a mystery. The idea that their Great Leader would come from the small town of Bethlehem must have been even more confusing. Christians today have the great advantage of looking back at the many promises God has already fulfilled to make our hope totally predictable.

 During this Christmas season, let’s enjoy the mysteries of God, but remember to embrace the hope of a secure future in Jesus. Our eternity has been built on His blood and righteousness!

*Father, your Gift of a Savior is an overwhelming blessing. Thank You that we can “wholly lean” on the Solid Rock!*

--Karen Harrison--

**The Perfect Announcement**

December 25: Luke 2:1-20

 Upon the arrival of our first born son, we labored to create THE perfect birth announcement in order to share our great news with our beloved family and close friends. We wanted the "important" people in our lives to share in the joy of our precious gift.

 That is in stark contrast to how God planned the announcement of his only Son's birth. The news of our Lord and Savior's birth comes first to some shepherds--among the lowliest of the emperor's subjects. In those days, shepherds were not considered desirable company. They were poor, illiterate, dishonorable and thought of as thieves because they grazed their flocks on other people's property.

 Throughout his ministry on earth, Jesus continued to serve the poor, helpless, weak and unlovable. Centuries later, the Savior is born for us and his birth is good news for ALL people. His reign continues to break into our world wherever the lowly are lifted up--wherever the outcast are welcomed, wherever the hungry are fed, wherever the poor are clothed and sheltered, wherever the captives are set free, wherever enemies are reconciled, wherever the good news is proclaimed, sins are forgiven, and lives are transformed. God did not intend on making peace only with the spiritual elites and culturally powerful, but with all people. We did not earn it. We do not deserve it. He came because he loves us and that love extends to all.

 Just as the shepherds had moved from the dark coldness of night into the brilliant light of God’s glory, so to do we get to experience the warm and loving presence of God’s Spirit in our hearts by the grace of Jesus Christ our King when we repent of our sin and place our faith in Him.

*Just as you came to those humble servants on Christmas night, you have come for me. With your angels, I rejoice in the gift of your Son.*

--Lisa Eaker--

**Following the Star: Magi (From 2011)**

December 24: Matthew 2:1-12

 My children love being in the country. They always go outside after dark to gaze at the stars: one of the most beautiful gifts God has created for all to see. Kurt always says, “The stars are so beautiful and peaceful.”

 When the Magi heard of the birth of the “New Born King,” their long journey began to find this most precious child. They followed the star in the Eastern Sky to guide them to the Christ Child where they presented him with honorable gifts of great value and meaning: Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. They fell to their knees and worshipped him.

 How far would we travel to see our “King?” Would we honor him with the most valuable gifts? This Christmas season, bow down and worship the “King of kings,” “Lord of lords,” “Prince of Peace” as the Magi did. He gave his life so we might have Eternal Life; Life Everlasting. In the peacefulness of a quiet, clear night, go out and reflect on the beauty of God’s creation, the magnitude of his greatness, and experience the beautiful creation which led the Magi to our Lord.

*Dear Gracious Heavenly Father; May we all follow your Guiding Star and Worship you as the Magi did! May our hearts be filled with gratitude and joy during this Blessed Season in which we celebrate your birth.*

--Barbara Hale--

**The King is Coming**

December 9: Luke 1:26-38

 It was a Sunday morning, just like many before. I entered the sanctuary and sat in my usual seat. Then it happened, the choir was full and a young man with a trumpet was seated with them. The music started and Helen Costin began to sing the intro to the song "The King is Coming." The young man started to play the trumpet and the choir joined in to sing “The King is Coming." It was the most moving and Spiritual experience I can remember having before or since.

 Luke, in his book of the bible chapter one verse twenty six through thirty eight tells the account of the announcement of the birth of Christ. I doubt if words can describe the fear and excitement that filled Mary's mind and heart when the Archangel Gabriel appeared to her and told her she would be the mother of the Christ child. The King of Kings, Lord of Lords, The creator of all that is and will be. God in human form, the Savior of all who would accept Him and obey Him. I am sure she was stunned and scared beyond belief, but she was overjoyed and full of hope to see all this come to pass.

 I hope and pray that all of us, as members of the family of God and First Baptist Church, Sweetwater, would be overjoyed and full of hope to see all that God has planned for us as we follow Him in His plan to redeem the world. We are blessed every day with His grace and love so let us share that with others on our journey of life.

 And His love endures forever. Amen.

*Lord, Thank you for the hope of your return and allowing us to be a part of your plan for redeeming the world. Amen.*

--Wendell Williams--

**Joyful Praise**

December 10: Luke 1:39-56

 I remember the first night after the birth of my firstborn. I couldn’t sleep; all I could do was lie there and watch her. I felt like my heart was going to burst. Such joy, excitement and hope all bundled up in front of me! Words couldn’t express my thanks for such a wonderful gift.

 How much more joy must Mary have felt! Elizabeth recognized Mary’s faithfulness in believing that God will do all that He has said. Elizabeth said that Mary was blessed for her faithfulness. The act of faith alone brings peace, hope and joy to the restless soul. To know that God cares for each of us personally and acts on our behalf give me much hope. Even when there is much darkness and I can’t see the solution, I can follow Mary’s example and trust God to provide.

 I love Mary’s response, “I’m bursting with God-news; I’m dancing the song of my Savior God. He remembered and piled on the mercies; piled them high. It’s exactly what he promised, beginning with Abraham and right up to now.” I too love to sing songs to praise to God for all His mercies, now and forever. What a wonderful time to reflect and praise God for the hope He gives all His children.

*God help me live so that all can see me dancing the song of my Savior God and share your love and mercies with those I meet each day.*

--Debbie Moore--

**The Chorus of Love**

December 23: Matthew 1:18-25

 Watching the birth of one’s child is the most magnificent experience one can ever feel. I know it was for me. Love exploded from by heart and euphoria filled every ounce of my body. I knew that I was seeing a true miracle from God.

 Of course anyone would be ecstatic at the birth of their child. That is natural right? But what if the expected child isn’t going to be yours? What if your fiancée, who was supposed to be a virgin, was already pregnant? Can you imagine the confusion, anger and humiliation you would feel? Would you be able to still love your fiancée and her child?

 This was exactly the position in which Joseph found himself. To say Joseph lived a society that would find these circumstances scandalous is an understatement. In fact he could have legally had Mary stoned, her family could have been social outcasts. But Joseph chose not to hate, but to love.

 In Matthew 1:18-25, we see Joseph’s first reaction is to quietly send Mary off to have her baby. Most likely a divorce would ensue; thus, no embarrassment and no scandal.

 However, an angel of Lord came to Joseph and explained truth about Mary’s pregnancy. One could only imagine Joseph’s bewilderment. But Joseph loved God, because of his love for God he chose to love Mary and her expected baby. Because of God’s love he sent his only begotten son for our salvation. The chorus of love! Oh how sweet it is.

 Love for our children is natural, but Christ like love is a choice. What a wonderful world we would have if we chose to love like Christ loves us.

*Heavenly Father, thank so much for your love, it is our prayer that we learn to love ourselves and our neighbors like you love us. Amen.*

--Mike Wilks--

**Gripped by Fear: Herod (From 2011)**

December 22: Matthew 2:1-15

 Fears and insecurities often cause us to miss out on opportunities in life. A fear of heights might prevent you from enjoying the beautiful vistas at the top of Pike’s Peak. Social anxieties could keep you from forming a new friendship. Lack of confidence often keeps us from sharing our faith with unbelievers.

 In Matthew 2, King Herod was presented with the opportunity of a lifetime. He had received firsthand knowledge of the birth of Christ and could have gone immediately to worship him. Herod knew about the Old Testament prophecies telling of the coming Messiah. He feared that this future king of the Jews posed an imminent threat to his kingdom, and he allowed this insecurity to consume him. This eventually led to Herod’s plot to kill Jesus in an attempt to eliminate the perceived threat to his throne. Herod completely missed the point. He was so focused on the things he was afraid of losing that he missed the chance to know the true King of kings.

 Take a moment to list some of the things you fear most. What are you missing out on as a result of those fears? 2 Timothy 1:7 tells us that God did not give us a spirit of fear. Since fears are not from God, we should seek his help in overcoming them. The Christmas season offers many chances to share Christ’s love. Let us be mindful of these opportunities and not allow our own fears to cause us to miss out as Herod did.

*Father, please keep us from being anxious and allow us to trust in your sovereignty. We don’t want to miss the point this Christmas season. Show us where you want to use us and allow us to be your vessels. Thank you for sending your Son in whom we can have forgiveness and everlasting life. Amen.*

*­*--Ashley May--

**Hope in a Promise**

December 11: Luke 1:57-80

 Most people want to find someone to love, get married and start a family. I was no different. But moving back to a small town with hardly any single people my age was discouraging. I remember finally crying out to God asking "why". Why bring me back to a place where I have a lonely future. That night God made me a promise. He said chase after and love me and I will take care of you. One year later I met my husband. Now celebrating one year of marriage with a beautiful son, there is no denying that God kept his promise.

 In this passage God's promise to Elizabeth and Zechariah is fulfilled with the birth of John. With the recognition of his son, Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit, and shares his prophecy. He speaks of God's promise of a savior and how His people will be redeemed. He also talks about the important role his son, John, will have in leading God's people to salvation. Once again God kept His promise to His people.

 In life we sometimes forget the promise God has made us. He has promised to love and take care of us. We only have to trust in Him and follow Him completely.

"My hope is built on nothing less

Than Jesus Christ, my righteousness;

I dare not trust the sweetest frame,

But wholly lean on Jesus' name."

 I encourage you to pray and listen to what God is saying to you. Follow Him and recognize the blessings He has for you. We can all find hope in the truth that God keeps His promises.

*Lord, thank you for your promise to love us.*

--Mollie Brock--

**God Keeps His Promises (From 2009)**

December 12: Nehemiah 9:16-25

 My Daddy always said, “You’re only as good as your word.” He meant that you must always keep your promises to other people. God always keeps his promises to us.

 In spite of all the evil, God did not give up on his people. He led them with a pillar of cloud in the daytime and a pillar of fire at night. Even though they sinned, he provided manna and water for 40 years to nourish them as they wandered in the wilderness as punishment for their sins. God provided for all of their needs and continued to give them blessings. He led them to the Promised Land and allowed them to become a great nation. God prepared the land for them. They didn’t have to work. They took cities with strong walls, houses already built and filled with good things, and crops already planted. All of this was provided because of the goodness of God. He kept his promises to his people even though the people did not keep their promises to him.

 Hardly a day goes by that we don’t make a promise to ourselves or someone else. We promise to do something, quit doing something, or do something differently. But do we keep our promises? God set the perfect example of keeping promises. He never fails to keep a promise to us.

*Lord, help me to follow your example and keep my promises to you and others just as you always keep your promises to us.*

--Linda Maikell--

**God’s Great Faithfulness (From 2009)**

December 21: Luke 2:25-38

 Have you ever prayed for, hoped for or wanted some particular thing to happen? Maybe you anticipated its happening for weeks, or months, or even years and it didn’t come about. How did that make you feel?

 This is the situation with Simeon in our scripture passage for today. In some way God had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. A long time, we don’t know how long, had passed. Don’t you imagine Simeon would begin to feel disappointed, or discouraged, or doubtful? But he didn’t spend his time moping about it. The scripture tells us he instead was in the temple serving, praying and worshipping. This is what we are called to do while we wait for Jesus’ coming. Then it happened! Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus arrived at the temple. They had come to obey the Jewish Law of consecrating every first born son to the Lord. Imagine Simeon’s utter joy when he saw this baby and recognized him as the long-awaited Messiah! His response? Thankfulness and praise to God.

 All of this says two specific things to me. First, it tells of Simeon’s deep and abiding faith. Probably through the years he has been ridiculed and laughed at because of his belief, but he continued to wait expectantly with hope, and serve God while waiting.

 Second, it reminds of God’s great faithfulness. As the lonely old hymn says, “Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, blessing all mine and ten thousand beside.”

*Dear God in Heaven, thank you for your faithfulness. Thank you for being our anchor that we can trust and depend on during life in difficult times.*

--Beth Densmore--

**Comfort and Assurance (From 2009)**

December 20: Isaiah 40:1-11

 When adversity or hard times come our way, we sometimes feel that God has abandoned us. This is not the case. He is always near, all we need to do is just seek him. We can find comfort and encouragement in his word.

 At this point, the book of Isaiah shows how God will reunite Israel and Judah and restore them to glory. Isaiah told the people to prepare to see God at work. His promises would not fail. He is the divine shepherd and he would lay down his life for his sheep. He cherishes his sheep and feeds them.

 We need to remember that we will have trials and sufferings, but our faith need not be hindered by them. God’s word is eternal and unfailing. Let us find lasting solutions to our problems and needs in God’s word.

*Lord, may I always remember that your love and assurance are unfailing.*

--Barron Bird--

**The Peace of Reconciliation**

December 13: Isaiah 11:1-10

 The world can be a rough place. Sometimes it chews us up and spits us out! Even everyday life can cause stress and worry. Jesus told us how the ordinary cares of the world can choke out the fruitfulness of the Spirit in our lives. *Matt. 13:22*

 Israel knew all about trouble, stress, and the hardships of life. They had a long history of being conquered, captured and mistreated by surrounding nations. It was easy for them to be pessimistic, even depressed, about life. In the midst of their trouble, God sent a messenger, the prophet Isaiah, to bring them a promise of a coming Messiah….a promise of PEACE.

 Isaiah explained that when the Messiah begins His reign, it won’t just be a “cease-fire” kind of peace, where there is still a lot of mistrust and suspicion. It will be the kind of peace that only reconciliation can bring. Lions and tigers and bears (oh my!) along with wolves and snakes will no longer be dangerous predators. His reconciliation provides true peace between the Creator and His creation.

 This Christmas season, don’t just seek a “cease-fire” with the troubles and cares of the world. Embrace the reconciliation Christ provides to the Father and experience a true PEACE, indeed.

*Lord, thank you for the peace of reconciliation.*

--Glen Harrison--

**The Chorus of Hope**

December 14: Jeremiah 31:31-34

At Christmastime, children hope that they have been good enough for Santa Claus to bring them lots of presents. As a child, I remember staying up late on Christmas Eve, hoping to receive the newest toy or video game. Today I still enjoy giving and receiving gifts during the Christmas season, but it’s important to remember that Christmas is about the greatest gift of hope given to mankind.

Today we use the word hope to describe wishful thinking, such as “I hope the Dallas Cowboys win the Super Bowl.” (Maybe this year) The Bible defines hope as the assurance and conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). Jeremiah 31:31-34 prophesies about the new Covenant God established by sending our Savior Jesus Christ to be crucified for the redemption of our souls. Jeremiah’s prophecy about the new Covenant gave a chorus of hope to the house of Israel and Judah. They held onto the assurance and conviction (hope) that words that come from God do not return to Him empty without accomplishing what He desires and without succeeding in the matter for which He sent it. (Isaiah 55:11) We know that God’s Word, spoken through His prophet Jeremiah, is true since this prophecy was fulfilled.

 Christmas creates an opportunity each year for Christians to share the good news about Jesus Christ. The Bible says that if you confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9) By surrendering our lives to Jesus Christ, we have the assurance that one day we will share in the splendor, radiance and everlastingness of God.

Dear Jesus:

*Thank you for giving us the ultimate hope that one day we will be in your presence and that we will dwell in safety. Help us to remember that You living in our life is the assurance of glory and thank you for establishing a new Covenant by giving your life that we may all receive hope.*

--Steven May--

**Sing a Song (From 2009)**

December 19: Isaiah 12:2-6

 Sing, Sing a Song, Sing out loud, Sing out strong, Sing of good things not bad, Sing of happy not sad” – Carpenters. During this time of the year everyone sings, especially Christmas carols.

 Isaiah has given us a psalm (song) of thanksgiving for a time when we are thankful for salvation. Throughout the Bible are examples of God wanting us to sing for all types of reasons: at the birth of Jesus the angels sang.

 This time of year we need to be singing not just carols, but songs of thanksgiving for all God has done for us. He has given us The Way to live our lives, The Way to treat each other, and The Way to look forward to the future. Lift up your voices in praise and thanksgiving for all that he has done. I am thankful for all the Lord has done for me. And even though I cannot sing, I do my best to praise him with songs all year long.

*May God give us strong voices to sing songs of thanksgiving and praise. May we be blessed at this time for the gift of salvation that God sent us with the birth of Jesus.*

--Steve Roberts--

Rejoicing in the Lord by Serving

December 18: Philippians 4:4-7

 I have a relative that she gave up all she owned except her clothes and her truck. She is homeless. She serves the Lord daily, no matter what God asks her to do. That gives her joy. She loves sharing what she has. She loves helping others. If she had to give her shirt off her back to someone, she would. She has made God her first love. She rejoices in the Lord daily. She doesn’t think about herself. She helps me in the Church and she does not expect any pay because she loves her God. God allows me to bless her with food, money, and things she needs. She helps me deliver SNAP meals and the people on the route bring us joy. She gives her time to serve.

 As we see in Philippians 4:4-7, rejoice not for all things – but in all things. It all begins with rejoicing in the Lord. Be thankful with what you have. Be joyful in giving to all, even your enemies. Give your worries to God: no need to worry. Pray to God, he is the cure for all. Thank God for what he has done in your past, present, and future. Let all your needs be known to God. God can do all things. Give your heart and mind to God.

 I challenge people to rejoice in the Lord by serving the homeless, poor and elderly. Also, volunteer your service to something and don’t expect pay. God will reward you in another way. Donate things that you are not using. Don’t have a yard sale for the money, donate it to a good cause like Goodwill or Love and Care Ministries that helps the homeless and poor. You will be blessed. Serving will put joy in your heart. If people would give to the Kingdom of God, the world would be a better place.

Lord, help me to rejoice with others as they have been blessed and help us all to use our finances and blessings in the way you want us to use them.

--Doris Coe--

**Model of Peace**

December 15: 1 Peter 3:8-12

 Recently we have seen great unrest in the city of Ferguson, Missouri. No matter the cause, or the views held by those involved … and those who placed themselves into the equation … peace would not be a word to describe what we have seen. And yet, we are reminded in this Advent season that peace is offered to the whole world in the person of Jesus. And we, as God’s children, His church, have a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate the peace of Christ in this season.

 In 1 Peter 3:8-12, we are given very practical ways to not only experience, but to model, peace in a world where there is so much unrest. We are admonished to “keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies” and to “turn away from evil and do good.” That would tend to speak to our need to refrain from reacting in ways that are sinful. But then we are told to be proactive … to “search for peace, and WORK to maintain it.” At the beginning of the passage we are told that we should all be of one mind … to “sympathize with each other as brothers and sisters” … to “be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude.” And while the world (that doesn’t understand peace) would say that payback is the way, we are instructed to pay back insults with blessings! Look at the promise God gives to those who will pursue His peace … “the eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right, and His ears are open to their prayers.”!!! (Exclamation points belong to this writer)

 As you go through this season, will you have the opportunity to model peace? I think so! In the parking lot at the mall when looking for the only open parking space … or in the store when someone else may be reaching for the gift item you were looking for … or in the checkout line? Remember, though, that it is in your heart that God watches. It is your attitude first, that determines your actions.

*Father, help me to be at peace with you first. Then, I pray, help me to be your hands, feet, and voice actually modelling peace to everyone around me. When asked to share where my peace comes from, allow me the joy of sharing the Christ of Christmas with those who ask. Thank You for providing my peace with You through Your Son and my Savior, Jesus Christ.*

--David Woods--

**Glorifying God through Song**

December 16: Isaiah 42:10-17

 Songs have been used throughout history to express emotions. People put into song their life events that have impacted them in intense ways, both positively and negatively. As a listener, a great song can move us emotionally in ways that no written word alone can. There is power in a song.

 The verses in Isaiah 42:10-17 are titled "Song of Praise to the Lord.” Isaiah speaks of singing a new song. Songs would no longer be confined to the temple at Jerusalem. They would be sung the entire world over. Songs would ring out from every corner of the earth, by all people. Songs from Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, young and old. Toward the end of the passage, Isaiah is filled with passion about spreading the Good News of our Lord and Savior. He will no longer be silent.

 This advent season let a new song enter your heart as never before. Be filled with the boldness and power that filled Isaiah. Shout to the Lord a new song, His praise from the ends of the earth.

*Lord, we honor and glorify you with our songs. We will shout of your goodness until our last breath. We will not keep silent or hold ourselves back. We will turn the darkness into light for your sake. Amen*

--Cathy Wilks--

**Setting Things Right**

December 17: Zephaniah 3:14-20

 I will never admit such a thing vocally or to my guy friends, but I love the movie *Hairspray*…I might even get a tear in my eye near the end. It’s a musical, it’s a girl movie, it’s everything I despise in theatre; but in watching it, I leave wanting to be a person who stands up for others, who takes up the cause of those who have been mistreated, who makes things right in the world. There is something in our inner most being (or there should be) that desires justice, that longs for what has gone wrong to be set right.

 The words of God through Zephaniah are beautiful for all the same reasons. God is promising to set things right, to take up the cause of those who have been mistreated, to bring his kingdom to fulfilment. The words are powerful and must have brought hope and joy to those who first heard them. God’s love was moving as words from the mouth of Zephaniah.

 Today, those words ring true in our own lives. To know that my Creator rejoices over me with singing brings with it emotions that cannot be expressed. The beauty of the story is that the work of God to set right what has gone wrong is fulfilled through the work of Christ and the Church. We are to be the hands and feet of God moving in the world, bringing redemption and reconciliation to a lost and hurting world. The question is, “Am I living out the example Christ set for me?” Advent is a great place to begin to focus on being part of God’s plan that started with the baby in the manger.

*Lord God, thank you for being my Creator and allowing me to serve you in your Kingdom work. Help me to be an instrument of change in the world, never forgetting that “The Lord my God is with me, he is mighty to save.”*

--Tique Hamilton--