

WESLEY FREEDOM

ADVENT 2022



DAILY
DEVOTIONAL



Advent Fest 2022

November 27th, 2-4PM

Come make an Advent wreath for your home!

All materials will be provided. This is a great activity for family & friends! Register at wesleyfreedom.org/kids



Family Services Cast Sign-Ups

Cast members and readers are needed at all of our Family Christmas Eve services to share the story of Jesus' birth. Register your child(ren) 5-years-old and up at wesleyfreedom.org/kids

DECEMBER 10TH & 11TH SPECIAL WORSHIP

Dec 10
7PM

Community Cantata

Invite your friends and neighbors to this community performance of our Christmas Cantata! This year our choir & Cantata Orchestra usher in the Birth of Christ with *Winter's Grace* by Joseph Martin.

Dec 11
9AM

Cantata Worship

Hear the proclamation of Christ's birth by the choir and orchestra! There will not be an 8:00am or 9:30am service this day.

Dec 11
11AM

Blue Christmas Service

The Christmas season can be hard. This service is to share the love of God in ways that heal us and make us whole.

Dec 11
6-8PM

Drive-Thru Nativity

See the story of Christ's birth acted out by our youth all around the church grounds in this annual Wesley Freedom tradition!



Welcome to the 2022 Wesley Freedom Advent Devotional!

Each year, it is the tradition of the Church to prepare for our major feast days (holidays) with a season of fasting and spiritual preparation. For the four weeks before the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus Christ, Christians take time to reflect on the nature of the Incarnation – God becoming human – and the great gift that God gave us two millennia ago. In this Advent season, we also anticipate the second coming of Jesus Christ and the final redemption of the world.

In the modern era, churches also use the four weeks of Advent to reflect on four theological themes that help us understand the significance of Christmas – Peace, Hope, Love, and Joy. These themes will guide the reflections in this devotional guide.

As a companion to this devotional, you are encouraged to make or buy an Advent wreath. The wreath is one of the most powerful traditions of Advent. The round wreath symbolizes the endless love of God which encircles us. The four candles on the wreath symbolize the hope, peace, joy, and love which Christ shines into our lives. A single candle representing Jesus, the light of the world, is placed on the inside of the wreath. We invite you to bring the tradition of the Advent wreath into your home.

If you have an Advent wreath, each Sunday in this Devotional will provide a prayer to accompany the lighting of the Advent candles, lighting one additional candle each week of the season. Each weekday day of Advent, light the candles for that week and take a few minutes to read and pray with us. Each weekday has a scripture reading and a brief reflection & prayer written by the staff, members, and friends of Wesley Freedom. Saturdays will be days of rest with no readings.

May this Devotional help you to make this Advent season a time of spiritual renewal & reflection this year!

Rev. Ian Collier
Associate Pastor & Editor, Wesley Freedom Devotionals
The Feast of All Saints, 2022

Sunday, November 27

The First Sunday of Advent – The Candle of Peace

Jesus is the light of the world! Lighting candles in our homes and sanctuaries gives us the opportunity to celebrate Jesus, who is the light of God in our midst. Each Sunday of Advent we ignite one additional candle signifying our growing expectation for the coming of Christ in glory. On Christmas Eve and Day, we will complete this ritual by lighting the white Christ candle in the center. Today, we light the first candle and pray for peace.

One: Jesus is the light of the world. In him there is no darkness at all.

All: **Jesus cast out our darkness and lead us towards peace.**

(One candle is lit)

Pray Together:

Above the clamor of our violence your Word of truth resounds, O God of majesty and power. Over nations enshrouded in despair your justice dawns. Grant your household a discerning spirit and a watchful eye to perceive the hour in which we live. Hasten the advent of that day when the weapons of war shall be banished, our deeds of darkness cast off, and all your scattered children gathered into one. We ask this through him whose coming is certain, whose day draws near: your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ at Christmas, take this opportunity to pre-register for one of Wesley Freedom's Christmas services at <https://wesleyfreedom.org/Christmas> or by scanning this QR Code:



Monday, November 28
Matthew 1:18-25

REFLECTION

Advent, the season of expectation, begins for Joseph with a surprise! Unlike us, Joseph didn't know that Christmas was coming. His planned wedding and simple carpenter's life with Mary was unraveling due to the discovery of her pregnancy. Perhaps you can recall a few moments in your life when your plans and expectations were interrupted. Perhaps even today there is some uncertainty around what the days and years ahead will bring.

Into this place of fear and confusion, Joseph receives life-altering news. Mary is pregnant by the Holy Spirit; the child she carries will be named Jesus, "for he will save his people from their sins." The immanent interruption to Joseph's life plan will be one who can save Joseph and all people.

This Advent you will not experience peace because everything goes according to plan (like it even could, anyway). True peace will be found in a relationship with Jesus who comes to forgive you and love you unconditionally. Seek to spend these Advent days preparing your life and family to welcome Jesus, rather than planning for a party in his memory.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, come and save me this Advent from overwhelming plans and impossible expectations. Help me find true peace in your presence and share your peace with those around me. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Jenny Smith is the Senior Pastor of Wesley Freedom.

Tuesday, November 29
John 14:15-27

REFLECTION

Peace can be defined as “A stress-free state of security and calmness with everything co-existing in perfect harmony.” As we move through Advent and look forward to celebrating the birth of Christ, how many of us feel peace in our lives?

I love this time of year. Everyone has lights on their houses and decorations inside, we sing special songs, and eat treats all month long. The building anticipation of Christmas, the family traditions, the colder weather and snuggling by the fire – it sure can feel peaceful when it all lines up right. But it takes so much work to get there! With all the shopping, baking, and decorating, it is hard just to take a moment to sit and feel it.

The good news is that peace isn't a feeling we have to chase. It's not the perfect light display or Hallmark movie & cookie combination. Peace is given freely to us by Jesus. We can rest easy in the truth that all who love Jesus and obey his commandments will be filled with the Holy Spirit. Love Jesus and love others as yourself. No matter how many holiday “to-do's” you have, I hope you feel the peace of Jesus in your heart this Advent and always.

“Let There Be Peace on Earth, and let it begin with me. Let There Be Peace on Earth, the peace that was meant to be. With God as our Father, brothers all are we. Let me walk with my brother in perfect harmony. Let peace begin with me, let this be the moment now. With ev'ry step I take Let this be my solemn vow: To take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally. Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me” (*Let There Be Peace on Earth* by Sy Miller).

PRAYER

Lord, thank you for filling me with your Holy Spirit to teach me and to remind me to always put love first. Your peace is the calm I need in this busy world. Amen.

Jennifer Parisi is Wesley Freedom's Sunday School Superintendent.

Wednesday, November 30
Ephesians 4:25-32

REFLECTION

We are emotional beings. A lot of times we feel emotions we would rather not feel. Anger and frustration bubble up inside of us because of situations we experience. It seems like these emotions would separate us from God's love and peace. However, Paul points out that it is okay to be angry and feel even those negative emotions. But it matters how we react to those emotions, and how long we hold onto them. Sometimes we must act in anger to right a wrong in the world or to correct an injustice; Matthew tells us of Jesus behaving this way in the temple. But when anger causes us to sin, and be bitter, and lie, and strike out at others, then we are not living our lives for God's glory.

Paul tells us the behaviors we should embody in order to spread the peace and grace that can benefit our communities. The way to bring about God's peace and fulfill Christ's mission on Earth is, no matter how we are feeling on the inside, to "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you." That is easier to say than to act upon, but it is the way to live so we can be the presence of Christ in the world today.

PRAYER

Dear God, please help me be a presence of Christ's love and peace here on Earth. Even when I am frustrated and angry, please help me treat others with the respect, kindness, and forgiveness that Jesus showed to all of us. Help me build up the people around me and help me be a blessing to those in need. I ask this in the name of your son, Jesus. Amen.

Mike Stebner serves on Wesley Freedom's Leadership Development Team.

Thursday, December 1
John 20:19-23

REFLECTION

The world in which we live is a chaotic place; it is easy to lose sight of Jesus and his promises because of the challenges, trials, and tribulations around us. These things have created a lot of fear over what is to come, and they have increased doubts and anxieties within us. We scramble for anything that can help keep our minds and hearts at rest. Growing up, I did not fully understand what peace was, but I had always heard my folks talk about the “Prince of Peace.” I heard them say, “Jesus is the Prince of Peace,” and I was encouraged to talk to him whenever I felt uneasy within because he helped people “feel better” when they prayed. Since then, when I experience some difficult time, I talk to Jesus through my heart or voice, and I don’t feel the heavy weight anymore – even though the difficult time is still there, momentarily.

In John 20:19-20, Jesus was standing amongst the disciples and then he said, “Peace be with you.” This passage helps me understand that, for the disciples, peace was present because Christ (the Prince of Peace) was present with them. Their joy (and peace) was activated when they “saw” the Lord – in other words, when they came to know he was standing among them and had spoken directly to them. This peace was the encouraging kind – a peace filled with hope.

Reading verses 21-23, I am confident that there is hope. This was Christ’s mission on earth: to let us know that all is not lost, there *is* hope! Christ commissions us (his disciples) to do the same – to confidently share this hope that brings peace and joy to the world. By the help of the Holy Spirit, I will keep sharing this hope.

PRAYER

Thank you, Jesus, for the Hope you brought to mankind. Life is meaningful because you were, and always have been, mindful of us. Thank you for keeping us in perfect peace as we grow in the knowledge of your Son and by your Spirit; empower us to keep sharing you to the world – one person at a time.

Judith Oyedele serves in Wesley Freedom’s Worship Band.

Friday, December 2

Isaiah 2:1-5

REFLECTION

Isaiah's prophecy paints a beautiful picture of what will happen if we learn to walk in God's ways: a world where relationships between people have been restored and made whole, and no one is hungry or at war. In fact, in this prophecy, weapons will even be turned into tools to grow food. The people in Israel were expecting great things to happen when the Messiah's rule was ushered in. They expected a mighty military figure, a king with armies, chariots, and swords. Can you imagine seeing the peace they all longed for coming in the form of a baby being born into a lowly manger?

We, too, journey into the Advent season expecting great things to happen. We hope that God will bring peace among the fighting nations, intervene, stop the Coronavirus, and do something about poverty, corruption, and racism. We expect God to do something special in our families. We wait for extra-ordinary things to happen to us which will miraculously lead us to walk in God's light. But, if we only expect God to act for *us*, we may be as surprised as the Israelites were when we see people from all tribes and nations saying, "***Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.***" This Advent, we remember what God has already done, and we prepare for what he is about to do in the second coming of Jesus. Isaiah encourages us to embrace this hope for a future with God.

PRAYER

Lord, help us this Advent season to not only wait for huge events, but to go and see your mighty hand working in ordinary places in our daily lives. Help us to look into the eyes of pain and suffering – the orphans, widows, the sick, those in recovery and struggling with mental illness – and find you doing life-changing things. Help us to look for you among the deserted and outsiders. Help us look for you in a simple manger.

Shannon Reinhardt is the Director of Wesley Freedom's Hope Rising Resource Center.

Saturday, December 3
The First Sabbath of Advent

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” (Exodus 20:8-11)

PRAYER

Lord, help me make your Sabbath holy. Through your Holy Spirit, compel me to take the rest I need, and restrain me from withholding rest from others. Amen.

Sunday, December 4
The Second Sunday of Advent – The Candle of Hope

One: On this second Sunday of Advent, we light two candles and we pray in hope.

All: **Jesus is the light of the world. In him there is no darkness at all.**

(Two candles are lit)

Pray Together:

God of hope, you call us from the exile of sin with the good news of restoration. You build a highway through the wilderness. You come to us and bring us home. Comfort us with the expectation of your saving power, made known to us in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Monday, December 5

1 Peter 1:3-12

REFLECTION

As we prepare to celebrate Christ's birth, today's reading brings us back to our own birth – not the natural birth through which we came into the world, but our “new birth.” St. Peter writes that this birth into the Christian life brings with it not only the salvation of our souls but also hope, for we know that death is not the end, and our own resurrection is waiting for us.

As Methodists, we stand with the historic Christian faith in confessing that the Sacrament of Baptism provides us fully with all the grace and divine empowerment needed for us to be born again. Yet, our tradition goes one step further. For us, the new birth is not merely receiving God's grace, but also cooperating with it to live a transformed life. As St. Peter writes, God “has given us a new birth into a *living* hope.” The same grace of God which empowers the source of our hope – resurrection – also demands that this hope be more than an abstract belief in life-after-death; hope must become a defining feature of the way we *live*.

This is the difference between an ‘almost hope’ and an ‘altogether hope.’ Someone with ‘almost hope’ will really, sincerely believe that resurrection is coming, but they will live as if death is the end of life, and their priorities will be the same as anyone else's. We strive for an ‘altogether hope.’ Believing that we have been gifted resurrection, we dare to cooperate with God's grace and allow God's hope to live in us – meaning that we dare to respond to times of trial in ways that would not make any sense unless we were counting on God's inheritance for us. This is a living, altogether hope.

PRAYER

God of hope, thank you for our new birth and the promise of resurrection. Help us live as those who not only believe, but who have altogether hope. In our living and in our dying, may our lives testify to our living hope in our inheritance in heaven and our place in the world to come.

Rev. Ian Collier is the Associate Pastor of Wesley Freedom.

Tuesday, December 6

Luke 1:5-25

REFLECTION

A scripture's meaning can change from one reading to the next. Sometimes our focus is on a particular verse, or maybe something is occurring in life that impacts our interpretation. This time as I read this passage, it is Zechariah who grabs my attention. He was righteous in the sight of God, observing the Lord's commandments and decrees. Yet, when an angel visits him in the sequestered silence of the temple – an angel bringing him news of such a great joy in a son he thought he would never have – Zechariah's righteousness and faith seemed to fail him. "How can I be sure of this?" he asks the angel. Where is your faith, Zechariah? It made me think of a young virgin who would soon receive a visit from an angel with a similarly amazing message. I began to wonder about my own faith and whether it was more like Zechariah's – strong at times, but maybe shallow – or would it be like Mary's faith – unwavering, but with questions as she tries to understand how this magnificent thing is going to happen.

Even though Zechariah's faith seemed to fall short in an important moment in his life, God still kept his promise to Zechariah and gave him a son! This son was filled with the Holy Spirit even before he was born; a son that would make ready a people prepared for the Lord! That tells me there is hope! There is hope for each of us as we try to live our faith righteously in the eyes of God, following his commandments, loving God and loving each other as God loves us. There is hope for eternal life with Jesus Christ. We are not a perfect people, and even when we fall short on faith, even when we question, doubt, or want proof, God keeps his promises!

PRAYER

Dear gracious and loving God - whether our faith is strong or weak, your arms are always wrapped around us. Your promises are always kept. Please help each of us grow more righteous in your eyes and allow our faith to be ever strong as we walk through this season of Advent with great anticipation and so much hope. Amen

Mark & Teresa DeVault lead Wesley Freedom's South Carroll Food Pantry.

Wednesday, December 7

Isaiah 11:1-10

REFLECTION

As we meditate on the coming of Christ this Advent season, we sit in hopeful anticipation of the fulfillment of God's promises to us. These verses in Isaiah describe the coming of the Savior as a branch growing from Jesse's roots. Jesse's was the father of King David, of whose house Joseph was a part. Tracing the Messiah's lineage to Jesse rather than explicitly to King David is interesting. Perhaps it emphasizes the humility of the Lord which we will see again in the Christmas story.

These verses illustrate a number of promises that will be fulfilled through the life of Jesus:

1. He will judge the poor and meek with righteousness and equity.
2. He shall destroy the wicked with his breath.
3. An unfathomable peace will arrive; predators will lie down with prey.
4. The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord.

As Christians who live with the knowledge of the Risen Lord, we are tasked with the responsibility to live as the fulfillment of these verses. We are charged with employing peace, love, and community in uncomfortable scenarios. We are charged to be lions laying with calves, no matter what advantage feasting upon them may provide us. We are charged to be calves laying with lions, in spite of how vulnerable it may feel. These tasks may seem unreasonable. But this Advent season, think about situations when you may be a lion and when you may be a calf and find ways to lie in peace with your foe.

PRAYER

Righteous Lord, thank you for your life that you sacrificed for our sins. Help us to be more like you, in thought, word, and deed. Give us the strength and courage to employ peace, love, and community, even when it may be tough. May the Earth be full of the knowledge of you. Amen.

Jared & Katy Revay serve in the Wesley Freedom Tech Ministry, Middle School Ministry, and Sunday School.

Thursday, December 8
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

REFLECTION

In this passage, I see the Lord wanting me to know that when others pass away, we grieve their presence not being with us anymore. But God wants me to find hope! When I and others die, we'll be with him, and this is why we have hope. I don't need to be scared of death. When my time comes, others don't have to be upset, because the Lord has me in his hands. I will be in a better place and the Lord wants hope with our sadness when it happens.

My complete take away from these verses for everyday life is that whenever I am having a horrible week that feels like it's never going to end, there's a light at the end of the tunnel and the Lord has my back and knows what I am going through – even in the worst of times. I know he will put something good into my life. This verse has taught me that God's Kingdom is the same way – peaceful and good even on the bad days, because I have Jesus by my side, always.

PRAYER

God, let us have hope, even in the face of death. Take away our fear and remind us that you are always with us. Amen.

Aubrey Metz is a Middle School Youth at Wesley Freedom.

Friday, December 9
Daniel 7:1-28

REFLECTION

This was a challenging scripture for me. While Daniel was experiencing a dream of biblical proportions, I was struck by the similarity of Daniel's dream and the reality of the horrific hallucinations that my son deals with as he lives with the illness of schizophrenia. Early in his diagnosis, when the entire family was reeling and things were unstable for him, I found myself in a strange and dark place. While I was outwardly functioning, I was struggling. It was during this dark time that I had a profound and personal faith experience. I felt the presence of God in what felt like a laying on of hands. That moment gave me the strength to get up, to begin to educate myself, to advocate for my son, to help our family find a way of coping with this new reality. I found hope, not for a specific outcome, but a true grounding of trust and faith in God. Hope helps to guide me out of bed each day, knowing that as the day unfolds God will help me see it through. A personal saying that is central to my life is "Live in hope and grounded in reality." I remain hopeful that my son can live his best life in a safe environment, and I live in the reality that there is no miracle cure for schizophrenia or the social stigma that surrounds it. With God's help I hope that I can continue to be part of the support he needs.

The season of Advent brings renewed hope for all of us who celebrate the birth of Jesus and anticipate his second coming. Our reality is by living into that hope we agree to continue the ministry that Jesus began. The first step, as my son has taught me so richly over the years, is to love like Jesus.

PRAYER

*God of hope, remind us of what it means to place our trust in you.
Help us to rely on you through each day of our lives. Amen*

Sherry Perrine is the Director of Children & Family Ministries.

Saturday, December 10
The Second Sabbath of Advent

“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath
and from doing as you please on my holy day,
if you call the Sabbath a delight
and the Lord’s holy day honorable,
and if you honor it by not going your own way
and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,
then you will find your joy in the Lord,
and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land
and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.”
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” (Isaiah 58:13-14)

PRAYER

*Lord, help me make your Sabbath holy. Through your Holy Spirit,
compel me to take the rest I need, and restrain me from
withholding rest from others. Amen.*

Sunday, December 11
The Third Sunday of Advent – The Candle of Love

One: On this third Sunday of Advent, we light three candles and
we pray for love.

All: **Jesus is the light of the world. In him there is no darkness
at all.**

(Three candles are lit)

Pray Together:

**God of power and mercy, you call us once again to celebrate
the coming of your Son. Remove those things that hinder love
of you, that when Christ comes, he may find us waiting in awe
and wonder for him who lives and reigns with you and the
Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

Monday, December 12
Luke 1:26-38; John 3:16-17

REFLECTION

There is probably no greater source of inspiration for contemporary music than love – being in love, love lost, physical love (and the lack thereof). It seems like the best thing for a music career is a series of intense breakups and rebounds. Yet, when this is our dominant example of ‘love,’ our understanding of God’s love for us becomes distorted. In love songs, it’s possible for love to come to an end – it can even turn into hate when a partner is unfaithful. On the other hand, love songs also show how romantic love can become toxic, with one partner enduring abuse or losing themselves for the sake of the other. For this reason, the *feeling* of love (as good and holy and righteous as it can be) is, in truth, only ever ‘almost love.’

But God’s love for us is an ‘altogether love.’ For God, love is not a feeling. God’s love is not something that we can cause to turn sour by our actions, and God’s love is not something that is going to force us to lose ourselves (deny ourselves, yes; purify ourselves, yes; but not become someone we aren’t). Rather, God’s love is God’s free choice (from before time itself) to create the world – even knowing that God would have to die so we could live *and* that our existence wouldn’t add anything to God’s own pleasure. God’s love is God choosing us over and over again just because it’s God’s unchangeable nature. God *is* love.

So, instead of worshiping a God who is a ‘love song’ sort of love, this Advent we are reminded that God is a *The Who* sort of love. A love that reigns over us. A love that falls on us in our good times and our bad, when we don’t deserve it, and when we’ve done plenty that would make anyone else walk away. God reigns over us, and therefore, so does Love. And there’s nothing we can do about it.

PRAYER

Love, reign o’er me. Love, reign o’er me, rain on me...The nights are hot and black as ink Oh God, I need a drink of cool, cool rain. Love, Reign o’er me. Amen. (from “Love, Reign O’er Me” by The Who)

Rev. Ian Collier is the Associate Pastor of Wesley Freedom.

Tuesday, December 13

1 John 4:7-21

REFLECTION

As I reflected on this scripture, I thought about the importance of letting people know that we love them. When my brother-in-law tragically died in 2003, I felt the intense need to constantly let my sister know how much I loved her. To this day, we never end a conversation without saying, “I love you.” This became a common practice with my parents, husband, and daughters, as well. We recognized how fragile life is and how important it is to let people know we love them.

The first time I read this scripture, I thought that this was all that it was describing. I was only partially right. I had already accomplished the easy part – loving those easy to love – family, friends, colleagues. However, Jesus loved everyone and lived out perfected Love. This can be a challenge when our feelings and emotions affect our ability to truly have *agape*, or “selfless love,” for all God’s people. Fortunately, we have the blessing of Jesus Christ as an example of perfect Love and how to love the seemingly unlovable. Sometimes I imagine Jesus next to someone who is a challenge for me to love, with his arm around them in full *agape* love. I try to focus on the love that God placed in me as an infinite resource to love those I encounter. Transforming God’s love for me into *agape* love for others is what it means to truly live a life filled with the spirit of Jesus and love – the spirit of the same God who loved us enough to send his son to live among us so we may live through him.

It is important to let my loved ones know that I love them, but to love all people is living in the spirit of God’s love.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, give me the strength and clarity to see you in all those I encounter. Give me the wisdom and tools to help those in need and love them. Amen.

Cindy Shruell is the Front Office Assistant.

Wednesday, December 14

Hosea 11:1-4

REFLECTION

Hello! Any parents out there? How about anyone that has ever had a parent? For you parents – how do you describe that endless, bottomless, unconditional love that you have for your kids? For me it defies description. If any of you are expecting, parents-to-be...just wait. A whole new thing is hopefully coming your way. I can think of nothing else in my life's experience that better informs my perspective in comprehending God's love for us outside of my love for my family.

The book of Hosea describes the Israelites as a nation that had turned away from God's teachings. God's children, led astray by the shiny objects and earthly passions that surrounded them, forgot who their Father is. And even though that nation had turned away, God did not turn away from them; the eternal love and faithfulness of God would not turn away. God's faithfulness, his eternal love, and the grace given to us as described in Hosea are gifts without measure. How blessed are we to have a Father that loves us so?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, please open our eyes. Unveil to us the depth of your love for us, that even when we are swayed by the things that surround us in this world, we find love and salvation in you. Let us see clearly the distractions of this world that would keep us from you. Let us love you with all our hearts and minds and souls in the realization that you, our God, are all that we truly need.

Cragg Entwistle serves in Wesley Freedom's Worship Band.

Thursday, December 15
Romans 8:1-39

REFLECTION

I am a worrier by nature, and I have been for as long as I can remember. The constant “what if’s” have a permanent spot in my brain. It’s easy to follow their curious voice down rabbit trails that lead me nowhere but straight to exhaustion and fear. But, what if...I can remember how much God loves me? Romans 8 is filled with the reminder of the confidence we can claim as Christians. No matter the fictional doomsday story I make up in my mind for today’s “what if,” I can have confidence that God will be there working for good.

Does it mean everything that happens to me is good? **No.** Does it mean God *makes* bad things happen? **No.** But it does mean that, no matter what, God can bring our circumstances and experiences to good. Even if my worst-case scenario plays out, I have peace knowing God can use it in powerful ways I cannot imagine.

Because of God’s love for us, he sent his son, Jesus, to be born and take on human form. Jesus died and was raised again, and because of this, we can face each day with the confidence that God is in our corner, fighting our battles. If he went to such great lengths with his son, why should we think for one minute that he’d now turn around and abandon us in our day-to-day hardships? Anything we face in our day he is prepared for. The good things, the bad things, and everything in between, he is there loving us through it. None of those “what if’s,” whether real or fictional, can separate us from him. What if...I am loved beyond measure by the God of the universe? Now that’s a rabbit trail I’d like to follow!

PRAYER

Father God, thank you for loving us so much that you made us heirs to your kingdom through the death and resurrection of your Son. Help us to remember that your love for us knows no bounds and there is no thing and no one that can separate us from you. We ask for peace and confidence in knowing just how much you love us. Amen.

Sarah Gibson serves in Wesley Freedom’s Worship Band and supports the Middle School Ministry Band.

Friday, December 16
Psalm 136:1-9, 23-26

REFLECTION

I sure hope I'm not the only one who struggles to read this passage without singing some good ol' Michael W. Smith circa 2001. What I do know is both David, the author, and Michael W. Smith used this writing as a declaration of truth: God's love endures all things. David urges us to focus on the *who* and *when* of this truth. His repetition of the words "God" and "forever" not only emphasize how God's love works, but also reminds us that it is only God whose love works this way. Christmas is a reminder, and Christ is a continuation of the steadfast love God's been offering us since the beginning of creation. Nothing, from long holiday checkout lines or the pain of a grieving heart, can stand against this love. Not today, not tomorrow, not ever. As we enter into the darkness of winter, I pray this scripture can be a light in your life. If you, or someone you love, finds themselves in a low estate, may David's song be the one to get stuck in your head this week: His love endures forever!

PRAYER

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. O give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever. O give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever. O give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever. Amen.

Taylor Boone is the Director of Youth Ministries.

Saturday, December 17
The Third Sabbath of Advent

“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.” (Deuteronomy 5:12-15)

PRAYER

Lord, help me make your Sabbath holy. Through your Holy Spirit, compel me to take the rest I need, and restrain me from withholding rest from others. Amen.

Sunday, December 18
The Fourth Sunday of Advent – The Candle of Joy

One: On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we light four candles and we pray with joy.

All: Jesus is the light of the world. In him there is no darkness at all.

(Four candles are lit)

Pray Together:

O Lord Jesus Christ, whose first coming brought joy to your waiting people, keep us in faith and hope as we eagerly await your coming again. Amen.

Monday, December 19

Luke 1:39-45

REFLECTION

“Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”

As our final week of Advent anticipation begins, we enjoy a moment shared by Mary and Elizabeth. The two women are likely hiding out from the crooked looks of their community. Their swelling bellies are scandalous. Elizabeth is well past menopause and Mary is with child before her marriage. In a practical sense, their families are in turmoil now, and there will be heartache ahead. Still, in this moment they embrace, encourage each other, and share tears of joy.

Like these two, you can likely name present struggles and future concerns. Human life is imperfect and includes struggle. Advent is all the more important in light of these realities. Advent reminds us that God chose to come be with us through Jesus and that Jesus, who sits at God’s right hand in heaven, will return to usher in an age of absolute peace, justice, and love.

We can rejoice today in the midst of our struggles because we are not alone. Jesus is with us, and we have each other. On a deeper level we rejoice in the promise of what is to come!

Moments of joy today, altogether joy ahead!

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, give me faith to trust in your promises. Help me notice the causes of joy you bring to this day and help me anticipate the joy you will surprise me with tomorrow! Amen.

Rev. Dr. Jenny Smith is the Senior Pastor of Wesley Freedom.

Tuesday, December 20

Psalm 30:1-5

REFLECTION

“Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”

~ Psalm 30:4-5

Joy is a divine gift; it can come after a deep sadness, after the tears to cry have dried up. This Psalm brings me back to last September. When I woke up one morning, my eyes would not work together to form a single picture. There were too many images in my head to make sense of the world. Strangely, being without sight made aspects of my life more clear. I could see joy in every breath and every smile. The loss of physical sight taught me to “live by faith and not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7), because I could not see well enough to walk up stairs or along a sidewalk. I remember going to the neurologist for the first time. Each step was nauseating and disorienting; but, I had an anchor. My husband was holding my hand and guiding me through each doorway. Isn't that how Jesus helps us navigate through life?

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

~ Romans 15:13

We all have an anchor. Jesus guides us through the rocky and unsteady parts of life. We can turn to God when life gets disorienting. God will fill our lives with joy and peace while supporting us every step of the way.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, please remove any veil from our eyes that keeps us from seeing you. Help us to remember that you are always here with us, supporting us with your right hand. Please fill us with your joy and peace as we go forward today. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Kayla Solinsky serves on Wesley Freedom's Hope Rising Resource Center Grant Writing Team.

Wednesday, December 21

Luke 1:46-56

REFLECTION

What makes your heart sing? What brings joy to your being? What fills your soul with praise for God? These questions came immediately to my mind as I read Mary's praise to God in these familiar verses from Luke 1, often called the Magnificat. As I contemplated these questions, several answers quickly flooded my mind: the miraculous birth of a baby, the magnificence of a sunset, the beautiful music of a symphony. All of these things cause my soul sing with praise to my God, the Creator.

However, God is more than a Creator. We read in Mary's reaction to the angel's news that she, a young virgin, had found favor with God and would become the mother of the Lord Jesus, the Savior of the world. This God to whom Mary sang praises is a God of Action, a God who showed the nations that the world was living life all wrong: the poor, not the rich were to be blessed; the humble, not the proud were to be raised up; the hungry, not the well-fed were to be cared for; and the servants, not the rulers were to be esteemed.

Oh, to be like Mary – to see the need to serve, not rule; to give away, not take; to be last, not first; to love, not hate; to include, not snub; to share, not hoard; to raise up, not put down; and to encourage, not ignore!

Mary's song of praise to her God and her willingness to be a servant is a call to each of us to use our God-given gifts and graces to serve our God, to spread God's love throughout our community and the world that other hearts might sing, glorifying God's holy name.

PRAYER

Humble us, O God Almighty, that we might be more like Mary – serving you with joyous hearts and singing your praises for all to hear. Amen and Amen.

Lorena Stone serves on Wesley Freedom's Adult Discipleship Team.

Thursday, December 22

Luke 6:12-36

REFLECTION

The Gospel of Luke was the first book of the Bible that I ever read start-to-finish, and it remains a foundational element of my faith. Maybe it's Luke's emphasis on social justice that resonates with my millennial heart. Or maybe it's the way characters in the story keep bursting into song like they're in a musical. In this passage, we get a solo from the Son of Man himself. It's a familiar theme, echoing the "reversal of fortunes" we hear from Mary in Chapter 1; this song could be titled "Magnificat (Reprise)." In these two stanzas of blessings and woes, Jesus paints a picture of God's Kingdom. Notice that this is not merely a future event. Fully half of these "blessings and woes" are delivered in the present tense: "Yours *is* the Kingdom of God." While we hope for the joy that comes in the morning, we also look for the glimmers of joy that surround us at night.

We've heard a lot about the good that God has done, is doing, and will do. Now we are called to take our own active part in creating that good. "Love your enemies," Jesus says. He then clarifies that when he says, "Love," he doesn't just mean to speak well of them, or to have loving feelings toward them. When Jesus tells us to love our enemies, he is speaking of an active love: "Do good to those who hate you." If someone has injured you, freely offer them the opportunity to do it again. Perhaps this is hyperbolic, an exaggeration for effect. But look at Jesus' actions as an example. He has called twelve of his disciples to be "apostles," his inner circle of followers. Among them is Judas Iscariot, the one who will ultimately betray him. Jesus knows this and invites him in anyway. What an act to follow.

PRAYER

Loving God, help me to love. When I am poor, when I am hungry, when I weep; when I am hated, excluded, insulted and rejected; grant me an awareness of your Kingdom that surrounds me, and hope for the Kingdom to come. When I am rich, when I am full, when I am highly regarded, help me to remember my responsibility to those who are in need. Give me your joy, and lead me in your love. Amen.

Dan Eschliman is the Director of Worship.

Friday, December 23

Isaiah 35:1-10

REFLECTION

Jesus was born to save you on Christmas Day.

And, as if that weren't gift enough, Isaiah 35:1-10 promises that "He will come to save you," replacing all earthly sorrow with the "everlasting joy" that comes from exulting in God's awesome majesty.

It is hard to imagine eternal life; however, this passage inspires me to envision Christ's second coming as an "infinite Christmas." Invited in from the cold of the wilderness, we will be called into a celebration far greater than the one we enter into each Advent season. Glory like that of the great mountain of Lebanon, striking beauty of Carmel, and lushness of Sharon will fill the senses of the redeemed. Moreover, God literally will enable joy where it would otherwise be impossible! Isaiah tells us that streams will appear in the desert at Christ's return and "the eyes of the blind shall be opened." Talk about Christmas presents!

This "Holy Way" is for God's people alone and we, as that body, are challenged to share the Good News of Jesus, now and year-round, with the perfectly imperfect resources and voices we currently possess. Isaiah reminds us to "strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees," so that others may know to be strong and fearless in light of hardship.

It is not easy to maintain that hope amidst daily challenges but, in faith, the mission Jesus started at His birth continues through us and will result in the unending praise and joy of limitless Christmases.

PRAYER

God, bring us along your Holy Way. Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear!" Lord, come to save us! Amen.

Tessa McKenzie serves on Wesley Freedom's Leadership Development Team.

Christmas Eve, Saturday, December 24

Luke 2:1-21

REFLECTION

For the people in the Roman Empire, certain titles – Savior, Son of God, Lord – could mean only one thing: the Emperor. And with good reason! Augustus had ended the turmoil that erupted after the death of Julius Caesar, he had transformed Rome into a powerful empire in which someone could safely travel from the Atlantic Ocean to Persia. Business and commerce flourished. Augustus & Rome rewarded those friendly to them regardless of ethnicity or former allegiance – as long as you had faith in Rome, Rome would bless you. In this way, Augustus was an ‘almost savior’. An almost savior will bring peace – as long as you can bear the harshness of their sword. The almost savior will bring wealth and prosperity – so long as you give them a cut. The almost savior will make you great, and influential, and happy in this life...and all it will cost you is your soul.

But Christ, the true savior, comes instead as a child born to ordinary people on the edge of the Roman world. He brings a peace that is not won by the sword, or forged by alliances with the powerful, but rather a supernatural peace declared by angels to simple shepherds. Christ brings a hope that is not for wealth in this life, but for the death of Death and a new life in the world to come. Christ brings a love that is not *quid pro quo* for how devout and public one’s praise for him is, but a love which is absolute and infinite – a love for humanity that is so strong that it empowers humanity to truly love God once again. And Christ brings a joy that is not for the powerful, but for the lowly – a joy at the sort of salvation that means good news for the poor.

Today, we do well to mark the strange qualities of *our* savior, and all of the ways that ‘almost saviors’ – in the first century and today – continue to try to convince us to settle for ‘almost salvation.’

PRAYER

Glory to you, God, in the highest heaven, and let your peace be known on earth, among all of humanity. Help us to hear the good news of Christ’s birth once again and trust in him alone as our savior. Amen.

Rev. Ian Collier is the Associate Pastor of Wesley Freedom.

Christmas Day, Sunday, December 25

John 1:1-18

The beginning of John's Gospel may seem confusing when you first read it. The remainder of the passage, however, makes it clear that John is referring to *Jesus*. John asserts that *Jesus*, the Word, was there at the beginning with God, during creation, and that through *Jesus* all creation came into existence. It is through *Jesus* that life and light came to all humanity; *Jesus* is a light for all the people, he brings grace and truth.

Jesus' coming into the world – the Word made flesh, Immanuel, God with us – was a life-changing event for those with whom he came in contact, and it is still so for those who come into contact with him today. At the same time, we read of a man sent from God, John the Baptist, whose mission was to witness to Jesus, to prepare the people for his coming. John did not know when Jesus would come; he was simply preparing the way.

We, too, are called to serve as witnesses to Jesus. In our baptismal covenant, we pledge to faithfully participate in the ministries of the church with our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, *and our witness*. Like John, we are called to witness to the coming of Jesus, to prepare the people for a time when he will come again. In Advent, we remembered that we live in a period of hopeful waiting for the second coming of Jesus, but it is not an idle waiting; we still have a mission. We are called to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Just as John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus, we can prepare others for Jesus to come again, through telling our own faith stories and being that witness for those with whom we come into contact.

PRAYER

As we hopefully await the second coming of Jesus, please let us not be idle. Let us faithfully witness through the sharing of our own faith, letting those with whom we come into contact better know Jesus, so that they might also be witnesses to Jesus as they live out their own lives, secure in the knowledge that he is our Lord and Savior and will, indeed, come again. Amen.

Kevin Silberzahn is the Lay Leader of Wesley Freedom.

Monday, December 26

Thank you for joining us for this season of preparation and reflection! It is our prayer that through these scriptures, devotions, and prayers, your faith has been deepened and you now enter the Christmas season with fresh eyes. Our next Wesley Freedom Daily Devotional guide will be published for the Christian season of Lent (Ash Wednesday, February 22, 2023 – Easter Sunday, April 9, 2023). If you would like to join our team of devotion authors, we would love to work with you! Pastor Ian is happy to provide any help and guidance you may require. Your voice will be a blessing to the congregation. If you are interested in joining the team, email Pastor Ian at icollier@wesleyfreedom.org.

While this season of daily devotions are coming to an end, know that Wesley Freedom continues to produce a weekly devotional with daily readings & reflection questions year-round! Print copies can be found on the back of each week's Sunday worship bulletin and digital copies are sent out to our Wesley Freedom Devotional email list. You can subscribe at wesleyfreedom.org/devotion.

In the coming week, consider continuing your devotional practice with these daily readings:

- Monday: Matthew 2:1-12
- Tuesday: Matthew 2:13-23
- Wednesday: Luke 2:21-35
- Thursday: Luke 2:36-40
- Friday: Luke 2:41-52
- Saturday: Sabbath

May God bless you, now and always.

Merry Christmas!

Rev. Ian Collier
Associate Pastor & Editor, Wesley Freedom Devotionals



Coming January 2023!

**Grace Flows Through:
A Refreshing Approach to the Christian Faith**

Somewhere beneath the eroding shell of religiosity portrayed in the news – somewhere deeper than the judgement and division – there runs a river of grace. This current propels us forward and invites us to take a refreshing look at the relentless love of God.

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Sunday Worship Beginning January 8th

- 8:00AM – Traditional Service with Holy Communion
- 9:30AM – Traditional Service with Sunday School & Nursery Care
- 11:00AM – Contemporary Service with Nursery Care & Children’s Breakout Opportunities

Learn more about all of our in-person & online worship opportunities at wesleyfreedom.org/worship



MERRY
CHRISTMAS