

WESLEY FREEDOM

ADVENT 2023

DAILY
DEVOTIONAL



More Opportunities



A Very Family Stellar Christmas!

December 3rd,
2pm-5pm

Join us for a special family Christmas program from our VBS team! Sign up for singing, dancing, games, crafts, snacks, and time with the Sparkies!

Register at
wesleyfreedom.org/kids



Christmas Eve Cast Sign-Ups

Cast members and readers are needed at our 2pm & 4pm Family Christmas Eve services to share the story of Jesus' birth. Register your child(ren) 5-years-old and up at
wesleyfreedom.org/kids

Sunday Worship Times & Sunday School

- 8:00am - Traditional Communion Service.
- 9:30am - Traditional Service. Nursery & Sunday School for all ages provided.
- 11:00am - Contemporary Service. Nursery is provided.

DECEMBER 9TH & 10TH SPECIAL WORSHIP

Community Cantata

Dec 9
7PM

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 *One Incredible Moment* by Max Lucado and Tom Fettke, as well as a brand new Christmas song written by WFUMC Director of Worship Dan Eschliman, "Christmas Is For Everyone".

Dec 10
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 10
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.

Welcome to the 2023 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 (counted Sunday to Sunday), 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 the Advent season we also anticipate the second coming of Jesus Christ and the final redemption of the world.

As a companion to this devotional, you are encouraged to make or buy an Advent wreath. The wreath is one of the most beloved modern 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 inside of the wreath. We invite you to bring the tradition of the Advent wreath into your home.

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 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, 2023

Sunday, December 3

[Isaiah 52:7-10](#)

As we begin the season of Advent, we begin to light the candles of the Advent wreath. If you have others in your household, consider reading today's scripture responsively as marked below as you light the first candle on your Advent wreath.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
**who brings good news, who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."**

Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy;
for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion.

Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem;
for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.

The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations;
and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

(light one candle)

PRAYER

Glorious God, source of our hope, as we remember your promises of old, help us live into your coming future. As we reflect on the prophecies of Advent, help us prepare for the coming of Christ. As we commit ourselves to the ways of peace, help us find joy in the journey. Amen.

Monday, December 4

[Luke 1:5-25](#)

REFLECTION

What are your deepest prayers and hopes this Advent? In this opening reading we encounter Zechariah, an aged priest, who continues to pray even as his hopes to hold a child of his own or witness the Messiah grow dim. Many of us would have grown weary, but Zechariah faithfully worships. It is here that an angel interrupts his devotion declaring, “Do not fear, Zechariah, for your prayers have been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son.” This news alone is enough to make any old man speechless, but there is more! The Messiah is coming, and Zechariah’s son will be the voice in the wilderness making a way for him.

Today’s lesson reminds us that Jesus does not just show up in the manger. God had been preparing for the Word to become flesh since the beginning. The prophets had promised a Messiah to set God’s people free. Generation after generation had prayed and longed for deliverance. Zechariah was just seeking to be faithful by saying his prayers. Through these simple practices he made room for God in his life and was able to hear and respond to God’s invitation for him to play a part in God’s plan for salvation.

You have three weeks from today until Christmas. Claim this season as an opportunity to make space for God’s presence to be known and God’s voice to be heard. Each day say your prayers. Decorate your home with signs that point you towards Jesus. The hope this Christmas is not that you escape life through festival, but that Jesus enters your life with the news, “Fear not, your prayers have been heard...you will know joy and gladness.”

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, still me, calm my fears, gift me with faith, that I might hear and share the good news of Christmas. Assure me of your saving presence so that I can be present this Advent in ways that share your hope, peace, love, and joy. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Jenny Smith is Wesley Freedom’s Senior Pastor.

Tuesday, December 5

[Luke 1:57-79](#)

REFLECTION

Let me set the scene: parents who are too old to have a baby are told by angel Gabriel that they would bear a miracle baby. Dad struggles to believe it and is then made mute by Gabriel for his unbelief. After his wife has the baby, his praise is directed toward God for how the child would prepare the people for Christ's coming by preaching about sin, forgiveness, and repentance.

I look at the perfectly planned birth of John – how God planned each specific detail as John “grew and became strong in spirit” – all to lead us to the “tender mercy of our God,” and I can't help but question: How many times in my own life would I have been made mute because of my doubt? Or how many moments have I felt God speaking to me, but I allowed my own sin and fear to keep me from obeying?

During this Advent season, we are waiting with hopeful anticipation for the arrival of Jesus, and we reflect on how we can prepare our hearts and homes for Christ's second coming. May we trust in the details of God's plans for us. May we quickly obey no matter how overwhelming the task is that we are being given. May we never stop praising God for what he has done, what he is doing now, and what we know he will do in the future!

PRAYER

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come to his people and set them free. He has raised up for us a mighty savior, born of the house of his servant David. Through his holy prophets he promised of old, that he would save us from our enemies...In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace. Amen.

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

Wednesday, December 6

[Philippians 2:1-11](#)

REFLECTION

This scripture calls to mind the hymn, “Love Came Down at Christmas,” (UMH #242) first published as a poem in 1885 by Christina Georgina Rossetti.

*Love came down at Christmas, Love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas; star and angels gave the sign.
Worship we the Godhead, Love incarnate, Love divine;
worship we our Jesus, but wherewith for sacred sign?
Love shall be our token; love be yours and love be mine; love
to God and all men, love for plea and gift and sign.*

It seems, through the ages, that we have been able to overcomplicate things and forget the living example that Jesus came to provide. This becomes especially challenging during the Advent and Christmas seasons as we tend to become “me” focused as individuals and families. We strive to provide the perfect Christmas through decorations, gifts, and food. The retail industry makes it normative to foster selfishness with flashy displays and ads. How do we shift our attention and become more intentional? How do we embrace the qualities exemplified by Jesus the man?

We have a unique opportunity to lead with love, using Jesus as our model. We can be, as Eugene Peterson states, “deep-spirited friends;” loving, serving, caring for and listening to each other. Jesus embodied humble service, which is in sharp contrast with most of our everyday lives. In this busy season, can we return to the simple, direct, and sincere approach and embrace love for all?

PRAYER

God, in this demanding and stressful world that we are living in, help us slow down. Help us to focus on Jesus as the perfect representation of how to embrace your people. Guide us to fully grasp the depth of your love for us. Amen.

Sherry Perrine is Wesley Freedom’s Director of Children & Family Ministries.

Thursday, December 7

[Colossians 1:15-23; Colossians 2:9-15](#)

REFLECTION

“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Holding it together: the story of adulthood. I’m currently in my 30s and trying to hold it all together. *“Dadda, my turn! MY TURN!!!” “Daddy, I need help RIGHT NOW!” “Husband, tell me about your feelings and vulnerabilities!” “Son, make sure you are driving 5 miles under the speed limit, deer are running!” “Sir, you can’t bring that four-course meal into the theater!”*

The point is, being a fully functioning human in this world is not easy, no matter what stage of life you’re in. We try to establish patterns and systems to help us make sense of things. So much of the time, those structures that are seemingly indestructible in our minds come crumbling down around us, and we are left standing dumbfounded, even despairing. We feel broken, incomplete.

But here’s the (really) good news, according to St. Paul, though we alienate ourselves from God, and we’ve been fractured time and again, “in Christ [we] have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.” In other words, God’s got this. We are reconciled to the fullness of love and holiness – God – because the Lord wishes it to be so; not due to anything we can do other than to “continue in [our] faith” and “not move from the hope held out in the gospel.” Holding it together is all well and good. Just know that when you can’t, it’s okay, because you never really were in the first place. It’s God. Always.

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for canceling the charge of our sinfulness, nailing it to the cross and triumphing over the evils of this world. Help us to maintain the great hope of the Advent season, even when we feel like there is no way we can keep it together. You’re already keeping it together for us. Amen.

Tim McKenzie is Wesley Freedom’s Director of Youth Ministries.

Friday, December 8

[Hebrews 1:1-2:4](#)

REFLECTION

During this time of Advent, we are challenged to put aside our own selfish desires to focus on the reason for the season – the greatest gift from God – his Son, Jesus. It’s important to realize the sacrifice that Jesus made for us. In Hebrews, God expresses his love and respect for his only Son. In a biblical “chain of command,” the Bible says that Jesus is even higher than the angels and the angels are to worship him. Knowing this, that the Son of God has so much power and is even the creator of our world (John 1), yet he still longs to have a relationship with me, is a humbling thought. In John 15:15, Jesus even calls us his friends. To be called a friend by Jesus is a powerful thing. A friend will always have your back and be there for you no matter what! I take comfort in that – knowing Jesus has my back.

Know that Jesus has called you his “friend.” Now, return the favor by living a life that represents Jesus and what he stands for. Knowing the sacrifice he made, we should be thankful and grateful for the grace that God has given us through his Son. A simple act of kindness is a good way to start showing this love to others.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you for all that you have done in my life to show that you care about me. Please help me to be a better friend to you, to show others about your love. Thank you that your Word will never return void, and that you have given me the ability to spread that word. Give me the courage to reach out to others in a way that will cause them to draw near to you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

David Deisterhoft serves on Wesley Freedom’s Board of Trustees & Lay Leader Team.

Saturday, December 9
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 10

[Revelation 21:1-5](#)

On this second Sunday of Advent, we continue our tradition of lighting candles in expectation of Christ’s coming.

(light two candles)

PRAYER

God of mercy, you hear us when we cry to you and you come to save us. Touch us now with your healing power. Help us to lay before you every regret and disappointment. Give us courage to bring to you our grief and pain. Teach us to live together in love with our neighbors, and pardon us when we have acted against your will. Encourage us with your love. Guide our feet on the way of peace. In the name of Jesus, the healer, who binds all wounds and forgives our sins. Amen.

Monday, December 11

[Romans 5:1-11](#)

REFLECTION

We do ourselves a spiritual disservice if we treat Advent as merely the preparation for the remembrance of Christ's birth. True, this is part of it, but for most of Church history Advent's primary purpose was to prepare people for the Second Coming of Christ – the Apocalypse and our eternal fate. We, living between the First and Second Comings, would do best to always keep one eye on the future even while we celebrate what has happened in the past.

Two thousand years ago, God did what no rational person would do – he entered territory that had declared itself at war with him. We consummated our status as God's enemies on Good Friday when we murdered him. God knew that this would be the result of his incarnation, but God chose to become human anyway. He knew that the only way to save us from the eternal consequences of rebelling against the source of life (that is, eternal death) was to heal us of our sin infection – to transform us from the kind of people who would make war on God to the kind of people who can rest at peace with God and at peace with one another.

Through the manger and the cross, God closed the distance between himself and humanity, God sacrificed his own life for our forgiveness, and God opened the door for us to be not only forgiven but made righteous. Let us prepare, then, for the Second Coming of Christ and our final judgment with the confidence of those who are now at peace with God, and may we find that this confidence allows us to face the future unafraid.

PRAYER

Most merciful God, while we were yet sinners, you died for us in Jesus Christ. That proves your love for us. Forgive us, once again, for our sins and set our hearts right within us. Prepare us for your coming in glory and let us be reconciled to you for eternity. Amen.

The Rev. Ian Collier is Wesley Freedom's Associate Pastor.

Tuesday, December 12

[Luke 1:46-55](#)

REFLECTION

When I was in high school, I had an ambitious choir director. We sang The Canticle of Mary – The Magnificat – in Latin. I had no idea what I was singing about. Fast forward a number of years, I finally have some idea of what the scripture means and what it means for me today.

Mary reminds us of who God is. She gives examples of his might, mercy, strength, how he lifted up the lowly and filled those who are hungry for righteousness. She reminds us of God's promises and that he always keeps his promises. Mary *magnifies* the Lord. I had to think about this one – how can I magnify the Lord? The definition of magnify is to make things appear bigger than they really are. We cannot actually make God bigger, for he is infinite. But what we can do is to make God bigger in today's world that often loses focus on God. By saying yes and glorifying God and living Christian lives we can be examples to bring the focus back to God. This is so appropriate during Advent. We need to focus on the reason for this season.

Mary knew that she was carrying a divine child. She knew this was the savior God had promised. We need to know and trust God the way Mary did. We can do this by studying scripture to better know God. We are to accept him as our savior. He is savior to the lowly, the poor, and anyone who seeks righteousness. Mary says yes to being part of God's salvation. We should say yes as well, doing our part in God's plan for the salvation of the world.

PRAYER

Divine Spirit, guide me to fearlessly say yes to God. Help me follow and find ways to magnify you in my daily life. Help me to filter all the noise that the commercialization of Christmas has become. And help me to fulfill my part in God's plan. Amen.

M.J. Shannon serves in the Handbell Choir & Craft Group.

Wednesday, December 13

[John 1](#)

REFLECTION

“But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.”

My husband’s family sang joyfully and thunderously to welcome me into the Mudede family on our wedding day. They danced jubilantly, clapped, drummed, and ululated. One of the songs was “To the Mudede family a mother has come.” Although I was twenty-three years old, they received me as if I was “the world’s best matriarch.” On that day, I felt I belonged to a great family and made a commitment to give my best. I often ponder on that experience for strength when I feel weak.

Imagine what it is like to open your heart, receive Jesus, and believe in his name. To me, it’s a more joyous experience than what I experienced on my wedding day; it means embracing Jesus and allowing his character of love, grace, and truth to be my reflection.

When we welcome Jesus, we receive the authority to be part of God’s family! Jesus gives us life and helps us to shine in darkness. That is why he came in human form, though he is fully God. He came to save us and reveal God to us so that we know him more. Allowing him to dwell in us gives us power over sin. Jesus gives us strength and ability to overcome challenges or weaknesses.

Will you consider welcoming Jesus joyfully into your heart this Advent season? He is the King of Glory!

PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for coming to earth to save me. I joyfully welcome you into my heart. By your grace, transform my life so I can live according to your will. Help me to abide in you. Amen.

Emily Mudede serves on Wesley Freedom’s Church Council.

Thursday, December 14

[Psalm 22](#)

REFLECTION

A few years ago, my daughter asked me a hard question: In the Bible stories we hear in Sunday School, God is always talking to people. But when I pray, God doesn't say anything. Doesn't God love me, too? Why won't God talk to me?

This is the question King David asks in this psalm. David, the anointed king of Israel, is called "a man after God's own heart." But through all of that, David still questioned, "Why have you forsaken me?" Even Jesus, God's son, felt the divine absence and cried out, "My God, why?". And we, just one week away from the longest, darkest night of the year, must wrestle with this as well.

But there is hope. As you feel the absence of God, know that you are not alone. If David the king and Jesus the Christ could call out to God in frustration, surely so can we. God is strong enough to hear all of our honest prayers. Furthermore, the only reason we can feel the absence of God is because of the ways we have experienced God's presence. How could our souls and bodies tell us we need something unless that object of our yearning deeply and truly exists?

This is the paradox – the dual nature – of the season of Advent. As we remember the incarnation of Jesus in Bethlehem we also look forward to Christ's return, and the new heaven and new earth in which God's presence will never again be hidden from us. Praise the Lord!

Listen to Dan's Song, "I Have Heard" - tinyurl.com/IveHeard

PRAYER

God, as the days grow cold and short, and the nights long and dark, warm my heart with the light of your presence. I know you hear me. Help me to hear you. Amen.

Dan Eschliman is Wesley Freedom's Director of Worship.

Friday, December 15

[Job 19:1-25](#)

REFLECTION

“When the going gets tough, the tough get going!” We’ve all heard some version of this. When the going gets tough, the tough get tougher! Or, go shopping! Around our house, we’ve had seasons where the phrase is “When the going gets tough, a car breaks down.” This is where we find Job in today’s reading. He lost his property, his children died, and now he is experiencing extreme physical ailments. Job is crying out. He is not getting a response. And when we think that he is about to give up, he shifts gears and announces, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth.” What an incredible reminder that no matter how tough things are, our Redeemer lives.

During the Advent season, it would be nice if life could be calm, and we could spend ample time preparing our hearts for the coming of the Lord. However, this time of year becomes a never-ending list of worries. There is stress from balancing schedules full of concerts and parties, concerns over budgets and gifts, and worries about flu season forcing the cancellation of the plans. And remember to not let your normal day job fall by the wayside! The season can quickly become the perfect storm. We can find ourselves lamenting over the challenges and being swallowed by the stress. We can cave to the side effects of being overwhelmed and become angry and bitter. Or we can remember that our Redeemer lives. He can redeem all things and he *will* do just that. It may not be on our timeline, but he will stand on the earth. When the going gets tough, our Redeemer lives!

PRAYER

Dear Lord, we thank you for the lessons we learn from Job and his enduring faith. We ask that as the season gets difficult, you help us keep our focus on you. Give us reminders of your love and your plan to redeem. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Sarah Gibson serves in the Band & Middle School Ministry Team.

Saturday, December 16
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 17

Look up the lyrics of [“O Come, All Ye Faithful” \(UMH #234\)](#)

Reflect on Christ’s identity as a divine person who took on our
humanity to save us.

(light three candles)

PRAYER

**God of peace, we thank you for sending Jesus, the hope of all
the earth. Give us rest; free us from worries and distractions.
Teach us your perfect love that casts out all fear. Show us how
to live at peace with one another. Rule in our hearts, now and
forever. In the name of Jesus, our joy and our strength. Amen.**

Monday, December 18

[Matthew 1:18-25](#)

REFLECTION

Emmanuel – God is with us. The Hebrew people knew something about being in proximity to God’s presence – when God shows up, people start dying. After Moses finished talking to God through the Burning Bush, he experienced God as trying to kill him (Ex 4:18-26)! The Israelites were not allowed to touch God’s mountain when God was there, lest they die (Ex 19:12). Touching the Ark – God’s throne on Earth? Also, death (2 Sam 6:1-8). It was no wonder why poor Isaiah thought his end had come when he found himself in God’s throne room (Is 6:1-5). For sinful humans, the direct presence of God is too much for us to handle and survive. The only thing more dangerous than having God as your enemy is having God *with* you. And here’s Joseph being told that the child his betrothed is carrying is Divine – God *with* us. Yikes!

But it is this very predicament – our inability to have God *with* us – that Christ came to fix. The angel tells Joseph that Christ comes to save us from our sins – not just from punishment for our crimes against God, but from the very power of sin itself. Our sin distorts the image of God within us – mixing in a sprinkle of corruption & death that makes it unbearable for us to come face-to-face with the Source of Life. But in Christ – Divine & Human – God perfectly re-stamps his image into human clay. Through Christ, God will re-work our souls according to his perfect model. God *with* us in Christ still means that we stop living as we did – but instead of death, we find transformation.

PRAYER

Lord, thank you for not giving up on us. Thank you for having mercy on us for thousands of years by shielding your presence from us, lest we perished under the weight of our own corruption. And thank you for restoring our likeness to you through the incarnation of Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.

The Rev. Ian Collier is Wesley Freedom’s Associate Pastor.

Tuesday, December 19

[John 3:1-15](#)

REFLECTION

How often have you attended a class, church service, or had a conversation with someone and received way more than you expected? It can be exhilarating and unsettling to have your belief system upended and the foundation of your faith shaken. This appears to be what happened with the visit to Jesus by Nicodemus. He, like many, believed that Jesus was sent by God, yet his current beliefs were a hindrance to comprehending the concepts Jesus was teaching him. He desperately wanted to understand the idea of being born again and actively engaged with Jesus for clarity. His lack of understanding exposes the apparent irony of the situation, as he is a highly educated teacher. However, this knowledge became the obstacle to his own interpretation of being born again. The scriptures he studied and the numerous rules and laws he advocated for as a civil and religious leader created a comprehensive belief system – one that perhaps blinded him to who God really was – Jesus, the Holy One.

My husband has always liked Nicodemus because he said he was constantly seeking knowledge and truth even at the risk of being criticized by his peers. And, although Jesus was obviously frustrated with Nicodemus, he must have sensed his longing for a deeper understanding beyond the tangible. What a compassionate and patient teacher Jesus was! What joy this brings as we are learning alongside him, challenging our own beliefs, and surrendering to the spirit, as we find the promise of our salvation in these verses of scripture.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank you for scripture and your teachings as they remind us that you are the way to salvation and eternal life. Please keep my mind and heart open to your teachings and guidance. In your Son Jesus Christ's name, Amen.

Cindy Shruell is the Executive Assistant to the Pastors.

Wednesday, December 20

[2 Corinthians 5:16-21](#)

REFLECTION

In these verses we are reminded that God's new creation has dawned, and because of this we are part of God's handiwork. Paul teaches us that being "in Christ" results in a person becoming a "new creation"! Often, I question whether I am worthy to be an ambassador for God. But these words remind us that as recipients of God's grace, we are called to share the good news of God's reconciliation. God has provided salvation and reconciliation for us through the sacrifice of his Son. We now have a new identity as a child of God. So yes, we all are worthy.

As we journey through this Advent season, we can look back to the birth of God's Son who lived that sinless life for our benefit so that we all may be part of God's new creation even now. As a result, we are called to regard others as Jesus did. This can be difficult. Our humanness causes us to judge people from the outside and not look inside at the spiritual part of who they really are. We need to remind ourselves that everyone's greatest need is reconciliation with their Creator through Christ.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your only son to live that perfect life on our behalf so that through him we have been created anew. Give us the guidance to look at all our brothers and sisters through the eyes and heart of Christ. Amen.

Sharon Skolaski is a Member of Wesley Freedom.

Thursday, December 21

[Romans 8:5-25](#)

REFLECTION

In the season of Advent, as we remember Christ's birth and anticipate his glorious second coming, we turn to Romans 8:5-25 to gain insight into who Jesus is and his purpose. This scripture reminds us that Jesus came to fulfill the law and offer us salvation. In his birth, we witness God's ultimate gift to humanity, the redemption of our sinful nature. He came not to condemn but to set us free from the bondage of sin. His purpose was to bring us into a relationship with God, making us God's children and heirs to the promise of eternal life.

Today's passage speaks of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within us, guiding us towards righteousness and leading us to our eternal destiny. It assures us that nothing can separate us from the love of God, not even the challenges and trials we face in life.

What challenges me in this scripture is the reminder of the suffering that we may endure as followers of Christ. The groaning of creation itself and the struggles we face may be difficult, but they are not in vain. We are encouraged to persevere with hope, knowing that our suffering leads to future glory.

My main takeaway from this scripture is the profound assurance that Christ's birth and his second coming are interconnected. He came to save us and grant us eternal life, and we eagerly await his return when all creation will be redeemed. Advent is a time of joyful anticipation, not just for the Christmas season but for the fulfillment of God's promise when Jesus returns in glory, bringing an end to suffering and unveiling the fullness of our salvation.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus may we all find focus during this season to better know you, appreciate you and emulate your love in all that we do.

Mark Gage is the Chair of Wesley Freedom's Board of Trustees.

Friday, December 22

[Hebrews 2:5-18](#)

REFLECTION

I take great comfort from this passage of scripture. At the very beginning is a reminder that God's purpose for humans was to have dominion over all things when God created humans in the image of God. The passage states, though, that we do not currently exercise that authority; however, we have been given a glimpse of the world to come in the life of Jesus who, like us, was made "for a little while lower than the angels." I am given the assurance that I am being sanctified (perfected) through my sufferings, and that Jesus, the pioneer of my salvation, endured sufferings on my behalf. Through this I am grafted into God's family and made a brother of Jesus. We now all have the same Father.

This also harkens back to God's original creation when we were created in his image. Just as child carries the image of the parents, so do all humans carry the image of God. Therefore, I need to look on each person as my sibling. We are all in this together, suffering now in this world, but with the promise of the world to come. Yes, we are all doomed to die, but Jesus "tasted death for everyone" and was able to overcome it and destroy the power of death and the devil, thereby freeing us from death's slavery. This is comforting to me, as it means death is not something I should fear, it is not the end of me.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I pray that I may be worthy of being called your sibling. Help me when I stumble, keep me ever mindful that everyone I meet is my sibling, and help me to see God in each of them. Lead me through this life knowing that God is working within me to bring me closer to the ideal person that he would have me be. Let me approach death with the knowledge that it is not the end but a new beginning of life eternal in God's 'Kin-dom'.

Kevin Silberzahn is Wesley Freedom's Church Historian.

Saturday, December 23
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.

Christmas Eve, December 24

[Luke 2:1-20](#)

REFLECTION

We began the season of Advent with an angel interrupting Zechariah's prayers with the assurance that God hears and is bringing salvation and peace. Tonight, the good news is not just heard by those praying in the temple; the good news of salvation and peace is proclaimed by angels to the shepherds in the fields, announced by a star that catches the attention of distant Magi, and beheld by Mary and Joseph, cows, and donkeys in a stable.

The news of Christmas is for you and for all. God hears your prayers, God sees your joy and your sorrow, God knows your need for the presence of a Savior, and God joins you in your longing for peace. God is not distant nor indifferent. God entered into the weariness and longing of our world on the night in which Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Jesus lived among us as God in the flesh in order to show us how to live this life in relationship with God. Jesus died on the cross to offer us the forgiveness of sin, and Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, inviting us to rise with him to new and eternal life. Jesus came to make a way for us to live in God's peace and Jesus taught us the way to establish peace with our neighbors.

Pray today that you will welcome and live in God's peace and that you will be one who works toward that peace in every place until the angels' song is realized and there is peace on earth.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, in Bethlehem you drew near to your people in order to make peace. Today I open wide the doors of my home and ask that you would claim my heart as your manger that I may know and treasure your peace. In the days ahead, lead me in your way that I might contribute to the establishment of peace among siblings and nations. Amen.

The Rev. Jenny Smith is Wesley Freedom's Senior Pastor.

Christmas Day, December 25

[John 3:16-17](#)

REFLECTION

The Crab Nebula is an exploding star about 4200 light years away. Even if you look at it through a telescope, you don't see any motion, but it is expanding at the rate of 70 million miles a day.

God created this explosion. He set the gases in motion. He does it all the time, everywhere.

And yet, he also created Earth and human beings. Much smaller than an exploding star. And still, he watches over us every day. He created us out of love and gave us the ability to choose to love him back.

And then, he saw that we all needed a nudge, an example of what he had been saying through the prophets, and he sent himself as Jesus Christ to show us the way to an everlasting life with him. He creates exploding stars millions of miles away; he comes to us on earth to be our salvation. Does that not show us how important we are to him? Shouldn't we be joyful that he took time out from creating exploding stars to come and live with us and show us his love – person to person?

Be thankful for this birth, this life of Jesus – He is so much more than an exploding star.

PRAYER

Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten son to take our nature upon him, and to be born this day of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

Mark DeVault serves on Wesley Freedom's South Carroll Food Pantry Team & Lay Leader Team.

Tuesday, December 26 – Devotions For The Week

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 14, 2024 – Easter Sunday, March 31, 2024). 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 at 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 & praying the prayer from Christmas Day as your daily prayer:

- Tuesday, Dec 26: Luke 19:1-10
- Wednesday, Dec 27: Isaiah 52:7 – 53:12
- Thursday, Dec 28: Matthew 1:1-17
- Friday, Dec 29: Ephesians 1:1-14
- Saturday, Dec 30: Sabbath

May God bless you, now and always.

Merry Christmas!

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

Christian Believer

Coming January 2024!

Christian Believer: What Do Christians Do?

Christianity is usually defined by its beliefs – which is good since we are Christian Believers! But faith is more than belief; having faith in Christ is also about what we do.

This Winter & Spring, our sermon series continues with the Christian Believer study discussing the fundamental actions of our faith and the ways that our beliefs translate into a distinctive way of life.

Sunday Worship Beginning January 7th

- 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

**HELP
WANTED**

Assistant Editor Needed

- Are you proficient in English grammar?
- Detail oriented?
- Able to keep people to a schedule?

Join The Devotionals Team!

Pastor Ian is looking to put together a team of Assistant Editors for Wesley Freedom's Lent & Advent Devotionals. If you are interested in serving on this new ministry team, contact Pastor Ian to apply at icollier@wesleyfreedom.org.



MERRY
CHRISTMAS