

THE THRILL OF
HOPE

AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL OF HHPC

Dedication

We are delighted to give the gift of this Advent Devotional to the families of Hilton Head Presbyterian Church! It is our hope and prayer that this devotional will be used in homes, in Life Groups, Bible Studies, and between family and friends so that the body of Christ might see the beauty of Christ and join together in worshipping him.

Each week of Advent has three devotions (Monday, Wednesday, and Friday) which explore various scenes from the four great acts of redemption: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. And each day focuses on the HOPE that Christ brings amidst this great Story. Near the end of the devotional, you'll find questions for reflection intended to help you go deeper in prayer and the Word of God.

In addition, every Sunday you'll find a song or prayer that will help as you and your family prepare to gather with the people of God to celebrate the Author of this great drama. Again, we are overjoyed to be able to offer our congregation this devotional. We hope that it helps you celebrate the season of Advent in a new and meaningful way!

Download this devotional or view it as a PDF online: www.hiltonheadpca.com/advent-devotional.

On behalf of our pastoral staff and leadership team, we extend a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you and your family! We hope that you'll join us on Christmas Eve on December 24th as we celebrate Emmanuel, God with us!

Christmas Eve Worship Gatherings

December 24th at 10:00 AM, 4:00 PM, 6:00 PM

Hilton Head Presbyterian Church

235 Wm. Hilton Parkway

www.hiltonheadpca.com

*Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
‘Till He appeared, and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices.
For yonder breaks, a new and glorious morn.*

One of the hardest parts of parenting is disciplining my children. Obviously, I do it because of the great love I have for them. But there are so many things to consider when handing out the punishment: *How much grace do I show? Is the punishment appropriate for the crime which has been committed? How do I make sure each child understands why their actions are wrong?*

In the third chapter of Genesis, God is faced with the same problem. He must bring punishment to Adam and Eve for the crime they have committed—rebellious against a perfect and holy God.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve made the tragic decision to eat the fruit God had forbidden them to eat. And by doing so, they forever altered the course of mankind. Physically, their bodies began to decay, leading to death. Emotionally, they now experienced feelings such as fear, doubt, shame, and guilt. And spiritually, they could no longer walk and talk face to face with God.

Remarkably, the Lord sought them out and didn't leave them in a place of despair. He knew all along they would make that tragic choice. And before they ate from the forbidden fruit, He already had a plan to redeem their brokenness.

In Genesis 3:15, we find a hope-filled promise. God promised that in his perfect time, he would send a Seed that would crush the serpent. This Seed would allow Adam and Eve to have their relationship with God restored. And in this promise, they hoped.

After I punish my children, I take them into my arms and hold them. I remind them that though they have done wrong, I love them still. I want them to know that I punish them because I love them. And I pray that they can learn from this and not make the same mistake again. In these moments, I'm reminded of how God continues to relate to mankind even when He had to cast them out of the garden for their own good. He still loves us in our fallen state—so much so that He sent His Son to repair the broken relationship. And in His perfect and redeeming love, we place our hope.

“I am the Lord / I have heard your groanings / I will deliver you
I will rescue you / I will make you my people / I will be your God
I will give you the land that I have promised!”

— from Exodus 6:6-8 —

In Exodus 6, the Lord brings words of hope that are rich in compassion and care. But as the Israelites often do, they have a hard time hearing and believing. Israel began their sojourn in Egypt as a joyful family reunion in the good graces of the land. Time elapsed, their family grew, new Pharaohs ruled, and circumstances changed. A good and happy life turned to enslavement. And the Lord’s people worked day after day as they toiled under the taskmaster’s whip, mixing wet clay and straw into bricks. Generations passed and each became more weighed down. Bricks piled up and beautiful cities were created. Meanwhile, spirits were broken and hope began to fade.

Looking back on my childhood, I was not the greatest student. And as early as first grade, I felt trapped in the schoolroom forced to complete tasks that were often difficult and confusing. I’d watch the clock slowly ticking as the day wore on. And I would gaze out the window at the world going by. I longed to be one of those people outside enjoying life.

Finally, THE LAST DAY OF SCHOOL arrived! The ‘promised land’ of summer had come. The relief, and the joy, were incredible. Summer meant endless days of sunshine and warmth, turning cartwheels until I was dizzy, and flopping down in the soft, green grass to watch the clouds roll by. I remember swinging so high on the swings until I felt like I could fly. I had the freedom I longed for. It was a feeling incomparable to anything else.

This is what God offers us: *the hope of freedom*.

Let us remember that, just like Israel, God does not forget us. Instead, he allows us seasons of waiting, hardship, and the promise of deliverance. He allows us days of suffering alongside the hope of a beautiful sunrise. He hears our groanings, even when they’re too deep for words. And *He loves us*.

He is our God. He redeems us, and gives us ultimate hope—eternal life with Jesus Christ.

If you've seen the movie *The Hunger Games*, you know that ninety percent of the film takes place under depressing and seemingly hopeless circumstances. It seems as though evil has the upper hand from beginning to end.

There is a fascinating scene in the movie where President Snow (the evil ruler of the Capital) is talking with his "Hunger Games coordinator," Seneca Crane. Snow asks Seneca, "Why do you think we have a winner?" (referring to the barbaric events of the Hunger Games where contestants must fight each other for their lives). Before Seneca can respond, Snow says, "Hope. Hope is the only thing stronger than fear. A little hope is effective; a lot of hope is dangerous. Spark is fine, as long as it's contained."

When I read Isaiah 9, I can't help but translate this to our present reality as we live in a fallen world. We certainly have no shortage of events and fears that, if dwelt upon, can drive us to utter despair. Among political uncertainty, potential terrorism, and a culture forsaking devotion to God and His Word, our fear and hopelessness is confronted as we read verse 6: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God. Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

This hope that we read about is stronger than fear. It is the hope of a Savior who will come and restore every dark misdeed that has ever happened. Even more so, through the work of the Holy Spirit, Christ is placing this hope in the heart of every believer.

The hope that Jesus brings enables us to peer into the dark (and sometimes despairing) conditions of our fallen world and realize that none of it is forever. The darkness will not overcome us, for Christ defeated it upon the cross!

Be encouraged in this: the God in Whom you have placed your trust gives you power and hope unlike anything else this world affords.

HE WILL HOLD ME FAST

When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast;
When the tempter would prevail, He will hold me fast.
I could never keep my hold, through life's fearful path.
For my love is often cold, He must hold me fast.

Chorus:

He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast.

For my Savior loves me so, He will hold me fast.

Those He saves are His delight, Christ will hold me fast;
Precious in His holy sight, He will hold me fast.
He'll not let my soul be lost, His promises shall last;
Bought by Him at such a cost, He will hold me fast. (Chorus)

For my life He bled and died, Christ will hold me fast;
Justice has been satisfied, He will hold me fast.
Raised with Him to endless life, He will hold me fast;
Till our faith is turned to sight, when he comes at last. (Chorus)

— Music & Lyrics by Matthew Merker & Getty Music Publishing, 2013 —

CONFESSION OF HOPE

What is your only comfort in life and in death?

That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven. In fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

— from the Heidelberg Catechism —

FINDING HOPE IN PART "B"

Mindi Jo Furby

If the process of achieving a goal had three parts – A, B, and C – Part B would be the hardest. We love Part A. The beginning of every goal, project, or promise (Part A) is full of adrenaline, dreams, and inspiration. We thrive on the high of Part A, and savor its stimulating and rejuvenating energy. Likewise, we're fans of Part C. When a goal, project, or promise comes to fruition (Part C), we rejoice, commemorate, and reflect. We bask in a sense of fulfillment and breathe deep sighs of contentment.

But no one likes Part B.

Part B is where we wait. The drudgery of day in and day out routines don't seem to be making a difference. We've long used up the energy of Part A and can't yet see Part C and the second wind it offers. We begin to doubt. Will Part C even come? Am I striving for nothing? This is taking way longer than I had originally thought...Should I even continue? Oh, the dreaded Part B!

Unfortunately, the majority of life happens in Part B. While we most easily remember the highs and lows, beginnings and endings, we spend most of life in the middle – waiting. Striving. Hoping.

Israel did too. Except their wait lasted for centuries. God promised a Redeemer in the very beginning (Part A). He'd scarcely hung the stars in place when mankind's folly ignited the need for a Savior. And they would, indeed, welcome Him into the world (Part C). But it wouldn't be for a very long time. Their Part B would seem an eternity.

How did they manage? How did they keep their hope alive in the wait? The author of Hebrews gives us a glimpse:

"All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth."

Hebrews 11:13

They kept their hope alive because they 1) believed God and His promises, and 2) they knew "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" in God's time (Romans 8:18).

They knew Part C was coming because God was the One who promised it. That knowledge kept their hope fueled during even the most strenuous times. And it can for us too. He offers the same hope in our waiting, promising that Part C – His glorious return combined with our unfathomable future – is coming and is worth the wait.

When Matt and I found out we were expecting our first baby, we were not only overwhelmed with excitement, but also overjoyed to get to choose a name for him! Over the past five years, I have kept a running list on my phone with names we like. They range from authors, athletes, musicians, and family members. We LOVE names...especially family names. Each time we visited our hometowns, we would jot down lists of family names and hear stories about each person. Tradition, heritage, the sense of ownership and belonging, and knowing the story of where we've come from have always resonated with us.

Throughout the Bible, Jesus carries over 200 names and titles that reflect his nature and character. Around Advent every year, I love reading the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1. It feels just like I'm sitting in my grandparents' home hearing names and stories of relatives from ages ago. I enjoy piecing together the lineage of Jesus, reading the account of the angel appearing to Joseph, and hearing the name of Jesus, "Immanuel," proclaimed for the first time.

In Matthew 1:21 and Luke 2:11, we discover that Mary will give birth to a son and call his name Jesus, for He will save the people from their sins. The rest of the redemptive story shows us that God makes good on this prophetic promise as he saves his people by: 1) dying to redeem them, 2) renewing and sustaining them through the Holy Spirit, and 3) raising his believers up on the last day. Jesus is the Savior of our souls, our deliverer, our redeemer, and our liberator!

Jesus brings us hope by taking on flesh and dwelling among us. Matthew 1:23, John 1:14, and Isaiah 9:6 reveal that Jesus is Immanuel, "God with us." He lived and walked among us. He experienced joy and friendship, hunger and exhaustion, emotions, ridicule, temptation and pain. And, He experienced death. We have a great High Priest who sympathizes with our weakness.

Today, take great hope in the promise that God is with us. Jesus is our ever-present Savior who will never leave or forsake us.

*Our Deliverer, You are Savior;
In Your presence we find our strength.
Over ev'rything, our Redemption;
God with us, You are God with us.*

— God With Us, Jason Ingram and Leslie Jordan —

Hope is a basic need in one's life. Without it, we plunge into a state of despair. Our existence becomes meaningless, lacking purpose. We may achieve fame and fortune or make our mark in history. But whether a homeless beggar or a prominent citizen, we all share the same destiny. The grave awaits every one of us. And if we do not see anything beyond it, as King Solomon said, "all is vanity of vanities."

Everything changed on that first Christmas day when our Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord, was born. On that day, the hope of all mankind entered the world.

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

Luke 2:11

Consider for a moment what it would have been like to be a part of Jesus' birth. Angels announced His birth and the bright light of the glory of the Lord pierced the darkness. Multitudes of heavenly hosts praised God, and shepherds came to worship Him. They returned glorifying and praising God. But for the Innkeeper in Bethlehem, he received Him not. Just think...his inn could have gone down in history as the birthplace of the King of kings and Lord of lords. Imagine the amazement of the guests if the glory of the Lord (which shown all around) had lit up the establishment! Yet unlike the innkeeper in Bethlehem, we should not turn him away. Instead, let us open our hearts to him. Would we, like the shepherds, believe in Him and receive Him?

In the birth of Jesus, we experience great joy and a peace that passes all understanding. We sing, "Joy to the world, the Lord has come!" for the hope of all ages, the King of glory, abides in us. Our life now becomes a jubilee—a time of rejoicing! Was there ever a Christmas gift as great as this?

Today, we join with the angels and the shepherds praising God, for this child has brought us the hope of everlasting life! Whatever our lot, in Christ we possess new life that begins now and continues on into eternity. Christ is the fulfillment of the promises of God—and in Him, we hope!

HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING

Hark the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled."
Joyful, all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies.
With th'angelic host proclaim: "Christ is born in Bethlehem."
Hark! The herald angels sing "Glory to the newborn King!"

Christ by highest heav'n adored, Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come, offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail th'incarnate Deity.
Pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings, ris'n with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by, born that man no more may die.
Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

— Lyrics: Charles Wesley, 1739.
Tune: Mendelssohn.

GLORY BE TO GOD ON HIGH

Glory be to God on high, and on earth, peace, good will toward men.
We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee,
We glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory.
O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty,
O Lord, the begotten Son, Jesus Christ;
O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father;
Thou Who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.
Thou Who takes away the sins of the world, receive our prayer.
Thou Who sits upon the right hand of God the Father, have mercy on us.
For Thou only art holy; Thou only are the Lord.
Thou only, O Christ,
Thou only, O Holy Spirit,
Thou only, O God the Father, are most high in glory. Amen.

- Old Scottish Chant, to be used as a Prayer of Thanksgiving

If you grew up in the Church like I did, I suspect for many of you that the stories of Jesus' birth are now nostalgic. The stable, the manger, and the shepherds are all quaint parts of our Christmas story. We even hold children's plays with shepherds kneeling before a manger. What's perhaps lost on many of us is the fact that these symbols, in Jesus' day, were evidence of poverty. Jesus was born in a barn among shepherds, one of the lowest classes in his society. When Jesus was dedicated at the temple, the sacrifice was two doves (the standard sacrifice of poor families and the minimum that could be offered). He was raised in a poor family. And for his entire life, Jesus remained poor. He tells us so in Luke 9:58: *"Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head"*.

When Jesus launched his ministry after forty days in the wilderness, he returned to Galilee and his home town of Nazareth. In Luke 4:18-19, we are told the purpose of His ministry from Isa 61:1-3: *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Are you like me, asking, "What's up with God's obvious focus on the poor and oppressed?" Dr. Timothy Keller, in an article *"Identifying with and Caring for the Poor"** explains "Even the person who reads the scriptures casually can hardly help missing the fact that a major theme which runs throughout them is that God has a deep concern for the poor, oppressed and powerless. His desire that they receive justice is everywhere present." Our current world is not as God intended his creation to be. Though sin has caused injustice to reign, Jesus is God's plan to reverse the injustice in our world. In God's Kingdom, oppression and poverty will one day come to an end. Until then, Jesus makes it clear for his Church that caring for the poor and oppressed is not optional.

When Christians carry out this part of God's reversal of the Fall, the prophet Isaiah tells us God's light will shine in the darkness. How will you bring the hope of Christ to those who live in darkness?

"Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter when you see the naked to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear...If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness and your night will become like the noonday." (Isa. 58:6-10)

My daughter loves art. And one of the things that she enjoys most is reproducing pictures she likes using colored clay on Altoid boxes. In fact, she did one for me based on Antonio Ciseri's famous painting, "Behold the Man." It is painstaking work as each piece of clay is shaped and then carefully placed to form what becomes a work of art. As tedious as this work can be, because she has the finished product in mind, she continues that work until its completion.

In Ephesians 2:1-10, the Apostle Paul describes a similar work that God is doing in each of our lives. This work, which one translation calls "a masterpiece," is all God's work! He takes that which was "dead in trespasses and sins" (v. 1), "following the course of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience" (v. 2) and was "by nature children of wrath" (v. 3), and transforms it into something good. He makes us into something holy!

How does God accomplish this work? Paul mentions three times that this work is "in Christ" (vv. 6, 7, 10). In Christ, we have "the gift" of forgiveness, which we accept by faith (v. 8). And what does that mean? It means that Christ has done everything needed for us to be made right with God...everything. But wait, there's more!

Not only do we have forgiveness of our sins, we also have a present and future hope that is summed up in Paul's words, "he made us alive together with Christ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (vv. 5-6).

Why does God do all this, you ask? Simply, because of His incredible love for us (v. 4). God's amazing love is a love that results in His grace and kindness, forgiveness of our sins, and a hope that impacts us for eternity. So today, rejoice in God's good work and find your hope in Him and Him alone.

²⁵ But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,²⁶ for through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ.

²⁸ There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus.

²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:23-29

The lyrics of holiday favorites like "I'll be home for Christmas" and "There's no place like home for the holidays" paint a picture of home as a place filled with happy memories and a sense of belonging; a place where we are known and loved.

A dear friend of mine grew up in a home like this, filled with sweet traditions. One tradition was that everyone took turns on Christmas morning as each gift was opened, one at a time. She once described her first Christmas with her in-laws to me as a complete disaster. When it came time for the gift exchange with her new husband's family, a total free-for-all ensued. Tissue and wrapping paper flew in the air as children clamored to unwrap their noisy new toys without a clue as to who the gift was from or the notion of saying "thank you." That night, she snuck away to call her mother as soon as she could. Her tearful response to the question of how it was going was, "These are not my people."

Unfortunately for my friend, she married into a family that felt foreign to her. Some of us were born into families that feel that way. But even if your earthly family is as close to the Christmas ideal as that of my friend, it is still only temporary and transient. All of us were spiritual orphans before knowing Jesus, wanderers who were never truly at home. There is good news, however, for those who acknowledge Christ as Savior and Lord. Just as we are born into our earthly families, Christians are born again into God's family when they are justified by grace through faith in Jesus.

For all who are in Christ, we have been born of the Spirit. Being born of the Spirit makes us sons and daughters of God. And being sons and daughters of God makes us brothers and sisters in Christ. We are family.

So when we look around at each other in Sunday morning worship or wherever we may see one another, no matter how different we may be, the utterance of our glad hearts can be "These are my people!" The coming of Christ gives us the hope of a home in the gift of Gospel Community, a place to be known and loved in a family that will last for all eternity.

JOY TO THE WORLD

Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King.
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heav'n and nature sing, and heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the world! The Savior reigns;
Let men their songs employ.
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains,
Repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sin and sorrow grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground.
He comes to make His blessings flow,
Far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove.
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love, and wonders of His love,
And wonders, and wonders of His love.

— Lyrics: Isaac Watts, 1719.
Tune: Antioch.

O HOLY NIGHT

O Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Till He appeared, and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks, a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices!
O night divine, O night when Christ was born;
O night, O holy night, O night divine!

— Public Domain

Why did Jesus come to earth? It seems like an easy enough question. If you asked the average Christian, most would say Christ came to die for our sins. If that were it, this day would be worthy of infinite celebration. But that is not the full reason why Christ condescended into our world.

In John 10:10 Jesus said, "I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full." This verse is certainly a reference to eternal and perfected life promised to all who believe in Jesus. Yet, I think it is also more.

As you read John 14, you hear Jesus say things like, "If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever." This verse is not speaking of some far off world. Christ is calling us to live a full life *now*. In our days on this planet, he wants us to experience the fullness of a life not directed and owned by sin.

While I was in college, I worked as a teller at a bank. I still remember the first day when I was allowed to see customers. I was nervous that I was not prepared. I had nightmares of ruining someone's account and being fired. When I arrived that morning, Ruby, my boss, stood right behind me and guided me through the day.

In some ways, Ruby was a picture of Christ. Jesus has not left us to live this life alone. In John 14:26-27 Christ said, "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." The Spirit doesn't just stand behind us; He indwells the believer. He lives and rules and reigns in us.

As you celebrate the arrival of the Savior, take some time to celebrate the arrival of the life-giving Spirit who gives us power for the full-life now.

Was this year's Christmas everything you planned and imagined?

Two years ago, I came into Christmas reeling from the early arrival of our second son, desperately trying to plan all of that "Christmas magic" for my family. All the while, I was juggling night feedings, postpartum hormones, and a busy toddler who also desperately needed Mama's full attention. I had planned (bought my Christmas wrapping in late October!), I had lowered my expectations given our season of life, and I thought every hurdle was behind us. We had made it through a tough season. And our first Christmas as a family of four? Surely it was going to be one to remember.

Then, days before Christmas, our 8-week old preemie was diagnosed with a serious respiratory virus.

I was devastated. The next days and nights were physically and emotionally exhausting, watching his chest rise and fall as he breathed and worrying all the worries I possibly could. In the wee hours of Christmas morning, his condition worsened and we found ourselves rushing him to the emergency room at 4 a.m.

It was the worst Christmas nightmare a young mother could imagine.

Though those days were fraught with worry and exhaustion for our little family, they were a reminder to me of the true meaning of Christmas and the hope we have in Christ. It did not feel like "the most wonderful time of the year." It was decidedly not the Christmas I imagined...ever. I never imagined the tiny newborn jammies with trains on them that matched big brother's would make their way to a hospital bed on Christmas morning.

But Christ was not born in a picture-perfect Pottery Barn setting, either. He was born in an actual barn, into a world full of real suffering and real pain, illness, anxiety, and disappointment. He bore it all for us that we might experience His glory and know His peace. It wasn't just for presents and happiness that He came. It was for us to know his Presence in the midst of our joy AND our pain. Emmanuel, God WITH us. And from His fullness, we have received grace upon grace.

Wherever life finds you today, whether Christmas has been everything you imagined or pales in the eye of your expectations, let your heart be light as you rejoice in the miracle that Christ would come for all of this...for YOU. Our hope in Him is an unfolding gift greater than anything we can unwrap on Christmas day.

Do not be discouraged, do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is WITH YOU wherever you go.

-Joshua 1:9

One of my dear friends is named Kevin. Kevin and I met in seminary and have maintained a close friendship over the years. Though we live apart, we email and text and talk on the phone from time to time. And one of the conversations we regularly have is focused on the idea of heaven. From time to time, one of us will say something like, "I think this is what heaven will be like."

If you and I are honest, we have hopes and dreams of what heaven will be like. Perhaps you've thought about heaven in this way:

I hope I'll see my loved one again in heaven.

I hope I get to play golf in heaven.

I hope the weather will be a perfect 72 degrees in heaven.

I hope I don't have to lead the music in heaven. (My personal hope!)

And though there are many things we can't say for certain about heaven and eternity, there are truths we can count on with certainty. As we read Revelation 21, we see a beautiful picture of what heaven will be like. In heaven, we will dwell with God and He will dwell with us. Death will be no more. Tears will be no more. Darkness will be no more, for the Lord will be our Light. There will be no pain. No sorrow. No mourning. And we will drink from the Spring of Life and thirst no more.

I encourage you to think about heaven...to long for it. To dream about it. To consider it and to be hope-filled for it. Yet, *how* we will spend eternity (what we'll eat, drink, look like, do, etc) should be of far less concern to us than *Who* we will be with in eternity!

"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."

Revelation 21:3

As you come to the conclusion of 2017, I pray that you are filled with the hope of life eternal in Christ Jesus. May the future promise of forever dwelling with the Lord bring perspective to whatever you face in this present moment. For one day, we will live in "inexpressible joy, limitless peace, pure love and beauty beyond description" (Rev. Billy Graham). Let us hope in the One who will bring us to that place!

O COME, O COME EMMANUEL

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel;
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!

O come, Thou, Dayspring from on high,
And cause Thy light on us to rise;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadow put to flight.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!

O come, O come, true prophet of the Lord,
And turn the key to heaven's door;
Be Thou our comforter and guide,
And lead us to the Father's side.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall by His Word our darkness dispel.

O come, our great High Priest, and intercede,
Thy sacrifice, our only plea;
The judgment we no longer fear,
Thy precious blood has brought us near.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel has banished every fear of hell.

O Come, Thou King of nations bring,
An end to all our suffering.
Bid every pain and sorrow cease;
And reign now as our Prince of Peace!

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel, shall come again with us to dwell.

— *Original words (vv. 1-2) translated by John M. Neale, 1851*
Music: Veni Emmanuel. Alt. and add. words (vv. 3-4) by Steve Cook and Bob Kauflin

Sometimes, we find profound wisdom in the oddest places. I was recently listening to the wise sage, Forest Gump, and was struck by his statement, "I'm not a smart man, but I know what love is." As I consider Christ as the *Hope of the Nations*, I realize it doesn't take a profoundly smart person to see what is going on and what the solution needs to be.

If Christ is offering hope to the nations, it must be because they currently lack hope. They are hope-less. Revelation 20 describes the nations as being under the deceiving power of the Evil One. It causes them to rage against the Lord and against His people (Psalm 2). They have placed their hope in other things and, therefore, lack the life, joy, satisfaction, strength and power that comes from hope fixed firmly upon Christ – the "hope of the Gospel" (Col.1:23).

God knew what love was (John 3:16) when He sent His only begotten Son, Christ, to the nations to offer life and the hope of the Gospel. Romans 15:8-9 explains why Christ came:

"For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, *and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.* As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name." (italics added)

Therefore, we, the Church, are now tasked with the mission of taking the Gospel message to the nations: We must declare his glory among the nations, and proclaim his marvelous works among all the peoples! (Psalm 96:3) And we are called to make known his deeds among the peoples as we proclaim that his name is exalted." (Isaiah 12:4). And the best part of our mission is that we already know how it ends!

"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Rev. 7:9-10

We know what love is. Better said, we know *who* love is. Christ is true and perfect love. And we have the joyous privilege of sharing in His mission of proclaiming His love to the nations so that they will find the hope of the Gospel and worship the King.

Join with us in thanking those who have contributed to this devotional:

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

A THREAD OF HOPE

December 04

- What are some of the effects/consequences of Adam and Eve's sin?
- How does Genesis 3:15 give us hope?
- What restoration do we have now and what will we have in the future?

THE HOPE OF FREEDOM

December 06

- Recount the story of the Israelites in Egypt waiting and longing for freedom. How do you think they felt? Can you relate to how they felt? Are there similarities in your current season of life?
- What does Christ's coming free us from? What do we long for while waiting for Christ's second coming?

THE POWER OF HOPE

December 08

- What are examples in our everyday lives that often drive us to fear?
- Read Isaiah 9:6-7. How do these verses give you a future hope?
- How do verses 6 and 7 gives you courage and strength in your day to day living?

FINDING HOPE IN PART "B"

December 11

- Recall a "Part A" and "Part C" in your life. Now recall a "Part B." What was so difficult about Part B?
- What do you think God is teaching you in the midst of your Part B?
- Can you think of 3 tangible ways to find hope in whatever Part B you are in right now? Write those down and pray through those ways each day this week.

OUR EVER-PRESENT SAVIOR

December 13

- Can you list 10 or more names of Jesus? What names of Jesus resonate most with you?
- Think about the name Immanuel—God with us. How does that bring you hope today?

HOPE FULFILLED

December 15

- Do you ever think about death? If so, is that thought accompanied by hope or despair?
- Read 1 Corinthians 15. What does Paul have to say about the sting of death?
- What verses and truths of 1 Corinthians 15 can bring you hope concerning life eternal?

WAS JESUS POOR?

December 18

- Why was it God's plan for Jesus to be born and live in poverty? (Isa 61:1-3)
- How is poverty and oppression the result of sin? (Gen 3:6-24)
- What is Jesus calling his followers to do to be part of the reversal of injustice in our world?
- How will you and your family let God's light shine this Christmas & 2018? (Isa 58:6-10)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

OUR HOPE IN HIM ALONE

December 20

- How conscious are you of God's love for you? Is it something you take for granted, feel entitled to, or maybe don't feel worthy of being shown? Why?
- What if, because of what Paul says in Eph. 2:2-3, we aren't worthy of God's love, but He still chooses to give it to us? Does that change how you think about yourself, others, and more importantly, about God? If so, how?
- Paul says that God is also constantly at work in our lives to conform us into the image of His Son. How should that encourage you as you go about your day?

HOPE FOR A HOME

December 22

- What sort of earthly family were you born or adopted into? Did you feel "at home" within it?
- What factors distinguish your Church family from your earthly family?
- Read 1 Peter 1:9. How should the knowledge that God's family is "our people" impact the way we experience and relate to one another? Try thinking of some NT commands that use the word "brethren" or "brother."

OUR HOPE IN THIS LIFE

December 25

- What does "life to the full" look like in the world's eyes? How is that different for a Christ-follower?
- It's Christmas Day! Are you experiencing the peace of Christ? If not, why not?
- Are there any areas of sin or failure that you need to run from by the power of the Holy Spirit?

HOPE AMIDST SUFFERING

December 27

- How was your Christmas? Did it measure up to your expectations?
- What is God teaching you amidst your suffering and unmet expectations?
- Read Romans 5:1-5. How do the words of Paul inform your perspective about hope and suffering?

THE HOPE OF HEAVEN

December 29

- When you think about heaven, what comes to mind?
- Do you live each day in light of eternity? What are some ways in which you're focusing on the things of the earth rather than the eternal?
- Read Revelation 21. How does the hope of heaven give you perspective amidst what you're facing today?

CHRIST: THE HOPE OF NATIONS

January 1

- When you think about having hope, are your thoughts focused on your self? Your family? The Nations?
- Read Psalm 96 and Isaiah 12. How are you declaring the glory of God to those around you?
- In what ways can you pray for the Nations and for the Gospel to be shared through your speech and actions?



SUNDAYS AT HHPC

Worship Gatherings at 9:00 & 10:45 AM

360 Seminars at 9:00 AM

Coffee & Conversation at 10:15 AM

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