



2020

# ADVENT

DEVOTIONALS & LITURGIES



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Written by pastors and members of Coram Deo Church

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# Foreward

Advent is a time of looking back to remember, savor, and celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Each year, we set aside the four weeks leading up to Christmas to uniquely focus on Jesus' birth, his first Advent. This year, we will be exploring the four themes of Advent: Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace. Each Sunday leading up to Christmas, at our worship services, we will look at one of these themes through the lens of Scripture. We have provided this devotional as a supplemental resource to go along with each of the four sermons.

Additionally, we have provided four mid-week devotionals that trace the theme and narrative of Christmas anticipation through the Old Testament from Genesis to Micah. Without the broader context of Old Testament promise and expectation, Christmas cannot be fully understood or appreciated. We also have provided a Christmas morning prayer to help set our hearts on Christ as we enter into and enjoy our Christmas Day celebrations.

You will also find a number of liturgical prayers that have been written to stir our hearts and to direct our affections towards Christ during this season. All of these resources have been created by the elders, staff, and members of Coram Deo Church. It is our desire that they would be a blessing and source of joy and inspiration for you during this Christmas season.

And finally, I would like to invite you to attend one of our Christmas Eve Candlelight services. These services are simple and warm and they consist of singing traditional Christmas songs, Scripture readings, a short homily, and of course, the lighting of candles. It is one of my favorite services of the year and I would love to have you join us! May God's grace and favor shine upon you during this Advent season.

Merry Christmas!

Jon Needham

Lead Pastor

Coram Deo Church

## WEEK 1 — Lord's Day Evening

# The Hope That Christmas Gives

Devotional by Pastor Jon Needham, Liturgy by Brynn James

*<sup>11</sup> For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, <sup>12</sup> training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, <sup>13</sup> waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. — Titus 2:11-14 (ESV)*

Hope.

You want it.

I want it.

Everybody wants it.

But what is it?

We often confuse hope for wishful thinking. But wishful thinking is just that...wishful, airy, and empty. It has no substance because it has no objective foundation. It's just... wishy. The hope that Christmas gives is far greater than subjective wishful thinking. Christmas hope is the confidence that good things are coming in the future. This hope is firmly rooted and anchored in past events. Consequently, we hope for future events and realities because of past events. But what future events? What past events?

Titus 2 mentions a future event that all Christians wait for and hope in. That event is the second coming (or Advent) of Jesus Christ. Unlike his first Advent, his second coming will be characterized by glory (Titus 2:13). When King Jesus returns, he will consummate his Kingdom of perfect and everlasting joy and righteousness (Isaiah 9:7). In that day, Jesus will wipe away all of our tears and sin, suffering, sorrow, and death will be no more (Revelation 21:4). This is the world every human soul longs for.

But why should any of us believe in that future reality? Why, in the midst of a fallen and broken world that is devastated by sickness, war, oppression, and death, should we hope in a bright future? The answer to that is Christmas!



Christians believe that Jesus will come again to heal the entire world because he has already come in humility to bring us grace and salvation. Christmas is far more than just some nostalgic sentimental time of family, tradition, lights, and gifts. Christmas is about the first Advent of Christ.

Christ stepped down from his glorious heavenly throne and was born of the Virgin Mary and placed in manger (Luke 2:7). He was greeted by poor shepherds, not exactly the dignitaries you would expect for the birth of a king. He came, not to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45). He came to bring salvation for his people by dying on the cross for their sins (Ephesians 1:7).

He came for you.

As we look back and consider the humility, love, and grace of Jesus' first Advent at Christmas, we are given a solid and objective reason for the hope and the confidence that in his second Advent, Jesus will return and finish the good work which he purchased and started at Christmas. Jesus is the reason, foundation, and the object of our hope. This is the hope that Christmas gives.



*Here at the dawn of Advent, we seek you, O Savior—object of our hope. Your radiance is transcendent and your holiness unmatched.*

Week 1: Lord's Day Evening

*We confess that though we ought to hunger after our Redeemer,  
we gorge ourselves on worldly passions.*

*One hand outstretched, reaching towards what the cross offers.*

*The other hand clinging:*

*Desperately,*

*Feverishly,*

*To our lawlessness.*

*Lord, ease our rigid, white-knuckled grip on our old selves.*

*Knead your hope into our hearts like a healing salve.*

*You saw our depravity and yet came for us.*

*You saw us in our filth and yet loved us.*

*You saw our brokenness and yet called us your own.*

*You made yourself small so that we could be made yours.*

*Let everything we do declare that we are a people for your own  
possession. Messiah, shape our hearts to be zealous for good works.*

*Ingrain in us the hope that is bought by your blood.*

*In a world that oft seems so bleak, let this hope be our rebel yell.*

*May it give us courage and bring us through even the darkest night.*

*Together we hope for promises fulfilled.*

*We hope for all things to be made new.*

*We hope for future glory.*

*Sustain this faith and purify us, O Benevolent Healer,  
until the day when you've wiped every tear from our eyes.*

## WEEK 1 — Midweek Evening

# The Promise of the Seed

Devotional by Pastor Derrek Busha, Liturgy by Brynn James

*<sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel.” — Genesis 3:15 (ESV)*

There is a promise made in Genesis that keeps Adam and Eve looking forward. They will never see the promise fulfilled themselves, but their children and the generations to come will eventually see the end result.

However, Genesis 3:15 isn't directed at Adam, nor Eve, but to the serpent. And, God uses the word, “enmity” or strife as something that is placed there for the serpent to struggle with against the woman and her offspring. The offspring

that will lead to the promise of sin being rectified forever.

The serpent will never fully win against God's most prized creation but will, for generations, try to frustrate and condemn the people of God. The promise is made that there will be an end to all of this pain.

Temptation and sin permeate God's people as they expand and try to figure out what it looks like to be God's people. But the devil and his ways keep pressing in, trying to deceive and distort God's love for his prized possession. He uses slaveries and exiles to put pressure on them to disbelieve God's promise, and uses their own sin as a way to tempt them away from the love of God. But God keeps his promise.

Romans 5:6 tells us that while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly...

At the right time, the promise arrives! Jesus is born and is eventually led to a cross where his heel is bruised and he dies. But by his own resurrection-power, he crushes the head of the lying serpent, declaring that the promise is fulfilled! Putting meaning to hope and longing for the people of God, where they can finally be his people and he can be their God.

This Advent season, fix your eyes on our faithful God who has kept all of his promises in Jesus Christ.



*Let this Advent week be an offering of worship to you,  
our promise-keeping God.*

*Yahweh, the Covenant LORD, I Am Who I Am.  
You are abundantly faithful and steadfast.*

*And yet, even as you assure us, O Lord, we must repent:  
we don't trust You to fulfill your promises.  
The world preaches that we make our own promises come true,  
and, sadly, we often buy it.*

*In our impatience we misplace our hope.  
In our waiting on you, we settle for what we think is  
the next best thing—often something that hurts us.  
In our attempts to tarry and abide,  
we craft the answers we want to hear,  
or lose hope that we'll hear anything at all.*

*Worse yet, we doubt your covenant love.*

*What a marvelous grace it is that your promise-keeping doesn't  
hinge on our belief!*

*The promises of old are fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah.  
Like boats on the shores of Normandy,  
Christmas declares war on darkness.  
The head of the serpent will be crushed by the King.*

*The splintery wood of the Savior's manger gives way to the beams  
of his cross, and, on it, our blood-bought redemption.*

*A feeding trough built for barn animals,  
repurposed to shelter the Paschal Lamb.*

*Show us how to live as your people, Good Father.*

*Let our celebration of this Advent season  
teach the watching world about you.*

*May we never forget that from the beginning,  
the Christ Child was destined not for Bethlehem but for Golgotha.*

*Make whole again what has been broken, O God. Let all creation  
wait with baited breath for the fulfillment of your promise to make  
all things new. Christmas is, after all, the beginning of  
the end of all pain.*

## WEEK 2 — Lord's Day Evening

# The Love That Christmas Reveals

Devotional by Pastor Jon Needham, Liturgy by Brynn James

<sup>16</sup> *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

<sup>17</sup> *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

— John 3:16-17 (ESV)

All of us love to receive gifts. Most of us love to give gifts. Giving is a universal expression of love. We give because we love. The greater the love, the greater the gift. The greater the gift, the greater the love. Some gifts are purchased while others are personally crafted. But the most costly gift is the gift of self. There is nothing greater that we can give to another than our own life.

Christmas is a celebration marked by gift giving. On average, Americans spend nearly a trillion dollars during the Christmas holiday season. As Christians, we give gifts because we have received an incredibly costly gift from God. At Christmas, God gave us his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

God has given us so many things. We live in a world that is saturated with physical beauty. We enjoy a lavish diversity of flavors in the food and drink we partake of. We experience awe as we take in the beauty of snow-capped mountains. We sense warmth in relationships with friends and family. All of these are good gifts from God (James 1:7). And as great as these gifts are, they pale in comparison to the gift God gave us at Christmas.

The Apostle John tells us that God's love for this broken and sinful world was so great that he gave his only begotten Son, Jesus. Don't misunderstand that. The birth and Advent of Jesus is not a statement about the great intrinsic worth or value of the world. Rather, the birth and Advent of Jesus is a statement about the infinite, eternal, and perfect love of God (Ephesians 3:14-21). Jesus was given to us at Christmas not because of what we deserved but in spite of what we deserved!

Jesus, the light of God, stepped into this dark world (Isaiah 9:2). Jesus came to bring salvation to a world that was



drowning in condemnation (John 3:17). Jesus came to be with us, to be for us, and to die in our place for our sins that we might be saved (Matthew 1:21-23).

This is not just love. This is the greatest love because Jesus is the greatest gift!

Merry Christmas!



*We cry out in gratitude, oh Heavenly Father.  
Despite our unworthiness, you bestow your wonderful gifts  
upon us lavishly and unconditionally.  
Your radiance is unrivaled. All around, we see evidence of  
your provision and sovereign hand.*

*Thank you for giving us what you know we need,  
not simply what we want.*

*We don't have to look far to see your artistry at work; we only  
need to smell the head of a newborn babe, to relish in the first sip  
of a toasty drink on a frosty morning, to watch the wintry clouds  
swirl in the sky. Even the seemingly mundane—an ant tiptoeing  
across a window sill, being able to see our breath on a December  
evening—even these are gifts! Your glory abounds.*

*Despite your kingly generosity, we are often discontent.  
We chase after luxury and grandeur, yet in the face of the greatest  
gift imaginable, we balk and slink back to our own patterns of*

*squalor. O Lord, forgive our greed! For you offer joy in abundance beyond measure.*

*Today, we lay aside our filth and turn toward your goodness.  
You stepped down into our darkness to wash us white as snow:  
who are we to want more than your cleansing touch?  
This Advent, may you radicalize our gift giving and receiving with  
gratitude for the costliest gift of all.*

*Father, let your generosity inspire ours.  
Oh, for the grace to give more! Oh, for the boldness to proclaim  
the magnificence of Christ—the greatest gift!*

*We pray: in some small way, use our gratitude and our generosity  
in your work to nourish this pained world, every day until we see  
you face to face.*

## WEEK 2 – Midweek Evening

# The Promise of the King

Devotional by Pastor Ryan James, Liturgy by Brynn James

*<sup>4</sup> But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan,*

*<sup>5</sup> “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD:*

*Would you build me a house to dwell in?’ <sup>6</sup> I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from*

*Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. <sup>7</sup> In all places where I have moved with all the*

*people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel,*

*saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”” <sup>8</sup>*

*Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from*

*following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. <sup>9</sup> And I have been with you wherever you went and*

*have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make*

*for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.<sup>10</sup> And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly,<sup>11</sup> from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house.<sup>12</sup> When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.<sup>13</sup> He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.<sup>14</sup> I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men,<sup>15</sup> but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.<sup>16</sup> And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”<sup>17</sup> In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David. — 2 Samuel 7:4–17 (ESV)*

Leaders are a dime a dozen. **Godly** leaders? Not so much.

These days, leaders who honor God are rarer than the fans at a Seahawks game. Rather than looking to his Word for blessing and wisdom, most leaders tend to look everywhere else instead. They look to science, to politics, to law and order, to their instincts—literally, everywhere but to God.

And lest we make the mistake of thinking that this is a new problem, the Bible tells us story after story of kings and leaders going rogue and acting as though they are wiser than God.

In 2 Samuel 7:4-17, we see God's response to King David's offer to build a house for God. God hadn't asked David to build him a house but David offered anyway. In response, God essentially tells David via the prophet Nathan, "Did you think that was my idea? Thanks, but no thanks." It's as if God is telling David, "You've got this all wrong. I don't need you to do anything for me. You are the one who needs to be taken care of here."

God then goes on to speak to David, reminding him of the ways that he **had** blessed him and also of the ways that he **will** bless him.

But that's not all God tells King David. God also tells David about another King who would be born to David's family line after he's dead. God tells David that this King would be a Son of God who would endure the rod and stripes of the sons of men. And his throne and Kingdom would be established forever. Sound familiar?

Do you remember the angel Gabriel's words to Mary?

*<sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will*

*be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,<sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” — Luke 1:31–33 (ESV)*

Jesus is the long-anticipated King who came to inherit the throne of David. And unlike the many other kings who ruled so poorly, Jesus came to do the will of his Father.

In the midst of one of the most contentious seasons of our lifetime, let’s remember that our hope isn’t in our nation or our leaders. It’s in Christ, the humble King. This Christmas we celebrate his arrival. Thankfully, the kings of the world only reign temporarily. Christ will reign forever and of his Kingdom, there will be no end.



*We lift an anthem of praise to the Lord of Hosts,  
our True Shepherd.*

*In the face of a culture that worships autonomy, we profess:  
we are not our own.*

*Emmanuel, God with us: how sweet it is to be called  
one of your children!*

*This world often feels upside down.*

*Life. Justice. Love.*

*These words have been twisted and redefined in wicked ways.*

*From your throne, hear our humble confession: time after time*

*we forget that our primary citizenship is in your Kingdom. Our outlook and demeanor are shaped more by the words and promises of politicians rather than by those of our Father. We are guilty of trusting in men who will surely let us down.*

*Advent marks a time of anticipation.*

*We see the darkness and the chill sends a shiver down our spines  
Yet—we know of the coming warmth and light.*

*For whom do we wait?*

*A perfect leader.*

*A just and loving King.*

*A fierce Redeemer.*

*O Lord, you will not fail us.*

*No matter how hopeless our nation might seem,  
there is hope to be found in you.*

*Our political party might crumble, but we'll still  
belong to your family.*

*Injustice may surround us but we can rest knowing  
that you have and will continue to deliver us.*

*Let the only law and order that we find our hope in  
be that of the Son.*

*Grant us the fortitude to boldly declare the truth.*

*In the face of a world that lives as if you've never arrived,  
let us yet live knowing that you'll come again.*

*Set our sights upon eternity:*

*your reign is forever and your Kingdom will never end.*

### WEEK 3 — Lord's Day Evening

## The Joy That Christmas Produces

Devotional by Pastor Rusten Harris, Liturgy by Brynn James

*<sup>1</sup> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—<sup>2</sup> the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—<sup>3</sup> that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. — 1 John 1:1–4 (ESV)*

Let's play a word association game. What's the first thing you think of when you hear these words and phrases?



"Merry"

"Jolly"

"Glad Tidings"

"Joy to the World"

If you're like me, the first thing that came into your mind had something to do with Christmas. Each one of these words and phrases has been used to express the delight and cheer of the Christmas season. What other holiday squeezes the dictionary like this to use every possible word for joy?

This isn't just any ol' joy. This joy finds its meaning in the context of God's story in contrast to rival stories. For instance, I recently read an article by a physicist claiming that "At the end of the Universe, long after the last shining stars flicker out, there might be one final set of explosions...these dazzling blasts will herald in the everlasting darkness as the Universe sinks into dormancy." Talk about bleak. The story of materialism begins in nothingness, is carried along by chance, and ends in oblivion. In that story, joy is simply a distraction from the meaninglessness and "everlasting darkness" of reality.

But the Christmas story is different. In this story, the infinitely holy and glorious Triune GOD was there at the beginning (Genesis 1:1). He created all things from the largest galaxies down to the smallest grain of sand—and not because he needed anything! Rather this creation is an over-

flow of the overwhelming abundance of the infinite love and joy shared by the members of the Trinity. John tells us that the Father loved and delighted in the Son before the creation of the world (John 17:24)—that is the context of creation! Love and joy.

And this is the kicker. This is the mind-blowing surprise of Christmas. This is the reason we exhaust our vocabulary to describe the joy of Christmas: The Word of life—the Son of God—was made manifest to us in the incarnation of Jesus (1 John 1:1-2). The invisible transcendent one who made all things entered his creation and became heard, seen, and touched!

Why?

This joy goes deep. The reason the infinite Son was born and placed into a manger was to bring us into the thick and everlasting joy that he shares with the Father. (1 John 1:3). The same joy that overflowed in the creation of galaxies and rivers and marshmallows is the joy that we are invited into through Christ who reconciles us to the Father through the cross. Why do we party at Christmas, eat choice foods and give extravagant gifts? Because he is the God who made our senses and fills them abundantly.



*Praise be to our faithful and true Deliverer; our thankfulness compels us to our knees. Your generosity is unparalleled.*

*You meet our practical needs and might have stopped there—but  
your delight in us inspired you to give us things like hot chocolate  
and literature and lightning bugs, too. All of creation sings a  
symphony of your praises; every gift points us to you.*

*We recognize and repent: in our ingratitude,  
we often abuse your gifts.*

*We are less thankful than we ought to be.*

*We discard your gifts as if they are meaningless.*

*We confuse the gift with the giver, expecting your gifts to satisfy us,  
making idols of them.*

*Remove the blindfold of our greed, Father!*

*While the world offers us inflammatory headlines and  
grim devastation, you offer us joy.*

*For you, our risen King, not only know us, but adore us.*

*So much so that you came to be with us and pay our ransom.*

*Precious Savior, you made yourself lowly to rescue us  
from our own lowliness.*

*And so, this Advent season, may we party well.*

*We lift our glasses and toast to the one who drank  
the cup we deserved.*

*You are our ultimate, our legendary, our earth shattering, gift.  
Sustain us O Lord, that we might never lose sight of the everlasting  
joy that you freely give.*

### WEEK 3 — Midweek Evening

## The Promise of the Kingdom

Devotional by Pastor Rusten Harris, Liturgy by Brynn James

- <sup>2</sup> *The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone.*
- <sup>3</sup> *You have multiplied the nation;  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.*
- <sup>4</sup> *For the yoke of his burden,  
and the staff for his shoulder,  
the rod of his oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.*
- <sup>5</sup> *For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult*

*and every garment rolled in blood  
will be burned as fuel for the fire.*

*<sup>6</sup> 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.*

*<sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.*

*The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. — Isaiah 9:2–7 (ESV)*

Let's be honest. 2020 has been a political dumpster fire of a year.

This year has brought to our attention how much our civil government can have a positive or negative effect on our lives. Lockdowns have made “criminals” of those who desire to work to provide for their family. Mayors have let their cities burn at the hand of “fiery, but mostly peaceful” mobs and rioters. Police officers have unjustly abused their power. Presidential “debates” have revealed new lows of public rhetoric at the highest seats of power.

Meanwhile, we live in a country that legally kills unborn children by over a million a year over the last 50 years. Why? We live in a culture that more and more adamantly wants to erase all discussion of Christ from its public conscience and discourse. To be clear, without Christ, the nations walk in confusion and chaos. Without God and His Word there is no basis for justice and goodness and so the nations only know darkness. We are a people who desperately need the light of Christ to shine upon us and expose our evil deeds so that we might turn to him (John 3:19-21).

This is the story in which Isaiah speaks Good News: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” The gospel is indeed that Christ paid for our sins and made us right with God, but the gospel is also that Christ is Lord. He has been given “All authority in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). He has come as King, and his Kingdom—his government—is the answer to the darkness of our political woes.

Just listen to how his Kingdom is described. He came as light into our darkness in order to bring joy to the nations (vs. 2)—when was the last time you associated joy with politics? He came to remove the yoke of burdens and break the oppressor (vs. 4). He came to end the raging wars of nations (vs. 5). He is our “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” and his Kingdom knows no end (vs. 7).

While it may be hard to believe at times, the promise here in Isaiah began to be fulfilled in the coming of Christ. Christ reigns and his Kingdom comes through victories disguised as defeats (remember the cross?). As we read in 1 Corinthians “He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” (1 Cor. 15:25). It is in this confidence that we celebrate that child who was born in Bethlehem. We rejoice that he reigns and that of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end.



*Meet us O Christ in the wonder of Advent:  
a season illuminated by your brilliance.  
All authority in heaven and on earth is yours,  
and to you we humbly submit.  
May our every act of celebrating direct our hearts to you!*

*Let us not be defined by our political allegiances, but instead let  
our politics be conformed to your Holy Word. We confess, we get  
this backwards. Our worship and our affections are all too easily  
disordered.*

*You created everything from nothing and delivered us from death.  
You came in the smallest of ways to do the biggest of things.  
How dare we give you anything but the highest seat of authority  
in our lives?  
Contrary to political promises, our freedom does not come from  
man but was bought with your blood on the cross.*

*In a culture that worships moving-target moral fads, grant us the courage to be counter-cultural. Where the world says to live our own truths, may we instead live within your truth. As candidates and thought leaders rise and fall, remind us that your reign and rule are forever.*

*All year round there is evidence of our need for a Savior, but a pre-Advent election season makes it particularly clear. Bring us into your light, so that we may cast off our darkness.*

*The Christ Child came to be with us and to reign over us: let us live like this is true, every day until you call us home.*



## WEEK 4 — Lord's Day Evening

# The Peace That Christmas Purchased

Devotional by Pastor Jon Needham, Liturgy by Brynn James

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. — Romans 5:1–2 (ESV)*

Peace feels like such a foreign word right now. 2020 has been anything but peaceful. We have all had front row seats to the COVID-19 pandemic. All of us have been touched by it in some capacity. In addition to that, we have been reminded of the reality of injustice in our country which has sometimes led to peaceful protests but at other times has ended up in violent riots and acts of injustice against oth-

ers. And if all of that wasn't enough, we are in the midst of what feels like the ugliest and most divisive political season of our lifetime. Many of us are "checking out" in an attempt to find peace or at least avoid the conflict. While checking out might provide a measure of immediate relief, it cannot deliver the deep and true peace that our souls long for.

The fundamental human need is not peace with each other, as important as that is. Our greatest need is for peace with the Triune God who made us in his image for his glory and purposes. Each of us was made for relationship with God. We need it like a fish needs water, like lungs need air. Every hint of horizontal strife and unrest that we experience serves as a painful reminder of the vertical peace we so desperately need with God.

This is the peace that comes as a result of being justified and reconciled to God through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). Our sin has separated us from God, putting us at odds with our Heavenly Father. Until our sin is dealt with, we can have no peace. The peace that we need is costly. It's not something that we can purchase, for our sins are far too great and the price is far too high. The peace that we need requires a greater sacrifice. That sacrifice is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross, in our place and for our sins. This is the Jesus whose birth we celebrate at Christmas. Born in a manger, crucified on the tree. The cross is the point of Christmas,

and peace with God and the forgiveness of sins is the gift that Christmas gives. Jesus was born to die so that we who were dead in sin might have peace through faith in him. We have no greater need. There is no greater gift.



*Heavenly Father, you are worthy beyond measure.*

*Sweet is your love and rich are your mercies.*

*We ache for your coming.*

*We cry out to you today, crippled and mangled by our own sins.*

*We've been turning elsewhere for satisfaction*

*but have been left wanting.*

*We bring you our fear, our anxiety, our greed, our need for control,  
our need to be loudest, our need to be right. Won't you wash these  
away with waves of your comfort, Great Healer?*

*Restore our hearts and replace our turmoil  
with the peace of the Lord.*

*Many are the ways this election threatens to cloud our hearts and  
hold hostage our Advent season.*

*But greater still is the claim that you have on our hearts, O Lord.*

*We confess, we do not always live as if this is true.*

*We feebly fail to give you our allegiance before  
any political party or group.*

*Shamefully, your Church lacks peace and we divide over  
man-made law rather than finding unity in yours.*

*You were born to die so that we who were dead in our sin would  
have peace through faith.*

*There is no other restoration or reconciliation outside of  
your blood-bought Kingdom.*

*Oh that every nativity scene we see might serve as  
an undeniable reminder of your peace that passes understanding!*

*Let us see every bit of strife and unrest around us as  
a declaration of our need for you.*

*Teach us, O Lord, not only to live in your peace  
but to carry it with us wherever we go.*

*Let them know us by our love:*

*By our words,*

*By our deeds,*

*By our comment sections.*

*Peace was born in Bethlehem, yet it is with us now.*

*May the aroma of your holy calm permeate our souls.*

*Christ, fortify your Church and unify us with your love.*

## WEEK 4 — Midweek Evening

# The Promise of the City

Devotional by Pastor Brandon Johnston, Liturgy by Brynn James

*<sup>2</sup> But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,  
from you shall come forth for me  
one who is to be ruler in Israel,  
whose coming forth is from of old,  
from ancient days. — Micah 5:2 (ESV)*

God loves to use small, little, and weak things to shock us with his glory. From an aging Abraham and a barren Sarah was to come the family of God. Moses was slow with his speech yet proclaimed God's Words to Israel. David was a small shepherd boy who killed the Philistine giant Goliath. The town of Bethlehem was small and insignificant. Their

only claim to fame was being the home of the rock slinging King David. Yet it was through this tiny and insignificant town that God promised to raise up a ruler of his own.

The expected Messiah would come from the least expected place. A ruler who would shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord. A shepherd who will keep them safe and be their peace.

It is not from a great army that God calls this ruler, but from a small town, Bethlehem. As a child, he was from Bethlehem, but as the Son he was from everlasting. Bethlehem was a footnote in Christ's eternal existence. He always has been, he is, and he will always be. God promised a Kingdom (2 Samuel 7) and he promised to send a King (Isaiah 9), to come from this little town of Bethlehem, as *"God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God"*(1 Corinthians 1:28-29)

Bethlehem was quite ordinary. Not even big enough to be counted among the clans of Judah. Yet this is where the King would be born. This little town of Bethlehem. God often works through the small places and small things. God uses ordinary places and ordinary people to bring about his extraordinary Kingdom on earth. A Kingdom that brings peace through the forgiveness of sins. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot.

Lord, you will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

*“O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie. Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by. Yet in thy dark street shineth, the everlasting Light, the hopes and fears of all the years, are met in thee tonight.”*



*Accept our humble praise, our Ruler and Protector!  
Your sovereignty and might are unmatched.  
Everything that exists belongs to you.  
The world casts away the small and insignificant,  
but you claim them as your own.  
Why are we surprised? Using the ordinary to  
make the magnificent happen is your specialty.*

*We are not worthy to scrounge for your table scraps  
let alone feast at your table.  
And yet, here we are:  
invited to come and adore at the side of the manger.*

*Lowly and ordinary, you stepped into our broken world.  
You came to save us from ourselves,  
crushing sin and death forever in the least expected of ways.*

*We are simple and we struggle to believe that you could be both  
good and kind; for this we repent.*

Week 4: Midweek Evening

*Here we are Lord—your ordinary people.*

*Use us in your Kingdom for our good and your glory.*

*Teach us, O King, to renounce all that holds us back from  
worshiping at the manger.*



# A Prayer for Christmas Morning

By Pastor Aaron Kuhns

*Heavenly Father, when sin entered the world, it brought a burden that we did not know how to bear. The first man and woman hid, then attacked. And so began our struggle to find an answer to our fundamental problem. Our attempts to cope grew and diversified. We gave into violence, overfed our appetites, redefined reality, and built towers of works. Despite our attempts, relief did not last. Policies failed. Kingdoms fell. Pain, guilt, fear, and shame persisted. Yet, you did not abandon us. You gave the promise of a child, the promise that Christmas would come. Loving Father, show us again how the coming of Christ answers the chaos in the world and the darkness in our hearts.*

*Son of God, your arrival exposes our failure to save ourselves. You did not wait until we fixed ourselves, but met us in our weakness, confusion, and rebellion. It took your condescension and*

*incarnation to lift our burdens. You were crushed so that we could be lifted up. But even today, we put our hope in things that cannot save and will not last. Great Redeemer, show us again how your birth, death, and resurrection bring peace to the world and light shining into our hearts.*

*We have often put the weight of our longing for peace on policies, leaders, and money, but these cannot bear the burden. Holy Spirit, help us to put our politics and finances in their proper place by first finding our hope, peace, and rest in you.*

*We have often put the weight of our need for righteousness on our successes, skills, reputation, and relationships, but these cannot bear the burden. Holy Spirit, help us to put our good works and standing with others in their proper place by first finding our forgiveness, righteousness, and identity in you.*

*Even on Christmas, we often put the weight of our desire for satisfaction on tradition, experiences, and gifts, but these cannot bear the burden. Holy Spirit, help us to put the joys of Christmas in their proper place by first finding our joy, satisfaction, and contentment in you.*

*O God of our salvation, we thank you and praise you for bringing our redemption through the promise of Christmas. Amen.*

