



An Advent Devotional 2023



Advent Services
Ebenezer Baptist Church
Saskatoon Saskatchewan

December 3 – 8:30, 10:00, 11:30

December 10 – 8:30, 10:00, 11:30
6:00 – Kids Christmas Concert

December 17 – 10:00 – Celebration Service – Prairieland
Exhibition – Registration Required
Register by Dec.10th at ebenezerbaptist.ca or text ‘celebration’
to 306-249-0084

December 24 – Christmas Eve Services – 3:00, 5:00, 7:00

December 31 – 8:30, 10:00

An Introduction to Advent

As 2023 draws to a close we look back on recent history as being very troubled times. Covid restrictions seem nostalgic as we remember those strange days of masking and social distancing. We live with worried anticipation about what will happen in Gaza and Ukraine. Canada continues to grapple with a troubled history of injustice towards its Indigenous population.

For those of us with children we have also become aware of the spiking numbers of depression and anxiety among the younger generation. Lingering effects from pandemic isolation and overuse of social media on phones has led to a mental health crisis.

We need healing.

As a community this year we will be looking at Advent as a “season for healing”. As we look at some of the characters in this story, we will see sources for healing of those things that ail us.

Mary and Joseph show us the healing of shame.
The shepherds show us the healing of low self-esteem.
The wise men show us the healing of worldly wisdom.
And finally, Jesus shows us the healing of loneliness.

Please use this devotional to aid you in your worship this Advent season.

The word Advent is taken from the Latin word “Adventus” which means coming.

Today, the word refers to the Christmas season as we reflect on the coming of

Jesus Christ into the world 2000 years ago as a tiny baby in Bethlehem. We

“re-enter” the calendar and join in those who were awaiting God’s Messiah to

come. But we are also waiting for the second coming of Jesus Christ, when he

will come to restore, repair, reconcile and rule fully and completely.

Sunday December 3

The Healing of Self-Worth

The Shepherds

Luke 2:8-20

This week we study the shepherds of Christmas. These young men at work encounter a divine interruption. Heaven breaks through the physical barrier and they are confronted by an angelic chorus.

It is likely the shepherds were men in their late teens to early 20’s. They would have been born into a family of sheep herders and simply entered the family trade. Shepherds and

other laborers were at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. They had very little prestige or power.

And yet these men are the chosen ones. Out of everyone alive on the planet – these men are singled out for the honor of welcoming the savior to Earth. The angels come to them and guide them to Jesus.

The Shepherds are transformed into becoming the first evangelists in history. They return proclaiming all that had happened.

Can you imagine the effect this would have had on how they viewed themselves? We can speculate that being poor and powerless it was possible they held to a poor view of themselves.

All human beings struggle with a healthy perspective of their worth. We all struggle with insecurity and inferiority at varying levels. But, if you are born poor.

If you are born disadvantaged,

If you are born at the bottom

The natural tendency will be to view yourself in more negative light.

Do you struggle with seeing yourself as worthy?

As valuable?

As treasured?

Curt Thompson is a Christian psychiatrist who has done some helpful work in understanding shame, trauma and inferiority. He contends that “our deepest desires as humans is to be known – to be seen, soothed, made to feel safe and secure.”¹ When those desires are not met, we will suffer.

This week we will meditate on passages and ideas related to our self worth.

December 4

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this:

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. - Romans 5:8

God’s love towards you is never dependent on your morality. He loves you because you are you.

December 5

be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. - Ephesians 6:10

Life is a perpetual cycle of challenges. Advent shows us that we do not need to face its challenges alone. God comes to us in the person of Jesus. And when we invite him into our lives, he gives us his power to face whatever is in front of us.

Ask God for power today to face whatever is a challenge in your life.

¹ Thomspson, Curt, 40.

December 6

Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, - 2 Corinthians 3:5

We often delude ourselves when we trust in our own efforts and skills. All that we have comes via the grace of God in our lives.

Thank God today for the competence and gifts he has given you to do what he has called you to do.

December 7

I am ready for anything through the strength of the one who lives within me. – Philippians 4:13

Ultimately, there is nothing that can permanently impede God's will and vision for our lives. There is no challenge.

Problem,

Trial,

Test,

Or difficulty that we cannot face.

This again is due to the power of Christ within us.

Thank God for his power. Ask him to make it more visible and manifest in your life.

December 8

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord.

They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream.

It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green;

in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.

-Jeremiah 17:7-8

This is a true picture of you. A life grounded in faith in God is unstoppable. You need not fear.

You need not worry.

You will bear fruit during seasons of drought.

Spend time praising God for his abundant blessings in your life.

December 9

You are my hiding place.

You will keep me out of trouble and envelop me with songs that remind me I am free. – Psalm 32:7

Worship is a powerful weapon against negative thinking and faulty beliefs about ourselves.

Listen to the album “Sanctuary Songs” by Porter’s Gate. This album has many songs on healing and empowerment.

Meditate on these lyrics from the song, "Always with Me" from the album.

I can make it through the day
When you're with me on the way
In my heart and mind you'll stay
I can make it through the night
When I'm clinging to your light
You will make the darkness bright
For you are always, always with me

In the calm and in the storm
When it seems I'm all alone It's your hand I find to hold
In each hour of unrest When it seems I've nothing left
You speak peace in every breath

When I'm waking, when I'm sleeping
When I'm arriving, when I'm leaving
You will have me in your keeping
Even from my mothers womb
Never hidden from your view
I was always known to you
When I fade away in death
You will catch my final breath
You will take me to my rest

Sunday December 10
The Healing of Shame
Mary and Joseph
Matthew 1:18-24
Luke 1:26-56

Mary and Joseph are plunged into a story neither of them would (or could have even imagined) for themselves. Having a child out of wedlock is still a cause of embarrassment among some, despite the permissiveness of our current culture. Try to imagine the shock and awe when a teenage girl reveals her pending pregnancy in ancient times.

Imagine the emotions Mary had to grapple with. And Joseph – we see was a man of dignity and honor – “And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.” – Matthew 1:19

Then through a series of divine encounters both Mary and Joseph find themselves able to accept what they have been assigned, and are able to do it devoid of shame.

Shame is a restrictive emotion. When we feel shame, we feel constrained – we are not free to live as we were meant to live.

Over the next few days, make space to experience God’s love for you through meditation. Take 5 minutes a day and try to concentrate on the verse of the day, going over it slowly word by word and then personalizing it to your own context.

December 11

The peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:7

December 12

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. –
Numbers 6:24-26

December 13

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety – Psalm 4:8

December 14

Today – meditate on what God the Father said to Jesus at his baptism:

“You are my son in whom I am well pleased.”

Take time to imagine God looking at you in love and saying:

You are my child in whom I am well pleased.

Ask God if there is anything else he wants to say to you. Listen and then write down or share with a trusted friend what you think God is saying to you.

December 15

1 Peter 2:24 teaches that when Jesus died on the cross he:
Bore your sins on his body,
Broke the power of sin and death so that you might live to
righteousness.
And that by his wounds

You have been healed.

Reflect on God's forgiveness of your sins.
Praise him that the power of sin has been broken in your life.
Ask him to help you live for righteousness.
Ask him to heal any areas of brokenness in your life today.

December 16

Rejoice always,
pray continually,
give thanks in all circumstances:
for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. – 1 Thessalonians
5:16-18

Gratitude is a key tool in overcoming shame or feelings of inferiority. Reflect on the last 24 hours and think of 3 specific things you are grateful for. Bring them to God and thank God for them.

Sunday December 17

The Healing of Wisdom

The Wise Men

Matthew 2:1-12

Proverbs 1-8

James 3:13-18

We live in an age of with a wisdom deficit. We have knowledge, information, and data. All the world's information is only a google search away. But wisdom – wisdom is in short supply.

Knowledge and information can teach us about life. But wisdom, teaches us how to *live*. The Christmas story teaches us about what happens when worldly wisdom confronts the divine.

We are told when the wise men encountered Jesus, “they bowed down and worshipped him.” These wise men were pagan astrologers. And yet they are shown Jesus’ star and are led directly to Jesus. Despite being men of learning, they humbly bow before the very personification of wisdom!

December 18

Luke 1:38 – Read Mary’s response slowly several times. Is there something in your life right now that you need to say, “Let it be with me, according to your word”?

December 19

Luke 1:46-55 – Re-write this song/prayer to fit your own context.

December 20

Luke 1:67-79 - Reflect on this eloquent expression of praise.

December 21

Isaiah 53 – This is the classic prophetic writing of Isaiah concerning the coming Messiah. How have each of these prophecies been fulfilled in Jesus Christ?

December 22

Psalm 3 – Pray this Psalm back to God.

December 23

1 John 3:14-18 – Pray for this kind of love.

December 24

Christmas Eve

The Healing of Loneliness

Birth of Jesus

Luke 2:1-20

Matthew 8:1-4

In 2022, the New York Times wrote an article on the effects of loneliness on our physical health. The article said that feelings of loneliness trigger the release of stress hormones, increased heart rate and blood pressure.

Loneliness also affects us mentally and emotionally – leading to depression and anxiety. Spiritual loneliness is the worst kind of loneliness. To be spiritually lonely is to feel truly alone – adrift in the universe.

Because loneliness is so devastating – Christmas becomes so much more important!

We need never be alone again!

The God of the universe broke through time and space just to be with you.

Spend tonight and tomorrow meditating and reveling on the fact that Jesus came to alleviate us of our loneliness!

Enjoy meditating on this song performed by Caedmon's Call.
(link at bottom)

Babe in the Straw

Who is this child, asleep in a manger?
The heaven's are bright
The stable's so cold on this holy night,
Have you come to redeem us?
little child in the straw
and if we lose sight of your sweet face
at the birth of grace,
at the birth of grace
light of truth shine like Bethlehem's star
lead us to where you are,
show us who you are
merciful one
lover of every soul
the Father's own Son
Emmanuel
yes, we believe,
you are able to heal us
Noel, noel,
save us all
-written by Steve Hindalong

December 25 – Christmas Day

*Today in the town of David
a Savior has been born to you;
he is the Messiah, the Lord
Luke 2:11*

Merry Christmas