

Three Devotions followed by the Service - Christmas Eve 2024

Devotion 1 - Gen 3 (after lesson)

Every day would have been like the perfect honeymoon.

Every day like the perfect Christmas.

Every day exploring God's gift of paradise.

Every day enjoying God's gift of marriage.

Every day tasting new treats, each one a gift from God.

Every day wowing at God and his gift of life in paradise.

Then what? They listened to the lies of a liar. "God is holding out on you." "You know better than God. Don't listen to him. Go with your gut; trust your feelings. You're better off trusting your feelings than trusting God." They listened to the lies of the Liar. And what did it get them? A whole new experience, a whole new set of feelings - guilt and fear, shame and fear, bitterness and anger. A whole new way of life - hiding and denying, blaming and excusing.

We know those feelings, don't we - guilt and fear, shame and fear, bitterness and anger. We know that way of life - hiding and denying, blaming and excusing. We know those feelings, we know that way of life, because the Liar has lied to us and we've been suckered in to believe the Liar's lies, suckered into trusting our self instead of trusting the God who has given us so much. Now we know what it's like to live a broken life in a broken world. Now we know what it's like to live a dying life in a damned and dying world. Like Adam and Eve, we have put our self in place of God, trusting our self instead of trusting God. And like it cost Adam and Eve, it has cost us.

If you were God, and you saw how Adam and Eve disrespected you, how they disrespected your gifts to them, what would you do? I don't know what button I pressed, but lately it seems that my phone feed has been filled with stories of vengeance and revenge, making people pay. And what saddens me is how eager people seem to be to jump on that bandwagon - "make them pay."

But what does God do? For Adam and Eve, for us? He comes to us: "Where are you?" He comes to us giving us a chance to "fess up," to ask for forgiveness. And even before we do that, while we're still blaming and excusing, what does God do? He promises another gift, another set of gifts. I know it sounds a bit odd; God's promise for Adam and Eve and for us comes in the form of a curse on Satan the serpent. In God's curse on Satan, we have God's promise - the gift of a New Start! God didn't turn his back on Adam and Eve; he hasn't turned his back on us. God didn't hand Adam and Eve over to the lies of the devil;

he hasn't turned us over to the lies of the devil. Instead God gave Adam and Eve, and God gives us, a New Start. We don't have to live suckered lives believing the devil and his lies. We don't have to live a life of guilt and shame. We don't have to live a life of hiding and denying, blaming and excusing. We get to live a New Start with God.

It gets better. In this New Start, this New Life, with God, we aren't alone. God promised to Adam and Eve, and God has given to us the Gift of a Champion. A Champion to stand up for us and fight for us. A Champion to crush the devil's head; a Champion to silence the devil and put him in his place; a Champion to set us free from the devil's lies, free to live in the promise and paradise of God.

Devotion 2 - Isaiah 7 and 9 (before reading)

It's an awful feeling isn't it? An awful Truth. Too awful to tell. Too awful to admit. What is that awful feeling, that awful truth? "I'm wrong. I need help." We see it in other people, don't we? They're clearly wrong; they clearly need help; but they won't admit it, and so they founder. Maybe we see it in ourselves; maybe we refuse to see it in ourselves. We do see it in our next lesson. King Ahaz, King of Israel, knew he was on the wrong side of God; he knew he was in trouble; he knew he needed help. But he didn't want to admit it; he didn't want to accept help from the LORD; because he knew that if he did, he would have to listen to the LORD - and Ahaz was too in love with his pride, too in love with his sin to listen to the LORD.

But that didn't stop God. God saw his people hurting; God saw his people living lives of darkness and distress in a land of death. God knew he had a promise to keep. He had promised a Champion to stand up for his people, a Champion to crush the devil's head, a Champion to set his people free for life the way it is supposed to be. With Ahaz or without Ahaz, God would share his promise ... God would give himself.

First Isaiah shared God's sign: "**A virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel**" - "God with us." Then Isaiah tells us about this son - "**He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.**" He would be God's forever King. He would make life right for his people.

Don't be an Ahaz, too stubborn to listen to God. Instead, join Isaiah: "**For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.**" Celebrate with Isaiah: "Jesus is born for me! God has given himself for me!"

Devotion 3 - Isaiah 40 (before lesson)

It didn't work - Living the life of the world didn't make life right for them. It didn't work - Lying and denying, blaming and excusing didn't get rid of their guilt and shame. It didn't work - Turning to the world for help didn't get them the help they needed. Instead it just got them kicked at and stepped on.

And what could we say? "Been there, done that." Too many times we've lived life the same way, and ended up the same way - beaten down, dark, and dirty.

But what did God say to his beaten-down people? What does God say to us? **"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God."** But he doesn't just pat us on the hand or the head and say nice things to us. God doesn't just say words; God keeps his Word. To keep his Word, God gave himself and he gives himself.

That's what Christmas is about. Not just beautiful words and songs; not just beautiful lights and smiles. Christmas is about God giving us the gift of God himself. God giving us the gift of himself in the manger - Jesus stepping in for us, stepping up for us, to make life right for us. Then God giving us the gift of himself on the cross - Jesus stepping in for us, stepping up for us to pay for our sin. And now we have God giving us the gift of himself as our Good Shepherd - Jesus stepping in for us, Jesus stepping up for us to look out for us, provide for us, protect us, to hold us safe with him for life with God in heaven.

We don't have to live a life of chasing the world. We don't have to live a life of hide and deny with our guilt and shame. We don't have to live a life of searching for help in all the wrong places.

God has given us the best gift ever, the gift we need more than any other. God has given us the gift of Jesus, God himself.

Christmas Eve 2024
Candlelight Service

The Gift of God

*In the spirit of the evening,
please be quieted when the music begins.*

PRELUDE

Piano and Organ

Christmas Hymn Medley – arranged by Valerie Floeter

What Child Is This? – Wilbur Held

Silent Night Partita – Charles Callahan

Piano and Violin

Away in a Manger

OPENING HYMN (*Please stand after vs. 2*)

“Once in Royal David’s City”

Hymn 343

Once in royal David’s city stood a lowly cattle shed,
where a mother laid her baby in a manger for his bed:
Mary was that mother mild, Jesus Christ her little child.

He came down to earth from heaven who is God and Lord of all,
and his shelter was a stable, and his cradle was a stall;
with the poor and mean and lowly lived on earth our Savior holy.

And our eyes at last shall see him through his own redeeming love,
for that child, so dear and gentle, is our Lord in heav’n above,
and he leads his children on to the place where he is gone.

Not in that poor, lowly stable with the oxen standing by
shall we see him, but in heaven, set at God’s right hand on high.
Then like stars his children crowned, all in white, his praise will sound.

M: Dear people of God, in this Christmas season it is our duty and delight to hear again the message of the angels and, in heart and mind, to go to Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us—the Christ Child lying in a manger.

Let us read and learn in Holy Scripture the story of the loving purposes of God who in his right time sent a Savior to deliver us for all time.

But first, let us pray for people all over the world who would delight with us to know the good news of Jesus Christ, and who would join with us in singing his praises. Let us pray for the people of Lake County and for all those in our own congregation.

And, because this would please our Lord, let us remember, in his name, the poor and helpless, the cold, the hungry and the oppressed, the sick and those who are sad, the lonely and the unloved, the elderly and the little children. We especially remember all those who do not know the Lord Jesus, or who do not love him, or who by sin have grieved his heart of love.

Finally, let us remember before God all those who rejoice with us in heaven, who live in greater light than we, that multitude which no one can number, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, who died in faith, and who live before the throne of God and praise him each day in his temple. We confess that we are united with them as we are united with one another. To sum up all these petitions, let us pray as Christ himself taught us.

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

LESSON – THE GIFT OF GOD IS THE GIFT OF A CHAMPION

Genesis 3:8-15

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

Cursed are you above all the livestock
and all the wild animals!
You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.

And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel."

HYMN

"Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising"

Hymn 362 vs. 1-4, & 6

Come, your hearts and voices raising, Christ the Lord with gladness praising;
loudly sing his love amazing, worthy folk of Christendom.

Christ, from heav'n to us descending and in love our race befriending,
in our need his help extending, saved us from the wily foe.

Jacob's Star in all its splendor beams with comfort sweet and tender,
forcing Satan to surrender, breaking all the pow'rs of hell.

From the bondage that oppressed us, from sin's fetters that possessed us,
from the grief that sore distressed us, we, the captives, now are free.

Gracious Child, in mercy hear us, from your lowly manger cheer us,
gently lead us and be near us till we join th' angelic choir.

LESSON – THE GIFT OF GOD IS THE GIFT OF GOD HIMSELF

Isaiah 7:10-14; 9:2,6, 7

Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in
the deepest depths or in the highest heights."

But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test."

Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. ...

The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned. ...

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.

HYMN

"Peace Came to Earth"
Hymn 330

Peace came to earth at last that chosen night
when angels clove the sky with song and light
and God embodied love and sheathed his might—
Who could but gasp: Immanuel! Who could but sing: Immanuel!

And who could be the same for having held the infant in their arms and later felt
the wounded hands and side, all doubts dispelled—
Who could but sigh: Immanuel! Who could but shout: Immanuel!

You show the Father none has ever seen,
in flesh and blood you bore our griefs and pain,
in bread and wine you visit us again—
Who could but see: Immanuel! Who could but thrill: Immanuel!

How else could I have known you, O my God!
How else could I have loved you, O my God!
How else could I embrace you, O my God!
Who could but pray: Immanuel! Who could but praise: Immanuel!

LESSON – THE GIFT OF GOD IS THE GIFT OF PEACE

Isaiah 40:1-2, 9-11

Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

You who bring good news to Zion,
go up on a high mountain.
You who bring good news to Jerusalem,
lift up your voice with a shout,
lift it up, do not be afraid;
say to the towns of Judah,
"Here is your God!"
See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,
and he rules with a mighty arm.
See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.
He tends his flock like a shepherd:
He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.

HYMN

"Where Shepherds Lately Knelt"

Hymn 345

Where shepherds lately knelt and kept the angel's word,
I come in half-belief, a pilgrim strangely stirred;
but there is room and welcome there for me,
but there is room and welcome there for me.

In that unlikely place I find him as they said:
sweet newborn babe, how frail! And in a manger bed:
a still, small voice to cry one day for me, a still, small voice to cry one day for me.

How should I not have known Isaiah would be there,
his prophecies fulfilled? With pounding heart I stare:
a child, a son, the Prince of Peace for me,
a child, a son, the Prince of Peace for me.

Can I, will I forget how Love was born, and burned
its way into my heart—unasked, unforced, unearned,
to die, to live, and not alone for me, to die, to live, and not alone for me?

THE CHRISTMAS LESSON – PART 1

THE GIFT OF GOD IS THE BABY BORN IN BETHLEHEM

Luke 2:1-7

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

HYMN

“Away in a Manger”

Hymn 340

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,
the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.
I love you, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky,
and stay by my side until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in your tender care,
and take us to heaven to live with you there.

THE CHRISTMAS LESSON – PART 2

THE GIFT OF GOD IS THE GIFT OF A SAVIOR

Luke 2:8-14

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

HYMN

“Angels We Have Heard on High”
Hymn 346

Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o’er the plains,
and the mountains in reply, echoing their joyous strains.
Gloria in excelsis Deo; gloria in excelsis Deo.

Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong?
What the gladsome tidings be which inspire your heav’nly song?
Gloria in excelsis Deo; gloria in excelsis Deo.

Come to Bethlehem and see him whose birth the angels sing;
come, adore on bended knee Christ the Lord, the newborn King.
Gloria in excelsis Deo; gloria in excelsis Deo.

THE CHRISTMAS LESSON – PART 3

THE GIFT OF GOD IS OUR GIFT TO CELEBRATE

Luke 2:15-20

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

HYMN

“What Child Is This”

Hymn 344

What child is this who, laid to rest, on Mary’s lap is sleeping,
whom angels greet with anthems sweet while shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary!

Why lies he in such mean estate where oxen now are feeding?
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here the silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce him through, the cross be borne for me, for you;
hail, hail the Word made flesh, the babe, the son of Mary!

So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh; come, peasant, king, to own him.
The King of kings salvation brings; let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise the song on high, the virgin sings her lullaby;
joy, joy, for Christ is born, the babe, the son of Mary!

OFFERING – A Gift for Our Savior and Our Gift to Share

If you would like to leave an offering for your Savior, we have an offering plate near the front door and our old wood church in the Narthax.

If you prefer to give online, the code at the right will take you to our Online Giving page. We invite our online givers to join in our offering with an “I Give Online” card in the pew racks.



Distribution of candles (See back page.)

Once your candle is lit, always hold it upright.

Please stand

HYMN

“Silent Night! Holy Night”

Hymn 337

Silent night, Holy night! All is calm, all is bright,
Round yon virgin mother and child. Holy infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, Holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight.
Glories stream from heaven afar; Heavenly hosts sing, Alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born!

Silent night, Holy night! Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord at thy birth, Jesus, Lord at thy birth.

PRAYER

M: When all was still in the midst of the night, Emmanuel, the Prince of Peace, descended from the almighty throne to dwell among us. May we receive him in the peace of forgiven hearts and proclaim your gracious goodwill to all people on earth, for he is God with us, Emmanuel, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: **Amen.**

BLESSING

M: Go forth into the world in peace, be of good courage, hold fast to that which is good, render to no one evil for evil, strengthen the fainthearted, support the weak, help the afflicted, honor all people, love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the blessing of God Almighty—the Father, the Son, † and the Holy Spirit—be upon you and remain with you forever.

C: **Amen.**

Extinguish candles (please hold upright until the wax hardens)

CLOSING HYMN

"Joy to the World"
Hymn 353

Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King;
let ev'ry 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 earth, 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 sins and sorrows 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, wonders of his love.

POSTLUDE

Joy to the World – Robert Hughes

Angels We Have Heard on High – James Southbridge

Thank you to our choir and musicians this Christmas week!

*Beth Rockwell: flute and keyboards; Tim Samelson: piano and guitar; Louis Luedtke: trumpet;
Meredith Fein: violin*

Join Us In Worship This Christmas Season!

Christmas Day Sunday Worship - 9 am
New Year's Eve Service - 5 pm



Acknowledgments

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For Your Safety During the Candle Lighting in This Service

- The Village of Libertyville and the Libertyville Fire Department require us to follow some rules when using hand-held candles. This is for your safety and the safety of all who worship here.
- The ushers will hand out wax candles only to adults and teenagers. Children under 10 should not be allowed to hold a lit candle. LED candles are available for children and all who prefer them.
- Ushers will be stationed to observe the whole worship area while the hand-held candles are lit. They are ready with fire extinguishers should any problem develop.
- Note where the exits are. In case of a fire, calmly proceed to the nearest exit.
- **Once your candle is lit, always hold it upright.**
- Keep the flame away from hair and clothing.
- When the lights come on after the prayer, blow the candle out and hold it upright until you exit. After the service ushers will be waiting at the exits for candle disposal.
- Please keep pieces of wax from falling on the floor. It will make the after-service cleanup much easier.

***In the Peace and Joy of the Christ-child,
Have a Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year***