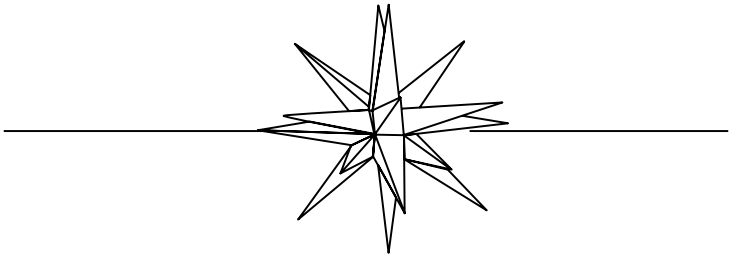


Devotions for Advent 2026

New Philadelphia Moravian Church



Advent 2026 Introduction

Have you ever thought about waiting as an adventure? For many people, waiting is something to endure. In our community (and our lives?) it is common to see attention spans decreasing and impatience increasing. One might say that the motto of many is "Hurry up, already!"

But what if we began to see waiting less as a burden to endure and more as a blessing to enjoy?
What if we began to see Advent as an ADVENTURE?

"These Days of Adventure," our 2026 devotional theme, comes from the lyrics from the Advent hymn "People in Darkness are Looking for Light" *(Moravian Book of Worship #266).* Each hymn verse ends with the phrase: "These days of adventure when all people wait are days for the advent of..." Love, Hope, Peace, or Joy (the four Advent themes). The scripture passages this year focus on the adventures of Jonah, Ruth, Peter, and Mary as they heard God's call and responded with faithful action. While their stories have different details, several common characteristics emerge. Jonah, Ruth, Peter, and Mary all:

- had an unusual encounter with a person or angel,
- sensed God calling them to do something strange,
- traveled to a new community,
- formed new relationships with people who were "different,"
- experienced something miraculous,
- received a new perspective on life and faith,
- developed a deeper sense of trust in God, and
- discovered God's mission to welcome "outsiders" into the family of faith.

Their stories of faith have been told for centuries, and they continue to inspire God's people today.

It's unlikely that you will see the inside of a whale's stomach like Jonah, but we all will have opportunities to encounter new people, to sense the Spirit's nudge to step out in faith, and to deepen our trust in God's faithfulness. May our waiting this Advent be a time of increasing adventure as we take steps of faith, expecting to encounter Jesus in the people that we meet.

Pastor Paul Stutzman

"People in Darkness are Looking for Light"

Moravian Book of Worship, #266

People in darkness are looking for light,
Come, come, come, Jesus Christ.
People with blindness are longing for sight,
Come, Lord Jesus Christ.
These days of adventure when all people wait
are days for the advent of Love.

People with sickness are praying for health,
Come, come, come, Jesus Christ.
People in poverty want to have wealth,
Come, Lord Jesus Christ.
These days of adventure when all people wait
are days for the advent of Hope.

People in trouble would like to be free.
Come, come, come, Jesus Christ.
People with arguments want to agree.
Come, Lord Jesus Christ.
These days of adventure when all people wait
are days for the advent of Peace.

People in sorrow are yearning to sing,
Come, come, come, Jesus Christ.
People in misery want bells to ring,
Come, Lord Jesus Christ.
These days of adventure when all people wait
are days for the advent of Joy.

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On the Advent page also find brief video devotionals that connect to the daily lessons in this booklet.

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Jonah 1: 1-5

Jonah was called by God to embark on what should have been a great adventure – filled with travel to new places, meeting new people, and delivering exciting news. God did not just offer this opportunity for great adventure – He commanded it. It was the opportunity of a lifetime for a prophet – to deliver the message to one of the wickedest cities in the world and warn them of impending doom if they did not repent. Anyone would jump at this chance, wouldn't they? Not Jonah. He fled to Joppa to catch the first boat at his own expense to take him as far from the Assyrians of Nineveh as possible. He was sure that God could not do this without him, and he wanted no part of it!

Jonah, as a Hebrew, held deep-seated hatred for the Assyrians that went back generations. The Hebrews had suffered greatly from the destructive cruelty of these people. Jonah feared them. He wanted no part of their reception of God's grace should they be warned and given the chance to repent. He wanted God to simply swoop in and destroy them.

Rather than trusting in God's will and obeying Him, he sought to run away. God's wrath caught up with him, and he caused needless suffering of innocent sailors while suffering himself. He ended up in Nineveh. He ended up delivering God's message, even if reluctantly, and the Ninevites ended up receiving God's grace.

How many times have we each put ourselves and others through needless suffering because we failed to trust God and accept an opportunity He has laid before us? During this Advent season, as in every Advent season, God asks us to prepare our hearts to accept Christ into our lives for the greatest adventure of all – that of following His word, even when it is hard, when it is uncomfortable, and especially when it challenges long-held beliefs about others. Reach out and grasp this transformative adventure this Advent season!

Prayer

Dear Father, let me set aside my fears, my prejudices, and my sense of entitlement to follow you more closely. Let me serve others with an open willing heart.

Questions for Reflection

1. *What fears and prejudices do you seek to set aside that might be keeping you from serving God?*
2. *What opportunities for adventure will you seek out this year?*

Barbara Howard

Day 2: **November 30, 2026**

Jonah 1:6–17

I was a pretty sick puppy as the new year of 2020 rang in. I was diagnosed with end-stage liver disease and needed a transplant. The problem was that according to the metrics used to determine transplant priority, I wasn't quite sick enough. But there was a silver lining to the COVID-19 pandemic ravaging the world. In March, transplant centers around the country paused transplants, not knowing the ramifications of transplanting a COVID-infected liver. However, Duke decided to forge ahead with transplants, opting to vet the donors and patients thoroughly. Late one night, on my wife's birthday, a call came from Duke informing me that a liver from an organ donor had become available. As in Jonah 1:7, "So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Preston!"

I'm pretty sure that even though Jonah was running from God, he was still praying mightily, just as I, my family, and my friends were. Did Jonah have hope when he told his shipmates to "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you"? You bet he did, as did I, comforted by knowing that my Lord and Savior was going to "swallow me up" and save me.

Looking back on my transplant saga, I realized that God had a hand in my journey. One of the side effects of liver disease is ascites, a buildup of fluid in the belly. Every 10 days or so, I had to have this fluid drained. Two weeks before the transplant, I got an infection from this procedure and was hospitalized for 4 days to receive IV antibiotics, which improved my health immensely. Then came Duke's decision to proceed with transplants despite the uncertainty. Finally, an organ donor lost his life, and through his gift, I was given another chance at mine. Looking back, I don't see luck. I see God's hand at work.

In this Advent season I'm reminded of those days when "Preston in Darkness was looking for Light." He found it in "the advent of Love" from the outpouring of prayers. He found it in "the advent of Hope" from the doctors reassuring him that a liver would be found. He found it in "the advent of Peace" knowing that God would provide. And he found it in the "advent of Joy" when he awoke from a successful operation. Let God "swallow you up" and deliver you to an unimaginable destination.

Prayer

Lord, help us trust you when we cannot see where the journey is taking us. Give us faith to recognize your presence and your provision, even when they arrive in unexpected ways. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. *When have I experienced a difficult or uncertain time that I understood differently only after looking back?*
2. *Do I sometimes expect God to answer my prayers in a particular way?*
3. *Where might God be asking me to trust Him and step more adventurously in faith today?*

Preston Corbett

Day 3: **December 1, 2026**

Jonah 2:1-10

Just for the sake of conversation . . .Let's say that Jonah was just an average sized, pre-fast food Israelite. So why did God need such a large fish? My guess is that the fish had to be large enough to accommodate not just Jonah's body, but also his ego, which said, "Those Ninevites are not nice people. I don't like them, and you, God, shouldn't like them either!"

That raises the question, "Who died and made you God, Jonah?" And just as the fish was asking itself that question, a severe retching reflex sent Jonah to a Mediterranean beach appointment with God where Jonah reconsidered God's non-negotiable offer.

Meanwhile back on a ship still headed for Tarshish on a suddenly smooth sea, a group of sailors, wiping their hands of what they had just done in throwing Jonah overboard, and swearing like only sailors can swear, decide that Jonah must have been ***one bad dude.*** But Jonah, sitting in the dust left behind by a wilted gourd vine, puzzled over this post mission trip question about a God who has concern not only for 120,000 Ninevite humans and their cattle. No, Jonah wasn't a bad dude. He was no better than any of the people in Ninevah, and he was a ***work in progress***-kind of like each of us.

Prayer

"God, you are Lord, even over all the big things that tend to swallow us up as we ponder your purpose for our lives. Cause us to pause and listen to you as you seek to tell us what you are trying to do in our lives today."

Questions for Reflection

1. *Think about a time when you felt that you were being swallowed up by circumstances of life that seemed much larger than you.*
2. *Are you ever tempted in your prayers to tell God how you think a situation should be handled rather than listening for God's instructions for your response in that situation?*
3. *What might God be seeking to do in your life today, and can you submit to that?*

Michael Crane

Day 4: **December 2, 2026**

Jonah 3:1–5

One thing that jumps out to me when I read Jonah 3:1–5 is that God gives Jonah another chance. Jonah had already run away from what God asked him to do, but God still called him to go to Nineveh. This time, Jonah went. I think that is something a lot of us can relate to. We all have moments when we avoid something because we are scared, uncomfortable, or simply do not want to do it. Jonah shows us that one wrong decision does not mean God is finished with us.

As a freshman in college, I have been realizing how many new opportunities and challenges come with being in a completely different stage of life. There are times when I feel like I am supposed to know exactly what I am doing, even though I am still figuring things out. Following God can feel the same way. Sometimes I might know that I am being called to do something, but I do not know what will happen if I take that step. Jonah probably did not expect the people of Nineveh to listen to him, but he went anyway. His job was not to control what happened after he obeyed. His job was simply to go and be faithful.

That is what I want to remember during Advent. Preparing for Jesus is not just about looking back at what happened in Bethlehem. It is also about preparing ourselves to follow God into whatever comes next. I do not know what this year of college, or even the next few months, will bring. But I do not have to have everything figured out before I take the next step. Sometimes faithfulness is just saying yes when God gives us an opportunity, even when we are unsure where it will lead.

Prayer

Thank you, Jesus, for giving us second chances and for continuing to guide us even when we do not know what comes next. Help me to trust you enough to take the next step, even when I am uncertain. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. *When have I been given a second chance to do something I was afraid or unwilling to do? How did I respond?*
2. *What might God be trying to teach me through the uncertainty or new experiences in my life right now?*
3. *As I join Jesus in adventure today, what is one step of faithfulness I feel God is asking me to take?*

Charlotte Henshaw

Day 5: **December 3, 2026**

Jonah 3: 6–10

In your life right now, where do you long for a "second chance", or a new beginning with God? We all have sinned before. We're human, we're Christian. God knows that, but at the end of the day, it's not necessarily how we sinned but how we handle the aftermath of our sin. Do we just say a quick prayer for forgiveness? Or do we fully surrender control and admit our guilt when faced with conviction?

In these verses, the king and the people of Nineveh humbly repent from their sins of violence and evil ways. Jonah had previously come to the King and the people and warned them that because of their evil ways, their city would be overthrown. The king of Nineveh could have handled this news in various ways. For example, he could have mocked the message and completely ignored it. He could have defied the message. Did he do any of these things? No. The king stepped down from his throne, removed his robe, and covered himself with a sackcloth. He then proclaimed to his people that all, including livestock, must fast, wear sackcloth, and "call out mightily to God."

After I read this story, I immediately started to ask myself if I was doing all I could to fully repent for my sins. Then I realized that I don't know what real and true repentance is. True repentance is a real and complete change of heart, attitude, and life direction. Turning away from sin and turning towards God rather than turning towards a temporary state of guilt or regret. This story from the book of Jonah is a great example of true repentance that highlights God's plentiful and boundless mercy, and the power of humility before divine judgment.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, as we reflect on the story of Nineveh, we see a community that heard your truth and humbled itself. Lord, we give you all of our hearts. Any feelings of pride or harshness, and any wrongdoings. Help us not just to feel regret, but help us to truly turn away from our evil ways. Grant us the spirit of true repentance and a soft heart towards Your word. In your name we pray, Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. *What are some specific habits and attitudes that draw us further away from God?*
2. *How can we fully surrender every part of ourselves to God?*

Molly MacReynolds

Day 6: **December 4, 2026**

Jonah 4: 1-5

Jonah's story is a complicated one dealing with his adventure based on a command from God. After trying to run away from God, Jonah eventually journeys to Nineveh and gives a short passive-aggressive message, essentially meeting the bare minimum of God's command. To Jonah's surprise the populace of Nineveh changed from their evil ways as God desired. Because they listened to God's command, God decided to spare them from destruction. This mercy angers Jonah who cries out to God saying that he knew that mercy was God's goal from the beginning!

I felt some confusion and distaste for Jonah. Jonah shows angry judgment towards people he does not even know personally, leading to his ignoring God's command. This indicates a bitter heart and implies that he wants God's mercy for his own people but not for this group that he dislikes. God tells Jonah to warn the Ninevehans of possible destruction so that they can repent, but destruction is exactly what Jonah desires for them. Is Jonah's hate so strong that seeing his enemies find redemption causes him to want to die? Could this be us seeing some guilt in Jonah's heart? In these verses, I see a prime example of how hatred and pride can make a person blind to God's acts of love, mercy, and redemption. I believe our God is a loving God, who extends his open arms to all that seek him.

While hatred may be the easier path, acceptance, love, and sharing God's values is the higher path. I am honored to call myself a Christian and a Moravian. When I encounter situations where I feel negative feelings towards others, I immediately think back to all that I have been taught about God's mercy, love, and redemption. If I had one bit of advice for my congregation it would be that next time you feel anger or hatred towards another person or group of people, first reflect on the Moravian Motto and remember, **"In all things love."**

Prayer

Dear God, please open our hearts to your mercy, your grace, and your light so that we may see the world through the same loving eyes that you see us in. Please enable us to quell the anger in our hearts, to treat those different than us with understanding, kindness, and love and allow us to spread this accepting and loving redemption to all we encounter. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. *When we as Christians pray are we seeking God's will or are we trying to convince God to see things our way?*
2. *In what areas of our lives do we demand strict justice for others while deeply desiring grace for ourselves?*
3. *When things don't go your way, do you tend to withdraw, isolate yourself, and harbor bitterness instead of engaging with God?*

David Reagan

Jonah 4: 6-11

Jonah 4:6–11 is an extremely important passage. It serves as an Old Testament bridge to New Testament grace, acting like a preview of the Gospel. It shows that God's favor cannot be earned and is not restricted to any particular group of people. In Jonah, the recipients of God's mercy are the Ninevites—enemies of Israel who did not know God's laws. Jonah is furious that God would extend grace to them. This mirrors the early church's struggle in the Book of Acts. Just as Jonah resented the Ninevites, many early Jewish Christians struggled with extending salvation to Gentiles (non-Jews) without requiring them to follow strict Jewish laws. Ephesians 2:14 highlights this transformation, saying that Christ broke down the "dividing wall of hostility" between groups to create one new humanity through grace.

Jesus uses Jonah's story in the Gospels to explain His own mission and the nature of God's grace. When religious leaders demanded a miraculous sign, Jesus replied that no sign would be given except the "sign of the prophet Jonah" (Matthew 12:39–41). Jesus pointed out that the pagan Ninevites repented at Jonah's preaching, showing that those thought to be furthest from God are often the quickest to receive His grace.

God points out that Jonah did nothing to make the shade plant grow. The New Testament continually emphasizes that human effort, heritage, or good works cannot earn salvation. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Jonah's anger at God's mercy reflects a self-righteous attitude: he believed Israel deserved God's love, while Nineveh deserved destruction. Jesus targeted this mindset in his parables, most notably the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32). Jonah acts like the resentful older brother who fumes outside the house because the father throws a celebration for returning younger brother. God's final question to Jonah is the same as the father's plea to the older brother: Should I not rejoice over those who were lost but are now found?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, Today, as I look at the ending of Jonah's story I see sinfulness in my own heart. Forgive me for the times I care more about my personal comfort than I do about the people around me. It is so easy for me to get angry over minor inconveniences while staying indifferent to hurting in the world. Help me overcome all self-righteousness or prejudice. If there are people or groups I have judged as unworthy of your mercy, change my heart. Guard me against bitterness when you choose to show unearned grace to those who repent. Thank you that your grace is entirely unmerited. I have done nothing to earn your

salvation. It is a pure gift. Give me a heart that pities the lost, rejoices in forgiveness, and wants restoration over destruction. Lord, you have every right to love who you love. Teach me to love them, too. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. *Have you experienced God providing comfort during a season of distress or anger?*
2. *Should we view people who are different from us with judgment or compassion?*
3. *Jonah lost the shade of the gourd plant. How should we react when we are forced out of our comfort zone?*
4. *Which is more important, our comfort or the well being of other people?*
5. *Should we expect God to align with our political, national, or cultural views rather than aligning ourselves with His universal heart?*

Doug Gerringer

Ruth 1:1–22

Stories of our ancestors can show us unexpected connections. My grandmother Annie often began conversations with "I know your people"—she wanted to know their connections, even several generations back. I'm sure there were other reasons. She lost her mother when she was 12, and for years, she moved from relative to relative caring for households and children until she married at 16 and had twelve children of her own. Losing her mother at a young age, she so wanted to keep connections in the family she nurtured.

The first chapter of Ruth tells the story of Naomi, her husband and two sons who moved from famine-stricken Bethlehem to Moab. Naomi's two sons married Moabite women. When Naomi's husband and sons died, three childless widows were disconnected from the family. Naomi planned to send Ruth and Orpah back to their birth families, and she would return to Bethlehem. But in "the time of judges," generations before the birth of Jesus, a Moabite woman named Ruth made the decision to move with her mother-in-law, Naomi, to her home of Bethlehem instead of returning to her parents in Moab. "Wherever you go, I will go. . .your God will be my God," Ruth tells Naomi.

In Bethlehem, Ruth married Boaz, a relative of Naomi's. Their son, Obed was the father of Jesse, the grandfather of David, the ancestor of Jesus. A woman from another culture choosing to go with her mother-in-law to a strange land provides a missing part in the genealogy of Jesus. Jesus, born in Bethlehem, the land where she had come with her widowed mother-in-law, was a direct descendant of Ruth. Joseph, "of the house and lineage of David," traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem with Mary, where Jesus was born.

Prayer

Dear God, As we are often a people in darkness looking for light, help us to see the advent of love and the stories that illuminate and connect us too. Show us how we are all connected, every one to each other. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. *What family stories have you learned that offer connections that surprised you?*
2. *Why do you think the loyalty of Ruth to Naomi is important in telling the story of Jesus being of "the house and lineage of David"?*
3. *How has God's grace and mercy followed a decision you have made to go with someone, to find new connections?*

Kay Harper Windsor

Day 9: **December 7, 2026**

Ruth 2:1-7

If you have driven up and down Stratford Road, you have noticed an empty building that was previously a restaurant – P.F. Changs. The restaurant closed some months ago, and a building with reasonable square footage has been sitting empty ever since. I am sure this is not the only empty commercial space in our area. I can't help but wonder what could be done with these empty spaces that could actually be useful or meet needs in the community. What good is an empty building to anyone?

In the passage today, Ruth has gone into a field to gather grain from what might be left behind. Among the other commands in Leviticus 19 for personal conduct, God had commanded his people to "not harvest grain along the edges of the fields" and to not "pick up what the harvesters drop." God gave this command for people like Ruth. The grain at the edge of the field or the grain that was dropped was for the "poor and foreigners living among you." This is just another example of God's incredibly complex plan for living to take care of each person, especially those who are vulnerable. God already knew there would be people of wealth and people with lesser means. This was the case then, and it continues to be the case now. God was trying to provide his human creations with another direction for living.

In 2026, most of us are probably not harvesting grain. However, this does not mean that we cannot take some time to look around at the things right in front of us that exist in abundant amounts that could be used or shared or "harvested" for the "poor and foreigners living among us". It might be an empty building, but it also might be something that has been sitting in the corner of the garage collecting dust.

Prayer

God, thank you for your abundant blessings that at times overflow in our homes and communities. Help us to remember that abundant blessings can and should be shared with others. Amen

Questions for Reflection

1. *If you are a person who tends to keep things in abundance, why do you think you prefer an abundance versus just what you absolutely need?*
2. *Challenge yourself to be a part of this adventure today. Is there anything in your life God might want you to "leave and not pick up" so it can be used by someone else?*

Robbi Muckenfuss

Ruth 2: 8-23

"May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!"

This is surely a day of adventure for Ruth! As seen in Ruth 1:22, this scripture passage is set in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. Yes, *that* Bethlehem — the town where both David and then the Christ child were born!

Ruth was a hard worker, not missing an opportunity to provide for her needs and those of her mother-in-law, since both Ruth and Naomi were vulnerable widows. Boaz told his young men to allow Ruth to glean among standing barley sheaves; he further told them to pull out handfuls from bundles and leave them for her to glean. Due to these kind and generous actions from Boaz, she was able to glean an ephah of barley, about a half bushel.

Boaz cared for Ruth, addressing her as "my daughter." He protected Ruth by ordering young men not to bother her. Boaz also instructed her to stay close to his young reapers, since foreigners were not always welcomed in Israel. Further, Boaz took care of Ruth's physical needs by caring for her thirst and feeding her bread and wine. He showed compassion at every single turn. Finally, Boaz asked the Lord to reward Ruth and give her a *full reward*. God was working on Ruth's behalf – just as he works on our behalf.

This entire passage is analogous to God's daily compassion for us: lavish grace, provision, love, and protection. When we stop to consider, it is almost too much to comprehend. What gifts!

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, Please guide us during this Advent season to reflect on your compassion, protection, and provision. Help us to seek opportunities to share kindness, love, and generosity with others. Thank you for your ultimate grace in the perfect gift of the birth of your only son, Christ Jesus.

Questions for Reflection

1. *Was it a coincidence that Ruth went to this particular field to glean barley leftovers so she and Naomi could eat? Did it "just happen" that Boaz noticed Ruth?*
2. *How has God unexpectedly provided for you this year?*
3. *How can we demonstrate grace and compassion to our neighbors near and far during the Advent season and in 2027?*

Mona Brown Ketner

Ruth 3:1-9

The threshing floor is an unexpected place to find hope. It is dark. Ruth has no guarantee of what will happen next. She approaches Boaz with courage, but also with vulnerability, placing her future into the hands of another person. Naomi told her what to do, but neither woman knows how the story will unfold.

Boaz demands to know who she is when he discovers her lying at his feet. Ruth replies, "I am your servant, Ruth. Spread the corner of your covering over me, for you are my next-of-kin."

It is more than a request for protection. It is a request for belonging.

Earlier, Boaz had praised Ruth for seeking refuge under the wings of the God of Israel. Now, Ruth asks Boaz to extend that same refuge to her. She trusts that the God who has carried her this far may continue His work through the faithfulness of another.

Advent is a season of waiting in the dark. We often want God to give us the whole story before we are willing to take the next step. We want certainty before courage; answers before obedience; and a clear path before we move forward. But Ruth shows us that faithfulness sometimes means stepping into the unknown with only enough light for the next step. The people of God waited for a Savior without knowing exactly how salvation would come. Yet God was already working—even in the darkness, even in the uncertainty, even when His people could not yet see the shape of His plan. On the threshing floor, Ruth could not see the future. But God could. And He still can.

Prayer

God of the waiting and the unseen, meet us in the places where we do not know what comes next. When we are tempted to demand answers, teach us to trust Your presence. When we are afraid of what the future holds, remind us that our future has never been outside Your hands. Give us the courage of Ruth and faithfulness of Boaz. Help us remember that silence does not mean absence and uncertainty does not mean You have forgotten us. And as we celebrate the coming of Christ, remind us that the child in the manger is proof that You are faithful to Your promises. We may not see the whole story, but we know the One who holds it. Amen

Questions for Reflection

1. *Where in your life are you currently waiting without knowing how the story will unfold?*
2. *What would it look like to trust God with the part of your future you cannot yet see?*
3. *Are you more comfortable having certainty or practicing faith? Why?*
4. *Where might God be quietly working, even though you cannot see the outcome yet?*
5. *What is one "next step" of faithfulness God may be inviting you to take this Advent?*

Rachel Paden Smith

Ruth 3:10–18

In this scripture, Naomi's acts of kindness toward Ruth demonstrated that she truly cared for her and wanted what was best for her. Boaz affirmed Ruth's good character, noting her loyalty and high standing in the community. Boaz wanted to do the right thing for Ruth and offered to direct her to a closer relative who might be a better fit. However, if that relative chose not to step up, Boaz committed to caring for her himself. In addition, Boaz provided barley for Ruth to take back to Naomi so she would not return empty-handed.

Both Naomi and Boaz demonstrated God's love by acting righteously toward Ruth. Ruth's devotion to Naomi showed that sacrificing for others ultimately brings greater blessings. This passage highlights how living sacrificially brings true joy and draws us closer to God.

Reading this passage reminded me of when I was deciding on my first career path after college. My parents advised me to focus on a role that would utilize my strengths and challenge me. They encouraged me not to worry about job titles, but to look for a financially sound, reputable company that valued ethics and growth.

Although I felt uncertain at the time, I trusted my parents and following their advice truly paid off and set me on a fulfilling career path.

Prayer

Dear Lord Father – Thank you for those individuals in my life that have demonstrated your love by sacrificing on my behalf. Guide and motivate me to pass this type of love on to others.

Questions for Reflection

1. *What person in your life has provided sacrificial guidance which led you in a positive direction.*
2. *What small action have you taken for the benefit of someone else that has multiplied beyond your expectations?*

Patrick Linville

Ruth 4:1-12

With inspiration from our New Philly tradition of providing new confirmands with their Daily Text verse on the day they were born, I delved into the scanned online Moravian archives and found my daily text verse for my birthday. It turns out to be Isaiah 12:2- "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation." How perfect! We can be sure that Ruth had this verse, or something similar in mind when she made her decision to leave her home and kin, trust in the Lord, and travel with her mother-in-law after the death of her husband. In her travels, she ended up becoming the wife of Boaz as part of a real-estate deal.

Talk about an advent-ure! She was blessed by the witnesses to the "transaction" to be like Rachel and Leah, two of the four "mothers of Israel." That blessing came to fruition. She had a son with her new husband and named him Obed who became the grandfather of King David with a direct lineage to Jesus. Ruth waited, obeyed and trusted in the Lord, and in doing so, Ruth continued the genealogy that led to the birth of our Savior. As Ruth did, we too must wait and trust in the Lord during this season of Advent.

Prayer

Lord, we thank You for the courage of Ruth, living out her advent-ure. Help us find the trust in You as Ruth did. Help us not be afraid of our own advent-ures.

Questions for Reflection

1. *What advent-ures are you facing?*
2. *How can trust in the Lord steer you away from fear like the example of Ruth?*

Bob Saturn

Ruth 4:13-22

Everyone experiences loss. Some suffer the excruciating loss of a child. What do you say to someone in profound grief? Presence often outweighs words. You can pretend to care, but you can't pretend to show up. God shows up in our pain, usually bringing others to share our burdens. When Naomi's husband and two sons died, God brought her daughter-in-law Ruth alongside. "Where you go, I will go," Ruth said, and her presence fulfilled her words. A child's death is an irreplaceable loss. Even so, God always seeks to bring healing. Irreplaceable is not irredeemable.

God delights in transforming overwhelming loss into overflowing joy! Imagine Naomi's face as she proudly shows her infant grandson to neighbors? Hear their joyful shouts "Naomi has a son!" God redeemed Naomi's loss through Ruth's delivery, and Naomi unknowingly became his agent, bringing the immigrant Ruth to Bethlehem. God redeemed this "outsider" and grafted her into a royal family tree; King David was Ruth's great-grandson!

Horatio Spafford suffered the devastating loss of four daughters in an 1873 shipwreck. Traveling to England to comfort his bereaved wife Anna, he penned this poem near the place their daughters drowned: "When sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, it is well with my soul." In that awful moment, he felt God's comforting presence, and God was planting seeds of hope for future generations.

God began rebuilding the Spafford family through Anna's delivery of three children. The Spaffords moved to Jerusalem in 1882 to establish a mission to Jewish and Muslim neighbors. In David's city, they met a Jewish orphan who had recently discovered the Hebrew inscription carved in Hezekiah's tunnel in 701 BC. The Spaffords adopted Jacob into their family and into faith. Surely their scars remained. Yet imagine Horatio Spafford's joy as he fathered Jacob in faith, knowing his son had discovered evidence of King Hezekiah, a thirteenth-generation descendant of Ruth? (SeedBed.com/what-goes-around)

Prayer

Thank you, Jesus, that earth has no sorrows that heaven cannot heal. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. *When have I experienced something profoundly joyful that came after a season of difficult loss?*
2. *Who might I find it hard to receive something good from? What joys might I be missing because of my resistance?*
3. *What recent joy is evidence of God's redeeming presence in my life? Who might I share this with today?*

Pastor Paul Stutzman

Acts 3:1-10

He was born crippled. His future would be to beg. With help from family and friends, he made it to the temple each day where he could sit and ask for help from those entering the temple. Neither he, nor his family/friends could see him doing anything else based on his physical circumstances.

The man was used to most people ignoring him with a few stopping to giving him some coins, but Peter and John didn't do either. Instead, ***Peter said, "I don't have a nickel to my name, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!"***

Peter grabbed him by the right hand and pulled him up. In an instant the man's feet and ankles became firm. He jumped to his feet and walked.

Peter remembered that Jesus had given the apostles the authority to heal and used this gift saying ***"...what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!"***

Take a minute to think of gifts you do have to give in the name of Jesus Christ-and who they could benefit. Now Peter did more than speak; he also reached out to help the man up. With Peter's support, the man was able to stand; his ankles became firm, and after years and years of being known as the crippled beggar, he finally was able to walk.

The beggar never expected to walk; Peter never expected to be a healer. Could God be calling you to do something unexpected as well? Would you be willing to accept?

Prayer

Lord, we are all crippled and need your healing touch – emotionally, spiritually, physically, mentally, etc. We beg you to make us be like Peter and to use the gifts you have given each of us to be your healing hands. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. *How about you? Have (or are) you been a position where you haven't been able to imagine different circumstances for yourself because of what you have been told or what you believe? Could this story open your eyes to the possibility that God envisions more for you?*
2. *Do you have a contemporary story of the Healing of the Crippled Beggar? How is God using us to heal others? Are you willing to allow God to heal you?*

Valerie Crane

Acts 4:1-21

Most commentaries on these verses speak to the boldness Peter displayed in his explanation of their actions and defiance of the Sanhedrin. In Acts 3, the way the Apostles handled the event leading to their appearance before the Sanhedrin sparked my thoughts in writing this devotion.

The Apostles faced a decision when they encountered a lame man begging for money as they entered the Temple. Having none, they could have ignored him. Instead, they gave what they had to give which was the healing love of Jesus Christ. This approach of "Doing What They Can With What They Have" was a key part of the early church.

The next day the Apostles appeared before the Sanhedrin. Church leaders saw them as fishermen with no formal training in Jewish law. The Sanhedrin intended to intimidate them with the hope it would stop their preaching. The Holy Spirit gave Peter the courage to boldly speak before the Sanhedrin saying Jesus, the cornerstone they rejected, healed the man. His defiance placed the Sanhedrin in a dilemma. All they had left were threats which Peter brushed aside. Peter asked them whom should he obey-the word of God or the word of men.

Teddy Roosevelt tweaked this approach with, "Do what you can, with what you've got, where you are." His addition of "where you are" emphasizes you can make a difference wherever you are. By activating the Holy Spirit in us through prayer, we can have the same source of courage displayed by Peter when we use our talents to make a difference in someone's life. If you think our work will not help, remember a Roman emperor noticed the early church did a better job providing aid than the largest empire in the world.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for the bold witness of Peter and the other disciples who were filled with the Holy Spirit. Please fill us with similar courage to do what we can, with what we have, wherever we are, to help those both inside your church and the greater community. Amen

Questions for Reflection

1. *The Sadducees and Jewish leaders believed they were upholding God's will by opposing this gospel. How does this challenge your thinking? How can we be confident in God's will?*
2. *In Acts 4:8, it states that Peter was "filled with the Holy Spirit" before speaking. What does this tell us about the source of Peter's boldness compared to his behavior before the crucifixion?*

Smitty Welborn

Acts 9:36-43

Peter! Peter! We have been searching for you! The news of your miracles in the name of our beloved Jesus is known to us in Joppa! We have walked the 12 miles to Lydda on this day in search of you! Please, come with us at once!

Can you hear the urgency in their voices? The pleading? The *expectation*? If I were Peter, my first question would be "why?" We don't know his first response, but we do know that he *went with them*. He left Lydda and walked the 12 miles back to Joppa with these two disciples. The "why" however, matters. Tabitha, a disciple of Jesus, who "was always doing good and helping the poor" was dead. The "why" was that these two men wanted Peter to raise her back to life! What must Peter's life with Jesus have looked like for him to say "yes" and go with them? I wonder what he was thinking on the walk to Joppa. What were his prayers to God? Was he remembering Jarius' daughter? Did he recall when Jesus said to Jarius, "Do not fear, only believe?"

When Peter arrived at the house, he went to the upper room where Tabitha's lifeless body had been washed and lovingly placed. The widows were grieving and showing Peter what Tabitha had left behind, the work of her hands, beautiful robes and clothes that she had made in service to those in need.

Then, Peter sent them all out of the room and got down on his knees and prayed. In the silent stillness, Peter faithfully sought the Lord's glory and then turned to her and said "Tabitha, get up." How they must have all celebrated when he then presented her, alive!

Prayer

Lord, may we seek you out with expectation and in silent stillness, find you. Make your glory known to us and through us to bring healing and life to those shrouded in darkness. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. *What instances throughout your walk with the Lord have strengthened your faith?*
2. *When your days come to an end, what "works of your hands" do you want to be remembered for?*
3. *How can you humbly allow God to use you to reveal His glory to those in your spheres of influence?*

Hollie Gomez

Acts 10: 1–16

In *"Oh, the Places You'll Go!"* Dr. Seuss describes "The Waiting Place," a place where people simply wait... hoping for something, *anything*, to happen. Throughout my life I've found myself there many times, and I know how dangerous it can be. But Acts 10:1-16 shows us waiting itself is not a danger, rather it's the way we wait that is important.

Cornelius, a Gentile, is described as a devout man who gave generously and prayed continually (v. 2). His devotion didn't save him; he hadn't heard the gospel, but it was a life of active devotion that opened the opportunity to play an important role in the Church. When an angel was sent to him, he didn't hesitate; he did what he always did and followed with devotion to the best of his ability. Likewise, Peter wasn't passively waiting. Verse 9 finds him on the rooftop praying, receptive to God's word even in his moments of rest. There he received a vision he didn't yet understand, one that would soon show him the gospel was for Jews and Gentiles alike.

These two men shared little in common: one a Jewish fisherman, the other a Gentile centurion. But both refused to simply wait in idleness, and God used that faithfulness to grow His Church.

It's easy to see the day-to-day life as mundane but even before a call to action, there is action to be done. Devotion is not passive, nor should we be.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for always being with us. I pray that you help us to keep our eyes firmly fixed on you, today and every day to come. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. *Have you experienced a moment like the big events described? How was your daily devotional life then?*
2. *How might this help you see your walk with God differently?*
3. *As you join Jesus in devotion today, what might you feel led to do or say?*

Elijah Moore

Acts 10: 17-33

Have you ever been in a dream, and heard the voice of God? Or maybe, in a less apparent fashion, you feel an insatiable desire to do something, and you have no idea where it comes from? Of course, I'm not saying that wanting a midnight snack because you feel hungry is divine intervention... (usually), but I am saying that God speaks to us, and it is important to listen.

In Acts 10:17-33, God breaks down barriers between Jews and Gentiles by showing Peter that the message of salvation is for everyone, and Peter obediently shares the Gospel with Cornelius and his household. Peter was a devout Jew, and pretty much everything he did in this story was against Jewish laws, but he did it without question. Because of his incredible faith, Peter was able to fulfill God's plan. Choosing to follow God's command can seem like an obvious decision, but when something we value is at stake, it's a different story. We might be asked to give up things like time, energy, money, or even our reputation. Proverbs 3:5 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, do not depend on your own understanding." Hearing God and listening to God are two different things, and it's ultimately up to us to answer to the call.

Prayer

Father God, we thank you for giving us your son so that we may be with you for all eternity. We know you have a plan for each of us, and we pray you give us the wisdom to recognize when you call us to serve your will, and the courage to carry it out. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. *As you go through your day, try and think about what God could be trying to tell you, and what you'll do in response.*
2. *What might you give up that you value to follow God's command?*

Sam Gomez

Acts 10:34-48

In Acts 10:34 – 35, the apostle Peter says, "I now realize that God shows no partiality, but in every people anyone who fears him and practices righteousness is acceptable to him."

What happened to make Peter "*now* realize" that God doesn't show partiality? Well... a lot!

First, God showed him a vision with all kinds of food that he had been taught *not* to eat and told him to eat it. When, like a faithful follower of the Hebrew Scriptures, he refused to do so because it was unclean, a voice said to him, "What God has made clean you must not call unclean."

Then, Peter was led to meet a God-fearing man who was *not* one of "God's chosen people" but who had also seen a vision. God used these visions to bring these two men together for an unlikely encounter. And Peter *realized* that the vision God had given him wasn't just about food; it was about people. He realized that "God shows no partiality, but in every *people* anyone who fears him and practices righteousness is acceptable to him."

We have to remember that Peter had grown up with some very specific and detailed teachings regarding right and wrong. He was taught what the "right" foods were and yes, who the "right" people were. The children of Israel – the descendants of Abraham – understood themselves to be God's chosen people. And they were "right" in remembering that God had made a covenant with Abraham.

But the apostle Paul saw that many Jewish people, like the Galatians, were misunderstanding this covenant and claiming it as their own based on their lineage (traced back to their ancestor, Abraham). Paul wrote to them:

Just as Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,"
[7]so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. [8]And the scripture, foreseeing that God would reckon as righteous the gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the gentiles shall be blessed in you." [9]For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed."

I think what Paul was saying – and what Peter *realized* – was that there is no free pass or special connection to God's promise based on one's race or nationality. When God made the covenant with Abraham (in Genesis chapter 12) the condition of that covenant was that "all the families (literally, all the ethnicities) of the earth would be blessed through his descendants." Paul makes this very clear when he says, "There is no longer Jew or Greek (gentile); there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. [29]And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."

And thankfully, Peter could say, "I now realize that God shows no partiality, but in every people anyone who fears him and practices righteousness is acceptable to him."

Prayer

Gracious and Loving God, Help us to see the world through your eyes. May we always remember that you so loved the whole world that you gave your only Son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. May we live our lives in such a way – and treat others in such a way – that the communion and fellowship that we will share in that eternal life together can be a reality in this life and in this world. Thank you that your unconditional love includes us... and everyone. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. *What are some ways in which you have come to **realize** that God shows no partiality?*
2. *What are some areas of your life where you might take more seriously Peter's statement that **anyone** who fears God and practices righteousness is acceptable to God?*
3. *How can we as Christians be part of the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham by not only accepting God's blessing but by **being** a blessing to "all the families of the earth?"*

Pastor Sam Gray

Acts 12:1–17

Upon receipt of my assigned scripture, I chose two Bible resources. First, my "go to" Bible, the *Life Application Bible*, where I found a "dog-eared" page marking this scripture. (Side note-only one other page in this Bible is "dog-eared"; [Isaiah 41:10], a scripture Peter probably knew and received comfort from while in prison.) Second, my "have had since high school and haven't touched in years" copy of *Good News For Modern Man*. In this Bible the scripture starts near the bottom of a page and ends on the following page. In the crease between the two following pages, I found a perfectly pressed 4 leaf clover. For sure it has been between those two pages untouched for literally decades! So…a dog-eared page and a four-leaf clover mark my assigned scripture…coincidence? You may disagree, but I'm thinking… maybe not.

So, what should we learn from this scripture? We find contradictions and affirmations: James killed while Peter is saved; soldiers placed to prevent escape, but Peter escapes; undeserved imprisonment; miracles; an angel; faith; friends; prayers; rescue; peace; doubt; excitement; thanksgiving. The list could go on and on. Certainly, we each may have a different "take-away" from this scripture. For me, I am envious of the trust and peace Peter obviously had to be able to sleep on a cold, hard cell floor, chained between two soldiers, as he awaited his execution. How does one do that? Where does such peace come from? I know the "theologically correct" answer, but Peter's peace is beyond my comprehension. And…the prayers for Peter's safety…they were answered! I know I shouldn't be surprised, but I have been praying for a situation for a long time (well…feels like a long time) but I have no clear answers yet. I'm not saying my prayers aren't being answered…I'm just saying, unlike the prayers of Peter's friends, I have not yet seen answers. So…for now…with scripture's promises and a dog-eared Bible page and a four-leaf clover, I will wait.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for the gracious gifts you constantly shower upon us as we face life's challenges and adventures. May we rest peacefully, trusting we are safe and secure in your loving arms. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. *What challenging situations have tested my faith and resolve in Jesus's promises and how have I responded to such?*
2. *Trusting in Jesus's promises, how can I know the peace that Peter exemplifies in this scripture?*
3. *What are some specific ways I can share this peace with those I come in contact?*

Marie Rodden

Luke 1: 26-33

Throughout the years of my life there have been a plethora of times when I have felt overwhelmed or anxious, especially when responsibilities seemed to crash down on me all at once. Even while being surrounded by people, I managed to feel alone, carrying worries with which I didn't want to burden others. The pressure to be strong and capable left little room to admit my fears. My anxiety grew louder and louder amidst the silence.

Mary experienced uncertainty when the angel Gabrieal appeared to her. Luke tells us, "But she was greatly troubled at the saying," referring to Mary being told she was to bear a son for God. Mary was understandably fearful; the news she received was life-changing and far beyond her own comprehension. Yet, the angel immediately followed the news with words of comfort, "Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God."

In her anxiety Mary was not abandoned. God saw her fear, knew her concerns and reminded her of His presence and grace. Advent invites us to remember that our worries do not separate us from God. Just as Mary was troubled at heart, we are met by a Savior who enters out fears and assures us that we are never alone. When anxiety comes to the surface, practice relinquishing concerns to God rather than carrying them on your own. Look for reminders of God's presence in the ordinary moments, kind conversations or quiet moments of rest. When fear tells you are alone, remember the angel's words to Mary. God is near and his favor is not earned by having everything together.

Like Mary, we can move forward in faith, trusting the One who calls us is the One who stays with us.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for meeting us in our moments of fear and uncertainty. When worries feel overwhelming and isolating, remind us that we are not alone. Help us to trust Your presence when we cannot see the way forward and to rest in the assurance in your love.

Questions for Reflection

1. *What worries are you carrying today, and what would it look like to entrust them to God rather than carry them alone?*
2. *Where have you noticed reminders of God's presence—in ordinary moments, kind conversations, or quiet rest—during this Advent season?*
3. *How does Mary's experience remind you that God's grace and nearness do not depend on having everything together?*

Jillian LaMontagne

Luke 1:33–38

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."

I wonder what Mary was thinking in that moment when the angel shared this extraordinary news. She was being asked to do something she couldn't possibly understand, something that would change her life and the world.

Mary had questions. "How will this be?" she asked the angel. She didn't know what the future would hold. Yet she responded, "I am the Lord's servant."

What strikes me about Mary is that she didn't just accept what was happening to her. She made a choice to actively participate in God's plan. She didn't have any of the answers, but she trusted God enough to say yes.

As Moravians, we believe that God's love comes first. We don't have to earn it. We are invited to respond to that love through the way we live, serve, and care for one another. Mary shows us the most beautiful example of responding to God's leading.

I think we sometimes wait for certainty before we're willing to act. We want to know how things will turn out, what will be expected of us, and whether we're up to the task. Mary reminds us that we don't have to have everything figured out to take the next step in faith.

This Advent season, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I wonder where in our own lives God might be inviting us to say yes. God continues to work through ordinary people, just like us, to bring love, hope, and healing into the world. Are we willing to participate in that work?

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for loving us before we even know how to respond. Help us to listen for your guidance, trust you when the way is uncertain, and have the courage to say yes. May our lives reflect your love in the world. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. *What do you learn from Mary's willingness to say yes, even with unanswered questions?*
2. *Where might God be inviting you to take a step in faith?*
3. *How can you respond to God's love through the way you serve and care for others this Advent?*

Andi Williams

Luke 1:39-45

Elizabeth was the elderly wife of Zechariah, a member of the priesthood in the temple in Jerusalem. Zechariah's position gave Elizabeth a significant amount of social standing; yet, because Elizabeth was childless, she lived in deep social disgrace. Mary was a poor teenager from the little-known town of Nazareth; yet she was chosen by God to bear the Messiah! The relationship between these two Godly women is a beautiful example of how God can choose the most unlikely people to carry out his most important tasks.

It is heartbreaking that Elizabeth felt disgraced among her people. In their culture, childlessness was considered a sign of disfavor with God. Elizabeth demonstrated her faith with gratitude to God for the news that she would give birth to a son. After Gabriel visited Mary, imagine her anticipation as she hurried from her home in Nazareth to Judea to share the good news with Elizabeth. In reality, her haste was likely due, in part, to the danger of her journey. It is estimated that Mary traveled for 4 to 5 days in steep, stony terrain frequented by bandits. She was a pregnant, unwed teenager who probably joined a caravan of other travelers for physical safety. When Mary finally reached her cousin, Elizabeth could have condemned Mary's condition. Instead, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear!" To top it off, another miracle occurred as John the Baptist leapt in Elizabeth's womb when Mary approached.

If Mary and Elizabeth were not believers in our one true God, they would not have been chosen to give birth to perhaps the two most important men in the New Testament. Their encounter in Luke 1:39-45 is a joyful beginning to the greatest story ever told and an inspiration to us to listen for God's will and follow his guidance.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, let me have the deep faith of Mary and Elizabeth. Both women accepted your blessings and guidance and carried out your will. Help me to have that kind of trust in you and the strength to do as you require.

Questions for Reflection

1. *The encounter between Mary and Elizabeth is a beautiful example of a loving relationship between two Godly women. Is there a person in your life with whom you can share your faith openly and honestly?*
2. *Imagine being visited by an angel who delivers a message from God to you. Would you be afraid? How would you react? Would you follow their instructions?*

Beth Byrd

Luke 1:46-56

In Luke 1:46-56, Mary's response to God's unexpected call to bear the Messiah is nothing less than courageous. Did she fully understand the magnitude of what was being asked of her? Scripture does not provide an answer to that question. What scripture does provide is her response – one of praise and gratitude before she knew how the story would end.

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

Isn't this one of the most challenging and beautiful aspects of faith? Oftentimes, we praise God after answers come, after circumstances make sense, and after paths become clear. Mary, however, shows us another way. She reminds us of the importance of worshiping God while the story is still unfolding. Mary recognizes that God sees those whom the world may overlook; He lifts up the lowly, fills the hungry, and remembers His promises. Mary understands that what God is doing through her is not about her—it is part of a much larger story of God's faithfulness.

Perhaps, we need this same reminder today. We may be living in the middle of a story we do not yet understand. We may be waiting for an answer, facing an uncertain future, or wondering what God could possibly be doing in the circumstances before us. Mary's faith invites us to remember that we do not need to know the ending in order to trust the One who holds it. It is God who is still writing the story.

And if we know the Author, perhaps we can find the courage to praise Him—even while the pages are still turning.

Prayer

Lord, help us to trust You when we cannot see what lies ahead. Give us Mary's faith to praise You in the middle of the story, knowing that You are faithful and that our lives rest safely in Your hands. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. *Where in my life am I being asked to trust God even though I cannot yet see how the story will unfold?*
2. *What would it look like for me to praise God today—not because I have all the answers, but because I trust the One who holds the ending?*

Leigh Walters

Luke 2: 1-5

Taxes . . . really? Most of us, if we are honest, would like to bring something important into the world. Or at least be a part of something significant. Ironically, some of the things that have had the greatest impact on mankind usually start with something very small, or seemingly insignificant.

No one relishes taxes, but in Luke 2:1-5, Ceasar Augustus called for a "registration" or what we would call a Census to facilitate tax collection. Thus, Joseph made the decision to travel with his expectant wife, Mary, to Bethlehem. I liken this to a modern-day couple who move across state lines. At year end, they go back to their former hometown and meet with their accountant to file their federal and state taxes.

It is doubtful that Joseph or Mary could foresee that being dutiful citizens and registering to pay their taxes in Bethlehem would cause ripple effects over the more than 2,000 years that followed. Yet, because they went, our Savior Jesus Christ was born humbly in a manger in Bethlehem, miraculous astronomical signs occurred, and three Magi traveled – just as a start! This birth fulfilled a prophecy in small part because of taxes.

As Jesus once said, "Give to Ceasar what is Ceasar's, and to God what is God's".

Give yourself over to the Advent season. Celebrate one of the greatest miracles: our Lamb who has conquered!

Prayer

Divine Spirit awaken us to life this day. Help us to see the light of Christ in all things, even the mundane. As we celebrate Jesus' birth, bind us to the everlasting hope he brings. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. *How many of us make ordinary, commonplace, decisions each day that have far impacting effects or ramifications?*
2. *How could small decisions you make every day change, if you knew that they would impact your grandchildren's children?*

Dawn Rogers

Luke 2: 6 - 20

When we sat down and read the passage together, we noticed two distinct parts: the first few verses, where Mary gives birth and lays her baby in a manger, and the bulk of the passage, where angels appear to the shepherds to share the news and call them to action.

As we began our reflection, I asked Stella how she felt about the baby being wrapped in strips of cloth and laid in a feeding trough among animals. What if that were a baby she knew, like her cousin Nora or her friend Harrison? Stella immediately began searching for a word she remembered learning in school last year. She racked her brain until she came up with it: aghast. How could a defenseless newborn be laid in such harsh conditions, with no room for him anywhere else? In Stella's world, babies are loved and cuddled, protected, and treated with the utmost care.

We followed the same process with the second part. I asked Stella, "What if, in the middle of one of your soccer games, a bunch of angels appeared on the field?" She said she would run away and either hide or find an adult to keep her safe. The shepherds were terrified too, but they didn't run or hide. They listened, and then they hurried to Bethlehem to see for themselves. Stella decided they must have been extremely brave. And their bravery mattered: after seeing Jesus, they spread the word, and everyone who heard it was amazed. The story could have unfolded differently if they had given in to fear instead of listening to the message. At first glance, the miracle seems to be the angels appearing, but perhaps the true miracle is that the shepherds did not flee.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, in this Advent season of giving and celebration, open our eyes to the injustices and iniquities that remain in the shadows. Bless us with the bravery to hear Your message and to be the messengers who share it with the world. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. *Where in our community are there injustices against the most innocent among us? Have we grown numb to them when we should feel aghast?*
2. *Are there moments in your life when you stay quiet out of fear? Where can you be braver in sharing the good news?*

Stella & Erin Key

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