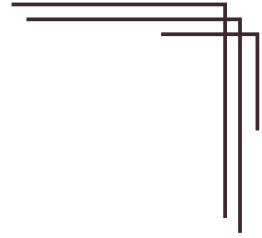




A WEEKLY ADVENT DEVOTIONAL
FROM EEN

CHRIST

in creation



For the redemption of all things in heaven and on earth, we seek the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

*“Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.”*

Philippians 2:6-7 (NIV)

This Advent season, EEN invites you to journey through a weekly devotional with us as we discover the Hope, Faith, Joy, and Peace that God fulfills himself by becoming Christ in creation.

Rev. Dr. Jessica Moerman

EEN PRESIDENT & CEO

WEEK 1

HOPE

TORI GOEBEL

EEN CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

SCRIPTURE

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

(John 1:1-5, 9, 14)

DEVOTIONAL REFLECTION

"The celebration of Advent is possible only to those who are troubled in soul, who know themselves to be poor and imperfect, and who look forward to something greater to come."

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The season of Advent is officially here. As followers of Christ, we know that this season is about so much more than just celebration; it is a time of waiting, anticipation, and expectation. As we enter into this space, we at EEN are joining others around the world in reflecting on the themes of hope, faith, joy, and peace. Thank you for choosing to share your Advent journey with us!

Hopefulness is a beautiful part of following Christ, and yet, it can be challenging to find and maintain a sense of hope in the face of so much darkness around us. As we look to God's creation, we hardly have to search for injustice, to see creation groaning under the weight of the climate crisis and environmental destruction, and to see people turning away from perceiving and addressing these realities.

This week, and every week, I am challenging myself to see hope as an action, as something that requires commitment and recommitment. This Advent season serves as the perfect time to reflect on God's promise of deliverance and restoration and to lean into that truth while facing the reality of present darkness. After all, John 1:9 tells us that Jesus is the true light, and we can rest assured knowing darkness will never prevail in the end.

I think the first step on this constant journey of living into the hope of redemption is to turn our attention and expectation to the true light, the One who came to give abundant life. Over the next four weeks, let's remember God's promise of redemption and restoration and consider how we can live that out here and now.

As the EEN community journeys through this Advent season, we invite you to embrace a sense of hopefulness as we sit in the now but not yet. In the coming days, meditate on what it means to find hope in this season of anticipation.



PRAYER

Oh God, creator of life, I thank you and praise you for the gift of your Son during this Advent season.

Open my eyes that I may see not only the suffering and darkness, but the hope of your deliverance and restoration. Renew in me a sense of hope so that I might joyfully join you in the work of redemption. Help me to lean on your promises and remember that the victory is yours, and guide me as I seek to care for your creation.

Amen.



WEEK 2

FAITH

REV. DR. PHIL COVERT
EEN BOARD CHAIR

SCRIPTURE

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!"

"He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty."

(Luke 1:39-42, 51-53)

DEVOTIONAL REFLECTION

In reflecting on this week's scripture passages, it dawned on me that when it comes to the Messiah, the one who represents God with us, God has done the unexpected. Christmas isn't at all about what we expect; it's about what we don't.

Zechariah and Elizabeth didn't expect to have a baby in their old age. Mary didn't expect to become the Messiah's mother. Joseph didn't expect his bride-to-be to become pregnant. Herod didn't expect to be disturbed by news of the Messiah. The shepherds didn't expect to see angels. The Magi didn't expect to find the world's Savior in a poor country village.

God surprised everyone that first Christmas, and Jesus has been surprising us ever since. Surprise! He ate with outcasts and hung out with common folk rather than the power brokers of his day. Surprise! He didn't live in a palace or sit on a throne. Surprise! He turned the world's values upside down when he said things like the meek shall inherit the earth, love your enemies, the first shall be last, you are not called to be served but to serve. If you have two coats, give one to the poor. Blessed are the meek.

Jesus turned the values of the world upside down.

But even before the surprise of Christmas, God creating the world is unexpected. God giving humanity the responsibility for his creation is unexpected. Nothing that God has ever done is expected. Surprise! Jesus didn't come for the religiously elite but for the outcasts and the rejected. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. That's not a tepid faith; it's faith in action. It's faith that makes a positive difference in the lives of all God's people!

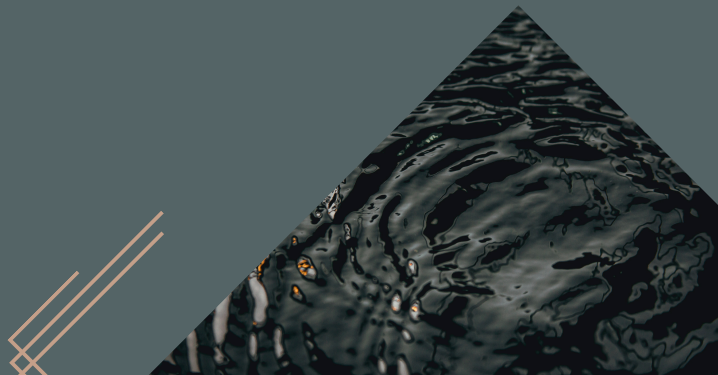


PRAYER

Creator God, thank you for the many ways your plans for your kingdom surprise us. Help us to see the story of Christmas with fresh eyes this season and recognize how you and your ways go against the expectations of this world.

As we spend time in scripture, in prayer, and in your creation, may we be inspired to take on an action-oriented faith that helps bring your surprising kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.



WEEK 3

JOY

REV. DR. JESSICA MOERMAN
EEN PRESIDENT & CEO

SCRIPTURE

Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

(Nehemiah 8:10)

DEVOTIONAL REFLECTION

It can often be hard to find joy today, especially when we allow the reality of the role our actions play in our changing climate to truly sink in. This realization can fill us with the opposite of joy: grief.

The Israelites in Nehemiah’s age experienced something similar.

With the favor of King Cyrus of Persia, a remnant of the exiled Israelites returned to rebuild the Temple and a ruined Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-5). To provide safety for the returning exiles, Nehemiah rallied the Israelites to restore the city walls in a miraculous 52 days (Nehemiah 6). With the walls rebuilt, the first order of business was to celebrate and gather the people to hear the Law together so they could truly understand what God desired of them.

As the people listened, the scales fell off their eyes. They began to understand—to truly understand—how their failure to keep God’s covenant, how their rejection of the Lord their God who loved them and saved them time and time again, had led to their own exile and destruction of their holy city. With this realization, they wept bitterly. In seeing the grief and distress of the people, Nehemiah comforted the crowd saying, “This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Today, as we realize our role in climate change, it can bring up feelings of great grief, remorse, and lament. And rightly so. But God doesn't want us to stay stuck in our grief. As Nehemiah encourages the returned Israelites—don't remain in your grief, but be strengthened by the joy of the Lord. Be strengthened by the joy of a good Father who says "I love and delight in you no matter what. I will do anything to bring you back and restore what is broken."

The rebuilding of Jerusalem and the return of the exiles in Nehemiah is a prophetic picture of the restoration work of Jesus—a work that is cosmic in scale, that is for all of God's creation, and that Jesus invites us to partner with him in accomplishing.

As we turn our hearts and minds toward Jesus in this third week of Advent, I am filled with joy as I imagine the joy it gives God to see his people rediscovering and reclaiming his mandate and commission for us to care for all he has created. I imagine the joy he has as others see us operating in joy—in spite of the circumstances—and see the face of Jesus shining through us. This is a joy that gives me strength to keep going.



PRAYER

Jesus Emmanuel, thank you for coming to rescue us. Thank you for your reconciling work on the cross and that you invite us to partner with you in your mission to restore and renew all things. Help us to not remain stuck in on our own failures, but to lift our eyes to you, to receive your mercy and grace and rejoice in your goodness. Fill us and strengthen us with your never-ending wellspring of joy, so that we may never grow weary in doing the good works that you have set before for us and that we may share your life-restoring joy with those around us.

Amen.



WEEK 4

PEACE

REV. MITCH HESCOX
EEN PRESIDENT EMERITUS

SCRIPTURE

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 guest room available for them.

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 that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

(Luke 2:4-12)

DEVOTIONAL REFLECTION

What were the shepherds thinking as they watched over their charge on that first Christmas? Some, perhaps, were simply thinking about a warm fire or a cup of hot broth. Others might have been thinking about how they ended up in a dead-end job watching someone else's flock. Still others may have been wondering what it would take to make ends meet in their lowly economy.

Times were tough in this Judean province. Judea's massive public works project—the building of Herod's Great Temple—was nearing completion. Jobs were in short supply, and double taxation to pay both Rome and Herod for his temple stifled already meager incomes. To make matters worse, these shepherds lived at the bottom of the social ladder and were considered outcasts to most. They became victims of cruel stereotypes, and religious leaders even banned pasturing throughout Israel, except in the most rugged and unfriendly places.

Probably cold, lonely, and hungry, many shepherds may have wondered: where was God? As they gazed upon the barren and rocky hills, some might have thought in irony of verses they memorized as children:

*I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you will not slumber;
indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord watches over you—
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;
the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all harm—
he will watch over your life;
the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore. (Psalm 121)*

As they scratched out an existence in the Judean wilderness, these socially “undesirable” folks were offered an extraordinary gift: the opportunity to experience the gift of Jesus, the Emmanuel God with us. They saw in the Christ child a God just like them—God living their existence. This was a God who knew and cared for them just as they were, a God who suffered with them and for them, all in pursuit of his peace. Not the peace of at once making all things right, but the peace that God would be with them through all their pain, suffering, and challenging times. A peace given through God’s love in simply becoming human.

As we consider our world, our lives, and everything from epidemics to high inflation, I pray you might know the peace that God is still with us. Please take the time this Advent to gaze upon God’s creation. Look upon the majesty of all that God has made and remember that Jesus is still with us—the God who is just like us, who came to offer us his peace. He gave not as the world gives, but instead gave the lasting peace in knowing that God is with us.



PRAYER

Holy God, as we prepare for Christmas and the celebration of your coming to be with us, help us to see you with us and for us even before we recognize your presence. Open our eyes and minds to experience your peace and know your love that comes with your amazing grace.

Help us to remember that you are Emmanuel, always with us. Guide us to accepting your amazing love, your walk with us, and the gift of peace, shalom.

Jesus, please be with us.

Amen.



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