



WHO
IS HE?

TITLES OF JESUS THE MESSIAH FROM ISAIAH



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INTRODUCTION

One of my uncles loves to research family history. He has traced our family line through many descendants and across generations back to homelands before they immigrated to the United States. We have learned some interesting facts along the way, such as that what we took as my grandmother's first name was actually her middle name...and she had a different first name that no one knew about. We also made connections with family members we did not know we had. Sometimes you can learn a lot about yourself not only by understanding who you are but also by understanding who others are.

During Advent this year we are doing just that. We are getting a better sense of ourselves not by looking in the mirror but by looking at the One who has made us. Specifically, we want to see more clearly who Jesus is in light of the prophecies of Isaiah about the coming Messiah. Each week of this devotional and teaching series will explore themes about the identity of Christ our Messiah spoken of by Isaiah. And as we more fully understand Jesus our Messiah, in that light we will also more fully understand ourselves.

Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus* ("appearing"). It is a four-week preparatory season building toward celebration of Jesus' nativity at Christmas. During Advent we look back with wonder at Jesus' birth roughly 2,000 years ago, while also entering into the history of God's chosen people, Israel, whose prophets anticipated Jesus' birth in their messages. Simultaneously, we stand as the new chosen people, looking forward to Jesus' appearing at the end of human history. Our Advent devotional this year connects with our preaching series from Isaiah entitled "Who Is He?: Titles of Jesus the Messiah from Isaiah."

The devotional you have before you is written by members of our own church community, reflecting on Scripture and life, as a way to guide us to encounter Jesus during this season. You can use this devotional individually, but we also hope it serves those in small groups, as well as groups of friends, family members, or housemates.

May God give us grace this Advent to more fully hear with fresh ears Isaiah's words about Jesus our Messiah, and also to more truly "*fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith*" (Hebrews 12:2).

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Matt Eicken". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned at the bottom left of the page.

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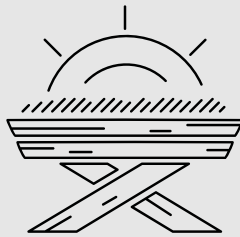
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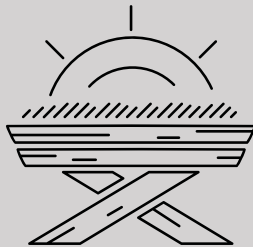
How to Use this Devotional:

Each week of this devotional begins with a Sunday reading written by our Pastoral staff for older students and adults. There is also a version called “Family Talk” written by a member of our NextGen team, intended for families with young children. Each day Monday-Friday has a short devotional thought written by one of our Eastbrookers with questions at the end for deeper reflection. Saturdays are intended for small group discussion and for deeper reflection.

As a family, you may want to join in on our Nativity Building activity. Use your own Nativity figures for this activity that allows for slow, progressive building of the nativity scene. Look for this symbol (*) throughout the devotional to find each step. The gradual nature of this activity and the periods of waiting remind us of how God’s people waited years for the promised Savior to be born! “*When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son...*” (Galatians 4:4).

Finally, you can also interact with the digital version of this devotional in a variety of ways: on the Eastbrook App, Instagram, daily emails, blog, or PDF. Find these options and links on our website at eastbrook.org/WholsHeDevo.

THE ONE WHO
RULES



*⁶ 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.*

*⁷ Of the greatness 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.*

ISAIAH 9:6-7

THE ONE WHO RULES

READ ISAIAH 9:1-7

We all want a ruler who will administer justice fairly, be kind to its citizens, and keep them safe from enemies. These are some of the traits expected of a good king. The Bible records many kings who were good during their reign. They were God-fearing. They administered justice, especially to the weak and vulnerable. They were good warriors who cared for their people. Such kings include King David, King Josiah, and King Asa.

None of these kings compares to King Jesus. In Isaiah 9:1-7 we read about the prophecy of the One who will come and rule. This prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus, our Messiah, and Matthew quotes Isaiah 9 to show that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy in Matthew 4:12-17. The ultimate fulfillment will be realized when Jesus comes back again to reign. He is the One who will rule over Israel and the world.

Isaiah 9:2 states, *"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light."* Jesus will be the bringer of light that will scatter the darkness. He will deliver His people from the bondage of the dark and bring them light, as John 1:5 notes, *"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."* Jesus will set us free from the darkness of sin. Verse three states He will bring us joy and gladness. This joy will be everlasting and will not end. The angels reaffirm this in Luke 2:10b, *"I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."*

The prophet Isaiah notes in verse 6 that Jesus, the Messiah born for us, is our Wonderful Counselor. He is God, the Creator of all things (see John 1:1-3). He is our Prince of Peace. Jesus will rule with peace. He is our peace. He brings peace to us, and His kingdom of peace will dispel all war, anxiety, and enmity with God that mankind has been struggling with.

In verse 7, we read that the kingdom of the Messiah will be everlasting. It will never end. This is excellent news. The verse also notes that King Jesus will rule with justice and righteousness. We long for these things in a world where justice has fallen by the wayside and righteousness is hard to come by. It is good to know that the hallmark of King Jesus' rule will be justice and righteousness. This should fill our hearts with joy. The One who rules is a good King. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. His reign will last forever and ever.

For Reflection:

- *Each Sunday we include discussion questions on the sermon insert that can be used for deeper reflection and/or small group discussions. Take time to read through those questions today. You can find a digital version online at eastbrook.org/WholsHe.*

READ ISAIAH 9:1-7

Dressing up as the royal family is a favorite game in our house.

I don't mean Prince William and Princess Kate, or any part of *that* royal family, but from a very young age my son has

been fascinated by the idea of being a king. Maybe we all relate, because we see evidence of this throughout classical and modern stories: from sleeping princesses to frog princes, or kings of round tables to evil queens, and every other type of ruler imaginable. Why do these stories interest us? Perhaps it's because rulers have the means and power to control their world and circumstances in ways that you or I likely do not.

We don't have to look far to see this world is broken, and it can feel like a scary place to live. Death, violence, hunger, homelessness, broken relationships, bullying, hatred, and illness of all kinds—painful reminders we are surrounded by darkness, and it makes our hearts feel so heavy. Fear creeps into our minds and lies by saying this darkness and suffering will never end. Who has the power or desire to end all human suffering? Our rulers always let us down. We find ourselves wishing we were a king or a queen—maybe then we could make the world, or at least our own life, how it should be.

Long ago, the prophet Isaiah told of a coming Ruler who would bring bright light to *“those who live in a land of deep darkness”* (Isaiah 9:2). Isaiah spoke of a special child who would be born and He would rule forever. This Ruler would bring joy, freedom, provision, justice and peace to all His people. Finally, someone with the power and desire to fix this world! Best of all, it says this Ruler's *“government and its peace will never end”* and *“He will rule with fairness and justice. . . for all eternity”* (Isaiah 9:7). Isaiah's prophecy has come true in Jesus. If we follow King Jesus, we live with the hope that although we still live in a dark world, we can help by sharing His light with our neighbors. And someday we will see the coming of His kingdom of perfect peace, joy, and righteousness that will never end!

Let's Talk!

- *Think of a time when you dressed up as someone else—maybe for a play, or Trick-or-treat, or even just for fun. What special powers or abilities did you have? How did that make you feel?*
- *How would you change the world if you had all the power of a king or a queen?*
- *Isaiah 9:6 describes Jesus as the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Which name of Jesus describes who you most need Him to be in your heart and life right now?*

FAMILY TALK

A GREAT LIGHT

READ MATTHEW 4:12-17

What a lot of words to introduce Jesus' ministry. Couldn't Matthew just have just said, "Jesus started preaching, and then got on with it?" The biblical writers didn't just say things to fill the pages, they didn't have a word count to meet, they said things with intention. We have to stop and ponder: why did Mathew say these words, and what was his intention?

The imagery here is wild. Matthew is painting this picture of Jesus bringing the kingdom of Heaven to fruition by His mere presence. It's an image of dark places being interrupted and illuminated by Light. All of these places the original readers of Matthew would have seen as a dark place, the gentiles beyond the Jordan river, and the pagans on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. These people and places were blessed with a great light, a new dawn for creation.

Have you ever seen the darkness before sun's first light? Have you ever felt the hope of a dawn after a long dark night? The Hebrew people had been living that way, metaphorically at least. They were on the look-out for a great light, their Messiah. Matthew paints this picture of a wildly bright and powerful sunrise screaming across the land, bringing in the new kingdom.

But this light came from places the original readers would have considered a dark place, a place that perhaps didn't deserve God's light: the gentiles, the others, the unclean ones. This light came to everyone, both to fulfill the prophecies of the Hebrew Messiah and to light the darkness for those of us who live in the "*land of the shadow of death.*"

Jesus is more than just a rabbi and great teacher, He is more than a prophet, more than a healer. He is the Light that brings in the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom of heaven ruled by love, life, and light. As we think about who Jesus is, we can imagine, as Matthew does, the dawn breaking forth to bring light to a dark world.

For Reflection:

- *Who is Jesus to you? What areas in life do you need the Light of Christ to shine forth and bring healing and growth? How can you show that light in your life to those around you today? This coming week?*

PROMISE • PATIENCE • PEACE

READ MICAH 5:2-5

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3

If Micah were a motivational speaker in today's world of startups and dreams, you would get this:

Fellow employees—we are a small and seemingly inconsequential company, but with patience through growth, we will see adjustments leading to profits with increased durability. Right now there is a boy somewhere who will grow up to lead us through our lean times, over the hurdles and to prosperity. Changes will be made. Maybe not today; maybe not tomorrow, but be ready. Change is coming. Don't lose faith—if we stay united, we will see success and security.

Ever had a situation like this presented to you? Analysis of the present and the changes that will be instituted as time passes. There is no firm timeline, just a promise of a future. You have to decide to stick it out or not. Sometimes all we need is that one convincing person who advises that you hold on and wait.

Imagine Bethlehem being told that the future will be theirs. As one of the smaller clans of Judah, they feel abandoned by the rest of Israel—no unity, no leadership, and no hope.

Micah tells them that they may feel left behind now, but to wait for the completion of prophecy. There will be a leader born who will unite all the brothers and lead them to victory—not through His own power but through the strength and majesty of the Lord, our God.

Micah's words encourage Bethlehem, of Judah, to be patient and faithful. They will see the fulfillment of prophecy and the One who will be the source of safety and security in their lives.

This is our Christmas renewal—to once again see the promise; respond in patience; and celebrate God's peace through His Son.

For Reflection:

- *In one sense, we are still waiting for the ultimate reign of Christ to occur. How does knowing that He will one day put all things right impact the choices you make today?*
- * *Set up the stable, but leave it empty for now. Long before Jesus was born on earth, God was getting everything ready.*

FILL THE EARTH

READ EPHESIANS 1:22-23

"And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." (Ephesians 1:22-23)

Our perfect, holy God has supreme authority; His dominion is over all things, people, nations, and places. There is no greater power in the universe, as Jesus' resurrection shows. His rule is indeed over everything, and while He could rule on His own, our relational God involves His people in His rule. It's through His body, the church, that He extends His rule over the earth!

It is God's will for Himself to "fill all" with His kingdom. He does not want there to be a place in this universe where His rule is not. His presence lives in His people, so when His people go about the earth, so does He, thereby filling all the earth.

Consider how the law functions in society. The law itself is invisible but dictates how our society functions. We see the effect of the law through law-abiding citizens, but without such people, the law would still exist and hold authority. In the same way, without the church, God would still have all authority and be the supreme ruler. But as we, His body, live lives of obedience to our King, His rule extends to fill the earth.

Ponder what it means that you, if you are in Christ, can help extend the rule of Christ throughout this earth. His rule fills the earth as we follow Him and obey Him. How is God inviting you to obey Him right now? In what ways is He asking you to take a step of faith? Consider that your step of faith reveals His glory on earth. You participate in Him filling the earth with His fullness!

For Reflection:

- *What places in your life do you need to speak the name of Jesus over?*
- *What places in this world do you want to speak the name of Jesus over, invoking His rule and reign there?*

SON OF MAN RULER

READ DANIEL 7:13-14

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5

In the Christmas season we are inherently reminded of Jesus coming to earth as a little baby in Bethlehem born to the virgin Mary and the profoundly humble origin of the plan for salvation. We also need to be reminded of the other characteristics of who Jesus is: revealed as the Word of the Lord in the Old Testament and our Almighty Ruler of the Heavenly Kingdom.

I sometimes get overwhelmed when I watch or read too much news about what is happening in the world: the violence, wars, greed, and general lawlessness. Similarly, in this passage, Daniel is distressed at the vision of the evil rulers that will come before Jesus as the final ruler. Daniel sees in his vision that "one like a Son of Man" will be given a dominion which is an everlasting dominion where people of every language will serve Him.

Jesus called himself "the Son of Man" on many occasions. He explained to the Pharisees that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins when He healed the paralytic that was lowered into the room from the ceiling by his friends. He declared to the Pharisees on another occasion the Son of Man was the Lord of the Sabbath. And toward the end of His ministry on earth, He reminded the disciples that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and die, but rise again on the third day. I believe that Jesus intentionally referred to himself as the Son of Man not only to remind us of His own humanity—that He relates to us—but also to remind us that He is the Son of Man ruler that Daniel saw on His eternal throne.

Let us be reminded this season that Jesus came to earth not only to be our Savior but also to be our King. There will be other rulers and leaders in the world, but none are as powerful as Jesus, and none are the kind of ruler that Jesus is. The book of Daniel tells us that Jesus is the ruler of a kingdom that will not pass away and will not be destroyed, and that we, as believers will actually "possess" the kingdom forever. Contemplate Jesus as our Ruler this Christmas season.

For Reflection:

- *When you consider Jesus as the One who Rules, how does that help you find peace in the midst of a chaotic world?*
- * *Place Mary, Joseph and an angel figure across the room from the stable. God sent an angel to tell Mary and Joseph that Jesus would be born to Mary.*

SON-SHINE

READ HEBREWS 1:3-4; 8

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs." (Hebrews 1:3-4)

But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom." (Hebrews 1:8)

Have you ever felt the warmth and light of the sun on your face on a bright and sunny day? Maybe you were hiking or swimming at the pool or beach. Maybe you were in your yard or deck, gardening or relaxing. Either way, the sun was there.

At creation, God set the sun over all the earth to sustain physical life. Similarly, God sent His Son to save us and give us new life, eternal life through Him. He is the physical representation of God. God set Jesus here on earth to walk and teach, demonstrating God's love and His glory. Jesus is the ultimate source of light and life, sacrificing Himself in obedience to God's plan for salvation. Because of His obedience, Jesus has been granted Yahweh's glory and power. This power and glory are not just over humans and earthly things, but also for heavenly things like the angels. He is superior to us all, yet He is with us all the time. Jesus honored God the Father and was obedient to Him.

Unlike the sun, the light of the Son will shine forever through the power, glory, and authority given to him by God the Father. The ability to experience the light of the sun and its warmth is free. The Son offers freedom when we look to and follow Him.

For Reflection:

- *Pray this Prayer: God, as we look up and see the sun in the heavens, remind us of your Son. Remind us of the love you have for us and that we can trust in your glory and power through Jesus.*
- * *Place a donkey near Mary. She may have ridden a donkey to Bethlehem, because she was so close to having a baby. Years later, Jesus Himself would ride a donkey into Jerusalem. Rulers usually rode on proud horses, but because Jesus was a gentle ruler, he chose to ride a simple donkey.*

REFLECT & RESPOND

Open in Prayer

Prayerfully look back through this week's readings and devotionals. Ask God to speak to you freshly as you consider them again.

Key Verses

Review the key verses for the week, Isaiah 9:1-7. What hope does it give you as you live your life for God this week?

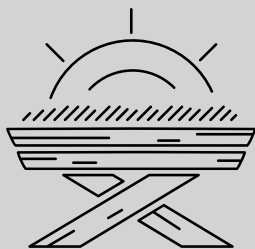
Weekly Theme

As you think of the theme for this week, *The One Who Rules*, where do you most need to apply this in your relationships, your work or how you live for and think about God? Write out a one or two sentence response that you can apply this week!

Share

Who needs to hear this message today? Who could you share your thoughts with?

THE ONE WHO
COMFORTS



*Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.*

² *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.*

³ *A voice of one calling:
"In the wilderness prepare
the way for the LORD;
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.*

⁴ *Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.*

⁵ *And the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

ISAIAH 40:1-5

THE ONE WHO COMFORTS

READ ISAIAH 40:1

When my children were young and they scraped a knee or faced some other injury, they would swiftly run to me or Kelly for immediate help to stop the bleeding or put ice on that bump on their head. After the immediate help, though, they would often look for something else: comfort.

As we grow, we may become better at providing our own immediate help for injuries, whether bandaging our cut finger or driving ourselves to the hospital. But no matter how young or old we are, finding comfort requires other people. When we suffer loss, it is comforting to have others cry with us. When we go through difficulty, it is comforting to have conversation partners who listen to us and respond.

When the entire people of Israel face a traumatic, forced exile from their homeland, they listen for a good word from the prophet Isaiah. It is within this context of exile that Isaiah speaks an apt message, beginning with these words: *“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God”* (Isaiah 40:1).

There are two invaluable parts of this message. The first part is that comfort is coming to the people after much suffering. The prophet expands on this by saying of Israel *“that her hard service has been completed”* (40:2). There is an end in sight, Isaiah says, and on the other side of the end is true comfort. The second part is that this message is not just from the prophet but actually comes directly from God. The exile had left Israel wondering if God had disowned them, but Isaiah says, “No, God Himself is drawing near to bring a personal word of comfort to us.” There is comfort coming and it is divine comfort.

One of the most interesting parts of Isaiah 40 is the depiction of a “voice” calling out to prepare the way for the LORD (see 40:3). We may wonder who this voice is and when God will come. It is no mistake that three of the gospel writers pick up these very words to describe John the Baptist. John is the voice calling people to turn their lives over to God in preparation for One who would come after him. And that One, John the Baptist and all the gospel writers tell us, is Jesus Himself. He is the Messiah who will bring true, lasting, and divine comfort.

For Reflection:

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READ ISAIAH 40:1

Have you ever felt sad or worried? Maybe you've had a tough day at school or felt alone. The good news is that God is always there to comfort us!

FAMILY TALK

God brings comfort through His words and the people He sends. Isaiah 40:1-2 says, *"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed."* God tells His people to be comforted. He sees their struggles and wants them to know that He cares. He promises that their hard times will end. This reminds us that even when we feel down, God is with us, ready to help us feel better.

Many years later, God sent a special messenger named John the Baptist. Matthew 3:1-3 says, *"In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: 'A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the LORD, make straight paths for him.'"* John was like a friendly voice calling out in the wilderness, telling everyone that something amazing was about to happen! He was preparing the way for Jesus, who is our greatest comforter. Jesus came to show us God's love and to help us when we feel sad or lost.

Remember, God loves you and wants to comfort you! Just like He promised in Isaiah, He is always there to help you through tough times. Keep your heart open to His love!

Let's Talk!

- *Can you think of a time when you felt God's comfort? What happened?*
- *What are some ways you can comfort others when they are feeling down?*

A REAL REST

READ MATTHEW 11:28-30

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” (Matthew 11:28-30 The Message)

While I consider myself a bit of a Bible nerd and wouldn’t normally turn to Eugene Peterson’s *The Message* as my preferred translation, I have always been drawn to how he translates this passage. For whatever reason, when I read the words above I am overwhelmed by every sentence: Yes! I am worn out. I want nothing more than to recover my life. I need a *real* rest—not just a nap. I want to learn a new way of doing things so that I’m not always burnt out. I can’t wait to learn what the *“unforced rhythms of grace”* means and what it feels like to live out those rhythms in my life. I want to live freely! And lightly!

This week we are digging into Jesus as the One who comforts and this passage provides me with comfort. Life is hard and Jesus wants to be our burden-bearer. He gets it—as humans, we do get tired, worn out, and burned out on religion. He invites us to come to Him—that’s it! That’s our first step when we’re feeling weary...to come to Jesus and He will help us recover our life. He will show us how to take a *real* rest.

As I have been sitting with this passage to write this devotional, I’ve been struck by the three W’s: walk, work, and watch. Jesus’ invitation is not just to come to Him so He will take care of everything. It’s an invitation to *learn* from Him: to learn a new way of living that is unforced, has healthy rhythms, and is full of grace. We still have to do our part, but Jesus will be right there with us every step of the way. I’ve also been struck by this phrase: *“I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you.”* Wow. Jesus acknowledges that we have limits and boundaries—especially when we are worn out—and He promises to limit our burdens.

So, dear reader, how are you coming to Jesus this December? Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Jesus today and let Him be your teacher, your comforter, and your burden-bearer.

For Reflection:

- *Talk to Jesus about how you're feeling. Ask Him to show you the unforced rhythms of grace.*
- * *Place the magi in another room. These travelers remind us that Jesus' followers would be from all nations. Jesus' birth would bring COMFORT to people all over the world.*

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

READ PSALM 23

My mom was a collector of many different things during her life: dolls, angel statues, and beanie babies were her favorites. Our small apartment had multiple book shelves filled with her knickknacks (or treasures, I guess, depending on your viewpoint). In the midst of all the chaos of her collections was one shelf that always felt a little out of place to me. On it were about 30 different sheep statues. They were made of various materials (ceramic, wood, plastic) and included sheep of multiple sizes (small, medium, large, mammoth!). It just seemed so random in the midst of her multiple shelves of angels, dolls, and stuffed animals.

Whenever someone asked her about this particular collection, my mom would simply say, “They remind me I’m not alone.” My mom had a simple faith in God. She was not some great scholar of Scripture, but she trusted in God and the promises He gave us. Psalm 23 was a favorite passage for her (as I am sure it is for many of us) and it brought great comfort to her throughout the many trials of her life: that God was leading her and beside her at all times.

The promise of Psalm 23 is that our God is with us, providing and protecting. As a shepherd guides and guards their sheep, God guides and guards His people. Verse four says, *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”* Shepherds used their rods and their staff for many things—to prod and poke the sheep to go where they needed to go and to scare and fight off predators trying to attack the sheep. Either way, the use of the tools required the shepherd to be in close proximity to the sheep.

Whether God is guiding us or guarding us, knowing He is with us should provide comfort to us as we journey through this life.

For Reflection:

- *When have you had to remind yourself that God, as your shepherd, is near you? How do you remind yourself of that comforting thought?*
- * *Bring out the figures of sheep and shepherds and set them outside of the stable. These will be the first to hear that Jesus is born!*

A FATHER'S LOVE

READ JOHN 16:19-33

Take a few deep breaths. Let your breath remind you that God has given you life today, that He desires you today, and that He invites you to find comfort in Him today. Take some time to let that sink in. After (and only after) you do that, read John 16:19-33. If you want extra credit, read all of chapter 16. Then reflect on the text:

- Why are the disciples seemingly anxious about Jesus leaving them?
- Can you think of other stories where Jesus provides comfort?
- How would you summarize Jesus' response in your own words?

When I was in middle school, I remember going to a party at a friend's house. This friend had a thrills-and-spills-on-springs machine, also known as a trampoline. On one fateful bounce, my downward-bound chin met the force of my friend's upward-bound head and I bit straight through my lower lip. My wonderful father picked me up, realized I needed stitches, and began driving me to urgent care. My middle-school self did not like the doctor's office. It produced worry and anxiety within me. I wasn't sure of the pain I had to endure. I remember crying in the van, saying "I don't want to go." My father, though, loved me too much to listen to my anxiety, knowing true healing and comfort would only come through going to the doctor for stitches.

When I read John 16, I see the disciples in a more serious version of where I was in that story. They are beginning to recognize a few hard truths about following Jesus. They are learning that the world will reject them the way they will reject Jesus. They are learning that their Rabbi, their Messiah, their friend, will soon face unjust death. They are learning that He will no longer walk with them on earth. These are painful and hard things to swallow! Yet, in the midst of these harsh realities, Jesus provides comfort, not to escape the hard things, but to endure them and, through His power, provide healing to the world. How? Many ways, but for right now, let's focus on just one... the Holy Spirit. God is present, even in Jesus' physical absence, through the Holy Spirit. Taking John 15-16 together as a whole reminds us that the Holy Spirit is very much present, ready to embrace us, guide us, comfort us, convict us, and point us towards healing. There is no barrier that He can't overcome to be present with us. He is our comfort. Much like my father on that day in middle school, Our Father is present in our pain and guides us towards Himself, where we find real healing and comfort.

For Reflection:

- *Where in your life have you felt the pain of this world? Have you invited the Spirit into that pain with you?*

GOD OF ALL COMFORT

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-5

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12

Last summer when my wife Glenda and I were up north, I was out walking and picked my annual bouquet of wildflowers. The next day Cheri, our older daughter, was able to join us, and she and I picked another bouquet. This was a variety pack of ten forms of flora. It was so beautiful that she captured it with her camera, had it framed, and it was waiting for us when we returned home, available to enjoy whenever we desired.

Switching gears a bit, when I grew up in our local church, the Doxology was a weekly part of worship. It begins, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow..." Sitting back and praising God for His creative genius with a bouquet of wildflowers was special. Contrast that, however, to what it may have meant to God, who after six days, used the seventh to enjoy all that His own creation entailed. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 1, directed his praise to "God... Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... Father of compassion... God of all comfort." It is one thing to know with assurance that God specifically "comforts us in all our troubles." It's quite another thing to get a glimpse from God, the Creator of the Universe, of the "why" He comforts us: "... so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ" (vss. 4-5).

Let's not miss this point: The comfort that ABOUND through Christ is linked indelibly to the fact that we share ABUNDANTLY in the sufferings of Christ.

The seasons of sufferings which we go through, and God's corresponding comfort, serve as a platform for us not to just comfort others, BUT to "comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." That's something worthy of praise, and a reminder of what purposeful living in Christ is all about.

Thank you, Jesus, for the Incarnation, and that you have come that we "may have life and have it to the full (abundantly)" (John 10:10).

For Reflection:

- *Who do you know that is going through a time of crisis that you can comfort based on God's faithfulness to you through similar situations?*
- * *Scatter some sheep figures all around the room. Let them remind you of how people are lost without the Good Shepherd, Jesus.*

OUR REFUGE & PROTECTOR

READ PSALM 91:1-16

Psalm 91 begins with an invitation to dwell in the “*secret place*” of the Most High. This is not just a physical place, but a spiritual posture of trust and intimacy with God. When we make God our dwelling place—when we seek Him in prayer, meditate on His Word, and cultivate a relationship with Him—we find ourselves under His shadow, symbolizing His protection and care.

When I was younger, I was terrified of the dark. I would often sprint inside from the car at night or run up the stairs and into my room when the lights were turned off so that nothing could “get” me. Once I got inside the house or my room, I felt safe, and I felt protected. Now that I am older, I’m not so afraid of the dark, but there are still things in life that can be scary, stressful, or challenging. When this happens, we can run to God as He promises to be our refuge and our fortress, to protect us and to save us from harm.

However, God does not promise us that life will be easy. In your life, you will (or maybe already have) see, hear, and experience many hard things and/or trials, but in this; God will be and has been with you. “*He will cover you with His feathers—and he will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways*” (Psalm 91:4a and 11). When we know and declare that God is our refuge and our protector, we have nothing to fear because God is with us, He is walking beside us, watching over us, and protecting us. Knowing this can be truly comforting.

Lord, I thank You for being my refuge and fortress. In times of trouble, I choose to dwell in Your presence, trusting in Your promises of protection and peace. Help me to seek You daily and to rest in the assurance that You are with me. I pray that Your angels would guard and protect me in all my ways. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

For Reflection:

- *Where are some areas in your life where God has been or can be your shelter?*
- * *Bring your sheep figures close to the shepherd figures. The shepherds were keeping watch at night when they heard the news about baby Jesus!*

REFLECT & RESPOND

Open in Prayer

Prayerfully look back through this week's readings and devotionals. Ask God to speak to you freshly as you consider them again.

Key Verse

Review the key verse for the week, Isaiah 40:1. What hope does it give you as you live your life for God this week?

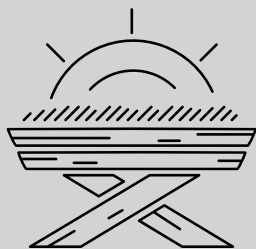
Weekly Theme

As you think of the theme for this week, *The One Who Comforts*, where do you most need to apply this in your relationships, your work or how you live for and think about God? Write out a one or two sentence response that you can apply this week!

Share

Who needs to hear this message today? Who could you share your thoughts with?

THE ONE WHO
BRINGS
JUSTICE



*“Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.
² He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.
³ A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;
⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged
till he establishes justice on earth.
In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”*

ISAIAH 42:1-4

THE ONE WHO BRINGS JUSTICE

READ ISAIAH 42:1

One of the deepest desires of human beings is for justice. We long for our lives and the world to be impartially guided by what is just, right, true, and fair. At our jobs or in our classrooms, in the courtroom or the sports field, we want all people treated well and measured equally against a dispassionate measure of fairness. This longing for justice is behind the outcries that arise when human rights are violated. International watchdog groups give voice to the helpless or the ignored so that justice can be upheld. The truth is that we long for justice even as we often experience injustice and a lack of fairness in our world and lives.

This longing for justice is a biblical theme. If we read through the Scripture asking what it tells us about God, we inevitably will discover that the God described in the Bible, amongst many other things, is a God of justice. The Torah calls God's people to maintain justice and deal appropriately with wrongs: protecting widows, orphans, foreigners, and the weak in the face of a difficult world. The Hebrew word, *mishpat*, is the word most often translated as 'justice' in the Old Testament. It conveys the idea of a just cause being maintained with right and appropriate order in the world.

When the prophet Isaiah speaks about the Messiah who is to come, we hear Isaiah say this Messiah will do many things, including reflecting God's justice. Isaiah describes the Messiah this way:

*Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations. (Isaiah 42:1)*

It is no coincidence that when Jesus begins His public ministry, He describes His calling by quoting a similar passage from Isaiah's prophecies:

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18-19; quoting Is. 61:1-2)*

In response to humanity's longing for justice God sends Jesus as a Messiah who brings justice.

For Reflection:

- *Find this week's discussion questions in your bulletin or online at eastbrook.org/WholsHe.*

FAMILY TALK

READ ISAIAH 42:1

Have you ever taken a really close-up look at a spider web? Before you wipe it away from the corner of your closet, that is? “Spider silk” looks so delicate, but did you know that it is one

of the strongest substances on earth? Spider silk has been proven to be twice as strong as steel fiber of the same mass! Part of the reason for this is that spider silk is soft and stretchy when first pulled, but then it stiffens and gets stronger the longer it’s pulled! This is how spiders trap other little bugs (their dinner!) in their webs!

Some things really can be both gentle and strong at the same time—and that’s what Isaiah is telling people about the coming Servant, Jesus! In these verses, Isaiah says:

“He will not shout or cry out.

He will not raise his voice in the streets.

He will not break a bent twig.

He will not put out a dimly burning flame.” (Isaiah 42:2-3, NIV)

These words describe just how gentle Jesus is—not even breaking an already bent twig! Not even blowing out a tiny flame! When we are struggling and sad, Jesus will understand and love us. When we come to Him asking for forgiveness for the wrongs we’ve done, He will take us back again.

But, kind of like spider silk, Jesus is also the strongest force in the world! Isaiah goes on to say:

“He will not grow weak or lose hope.

He will not give up until he brings justice to the earth.” (Isaiah 42:4, NIV)

Jesus came to earth to carry out His Father’s plans, and the Father’s plans win every time! Jesus, as the Servant-Rescuer, paid for sin when He died at the Cross. This is justice for those of us who trust Him. One day, He will bring justice to the whole world. He will make everything right again. And, there is no force on earth strong enough to stop Him!

Let’s Talk!

- *When have you experienced Jesus being gentle with you?*
- *When have you seen Jesus being strong?*
- *Why is it good to know that, when so many things in the world seem to be going wrong, Jesus promises to bring justice?*

THE CRITICAL ELEMENT

READ MATTHEW 12:15-21

Justice. It's such an admirable word. Since I was a young girl, an innate desire for justice existed and exists within me. Have you ever joined a cause because it touted justice, only to find out that your definition of how to achieve justice is quite different? Through the years, I've experienced many instances where people have different perspectives of what justice is and how to achieve it. Even in times of conflict, all parties want "justice" despite seemingly opposite objectives.

When I read the passages of Isaiah and Matthew, what sticks out to me is that Jesus was not sent to do the work of justice as a mere man; the Holy Spirit was required: *"I will put my spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations"* (Isaiah 42:1 and Matthew 12:18).

Somehow, every person that crossed Jesus' path, despite their ideology, recognized His uniqueness. In His earthly pursuit of justice, Jesus saw each person's humanity and did no harm. Matthew 12:20 says, *"A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory."*

God is the ultimate executor of justice; we humans are not. This provides a sense of relief. While we can do our best to follow the Holy Spirit in our pursuit of justice, we can rest in knowing that one day Jesus will bring *"justice through to victory."*

As we move forward on earth in our pursuit of justice, (until Jesus brings ultimate justice through to victory) let's be sure we have the critical element, the Holy Spirit, involved on our journey forward. When we do, we acknowledge the humanity in others.

For Reflection:

- *Find someone who has a different definition of justice than you do. Before hearing their perspective, thank God through prayer that He created that person in His image. Ask questions about how they envision justice to be achieved. Listen only to understand. Reflect. Then pray about how this new perspective may inform your actions and decisions.*

A RIGHTEOUS JUDGE

READ PSALM 9:7-8

Many of us living in the US today are worried about the state of our country and/or the amount of money we have compared to someone else. It's hard not to worry and to compare ourselves to others.

Something that comes to mind for me is that I need to stop judging myself and others based on their conduct because God is the righteous one who will judge the world. This is what we see in today's passage from Psalm 9—David says that the world needs a righteous judge. We also hear these exact words in Acts 17:31 more than a thousand years later, "*For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.*" God will judge the wicked based on what He views as wicked, not what we think.

During this time of year I usually don't buy my family members or people I love anything for Christmas because I like to remember the real meaning of Christmas. But God put my fiancé, a God fearing woman, in my life, and she has taught me that it is more blessed to give than to receive. God gave us the greatest gift that we celebrate at Christmas—Jesus. Jesus is the prime example of how we are to live at peace with others. When I am having a moment of judgment I need to remember where I came from and what God has brought me through to where I am today.

I want to challenge you to pause the next time you are agitated when things aren't going the way you want them to. Pray and ask God to direct your thoughts and really trust that God will bring justice in His way and His timing.

For Reflection:

- *How does remembering God's grace to you help you pause and trust His ability to bring justice when and if it is needed?*
- * *Move Mary and Joseph and the donkey a little closer to the stable. Mary and Joseph were filled with JOY as the time for Jesus' birth came closer. Move each of the Magi figures a little closer to the stable.*

DIVINE JUSTICE

READ JEREMIAH 23:1-6

Believe it or not, there are times when I get tired and cranky after a long day at school. Times when I'm selfish and act like everyone should cater to my every need. In those times I get mad easily. There have been times when I get home from school at 7 at night and I'm tired so I ask my sister if she can unpack my backpack. Well, most of the time she says no, so I get mad and ask my parents to tell her to do it but they say no too. In these times, I feel like they should do everything for me so that I can relax, but in doing so I end up implying that my needs are greater than all of theirs.

Now, according to Google, justice is "the idea that people should be treated fairly and impartially. It can also refer to the administration of the law to make sure that people are treated fairly and impartially." I know that my sense of justice is wrong. It's human. We all end up putting ourselves before others.

In today's passage from Jeremiah, God is saying that the people who were supposed to be in charge of enforcing the law—the kings and rulers of the people—were acting like humans. They were acting selfishly and mistreating their role as an impartial judge. Since we can't be trusted to judge right from wrong, God promised that He would bring in a righteous king, a fair king, and that king, Jesus, would do what was wise and just for His people.

God decides what is just and what is right, not us. If you are ever stuck in a matter that makes you question what is just and right, my advice is pray. Ask God, who knows what is good and just, to help and to guide you to the proper course of action.

For Reflection:

- *When are you most tempted to take "justice" into your own hands? Besides prayer, what else can you do to trust in God's ability to set things right?*

GRACE & PEACE

READ ISAIAH 30:18 & ISAIAH 9:7

In this year's Advent devotional and sermon series, "*Who Is He?*," we are exploring the titles of the Messiah as prophesied by Isaiah. The names that we read in Isaiah 9:7—Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace—help us develop a well-rounded understanding of who Jesus is and the impact He has on our lives.

As we reflect on the title "Prince of Peace," Isaiah's words remind us that Jesus' reign is one of peace and justice that knows no end. In the chaos of our modern lives, we are invited to rest in the unshakable peace of His kingdom. But Isaiah 30:18 also reveals God's desire to show us grace in our waiting. Even when we struggle to see His plan, we can trust that His justice and compassion are working on our behalf.

In my own life, I have found that waiting often brings its own kind of peace, a quiet trust in God's timing. In this Advent season, we are reminded to lean into the peace Jesus offers, trusting that His reign is just and gracious.

For Reflection:

- *In this season of waiting, where do you need to invite the Prince of Peace into your heart?*
- *How can you embrace God's justice and compassion in your life?*

A TIME FOR JUDGMENT

READ ECCLESIASTES 3:16-17

Recently, on a regular Tuesday night, I felt everything tremble a little bit. Not like an earthquake, but like an explosion. Rockets were flying overhead and being intercepted in air, and it didn't matter which side they were coming from because we all knew one thing: something is not right in this world.

I think you know that feeling too, even looking at the evening news: mass shootings, financial corruption, clergy caught in sin, and the list goes on. Our passage in Ecclesiastes laments with us that in this world, wickedness is found where we should find justice and righteousness. Humanity has been stuck in the cycle of death since the day our fellowship in Eden was broken.

Yet although we live in this broken world, we are reminded by this piece of wisdom literature that there will be a time when the cycle will be broken. There will be a time for judgment before God, and no deed will be overlooked—righteous or wicked. The author of Ecclesiastes knows that all will be judged, just as all will return to dust (3:20). This is our *memento mori* moment, the moment when we all remember our death.

Many people try so hard to evade or escape death. Doesn't it feel unnatural somehow? Dear Christians, we can embrace the remembrance of our death because it is not the end! We can humbly embrace our humanity with hope because Jesus overcame death and sits on the judgment seat. Our hope is secure in Jesus, the One who "will return to judge the living and the dead," as the Apostles' Creed states. We trust that Jesus is the righteous judge, just as He is our good, eternal King.

In Psalm 46:9, we are reminded that God is the one who "*makes wars to cease to the ends of the earth.*" We know that our God is making all things new, and although we live in the "not yet," we trust that when the day of judgment comes, the new heavens and earth will finally be revealed.

For Reflection:

- *Read and meditate on 2 Corinthians 5. Take time to notice the context around the judgment seat of Christ (v.10): We should be of good courage (v. 6) because He has made us new (v. 17). Spend time thanking the Father for making our Judge also our Redeemer. Confess your sins where needed and surrender to His love. Pray for others who also need reconciliation.*
- * *Place animal figures in the stable. Rulers are usually born in grand palaces, but Jesus' Kingdom—His justice—is different! He chose to be born in a humble stable, among the animals.*

REFLECT & RESPOND

Open in Prayer

Prayerfully look back through this week's readings and devotionals. Ask God to speak to you freshly as you consider them again.

Key Verse

Review the key verse for the week, Isaiah 42:1. What hope does it give you as you live your life for God this week?

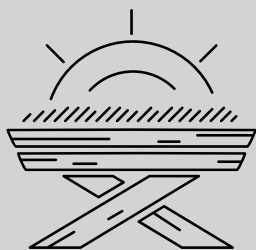
Weekly Theme

As you think of the theme for this week, *The One Who Brings Justice*, where do you most need to apply this in your relationships, your work or how you live for and think about God? Write out a one or two sentence response that you can apply this week!

Share

Who needs to hear this message today? Who could you share your thoughts with?

THE ONE WHO
RESTORES



*Listen to me, you islands;
hear this, you distant nations:
Before I was born the LORD called me;
from my mother's womb he has spoken my name.
2 He made my mouth like a sharpened sword,
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
he made me into a polished arrow
and concealed me in his quiver.
3 He said to me, "You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."
4 But I said, "I have labored in vain;
I have spent my strength for nothing at all.
Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand,
and my reward is with my God."
5 And now the LORD says—
he who formed me in the womb to be his servant
to bring Jacob back to him
and gather Israel to himself,
for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD
and my God has been my strength—
6 he says:
"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."*

ISAIAH 49:1-7

THE ONE WHO RESTORES

READ ISAIAH 49:6

In the Sanctuary of Mercy church, in Borja, Spain, a fresco of Jesus entitled *Ecce Homo* (*Behold the Man*) has been revered since the Spanish artist, Elías García Martínez, painted it in 1930. While not an artistic landmark or overly valuable, this fresco holds a treasured place within the village and area. Still, everyone could see that the fresco was deteriorating due to the impact of moisture and age.

Motivated to help, in 2012, 81-year-old Cecilia Giménez decided it was time for a restoration of the fresco. And so, armed with her own artistic views and no training, Ms. Giménez set to work. Unfortunately, she failed to realize the great gulf between her skill and the task. Her “restoration” took the fresco in a very different direction. Contemplating the botched restoration attempt, one journalist described the end result as a “crayon sketch of a very hairy monkey in an ill-fitting tunic.”

Restoration is no simple task. It requires vision, ability, and capacity to truly restore something whether in art, construction, or other domains. Considering how complex such work is with the inanimate world, how much greater is the complexity of restoring damaged interpersonal relationships, deep inner wounds, or the dealings between peoples and nations.

Isaiah the prophet tells us the Messiah of God will be One who restores.

*It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.* (Isaiah 49:6)

This Messianic figure, Isaiah says, will have the vision, ability, and capacity to do what seems impossible. For Israel in Isaiah’s prophecy, it was to bring the lost tribes back from exile to dwell in the land and shine God’s light to the nations. For those who encounter Jesus today, it is restoration of damaged relationship with God, healing of deep inner wounds, and the empowerment to bring the light of Christ to others. Jesus said it this way: “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.*” Jesus the Messiah is One who restores, and His restoration work is of divine quality.

For Reflection:

- *Find this week’s discussion questions in your bulletin or online at eastbrook.org/WholsHe.*

READ ISAIAH 49:6

Once upon a time there was a shepherd who had a flock of sheep. The shepherd would take the sheep into the fields to graze. They munched on sweet grass, drank from clear streams and rested on quiet, shady hills. Munch, slurp, snore—life was good in the protective presence of the Shepherd.

Then one day, the shepherd noticed a sheep was missing. Only 99 were in his flock. Where had the one sheep gone? He began searching right away because he knew there were dangers in the hills – sharp cliffs a little sheep could fall down and ravenous wolves and bears that would like to eat a lamb for lunch.

The Shepherd's search took him far and wide. He looked over hills and in caves for his lost sheep. After many days, he heard plaintive bleating and hurried to a pit. He looked down to find his stuck sheep covered in slimy mud. He lovingly wrapped his arms around it and carried it back to the flock.

This is a retelling of a parable Jesus told, and it reminds me of the verses from Isaiah 9 about the One who Restores. Restore means “to bring back,” and Isaiah 49 describes the Messiah as a servant who will bring back the people of Israel to God. And, the servant will be a light to the nations to bring salvation to all people.

You see, like the sheep in Jesus' parable, all people have strayed away from him. The Bible tells us that ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, we've sinned and been separated from God. Jesus is our Messiah who came to bring us back to a close relationship with God where we love and trust Him.

Let's Talk!

- *Why did the Shepherd go find the missing sheep?*
- *Have you ever felt far away from God?*
- *How did Jesus bring us back to God?*

THE ULTIMATE GIFT

READ HOSEA 6:1-3

“Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.”

(Hosea 6:1-3 ESV)

In chapter 6, Hosea tells us we are ready to “return” to the LORD; yet, as we prepare for Christmas this week, it is the LORD who is coming to us. Just as the LORD had planned even before creation, God sent Jesus to us to mend every tear and right every wrong. This was expressed like nothing else when God’s only begotten Son died for us all on the Cross.

As Hosea goes on to say, even God fully remedying every injustice done to us over the course of our entire lives is just a step along the way to His ultimate gift for us, and that is Jesus Christ’s resurrection. This holy gift is far beyond what we can comprehend, being caught up in our everyday worries and earthly preoccupations.

I tend to grow closest to Jesus when I constantly remind myself that His entire story, spanning from before creation till after the end of time, is running on a constant cycle. We may read Scripture and see the story at a macrocosmic level. But every time Jesus saves you from temptation, or God spares you from intense pain, or the Holy Spirit guides you in prayer—you can rest assured you have become a part of that cycle, along with every other one of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

For Reflection:

- *What themes do you see come up regularly at this time of year? How is God asking you to contemplate weaving those experiences with the beginning of Jesus’ earthly life?*
- * *Place Mary and Joseph in the stable. The time has almost arrived for Baby Jesus to be born!*

AN END TO SUFFERING

READ 1 PETER 5:6-11

CHRISTMAS EVE: TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24

Suffering. Whether we see the word in the Bible or somewhere else in printed form, just the mere sight of the word can cause a slight increase in our blood pressure. Suffering can take on many different forms, and it will not stop because you are a Christian—remember, we do have an enemy. 1 Peter 5:8 shows us one job description of the devil, “*Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*” I like to use the word attack.

So let me ask you, has the devil ever caused suffering in your life by attacking your health, character, peace, patience, family, ministry...? This list could go on and on. Maybe he is attacking you right now. Yes, we have all come under attack and we all experience suffering, but there is good news, his attacks have an expiration date. I know there are times when it seems like the suffering (or attack) will not end, but there is a spiritual clock counting down, and the devil’s time is running out.

The birth of Jesus was God’s promise of restoration for humanity, so when the clock stops, and we cross over into eternal glory, ALL SUFFERING COMES TO AN END! As a teacher, I use countdown timers a lot in my classroom, and my students often beg me for more time when the buzzer sounds to signal THE END. Well, the devil can ask God for more time, but he is not going to get it.

The Lord of restoration was born, and God will keep His promise of restoring us, making us strong, firm, and steadfast when we cross over into eternal glory (vs. 10). So, until that day comes, use 1 Peter 5:7-9 as one form of ammunition, and keep in mind, the spiritual clock is counting down, and soon the time of this life will be over.

For Reflection:

- *Are you currently suffering (or being attacked) in some area of your life or do you know someone who is? How does remembering the birth of Jesus bring comfort and hope in these moments? Make a list of scriptures you can read out loud or use in prayer to strengthen your faith in the God Who Restores.*
- * *Place the Baby Jesus figure in the stable. In the middle of the night, in this little barn, Jesus was born! “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son . . .” (John 3:16).*

READ 1 PETER 5:6-11

"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us')." Matthew 1:22-23

FAMILY TALK

Maybe you know what it's like to wait for a younger brother, sister, or cousin to be born. You're so excited to play together and to teach this new little person all the things you already know! But then, the baby is born. And, pretty soon, you realize that he or she isn't quite the little buddy you had in mind! Babies sleep and cry. They eat, and they fill up diapers! A lot of diapers!

Here tonight, on Christmas Eve, you're thinking about Jesus as a tiny baby—just like the babies you have known. How could this baby do all of the things that Isaiah promised?

If you've been reading each week of this devotional throughout Advent, you remember that Isaiah gave clues about what the Servant, Jesus, would be like. (And he didn't say anything about manglers or diapers!) Isaiah said that the Servant would:

- Rule over us
- Bring a message of comfort
- Bring justice to the nations
- Restore God's people and be a light to the nations

When Jesus grew up, He gathered followers and invited them into God's Kingdom. Then, He trained them to go seek others to invite into the Kingdom. Jesus went to the cross to pay for our sin and win over death! He will come back to make everything in the world right again.

But for now, Jesus in the manger—this is what set everything in motion! This is the answer to all of Isaiah's promises. This Baby named "Immanuel", God with us, would change everything, for all time!

Let's Talk!

- *Did you ever wonder why Jesus came as a baby instead of appearing on the scene as a grown-up man?*
- *Did you ever wonder what Mary and Joseph were thinking about as they looked down at Baby Jesus?*
- *Did you ever wonder what the angels were feeling as they announced the good news to the shepherds? (See Luke 2:8-14)*

REFLECT & RESPOND

Open in Prayer

Prayerfully look back through this week's readings and devotionals. Ask God to speak to you freshly as you consider them again.

Key Verse

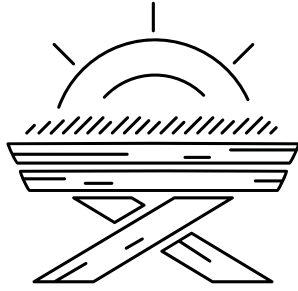
Review the key verse for the week, Isaiah 49:6. What hope does it give you as you live your life for God this week?

Weekly Theme

As you think of the theme for this week, *The One Who Restores*, where do you most need to apply this in your relationships, your work or how you live for and think about God? Write out a one or two sentence response that you can apply this week!

Share

Who needs to hear this message today? Who could you share your thoughts with?



COMPLETING YOUR NATIVITY:

- * *December 25: Place the shepherds near the stable. The angel told them that the Savior had been born! They believed, and there were the first to see Jesus and to tell others about Him!*
- * *January 6 (also known as "Epiphany"): Place the 3 figures of the magi at the stable. The Magi have followed the star to Bethlehem and find Jesus, Mary, and Joseph! They bow before Jesus and present Him with gifts of gold (showing Jesus' kingliness), frankincense (showing Jesus' divinity) and myrrh (showing Jesus' humanity).*