

Northminster Presbyterian Church

# The Ornaments of



# CHRIST

2006 Advent Devotional



# The Ornaments of Christ

*John the Baptist went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:*

*"A voice of one calling in the desert,  
'Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.*

*Every valley shall be filled in,  
every mountain and hill made low.  
The crooked roads shall become straight,  
the rough ways smooth.*

*And all mankind will see God's salvation."*

*- Luke 3:3-6*

John the Baptist had a tough job! He was supposed to be the one to get everyone ready for Jesus! We know what a challenge it can be to get ready for something special – let alone be responsible for getting other people ready too!

Advent is about getting ready. In addition to getting ready for all the holiday celebrations and the joy (*and sometimes tension*) that this brings, our deeper call is to get ready for Jesus. This season we are invited to examine Jesus in light of the many words that are used to describe him in scripture.

This devotional guide is provided to prepare individuals and families for the coming of Jesus, in such a way that we may, each day, experience the presence and power of the risen Christ! Each Sunday's writing is provided to enhance your encounter with the Sunday sermon bible texts as Dr. Andrew Ross preaches an Advent sermon series entitled "The Ornaments of Christ." Daily writings and reflection questions for adults and children have been submitted by members and staff of NPC. We hope this resource is a blessing to you and all who are passed a copy!

In the Name of the Risen One who is to come,



Rev. Pete Seiferth  
Associate Pastor of Spiritual Formation and Church Life

# **Sunday Worship Services at 8:00, 9:30 & 11:00 am**

## **“The Ornaments of Christ” Sermon Series**

### **First Sunday of Advent, December 3, 2006**

*“God Got Specific”* by the Rev. Dr. Andrew G. Ross

### **Second Sunday of Advent, December 10, 2006**

*“Something to Sing About!”* by the Rev. Dr. Andrew G. Ross

*Handel's Messiah* Choral Presentation at 9:30 and 11:00 am

### **Third Sunday of Advent, December 17, 2006**

*“Superman or Son of Man!”* by the Rev. Dr. Andrew G. Ross

### **Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 24, 2006**

*“Happy Children's Day”* by the Rev. Dr. Andrew G. Ross

### **December 31, 2006**

*“Jesus: All This and Lord Too?”* by the Rev. John Cheek

## **“Glow in the Dark” Christmas Eve Worship Services**

### **Carols and Stories at 5:00 pm**

Music, drama, and a visitor for the children

### **Family Services at 7:00 pm**

Carol Singing, Drama, Sanctuary Choir, and Candles

### **Candle Light Service of Lessons and Carols at 10:30 pm**

Christmas Music for organ with brass at 10:30 pm

Traditional Candle Light Service carols, Scripture, and Christmas Anthems with Sanctuary Choir processional at 11:00 pm

## **Special Events During Advent**

### **Friday, December 1, 2005**

The Hanging of the Greens at 6:00 pm.

### **Sunday, December 9, 2006**

Las Posadas Children's Festival at 2:30 pm.

Sanctuary Choir to perform at Winterhaven at 5:30 pm.

### **Sunday, December 10, 2006**

Christmas parts of *Handel's Messiah* at 9:30 and 11:00 am.

Children's Christmas Program at 4:00 pm.

Seniors' Supper at 5:00 pm.

# God Got Specific

by Andy Ross

Sunday, December 3, 2006

Jeremiah 31:1-9

*See, I will bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labor; a great throng will return. They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel's father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son. - Jeremiah 31:8-9*

All this talk about having a baby. And I didn't have a clue.

When we were expecting our first child, both of us tried to prepare — we read books, well, Michele read books and told me about them. We talked about getting ready for the baby. Followed instructions to build a crib. We received gifts and devices for a baby that I had never seen before.

It's funny, but after some time, I began to feel I was ready to understand what having a baby and being a father meant. But I was only fooling myself.

My appreciation of fatherhood came when Jeremy was born. Of course, all that preparation was very much worth it — and that reminds us about getting ready during Advent. But nothing could prepare me for the feeling I felt when my own son would clinch his tiny fingers around my thumb — it was then, that I started to get it. It was when I held my son, my very own son (!) that I began to wonder about fatherhood — in the specific!

Christmas is not all about us getting ready. Most importantly, it's about God getting specific and very real in our lives. Jeremiah spoke as a messenger for God, that God's compassion for his people would get real, it would bring specific blessings of hope and restoration — all because God is our very real heavenly Father.

Don S. Skinner once said, "God did not send Christ to us; God came to us in Christ."

May God's real and specific, life-changing presence come to YOU this Christmas!

**Children:** What helps you know or think about God during Christmas?

**Adults:** How does God need to lead you this Advent, to a "level path" and to his "streams of water" for refreshment and specific love, this Advent?

**Prayer:** Dear God, guide us today, to see and wonder at all the ways your love is so real in our lives. Amen.

# Son of David, Son of Abraham, Child of Mary

by Kurt Monroe

Tuesday, December 4

Matthew 1:1,16

*A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham: ... and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.*

If there were two names in Israel at the time of Jesus' birth that would have elicited respect and adoration, they would have been David and Abraham. Abraham was the father of all Israelites, the patriarch to whom so much had been promised. David was the king to whom so much had been given. And so, Matthew's Gospel starts with much promise and hope. What we see next though, in verses 2 through 15, is a picture of the descent Paul speaks of in Philippians 2: "[Christ] made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." Matthew's genealogy travels from those whose stories were told often and with much reverence in Israel – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jesse, David, and Solomon – to those whose stories were almost completely unknown by Israelites at the time of Jesus' birth – Eliud, Eleazar, Matthan, Jacob, Joseph, and Mary. In this way the lineage of patriarchs and kings spirals downward into unknown middle-class obscurity. The crowns and scepters of kings are traded for the humble tools of carpenters. Finally, a baby given the everyday name Jesus is born to an unwed teenage mother and placed in a feeding trough in an unknown village in a forgotten corner of the Roman Empire. It would seem that all hope is lost. Yet, this is the plan; divine wisdom demands divine descent. The Messiah, the hope of Israel and all mankind, would be born as a helpless babe in total obscurity. In fact, the God of all creation would take on the flesh of that helpless babe, not to exercise the authority of kings, but to serve all creation and bring it the only real hope it would ever know. In a list of names, we see that the journey toward the cross and the redemption of all things begins long before Jesus' birth. May we, this Advent season, make our own journey to the babe who lies helpless in a feeding trough and bend our knees in worship to him, the One who is truly King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

**Children:** What do you know about your family history? Ask your mom or dad to tell you what they know about your family or a favorite story about one of your ancestors.

**Adults:** How can you imitate Jesus' humility and service of others this Advent and Christmas season?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, empower us to do your work by serving those around us in ways that will bring about your Kingdom. Amen.

# Heir of All Things

by Ralph Edgar

Wednesday, December 5

Hebrews 1:2

*But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.*

In this early part of Advent, as we anticipate the celebration of the birth of the Christ-child, it is good for us to also celebrate and praise the totality of Jesus — who was with God before the universe was formed, who was the fulfillment of many, many, Old Testament prophecies, who lived among us in the flesh and spoke the Word of God as a human.

This introductory verse in Hebrews sums up all of that — and we know the rest of the story. But many in the early church, just as many of us in today's culture, were and are tempted to fall back into old beliefs, lose hold of their/our faith, and turn from the reality of the supreme deity of Jesus.

The sacrifice that Jesus gave us on the cross makes it possible for each of us to come before the throne of God — in repentance and humility — seeking forgiveness and an eternal relationship with him.

**Children:** How can you show Jesus that you believe he is the Son of God?

**Adults:** As you gaze upon Jesus in the manger — what can you do to strengthen and protect your faith in him?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, as we praise your name and prepare once again to celebrate your gift to us of the baby Jesus — we ask that you would draw us closer to you and place a protective cover around our faith — in Jesus' name, Amen.



# Immanuel

by Sharyl Russell

Thursday, December 6

Isaiah 7:14

*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*

We all want signs. Signs tell us where to park, if a business is open, where the yard sales are, the name of the building, the name of a street and so many things we don't even pay attention to them all. We couldn't get along without signs. But, often we hear people say, I wish God would give me a sign so I know if this is the right decision.

In our lifetime here on earth, we may never experience the caliber of signs that were sent to the shepherds or the Wise Men. We may not hear choirs of angels or be instructed to follow a certain star. We may not even have a dream in which God speaks directly to us. But, we do have a sign. We have Jesus Christ to show us the way.

Some of the most thrilling words in the bible are "the virgin will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel." The baby is a sign for us. A sign of hope. Without him, we are without hope, we are without direction or purpose. Our purpose is to worship God and enjoy him forever. Jesus is our guide to do that. Wanting a personal sign to tell us how we are doing is asking for something we already have.

**Children:** What signs do you see around you as you ride in the car that make you think of Jesus?

**Adults:** Daily we are surrounded by signs of God's love and generosity. Which of those give you the most comfort and hope.

**Prayer:** Father, help me to see your signs of love and comfort as I go through my day. I thank you for those signs and I thank you for all the blessings you provide for me. I thank you for your son, my personal savior, Jesus Christ. Guide me now to be a sign of your love for those around me today. In Jesus' name. Amen.



# Bread of Life

by Mary Krongaard

Thursday, December 7

John 6:35

*Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."*

As a child my favorite food was a peanut butter and jelly sandwich! I would often tear off the crust and not eat it! When I am hungry I eat things like bread. Bread in the modern Western culture is really not a necessity. One could function quite easily without bread. Not so in Biblical days. At the very center of life during the times of Jesus, stood the stalks of grain that carried man every day. Bread was the main staple of life. John 6 records the first picnic in which Jesus feeds 5000 people! They probably ate plain old barley bread on that hillside, the sort found on the humblest table. This was the "staff of life" eaten morning and evening, taken into the fields for sustenance, baked in community ovens daily across the area. What it lacked in elegance, it made up for in nutrition. It symbolized the source of life because it was the primary means by which those people survived. When Jesus said "I am the Bread of Life," the people understood the importance he was accruing to himself. He was saying, "I am your daily spiritual food." As physical bread satisfies temporarily, Jesus is spiritual bread that satisfies eternally.

The truth about God's gift giving lasting satisfaction is seen in Jesus' words. Those who put their trust in Jesus would be spiritually satisfied. As the Bread of Life, Jesus is anxious to give us his joy, his love, his eternal life. How about you? Do you hunger and thirst for eternal life? Do you long to have confidence before God here on earth and in the life to come? Then consider this great invitation from the Lord Jesus Christ who says, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest ... I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty!*" (Matt. 11:28; John 6:35)

**Children:** We need to feed our spiritual appetite by spending time with Jesus. How can you spend time daily with Jesus this Advent season?

**Adults:** Bread, the most common foodstuff throughout the world, has now been elevated to an unimaginable stature. Jesus, who has just emphasized his divinity, offers to share himself personally with human beings. How does Jesus share himself personally today?

**Prayer:** Glorious God, through your love, miracles happen! Lives are nurtured; faith flourishes. Thank you for sending your Son, Jesus — "the Bread of Life" — to nourish our souls. In your name we pray. Amen.

# I Am

by Ken Skodiak

Friday, December 8

Exodus 3:14-15

*God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob — has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.*

Have you ever seen someone you thought you knew, but you're not quite sure. Then you wonder if you should say hello. But then you think, 'What if I don't know them? They'll think I'm strange.' So then you don't go say hello only to find out later you did know them and they knew you and now you are afraid that they think that you were being rude because you didn't say hello to them? Well I have and it is not a great feeling.

In many ways that is what this question is about. How the heck are the Jews supposed to know if this Moses guy, who if you recall, ran away and has been gone for awhile, is really telling them the truth. It's actually not a bad question from Moses, especially back in that culture and time when a 'name' meant a lot and carried a lot of weight. But like always, God's answers are much better than our questions.

God's answer, "Don't even try to put a label, a name on me. Only I can name myself." Yep, well that about says it all.

That is what makes Jesus claim in John 8:56-58 so amazing. There is no question that the Jews would have heard Jesus claiming to God. That is why in verse 59 they went to pick up stones to throw at him. Many claim, that Jesus never explicitly claimed to be God, yet this verse makes it clear that he did. That is what makes Christmas so amazing. It is about the "I Am" becoming 'one of us.' If that isn't something to celebrate than I don't know what is!

**Children:** Try to find out for yourself or ask your parents what your name means. If you could choose your name, what name might you choose for yourself and why?

**Adults:** How have you recognized the "I Am" in your life this past year? How do you think you as an individual and we as a church can make God real to people in our community in the next year? Here's a challenge, write them down and give them to Pastor Ken and we'll see if we can make those ideas come true in 2007 during our 40 days of Community and mission during Lent.

**Prayer:** Lord, what an amazing thing to contemplate your awesome and holy presence in our lives and our world. May we not keep this good news to ourselves but let us share it with others in word and deed. Amen.

# The Word

by Jennifer Monroe

Saturday, December 9

John 1:14

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

What do the words “I love you” look like? Beyond the simple arrangement of eight consonants and vowels and various spaces in between, what does “I love you” really *look* like? A dozen red roses? The liquid brown eyes of your Labrador retriever? What does “I love you” smell like? A fragrance from Calvin Klein? Freshly baked chocolate chip cookies? Does “I love you” sound like the ocean or a solo violin? Does “I love you” taste like filet mignon or strawberries and cream? Is “I love you” soft like velvet or smooth as glass?

If we were to ask God these questions, I think he would say, “Yes! All this and more!” To God, “I love you” also looks like a tiny baby, sleeping in a cow’s feed trough in a crude and bare stable. God’s “I love you” smells like the sweat of a man who has been walking for miles under a hot sun, healing the sick, casting out demons, and raising the dead back to life. God’s “I love you” tastes like the freshly baked bread and wine of the last supper. God’s “I love you” feels like the sharp point of a nail being pounded through hands and feet, and finally, God’s “I love you” sounds like the triumphant echo of an empty tomb.

The words “I love you” aren’t just words to God. God’s love for us is so great that he slipped into human skin and came to live among us and became a part of his own creation. His love means he had to risk getting dirty, skinning his knee, and having his heart broken. When The Word, Jesus, became flesh, God was putting his money where his mouth was, not simply talking about or feeling love, but actually doing love, living it out. Our words become flesh when, instead of just talking about what is good and right, we make an intentional decision to *live* what is good and right. We also must be willing to risk getting dirty, smelly and maybe even a little bloody and broken in the process of putting skin and bones on our words.

**Children:** What does “I love you” look like to you? Smell ... taste ... sound ... feel like?

**Adults:** What is one way that you can “put your money where your mouth is” and make your words become flesh?

**Prayer:** Jesus, you who are the Word who was in the beginning, who became flesh and who walked around in our shoes, please give us the strength and courage we need to be people who are not just hearers and speakers of good words, but doers as well. Amen.

# Messiah

by Andy Ross

Sunday, December 10

Isaiah 61

*The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion — to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. - Isaiah 61:1-3*

Plants were made to sprout and grow. People were made to sense God's love and hope, and live for praise instead of despair. As a plant grows upward through the soil towards the light of the sun, so were we made to know God, and to live lives that are "upward" for God's praise and service.

Stan Ott, a Presbyterian pastor, tells of a time he overheard a man waiting in a hospital tell someone who was leaving, "Have a blessed day!"

After the other man left, Pastor Ott asked the stranger, "That's quite an expression! You must know that God has to be involved in being blessed."

The man in the waiting area lit up at Stan Ott's question, and beamed back his reply, "It means that when you are blessed by God, you're going to rise!" Just then, this man was called to meet his physician, and he headed for the elevator. As the doors opened, he turned back to Stan and said again, "Have a blessed day!"

And Stan immediately rejoined, "You're going to rise!" And the stranger got into the elevator and the doors closed.

Isaiah wants us to know good news this Christmas. Isaiah wants us to know that we can live as a planting of the Lord. Because Jesus is coming, we can grow roots into the soil of God's Word and promises — and that because Jesus was given to us, we're going to rise!

**Children:** Have you ever grown a plant? What does a plant need to grow and be healthy? What do we need to grow and be healthy in God's love?

**Adults:** What is one specific way you can rise upward in God's hope this week?

**Prayer:** O God, thank you for giving us a reason to have hope, to sing, and to celebrate! Amen.

# Gate for the Sheep

by Barbara Schmidt

Monday, December 11

John 10:7

*Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep."*

Jesus attempts to make it very clear in this passage that he is the one and only way to God. Notice that the passage states "... Jesus said again," implying that the folks that were listening were not "getting it" the first time. This is a concept that gets lost in modern times as well. In the business of our lives, it is easy to get distracted with a mentality of good works or saintly scoreboard that will tell us if we are Heaven-bound. The message is simple enough; we just have a difficult time grasping it. We don't "do" anything to deserve it and we can't earn it. Jesus gives us a clear plan by which we can all get to the Father. We wrestle with the understanding of our debt being paid by Jesus.

The image of us as sheep, and Jesus as the shepherd is certainly comforting. In this passage, Jesus goes beyond that picture with the reassurance that he is the gate. He watches over us and protects us, yet he is also the means by which we enter into heaven. Without the gate, the sheep wander aimlessly. Getting the sheep through the gate and into the safe pasture is the goal of the shepherd. Conversely, the gate protects the sheep from harm and keeps evil outside the pen.

**Children:** Do you have a gate at your house that guides the way to your yard?

**Adults:** Are you headed towards the gate or distracted with studying other options for entering God's house?

**Prayer:** Jesus, thank you for your teachings. May we always remember that there is one way to our Father in Heaven and that is through you. You gave us a precious gift that we could never earn. May we, the sheep, stay focused on the shepherd and the gate. Amen.



# King, Judge & Lawgiver

by Jim Kaucher

Tuesday, December 12

Isaiah 33:22

*For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us.*

Before he became a Justice of the United States Supreme Court, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. achieved renown for his speeches to his fellow lawyers. Wary of the cultural developments of the Gilded Age and a growing acquisitive spirit in his profession, Holmes noted that "The world has its fling at lawyers sometimes." Consequently, Holmes dedicated his enormous intellect and his rhetorical skill to ennobling his profession, urging his fellow lawyers to "Live greatly in the law," and reminding them "Every calling is great when greatly pursued."

As inspiring as Holmes' speeches might have been, we have an even higher calling, in service to the Judge who sits in the highest Court. The prophet Isaiah writes, "For the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our King; it is he who will save us." Isaiah 33:22. The Lord gave us the Law and he judges how we have fallen short. Although God hands down his sentence, he also sent his Son to take our punishment.

Nicky Gumbel tells the story of a Judge whose childhood friend appeared before him, accused of a crime. The evidence was clear and the judge had no choice but to find his friend guilty and to impose a substantial fine. When the proceedings were over, the judge stepped from behind the bench, took off his robe, pulled out his checkbook, and paid the fine for his friend.

So it is with us. We appear before God and we have no defense for our sin. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, however, the words of Psalm 84 ring true: "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere."

**Children:** What would your life be like if you were "king of the world"? What kind of things would you do? How would you treat people who did not do what you said?

**Adults:** Do you sometimes act like you are the king of the world? How do you respond to the fact that Jesus is both the King of the universe, and a personal Savior that who gives his life for yours?

**Prayer:** Almighty God, we live in a world of earthly rulers and judges, and yet we see injustices occur every day. By your Holy Spirit, move in us so that we may experience your sovereign love. May you rule our lives, and may we be your peace makers and justice seekers in this world. Amen.

# Good Shepherd

by Bea Carter

Wednesday, December 13

John 10:11

*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

A shepherd guards his sheep from predators and mishaps of every kind. Sheep have a strong “flock mentality” and they become agitated and unhappy if they become separated from the rest of the flock.

The shepherd knows his flock very well and he knows how to calm them and he has the skills he needs to herd them and keep them together so they don't become scattered and lose their way. Just as our “Good Shepherd” helps us on a daily basis not to lose our way or become scattered from him. We are God's people and like sheep we need to be led by our “Good Shepherd.”

The “Good Shepherd,” Jesus Christ, did lay his life down for us when he was crucified. There are many places in the Bible where it is written that the “Good Shepherd” cares for his flock. One of those places in the Bible which is the most familiar is when the angels delivered the message of the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem. The shepherds were tending their sheep on the hillside of Judea. Can you imagine how those simple shepherds must have felt when the angels gave them the message of the birth of the Christ child? They were more than likely worried about leaving their sheep to travel to Jerusalem. Shepherds usually have good sheep dogs to help herd the sheep or perhaps they had good leaders among the flock. Sheep have strong instincts to follow. We humans have strong instincts to follow so we follow our “Good Shepherd,” Jesus Christ.

Now, during this season of Advent we want to be led by the Good Shepherd and as the leaders in his flock we want to lead others to the Good Shepherd. Look for any opportunity that arises for you to bring a neighbor or friend to church. This is the season people who don't have a church home are looking for a place to worship. More people find a church home by an invitation from a friend than any other way. Invite someone to find our Good Shepherd this week.

**Children:** Shepherds are caring and loving as they protect their sheep. Jesus said he was the Good Shepherd. How is Jesus like a shepherd?

**Adults:** In what ways have you gone astray, and you feel that God is calling you back? How can God use you to be a shepherd for others?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, with your shepherd's staff, will you correct us on our way and will you hold us in your love this day. Amen.

# The Resurrection & The Life

by Judith Morgan

Thursday, December 14

John 11:25

*Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies."*

Jesus performed a miracle in this story of Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary. Lazarus was dead. Mary and Martha were upset that Jesus hadn't come sooner to save their brother. Martha's faith was strong but she didn't think of Jesus performing a miracle to save Lazarus. She didn't think of Jesus as Here and Now — but of the past and the future — not realizing that Jesus could restore Lazarus now. She was more of a small thinker not long range or the bigger package.

Are we that way? Do we open the small gifts of life, but don't expect the larger gifts that Jesus has to offer? Jesus died for our sins — he went to the cross for us!

Jesus came to us in a small package — a babe in a manger. He became the largest gift this world has ever known!

At Christmas time we marvel at the miracle of Jesus' birth. A gift given to us in a small package.

**Children:** How do you open your gifts — big ones first or small ones first? The value of the gift is not in the size of the box.

**Adults:** Same question — do you look for the large box or the small box first?

**Prayer:** Lord God, help us not only during this Advent Season but the rest of our lives to remember that we may start small in our faith but that as we grow — our faith journey can be a BIG box size! Help us Lord — help us to grow each day to burst at the seams in our faith. In Jesus' name. Amen.



# The Alpha & The Omega

by Jan Davenport

Friday, December 15

Genesis 1:1  
Revelation 22:13

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. - Genesis 1:1*

*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.*

*- Revelation 22:13*

In the beginning God ...

Scripture tells us that everything in the heavens and on the earth was created by God. As we think of the "Ornaments of Christmas" surely the most prominent is the Star — shining above the manger, lighting the way for the Wise Men, shining atop our Christmas trees radiating the Light of the World and proclaiming God's greatness. We were created by God in his image for his pleasure and to worship him. We were and continue to be blessed by God. Everything—the world, our lives — revolves around him. We behold the Christmas Star and joyfully praise and adore him.

I am ... the Beginning and the End.

God was in the beginning, God is now and God will be always. What a powerful message and how comforting it is to realize that we are never alone. The glory of Christmas is that God loves us, loves us so much he gave his only son, Jesus Christ to us. And although Christ is no longer walking on Earth, he is still with us. We need only call on him and he is here. God's love and blessings abound. When we have God in our hearts, we too shine with the love of Christ just like the Christmas Star.

**Children:** Jesus loves you very much and is always with you. In what ways do you know Jesus is with you, watching over and caring for you? How can you show Jesus' love to others all year long?

**Adults:** In what ways do you in your daily lives forget the omnipotence of God and give troubles and frustrations more importance than they deserve? How can you bring the light and love of Christ into your family?

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us and giving us your son, Jesus. Especially at this holy time of year we feel so very blessed to know you are now and always will be with us. May your love shine through us so we may radiate the love of Christ to others. Blessed be our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

# Author & Perfecter of Our Faith

by Jerry Smith

Saturday, December 16

Hebrews 12:2

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

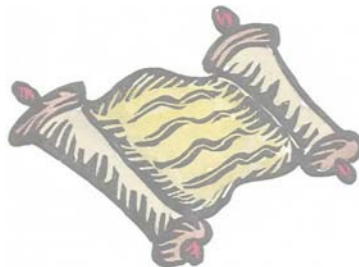
Let us examine this Scripture together:

1. Fix = Blotting out everything that would distract and unwaveringly focus your whole being on Jesus.
2. Author = Jesus not only wrote the story, but came to earth in the flesh and fulfilled what he wrote about. With his death on the cross he purchased our salvation, the beginning of new life as child of God.
3. Perfecter = It's a miraculous beginning but it's only the start. Jesus wants you to continue your journey of faith to perfection. And, like salvation, he has provided everything you need to finish the journey. All that's required is for you to accept it. First, it's the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures which are God breathed and are useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, training in righteousness and his method of talking to you. Second, is God the Spirit. Jesus said the Holy Spirit will teach you all things, will guide you into all truth and will give you the mind of Christ. So, let us stand upon the promises of Christ our King and start our journey through the Bible with our teacher, the Spirit of God, as he showers us with blessings of his fellowship, love and direction.

**Children:** It's never too early to start your journey. How do you follow Jesus?

**Adults:** It's never too late to start yours. Where is Jesus calling you to follow after him?

**Prayer:** Father, grant us a heart that burns for your Word and help us journey in it until it is emblazoned on our hearts and we can recall it in our minds. Amen.



# Son of Man

by Andy Ross

Sunday, December 17

Mark 10:43-45

Daniel 7:13-14

*"Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." - Mark 10:43-45*

*"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of Heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." - Daniel 7:13-14*

Do you have a favorite superhero? When I was young my favorite was Spiderman, but I also was partial to The Flash and Aquaman (*I was on a swim team at the time*).

In these two passages of scripture, we see two "super powers" of Jesus, God's Son. One, is the power of serving love. Jesus surprised a lot of people when he was born in a manger, to poor parents. Jesus didn't act like the Messiah of everyone's expectations. Jesus didn't come and just take over and make everything all shiny and just the way many thought it should be.

But Jesus did heal people. He did bring people back to life after they died. Jesus did walk on water and told a lake to become calm — and it did. Jesus caused blind people to see. Jesus brought comfort and healing to sick people. Jesus spoke in all sorts of heart-touching ways about the Kingdom of God, and how to live as a "kingdom person." Jesus prayed a lot.

Jesus' other super power is holding all the power and glory of being the Son of the living God. One day, Jesus will return in the way Daniel describes above. On the day of Christ's return, all the world will see the wonder and glory of Jesus' super identity. But until then, Jesus wants us trying out his super powers for serving, in us. Jesus wants us, in his name and Spirit, to keep showing others that he is here with us, in his special Spirit, until he comes again.

**Children:** If you could have a super power, what would it be? How is helping to serve someone else like a super power for them?

**Adults:** What are some Christmas gifts of service that you can offer to others this week? What would be a form of serving that would be bold and new for you?

**Prayer:** Jesus, please give us your Spirit and power, and the holy gumption, to serve in your name. Amen.

# Bright Morning Star

by John Cheek

Monday, December 18

Revelation 22:16

*I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.*

When I was a teenager, camping meant putting a bedroll on the ground and going to sleep. One of the advantages of this kind of tentless camping is that, early in the morning, before daylight, I could wake up, snuggle deeper in the bedroll, and look at the brightest star in the sky, the planet Venus, often referred to as the Morning Star. The Morning Star carried the promise of coming daylight, warmth, and opportunity.

In today's passage, Jesus emphatically proclaims himself to be the Messiah (*the Root and Offspring of David*) and the hope of a glorious new day (*the bright Morning Star*). May we experience a sense of profound wonder as we journey onward toward the stable, the cross, and the new and eternal day of joy.

**Children:** Do you like to look at the stars? See if you can find the brightest one.

**Adults:** What does it mean to you that Jesus prepares us for a new day of glory, power, and joy?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, Messiah, Morning Star, thank you for your love, your obedience, and the salvation you have purchased for us on the cross. Amen.



# Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace

by Dusty Johnson

Tuesday, December 19

Isaiah 9:6

*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.*

During this Advent season, as you await the coming of the Savior, take a moment to reflect on this Messianic scripture from Isaiah. Perhaps the words are familiar. You might recall hearing them sung as part of Handel's Messiah. You might even start to hum or sing *For Unto Us Is Born*. Because the words are familiar, their raw power is easy to overlook. Read them again. The words boldly proclaim the coming of a savior and the power and glory of God. At their core, they encapsulate what we believe as Christians: That God sent his son into the world that all might be saved. This powerful scripture is at the foundation of Old Testament prophecies relating to the coming of Messiah. It tells us what we need to know: that the Messiah will be born a child; that the Messiah will be wonderful, that he will be a counselor, that he is mighty God, the everlasting father and the prince of peace. Wow! Why should God send his son to us as a child, as the scripture says? Christ's birth as a child, a baby affirms his humanity. How amazing that the mighty God could be born as a vulnerable, helpless child, needing nurture, love, the care of a mother and a father. Being human, though, allows him to understand, to feel, to empathize with our human experiences—joys, losses, tragedies, the humdrum of daily work. Empathy for the challenges of our lives that we all desire and need. Although humbly born a baby, the scripture tells us that Christ is also God. Not just any god, but the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, the long-awaited Messiah who comes to save mankind. This is what we believe: that Christ was fully human and is fully God. He bore our sorrows and suffering. He lives that we might live eternally, through him. Hallelujah! If you have the opportunity this Advent, listen to the chorus, *For Unto Us a Child is Born*, from Handel's Messiah, which powerfully reflects the character of these awesome names for Jesus. Let the words and music speak to your heart and your very soul, knowing that Christ came as a baby, that he is King of Kings and Lord of Lords and that he came so that we might live.

**Children:** Who was born a baby? What are the names for Jesus?

**Adults:** What do the names for Messiah mean? What relevance do they have to you today, December 19, 2006?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, come now and reign in me, Be Lord of my life this hour.  
Come be my Counselor and my God, My source of wisdom and power.  
Watch o'er me with your Father care, My heart and my mind, fill with peace.  
I worship you, my Lord and King, My praise will never cease. Amen.

# The Way, The Truth & The Life

by Pete Seiferth

Wednesday, December 20

John 14:6

*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

In the animated film *Cars*, the main character and rookie racecar, Lightning McQueen, has gotten himself into a mess. He's off the predictable interstate on the way to California, lost at night along old Route 66. He's speeding, chased by the Sheriff, and winds up destroying the road surface throughout the entire town of Radiator Springs. As retribution, McQueen must repave by pulling the asphalt spreader, Bessie. He is in a hurry, and everyone is surprised when he completes the road in record time — except that the road is paved so poorly, no one can drive on it! This repaving job is going to take more time and commitment than he hoped. He doesn't expect that finishing the road well will connect him at a deeper level to friendships that he didn't even know could be important to him.

In John 14, Jesus is trying to explain to Thomas, Phillip and the other disciples about their life's destination, and how they are going to get there. The revelation is startling to them and to us: Jesus is both the destination, and the road to get there. In saying, "I am the way and the truth and the life" Jesus is explaining the spiritual truth that he and God the Father are one, and that the journey to God is found in a relationship with Jesus Christ, and a commitment to follow him. There are no shortcuts or expressways. It's all about a real relationship with a real savior on a real road with real companions that he places in our life along the way.

**Children:** Were you ever on a really long trip, when you couldn't wait to get where you were going fast enough? What did you do to make the trip more fun?

**Adults:** As we approach Christmas (*the holiday destination!*), do you find it difficult to enjoy the journey in getting there? How can you be more aware of the fact that The Way longs to accompany you on the way?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, You are the both the destination of my life and the way to get there. Thank you for offering me a new life, a new hope, and a way of living with you that gives me meaning, purpose and power. Amen.



# The Vine

by Renee Guth

Thursday, December 21

John 15:1

*I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.*

We are now reading the seventh and last of the great "I am" statements found in the Gospel of John. They are truly ornaments worthy of our attentive gaze. The first six include, "I am the Bread of Life," "I am the Light of the World," "I am the Gate of the Sheep," "I am the Good Shepherd," "I am the Resurrection and the Life," and "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." All of these "I am" statements give us both comfort and encouragement. This is also true of Jesus' words, "I am the Vine."

John 15:1-11 is found in the middle of Jesus' farewell address to his disciples. These are the words that he chose to give his disciples in the Upper Room. He encourages his disciples to "Abide in me" and to "Abide in his love." Reciprocally, "His words abide in us." We know that we are his disciples when we bear much fruit, when we love one another.

There is a play on the original Greek words in this passage. Our savior tells us that the Father is the gardener and he prunes (*kathairei*) us that we might be more fruitful. Jesus also tells us that we are clean (*katharoi*) because of the words that he spoke to us. The words for "prune" and "clean" are similar to each other and helps emphasize his message. We are clean because of his words spoken to us. His Word lives in us and changes us.

The message of the Vine, the Gardener, and the branches gives us a picture of how Jesus and the Father work together and then, how we are to be one with him and one with one another. Abide in his love!

**Children & Adults:** Who is your best friend? How do you know that you are friends? How do you know that you and Jesus are friends?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, we are often disconnected from you and from our closest friends and family. We are thankful for this time that we've just spent with you and your words. Bless us this day with a picture in our mind's eye of our renewed connection to you, the Vine. Help us find some extra time to remain lovingly connected to you and all of our friends today. We love you. Amen.

# Humble Servant

by Ken Dorushka

Friday, December 22

Philippians 2:6-7

*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

When you think of leadership, humility is not one the first characteristics that come to mind. Most of the time, it is quite the opposite. For many years I had the privilege of being on a group that negotiated technology agreements with most of the world's leading technology companies. During these negotiations, I had the opportunity to see first hand and close up the operational style, character and behavior of famous business people that are often in the headlines. Arrogance, rather than humility was the trait most exhibited. Most of the truly breakthrough ideas came not from the CEO, but from his staff. Yet, many would act as if they did it all simply because of their position. Many seem to forget, or perhaps never realized that their lives have been made rich by the Providence of God.

God's own son could have come to earth as a king, descending from Heaven with an angel convoy, trumpets announcing his arrival, chariots of fire, radiant with light that would have been a kingly coming that would amaze the masses and compelled their allegiance. Instead, he came humbly, the apprentice of a carpenter, enduring years of toil as a laborer, when actually he was the Master and Redeemer of us all.

**Children:** When you pick sides to play a game, do you always want to be the captain? Why would God want each person on the team to feel they are all important to the team?

**Adults:** Reflect on a recent activity where you had the opportunity to take credit for the successful results. Did you take the credit or take the more humble path? How did that make you feel?

**Prayer:** Lord, you sent your Son to us to take the form of a servant, to assume our problems, our sufferings, our shame rather than to take the position of an exalted ruler. Help us Lord to recognize that all that is done in our lives is through you and your love for us. Amen.



# Chief Cornerstone

by John Cheek

Saturday, December 23

Matthew 21:42

*Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?'"*

The Greek word which is translated as "capstone" or "cornerstone" in this passage can mean any of three things. It can mean a cornerstone, with its angles perfectly cut so all the other building stones can be lined up perfectly. Or it can mean the large stone lintel above the entryway of a building, protecting the structure from collapse. Or, finally, it can mean the keystone, the stone which fits perfectly into the structure and is required for stability.

Jesus is all these things for us. He is our guide, our protector, and our source of stability in the chaos of life. In his grace, he came to live for us and to die for us, the best gift we could ever receive.

**Children:** How does it feel when you're about to fall? Have you ever almost fallen, but then somebody helped you get your balance? How did that feel?

**Adults:** How do you cope with the things in your life that throw you off-balance? How does your faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior impact that?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, be our guide, our protector, and the source of our peace. Amen.



# Son of God

by Andy Ross

Sunday, December 24

Mark 1:11-15

*And a voice came from Heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" - Mark 1:11-15*

Have you heard about the Cherokee legend and rite of passage, for a boy to become a man?

The father takes his son into the forest ... blindfolded ... and leaves him ... alone. He is required to sit on a stump the whole night ... and not take off the blindfold until a ray of sun shines through it. He is all by himself. He cannot cry out for help to anyone. Once he survives the night ... he is a MAN. He cannot tell the other boys of this experience. Each lad must come into his own manhood.

One boy who experienced this test was terrified ... He could hear all kinds of noise ... It seemed as if animals were all around him. His head became filled with thoughts and fears about what could hurt him. The wind blew the grass and earth ... and it shook his stump. But he sat stoically ... never removing the blindfold. It would be the only way he could be a man.

Finally, after a horrific night ... the sun appeared and he removed his blindfold. It was then that he saw his father ... sitting on the stump next to him ... at watch... the entire night.

We celebrate the miracle of Christmas, because it was God's special way to be with us, to understand what we go through, and to do something to save us from whatever dangers this world has to offer. Jesus went into the wilderness knowing that his Father was with him. And because of Jesus' birth in our lives ... because of Christmas ... we can go through all our tests and scary places, knowing that God's love, in Jesus, is with us.

**Children:** How is Jesus' birth like a gift to you? And what do you think that gift means? How can we enjoy the Jesus' birth gift throughout our life?

**Adults:** What is one "stump" of testing in your life, in which you need to reach out in prayer and ask for God's saving, calming presence?

**Prayer:** O Lord, we praise you for sending us your Son! Hallelujah! May we find our strength and peace in Jesus, born for us, born to save us. Amen.

# Light of the World

by Andy Ross

Monday, December 25

Luke 2:29-32

Isaiah 9:2-7

Isaiah 60:1-3

*"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. - Luke 2:29-32*

Something I once saw on a poster: "The darkness of the entire universe cannot stop the flame of one single candle."

It usually takes a black out, or power outage, to make you realize how much we rely on electricity and power to get around in life. And it's at moments like those that we reach for battery operated gizmos and candles — to find and recover light to penetrate the darkness.

Maybe the reason we go crazy with colored lights at Christmas, is because we are celebrating that Jesus was born to be the light of the world ...

A light helps people to see and understand God.

A light that shines in dark places, where this is despair and anguish.

A light that gives us direction and guidance for living.

A light that gives power to people like you and me to shine the light of God's mercy, hope and love for others.

May the glory and light of Jesus' presence shine upon you this day! Shine, for him, who was born for you!

**Children:** How does a flashlight work? What makes a flashlight shine? How does Jesus' Spirit in us help us to shine for him in our lives?

**Adults:** How can you find and shine the light of Christ for someone this day?

**Prayer:** All praises, glory and honor we give to you, Son of God, Jesus — Our Savior and Friend, Light of the world, hope of salvation. May your light shine upon us, so that it might shine through us — this day, and throughout the new year. Amen.



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