

FIVE CANDLES, ONE FLAME:

THE ADVENT WREATH

AN ADVENT GUIDE





Welcome to Advent

The Advent wreath with candles may be one of the most recognizable symbols of this season. You know the rhythm: each week you light another candle as the days count down toward Christmas. What some do not know is that each candle has a theme attached to it. Though they vary slightly, depending upon our various traditions, we find five grand themes for the Advent candles. This guide will shepherd us through **FIVE CANDLES** sharing **ONE FLAME: Hope, Faith, Joy, Peace, and Love.**

Some years ago, *Urban Skye* produced an Advent Guide, *Prophecies of the Christmas King*, based upon Messianic forecasts found in chapters seven and nine from the Old Testament Book of Isaiah. Our Scriptural foundations this year bring to light even more prophecies from Isaiah concerning the coming of Jesus. To place these in a historical timeline, Isaiah ministered roughly 300 years after the time of King David and 700 years before the birth of Jesus. We focus on several of the other clues God's people received about the One who was to come from the lineage of King David (the son of Jesse).

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord*
(Isaiah 11:1-2)



This guide's twelve contributors—five Colorado pastors and seven artists associated with *The Christos Collective*—believe that engaging this season of anticipation for Christmas is good for the soul as well as the Church. Advent is a spiritually-necessary on-ramp to the Feast of the Nativity. The Church, in her wisdom, has known that preparation of heart, hands, and head are essential for getting us ready to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

This kind of preparedness is our annual challenge, isn't it? Our hearts need encouragement, our hands need rest, and our minds need clarity. All these require time; you'll have to make some space to lay



the groundwork for the Christmas holiday. And, for most of us, our preparation is desperate for some direction. That is what this guide is designed to do. We will lead you through five themes over these four weeks; all you need to do is make the time and allow yourself to be kindly led as we trek toward Christmas. Jesus awaits. May this Advent Season bring us all closer to the One whose birth we celebrate,

Dave Meserve and Mike Sares (*Editors*)
Jeff Gagliardi (*Art Director*)

On Using this Guide

We offer a devotion and reflection each of the four weeks of Advent along with one for Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. Each week is introduced by original artwork accompanying the devotion. We start with the prophet Isaiah who gave us this word-picture that has been the Church's Advent theme for all these centuries: "*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light*" (*Isaiah 9:2*).

Light a candle. The traditional order of candles each week (by color) is purple, purple, pink, purple, and then white for Christmas Eve/Day. If you don't have all the candles, just light one you have each week.

Open in prayer. *Lord Jesus, Master of both the light and the darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas.*

Read the texts and devotion aloud. The Bible texts are included in the devotion. We encourage you to read aloud, even if you're by yourself!

Engage the Reflections and art. If you are with another person or your family, have a conversation around the reflections. If on your own, consider recording your own reflections in a journal. Don't forget to contemplate the art which was created around the week's theme.

Close in prayer.

Lord Jesus, Master of both the light and the darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas. We who have so much to do seek quiet spaces to hear Your voice each day. We who are anxious over many things look forward to Your coming among us. We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of Your kingdom. We, whose hearts are heavy, seek the joy of your presence. We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light. To you we say, "Come Lord Jesus!" Amen
(Henri J.M. Nouwen)

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Anticipation in HOPE

WEEK ONE: DAVE MESERVE

Art by Katina Lowe katinamlowe@gmail.com



Isaiah 42:1-4

“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.
He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.
A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;
he will not falter or be discouraged
till he establishes justice on earth.
In his teaching the islands will put their **hope.**”

Isaiah 40:31

But those who **hope** in the Lord will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

You may remember the line from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in the *Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis, “always winter, but never Christmas.” It describes the feeling of living without hope, the most telling description of Narnia under the perpetual rule of the White Witch. That is, until the faithful recognize that Aslan is on the move; then, hope begins to reign in anticipation.

Communities of faith throughout history have a similar story of hope displacing despair. In the story of ancient Israel, Isaiah and other prophets foretold of a time when “winter” would come with a vengeance in the form of exile. The Jewish people would be brutally deported from their beloved homeland and forced into the captivity of a foreign power. Where would they find hope in exile?



They find hope when Word comes that God is—and has always been—on the move! The news begins in the heavens where God says to His divine council, *“Comfort, comfort my people . . .”* (*Isaiah 40:1*). Like a growing flame the message gets brighter; a voice begins to call out to get ready for the King Himself is coming. And not just any king but The King who will *“bring justice to the nations.”* He will accomplish this with the deep tenderness of a good shepherd to lead us home.

Imagine the impact of that news on a people in exile! Even before they start packing their bags something small, but powerful, begins to stir in their hearts. It has the power to lift their countenance and energize their movement. As Isaiah puts it to the faithful, this news will make you feel you can fly like an eagle! That is the potency of true hope.

While the ancients anticipated a future Savior, we know Him already. This peace-making, justice-loving, Spirit-infused King is identified as Jesus in our New Testaments (*Matthew 12:17-21*). And, like our spiritual ancestors, we too anticipate His Second Coming when the Promised One will make all things right—in the world and in our hearts.

Without this hope, our souls grow weary and even our bodies can grow weak. We struggle to live well and flourish when we cannot anticipate a better future. And so, the journey of Advent, like all true spiritual journeys, begins with a strong dose of hope.

This is not just any vague, wish-list kind of thing. We don't just “hope for” something we think we want, but we “hope in” Someone who can give us what we desperately need: a renewed heart. It is in the very center of our being where hope is planted, St. Paul tells us, *“because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit”* (*Romans 5:5*).

Advent is a journey of the heart, jump-started by an implanted hope. We may feel exiled in our lives, cold in our relationships, darkened to our futures in what may seem like an endless winter.

So, get ready; the Christ of Christmas is coming!

REFLECTIONS

- Our Christian hope is for a future where the justice of Christ will blanket the whole earth. As a candle burns brighter in the dark, where do you see a deep need for justice? Offer a grateful prayer of anticipation for that justice to come through Christ.
- Dave writes that what we most desperately need is a renewed heart. Begin your Advent journey with what feels to you like “winter, but never Christmas”: a lie you keep believing, a darkened thought that keeps coming, an emptiness that seems un-fillable ... Now, read all of Isaiah 40 with Jesus in view. Find your hope renewed!





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Preparation by FAITH

WEEK TWO: JEFF BAXTER

Art by Melissa Pape melissapapefineart@gmail.com

Isaiah 28:16

So this is what the Sovereign Lord says:
"See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation;
the one who relies on it
will never be stricken with panic.



Stone is everywhere in Israel.

Throughout history, stone was chiseled from the bedrock of Mount Moriah to build homes in Jerusalem. Wood was scarce. Olive and sycamore-fig trees were not cut down. They produced precious fruit for consumption. Acacia trees were not dense or extensive enough for any real quantity of wood and they produced valuable shade during the brutal summers. Fishing boats were often made from multiple kinds of wood because they used whatever they could find. But stone...stone was everywhere.

Each block of stone used to build homes was tested to make sure it was solid. Other household items like water jars, bowls, and boxes were carved from stone as well. Even mangers were made out of rock, being sculpted into a feeding trough for animals. It is more likely than not that the manger in which Mary and Joseph placed Jesus was made from rock.

The Jewish Temple had a sure, stone foundation. The rock upon which Jerusalem and God's Temple was built was Mount Moriah itself! Mount Moriah was where the Jewish patriarch, Abraham, was tested with his son, Issac (Genesis 22:1-19). It is also where the Messiah would be crucified. In God's providence and salvation history, Jesus would give his life for the world upon that mountain.



It is no wonder Isaiah, in his writings 700 years prior to the birth of Jesus, would use the strong metaphor of stone to describe the One in whom we should place our faith. Isaiah would not only make it obvious that the future Messiah was coming, but even tell us how we should respond. Each of us are instructed to be one who “relies on” that stone. The stone was coming to Zion (Jerusalem). It would be a tested stone, a cornerstone, and a steady foundation for our faith according to Isaiah. Who is this Stone who was coming? He is the Messiah, Jesus.

This was no weak, thin, stone foundation which could fall apart. A solid foundation was coming—One in whom we can trust. Peter, a close follower of Jesus, would identify that cornerstone as Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:6). He is the foundation for our lives, and the only one who provides a secure, stable base in a turbulent world. The Gospel doubles down saying anything not built upon that foundation is sure to end up in wreckage.

Jesus told a parable about building a house on a strong foundation of rock so that the world does not sweep us away by flood and wind. He goes on to tell us, *“Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash”* (Matthew 7:24-27).

We all fall short of God’s perfection and glory. Perhaps you feel it especially during this time of the year—I have at times, too. Maybe there is a crack in the foundation of your relationship with Jesus. What needs repair? Where does it need to be patched up? This is a wonderful season to remember the birth, life, death, resurrection, and return of Jesus. We can confess where we fall short and place our feet upon the strong foundation of Jesus again.

Isaiah told his people that, in the future, this precious cornerstone would be *“a tested stone.”* Jesus would be tempted by Satan himself and not waver from God’s plan. He would prove Himself worthy by enduring torture and death on a cross. Jesus confirms the reliability of the Messianic promise. He was tried, tested, tempted, and was proven to be the glorious, obedient Son of God. He is solid and steady. This is why we anticipate the celebration of the coming Savior.

Let us put our faith in Jesus. We can trust in Him through the testing and trials of life and rely on Him both now and forevermore.

REFLECTIONS

- Our understanding of what faith looks like is aided by being with good people, especially during our most formative years. Who has been a steady “stone” person for you? What about them has given you a sample of faithfulness?
- Jeff mentioned that we all experience cracks in our foundational relationship with Jesus. On your Advent journey, identify a place where your relationship with Jesus needs repair. Confess this to Him and receive Christ's forgiveness.







Reception in JOY

WEEK THREE: JIM EMIG

Art by Kathy Self kathy@colorbrush.com

Isaiah 61:1-2a

*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim **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,*

Isaiah 35:10

*They will enter Zion with singing;
everlasting **joy** will crown their heads.
Gladness and joy will overtake them,
and sorrow and sighing will flee away.*

“Joy to the world, the Lord is come...”

The concept of joy is fascinating. Whereas happiness refers to well-being or contentment, joy adds this important component: joy is happiness after an extended period of loss or want. This is what makes a wedding, graduation, or the celebration of a promotion so special.

During this advent season, we have contemplated hope, which includes a confident expectation that something good is on the horizon—and faith, which motivates us to rely on that hope. Joy is the celebration that erupts when that hope is realized.

Israel was a nation that lived by hope and faith, and was commanded by God to celebrate the times when joy erupted via His deliverance. The most well-known example was Passover. God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation, but all Israel

found themselves slaves in Egypt. After over 400 years of loss and want, God leads his people out of captivity.

With the Passover meal still in their stomachs, the Israelites spilled out of Egypt and into the wilderness. After three days of wandering, they found themselves up against the Red Sea. I have always found it interesting that there is no mention of the Israelites rejoicing during those first three days. I think it had something to do with the fact that they were still in Egypt; the job was not yet completed. Rejoicing would be premature, and now, as they gaze out over the water, they hear it—the sound of Egyptian chariots coming from behind them.

Their deliverance had appeared too good to be true. That's why there was no rejoicing. Moses then calms them, telling them to wait for their final deliverance. You know the story...and then, while on the other side of the Red Sea, they watch the water settle over the Egyptian army as it attempts to cross. Now they can rejoice. (*Exodus 12-15*)

We see this theme of waiting for joy again and again.

- In *Luke 2*, Jesus is born in Bethlehem and the angels appear to the shepherds, telling them that Messiah has been born. Their deliverance is at hand! The shepherds spread the good news throughout town; the people are amazed, but they do not rejoice. The birth of the baby does not finish the job.
- In *Luke 4*, Jesus is asked to speak in the synagogue in Nazareth. He reads *Isaiah 61* to them, proclaiming their freedom, yet they do not rejoice.
- Throughout His ministry, Jesus encounters both success and rejection, but not rejoicing on a national scale.
- On Palm Sunday the crowds are excited, but their cries of "Hosanna" [Save us] is a cry of hope, not joy.
- Jesus endures the Passion while the disciples watch in horror and confusion—it is a reprise of the Israelites listening as the chariots approach. Moses calmed Israel in that story, but it is Isaiah who offers comfort to the disciples: healing for the brokenhearted, freedom for the captives, release from darkness for the prisoners, and comfort for all who mourn.

Comfort does not seem possible as Jesus proclaims, "*It is finished*," but three days later as cries of, "*He is risen*" begin to ring out, joy finally seems possible. Fifty days later, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit indwells the believers and the song of joy becomes a chorus. As Peter and the

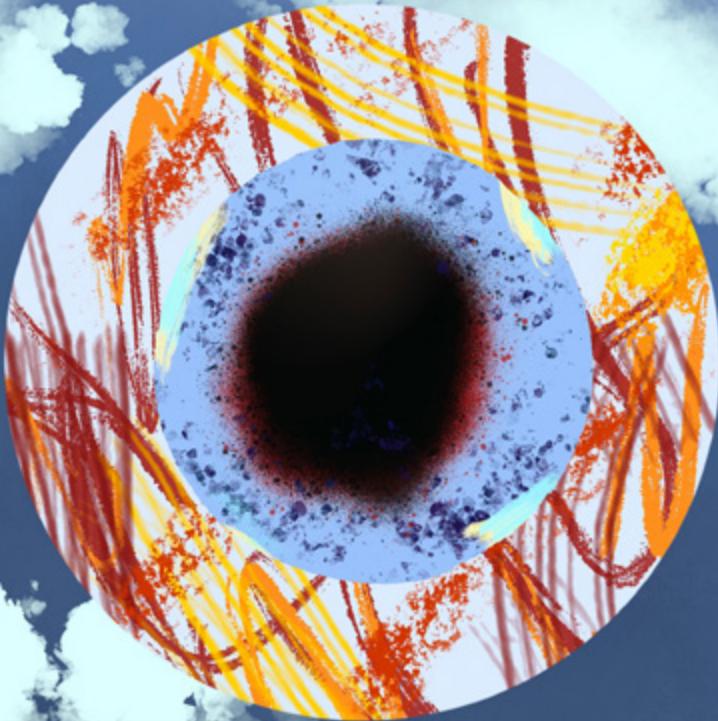
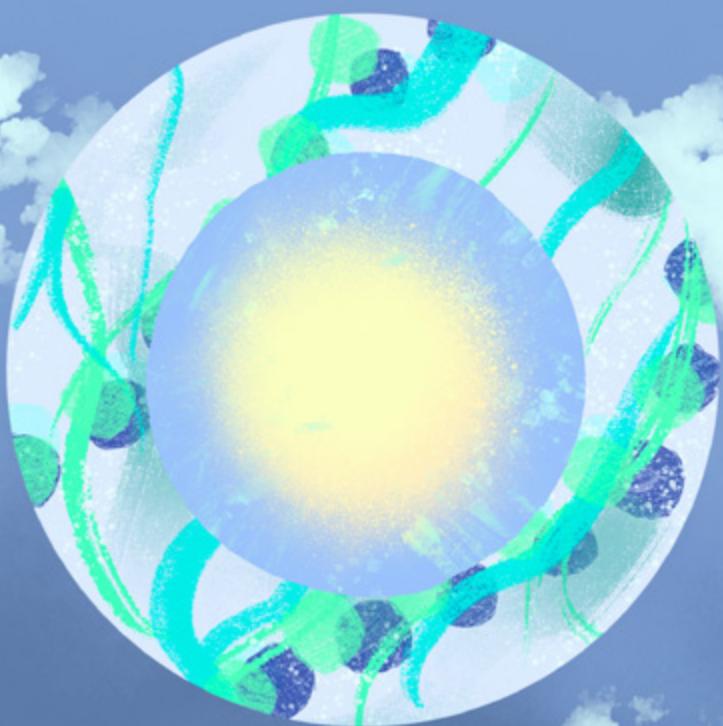
Apostle Paul travel through Gentile lands proclaiming the truth that death itself has been defeated, the chorus becomes a symphony.

At the Red Sea, Israel could not truly rejoice until the Egyptian army was dead. That is when they knew they were free. In Jesus' day, the Jews believed they could not rejoice until their captives, the Romans, were dead. Of course, Jesus did not come to defeat the Roman captors—He came to defeat sin and death itself. The brokenhearted could not be healed, the captives could not be freed, those mourning could not truly be comforted until this happened.

Because of Jesus' resurrection, sin and death are being drowned in the "Red Sea" of his blood. The *Book of Revelation* describes this as the *second death*, when death itself dies. We can begin the rejoicing now, and will sing it in full-throated symphony in His Kingdom when we see him face-to-Face.

REFLECTIONS

- Jim writes that true joy comes after an extended period of loss or want. Where have you experienced this? How did joy come in the end? What kind of loss or want are you aware of today? Offer these as prayers to Jesus and ask Him for His path that leads to joy.
- In the Nativity story, the angel of the Lord spoke these words to the shepherds "*I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people*" (Luke 2:11). With our faith in Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection and our hope in something unbelievably good that is coming—and has already begun to come—joy is available now. As Jim mentioned about the symphony to come, find the lyrics to *Joy to the World* and sing it out loud, even if you're by yourself!





Proclamation of PEACE

WEEK FOUR: JILL JONES

Art by **Briana Pinell** briapanell02@gmail.com

Isaiah 50:4-7

*The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue,
to know the word that sustains the weary.
He wakens me morning by morning,
wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed.*

The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears;

*I have not been rebellious,
I have not turned away.*

*I offered my back to those who beat me,
my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard;
I did not hide my face
from mocking and spitting.*

*Because the Sovereign Lord helps me,
I will not be disgraced.*

*Therefore have I set my face like flint,
and I know I will not be put to shame.*

Isaiah 26:2-3

*Open the gates
that the righteous nation may enter,
the nation that keeps faith.*

*You will keep in **perfect peace**
those whose minds are steadfast,
because they trust in you.*

Sixty years ago, John Lennon and Yoko Ono penned the song, *Give Peace a Chance*, protesting the ravaging effects of war. Thirty years ago, one of my favorite 90s artists, the Cranberries, wrote the song, *Zombie*, joining the choruses of lament over the violence in their homeland of Ireland, and mourning the loss of two young boys who were caught in the crossfire. And as I write this, just yesterday, there was another school shooting in Colorado—once again causing all of us



to question if these senseless shootings, the senseless loss of life, will ever stop.

Even a cursory glance at human history reveals the unfortunate truth that conflict, war, and violence have been mainstays in recorded history, rather than just an occasional or unfortunate anecdote. For decades, centuries, and even millennia—musicians, writers, poets and artists have protested the realities of war and have cried out for peace. And on this day after another school shooting, I join their cries of lament. We all long for peace...we cry out for peace. And yet, I wonder: if peace were given a chance, what would it look like?

A pastor friend of mine has often said, “In times like these, it’s helpful to remember that there have always been times like these.” So when the prophet Isaiah spoke out against the corruption and injustice present within the Kingdom of Israel 2,700 years ago, his words are surprisingly relevant. Isaiah not only warned the people of Israel of impending judgment if they didn’t repent (which history tells us took pace at the brutal hands of the Assyrian and later Babylonian Empires), he also held out hope that his words of warning would compel them to come back to the true source of peace: Yahweh, the Lord.

With this all-too-familiar backdrop of war and conquest, the prophet Isaiah returned to God’s promises and took Yahweh at His Word, when He proclaimed: *You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you (Isaiah 26:3)*. The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*—a wonderfully complex word, comprising the concepts of wholeness, completeness, welfare and prosperity. And it’s a fascinating choice of words for Isaiah to use.

Shalom is not merely the absence of conflict. It is the presence of so much more. More than just the cessation of war or the wearying aftermath of war, shalom is the experience of serenity and goodness—the kind of contentment and settledness one feels when it seems all has been made right with the world. It’s both an external and internal experience. It’s the fullness and gratitude one feels when a relationship is restored or when an illness is healed.

Shalom is both something we can experience in the present moment as well as the promise of a future reality. Even when the world around us is engulfed in turmoil, we can still experience shalom because God is present in it. He is both the Source and Giver of this shalom (*Isaiah*

9:6; Ephesians 2:14; John 14:27). He gives it abundantly and we have to take Him at His Word. He calls us to keep coming back, to keep trusting in His promises, His commands, His invitation to relationship, to keep surrendering to His way of doing things. This is because He gets it—He's both the Creator of the world and then the Redeemer of this same world.

He knows intimately the weariness that comes from just simply living in this world. And He knows the word that sustains those who are weary. He knows how we need to be reminded each morning of where we find shalom. When the bottom drops, when headlines hit, when our fears are realized, He is the One we run to, moment-by-moment, day-by-day. He is our help, He is our hope, and He is our peace. Shalom is the experience of God with us in our world as it is, not as we would have it.

So much more than Lennon and Ono's catchy mantra to *Give Peace a Chance*, God's invitation is to trust Him as our source for shalom now and to trust Him as our hope that one day there will be a lasting peace on earth, and good will to men and women.

REFLECTIONS

- Jill describes “shalom” in a variety of ways. Which one stands out to you as you look them over? Why do you think that is? How is your longing for peace distinct from simply the absence of conflict?
- God is inviting you to experience His peace this Advent! Consider spending focused time each day this week reading the Nativity stories of *Matthew* and *Luke* (chapters 1-2 in both). Keep thanking Him for the Peace Child that has come for you.





SLYang



Celebration with LOVE

CHRISTMAS EVE/DAY: MIKE SARES

Art by Shan Yang peacefulrainDS@gmail.com



Isaiah 16:5

In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it—one from the house of David—one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness.

Isaiah 54:10

"Though the mountains be shaken
and the hills be removed,
yet my **unfailing love** for you will not be shaken
nor my covenant of peace be removed,"
says the Lord, who has compassion on you.



On Christmas Eve, by tradition, a fifth candle is added to the advent wreath. It is white, placed in the center of the wreath, and is known as the *Christ Candle*. It symbolizes the coming of the Messiah, the Christ, the One about whom the Scriptures have prophesied who is the Light of the World. It is about Jesus and His love for us. In lighting this candle, we look forward to His second coming as well as celebrating His first arrival in Bethlehem. When Jesus returns, however, it will not be to a manger but to a throne.

Nothing in the human heart burns brighter than love. "It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away" (Song of Songs 8:6-7). The Prophet Isaiah predicts that the Messiah's reign will be instituted and maintained by love. He anticipates a government rooted in the love of God and the love of people. Jesus' Dominion begins on Earth, continues in Heaven, and the Scriptures tell us that He rules from Jerusalem.

The prophet Zachariah states, "The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name"



(Zechariah 14:9). When one reads the rest of the chapter, it becomes obvious that this is not Heaven the prophet is writing about, but Earth. Furthermore, Isaiah predicts that the Christ's reign will put an end to war.

"He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore" (Isaiah 2:4). What we have all longed for will be a reality when Jesus establishes His Kingdom on Earth. What's not to love?

Given the tremendous divisions that can exist in a country because of its leadership, it's difficult to imagine any scenario where everyone loves their head of state. It's even more difficult to imagine a country where the head of state loves each and every citizen...even those of all other countries! But then, when one thinks about the ministry of Jesus—curing the sick, healing the lame, casting away people's demons, restoring sight to the blind, returning hearing to the deaf, and raising the dead—then it's not so difficult to imagine a King who loves and is loved in return.

Here is the kind of love Jesus gives to every one of us:

- It's more than the love good parents have for their children.
- Jesus loves us beyond friendship and beyond romance—even though He calls us His friends and even though we are His "bride."
- Jesus loves us when we ignore Him and don't talk with Him.
- He loves us when we do things our own way, with no thought of what He would want.
- He loves us when we're bad—and I don't mean naughty—I mean really, really bad.
- He loves us when we curse Him.
- The Bible even leads us to believe that He loves us all the more as we run away from Him.
- He loves us with a divine and sacrificial love that is stronger than death. *"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:38-39).

That is love committed to us beyond feelings. God wants our lives to be shaped by the wonders of his mercy and His grace. He doesn't give us the punishment we deserve; instead, He gives us the love we don't deserve. If we can understand how completely we are loved in Christ, our gratitude will birth in us the kind of thoughts, words, and deeds that will transform not only us ourselves—but the people and the world around us. May His Kingdom Come!

REFLECTIONS

- As Advent crescendos at Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, even if you have not lit a traditional Advent wreath this season, find a candle to light. As you do, read aloud all the Bible verses Mike has highlighted. Love has come for you!
- Think of someone who doesn't deserve your love and do them a kindness because of the love that Jesus has for you.





A CLOSING PRAYER

O God who has spoken through the prophets
To prepare us for the coming of your Christ, the Messiah,
Open our eyes so that we may see wonderful things in your Word.

Give us **hope** for each day of our lives.
Bless us with **faith** to believe what you have promised.
Fill us with **joy** because of Your great deeds.
Grant us **peace** that passes all our understanding.
Let us know Your **love** for us. Help us to love You in return
and to love others as we love ourselves.

Merry Christmas.