



NASSAU PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Advent Devotions

2020

DECEMBER 27 - JANUARY 6



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December 27, 2020

Psalm 148

***Young men and women alike,
old and young together!
Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven (Psalm 148:12–13 NRSV).***

As the Psalms continually remind us, we were created to praise and glorify God. Psalm 148 unfurls a whole cosmology of praise, from angels in heaven down to things that creep on the ground. The order of creation in Genesis is echoed here as the psalmist urges all God's creation to praise the Lord of heaven and earth. I am reminded that Jesus said if the crowds were silent the very stones would praise him.

Of course, we humans find it easier to offer praises when things are going well. In this plague year we have much to lament. Although I have not suffered from the effects of the pandemic personally, I still catch myself grumbling about loss of contact and community, political polarization, or some other gripe de jour. During our recent communal toe-dip into the deep waters of the Psalms I was reminded that the proper response to good fortune or bad is the same: praise the Lord! Some days I really need to remember *who* I am and *why* I am.

One of our strengths as a church family is that we are made of *young men and women alike, old and young together*. I am grateful for the work of our staff and congregation to maintain and strengthen our bonds of affection over the seasons of Advent and Epiphany, and to direct our communal praise to the Lord at a time when we cannot gather in person. Thanks be to God, from whom all blessings flow!

Dearest Lord, who has made us and loves us and continues to sustain us, please accept our humble praise. We are wayward creatures and forgetful, slow to offer praise and quick to find fault. When we forget, please inspire us anew to raise our grateful praise to you, Lord, for our lives, for this beautiful world, and most of all for your care and love for us, made manifest in your son Jesus Christ. Amen.

John Parker

John has served in various ministries and leadership roles at Nassau Presbyterian Church over the years. He is thankful for the continuing witness of Nassau to the Word of God, for his church family, and especially for the students of the 3rd and 4th grade Zoom church school, who keep him on his toes and help him to better understand our shared faith.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 28, 2020

Matthew 2:13–18

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son” (Matthew 2:13–15 NRSV).

How would it feel to be told to leave your house to go to a new country to protect your newborn child? Even though protecting your baby is your number one priority, I'd be upset. "But God, all my stuff is here! I can't pack this crib into my car! What about my wedding china? Can't I just move to the next neighborhood over?"

A lot was being asked of Joseph: acceptance of a child of the Holy Spirit by his future wife *and then* having to move to Egypt? Especially after meeting wise men and shepherds who came to praise Jesus, why is this exalted one being told to move? This child is to be praised!

But without thought or question, Joseph and his family go to Egypt until Herod's death, forging into new territory without hesitation or complaint. May we all have such faith that we are willing to follow God's voice, directing us how we can best be used.

Heavenly Father, keep our hearts open for direction and guidance from you, especially when we are unbelieving of what path you are sending us on and unwilling to listen. Amen.

Kate Torrey

With her husband, Tim Flood, Kate misses seeing your faces from the balcony every Sunday, but Zoom coffee hours have been a lovely temporary substitute. As new homeowners and soon-to-be new parents, they are looking forward to the excitement 2021 will bring.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 29, 2020

Isaiah 49:1–15

Seem they will come from afar—some from the north, some from the west, some from the region of Aswan (Isaiah 49:12 NIV).

In this passage Isaiah is predicting the restoration of Israel, but he is emphasizing that God's blessings are not intended exclusively for the Israelites. He predicts that people will come from the north and the west. Those are directions.

Then he adds that people will come from Aswan. That's a place.

Aswan is located on the Nile River and today is part of Egypt. The occupants, however, are not traditional Egyptians. They are Nubians, a tribe of black Africans who have their own distinct language and a very rich culture. That was also true of their ancestors in biblical times.

I believe Isaiah was trying to make a specific point when he included Aswan in this particular passage: God's love is universal.

As children of God, our love should also be universal.

Father, we know you have commanded us to love others as much as we love ourselves. Help us to extend that love to people who are different from us as well as to people who are similar to us. Help us to do whatever we can to help others live more abundant, rewarding lives. Amen.

Jay Dunn

Jay is a semi-retired sports writer. During the baseball season he publishes a weekly column in *The Trentonian*.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 30, 2020

Psalm 108

My heart is unwavering, God.

I will sing and make music—yes, with my whole being! (Psalm 108:1 CEB).

This verse reminds me of Matthew 22:37: *He replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind.”* I wonder if in Psalm 108 the psalmist is praising God for helping them when they needed it because they loved God with their whole being. The psalmist is now saying that they will be faithful to God because God helped them. Reading these two passages together shows us how other parts of Scripture can help us read the Psalms. Also, the psalmist shows us how Scripture can shape our lives, even when it takes some thinking to realize that God was speaking to us through Scripture.

God, help us to remember to follow your commandments and be faithful to you. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Nico Barreto

Nico is 10 and in 5th grade. He enjoys participating in the chancel drama every summer. He likes chinchillas and believes in unicorns. He spends most of his free time reading.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 31, 2020

John 8:12–19

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

The Pharisees challenged him, “Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid” (John 8:12–13 NIV).

This is one of my favorite verses and it makes me recall my encounters with the many people that seem to pass judgment on things big and small using their very limited perception of reality and without any apparent modicum of wisdom. It is a human predicament to think that one knows it all as one is unable to grasp that there is something beyond comprehension. It is also a human predicament to walk in the so-called darkness and operate through life from the vantage point of ego and limited understanding.

From the vantage point of humanity, walking in darkness has many pitfalls and humans cause other humans much pain and suffering. To alleviate our self-inflicted pain and suffering, Jesus gave us a gift and his gift is in his being as the light of the world. His promise to us is that if we follow this light, we will never walk in darkness. Jesus appears to us as his own witness as he is the light of the world and does not need corroboration, or proving who he is since he stands with God who sent him to lift humanity from the darkness into the light of truth.

It does pain me to no end to live amongst others who dwell in darkness. It does pain me even more to bear witness to all the string of miserable events that has befallen on the human race because of those in control who dwell in darkness. There is really only one thing that can save humanity and that is to realize that Jesus is the light to follow as only he can save us from more misery as we move from the darkness to the light.

Jesus, I pray to you that you lift the veil of ignorance that is clouding people’s vision so that they can move from the darkness into the light so that humanity’s pain and suffering is lifted. Jesus, I also pray to you to help me see the light so that when I need it the most, I am able to trust into a higher purpose in order to withstand my own trials and tribulations. Amen.

Lina Genovesi

Lina has been a member of Nassau Church since April 2019. She is an intellectual property attorney with a law firm in Greenwich, Connecticut. She spends her free time working on her memoir of growing up in Beirut, Lebanon.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

January 1, 2021

Ecclesiastes 3:1–13

I know that there's nothing better for them but to enjoy themselves and do what's good while they live. Moreover, this is the gift of God: that all people should eat, drink, and enjoy the results of their hard work (Ecclesiastes 3:12–13 CEB).

My husband and I recently celebrated our fifteenth wedding anniversary with a sushi supper for two.

As Errol unpacked the take-out, he asked, “What are the kids having?”

I shrugged, “I don’t know. Frozen pizza?”

He winced. “That’s not going to go over well.”

Of course, he was right. Our brood soon swarmed the table, begging for bites.

While these verses from Ecclesiastes seem to give us a free pass for indulgences and our recent holiday gorging, I fancied the concept of enjoyment as a divine gift stemming from labor. We’re suddenly in the fable, *The Little Red Hen*: you don’t get a slice of warm bread if you didn’t put in the work.

No one earns God’s love or works for God’s grace, and our kids are learning this. Yet, the lesson of hard work is a valuable one. Perhaps they will learn it soon. Maybe in the new year, they’ll work to save up and buy their own sushi.

Dear God, Thank you for minds and bodies that can work and play. Amen.

Anne Thomsen Lord

Anne is a deacon, ruling elder, and mother of four. She works early in the morning as a lifeguard at the Princeton YMCA, but has a lot of fun there too.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

January 2, 2021

Psalms 117–118

***I was pushed hard, so that I was falling
but the LORD helped me (Psalm 118:13 NRSV).***

I remember slowly waking up on the Sunday prior to the election. In those moments between sleep and wakefulness, when the mind races without any logic or perspective, I found myself panicking about the imminent vote, the Supreme Court, and the pandemic. I sensed for the first time in my life, if only for a few moments, what real depression must feel like. For those of you who deal with depression on a serious and sustained level, my heart goes out to you.

I realized, at that moment, I needed something more than my own emotional resources, support from family and friends, and what any medication could provide. I needed to rely on my faith more than ever before. At 72, I've finally come to appreciate that there are times when faith and prayer are the only balms that can make the wounded whole.

The closing words of Dave's sermon brought me comfort and encouragement: "Jesus, I know who you are and I am begging you to do something about all this. Strengthen and inspire me to do my part...because, if steadfast love and faithfulness is who you are, then it has to be who I am."

Steadfast love and faithfulness appear in Psalm 118 and Psalm 86, the text for the sermon. The footnotes on Psalm 118 in my Bible describe it as a "thanksgiving for deliverance in battle," which aptly describes the challenges we face today: a battle for our democracy, our rule of law, and our lives. We need all the help we can get in dealing with these existential challenges but I am most sustained by the faith we share. For, in the end, each of us can say with the psalmist, *I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the Lord helped me.*

Enduring Lord, these are hard times, but we have seen hard times before and you have always been there for us. Help us to stay positive, to find ways to be connected, and to focus, in this new year, on the spirit of our recent Christmas celebration. Amen.

Tom Charles

Tom, along with his wife Lynn, is a long-time Nassau member having a relatively easy, but still challenging, time during these hard days: being retired, having Marisa (who remotely continues her NGO work in Burma/Myanmar) staying with us since March, appreciating the quarantine discipline by Natalie (on the staff of a retirement community) and her husband Paolo, and relishing live-streamed worship and hymn sings.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

January 3, 2021

John 1:(1–9), 10–18

***The Word became flesh
and made his home among us (John 1: 14a CEB).***

This text from John is included in the lectionary readings for worship on the second Sunday after Christmas as well as verses 1–14 for Christmas Day for all three years. At Nassau we hear it as the concluding text for the Lessons and Carols Service on Christmas Eve.

This year I am stuck on *Word*. In the Greek text, it is *logos*, which means much more than a spoken or printed word. It is word, spirit, and mind. I'm no linguist, but from my limited study of other languages, I know that learning vocabulary is one thing, but learning the language involves much more. Learning to read your own language is rote until something clicks and the words come alive with meaning, a meaning specific to your culture and context. Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator popular a few decades ago, spoke of learning to read the world, along with learning to read the words.

As we begin this new year and slowly make our way out of a pandemic crisis, how will we read the world as we follow the Word made flesh? These 18 verses are John's nativity story, but the rest of his Gospel, along with the other three Gospels, needs to be our focus, our words, spirit and mind, our ministry as he taught and showed us.

God, Word become flesh, we asked for the courage and strength to open our spirits and minds to follow your path as people of your way. In your name, we pray. Amen.

Carol Wehrheim

Carol is Clerk of Session, but cherishes most her opportunity to tell the words, the stories of the Bible to all generations, hoping that the message translates to the worlds of the listeners.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

January 4, 2021

Psalms 120–123

***The Lord will protect you from all evil;
God will protect your very life.
The Lord will protect you on your journeys—
whether going or coming—
from now until forever from now (Psalm 121:7–8 CEB).***

God is your warrior. He fights for your body in the day and in the night. He is your shield that protects you from the danger. His shield spreads throughout the world. He will never forget you. He reminds you every day that you are safe, and he will protect you. And that makes me feel safe and happy.

Dear God, you are my protector. Amen.

Pryor Roberts

Pryor is a fourth grader at Village Elementary School. He enjoys playing baseball with his brother, Go Fish with his sister, painting with his mama, and woodworking with his dad. He loves nature and all of God's creatures.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

January 5, 2021

Luke 6:27–31

But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you (Luke 6:27–28 NRSV).

The message of “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” in Luke 6, verse 31 is one of the most simple, yet challenging, requests the Lord makes of us. It makes sense in theory, we are all children of God and thus all want similar things; love, respect, kindness, compassion, the list can go on! Why, then, is it so hard to live by these words? I think the answer to this question can be found in the verses leading to this Golden Rule. When someone curses me, mistreats me, or hates me, my initial response is not to love them, do good things to them, and bless and pray for them. I have trained myself to think of myself without thinking of them. What is the motivation for the action? How can I show kindness and love against adversity? These questions seem especially applicable in the social climate we live in, whether it be oppositions in thought regarding politics, the current health crisis, or even aspects of people that can never be changed. In this season leading to the epiphany, it is important to remember the light the magi followed to find the Christ child. We too need to be a light to others – preaching the gospel at all times. When necessary, using words.

Dear God, please give us the wisdom and strength to live by your tenets, even when they are challenging. Empower us to truly embody the words attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love.” Allow us to be beacons of light to others, just as the star lit the darkness and revealed the path to the magi. Amen.

Robert Duffy

Robert has participated in the life of Nassau Church for years now, despite it feeling like it was only a couple months since first stepping between those iconic, ionic columns. He has continued being an active “cyber-participant” in Breaking Bread, which he finds grounds him and allows him to explore his faith during this time of solitude. He is a dermatology resident at Cooper University Hospital and finds joy in his calling to heal others.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

January 6, 2021

Isaiah 60:1–6

***Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you (Isaiah 60:1–2 NRSV).***

These words speak such hope and joy. My most favorite way to hear them is in an alto aria in Händel's Messiah. The music feels like a glorious hug for the soul followed by the choir veritably dancing its response. The music suddenly changes as the bass broods about a darkness that will cover the earth and its people. And yet, the sun audibly comes out of the darkness at, "but the Lord will arise upon you." These words of joy for Israel feel like a balm in this year of so much "thick darkness."

Please enjoy these recordings from Händel's Messiah.

[No. 9: O Thou That Tellest Good Tidings to Zion](#)

[No. 10: For Behold, Darkness Shall Cover the Earth & No. 11: The People That Walked in Darkness](#)

Dear God, especially in this time of darkness of winter and of an ongoing pandemic, we look to the light of your son Jesus. We are grateful that his light shines through even our darkest darkness. Help us to seek the light when we forget its presence, and see the light when it appears dim and distant. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Christianne Bessières Lane

Christianne is a mom, wife, and musician. She, with her flutist husband John, has been a member of Nassau since 2003, and sang in the choir for several years before the gifts of her two children. She looks forward to the day when we can arise and sing our praises to God together in the sanctuary.