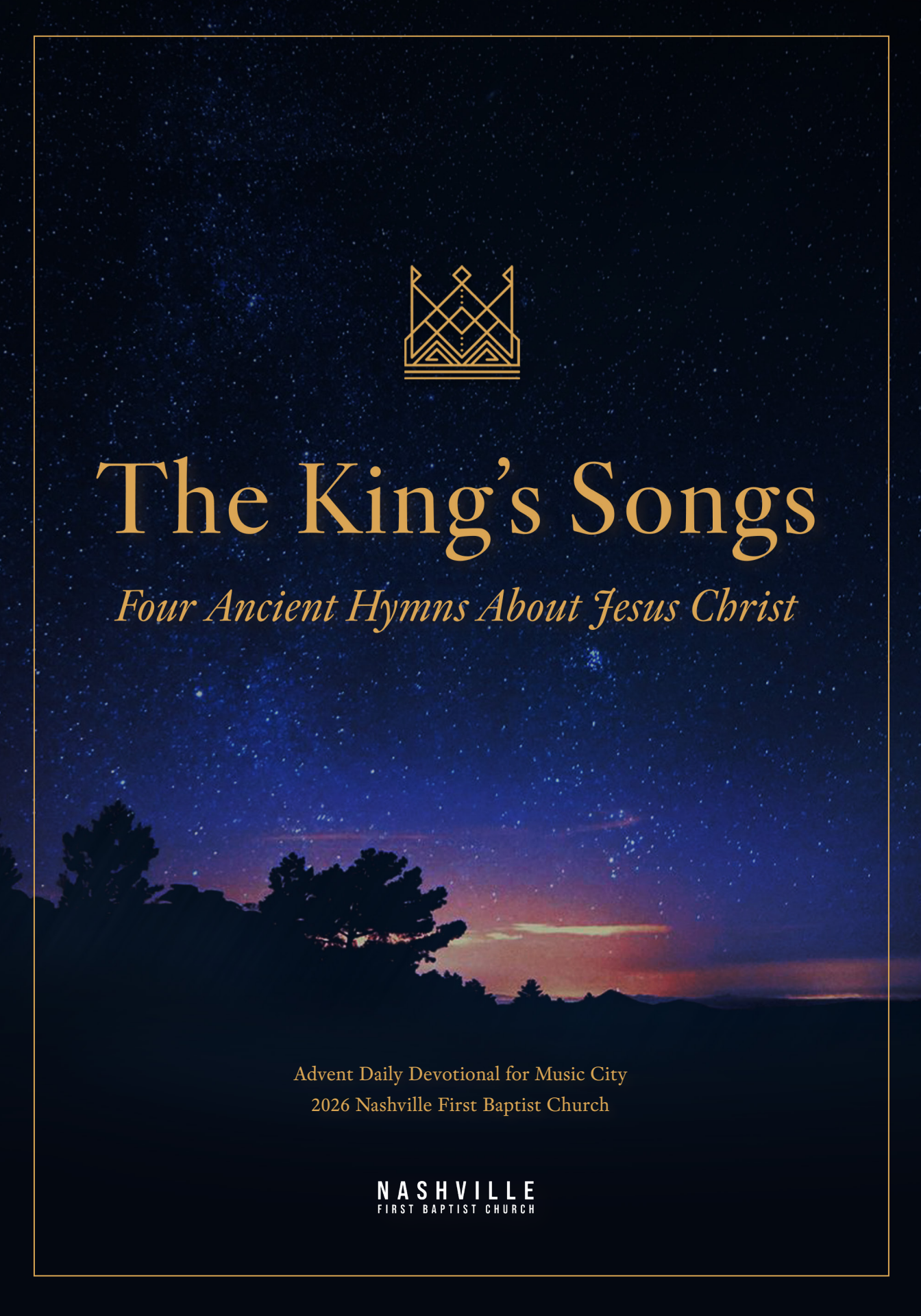


The King's Songs

Four Ancient Hymns About Jesus Christ

Advent Daily Devotional for Music City

2026 Nashville First Baptist Church

NASHVILLE
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

CHRISTMAS HAPPENINGS AT NASHVILLE FIRST

Broadway Christmas Tree Lighting & Carols Service

Friday, December 4 | Broadway Chapel & Patio
Ministry Fair begins at 5 p.m., Tree Lighting at 6 p.m., and Caroling downtown at 7 p.m.

Nashville First is welcoming in the season with a festive Christmas tree lighting on our Broadway patio. The evening includes a ministry fair, snacks, hot cocoa & coffee treats, live music, and more. Anyone who would like is welcome to go caroling downtown as we minister to our community.

Tuba Christmas

Tuesday, December 8 | Sanctuary at 11 a.m.

Tubas and tuba enthusiasts from across Middle Tennessee will fill our sanctuary with joyful noise! This beloved community event is as much fun as it is meaningful, with an opportunity to donate to Second Harvest Food Bank.

Carol-Candlelight Celebration

Sunday, December 13 | Sanctuary at 5 p.m.

The Nashville First Baptist Church Sanctuary Choir, Orchestra, Narrator, and the Adonai School of Ballet from Huntsville, Alabama, will share majestic music of the season as we worship Christ together. After the service, join us for hors d'oeuvres and holiday treats in the Fellowship Hall.

First Kids in Bethlehem & Petting Zoo

Sunday, December 20 | Broadway Hub & McGavock Patio

Before and after worship, First Kids and families can experience what it would have been like in Bethlehem with a living manger.

Christmas Eve Worship

Thursday, December 24 | Sanctuary at 5 p.m.

Come celebrate the birth of Christ with us on Christmas Eve. Together we'll sing carols, light candles, and worship on this holy night.

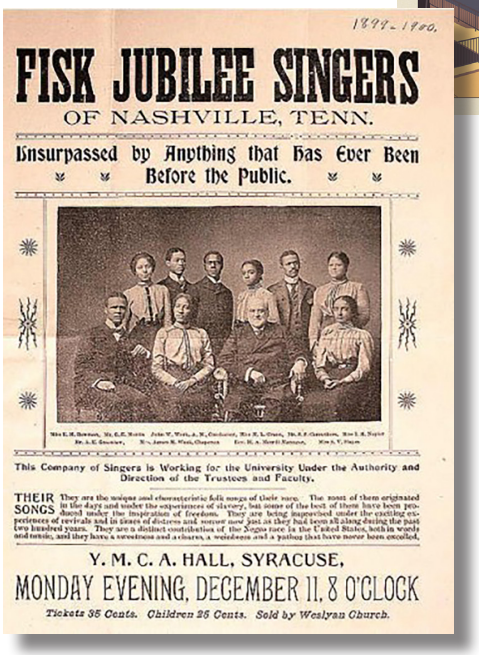
All church events are free and open to the public. Free parking is available in lots surrounding the church for all church events. For more information about any of these events, visit NashvilleFirst.org.

Music City

In October of 1871, the Fisk Jubilee Singers set out from Fisk University, left town with almost no money to their name, and sang in Northern churches to raise funds to keep their school open. This newly established historically black university was composed mostly of formerly enslaved students. History tells us they sang "Steal Away" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," songs about a Lord who comes to carry His people home.

George L. White was the leader of this wonderful group, and he named them after the biblical Year of Jubilee, when enslaved people were set free. After several early hardships, they began to find some success. They sang at the World Peace Festival in Boston in 1872. They were then invited by President Ulysses S. Grant to perform at the White House. Within two years, they had sung for the Queen of England. After complimenting the quality of their music, Queen Victoria allegedly said that they must come from "a city of music." No one has found her saying it, but legend has it this is how Nashville became known as "Music City." Queen Victoria commissioned court painter Edmund Havell to paint a floor-to-ceiling portrait of the singers as a gift to Fisk. Before this city had a musical name, it sent liberated singers into the darkness, echoing the gospel with their mouths and their lives.




1871-1900.

FISK JUBILEE SINGERS

OF NASHVILLE, TENN.

Unsurpassed by Anything that Has Ever Been Before the Public.

This Company of Singers is Working for the University Under the Authority and Direction of the Trustees and Faculty.

THEIR SONGS They are the unique and characteristic folk songs of their race. The most of them originated in the days and under the experiences of slavery, but some of the best of them have been produced under the inspiration of freedom. They are being improvised under the exciting experiences of revivals and in times of distress and sorrow now just as they had been all along during the past two hundred years. They are a distinct contribution of the Negro race to the United States, both in words and tunes, and they have a sweetness and a charm, a wierdness and a pathos that have never been excelled.

Y. M. C. A. HALL, SYRACUSE,

MONDAY EVENING, DECEMBER 11, 8 O'CLOCK

Tickets 35 Cents. Children 25 Cents. Sold by Wesleyan Church.



Thomas Ryman

The revival of souls has long been connected to singing. In 1885, a riverboat captain and saloon owner named Thomas Ryman stumbled into a tent revival on Broad Street. Sam Jones was preaching, and Ryman intended to heckle and discourage. Ryman heard the gospel and was dramatically converted. He pledged to build a hall large enough that Jones and preachers like him would never again have to use a revival tent. The Union Gospel Tabernacle was later opened in 1892 with a sermon. The Grand Ole Opry did not move in for another half century. The building, known worldwide as the Mother Church of Country Music, was a place of Christian proclamation and music before it became home to anything else.

There's an older piece of Nashville's music heritage than the Jubilee Singers and the founding of The Ryman. In 1820, our church was born in the winds of

the Second Great Awakening and has been believing and preaching the gospel and singing its songs long before these other cultural icons were well known.

The Other Soundtrack

December in Nashville has another soundtrack that vies for our attention and the affection of our hearts. It is one of the strangest things about Christmas in a secular age. The city still plays our songs. "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" runs between the sale announcements, as the ceiling speaker invites a line of shoppers to "hail the incarnate Deity." Charles Taylor describes our world today as one in which belief and unbelief press on each other, and neither can silence the other. We are, as he would say, "cross-pressured" by these powerful stories, visions of the world, and forces. The carol in the checkout line is a cross-pressure. A city that no longer believes the whole story rehearses the parts it likes.

There's a different calendar that urges you to live by a different clock. The Christian story finds its rhythms in seasons of fasting and feasting, working and resting. The consumer calendar gets into full swing this time of year. It begins on the morning after Thanksgiving, counts down the hours left on the deals, and ends on Christmas Day when the music stops. Go back to the same shops, and you'll find large storage bins placed where the trinkets were previously for purchase. There is a better way.

There are all sorts of cultural stories that try to teach us during the holiday season. *The next device will tell you what you need. The universe has no author, so the holidays mean whatever you want them to. You are what you buy, and underneath it all, you are basically good.* Jesus, if He comes up at all, according to this other soundtrack, is basically here to affirm you.

Beneath the other soundtrack, these cultural stories usually convey a strong sense of longing. Each of them promises the arrival of what we're looking for. Deeper than the package on the porch or the latest update that will fix everything, we are waiting for someone, and when we stop waiting for Jesus Christ, who is the deep longing of our hearts and hope of the nations, we will shift our attention and waiting to something else. The longing in our hearts isn't the problem. It's that we tend to suppress that desire for Jesus and substitute all sorts of insufficient false saviors in their place. We need a better story than the cultural story of Christmas. We need Jesus Christ.

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How This Book Sings

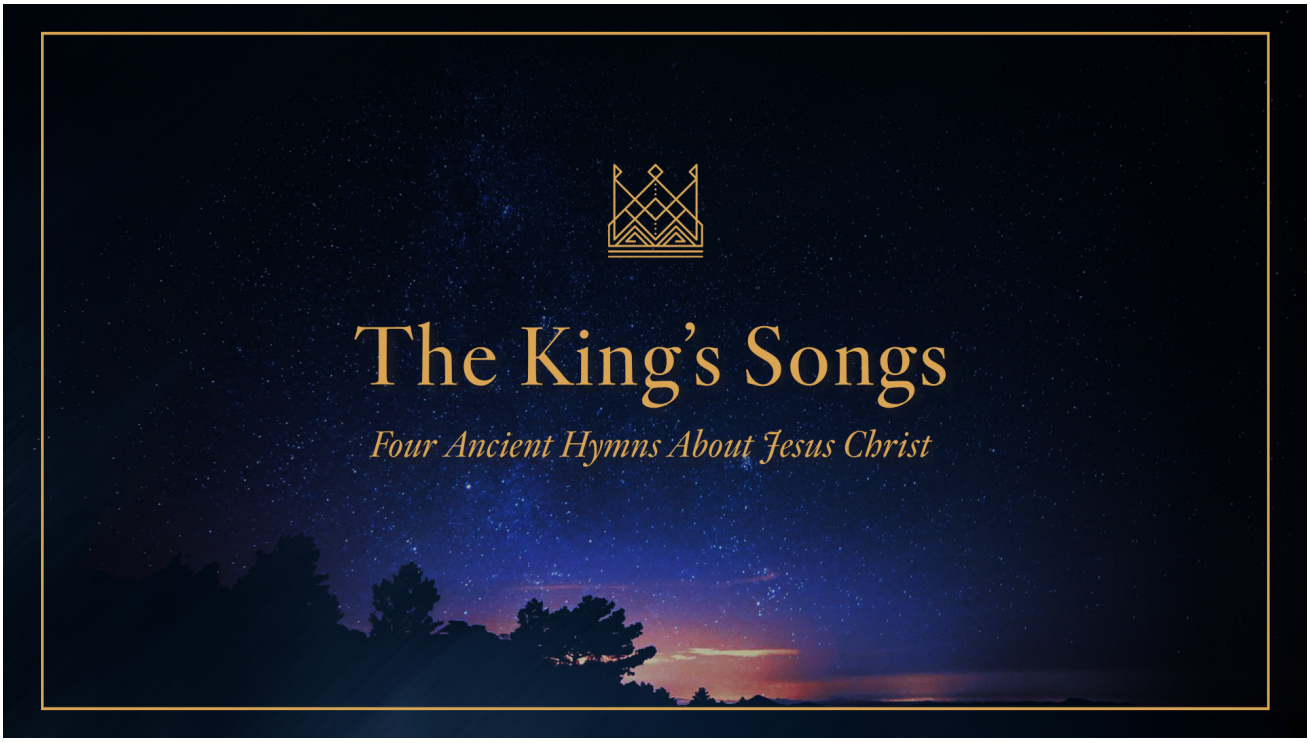
The New Testament gives us four great Christ Hymns. These ancient songs and poems about Jesus contain great truths of the gift of Christmas, Jesus Christ. We are going to study them as a church across this Advent season.

Advent is a time of waiting and preparation. It's an intentional season of cultivating longing and anticipation in our hearts. It might feel strange at first to practice Advent for Jesus Christ, who came into the world 2,000 years ago. This is a season of practicing the discipline of waiting. We continue to wait for the victorious King to come again. Practically, we wait for

him to work in our lives, provide for our needs, and demonstrate His glory in us and through us.

Each Sunday of Advent, we will focus on one of the four Christ Hymns about Christ the King. We will study it when we gather as God's people, and then we will have specific readings and devotional practices across the next week to meditate on it.

We will listen to the Christmas song sung through these four melodies. Meanwhile, we're considering the other soundtracks that vie for our minds' attention and the focus of our lives. *The Gospel Way Catechism* will help us think about the world story that threatens to distract us from the heart of Christmas. Every week, we will consider a question-and-answer truth about God and allow it to help us develop the instinct to recognize the cultural story and proclaim Christ to it.



Sunday, November 29

Scripture: Hebrews 1:1-4

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,
2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all
things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God
and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.
After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,
4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent
than theirs.

THE GOSPEL WAY CATECHISM: QUESTION 50

Question 50:
What Does It Mean to Live in Light of the End?

Answer:

We walk by faith, not in secular progress and technological advance, but in the promise of God to reclaim this world and make everything right. With hope, we await the return of the King we love.

COMMENTARY

The Old Testament tells us the story of God speaking to His people through Prophets, Priests, and Kings. The prophets of old were the most vocal mouthpieces God chose to reveal Himself to His people. God spoke to His people through their dreams, visions, and promises that He made to them.

God spoke through Abraham about a blessing that would reach the nations. God spoke through Moses at a burning bush. God spoke to Israel through prophets who called God's people to repent, to be a bright light to the nations, and to embrace their calling as God's covenant people.

Every revelation told part of the story of God's plan to rescue His people. The opening words of Hebrews announce that something extraordinary has happened. God, who spoke in many ways throughout history, has now spoken clearly and finally through His Son. This means that God's Son, Jesus Christ, is not just another prophet bringing a message from God. Jesus is the one to whom all the promises and prophecies were pointing. And Christmas is when we celebrate God's revelation to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

This Christ Hymn from Hebrews begins with seven remarkable descriptions of Jesus. The rest of the chapter draws on the Old Testament to show that Jesus is greater than angels – divine messengers associated with delivering God's messages. The Son is no mere messenger. He is the eternal King of heaven whose throne lasts forever (1:8). The child born in Bethlehem is the Lord

who created the heavens and the earth. He entered the world He created to deal with our sin. Having completed the good work the Father gave Him to do, He sat down at the right hand of the Father.

Christmas is full of rival voices competing for our attention. Advertisements tell us what we need, traditions tell us what we're supposed to do, and the expectations of other family members and friends can leave us feeling exhausted. Hebrews helps cut through all the noise and reminds us that God has spoken, and His final word to us is this Son.

We do not have to wonder what God has to say or what He has done. We can fix our eyes on Jesus through the written Word of Scripture and see God at work in the world. This Christmas, with everything around you pulling for your attention, will you make room to listen to this final Word that God has spoken?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Read 1:1–3. How did God speak to His people in the past? What is different about the way God has spoken through his Son? What does this tell us about Jesus?

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2. Look closely at verses 2-3. What do these verses tell us about who Jesus is and what He has done? Why does the passage end with Jesus sitting down at God's right hand? How does this shape the seriousness of this baby we celebrate at Christmas?

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3. Read verses 4-14. What do the Old Testament quotations reveal about Jesus that set Him apart from the angels? What would the original readers have found remarkable about these claims?

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4. Think about the voices shaping your own life. Where do you turn for guidance, reassurance, or a sense of purpose and what matters? How do those different voices of direction compare with what God has spoken through His Son?

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5. Read the answer to Question 50 together. If Jesus is reigning now and will return to make all things right, how should that change the way you approach the ordinary details of your week? How does that affect the way you speak to one another?

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WEEK 1

Scripture: Hebrews 1:1-4

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. [3] He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, [4] having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

WEEK 2

Scripture: Colossians 1:15-20

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16]For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. [17]And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [18]And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. [19]For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

WEEK 3

Scripture: Philippians 2:5-11

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

WEEK 4

Scripture: John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God. [3]All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. [4] In him was life, and the life was the light of men. [5]The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

[6] There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. [7] He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. [8]He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

[9] The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. [10] He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. [11]He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. [12] But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, [13] who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

[14] And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. [15] (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") [16] For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. [17] For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. [18] No one has ever seen God; God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

Tuesday, December 1, 2026

GOD HAS SPOKEN BY HIS SON

Isaiah 64:1-5, Hebrews 1:1-4

God has spoken clearly through His Son. We don't have to ask anyone or anything for more clarity than what has been clearly revealed in Jesus. And yet, there's a growing trend of asking a chatbot before asking God. Technology can be a good use of God's creation. We have been created in the image of God and endowed with the special capacities to imagine, invent, design, and build. In all of this - and more - we reflect Him, our God, Creator, and King. God has given us the responsibility to unlock the latent potential of creation through agriculture, science, engineering, and technology (Genesis 1:28). The Bible is full of mentions of God's people wisely leveraging technology. We remember Noah using gopher wood and pitch for the ark, Solomon utilizing cutting-edge craftsmanship for the temple, or the apostles leveraging Roman roads and written letters to spread the gospel.

Technology can be a gift that is used for good works. And like all other good things, we need to be careful that it doesn't become the central thing in our lives. Technology is shaped by the human heart and its intentions; it can be used for harm, exploitation, or distraction. The greatest risk is in our own hearts – we are all at risk of idolatry - worshiping created things instead of the Creator. We can use it as a useful tool, aimed at caring for others, solving real problems, and promoting human flourishing – while recognizing that no device or system can replace genuine human relationships. The greatest gap, amid all the goods of technology, is that it neither can nor does supply the grace that only God gives.

Isaiah 64 is a passionate and communal prayer and lament from the people of Judah during a time of national distress and exile. It is a plea for God to come down and help (v 1-3), and a confession that no eye has seen a God like Him, "who acts for those who wait for Him" (v 4), even as His people admit their sin (v 5). Hebrews 1:1-2 is the answer: God spoke in pieces through the prophets, and then He spoke by a Son.

Do we turn to technology or turn to God? We might be tempted to find quick answers by pressing a button, typing our question into a search bar, and engaging a chatbot. There are many great uses of these features, but they cannot deliver God's wisdom. God is known through His Word and His works in creation. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, reveals God to us. While it's great to use technological gifts, we don't mistake bits and pieces for the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

Advent helps us learn to wait on God, who not only has come into the world in the incarnation of Jesus Christ but will also one day return to judge the living and the dead. Isaiah asked God to rend the heavens and come down, and the one who came down was the eternal Son, born as a baby boy. He would grow up to be a man who would go to the cross, make atonement for sins, rise from the dead, and then sit at the right hand of the Father in heaven. You have access to a seated Son who has already spoken. Go to Him, give Him the deep and burning questions on your heart, and let wisdom from heaven be your guide. God has spoken by His Son.

Wednesday, December 2, 2026

THE LAST PROPHET

Malachi 3:1-4; 4:1-6, Hebrews 1:1

There's so much pain and hurt in the world. We might be tempted to assume God has forgotten about who we are and what's going on. People will cry out and ask, "Where is the God of justice? When will God make things right?"

The prophet Malachi was the last in the Old Testament. He answered the questions about God's deliverance by promising that God will one day come and make everything right. He specifically said that His arrival would be sudden and unexpected (Malachi 3:1). Then, no prophet speaks for about 400 years.

We live with uncertainty today. Our news scrolls are infinite. The feed never goes quiet. The timeline is ever expanding. There's so much information and so many different narratives about what it will finally take to make things right. We are thankful for the prophets of old, but we need God to shatter the silence and speak to us clearly.

God made four great promises through the prophet Malachi. These four promises helped prepare people to identify the Son of God when He comes into the world. First, Malachi promised that a messenger would prepare the way; this is John the Baptist (Malachi 3:1). Second, the Lord Himself was promised to come suddenly to His temple. We see Jesus presented in the temple as a baby and teaching in the temple as a man (3:1). Third, the Lord would come like a refiner's fire to test and purify His people, and we see Jesus cleansing the temple and exposing the hearts of the religious leaders (3:2-3; John 2:13-17). Finally, Malachi promised the coming King would be a sun of righteousness that rises with healing in its wings – and Jesus demonstrated this through His life of moral purity and miraculous healing ministry (v. 4:2).

What an amazing set of expectations! And then four hundred years with no new word. The prophets pointed God's people forward to Christ. Then, as Hebrews tells us, this season of "at many times and in many ways" ended, and "in these last days" God spoke to us by His Son.

The Lord Jesus did not appear suddenly in a temple. His arrival was promised in Malachi 3:1 and prepared for by John the Baptist (Mark 1:2-4). Zechariah's song names the sunrise (Luke 1:78). The sun of righteousness has dawned, and it is healing to step into His light.

There will always be more and more information to read. There are also many different voices promising how things can be made right. We can be grateful for pundits, prophets, and all sorts of political figures, but we put our hope in the promised Son: Jesus Christ.

Thursday, December 3, 2026

GOD'S SON IS THE HEIR OF ALL THINGS

Psalm 2, 2 Samuel 7:12-16

Leaders come and go. It's both good news and bad news for us. Don't like the president right now? He'll be replaced soon. Love this season of your job, leaders, and relationships? All of that will eventually change as well.

We crave order and stability. Who doesn't like the idea of a good situation that will last forever? This longing in our hearts is revealed in the Old Testament promise "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me" (2 Samuel 7:16). And then, four centuries later, the last king of Judah watched his sons killed. He was carried away to Babylon for a season of exile (2 Kings 25:7). The promise outlived the throne.

Many people today like the idea of having no one in charge of their lives. "Nobody rules me" is a popular sentiment. The self-authored life is the goal many of us carry around, consciously or unconsciously. And with so many bad leaders and unfortunate situations in the world, it might actually seem sensible and wise to protect yourself in this way – insulating your life from the possibility of rule, overreach, or harm.

King David wanted to build God a house (2 Samuel 7:2), and God said He would build David one instead (7:11). Sounds good and simple enough, but the background and context to this interaction help us appreciate how extreme this claim really was. The situation looked like this promise wasn't being kept. Solomon's idolatry led to the kingdom splitting in two under his son Rehoboam (1 Kings 11:1-13; 12:16-20), followed by a long season of decline, a seventy-year exile, and an empty throne.

Psalm 2 kept God's people steady through many leadership failures among their own. The song deals with the themes of nations raging and tottering on the brink of collapse, with God laughing in the heavens. God promises His incoming King, "You are my Son" (Psalm 2:7), and promises Him the nations as His heritage (2:8). The kings of Israel, noble as some of them were, teach us to look for the coming King of Christmas. This psalm helped God's people avoid placing their hope and trust in any ordinary earthly king and instead wait for God to provide a king from heaven.

Israel wanted a king so they could be like the other nations around them. Through God's prophet Samuel, God urged them to consider another way because all earthly kings and leaders will fail. This is relevant to us today, as it is to so many people. We want to be autonomous and live life on our own terms. We try to set up our lives so that we can depend on ourselves without needing God. But this never works. Our best leaders eventually disappoint us. And we ourselves are imperfect. We need help.

This season is a good time for us to consider our own hearts. What are we ultimately hoping for? Who are we ultimately hoping in? Do we think an earthly king is going to come along and make everything right? Or should we wait on the King of heaven to fix it all once and for all?

The angel Gabriel promised that this child would receive the throne of His father David, and that His kingdom would have no end (Luke 1:32-33). The King the world should fear is the one whom God has set on Zion, and He offers refuge to all who come to Him.

Friday, December 4, 2026

HIS WORD AND HIS WORKS

Psalm 19, Hebrews 1:3

New year, new you. That's the message that's waiting for you as soon as Christmas Day passes. January is the great reset month, and we have plans, apps, and high hopes that this year will be different. As much as we can do to make surface changes to our lives - exercise consistently, eat better, stop drinking alcohol, sleep more - there are deeper heart issues that we can't fix so quickly. Our souls struggle with a weariness and deep sin that can't be so easily displaced.

Who or what should we look to for guidance when we're hungry for change but don't know where to go? The catechism teaches us that we learn about God through His Word and works.

Hebrews 1 promises that this coming King of Christmas is the manifestation of God, who cleanses us from our sins. Psalm 19 helps us see this coming. This great song speaks of God's world (Psalm 19:1-6) and God's Word (Psalm 19:7-14). The heavens declare the glory of God (19:1-6), and the law of God revives the soul (19:7-11). The author of this song turns to his hidden faults and asks how they and his heart issues could ever be changed at the deep level he needs (19:12-14). The works of God reveal God's glory; the word of God reveals our sin; and we need to be cleansed of our sin deep in our hearts. This is exactly what the author of the Hebrews hymn is telling us Christ came to do.

Hebrews 1:3 holds all three together. The Son upholds the universe by the word of His power (God's works); He is the radiance of God's glory and God's final word to us (God's Word), and He made purification for sins – which neither creation nor the Law could do for us.

Jesus Christ is the place where God's works and God's Word meet and do what they could not accomplish alone. Jesus is the one who cleanses us from our sins. The last words of this psalmist are the words we need this Advent season: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer" (Psalm 19:14).

It's good to want to change. Take time in this season to wisely number your days so you can gain a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90:12). Think about what went well over the past year and seek the Lord for what you need to add, stop, or start in your life. Carve out the time and space to plan to read the Word of God with our church family in the year ahead. Make plans to build your year around reading the Bible from cover to cover — we'll have journals, a podcast, and talk about it every week when we meet as a church family. And as you make some changes, depend on the power of God's grace in your life to live out the new commitments He's leading you to. We can obey; we can want to obey, because of the finished work of Jesus Christ. He has given us new, clean hearts that want to learn about Him through His Word and His works.

Saturday, December 5, 2026

NOTHING HERE LASTS

Psalm 102:25-27, Psalm 110:1-4

"Newer is better." That's the subliminal messaging of Christmas time. The next upgrade, another subscription, or the latest piece of tech will fill in the gaps. And all of this does provide a new buzz, for a little while. Then the new phone turns into just your phone. Those new charging cables end up in that drawer with all the other jumbled-up charging cords. Newer might be better, but it's no fix for the deep longings and aches of our hearts.

Psalm 102 is a lament. A prayer, or song, of lament is a prayer in pain that leads to trust. Christians don't have to have it all figured out. It's okay to have our questions and our struggles as long as we turn to God in the midst of them and ask for his help. The author of this song looks at the most permanent things the afflicted man can see, the heavens, and says they, too, will wear out like a worn jacket, while God remains the same. The author of Hebrews hears the Father speaking these very words to the Son (Hebrews 1:8, 10-12), so the Lord who made the heavens is the one born in Bethlehem.

Jesus used Psalm 110 to ask how the Messiah can be David's son and David's Lord (Mark 12:35-37). Teaching the crowds in the temple, Jesus pointed out that the scribes called the Messiah the son of David (Mark 12:35), and they were looking for a human king from David's royal line. But David called his future descendant "my Lord" – something a king would not ordinarily say of his own son. Jesus used this verse to show that the Messiah is far greater than an earthly king. The Messiah is both human (descended from David) and divine (David's Lord and God's co-regent, seated at His right hand). This helps us to think about what it means that the child in Bethlehem is both David's son and David's Lord.

Psalm 110:1 adds a very helpful "until": *"Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."* Hebrews 1:13 applies this very verse to the Son, and Psalm 110:4 adds that this King is also "a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." He is seated until the subduing of His enemies is complete.

Jesus Christ gave His life for ours. Trust in Jesus this Advent season and all the days of your life. Believing in Him, you too will be raised from the dead. He sits on the throne and is worthy of every breath you breathe and every song you sing.

Sunday, December 6

Scripture: Colossians 1:15-20

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16]For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. [17]And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [18]And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. [19]For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20]and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

THE GOSPEL WAY CATECHISM: QUESTION 49

Question 49:
What Is The Ultimate Hope for the Christian?

Answer:
Our hope is Jesus Christ. We believe He will come again to reign over and restore the world, delighting to dwell with us and grant life everlasting, forever filling us with wonder, love, and praise.

COMMENTARY

Paul wrote to the Christians in Colossae to strengthen their confidence in Jesus Christ. They had received the gospel and were growing in faith - they were off to a great start! But they also faced teachings that threatened to draw their attention away from Christ and toward other spiritual powers and religious practices (2:8, 16–23).

This is how it goes with all of us. We get into this life with God by believing the gospel: Christ's life for ours. We enter with this truth, but then think that Christianity must be about more than this, and we are tempted to leave the gospel and move on to other, more sophisticated things. This mistakes the fact that the gospel isn't the A-B-C's of the Christian life, as if it's the beginning stages or the diving board that gets you into the pool. No, the gospel is the A-Z of the Christian life; it is the whole thing; it is the pool itself. These ancient Christians were being tempted to move on and move away. Paul was a good gospel leader who wanted to help them not stray.

Paul wanted them to understand that they lacked nothing in Jesus. Just before this passage of Scripture we're studying for Advent, he reminds them that God has rescued them from the domain of darkness and transferred them into the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom they have redemption and the forgiveness of sins (1:13–14). He then launches into this second great Christ Hymn, which is one of the most remarkable descriptions of Jesus in the New Testament.

Two major themes stand out in Colossians 1:15–20.

First, in verses 15–17, Paul presents Jesus as Lord over creation. Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the one through whom and for whom all things were created. When Paul calls Him the "firstborn of all creation," he is speaking of Christ's supremacy over creation, not suggesting that Jesus was Himself created. Everything owes its existence to Him, and everything continues to hold together in Him.

Second, in verses 18–20, Paul turns from creation to new creation. Jesus is the head of the church, the beginning, and the firstborn from the dead. His resurrection marks the beginning of God's work of making all things new. The one through whom God created the world is also the one through whom God is reconciling all things to Himself, making peace through the blood of His cross. Notice how Paul repeats the phrase "all things" throughout the passage, connecting Christ's authority over creation with His work of reconciliation.

This Christ Hymn would have been very helpful and encouraging for the Colossians. Their temptation was to bend the gospel message to fit the tune and appetites of surrounding powers and cultural forces. The truths in this Christ Hymn also draw on a broader vision of Christian hope. The world is neither accidental nor purposeless, nor is its future finally determined by the powers that appear to control it.

Creation belongs to Jesus Christ. Although sin and death have brought terrible disorder into God's good world, the risen Christ is already reigning, and He will return to complete his work of restoration.

The church belongs to Jesus Christ. From Genesis to Revelation, God has always been about one thing: creating a people to whom He would reveal his glory, and then to whom He would reveal His glory through the world. God accomplishes this by uniting people to his Son and transforming their ordinary lives so they can be His witnesses throughout all creation.

Question 49 of *The Gospel Way Catechism* reminds us that our ultimate hope rests in Jesus Christ, who will return to reign over and restore the world, dwelling with his people forever. As you read, consider what it means that the child born in Bethlehem is both the Lord who holds all things together and the Savior who makes peace through His cross.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Read Colossians 1:15–20. What does Paul tell us about who Jesus is and his relationship to creation? What does the repeated phrase "all things" reveal about his authority?

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2. Look closely at verses 18–20. How does Paul move from Jesus as Lord over creation to Lord over the new creation? Why is His resurrection essential to the hope described in this passage?

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3. Read Colossians 2:8 and 2:18–19. What threatened to draw the Colossians away from Christ? What beliefs, promises, or powers tempt us to place our confidence in something other than Jesus today?

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4. Think about the brokenness of the world. Where do you see the effects of sin and death in creation or in your own life? How does knowing that all things hold together in Christ and that He is making peace through His cross change the way you face that brokenness?

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5. Read the answer to Question 49 together. If Jesus created all things, reigns over all things, and He will return to restore all things, what difference should that make in the way you live this week? How might this hope shape a conversation with someone who believes the world has no ultimate purpose?

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Monday, December 7, 2026

THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD

Genesis 1:26-31

The Bible tells us not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2). It's scary to think how little time we spend meditating on the Scriptures, in prayer, and making a conscious effort to abide in Christ, versus the continuous scroll and draw of technological algorithms. It's in this fast-paced, frictionless world that the phrase "and it was very good" seems light, flippant, and impossible. "The algorithm knows what you want," we subconsciously believe. It's almost as if the ads we see are listening to our family conversations. How do we work out what it means to follow Jesus and to behold Jesus in this new sci-fi existence we call life?

The way forward begins with knowing that we are bodies, not just minds, made in the image of God. "Very good" is the verdict God pronounces on everything He has made after He creates humanity (Genesis 1:31).

There's a materialistic vision of life that threatens the good, biblical baseline we celebrate at Christmas. Are you familiar with the popular world story which is steadily chewing away at God's good creational design? Bertrand Russell wrote "A Free Man's Worship," in which he taught that humanity is the product of causes with no foresight of the ends they produce, and that the soul must be built on unyielding despair. Happy visions of life? Hardly. Russell gave a memorable voice to a materialist philosophy far older than he was, and it seeps into the very anticipation and celebration of Christmas. Russell's universe might sound moody, but it's actually headed for everlasting darkness.

There's a better way. The apostle Paul says the world's groaning and aching is evidence that all is not as it should be – it's as if this creation is in the pains of labor and ready to give way to a new form of life (Romans 8:22). Paul's vision doesn't end in the darkness but in peace with God, made by the blood of the Son of God on a Roman cross.

Genesis 1:26-31 tells the story of how humanity was created in God's image and that the whole of creation was called very good. Then this New Testament Christ hymn declares that while Adam was made in the image of God, Jesus Christ is that image.

Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. The image of God came to the image-bearers. The Son, who had always been the exact imprint of the Father's nature (Hebrews 1:3), was born in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:7). He came to restore what Adam had broken. The true Image of God took on flesh to renew the image of God in us (Colossians 3:10). This is great news for us. In Christ we "have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. The renewal has begun but is not finished. "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Corinthians 15:49).

Tuesday, December 8, 2026

THE PROMISED CHILD

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-52

Nostalgia is a good and beautiful thing, as long as it's balanced with hope for the future. "It's not what it used to be" and "Christmas used to be better than this" are both cutting in their own right. Looking back with fondness is fine, but enthroning the past as the best is no way to live. Pure nostalgia does make sense, though, when the future has no author.

"How long, O Lord?" is a common cry in the Scriptures. They were aware of where they were coming from and clearly looked forward to God doing a great work in their future. It's a very common experience for the people of God to wonder where God is and whether God is still on time. I've felt this many times in my own life, in my family, and in my ministry.

Psalm 89 is especially helpful during the Advent season. God swore to establish David's offspring forever (89:4). He promised to make David "the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth" (89:27), and his offspring's throne would endure "as long as the sun" (89:36). But there's a huge problem with this promise. God had cast off His anointed, broken his walls, and covered him with shame (89:38-45). The question: how long, and the doxology of praise that ends this psalm leaves us with our basic question unanswered (89:52). The author of this psalm felt some nostalgia as he looked back on the works of God. It's important to notice that he didn't stay there, for he looked up as well.

The great Christ hymn from Colossians calls this Christ the "firstborn" twice (Colossians 1:15, 18). The title of firstborn might seem confusing, for example: does this mean Christ was literally born or created? Created, no. This title declares Christ's supreme rank, authority, and inheritance over creation and the resurrection.

In Colossians 1:15, the title highlights the sovereignty, preeminence, and status as the eternal Creator through whom everything was made. Then, Christ is called firstborn again in verse 18, referring to His resurrection as the decisive event that makes Him preeminent over death itself and inaugurates a new creation and resurrection life for all who belong to Him. Paul does not quote Psalm 89 here, but he uses its old title, which speaks of position, power, and privilege, for the eternal Son who was born as a baby at Christmas.

The firstborn arrived when no son of David had sat on the throne for nearly six centuries. The psalm's question got its answer not in a palace but in a stable. We might wonder, "How long?" and "What in the world are you doing, God?!" The mystery of God's perfect timing at Christmas is a good reminder and a comfort for our souls. God is always on time.

Wednesday, December 9, 2026

HE CALLS THE STARS BY NAME

Isaiah 40:1-11, 25-31

Sometimes it feels like God's activity is hard to detect in our lives. This is compounded by the ways of this world that are utterly closed off to the possibility of God at all. "You're an insignificant speck floating through the universe." Not the warmest Christmas greeting, but it's the logical conclusion of much of materialist philosophy. "Life is devoid of meaning, and you have no purpose" is the essential punchline for those who seek to make sense of this world as if it's all there is. Think about how hopeless that is. Cosmic insignificance and the assurance that no one sees you walking through the mall. How hopeless!

The Hubble Deep Field image helps us see beyond this hopeless view of the world. In December 1995, the telescope spent about 10 days photographing a patch of sky that looked empty, and the resulting image revealed around 3,000 galaxies. The promise from Isaiah 40:26 intensifies the bigness of this: "Lift your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing" (Isaiah 40:26). What the Hubble telescope took ten days to photograph, Isaiah tells us, is one more patch of the massive universe that God created and keeps.

Isaiah 40 is full of comfort. It begins with the voice of one in the wilderness and the intense awareness that life is fleeting and soon to be past. "Behold your God!" is the herald's cry to the cities of Judah (40:9). God announces that He is a shepherd who gathers the lambs in His arms (40:11). Israel's protests: "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God" (40:27). You can hear the feeling behind it: if that's who you really are.

You might have thought or felt this in your own life as well. The gravity of this complaint (40:27) is addressed in verses 28-31 – take a look for yourself. The materialistic vision of reality makes the universe feel fast, and people feel small. Isaiah offers a very helpful and comforting counter by making God larger than the universe and attentive to one tired person who needs God's attention in their life.

Colossians 1:17 promises us that this child born at Christmas is the one in whom all things hold together, including you who are reading this right now.

The gospels tell us John the Baptist is the voice Isaiah 40:3 promised (Mark 1:2-3). The shepherd who carries the lambs is the same one who created those 3,000 galaxies you didn't know about. Wait for Him this Advent season, and practice waiting for Him in your life. Those who wait for the Lord "shall renew their strength (40:31).

He created the stars, knows them by name, and knows the number of hairs on your head. You can trust Him with your life.

Thursday, December 10, 2026

THE FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD

Ezekiel 37:1-14, Colossians 1:18

Funerals are always hard on the heart. Losing a loved one during the holidays is especially trying for the soul. Remembering our family and friends who have died is tender around the holidays as well. Funerals remind us of the finality of life and the time when all of us will breathe our last, and our lives in this world will be done. What does Advent have to offer us when we are reminded of death?

The prophet Ezekiel lived during a time of death and decay among God's people. His fellow exiles said, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost" (37:11). They were unsure whether God's people could rise again.

One day, God led Ezekiel through a valley of dry bones and asked, "Can these bones live?" Ezekiel, though exhausted, wisely replied, "O Lord God, you know" (Ezekiel 37:3). The holiday season can create that same sigh in our hearts. Being confronted by the finality of death in the midst of all the festive joy can make us feel overwhelmed. If it's not the death of a loved one, all the work to do and rebuilding required in a particular area of life can leave us overwhelmed. We need God to do what only God can do.

Israel's return from exile and God's Spirit in His people is the future Ezekiel longed to see (37:14). Materialism, that shortsighted view of life, offers nothing beyond the grave. But the Christmas story shows that life beyond the grave is possible, because the child born at Christmas will take on death and the grave.

Thinking about the philosophical implications of materialism at Christmas time might feel even stranger than thinking about death. Yet it is necessary because the enticements of buying, getting, giving, and receiving threaten to narrow our attention to the idea that this world and its stuff are all there is. We need to keep a broad view of what God says about this world.

The child born at Christmas would go on to take on death through the cross, be buried in the ground, and rise from the dead, beginning His state of exaltation. Ezekiel was allowed to see only a picture of this restoration and resurrection that Jesus was bringing. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25), and His risen body is the first piece of the new creation.

We are so glad God sent His son into the world out of love for the world (John 3:16). It is so important that this Son died and rose from the dead. His rising means a new beginning.

You might find yourself in a valley. The loss of a family member or close friend hurts in this season. The one born in Bethlehem will also rise and become the firstborn from the dead. So, celebrate this life, but you don't have to try to find your life in this world. One day, as you hope in Christ, you too will rise from the dead to a life that will never end.

Friday, December 11, 2026

THE FULLNESS THAT DWELLS

1 Kings 8:22-30, Colossians 1:19

"Home for the holidays." This Christmas season, you might be looking forward to returning to the place where you grew up or spent a significant part of your life. Your home might be the place where fun and safe memories were created. For others, it's not as much their home but a familiar town or city. Those old roads, full of nostalgic memories, bring back fond, happy thoughts. And for many others, Nashville is their second city for good reason. There are people and families to flee. There are places in our past too full of pain and harsh memories, and the thought of returning to them is difficult to imagine. We all have a common longing for family and home, complicated as it is.

In the Old Testament, God dwelt with His people in a temple. King Solomon built a house for God. It was a beautiful creation of cedar, gold, and stone that took seven years and the wealth of a king to create. Yet, when the dedication ceremony was held, a great paradox emerged: this temple was the greatest structure he could create for God, but in the end it was only a simple, finite box. God is infinite. Solomon asks it himself: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27).

The same tension can be detected in our modern longings today. We buy, build, or go on trips hoping to create a specific set of circumstances that can contain "the perfect family experience," lasting peace, or unhurried rest. But just like Solomon's temple, the holiday journey home cannot hold what we were built for. The holiday visit begins and then ends; we drive away again, the presence fades, strong as it was. Sometimes the argument or misunderstanding follows us out the door or remains in those same old walls. There's no place here on this earth that can contain the presence we long for.

But where brick, mortar, and human effort all fail, God is there to provide what we long for. In Colossians 1:19, we are promised, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." What the highest heaven could not contain, and what Solomon's temple could only foreshadow, came to dwell bodily in a person (Colossians 2:9). Jesus Christ did not just carry a spark of the divine; the fullness of God took up residence in Him. The eternal Son took to Himself a true human body and soul without ceasing to be the infinite God. God's answer to Solomon wasn't a bigger and better building. It was the body of his Son, the true temple (John 2:21).

So, we make plans to travel and gather with our families and friends, but we do so sensibly, not expecting too much from a place that only God can provide for us. Jesus is Emmanuel, God dwelling with His people forever. Jesus is the architectural wonder of the temple in human flesh. He is the Word who "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The Greek word John uses means He pitched His tent, or tabernacled, among us.

Saturday, December 12, 2026

MAKING PEACE

Isaiah 11:1-10, Colossians 1:20

"Can we just get along?" is a natural question many families and friend groups will ask of one another when we get together for Christmas celebrations. The hot buttons eventually get pressed, and things start to boil. Family drama, fanatical political dialogue, or the very basic, human quirks that drive us crazy all seem to surface when we're just trying to find some rest during the holidays. We all long for "peace on earth," even if it's just for one day in the whole year.

Isaiah 11 gives a radical picture of what this promised peace would look like. He first promised that the "shoot from the stump of Jesse" would be the start. Isaiah wrote while a son of David still sat on the throne in Jerusalem, but he foresaw a day when judgment, exile, and political failure would cut the royal line down to a bare stump. And yet, from this seemingly dead stump, God would bring about the impossible eruption of new life by the power of the Spirit. From that place, God would deliver real and lasting peace into the world. This would be so much more than a "one-day truce" or a holiday ceasefire; it is a peace deeper and more pervasive than anything we can imagine.

Our human vision struggles to keep up with the massive restoration program God is bringing into the world. The peace God promises shatters our small visions of what is possible. Isaiah 11 describes justice for the poor, predatory animals dwelling with the vulnerable. The earth will be full of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the water covers the sea (Isaiah 9:11). The wolf will eat straw like the ox, and a nursing child will play over the hole of the cobra (Isaiah 11:6-8).

Isaiah saw the peace, and the New Testament shows us its price: it was made possible only by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross. Massive absorption of the evil and consequences of our sin is necessary to make space for this sort of healing in the world, and God has done just that through His Son, Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:20 tells us this is what the child of Bethlehem grew up to accomplish in His death, "making peace by the blood of his cross."

The stump of Jesse seemed dead, and you might be preparing to re-engage with a family situation that seems near-dead as well. You can be comforted that Jesus came from a cut-down, forgotten line to prove God builds His kingdom from what the world discards. The fragile sprout carries the weight of His peaceable kingdom. This promised shalom is available to you today. It will one day cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. The blood of Jesus provides the final ceasefire we're looking for.

Going home for Christmas might feel like entering a war zone. Jesus models for us what it means to be people of peace, and the finished work of Jesus on the cross and the active presence of the Holy Spirit equip you to be a non-anxious presence of Jesus and His peace. This is all possible because of the finished work of the cross.

Sunday, December 13

Scripture: Philippians 2:5-11

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was
in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied
himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being
found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the
name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in
heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is
Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

THE GOSPEL WAY CATECHISM: QUESTION 16

Question 16:
What Has Gone Wrong?

Answer:

The deepest source of misery in the world is not ignorance, injustice, or the failure to be true to ourselves. It is sin: cosmic treason against our Creator and His rule. Sin corrupts creation, wrecks relationships, and enslaves us to the Evil One.

COMMENTARY

Paul wrote to the Christians in Philippi, a Roman colony where public honor, social standing, and loyalty to Rome were important features of everyday life (Acts 16:12). Like other Roman cities, Philippi celebrated those who attained positions of power and influence. This cultural story of power and position would have been a prevailing wind trying to knock the early church off its course. If they did not keep their eyes on Jesus, then certainly they would have started to practice some of these very ways of relating to one another.

Paul was concerned about a different kind of greatness taking hold in the church. He urged the Philippians to reject selfish ambition and conceit, to count others more significant than themselves, and to look to others' interests (2:3–4). To show them what this kind of life looks like, Paul directs their attention to Jesus Christ. The passage that follows contains one of the New Testament's clearest descriptions of who Jesus is and what He has done, but it also serves as a model for how Christians should live together.

This stunning Christ Hymn has loads of details. It's easiest to sum it up into two movements.

First, in verses 5–8, Paul describes Christ's humiliation. Although Jesus existed in the form of God and was equal with God, He did not exploit His divine status for His own advantage. Instead, He emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant and becoming human. His humil-

ity led Him all the way to death on a cross, one of the most shameful forms of execution in the Roman world. Theologians also call this the "descent of Christ," which is not simply going down into the grave but the long journey from the throne in heaven to a grave on the earth.

Then, in verses 9–11, Paul describes Christ's exaltation. God raised Jesus to the highest place and bestowed on Him the name above every name. Paul draws on Isaiah 45:23, where God declares that every knee will bow and every tongue will swear allegiance to Him. By applying these words to Jesus, Paul identifies Him with the Lord of Israel and declares his authority over all of creation. As you study this great passage of Scripture, notice the contrast between the downward movement of Christ's humiliation and the upward movement of His exaltation.

The church was supposed to operate according to the model of Christ and His leadership. It was supposed to operate in that Roman colony - and in every time and place through the generations - as a counter-culture. In the world and yet not of the world. The metaphor is a picture of a ship in a sea. The ship is in the sea. But when the sea ends up in the ship, it's a perilous situation, and it must be pumped out with great force.

This passage also helps us understand the seriousness of sin and the wonder of God's grace. Question 16 of The Gospel Way Catechism teaches that sin is rebellion against our Creator, corrupting our relationships with God and one another. The selfish ambition Paul confronts in Philippians 2 is one expression of that deeper problem. We seek our own importance, insist on our own way, and struggle to put others' interests ahead of our own. Jesus came to rescue us from this rebellion through His obedient life and sacrificial death.

God's grace saves us and changes how we live. As you study this passage of Scripture, consider why Paul places the story of Christ's humiliation and exaltation at the center of his appeal for Christian unity. The eternal Son humbled Himself to save sinners, and the risen Lord now calls His people to share His mind.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Read Philippians 2:1–11. What concerns does Paul address in verses 1–4? Why does he direct the Philippians' attention to Jesus as the answer to these problems?

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2. Look closely at verses 5–11. How does Paul describe Jesus' humiliation and exaltation? Why does he emphasize that Jesus became obedient "even to death on a cross"?

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3. Read Isaiah 45:22–23 alongside Philippians 2:9–11. What does Paul's use of Isaiah reveal about Jesus' identity and authority? What does it mean that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord?

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4. Think about the relationships in your own life. Where do selfish ambition, pride, or the desire for recognition create tension? How does the example of Jesus challenge the way you think about greatness and serving others?

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5. Read the answer to Question 16 together. How does Christ's willingness to humble himself and die on the cross reveal the seriousness of our sin and the depth of God's love? What would it look like to have the mind of Christ in one relationship this week?

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Monday, December 14, 2026

"TREAT YOURSELF"

Genesis 3:1-15, Philippians 2:6

Phillip Pullman dramatically reinterpreted the events of Genesis 3 in The Amber Spyglass, the final book in his trilogy, *His Dark Materials*. His point is that Adam and Eve's rebellion against God is not a tragedy but their moment of true liberation. He recasts God as an oppressive parental figure who wants to keep His subjects innocent, small, and dependent. The tempter's role is recast as a catalyst for self-awareness.

We know something is wrong, and we deeply desire to name it. Pullman thinks the move is to reinterpret the plain reading of Genesis 3 into a story about how we need to take what belongs to God. You might be tempted to do the same, or see other friends, children, or grandchildren attempting to make a similar move based on their own understanding of who God is. Are they right? Have we made such a fuss about sin when it's really not that big a deal?

The cultural mantra of "treat yourself" is an empty echo of the tragedy found in Genesis 3:6. When the serpent plants the seed of doubt, "Did God actually say . . . ?" (3:1), he goes on to twist God's Word. The woman looks at the forbidden fruit and evaluates it on purely autonomous terms: good for food. The reality is that she would soon experience shame, hiding, and blame in place of these aspirations.

The ideas of the "treat yourself" philosophy sound promising and straightforward. Do what feels good, purchase whatever you want, and all will be well. But it's never that simple. Fulfillment through consumption delivers no sustaining power for our souls. By taking what God does not grant to us, humanity does not receive liberation; instead, it loses its inheritance.

There's a cosmic contrast between the first Adam's grasping and the second Adam's humility. In the Garden of Eden, we see the first Adam grasp at equality with God, believing the serpent's lie that he could know good and evil on his own. The second Adam, Jesus Christ, chose another way. Though He eternally existed in the very form of God, He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped or exploited for personal advantage. Where Adam demanded a promotion he did not deserve, Christ chose a humiliation we could never endure. Without ceasing to be God or King, He took up a cross; He took up a cross to rescue us from our self-imposed misery.

Right in the ruins of the curse, Genesis 3:15 shines out as the very first promise of Advent. God proclaims to the serpent that the seed of the woman will eventually crush his head. Hunger is a good thing. Advent reminds us to direct our profound spiritual hunger to our Deliverer who will break the power of our blame-shifting, pierce through our hiding, and cover our shame.

Tuesday, December 15, 2026

THE FORM OF A SLAVE

Exodus 5:6-23, Philippians 2:7

We all know the feeling of being overwhelmed and overloaded. We can max ourselves out by overcommitting and overreaching beyond what God intends for us, given good and natural creaturely limitations.

Yet there are times when our situation is simply too much to bear. Sometimes it's the inbox maxing out. Other times, it's about having significant conversations about the long-term health support for a spouse or parent. Other times, it gets caught up in the rush of a seasonal sprint, like the December calendar. Even around churches this time of year, we can feel like we're under an industrial-level production quota – services, pageants, staffing, and volunteer shifts – that routinely outpaces the actual rest it is supposed to embody.

In Exodus 5, Pharaoh withholds straw from the Hebrew slaves while forcing them to maintain their production quota for more bricks. When they cry from the crushing physical burden, Pharaoh dismisses their exhaustion as laziness. When the quota is not met, Pharaoh's taskmasters beat the Israelite foremen (5:14). Pharaoh's economy has no room for the Sabbath. Walter Brueggemann calls it an "anxiety system" run on an "insatiable script for production."

Consumer culture does this to us as well, especially in December. Consumer culture sells the promise of rest, recovery, and wellness, only to put us on an exhausting treadmill of trying to earn enough money to pay for it all. Churches can even operate under the same quota mentality in December! Seasonal events, programming demands, and performance targets – while all good and helpful so long as they're measured – can be their own form of brickyard quota if they get out of place.

Christ takes on this challenge in His incarnation. The hymn of Philippians 2 says that Christ took "the form of a servant" or "slave." Jesus took the form of a slave to enter the ultimate brickyard of human bondage and bring slaves out into true, liberated rest.

The brickyard of Exodus 5 demands an impossible tally – making more bricks without straw while the daily quota stays the same. Moses cries out to God in protest, questioning why deliverance has failed while the foreman bleeds. Jesus Christ takes on the kiln of our suffering and sin. The rest we are chasing is offered freely, because Jesus met the full demand in our place by giving Himself.

Jesus invites you to come and rest, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

Wednesday, December 16, 2026

HE WILL NOT BREAK A BRUISED REED

Isaiah 42:1-9, Philippians 2:7-8

We all know the disorienting experience of needing to be met with tenderness and sensitivity, but instead being met with force. Meeting someone in gentleness might take all the strength we have to offer. Raising your voice at a child who has had a hard day. A friend needing understanding but confronted with your own preoccupation instead of counsel and care. Maybe you lacked appropriate Christian concern for someone at work but didn't listen to them when they needed you. In all these situations and countless others, the people who need our tenderness most sometimes receive our impatience instead.

Why do we do this? The root cause is sin. It manifests itself in our selfishness and in our use of strength to get our way. We live in a world where the loudest voices command attention, the strongest personalities control rooms, and the most powerful people always seem to get what they want. Many especially admire people who take charge and push people around to get the job done.

What if we've misunderstood true greatness? What if the greatest display of power the world has ever known arrived without demanding attention, asserting privilege, or overpowering anyone?

Centuries before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah announced the coming of a Servant who would bring justice to the nations. In Isaiah 42, God introduces Him with remarkable tenderness: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him" (42:1).

The picture Isaiah uses might seem old, but it's a comfort to our hearts when we understand it. A bruised reed is already bent and damaged. A faintly burning wick has almost exhausted its flame. Neither needs any more pressure. Both need someone who will handle them with care. And that is precisely what God's Servant promises to do, "He will not cry aloud or lift his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice" (Isaiah 42:2-3).

Matthew tells us plainly that this Servant is Jesus (Matthew 12:18-21). But how will He accomplish His mission? The apostle Paul tells us that Jesus "emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7-8). He will not use his strength to crush the weak or extinguish the weary.

The world tells us greatness means rising above others. Christmas tells us a better story: the greatest King came down to rescue us. He has all the strength necessary to put the world right, and all the tenderness necessary to receive those who can barely stand.

Thursday, December 17, 2026

OBEDIENT TO DEATH

Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Philippians 2:7-8

Every December, children hear about Santa's naughty and nice list. The arrangement is simple enough. Santa knows who's been good, and good children get presents. We know it's a bit of Christmas fun, but there's an assumption behind it that follows us well beyond childhood: if we're good enough, things will work out for us.

The trouble comes when we begin to look a little more closely at ourselves. We remember the things we've said in anger, the people we've quietly resented, and the moments when we knew what was right but chose to do otherwise. We've been selfish with people we love. We've found ways to excuse our own behavior while being considerably less forgiving of others. No amount of generosity in December can undo what we've done throughout the year.

Isaiah tells us that our problem goes deeper than a few regrettable decisions. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6). The trouble with humanity is that we've turned away from the God. Sin is something we've all participated in, and its consequences reach further than we care to admit. We see them in our broken relationships, in the suffering of the world, and ultimately in the reality of death.

Isaiah also announces astonishingly good news. God has promised a Servant who will bear the very sins that condemn us. He will be despised and rejected, pierced for our transgressions, and crushed for our iniquities. "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). On the cross, Jesus willingly took our place, bearing the judgment our sins deserved, so that we might be reconciled to God.

Paul tells us that Christ "humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). The Son who deserved every honor willingly endured our shame. Through His wounds, we are healed.

The Christmas story begins with a child in a manger, but it leads us to a Savior on a cross. The One who never strayed from the Father's will bore the punishment of those who had.

His work is not finished. Hebrews 9:28 tells us that Christ will appear a second time, "not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him." The sacrifice for sin has already been offered. When Jesus comes again, those who trust in Him will welcome the Savior who has secured their salvation.

We have good reason to celebrate Christmas, then, even with the failures of another year behind us. Our standing with God does not rest on whether we've managed to be good enough. It rests on Jesus Christ, who obeyed where we disobeyed, suffered for our sins, and rose again so that we might live.

Friday, December 18, 2026

THE NAME ABOVE EVERY NAME

Genesis 11:1-9; 12:1-3, Philippians 2:9

"Let's make a name for ourselves." It's the motivation behind many who move off to the city. It's the mantra of the human heart boldly hiking down Lower Broad with a guitar in hand. Let's get out here; let's go for it. People take on new ventures, new companies, and new churches with this as a key motivating factor. Some of us think and feel this more subliminally or implicitly. Others are much bolder and more candid about this desire.

Underneath this is the good desire to be known. But it manifests as personal ambition, social-influencing personas, corporate names on the skyline, and our end-of-year pic-nine on socials. A few blocks from our church building stands the Batman building. Famous skylines also include those of the Eiffel Tower, Big Ben, and the Freedom Tower. Nashville has one of the most iconic and recognizable skylines and streets in the world.

This desire to make a name for oneself and have a great name isn't new. In Genesis 11, the first builders of that city gathered because they wanted a name (11:4). They intended to build a tower that would reach all the way to heaven. God had to come down to see this little tower His creatures were building (11:5). The next chapter tells us that it is God who gives names as He blesses Abram and promises him a name.

The great reality is that we were made in the image of God, and the name we long for is one only God can give. The desire to promote our own name, image, and likeness falls short of the honor and dignity uniquely ours when we receive the name and identity that only God can give.

The prophet Micah foretold that Israel's coming ruler would emerge from Bethlehem, a town too small to be counted among the clans of Judah (Micah 5:2). No one saw that coming. The King would be born into obscurity and take the form of a humble servant. The King who would receive the name above every name did not arrive in a great city or build a monument to His own greatness.

Here is the wonder of Christmas. While we spend our lives trying to make a name for ourselves, Jesus humbled Himself to make a way for us. He did not grasp at glory. He stooped down to save sinners, and the Father exalted Him above every name (Philippians 2:9-10).

As you look back on this year, you might have spent much of it trying to establish yourself, prove your worth, or secure a legacy. It's good to make a difference and influence the world for Christ. It's exhausting to do this in our own power and for our own fame. Christmas invites you to lay that burden down. You already matter to God. In Christ, you are beloved, forgiven, and a child of the Father. And Jesus has the name that is above every name. Rest in the fact that you are in Him.

Saturday, December 19, 2026

EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW

Isaiah 45:18-24, Philippians 2:1-11

Christmas can be a really confusing time of year. People are "celebrating" the holidays (holy days) but not really worshiping Jesus Christ — the reason for the Christmas season. It's actually a weird time of year when everyone seems to turn up to the party for different reasons.

"You can believe whatever you want to believe" is a popular idea that gets tossed around during the holidays. "I believe in the Christmas spirit, but not in Jesus Christ" is something you might hear. This is the idea that all spiritual paths are valid and ultimately lead to the same destination.

At first, it might feel like peace or look like harmony. By reducing faith and deep conviction to the status of personal preferences – no different than choosing pecan pie over sweet potato, really – the holiday gathering can help successfully bypass the minefield of holiday arguments. But the pluralism that is often supposed to bring peace does not bring the peace our hearts desire. And if we're honest, to say "whatever you believe" is often less about validating another person's journey and more about protecting our own creaturely comfort and peace of mind.

Isaiah declares the absolute, exclusive sovereignty of God, asserting that there is no other God and swearing, "To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance" (Isaiah 45:23). Paul explicitly applies this promise to Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:10-11; Romans 14:11).

And when the weary travelers entered the house and saw Jesus for the first time, they fell and worshiped Him (Matthew 2:11). They were not forced to, but they did recognize who Jesus was. Today, Christians around the world step into that same posture of worship: bowing freely, willingly, and out of love, long before the day comes when every knee in creation will do the same. The day when every knee bows is certain. Today it comes to us as an open door.

Isaiah invited, along with this bold claim: "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!" (Isaiah 45:22). The verse is more an invitation than a verdict. How do you respond?

The account of Polycarp's (a disciple of the Apostle John) martyrdom tells us that Herod, the captain of the police, and his father, Niceties, met Polycarp and took him into their carriage. They tried to persuade him, "Why what harm is there in saying, Caesar is Lord, and offering incense . . . and saving thyself?" Then things got more tested when the Proconsul urged him to swear by the genius of Caesar, to which Polycarp memorably replied, "Fourscore and six years have I been His servant, and He hath done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

Sunday, December 20, 2026

Scripture: John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. [4] In him was life, and the life was the light of men. [5] The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

[6] There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. [7] He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. [8] He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

[9] The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. [10] He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. [11] He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. [12] But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, [13] who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

[14] And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. [15] (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") [16] For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. [17] For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. [18] No one has ever seen God; God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

THE GOSPEL WAY CATECHISM: QUESTION 5

Question 5:
Who Is God the Son?

Answer:

God the Son is the eternal Word who took on humanity: Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah of Israel and King of the world. He is not a life coach or therapist who affirms all our desires, but the Great Physician whose blood heals our sin-sick hearts.

COMMENTARY

In Genesis, God speaks the world into existence. Light breaks into darkness, life begins to flourish, and everything God makes is good. John memorably begins his Gospel with the same words that open the Bible: "In the beginning" (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1).

John was part of the core team Jesus established while He was on earth. He knew Jesus up close and personally. He wrote this account of Jesus with the explicit purpose that people would believe

in Jesus and have life in His name (John 21:31). John gets his readers there by telling stories about Jesus, and he begins by making sure we first understand that this Jesus existed long before anything or anyone was created.

John wants his readers to understand that the same Word through whom God created the world has now entered it. Before Abraham was called or the first stars appeared in the sky, the Son was with God and was God. This is where John begins because everything else he tells about Jesus depends on knowing who He is. The man who walked on the streets of Galilee, welcomed sinners, and eventually died on a Roman cross is the eternal Son of God. Christmas marks His arrival in human flesh, not the beginning of his existence.

As you read John 1:1–18, pay attention to how John develops this remarkable claim. He begins by describing Jesus as the source of all life and the true light that shines in the darkness (1:1–5). Then John the Baptist enters the story as a witness, sent to prepare people to receive the light. Yet something tragic happens. The world fails to recognize its own Creator, and even His own people reject him. Sin has so distorted our understanding of God that we do not naturally welcome Him when he comes near.

The tragic story of our rejection of God is what Jesus brings such wonderful news. Those who receive Jesus and believe in His name are given the right to become children of God (1:12). Then, with all of this filling up our imaginations, comes the announcement at the center of the passage: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (1:14). John uses language that recalls the tabernacle, where God made His presence known to Israel in the wilderness. Now God's glory has appeared in a person. Jesus has come to make the Father known, full of grace and truth.

There is something deeply comforting about this at Christmas. We spend a lot of time in December trying to perfect situations for the people we love. We prepare our homes, gather our families, and hope the season will give us a little relief from the ordinary troubles of life. But we cannot make everything right, no matter how hard we try. John reminds us that our deepest need has always been something only God could meet.

Question 5 of The Gospel Way Catechism identifies Jesus as the eternal Word who took on humanity, the Messiah of Israel, and King of the world. He is the Great Physician who came to heal our sin-sick hearts. The good news of Christmas is that God has come to us in Jesus Christ. The One who made us knows the full extent of our sin and has come to save us. And everyone who receives Him by faith is welcomed into God's family.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. **Read Genesis 1:1–5 alongside John 1:1–5.** What similarities do you notice between these passages? What does John want us to understand about Jesus by introducing Him as the eternal Word?

2. Look closely at John 1:6–13. How does John describe the different responses to Jesus? What does it mean to receive Him, and what does God promise to those who believe in His name?

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3. Read John 1:14–18 alongside Exodus 34:5–7. What connections do you see between God's revelation to Moses and His revelation through Jesus? What does John mean when he says that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us?

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4. Think about the ways people understand Jesus today. Why might someone admire Jesus as a teacher or example without receiving Him as Lord and Savior? How does John's description of Jesus challenge the way we think about who He is and what we need from Him?

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5. Read the answer to Question 5 together. How does John's account help us understand why Jesus came into the world? What difference should it make this Christmas that the eternal Son of God became human to bring us into God's family?

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Monday, December 21, 2026

THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS

Isaiah 9:2, John 1:4-9

Today is the shortest day of the year. In Nashville, we'll have just under ten hours of daylight before the sun sets and another long December night begins.

I love how our city responds to the darkness during this time of the year. The neighborhoods are full of Christmas lights. Rooftops and trees glow with lights. Familiar streets take on a new and exciting angle as homes are illumined in ways they weren't just a few weeks ago. After the gloom and spookiness of Halloween, we've filled our homes with warmth and light. It's one of my favorite things about December.

But Christmas has a way of making us aware of other kinds of darkness, too.

Some of us approach this time of year with real absence and loss in our lives. We carry personal losses and injury we didn't have a year ago; a freshly broken relationship or diagnosis might threaten our joy this time of year. The Bible has room for that sadness. In fact, the promise of Christmas begins by acknowledging just how dark our world has become.

Isaiah described a people walking in darkness who would one day see a great light (Isaiah 9:2). Later, he wrote about a thick darkness covering the nations before announcing, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you" (Isaiah 60:1). Isaiah had already promised it: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Isaiah 9:2). Where does this light come from? We might be tempted to believe it comes from within us, ourselves. But the Bible says this Light comes to us from God.

John fulfills this promise when he introduces Jesus: "In him was life, and life was the light of men" (John 1:4). Jesus is the true light entering the world, and the darkness has not overcome Him.

For centuries, Christians have marked this evening with an Advent prayer, "O Dayspring, splendor of eternal light and sun of righteousness, come and give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death." The words echo Zechariah's song, which promises that God's tender mercy will bring the sunrise from on high (Luke 1:78-79). I love that the church has prayed these words on the longest night of the year. It reminds us that Christian hope never pretends the darkness isn't there.

Tomorrow, the days begin to grow longer. We won't notice much difference, but the turn has already come. Christmas tells us this story. The light has already entered our world in Jesus Christ, and one day we will see Him again. Until then, even on the darkest nights of the year and in the darkest nights of the soul, we have good reason to hope.

Tuesday, December 22, 2026

HE CAME TO HIS OWN

Exodus 4:22, Hosea 11:1-4; 8-9, John 1:10-13

Christmas can bring us face-to-face with what we've lost. People and possessions that we miss. The anticipated absence of someone key might already darken your Christmas celebrations, and you find yourself bracing for it.

Perhaps someone you love lives too far away to come home. For some families, the empty chair brings memories of someone who has died. For others, it represents a child, sibling, or parent who has chosen to stay away.

Christmas has a way of bringing our deepest longing for family into focus. We want to belong somewhere, to be welcomed in without hesitation or reservation, and to know that there are people who will make room for us in their hearts and at their table.

But even the happiest families cannot carry the full weight of that longing. Relationships aren't as durable as we wish they would be. Unfortunately, people disappoint us, and sometimes the people who love us most are the ones who hurt us most deeply. The Bible tells us that this good longing for home extends beyond Christmas, all the way back to the beginning of time.

Before God liberated Israel from slavery in Egypt, he sent Moses to tell Pharaoh, "Israel is my firstborn son" (Exodus 4:22). God had chosen a people to love, protect, and call His own. Yet Israel repeatedly turned away from Him. Centuries later, Hosea described God's relationship with Israel using the tender language of a father and child. God remembered teaching Israel to walk, taking them by the arms, and bending down to feed them. God responded like a parent pursuing their child, "How can I give you up, O Ephraim?" (Hosea 11:8). The Father remained committed to bringing His wandering children home.

John introduces Jesus by telling us that the same tragedy, rejecting the love of God, abandoning Him and His ways, happened again: "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him" (John 1:11). The eternal Son of God entered the world He created. Still, the people he came to rescue rejected Him. And yet rejection would not have the final word. John continues: "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (1:12).

This is the wonderful promise of Christmas. God did not send His Son merely to offer us a better life. He came to bring us into His family.

Matthew tells us that Jesus Himself was taken into Egypt as a child and later brought home, fulfilling Hosea's words, "Out of Egypt I called my Son" (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:15). When Israel had wandered from God, Jesus would remain faithful. Christmas announces that there is a Father whose love is greater than our failures and whose grace is sufficient to welcome us home.

Wednesday, December 23, 2026

THE GLORY MOSES ASKED TO SEE

Exodus 33:12-34:9, John 1:14-18

Few hymns have comforted Christians in times of sorrow as much as "Rock of Ages" by Augustus Toplady. The opening lines remain a familiar prayer for many Christians today: "Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee."

We often sing these words in seasons of suffering, when life's uncertainties remind us how much we need a place of refuge. But the image of hiding in a rock takes us back to one of the most fantastic encounters with God in the Bible.

In Exodus 33, Moses makes an extraordinary request: "Please show me your glory" (Exodus 33:18). Consider the circumstances surrounding this powerful prayer. Israel had failed to keep their commitments to God. They were supposed to worship this God who saved them from slavery and delivered them from their oppressors. Instead, they're down in the valley worshiping a golden calf. Moses pleaded for God's presence to remain with them, and God graciously agreed. Then Moses asked to see God's glory.

God responded by first placing Moses in the cleft of a rock and covering him as His glory passed by. Moses could not see God's face and live, but he heard the Lord proclaim His name: "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6).

What a revelation! God revealed His glory to Moses on behalf of a people who had just sinned against Him. He announced His name, revealing a God whose holiness and breathtaking mercy.

We live around people who want to be seen. We carefully choose how this happens, though. We choose the photographs we share, the stories we tell, and the impressions we leave. We want to be seen, known, and loved, but we fear we might be exposed and found to be imperfect. To be fully seen, fully known, and fully loved sounds too good to be true.

Christmas offers something far better than a carefully managed image.

John tells us that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory" (John 1:14). The word translated as "dwelt" recalls the tabernacle, where God's presence rested among Israel. What Moses glimpsed from the shelter of a rock, God has now revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

John describes Jesus as full of "grace and truth," echoing God's declaration of His steadfast love and faithfulness to Moses. As *The Gospel Way Catechism* reminds us in Questions 3 and 5, God revealed his glory to Moses on behalf of a people who had just sinned against Him.

Christmas wonders that God has come near enough to be seen. In Jesus, He has revealed Himself to us. His grace does not overlook the truth about us but makes our forgiveness possible.

One day, what Moses could not experience will become the joy of every redeemed child of God: "They will see his face" (Revelation 22:4). Until then, we can come out from behind our carefully managed appearances and find refuge in Christ. He knows us all the way through, and His grace reaches all the way down to us.

Thursday, December 24, 2026

CHRISTMAS EVE: MARY SINGS HANNAH'S SONG

1 Samuel 2:1-10, Isaiah 7:14, Luke 1:46-55

Have you listened to enough Christmas music? We've heard it in the shops and stores, different soundtracks depending on the location. Some of us have probably abandoned it by now. Too much of a good thing, and we're ready for tomorrow to come and go. Anyone envision packing up the Christmas decorations by Sunday?

Some of these songs are so familiar that we can sing them without giving much attention to the words. We can become so familiar with the songs that we don't hear them anymore - they blend into the background and simply become noise in the season.

Have you noticed how the gospel of Luke is full of Christmas music? Luke records four songs surrounding the birth of Jesus, each drawing from the promises of the Old Testament and announcing that God is keeping His word. Mary sings. Zechariah sings. The angels sing. And an older man named Simeon takes the infant Jesus into his arms and sings because his eyes have finally seen God's salvation.

But Mary sings first, and her song is worth listening to closely. She has just learned that she will give birth to the Messiah. She's young, from an ordinary town, and has no particular standing in the world. Yet when she opens her mouth, she sings about kings listing their thrones, hungry people being fed, and the proud being scattered. Where did she learn to sing like that?

Much of Mary's song comes from Hannah, another woman who knew what it meant to be overlooked. Hannah endured years of childlessness and humiliation. Another woman mocked her. She prayed for a son and gave him the name Samuel; she returned to the house of the Lord with a song of Thanksgiving.

Hannah praised God who breaks the bows of the mighty and raises the poor from the dust (1 Samuel 2:4-8). Her song looked ahead to a King whom God would anoint and exalt (2:10). Mary knew Hannah's song. Now, with the promised King growing in her womb, she sings it again, "He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty" (Luke 1:52-53). It's quite the song for Christmas Eve, especially on a night when so much of our attention is given to what we've bought, what we've prepared, and whether tomorrow will turn out the way we want it to.

Mary reminds us that God pays attention to the people the world overlooks. His mercy cannot be purchased, and His favor is not reserved for the impressive. The proud have reason to tremble, but those who knew their need have reason to rejoice. Mary sings of God's victory as though it has already happened. But her son has not yet been born. Yet she trusts God's promise enough to celebrate its fulfillment. God has remembered His mercy. And we have every reason to sing.

Friday, December 25, 2026

THE ANGELS ANSWER AUGUSTUS IN SONG

Isaiah 9:2-7, Luke 2:1-20

A few years before Jesus was born, an old inscription in the Roman city of Priene declared that the birthday of Caesar Augustus marked the beginning of good news for the world. The emperor had brought an end to a civil war and established peace throughout his empire. A whole set of events led to Augustus's birthday being celebrated as the first day of the new year.

When Luke begins the Christmas story, he introduces us to this same emperor: "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered" (Luke 2:1). Augustus ruled from Rome, issuing decrees that moved people throughout his empire. One such decree sent a young couple from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where Mary gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger.

How did God announce the birth of this true King? Did he publish a decree and send it to all the government offices? That night, shepherds were watching over their flocks when an angel of the Lord appeared with a royal birth announcement: "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10). The first people to hear this good news were not governors or generals, but ordinary workers keeping watch through the night. And suddenly, heaven broke into song: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased (Luke 2:14).

The angels announced the arrival of a King whose peace would accomplish what no earthly ruler could. Augustus, the biggest leader on the scene when Jesus was born, had established peace through military power, but Roman peace still depended on soldiers and swords. Jesus came to make peace between God and sinners by the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:20).

Isaiah promised a leader whom it would be true, "Of the increase of his government and peace, there would be no end" (Isaiah 9:7). Jesus of Nazareth is that promised leader, born of the Virgin Mary, fully God and fully man. Better than a government leader, He entered history not simply to teach us how to live, but to rescue us from sin and bring us into God's everlasting kingdom.

When Isaac Watts wrote "Joy to the World," he drew on Psalm 98, which celebrates the Lord coming to judge the earth with righteousness. The song looks beyond Bethlehem to the day when Christ's reign will reach as far as the curse is found.

Since the first Sunday of Advent, we have followed the ancient songs of Scripture, listening for the promises of a coming King. Today, we join the angels in celebrating His arrival. The long-awaited Savior has come. His light has pierced the darkness, and the future of the world rests securely in His hands. Joy to the world! The Lord has come. And the King is coming again.

AFTERWORD: THE COUNTER-CULTURAL SONGS OF CHRISTMAS

Paul told the Colossians why they sang. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Colossians 3:16).

Luke tells the story of the first Christmas as a song-filled account. Mary sings. Zechariah sings. The angels sing over a field of shepherds. Simeon, who had been promised he would not die before he saw the Lord's Christ, sings with the child in his arms. Zechariah's song gives this little book its central image: "the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Luke 1:78-79). Paul supplies the other half: "The night is far gone; the day is at hand" (Romans 13:12). For centuries, the church has read those words on the first Sunday of Advent.

Holding these together forms the shape of the Christian life. The sunrise has visited us, because Jesus has come. The day is at hand, because Jesus is coming again. We live in the last hour of the night, between a dawn that broke over Bethlehem and a day that has not fully come. The church has always spent that hour singing.

The first song in the Christmas story is sung by a poor, pregnant girl in a country ruled by a viscous Herod in the shadow of Augustus. She sang no lullaby. God, she sings, "has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty" (Luke 1:52-53). Mary sings about the coming King because His coming means the mighty lose their thrones.

Songs about a coming King have never kept anyone in their place.

Isaac Watts did not write "Joy to the World" as a Christmas carol. He published it in 1719 as a paraphrase of Psalm 98, a psalm that ends with the Lord who "comes to judge the earth" (Psalm 98:9, and he titled it "The Messiah's Coming and Kingdom." Most of us sing it on Christmas Eve as if it were about a baby. Watts wrote it about a King, and about an arrival that will reach far as the curse is found.

We celebrate Christmas by looking back at the first coming of this King. We look around with Christmas joy and consider who needs to hear about this King in Nashville, in our nation, and in the great nations of the world. We look ahead with hope for the second coming of this King who was born at Christmas.



The King's Songs

Four Ancient Hymns About Jesus Christ

2027 Scripture Reading Journal

The Whole Story: A One-Year Bible Reading Plan

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

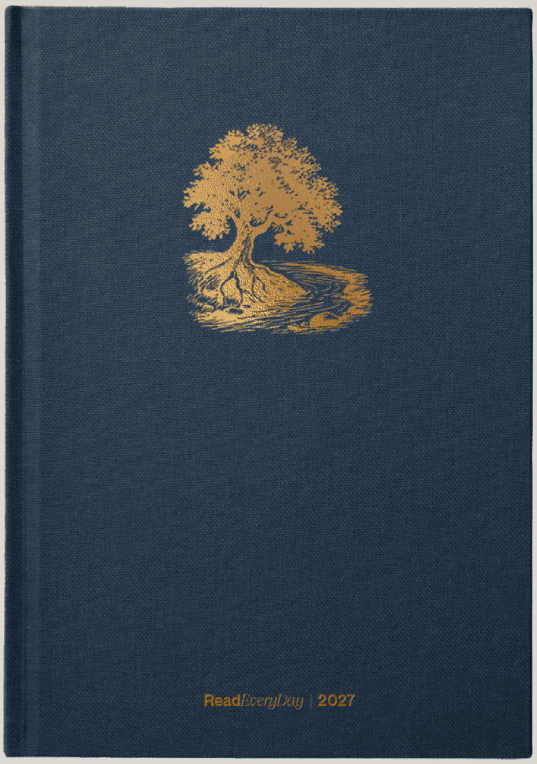
- Colossians 3:16

Together as a congregation, we're setting out to read the entire Bible in one year. To help you stay on track, we've partnered with a group to produce hard-back journals that include a reading plan, with dates that follow the schedule Pastor Thomas has developed.

The Scripture Reading Journals are meant to accompany your Bible reading. They have lined pages for you to write down notes, thoughts, prayers, and more. The plan starts in January 2027. We wanted you to be able to get these ahead of time so you would be ready when the emphasis starts.

Journals are $20 each. You're welcome to purchase one for yourself and perhaps another to share with a friend or family member. A journal isn't required to take part in the study, so it's entirely optional. They're being sold below cost, so Nashville First makes no profit from the sales.

Scan the QR code to learn how to purchase a Scripture Reading Journal on our Realm site. You can also visit the hub or lobby areas at church from November to January to purchase one directly.


ReadEveryDay | 2027

NASHVILLE
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This devotion book is aimed at stirring your heart's affections for God in this Advent season. It begins on Advent Sunday and concludes on Christmas Day. Along the way, it moves through four Sunday studies and twenty-five daily readings.

Each Sunday has one of the four ancient "Christ Hymns" in the New Testament: Hebrews 1, Colossians 1, Philippians 2, and John 1. The Sunday song is printed, commentary is provided, and discussion questions are provided to work through in your Bible Study Group, with your family, or with friends. We will study the Song as a gathered church each Sunday morning. We'll also study different Questions and Answers from *The Gospel Way Catechism* throughout the season.

The King's Songs: Four Ancient Hymns About Jesus Christ
was written by Nashville First's Senior Pastor Dr. Thomas West.
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Unless otherwise noted, printed Scripture passages
are from the English Standard Version (ESV).