

A COVENANT MADE
TO A *manger* LAID



A B B C A D V E N T
D E V O T I O N A L

December 2025

DAY 1

GENESIS 1:26-28

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

REFLECTION

by Sean Ulrikson

What I love about this passage is the clarity it provides in regard to the Trinity. God (singular) said let us (plural) make man in our (plural) image. This is helpful for me when thinking through how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit exist together as the one true God. Another reason why this passage is important to me is because it provides clarity and reasoning to some marvelous mysteries that I have experienced in my own life. Have you ever wondered why man lives in houses and eats cooked food, while animals live outside unless man intervenes for them? Surely, scientists would tell you how our brains are much larger and have different parts, but if you continue asking why, you will be met with the comforting truth that we are this way because God decided we should be. He created us in his image and gave us dominion over the rest of the earth. The passage continues to provide clarity on why we love our kids so inexplicably much. Much like we can see the familial resemblance in our children, God sees that in all of us. I know that I have seen examples of how to show my love for my children from my parents or my in-laws or even books or movies, but where that innate, parental love comes from is from God. We love our kids so deeply because we are so deeply loved by our Father, our Creator, who made us in His image. As we meditate on Christ's first advent, let us remember who Christ came to save: those who are made in God's image.

DAY 2

GENESIS 2:15-17

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

REFLECTION

by Elizabeth Roemer

The man didn't wander by himself into the garden. The Lord placed him there on purpose. The Lord gave Adam instructions to fulfill the purpose he had been given. Our Lord knows how he created us and why. He shows how he is our great provider. From the beginning, he gives us what we need. But then, in verse 16, the tone changes. The Lord gives Adam a command and a choice. It is the first covenant; the first promise with conditions and consequences. In this moment, the Lord has defined sin. The consequence of sin is death. God tells Adam he can eat from every tree in the Garden except one. The Lord had given Adam variety and plenty. The Lord is good and he had surrounded Adam with goodness. In love, he had also given Adam the knowledge to choose wisely. He told him up front the consequence of eating from the forbidden tree.

As I read these words, I want to shout to Adam, "Pay attention! Focus on what the Lord has said you *can* eat versus what you *can't*. What the Lord says is important! Believe him!" But then, I remember: Adam doesn't know the devastation of sin yet. He hasn't yet experienced the pain of death. He doesn't understand the heartache of broken relationships. Adam only sees the beauty and goodness of God's creation. He only knows the close personal relationship he has with his Creator, the Lord.

As I reflect on this passage, I am reminded of how much I underestimate my sin and the consequences that always follow. Yet, because of the reality of sin, my heart overflows with gratitude and thankfulness for the Lord of my salvation given to us at Christmas.

DAY 3

GENESIS 3:15

*¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.*

REFLECTION

by Makala Nordick

Okay, I'm terrified of snakes, thus the enmity here is real folks!

But in all seriousness, the curse of hatred described here is so much more than a dislike of reptiles.

Sin, ever so cleverly in conjunction with mankind's choices, entered the world on that fateful day.

What amazes me is that alongside the curse from God, he also gave a promise.

It's a seed of hope whispering victory.

The Seed appears to lie dormant for centuries, when in reality its roots are being nourished by Living Waters until one day the Shoot of Jesse emerges.

Not unlike a certain tree in the garden of paradise, the Branch of Life comes to bring restoration.

This Offspring of Eve mentioned here was to one day bruise the head of the serpent as he himself hung bruised probably beyond recognition on the very flora from which Adam and Eve were severed—a tree.

The tree of death became the Tree of Life!

As you anticipate Christmas may you rejoice knowing Jesus became the hated curse for us; He is the long-awaited Offspring.

DAY 4

GENESIS 9:8-17

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” ¹² And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” ¹⁷ God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

REFLECTION

by Taylor Johnson

What a gracious God to give us such a tangible symbol of his promises. When God made his covenant with Noah, it's not only to him, but to “your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you” (verses 9-10). God's ultimate intention is redemption. In one miraculous sign of water and light, we are shown for generations that God believes that we—a broken, sinful people—are redeemable through his Son. His good creation was part of a grand plan to redeem all nations in the New Heavens and Earth.

The rainbow is a reminder that God's not finished until his creation is restored. We experience loss and trials while here on earth, but we must remember that the baby born on Christmas Day has redeemed it. He is the New Covenant! He is the path to salvation and redemption. What a good and gracious God we have!

DAY 5

GENESIS 12:1-3

¹ Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

REFLECTION

by Matt and Sarah Baker

It's hard to imagine packing up your family and moving to an unknown location. A decision like that would usually require lots of planning and preparation. But with his small family and belongings in tow, Abram headed towards the land that God would show him, without hesitation.

Abram believed the Lord's promise of a large family—a family that would be a blessing to all the earth. This promise that God satisfied for Abram was a foreshadowing of the promise that was to come. That promise was Jesus, who descended from Abraham and blessed the world with salvation.

This Advent season, we reflect on the promise of a baby who became a blessing to all the earth.

DAY 6

GENESIS 15:5-6

⁵ And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ⁶ And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

REFLECTION

by Pastor Nate Bucher

I can't imagine the awe-striking nature of this promise.

Abram, already an old man, with no child as an heir. Yet the promise was children more numerous than stars visible to the eye.

What an audacious thought for the aged man.

Even now, thinking of just the stars that I can see really well at my house with little light pollution — it would have been nothing compared to the brightness of stars unencumbered by any man-made light sources.

But Abram *believed* the LORD's promise, at his advanced age, completely overwhelmed by the vastness of the starry sky and the lights radiating from an incomprehensible distance. He believed.

The promise by the Promise-keeper. The promise of a baby to be born. We anticipate in this advent season another baby promised to be born.

DAY 7

GENESIS 15:7-16

⁷ And he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess." ⁸ But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" ⁹ He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰ And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. ¹¹ And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

¹² As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. ¹³ Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. ¹⁴ But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. ¹⁶ And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

REFLECTION

by Jake Nordick

How am I to know that I am to possess it?

This is an incredible moment. It's a moment where God, the Creator, reaches down and meets Abram in a tangible way. He forges a covenant with Abram, a promise to stand as a testimony to his character. Abram asks how he will know, and God answers by entering into a covenant. The thing is, Abram was satisfied knowing that he wouldn't see the promise fulfilled, but his offspring would. The Lord would be faithful to his word. I have to wonder at Abraham's reaction when he entered glory and saw the true fulfillment of this covenant—eternal life, hope of glory. What did he think when he witnessed the promised land being more than earth? His offspring included a grafted vine encompassing every tribe and tongue. How could he not marvel and worship at such an incredible, faithful God!

As you look forward to Christmas, look forward to celebrating the faithfulness of our God. When you ask, "Lord, how will I know?" you can know that you can look into the past and see his faithfulness. On his faithfulness we can stand firm, as strangers in a world not our own. We look forward to that promised land, to Christ our hope in glory.

DAY 8

GENESIS 22:15-19

¹⁵ And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶ and said, “by myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, ¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” ¹⁹ So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.

REFLECTION

by Pastor Kale Fritz

What precedes this passage is quite remarkable. God just asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son who was the firstfruits of the fulfillment of God's promises. Why in the world would God do that? Doesn't he value the life of Isaac? Of course he does! And yet, God had a good purpose in this request: he was testing the faith of Abraham. From a human perspective, it is impossible for God's promise to be fulfilled if Isaac died. However, from God's perspective, nothing is impossible. Would Abraham believe this? Would he believe that even if Isaac was gone, God's ability to fulfill his promises did not rest in Abraham's precious son, but instead upon his unchanging word?

In the end, God graciously stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac. In this passage, what does he then do? He praises Abraham for his faith AND repeats his promises and his absolute commitment to fulfill them. Remarkably, on one miraculous day, God would send his only Son into the world to take on human flesh. However, unlike Isaac, Jesus Christ was not spared from being sacrificed by his Father. No—God the Father would do what Abraham was graciously prevented from doing—he would give up his one and only beloved Son for the sins of his people.

As we meditate on the incarnation of Jesus Christ this Advent, may we rejoice in our loving Father who gave up so much for us and in his Son who became man so that he could die for us. May the Holy Spirit direct our gaze upon the newborn babe who is now our risen King.

DAY 9

GENESIS 28:10-17

¹⁰ Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. ¹² And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! ¹³ And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. ¹⁴ Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. ¹⁵ Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." ¹⁶ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." ¹⁷ And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

REFLECTION

by Pastor Kale Fritz

Our covenant God is a God of memory. Not only does he know and remember all things (he's all-knowing), but in his mercy for sinners, he reminds us continually of his promises. Why do you think he repeats his promises to Abraham and to Abraham's descendants (like his grandson Jacob)? I would like to submit it's because we easily forget his faithfulness to fulfill his promises. Yet, God is patient with us. He reminds us of his promises in his Holy Word. In this passage, Jacob is reminded of the promises he would have been told about by his father Isaac, who would have been originally told by his father Abraham. We see God's faithfulness to multiple generations of his covenant people. As we know from the Bible, God fulfilled all three aspects of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He multiplied their descendants and established a holy nation (Israel), he brought Israel into the promised land of Canaan, and he ultimately blessed the world through the greatest of all Abraham's, Isaac's, and Jacob's descendants: Jesus Christ.

As we reflect on Jesus' birth this advent season, may we be *reminded* of God's covenant faithfulness to fulfill his promises to his people.

DAY 10

GENESIS 35:9-15

⁹ God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. ¹⁰ And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So he called his name Israel. ¹¹ And God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. ¹² The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you." ¹³ Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him. ¹⁴ And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it and poured oil on it. ¹⁵ So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.

REFLECTION

by Pat Chung

Jacob is heading back home (after fleeing because he stole his brother's birthright) and during this journey God re-affirms the promise he made to Abraham to his grandson Jacob, who he now calls Israel. God tells Israel that the land given to Abraham and Isaac are his and that kings and nations shall come from his family! I can think of promises I have made to others or promises made to me that were broken, but I am reassured knowing that when God makes a covenant, it comes with an iron-clad guarantee.

While Israel and his mother's plan was to steal the familial birthright, God's plan was to bestow onto Israel a more significant birthright! A birthright that led to the birth of our Savior, Jesus. He is the One that sits at the right hand of God and will one day come back to fulfill God's promise.

So in this season, let us remember God's steadfast love for us, the covenant he made to Abraham and Israel, and the eventual fulfillment of Jesus's return.

DAY 11

GENESIS 50:15-21

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." ¹⁶ So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: ¹⁷ 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you."' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. ²¹ So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

REFLECTION

by Kristi Bucher

There is so much in Joseph's story that points us to Jesus. The evil Joseph endured ended up bringing life to countless others as he stored grain that would keep multitudes from starving. The evil Jesus endured brings life to countless more through His death and resurrection.

But what grips me most in this passage is the final line: "...he comforted them and spoke kindly to them." Joseph comforted the very brothers who had plotted to kill him, sold him for profit, and robbed him of years with his father. They had meant him evil—yet he met them with kindness.

How? How does someone not only give food to those who wounded him, but bend low to care for them, provide for them, comfort them? Love like that feels almost reckless.

Joseph could do it because he looked to God—the God who had never left his side through every high and low in Egypt. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians that we comfort others with the comfort we ourselves have received. That's the only way love like Joseph's becomes possible: we have been comforted by God.

At Christmas, God sent the ultimate comfort—His presence with us. May we offer that same comfort to others this Advent season.

DAY 12

EXODUS 3:7-12

⁷ Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

⁹ And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." ¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" ¹² He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

REFLECTION

by Curtis Hed

Dear friends, is it not the most wonderful news that God, being true to himself, cares for us? True to his own name and glory, he desires to be our God and for us to be his people. He desires this so much that he has gone beyond what he did in freeing the Israelites from their physical captivity in Egypt by freeing us from our captivity to sin.

God so loves the world, so values and treasures us, and so longs for us to be his children, that he sent his Son—the Word of God, through whom he created all things—to become flesh. He did this so that, as the Son of Man—Jesus Christ, the Son of God—could pay the price and free us from our bondage to sin, and make the relationship God desires to have with us possible.

Therefore, let us not be like the Israelites of old, who though freed from captivity turned away in the wilderness and did not enter the promised land. Instead, let us continue to put our trust in God, allowing the Holy Spirit to work within us, transforming us into the image of God's Son. In doing so, let us encourage one another to stay the path and to rest completely in him. As always, but especially during this Advent season of remembrance, we thank you, Father, for treasuring us so much that you sent your only begotten Son to make possible the relationship that you desire to have with us.

DAY 13

EXODUS 12:1-13

¹ The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ² “This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. ³ Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. ⁴ And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb.

⁵ Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, ⁶ and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

⁷ “Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸ They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. ⁹ Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. ¹⁰ And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹ In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord’s Passover. ¹² For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. ¹³ The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

REFLECTION

by Mike and Brianna Graber

As each household of Israel prepared their hearts to follow these detailed instructions—having to sacrifice a perfect and unblemished lamb, which would have been a true sacrifice of their resources—they likely didn’t fully understand the significance that these instructions held in the broader picture. However, as it was made clear by the precise instructions, this was the Lord’s plan and the only way to spare the firstborn. Both the Passover and Christ are not plan B in the will of the Lord, they are the first and only option that will come to pass.

It’s easy for our thoughts to wander toward the perspective of the Israelites who had witnessed God’s plagues pillage and destroy any

sense of security and well-being in Egypt at that time. There may have been some skepticism amongst the Israelites who were unsure where the destruction would lead. They had now received specific instructions on how they could evade the eminent devastation of God's impending wrath. A specific sacrifice must be made both at the time of Passover and for our eternal salvation. Just as all of Israel could benefit from the sacrifice of Passover lamb, all of mankind can benefit from the sacrifice of Christ.

It is humbling to place ourselves in their shoes wondering whether we would fully grasp the scope of God's mercy and provision. We now see the ties of the first Passover to the sacrifice of our true Lamb, Jesus. Just as the blood of the lamb saved the firstborn sons of Israel at the time of Passover, the blood of Christ saves all of those who believe. Let us remember the Lamb of God this Advent season!

DAY 14

EXODUS 14:21-31

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. ²² And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. ²³ The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. ²⁴ And in the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, ²⁵ clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians."

²⁶ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen." ²⁷ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the Lord threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. ²⁸ The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained. ²⁹ But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

³⁰ Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹ Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

REFLECTION

by Mark and Cristine Nicholson

When we read this passage we are reminded of how God saved Israel from slavery. We are reminded how he not only provided a way out but also protected them by destroying Pharaoh's army. Just think: they witnessed dead soldiers on the shore in the morning after escaping. This event has been told to generations of Israelites, reminding them of the incredible power God used to free His people and to give them hope (Judges 6:7-8).

This all happened thousands of years ago. It is a key example of God fulfilling a promise to save his people.

So, what does this mean for us today? We think about it like this:

We are all sinners and need salvation from our sin much more than the Israelites needed salvation from slavery in Egypt. Scripture tells us that God has planned a way to save us since before time began (2 Timothy 1:9). Because of this, we look forward with great joy and anticipation in celebrating the fulfillment of that plan: the birth of Jesus!

DAY 15

EXODUS 20:1-17

¹ *And God spoke all these words, saying,*

² *"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*

³ *"You shall have no other gods before me.*

⁴ *"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

⁷ *"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.*

⁸ *"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*

¹² *"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.*

¹³ *"You shall not murder.*

¹⁴ *"You shall not commit adultery.*

¹⁵ *"You shall not steal.*

¹⁶ *"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

¹⁷ *"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."*

REFLECTION

by Pastor Kale Fritz

When God gave the Law through Moses at Mount Sinai to Israel, he was expressing his holy character and will for his covenant people. He had just graciously rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, but he didn't

do this whimsically. He delivered them from slavery to be *his* people—*his* treasured possession. The Law, which is written on every human heart, was written on tablets of stone to be a binding code for all generations of God's people. In the context of God's covenant with Israel through Moses, the Law functioned as the covenant's standard of blessing and curse. Obedience to the Law led to God's blessing and protection, whereas rebellion would eventually lead to exile. The Mosaic covenant was a *conditional* covenant. Its blessings were conditioned upon Israel's faithfulness to God. As we all know, Israel's (and our) efforts to obey the Law perfectly always fall short. So then, since this is true, is there any hope? Yes, yes, and YES!

The Law functions to point us to Jesus Christ in two remarkable ways. First, it demands perfect obedience, which we cannot fulfill. However, our great Savior, born on Christmas Day, was born to fulfill the Law. Think about this! Jesus was born under the Law in order to fulfill what no sinful human being could do. By fulfilling it, he achieved the blessing of righteousness. Through faith in him, his righteousness becomes our own. But that's not all. Second, the Law exposes our sin (since we cannot fulfill it) and brings us under condemnation. This reveals our desperate need for our sin to be dealt with! However, are we able to make up for what we have done? No, we can't! What has God done in response? He sent his Son, the Law-keeper, to die for Law-breakers! Jesus was born as a baby so that he would one day obediently hang on the cross to take upon himself the penalty of breaking the Law: death. By shedding his blood, he atoned for sin (he covered it) and he purified sinners (he washes sin away).

As we consider Christ's first coming this Advent season, let us remember how desperately we need him. We have all broken God's Law and deserve eternal condemnation. However, our God is a *gracious* God. He provides all that we need in his Son Jesus Christ—the God-man—the righteous Law-keeper who was punished for our sin.

DAY 16

EXODUS 40:34-38

³⁴ Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. ³⁶ Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. ³⁷ But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. ³⁸ For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.

REFLECTION

by Alisa Rusch

For the first time since sin separated God from man in the Garden, God has come to dwell among his people. Despite sin, God made a way to be with his people. For his people, who had cried out to him for deliverance for so long, his presence upon the tabernacle served as a visible reminder of his love and faithfulness. It was a visible reminder of his promises to Abraham and the nation of Israel.

Many years later, God would send another visible reminder of his love and faithfulness.

Jesus. Immanuel. God with us.

Jesus is God's love on display as he came to dwell among his people once more—the ultimate fulfillment of his promise.

DAY 17

LEVITICUS 16

¹ The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the Lord and died, ² and the Lord said to Moses, “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. ³ But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. ⁴ He shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on. ⁵ And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.

⁶ “Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. ⁷ Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the Lord at the entrance of the tent of meeting. ⁸ And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for Azazel. ⁹ And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the Lord and use it as a sin offering, ¹⁰ but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

¹¹ “Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. He shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself. ¹² And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil ¹³ and put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die. ¹⁴ And he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat on the east side, and in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

¹⁵ “Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. ¹⁶ Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses. ¹⁷ No one may be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the Holy Place until he comes out and has made atonement for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel. ¹⁸ Then he shall go out to the altar that is before the Lord and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around. ¹⁹ And he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger

seven times, and cleanse it and consecrate it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel.

²⁰ “And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. ²¹ And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. ²² The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.

²³ “Then Aaron shall come into the tent of meeting and shall take off the linen garments that he put on when he went into the Holy Place and shall leave them there. ²⁴ And he shall bathe his body in water in a holy place and put on his garments and come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people and make atonement for himself and for the people. ²⁵ And the fat of the sin offering he shall burn on the altar. ²⁶ And he who lets the goat go to Azazel shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp. ²⁷ And the bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be carried outside the camp. Their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be burned up with fire. ²⁸ And he who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.

²⁹ “And it shall be a statute to you forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you. ³⁰ For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the Lord from all your sins. ³¹ It is a Sabbath of solemn rest to you, and you shall afflict yourselves; it is a statute forever. ³² And the priest who is anointed and consecrated as priest in his father's place shall make atonement, wearing the holy linen garments. ³³ He shall make atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. ³⁴ And this shall be a statute forever for you, that atonement may be made for the people of Israel once in the year because of all their sins.” And Aaron did as the Lord commanded Moses.

REFLECTION

by Pastor Kale Fritz

Let's be honest: how many of us have gotten to the book of Leviticus and skipped it? Maybe it's because we are queasy when we think of blood, maybe it's because the content seems very strange and unrelatable, or maybe we start reading it and get confused. Why is there all this talk about blood, cleansing, animals, and atonement?

Why do these priests have to do all this work that seems so meticulous and exact? The answer is quite simple actually: it's because our sin is a serious offense to a holy God, but God has provided a way of dealing with it. This is what Leviticus is all about: our Holy God making a way for sinners to be in covenant with him.

What we need to understand about this passage is that the Day of Atonement was one of the most important days on the Jewish religious calendar. This was the only day during the whole year in which the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle (eventually the Temple) to be in God's presence as a representative for the people. But did you notice what he spent a lot of time doing? Before he could perform his priestly duties on the people's behalf, he had to cleanse and purify himself before God. Why? It's because he was sinful just like the people! After he did the cleansing and purification rituals, what was he then tasked to do? He had to cleanse the actual area he was in. Why? Because of human sin! Finally, once he did this, then what did he do? He had to sacrifice animals as an atonement for that year's sins and then send a scapegoat into the wilderness to carry those sins away. Is all of this starting to sound familiar?

You see—in the Levitical sacrificial system's most important day (the Day of Atonement)—we are shown some very important truths. We are shown that all sinners need a mediator to represent them before God, blood must be shed to atone and purify for sin, sinners need a substitute, sinners need to have their sin taken away, and that animals (like bulls and goats) are inadequate to totally atone for sin. Without all these requirements being met, we die! Remarkably, Jesus Christ came to fulfill *all* that is revealed in this passage. He is our mediator who represents us before God, he shed his blood to atone for (cover) our sin and purify us, he came to take our sin away, and he came to make the final, sufficient, once for all payment for sin. Also, unlike the high priest under the Levitical system, Jesus was without sin, which means that all who are in him by faith can confidently be in God's presence without threat of destruction. Jesus didn't need to purify himself before he died on the cross in God's presence—he was pure already!

This Advent season, consider how Jesus came as a baby to be the spotless Lamb of God. He came to fully atone for our sin, wash it away, and give us eternal rest in him.

DAY 18

2 SAMUEL 7:12-17

¹² *When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.* ¹³ *He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*

¹⁴ *I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men,* ¹⁵ *but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.* ¹⁶ *And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”* ¹⁷ *In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.*

REFLECTION

by Marilyn Wallberg

Covenants, promises, and prayers all speak of something yet to come. In this Old Testament passage, David is promised that ultimately, through his descendant, the eternal kingdom of the Messiah will come, as revealed in the New Testament.

We have the privilege and joy of “praying forward” and “looking back” to see God’s faithfulness in our lives.

I am reminded of the birth of my son who I met for the first time in the middle of the night when the nurse brought him to me at 2 am. I looked at his sleeping face and said, “Hello John. I’m your mother.” My heart exploded with joy and my tears ran as I started praying out loud, thanking my Lord for this precious miracle. I promised that my husband and I would raise him to know Jesus. My first prayer over my son concluded, “And Father, somewhere in this world, I pray for the little girl who will become his wife someday. Keep them both until they find each other.”

Twenty-eight years, two months, and seven days later, she walked down the aisle to my son, her beloved.

“God makes all things beautiful in His time” (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

DAY 19

PSALM 2

- ¹ *Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?*
- ² *The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying,*
- ³ *“Let us burst their bonds apart
and cast away their cords from us.”*
- ⁴ *He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the Lord holds them in derision.*
- ⁵ *Then he will speak to them in his wrath,
and terrify them in his fury, saying,*
- ⁶ *“As for me, I have set my King
on Zion, my holy hill.”*
- ⁷ *I will tell of the decree:
The Lord said to me, “You are my Son;
today I have begotten you.*
- ⁸ *Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.*
- ⁹ *You shall break them with a rod of iron
and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”*
- ¹⁰ *Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.*
- ¹¹ *Serve the Lord with fear,
and rejoice with trembling.*
- ¹² *Kiss the Son,
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,
for his wrath is quickly kindled.*
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

REFLECTION

by Pastor Nate Bucher

It is sadly easy to see the nations raging against God and his Anointed: Jesus, the real and eternal King. Looking around the world, we see many atrocities being committed against followers of Christ. We mourn these things, and we weep for those brothers and sisters.

Yet we are not without hope—those suffering for their belief in Christ are not without hope. Because the Lord has promised to send the Anointed one—to bring forth justice to be the refuge that brings blessing.

But to those in opposition to the covenantal King, *He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill."*

The sovereign Covenant Keeper has kept his loving covenant. He has set his King on his holy hill. The hill where that anointed one—Jesus—bore the wrath for human sin and won victory once and for all for all who believe. So be wise—be warned—serve the Lord: the One promised to come, the One who came, and the One who will come again to fully realize his eternal Kingdom.

DAY 20

JEREMIAH 31:31-34

³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

EZEKIEL 36:22-27, 35

²² “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. ²³ And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. ²⁴ I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

³⁵ And they will say, ‘This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden, and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.’

REFLECTION

by Pastor Kale Fritz

Isn't it amazing that when Israel was miserably failing to keep the Mosaic Covenant (the Law), God was determined to make a new, better covenant? This is a grace of God: he promised a new, better, unconditional covenant as his people were breaking the covenant he already made with them. What a God we serve.

The New Covenant would be better for multiple reasons. First, unlike the conditional Mosaic Covenant which was conditioned on Israel's

obedience, the blessings of the New Covenant would be unconditional because they are based in God alone. Second, God promised he would effectually write the Law into the hearts of his New Covenant people, which would draw them to him. Third, each person under the New Covenant would know God personally and sufficiently by faith. Fourth, God would fully cleanse his people of their sin and forgive them by blotting it out. Fifth, God would powerfully change hearts of stone (which are turned against him) into hearts of flesh (which are turned to him). Sixth, God would (amazingly) put his own Spirit into the hearts of all his New Covenant people. Do you see a common theme in the New Covenant's design and purpose? It's all about *God* and what he does for *us*! This means that in the end, only God deserves the glory for the free blessings he bestows upon his undeserving children.

Now—what does all of this have to do with Advent? The answer is that it has everything to do with Advent! The Son of God was sent by the Father to take on human flesh in order to enact and be the mediator of the New Covenant. All of those who have faith in Jesus are members of this New Covenant, which means all the blessings of the covenant are ours in Christ Jesus. We can rest secure in Christ. We can know God has forgiven our sin fully. We can have a genuine love for his Law and keep it by faith. We can know God truly in love. We can see how God has changed our heart of stone into a heart of flesh. We can rejoice that the Holy Spirit dwells within us! All of this is ours because Jesus Christ was born in a manger in the little town of Bethlehem. What a wonder this is!

DAY 21

LUKE 22:14-20

¹⁴ And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. ¹⁸ For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

REFLECTION

by Kylie Fritz

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, we often have gifts on our minds. Physical gifts we share with loved ones and acknowledging the gift of the Gospel through the birth of our Savior.

Another gift that God has given us is the Lord's Supper. Christ, in asking us to come together as a church for this act of worship, is giving us a chance to grow.

Bethlehem Baptist Church's Elder Affirmation of Faith recognizes the significance of the gift of communion in this way: *"Those who eat and drink in a worthy manner partake of Christ's body and blood, not physically, but spiritually, in that, by faith, they are nourished with the benefits He obtained through His death, and thus grow in grace."*

Physically, our small cracker and cup of juice is not very nourishing to our bodies. But spiritually? We are being fed together as a community in a way that helps us grow into the saints we are called to be. Verse 22 calls us to *"do this in remembrance of me."* We must be intentional as we partake in this gift from the Lord and be thankful for this New Covenant sign of a promise fulfilled—during this advent season and always.

DAY 22

HEBREWS 4:14-16

¹⁴ *Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.*

¹⁵ *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.* ¹⁶ *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

REFLECTION

by Terri Mason

As believers, we have our own High Priest. He represents us before the Father and stands in our place and has made atonement for our sins. We must only *believe* that he was meant for this purpose and accept that gift of salvation from our sins and recognize him as Lord. This High Priest, Jesus Christ, is the only one who could rightfully represent us, being God incarnate: born fully human while still being fully divine.

We can *remain steadfast* in our faith even during trials and temptations because Jesus can sympathize with our humanity. He knows our weaknesses and understands our temptations. He faced that himself while on earth until the day he died for our sins. But then, he rose again and now we can approach the throne of grace *boldly* in prayer because He knows how I feel (his humanity) and because He *will* extend compassion, love, mercy, grace and forgiveness (his deity).

This Advent we celebrate the birth of our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, who has ascended back to heaven and ministers there as our High Priest. We can have confidence and comfort in him!

DAY 23

HEBREWS 9:11-15

¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

¹⁵ Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

REFLECTION

by Jordan Danielson

The author tells us that Jesus' blood did what no earthly sacrifice ever could: it purifies our conscience. Not just our behavior. Not just our reputation. Our conscience! This is the very core of who we are. This is the place where guilt lingers, where our failures echo, where shame often whispers. Jesus doesn't just cover sin. He cleanses us so we can serve the living God with freedom!

Because of Jesus' sacrifice, he became the mediator of the New Covenant. We now have a relationship with God not because of our performance, but because of his grace.

If you have Jesus, your conscience has been cleansed. Your sins have been redeemed. Your access to God is secure, not because of what you do, but because of what Christ has done.

What a mighty God we serve. Remember that this Advent season!

DAY 24

REVELATION 21:1-4

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

REFLECTION

by Pastor Kale Fritz

What if I were to tell you that all of God's work in saving his people was meant to lead up to this climactic moment in the Bible? This is God's aim: he *will* (not might) dwell with his redeemed people in the New Heavens and Earth. You might read this and shudder because you think to yourself: "*How could the God of the universe want to be with me, a wretched sinner?*" That's a great question, and you'll spend the rest of your days here on earth unable to answer it sufficiently. There simply is no answer to the question on this side of glory. However, I think one day, when God makes his dwelling place with us, we'll begin to understand why God would want to be with us. My inkling is that we'll realize (and experience) how God's eternal glory is so preciously exalted when he is with his people, not because they are worthy, but because *he is*.

As we consider Jesus' first advent this Advent season, let us not forget where all of this is headed. Jesus came as a baby so that we would stand before God one day because God has made his dwelling place with us. What an amazing, unimaginable day that will be. Until that day, we can rejoice that God has come to us already in the humblest of ways: in the form of a helpless little baby. To God be the glory!

DAY 25

LUKE 2:11

*11 For unto you is born this day
in the city of David a Savior,
who is Christ the Lord.*

REFLECTION

by Pastor Nate Bucher

The promise that was promised is here.

The covenant between God and man has been fulfilled in the God-Man — Jesus. The promise of God to bring restoration to His creation has come. Immanuel, God with us. He has come to save His people, the rightful anointed King of God's Kingdom.

Rejoice! Again I say, rejoice! *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!* The promise revealed by the Promise-Keeper. Today we celebrate the One laid in a manger and remember that God is *with* His people, as He always has been — in the garden, in the desert, in the temple, and now in this baby in the manger. And we remember that Jesus went to the cross as Immanuel, bearing all our sin and shame to defeat it and atone for it once and for all.

But it doesn't end today.

Now we wait to sing "Joy to the World, the Lord is come" — that final time when He will restore creation and rule His Kingdom for eternity.

Rejoice, dear brothers and sisters.