



COMMUNITY CHURCH  
AT TELlico VILLAGE

# *Advent Devotionals 2022*



## *About This Devotional Guide*

This Advent Season, we at the Community Church at Tellico Village wanted to provide a devotional guide as we work to prepare our hearts for the celebration of Christ's birth. For each daily devotional that you read in this guide, we ask that you open your Bible, read the scripture thoughtfully and carefully, and the immerse yourself prayerfully in the devotional provided.

The devotionals that you will read in this guide have been written by a diverse group of people within our church community. Pastors and laity, men and women, folks from different areas within our community, younger and older, have all poured their hearts into creating these reflections that we hope that you will genuinely enjoy.

Be sure to always scroll down or flip to the next page, as some of these devotions take two pages instead of one. At the end of each devotion, we hope that you'll take the chance to read each author's **About the Author** section so that you might get a chance to get to know them a little better.

*Happy Reading!*



# November 28<sup>th</sup>

Isaiah 9:2

## Light

I am a morning person, and like many of you, I have a daily routine. I get up when it is dark outside and most days, I make my way to the kitchen (and my first cup of coffee) in the dark. However, at Christmas it is different. I have the glow of candles in the windows to greet me every morning. That little bit of soft light makes the house cozy, and it calms me. With my coffee in hand, I make my way into the den and sit looking out the window as the sun comes up over the mountains and the lake. The beauty of the sunrise helps prepare me for the start of another busy day.

*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.*

*-Isaiah 9:2*

As I pondered this verse from Isaiah, I thought about the many feelings I have as I encounter different forms of light in my daily life. Lamplight makes my life more comfortable by providing enough light so that I don't have to wear my reading glasses when I am enjoying a good book. Emergency vehicle lights and traffic signals give me instructions and make me feel safe. Firelight can elicit two entirely different feelings depending on the setting. It can be relaxing in a fireplace or threatening in a forest fire. Sun rays through a stained-glass window warm my heart with their variety of colors. Lightning demonstrates the power and immensity of light and instills a sense of awe whenever I see it.

We know that the prophet Isaiah was foretelling of an entirely different kind of light – Jesus. Christ's light is not something we can touch or see. It is a spiritual light that has all the attributes of the physical light I described. His light provides comfort, instruction, safety, warmth, and power. As Christians, we are blessed to have Christ's light in our lives.

At our fall Women's Ministry Retreat we studied the book of Philippians and learned more about how God wants to work through us to show Christ's light to the world. Philippians 2:15 says, "...shine among them like stars in the sky..." As we think of Christ's coming this Advent season, let us remember to reflect Christ's light in all we do. Shine on!

### About the Author

Shauna Oden was a member at First Baptist Church, Chattanooga, until joining the Community Church in 1996. She and her husband, Bill, moved into the Toqua neighborhood in 1987 and are Tellico Village Pioneers. After 17 years as Executive Director of Loudon County Habitat for Humanity, Shauna retired and has been volunteering at the church in a variety of capacities ever since. She is currently Council Chair.



# November 29<sup>th</sup>

## Isaiah 2:1-5

These verses are the vision of the end times given to Isaiah. It is the Jewish version of those times, and a much calmer finale of God's will than our Christian Revelation. God's mountain, soaring above all the others, will have the final, eternal temple established. In the time of Isaiah, this is where God lives. He will draw all nations to it and will open their hearts to Jesus.

Imagine all people loving and obeying God. It will end strife, war, and conflict. Weapons of war will no longer be needed and will be made into plowshares. The resultant farming will end famine, and we assume that the redirected energy of humans will find cures for diseases and new processes that eliminate poverty. It will be the new earth promised in the New Testament.

On this new earth, God will judge nations and deliver justice to all. The end of Satanic rule will then reveal the fullness of love and kindness in the human heart. I have often read and heard pastors who talk about our great hope. It is not the hope of a salvation and eternal life that we know exists, but a hope that we will have the faith to warrant it.

The end times envisioned by Isaiah are without trials and tribulations, so it is more appealing in some ways than our Christian Revelation. Either way, we end up with an existence devoid of fear and consequences where we can be anything beneficial to God and others without constraint. In this time of Advent, while we wait to celebrate our Savior's arrival, we should focus on being sinless servants of God. We can do that now, before the day arrives, knowing that Jesus is our bridge to God, waiting for us, waiting to plead our case.

### **About the Author**

Bill Barbour and his wife, Marianne, moved to Tellico Village in April 2021 and joined CCTV in May of that year. Bill has attended and been a member of multiple denominations, so CCTV was an obvious choice for his worship and service. He has served in church staff positions and as a Sunday school leader. When not working on his next book, or business projects, he can usually be found trying to play golf.



# November 30<sup>th</sup>

## James 4:1-10

I've always been intrigued by the writings of James since he was Jesus' brother and a leader in the early Jerusalem Christian Church. He wrote to the Jewish Christians who were scattered throughout the Mediterranean due to persecution in Jerusalem and they were experiencing temptations in their new and often hostile communities. I've been fortunate in my life to have an older brother that has always been there for me. Like most siblings, we often differ in our opinions and have experienced heated arguments that caused us to avoid each other for a few years. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit encouraged me to **humble** myself and reach out to my brother in love, asking for forgiveness. Do you think James struggled to accept who his older brother Jesus was, and with Jesus's teachings?

### James 4:1-10

James Chapter 4:1-10 is loaded with wisdom, grace, and truth to live a Christian life. For this devotional, I want to focus on verses 1-3 and 8-10.

### James 4:1-3

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with **wrong motives**, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

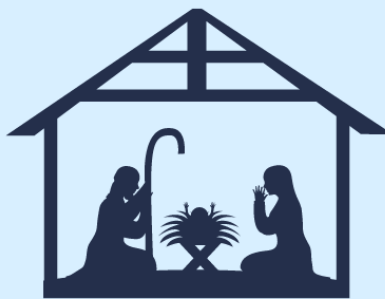
What are our individual **motives** when we ask God for something or an outcome? Do we sometimes seek God's approval for what we've already planned to do? Have we drawn close to God in thanksgiving and **humility** seeking his will for us? Like me, do you find true **humility** challenging? **Humility** begins with an attitude of trusting in God and not trusting in our own abilities, desires, and successes.

### James 4:8-10

“**Come near to God and he will come near to you.** Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded. Grieve, mourn, and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. **Humble** yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”

What does it mean to come near to God? How do we approach God as He is all-knowing, all powerful and possesses all goodness! He also desires to be in an intimate relationship with us! He sent his son, Jesus, from heaven to be with us, to be in relationship with us and to take our sin from us as he died on the cross. Approaching God daily with an attitude of **humility** may be a good way to draw closer to God this Advent season.

Immanuel...God is with us!



## **About the Authors**

Bruce and Nancy Jones moved to beautiful East Tennessee in June 2019 from a western Chicago suburb and joined Community Church at Tellico Village in November 2019. We were married and worshiped in an Episcopal Church until we joined Community Church at Tellico Village. Nancy worships God by singing in the Community Church Choir, she also enjoys singing in the Tellico Village Choir. Bruce enjoys playing golf and riding his road bicycle with friends.



# December 1<sup>st</sup>

Isaiah 9:6

## WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT THE SEASON

One of my favorite Christmas memories as a young child was when I got to be one of the three Wisemen in our church Christmas pageant. Not only was I a Wiseman but I carried the gift of gold. I was a very proud young boy as I walked down the center aisle to the manger. I often wonder if children today will have a chance to have similar memories since it seems far more difficult to find manger scenes among all the video games and other electronic devices being advertised as “the” gift for this Christmas.

While we are just approaching the second Sunday of Advent it seems as if Home Depot and Walmart have had their Christmas displays and decorations available for the past six or seven weeks. Halloween and Thanksgiving aren’t given much airtime anymore. Television ads urge us to buy early while supplies are available, and selections are good. Many of us can easily get caught up in all the hype and commercialization that has become the norm around the Christmas season.

As an adult what really makes Christmas special for you? Some people say it’s the gathering of family and friends. Others say it is the wonderful food and games played around the fireplace. Still others say it is the beautiful Christmas carols and stories that are read. Have you noticed that something magical happens to change everyone’s attitudes to be kind and courteous to each other at this time of the year. Wouldn’t it be a far better world if everyone had the “Christmas Spirit” every single day.

For me Christmas is special because on that day the world seems to stop. Very few businesses are open. The highways aren’t buzzing with traffic and even the Tellico Parkway is accessible from the neighborhood entrances. The stillness and peaceful tranquility of the day should help us to remember the true meaning and reason for the season:

*Isaiah 9-6*

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”*

### **About the Author**

My name is Don Lucas and I have been a member of CCTV since 2008. I grew up in a smalltown United Methodist Church in PA. I currently live in Coyote Hills neighborhood with my wife Lois and two dogs-Katie & Bitsy. We all love to travel in our travel trailer.



# December 2nd

## Psalm 124

May 1, 2020, we learned of our 28 year old son's death in a car accident. I felt the Holy Spirit walking with us during the weeks that followed. Only with the help of the Lord were we able to negotiate the path that lay ahead. Psalm 124:6-8 "Praise be to the Lord, who has not let us be torn by their teeth. We have escaped like a bird from the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord."

Moment to moment we were given the strength and guidance in making decisions concerning our son's body, his possessions, and his 125 lb. beloved dog, Laz. During the Covid-19 pandemic in California it was difficult to gather as a group, yet my son's boss opened her home to us and his co-workers to remember Spencer. Later, one of them adopted his dog, Laz. She contacted me at the same moment a hoped-for adoption fell through. Spencer loved his dog, and I wanted to honor him by finding a good place for him.

We asked our friends to pray for us and felt answered prayers as we found charities to take the entire contents of the apartment at a time when charities had stopped taking anything due to Covid restrictions. His friends came for 3 days to do the work of emptying his apartment. Pastor Steve recommended a mortuary that graciously walked us through tough decisions. Our son was an organ donor, which helped me feel it was appropriate to have his remains cremated. The Lord provided the support of friends and pastors who made contacts for us, we experienced the kindness of Spencer's work associates, and found people to care for our home and dog while we were away. Each of these acts came at times when we were feeling overwhelmed with our loss and sadness. God provided for us each time we had a need.

Our faith in our Lord and his promise to be reunited in heaven continues to sustain us. "We who are still alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" Thessalonians 4:17. I keep a copy of the poem "Death is Nothing at All" by Henry Scott-Holland to inspire hope and belief. I encourage you to look it up. May you find God's deliverance in your time of need.

### **About the Author**

Kaye Sandridge has lived in the Toqua neighborhood of Tellico Village since January 2019. She came from Dallas, Texas and has a Methodist background. Kaye spends time walking the neighborhood, traveling with her husband Jim, and avoiding cooking.





# December 3<sup>rd</sup>

## Isaiah 54:1-10

I admire the skill of woodworkers who perfect their craft of restoring broken down furniture. Many hours of patient, steadfast labor is involved in chiseling, sawing, scraping, nailing, sanding, polishing and buffing. Furniture that was discarded in dusty, drafty attics or basements became transformed, restored, and made new again. We serve a master-craftsman God who faithfully and lovingly pursues and restores his creation throughout all time, past, present and future. He seeks and saves all who are broken and lost.

When we read about our ancient brothers and sisters in [Isaiah 54:1-10](#) we see that God's love and judgment towards them was fierce and never ending. The overall message in these verses is one of comfort, hope and restoration. Time and time again God's people would turn away from him, integrate themselves into wicked, corrupt pagan societies and worship pagan gods. These actions deeply angered and grieved God. The prophet Isaiah warned the people of Israel that God would bring harsh judgment if they continued in their sin breaking God's holy covenant with them. God said: "I see your sins against me Israel, return to me and I will restore you unto myself and turn your mourning into singing."

Isaiah spoke metaphorically saying the nation of Israel was like a barren, childless woman full of shame and disgrace. In Ancient Biblical times unfruitful women of childbearing age were seen as a curse and could be rejected by their own husband and family. Families depended on children and offspring for survival especially when the parents became elderly. God said: "I hear your cries barren woman, I will restore you unto myself and change your mourning into singing." God's words were directed both to her and Israel, promising comfort and hope for future generations to come. They would be a nation blessed with many descendants, enlarging their tents, spreading abroad, possessing nations, and resettling cities that had been desolate.

God's restoration and deliverance of Israel was not because of their righteousness, but based upon God's faithfulness alone, in spite of their unfaithfulness. God would keep his holy covenant made with Noah that never again would the earth be destroyed with a flood. "Even though the mountains may be removed and the hills shaken, I will not remove my lovingkindness or allow my covenant of peace to be broken among my people." God's ultimate covenant would be sending his son Jesus Christ as a sacrificial lamb, the Savior of the world and end God's judgment once and for all.

Today we as a nation are also looking for God's restoration and deliverance. We mourn the fact that many of our Christian values and principals are being challenged. Fear, hatred, and apathy is encroaching on our cities, towns and doorsteps. God says: "I hear your cries my people and my church, I will restore you and your nation unto myself and change your mourning into singing." As we celebrate the coming Christ Child may we continue to unite our voices together singing: "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me."



## **About the Author**

My name is Debra Thompson and my husband Rick and I retired 8 years ago and relocated from Illinois to Tennessee and reside in the Kahite subdivision in Vonore. We have been members of the Community Church Tellico Village for 6 years. Rick sings in the church choir and Debbie is a teaching facilitator for the women's ministry. We have been blessed with one son Tyler who lives with his new wife Erica in Sarasota, Florida. Debbie enjoys walking, biking, swimming laps, crafts, reading and piano. Rick enjoys golf, competitive badminton and singing in the choir.



# December 4<sup>th</sup>

## Acts 13:16-25

Today's Bible passage, Acts 13:16-25 is an unusual one for the Advent season. As I was reading and studying, it talks about how God had a plan for the Israelites and that plan took many years. At one point in the passage it said it took about 450 years to fulfill.

Throughout the Bible, God has made many promises. For example, Abraham would be the Father of a great nation and yet at the time this promise was made, Abraham and his wife Sarah had no children. The promise of a Messiah who would be born to deliver the people of Israel is yet another promise. God did not only promise; he had a plan.

Does God's plan always take a long time? While one is waiting on God to answer prayer or put into action his promise, it may seem like a long time. There are several things to remember about God's plan. First, it will always be perfect since he is all knowing. Second, God's ways are not our ways and third, God's timing for the plan is given at the right time.

When moving to Tellico Village, it took over two years. We had to sell our home first and then find the right house to meet our needs. In that time I grew very weary and tired that things just were not moving along as fast as I would like. When it did come together, it was perfect. We sold our home and got the house we dreamed. After we moved, I would sit looking out at the lake apologizing to God for all the bad thoughts I had while we were waiting.

What does this have to do with God's plan for us? Everything! While we are waiting it forces us not only to wait, but to trust him. All God asks of us is to have faith and hope. It is that hope, knowing that all will be right, no matter what is going on in our lives. We do not have to worry, fret or be anxious. Peace can then take place. As we go through this Advent season let us remember God's plan for us is in place and it is a wonderful plan!

Peace to you.

### **About the Author**

Jeannine Wolf and her husband Steve moved to Tellico Village in 2013 from Morristown, TN and became members of CCTV soon after. Jeannine comes from a diversified religious background. Her mother was Catholic, her father was Methodist, her stepfather was from a Mennonite/ Amish background and her husband was Lutheran. Her husband and her have raised puppies for Canine Companions. Fun fact about Jeannine, she has a twin brother.



# December 5<sup>th</sup>

## Isaiah 40:1-11

I love Advent music. I have fond memories of singing and ringing Advent music in the church where I grew up. Every October, our choir director would hold a choir “advance” where we would begin rehearsing the music for the upcoming season. (It was called an “advance” because in the words of our choir director, “Our choirs never retreat!”) Some of the pieces were familiar favorites and some were new and unfamiliar, but the anthems were always beautiful and filled with deep meaning and melodic harmonies. Rehearsing the music helped me to prepare for the Advent season amidst the hullabaloo of all the holiday happenings.

Isaiah 40:1-11 serves as the basis for many of the anthems and hymns we sing during Advent, and throughout the year. We sing of “comfort” from the Lord, leveling mountains and valleys to make way for the coming of our Lord, and many hymns remind us that the Lord is our Shepherd.

Part of the text of Isaiah 40:1-11 tells us to prepare the way for the Lord:

*“In the wilderness prepare  
the way for the Lord;  
make straight in the desert  
a highway for our God.*

*Every valley shall be raised up,  
every mountain and hill made low;  
the rough ground shall become level,  
the rugged places a plain.*

Advent is all about preparation. When waiting for the arrival of someone we love, we always prepare. The word “advent” is derived from the Latin “adventus” which means “coming.” The Oxford Dictionary defines advent as “the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event.” Many of us spend the advent season in preparation - decorating our homes for the Christmas season, shopping for the gifts we exchange with others, cooking and cleaning in preparation for the arrival of friends and family. Just as we prepare our homes during Advent, we must also take the time to prepare our hearts and minds for the arrival of our Lord. We don’t need to build a literal highway or level the valleys and the mountains - God has done that for us if we simply take the time to open our hearts to the presence of our Lord and remember it is He whom we celebrate at Christmas. Let us remember that without the birth of our Lord Jesus, there would be no Advent. This Advent season, let us allow the Lord to restore our hearts and minds so that we can fully prepare for the greatest gift of all - the birth of our Lord Jesus. This year, take time to prepare your heart for the Lord as you read your daily devotionals, attend the CCTV Christmas concert, attend Advent services, or simply listen to the beautiful music of the season.



## **About the Author**

Judy Heard has been attending CCTV for nearly 8 years and is an active member of the bell choir. She transferred from a Lutheran church in Alexandria, VA where she was a member of the choral and bell choirs there. She spends time volunteering and boating in the summer. She and her husband, Jonathan, also keep very busy with their new puppy, Willie.



# December 6<sup>th</sup>

## Isaiah 11:1-10

### **PROMISES MADE; PROMISES KEPT**

Are you growing weary of reading about current events of the world we live in? It seems like there is a never-ending storyline of misery, crime, war, and general chaos in our world, with no end in sight. It is so easy to just stop reading the newspapers, isn't it? And can you really trust anything that you read on the internet these days? Yet, a news source is available to all of us that gives us a view of what is to come, and ways that we can prepare ourselves for that heavenly time. In Isaiah 11, v.1-10, the Bible describes a world that changes when Jesus makes his arrival. Instead of war, peace reigns; instead of hate, love takes over in our hearts; instead of dishonesty and deception, truthfulness and fairness become our approach; instead of bias and disrespect, we adhere to mutual understanding and acceptance; and instead of chaos, we find order.

Yes, our world is messy; but God promises in Isaiah that by accepting Jesus as our Savior, we will begin to see our world more as a kingdom of God's, rather than of man's. Thus, we should begin to live our lives according to His ways using compassion, fairness, mercy, peace, and understanding as our guideposts. The Gospel gives us a glimmer of hope in His promise kept. Therefore, believe. Let God work in your hearts, and let it change the way you operate in this world of ours. That is certainly Good News!

*Lord, let this be a day that I fully accept in my heart Your Good News. Help me to live my life today with Jesus as my guide, and the center of my life here on earth. In His name I pray, Amen.*

### **About the Authors**

John and Cheryl Nametz moved to Tellico Village in May of 2021 from Spring Lake located in western Michigan. They grew up Methodist and Lutheran and then were going to a Presbyterian Church for many years before moving to Tennessee. John was an optometrist and Cheryl was a teacher for the visually impaired. Their hobbies are boating, golf, reading and hiking. They have two daughters that live in Cincinnati with their grandchildren.



# December 7<sup>th</sup>

## Romans 15:4-13

As we know, the apostle Paul was one of the apostles chosen to spread the word and teachings of Jesus Christ. He used personal visits and letters to spread the word and especially the “rules” of Christianity’s now New Testament, which centered less on existing rules, and more on matters of the heart. This was inherently a difficult task, especially convincing those of different religious and value systems, as well as those with no prior religion and value systems, to accept this relatively “new” religion!

This particular segment of his letter to the Romans stresses unification, like-mindedness toward one another, and was especially directed toward including the Gentiles in Rome. The goal was primarily to unite the Gentiles with the Jewish people with both instructed together to follow Jesus’ teachings.

(We note that Paul was definitely “all in” on delivering the message, regardless of the consequences, exhibiting his usual loyalty and tenacity that makes him my favorite apostle!)

But could his message apply to our world today?

Unfortunately, when it comes to like-mindedness and unity for individuals, it seems too easy for us today to come off track, and allow ourselves to be stuck in our own desires, which may not be in total alignment with those of our neighbors’, and therefore a door opens for disagreement, which can, and many times does, become an ever increasing disagreement when a bit of anger sneaks its way into the mix! This same issue gets greatly multiplied when nations differ and push to get their own ways....not only with religious differences, but all other differences as well!

*How* should *we* react to this message of unification and acceptance, where we are encouraged to unify and glorify God together, for His mercy, and with our hope? What are we to do in response as individuals? I have struggled a bit with this task, as I’m sure some of you have also.

First, we are greatly blessed to belong to a multi-denominational church in “the bible belt”, where we respect and emphasize Jesus’ teachings on all-inclusiveness as important guidelines. Many of us were also blessed to have a church background, which makes it easier for us to understand Jesus’ teaching on love and unity for all.

However, looking back a few decades, it would appear that we also have been taking parts of God and His value systems out of our great nation. Clearly, we were founded on God’s value systems only, and have prospered, and now we seem to be turning away...So, what can/should we do about this?

We need to: Believe strongly in Jesus, follow His teachings, serve as good examples, pray for the future of our nation and spread the gospel whenever we have the opportunity to do so!

(We need to do this with Paul’s tenacity, and God’s help!)



May we then leave all else up to God and rest in joy and comfort in our own peaceful hope we have been promised!

### **About the Author**

Ken Kinzler moved to the village in 2007 and became a member of the Community Church shortly after that after nearly finishing a three year lay ministry certification and finished it here. He lives in the Toqua neighborhood right off the golf course. In his free time, he enjoys watching the golfers, and he makes the nail crosses that you'll see displayed throughout the church.





# December 8<sup>th</sup>

## 1 Samuel 2:1-8

When tasked with writing an Advent devotional, we were excited about the opportunity to share our thoughts...and (gulp) wisdom. Guess what?! *Hanna's Prayer* in 1 Samuel 2:1-8 sounded straightforward and easy to understand, but we wondered how to apply her marvelous attitude to our daily lives.

*Hanna's Prayer* is a beautiful song in which she affirms her love, trust and devotion to her Lord God. She declares that there is no one holy like the Lord. Her God is her rock. She tells of God's protection and elevation of the underdog, and the destruction and humbling of those who live in the excesses of the worldly powers of success, wealth and fame.

"The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength.

Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry are hungry no more. She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has many sons pines away." (Verse 4)

If one looks back to Samuel 1, he will learn that Hannah had once been filled with despair and longing because she was barren. But because of her strong faith and repeated prayers, God rewarded her with the conception and birth of a son she named Samuel. Hanna expresses her gratitude by dedicating Samuel to a life in God's service. It's important that we realize the supreme source of Hanna's joy is not in the birth of her child but in the God who has answered her prayer.

Like Hannah, we should not be hesitant to pray for what we want, while realizing that life and death, prosperity and adversity, are determined by the sovereign power of God rather than by our own desires, merits or actions.

How many times has God answered our prayers and given us what we wish for? And then do we quickly forget to thank Him, thinking we deserved His benevolence as our right? Let us try to remember that God hears all our prayers. He may not give you what you ask for, but remember He is always standing there beside you. He will never forsake you. He is your rock!

### About the Authors

Marce Strickland is a Registered Nurse from Pennsylvania and Georgia, moving here in 1997. Bob Kryter was raised in Indiana and moved to Tellico Village in 2000 after working as a Nuclear Engineer in Oak Ridge for 30 years. They both joined the church in 2000. As widowers, Bob and Marce met at a grief support group. They believed that God still had a purpose for them. They married in 2014 and brought GriefShare to CCTV in 2019. They live at Premier Residences.



# December 9<sup>th</sup>

## Isaiah 41:14-20

Whenever something seems like it's not going right, God steps in and helps out. I have always said, "God took care of that!" It never fails that HE just works things out! HE is the one I talk to when I need to discuss things.

When we were building a cabin in the mountains of Big Bear Lake in Southern California, we were there with our 5 and 7 year old boys for the Christmas Holiday.

"Santa" was driving up on the weekend and bringing a truck load of gifts and 2 bikes! They had had a snowstorm, and our street was unpassable. I called the locals and told them that "Santa" was on his way up the hill and needed to get up our street before Christmas Eve! Sure enough, that afternoon, a truck came up the street with a snowplow, and both our boys were so excited and waving at the driver through the window! I said quietly, God did that ~ Thank you God!

God has provided for our family many times; may he provide for you and yours this Advent Season!

### **About the Author**

Nancy Barrett grew up in a suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She had an older brother and a younger sister. She met Raphord Barrett when he was an Engineer and had just been hired by Westinghouse Electric Corporation. He grew up in Greenwood Mississippi. They married in November 1960. He took a position in Southern California, so we took our first-born son with us to La Habra, California. Our second son was born there in 1964.

They were transferred to The San Francisco Peninsula for a while, and then back to Southern California, and spent the rest of their time in Laguna Niguel before retiring and moved to Tennessee. He taught Jr. and Sr. high Sunday School, and they both were leaders in Scouts. He with the older boys, and she with the Cub Scouts. His Mother lived in Mississippi, so when visiting there, they would look for places to retire in the Southeast. On one of those trips, they discovered Tellico Village.

Nancy developed breast cancer while they were in CA, so they stayed in California for five years following her treatment. They bought a lot in Tellico Village in 2000. In 2001 they moved into a rental house in Vonore, TN, and began plans to build a home in Kahite.

Right away, they began to shop for churches. The first one they visited was the Tellico Village Community Church. Marty Singley and this friendly church stole their hearts and they never looked for another one!



# December 10<sup>th</sup>

## Psalm 146:5-10

Psalm 146:5 exclaims: *“Blessed are those whose HELP is the God of Jacob, whose HOPE is in the Lord their God.”*

Recently, my precious baby sister and best friend since her birth, 59 years ago, was writhing in excruciating pain in the hospital, fighting pneumonia on top of multiple myeloma; we learned a few days later that tumors had broken ribs and bones in her back. I spent one day at the hospital with my sister and her family, but that evening, my immune-compromised husband tested positive with COVID. I confined myself to caring for him at home, and so was unable to be with my sister and her family in the hospital for the next few days.

On the second day of confinement, I escaped to my back porch, overlooking the lake and Smoky Mountains, for a few minutes of fresh air and time with God. As I was sitting down, God dropped a heavy rain shower.... surrounded by bright sunshine as far as I could see! I asked God what He was telling me with this amazing show of His creation. I thought of my sister, and how she was in a health storm but surrounded by the sunshine of God’s love. Then I thought... who can I share this with? Immediately, a family member and a dear friend texted me. When I described the display God shared with me, they each said: “God loves you so much. He is telling you He is there for you.”

The next evening, the family decided it was in my sister’s best interest to let her go home to God. I sobbed for several hours, asking God to take her out of her pain as soon as possible, and for God’s help for me to give her up, knowing it was the best for her and that the experience would somehow glorify God. She passed less than 24 hours later, answering our prayers for quick relief from pain.

From that moment on, I have not cried, even in the numerous moments each day that I have been reminded of times spent with her. Because of my HOPE in the Lord, my Prince of Peace has given me a great gift: a piece of His peace. And Facebook posts by family and friends testifying that she was a Proverbs 31 woman glorified God. I join the psalmist in exclaiming “Praise the Lord.”

During this Advent season and beyond, I invite you to join me in placing your hope in God, for everything that happens in our journey from this life to our eternal life, so that you, too, may receive the gift of peace from your Prince of Peace.

### **About the Author**

Donna Barger is a native Knoxvilleian but has also lived in other parts of TN and TX and has lived in Tellico Village since 2007. She was raised Baptist, but also lived Methodist for a time; she has been a part of CCTV since she moved to the Village. Donna enjoys time in the Word, playing handbells, and boating and Tennessee tailgating with husband Jim.



# December 11<sup>th</sup>

## 2 Peter 3:1-9

Do you ever get frustrated, or even mad at the TV these days? I know I sure do. Especially around election time. Many politicians will say or do anything to get your vote, whether it's **true** or not. They will stoop to the lowest measures to discredit or humiliate their opponent. Forget the issues, or what their plan of action is to change things, no, it's easier to rile voters up and **hate** the opponent than it is to have a campaign of **real substance**. Dirty politics has become the norm. It just makes me sick to my stomach, and my blood starts boiling. Where is the **truth** anymore? Can it still be found? How can we change this? Maybe my perspective is too altruistic. Then I'm reminder of the passage in the Bible found in **2 Peter 2 1-9**. It speaks of **false teachers** among us, who will introduce **destructive heresies**, even **denying the Lord**. Then too there are those who claim to be acting on the Lord's behalf, but couldn't be further from His Way. These people make me even angrier!

The verses go on to say how these people will **exploit you** with their **greed**. Many others will follow in these shameful ways and bring the way of **truth** into disrepute. There's that word **truth** again. It's a word that jumped out at me from this passage. Unfortunately, it seems to be in short supply these days. Are you one to seek and uphold the truth, or do you share false stories about people behind their back? I'm sure we all do from time to time, because we are all sinners. We'd like to think all our thoughts and deeds are correct, but sometimes we fall short.

How do we punish those who spread lies, and seek to divide us? Personally, I'd like to see swift retribution now, and the bad people sent to jail, or punished in other ways. A good example is the false prophet, Alex Jones. He will pay most, if not all, of his worldly possessions for spreading such hurtful lies about the victims and families of the Sandy Hook massacre. How cruel can a person be, how low can one stoop? Hadn't those families suffered enough with the loss of their loved ones, only to have to listen to his vile and hateful words? There is no punishment on earth fit for his crime. Justice will be the Lord's. I always need to remember; the Lord is much more **patient** than I am.

Again, back to the verses, it says just as He condemned the angels who sinned to hell, as He brought the floods to wipe out the ungodly, condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to flames, so too there will be a day of judgement for the unrighteous, when they will be punished. It's not my role to judge and prosecute, I need to trust in the Lord that he will ultimately have the last word.

Personally, I have been the victim of false lies being told behind my back. I became so riled up, I was immediately thinking of retribution, perhaps the threat of a lawsuit for slander. Saner minds (Cheri's, my wife) prevailed, and after I took time to reflect, I was able to give my anger to God, and let Him guide me in the right way to respond. With His help, I've been able to control my anger, He's provided me with a longer fuse.



How do we react to these verses in Peter? I'd like to challenge everyone to think long and hard about them. Do we ourselves tell lies? Do we pass on ugly rumors about each other? Do we accept things at face value, or do we challenge those trying to lead us down the wrong path? My challenge to us all: always speak the truth. Always seek the truth. Always challenge ideas that seem to feed on our base instincts, whether they be prejudices, fears, or greed. Follow the Lord's path and we will be rewarded.

In God's name I pray: *Heavenly Father, thank you for all the blessings and grace you have bestowed on us. Thank you for our families, our friends, all those around us, and for those already in Your presence that we are that we are reminded of in this holiday season, where we celebrate your birth as Jesus. Thank you for all the beauties you have created on this earth, to help us recognize your power and majesty. Please give us the strength to follow the path you have provided for us. Please continue to bless us with Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace, not only in this Advent season but all year round. Help us to both recognize, and to tell the Truth. All these things I pray, in the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.*

### **About the Author**

My name is Steve Tompkins and my wife and I have been members of CCTV for about a year now, where I serve as a Stephen Minister, ironic since that is also my name. We first attended online during the Covid years before joining. Cheri and I live in the Chatuga neighborhood of Tellico Village a little over two and a half years now, loving every minute here. We love boating, kayaking, swimming, playing games with all our new friends, and so many other activities. I love pickleball, but it doesn't love me. I spent over a month recuperating from a twisted knee. Orthopedic Surgeons around here love the game! Personally, I take great pleasure playing my 12-string acoustic guitar. Music helps me relax, transforms me into my most serene state, and helps me transcend into tranquility.



# December 12<sup>th</sup>

## *1 Samuel Chapters 1 and 2*

Hannah's Story begins in Samuel 1 with the statement that God had closed her womb. She made a vow saying, "O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

Samuel 2:1 continues the story with Hannah's prophetic prayer beginning on a note of joy and Thanksgiving for God's gift of a son, an answer to her prayers. She speaks, "my heart rejoices in the Lord, my horn is lifted high, symbolizing strength. Hannah keeps her vow and in thanksgiving, gives Samuel to the Lord to serve Him in the Temple all the days of his life." Amazing Love, Amazing Sacrifice!

I relate to this story for I also have a son that I prayed for, my only child. Early in my pregnancy, the doctor could not hear a heartbeat and expressed concerns that the fetus was not viable. So, I prayed, pleading with the Lord for this child. God answered our prayers with the gift of our Life, a wonderful healthy son who grew to be a loving Christian man who touches the lives of many.

I think Hannah's words express the thankfulness of all who know and love the Lord. "There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God." Amazing Love, Amazing Sacrifice just like the Father who so loved the world that He gave his only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16

How will you express your thanksgiving for the gift of Jesus?

In service, in loving others, in giving of self, in caring for the sick, in forgiving others, in helping the elderly, in encouragement, in supporting the church, in singing His praises, in teaching His Word? Thank you, Lord, for all you have done for us, show us how we can express our thankfulness.

### **About the Author**

My name is Terry Wilson, and my husband is Eddie Wilson. We live in the Tommotley neighborhood. My husband grew up in the Methodist faith and I came from a Baptist background. We came to CCTV during Covid and have been members for 2 years. I belong to a wonderful Community Church Bible study that meets every Thursday. I am a member of the Women's Ministry Team and I serve on the Pastor's Prayer Team. CCTV is our forever church.

I am an ordinary woman who knows an extraordinary God. He is my Abba Father and He loves me and I love Him.



# December 13<sup>th</sup>

## Luke 3:1-18

When we were asked if we would consider writing a devotional, we both said “We aren’t spiritual writers! We are very logical, technical thinkers.” So, in our logical, technical way we both read the passage. Ginger went to several different Bibles.

This text is about John the Baptist preaching and baptizing. After reading the passage, John Tierney’s first words were, “This is an Easter passage.” Ginger remembered a time when she was editor of a tiny Episcopal church’s newsletter. We were trying to come up with a theme for Advent. Ginger suggested, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” (Luke 3:4). Priest Joanne smiled knowingly and said, “Ginger, that is an Easter passage.” **Hmmm!**

There is much in these few verses that speak to us regarding preparing for the kingdom of heaven:

- Sharing
- Taking only what is owed
- Do not extort money with false threats and accusations
- Be satisfied with your wages

The biggest theme of this passage is **Preparing the Way of the Lord.** John the Baptist says, “I baptize you with water; but one more powerful than I is coming. I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Luke 3:16)

As we reflect on our time of Advent, what is it all about? We are preparing for the birth of the child who will become our Lord and Savior. We are “Preparing the Way of the Lord.” We are at the beginning of the glorious journey to Easter. It starts with preparing for Christmas.

May God bless you this day and all days. Amen

### About the Authors

John and Ginger Tierney, live in the Kahite neighborhood of Tellico Village. We moved here in 2019 and have been attending TVCC for all of that time. While we have lived many places in the U.S., we are most recently from 22 years in Kenosha, WI where we attended a very small Episcopal church in Burlington, WI.





# December 14<sup>th</sup>

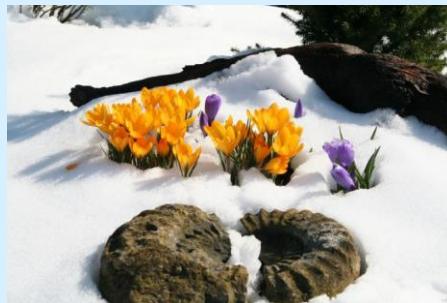
## Isaiah 35:1-10

When reading Isaiah 35:1-10 the first two verses captured me because they contain such a vivid image.

*“The desert and the parched land will be glad;  
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.  
Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom;  
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.”*

Out of a dry season goodness is coming! I adore flowers and was intrigued why a crocus of all things was mentioned here.

So, I did some research. The crocus is generally the first flower to bloom after winter. You can see it peaking up through the snow in the picture below.



It is a small flower, only growing between 1 and 3 inches tall. It is known for its fragrance and the rare spice saffron is made from this flower.

As I thought about the crocus along with Advent the visual makes sense. Long before the world has even changed from winter these flowers bloom. They offer the first food to bumblebees and other pollinators. They declare spring is coming, even in the midst of snow.

Jesus is like a crocus. He's the first sign of the in-breaking of God's kin-dom. Everything in our world still looks like winter. But the coming birth of Jesus signals change. It won't always be this dark winter. He, like the crocus, is our sustenance. As we wait for the birth of Christ again this year we can rejoice because the coming of Christ is just the beginning of all things being made new!

### **About the Author**

Pastor Jennifer Brown currently serves as the Senior Pastor of University Baptist Church in Hattiesburg, MS. She previously served as an associate pastor at CCTV. When not at work you can find her reading on her front porch, playing with her Goldendoodle Linus, or cheering on Braves baseball with her husband John-Mark.





# December 15<sup>th</sup>

## James 5:7-10

James, the brother of Jesus, provides practical advice on how to live a Christian life.

In chapter 5, verses 7-10, he encourages his readers to be patient with each other, and he uses the example of a farmer patiently waiting for the rains to come for his crops to be bountiful. The farmer has no control but faithfully waits for God to bring the needed rains.

Patience takes faith and hope that things will be made right in the future. James also tells them to not grumble at each other. Today there are situations other than poverty and oppression that test our patience and cause us to grumble.

How about the new mom whose toddler throws a fit in the supermarket? Or that bumper to bumper traffic on the interstate when you're late for an appointment? Grumbling and blaming others won't change the situation. We must take a deep breath, ask for patience, and have faith that it will all turn out OK. Instead of grumbling, go to the Lord in prayer!

The toddler will grow up and learn how to control his temper; the traffic will eventually start flowing as it should; flowers will bloom after spring rains; the Habitat house will be completed and house a deserving family; the service dog will complete his training and give aid to a needy veteran.

If we have patience, there will be good endings to our testy situations, but the good endings will not come because we worry or grumble. We may often be in a hurry, but God is not.

The good endings will indeed come, but in God's time.

Be patient.

### **About the Author**

Ann Snell and her husband, Don, joined Community Church in 2019 while they were building their house in Tanasi Shores. They maintain a dual membership with Germantown United Methodist Church in Germantown, TN. If she's not playing golf or pickleball, you can find Ann in her studio, painting and watching the wildlife in the woods.



# December 16<sup>th</sup>

## Psalm 42

As a small child, I learned this song in Bible School, and you may know it too. It goes like this:

I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart.

(Then the leader would say, "Where") And we would shout it out - down in my heart!

As a child, I did have the joy of Christ down in my heart. I had a happy childhood, surrounded by lots of folks who loved and cared for me. As I matured, I still had the joy, but life came along. Sometimes there are disappointments, misunderstandings, and discouragement. When those things happen, it is easy to overlook the joy of life and focus on the problems.

That seems to be what is happening in the verses of Psalm 42. The psalmist is longing for God, for a personal relationship with Him. The psalmist had enjoyed that relationship in the past, but life must have come along with all the issues associated with living in this world. And then he remembers and asks - why are you downcast? Your hope is in the Lord! He remembers, and that's what we must do, too, when we become downcast.

As mature children of God, it is easy to focus on our problems. But, when we remember how God has blessed us in the past, the blessings far outweigh the problems. We've reached the age where body parts don't work like they once did, skin is sagging and wrinkling, and sometimes the future looks dim. When we remember that our hope is in the Lord, then our joy is restored.

There are many verses to the little song I reference above, and there is one that didn't mean much to me as a child. It was just a tongue twister that I could barely lisp out:

I have the peace that passes understanding, down in my heart.

I certainly understand it now! I am so grateful for the peace of God that is present, even in the midst of my problems, and the hope that I find in Christ Jesus. As we enjoy this Advent season together, I pray that you, too, have the peace and hope that the gift of the Christ child brings to us.

### **About the Author**

My name is Julie Best, and my husband Roger and I live in the Toqua community, and we have been members of this church for 15 years. We come from the Quaker tradition. I spend many hours each day either knitting shawls for our Prayer Shawl Ministry or cutting up fabric and sewing it back together to make quilts for various charitable groups.



# December 17<sup>th</sup>

## *Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19*

Our devotion asks the reader to begin by slowly examining Psalm 80, picking key words and expressions. In my reading I noted that there is a plea to ‘Save us’, sorrow as expressed by a ‘cup of tears’, overtones of violence in asking God to destroy the enemies of Israel. My recollection is that not only some of the Psalms, but also other Old Testament passages plead for God to save Israel from her enemies, usually by destroying them.

It is my strong feeling that such hopes and language are in stark contrast to very clearly stated messages that begin in Genesis and are repeated throughout the Old Testament. The very act of creation is God’s love made manifest. It is not a love of some and condemnation of others. We are told that God created everything good and to be good. God is always and everywhere present in the creation. So if the Psalmist is asking God to stop sleeping, who is confused? If God loves his creation, why would He destroy any part of it and violate his own commandment, ‘Thou Shall Not Kill’? Destruction is not an act of love.

Some useful thinking has been provided by Martin Luther King, Jr. He defined agape love as willingness to serve without the desire for reciprocation, willingness to suffer without the desire for retaliation, and willingness to reconcile without the desire for domination.

History clearly shows that violence produces a very strong and long memory in those who have been harmed. When will violence, war, and racial hatred end? One answer is that it will be when God’s children overcome evil and hatred by engaging in an agape lifestyle.

### **About the Author**

Jack Fellers joined the church in May of 2019. He retired from being a professor of engineering at University of Tennessee and has been in the village since 2002. He was born and raised in Ohio but has lived in Tennessee for 52 years. He’s a Stephen Minister and loves to share his gift with the community.



# December 18<sup>th</sup>

## Matthew 1:1-17

If you're anything like me, you might have a tendency to skip the genealogies when they come up in scripture. They're long, they're tedious, and pretty often, I can't quite figure out who half the people are. My thought process when coming to them usually goes a little something like this: *I'm sure there's something interesting in here, but could it possibly be more interesting than the stories of Jesus teaching or healing?* Nonetheless, a close inspection of the text and the names that are included in the genealogy reveal something incredibly important about who God is in Christ. Before we get to that, though, let's answer this question: what in the world is Matthew trying to do in the first place by including this?

This genealogy finds itself in scripture because Matthew, throughout his entire Gospel, is incredibly concerned with connecting Jesus to the Jewish faith and the Jewish story. Because of this, there are a few names in this family tree that you might recognize – names like Abraham, Isaac, or Joseph. You may notice that within these words are a direct connection to King David and David's son Solomon. You might even recognize the name Amos, the prophet. Matthew desperately wants the reader to understand that Jesus is a part of the God of Israel's plan for the world. Matthew is telling us that Jesus isn't some new thing from some new God, but instead the promise that was made to the world all throughout the writings of the Jewish people – but that's not all that is being done here.

It's also worth mentioning that there are five women named in this genealogy, which would be a practice totally unheard of in ancient times. Lineage, to the ancient Jewish people, was passed down from father to son, and all other questions of mothers and daughters and even children out of wedlock were to be entirely ignored – but not to Matthew. Matthew makes a point to include Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba (the wife of Uriah), and Mary within the genealogy. And apart from Mary, these are women who, arguably through no fault of their own, had somewhat tainted reputations. Tamar was a prostitute, Rahab pretended to be a prostitute, Ruth was a very sexually forward widow, and Bathsheba was raped and was painted as an adulterer. And it's not like the men in the story were saints either – Abraham abandoned his son that he had out of wedlock, Jacob was a trickster, and David's sins against God and Bathsheba were many – and that's just to name a few. So why should any of this matter to us?

As you read this, it's almost Christmas. You've survived Thanksgiving, and many of you will find yourselves around a table Christmas evening with loved ones who *know* your story. Christmas can be a wonderful time filled with joy and light, but it can also dredge up the feelings of pain that come with a divorce, a death, an estranged child or sibling, the stories of an abusive parent, or even our own shortcomings. The pain that presents itself in this way is real and difficult, but I hope that in the midst of it, you find comfort in the family history of Jesus. Not even Christ found himself born into a pristine family without its flaws. Christ's family history is filled with wrongdoing, cheating, murder,



prostitution, children out of wedlock, estranged family members, and all of the pain in remembering that comes with those things. And yet, *it is out of darkness, that we see a great light.*

Sisters and brothers, Christ is at work redeeming you and your story. My prayer for each of us is that you might find hope in Christ's broken and pain filled family story this advent season so that you might see that Christ alongside you in *all things*. Amen.

### **About the Author**

Pastor Shawn is an Orlando, FL native who found himself in Knoxville about a year and a half ago when he moved out this way to be with his wife as she finished school. He's a United Methodist clergyperson serving here at the Community Church as the pastoral resident. In his free time, he loves to play board games with his friends, wrestle his dog, and watch movies with his wife, Olivia.



# December 19<sup>th</sup>

## Matthew 3:1-12

I often joke, "God gives us choices and we chose to live in Tellico Village. There must be a reason for us to be here, together, at this time and place, and we'd better get it right". Many times, I have wondered what that reason could be for me.

When Fred and I first came to Tellico Village I began to notice so many fascinating connections between individuals; two men working in an American compound in Saudi Arabia noticed Corvettes going to work each day, saying they hoped to buy similar ones once they returned to the States only to encounter those same cars and the men who drove them right here in the Village another friend learning that their children's babysitter from Chicago had also moved to Tellico. I could go on, but you get the idea. "Seven degrees of separation" have now become much fewer.

As I read through the scripture passage for today's devotional, I asked myself, "what I could possibly say?" Then it struck me: John was truly a "Man on a Mission". He certainly exhibited bizarre behavior, living in the wilderness, eating locusts and wild honey, clothed in a camel hair garment. He lived out his message of repentance and faith, through his actions as well as his words, all in preparation for the immediate coming of Christ.

I don't know what my "mission" is supposed to be. But if I ask my heart, it just might remind me of the time my Meals on Wheels recipient introduced me to her daughter as "the lady that always gives me a hug". I will always remember that day.

There are so many other ways to "touch" someone's life and no matter our circumstances, we can find one that will fit into our lives. I'm glad for that because even though I love wild honey, I don't think I could eat locusts! As for bizarre behavior, just don't ask my husband...

### **About the Author**

My name is Teresa Womack and my husband and I have been here in Tellico Village for more than 20 years, living in the Toqua neighborhood. I come from a Methodist background and he from the Church of Christ but we have been members of the Church since we moved here.



# December 20<sup>th</sup>

*Matthew 11:2-11*

*“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”*

The prophet John the Baptist uttered these words as he sat in prison knowing his days on this earth were few. He had taken a vow before God, he had preached repentance to the people of Israel in the wilderness, he had baptized Christ in the Jordan river. But here in this text we see him wrestle with something we have all experienced: doubt.

John, just like the rest of Israel, was hopeful for the Messiah to come and restore the nation back to its former glory. The Messiah was to be a royal priestly figure, one who would overthrow the Roman occupation and sit upon David’s throne. John was obedient to his calling in preparing the way for the Messiah, yet here we see him wonder “is he really the one we have waited for?”

Just as Israel sought their Messiah, so do we today. We look to the next pill, the next relationship, the next investment, all in hopes that it will ease the suffering and longing we feel deep in our soul, still looking for the next one that will satisfy. Every day we echo John’s question, “Is Jesus enough?”

It would be easy for Jesus to have simply answered yes. He could have tried to meet John’s doubt (and ours) with facts and theological points, but instead He offers a different type of evidence in verse 5: “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.” The greatest evidence of Christ’s deity and supremacy cannot be found in any textbook, but instead is found in lives changed by His coming and His Gospel.

The hope of the manger isn’t that Christ can make everything right in our lives. It isn’t that we will be blessed and have good fortune. The hope of the manger is that God loves us so much that He came to the manger and now offers us new life. One greater than we can ever imagine. A life where He shares our burdens, our pains, our insecurities, our sin, and our sickness, and in return gives sight, healing, security, and life.

As we look to the manger this week, may our brokenness, insecurities, sins, and doubts find healing in Emmanuel, God with Us.

## **About the Author**

Devin Phillips currently serves as an Associate Pastor at the Community Church at Tellico Village. Having served in youth and college ministries earlier in his career, Devin has been on staff at CCTV for 6 years. He enjoys golfing, all things University of Tennessee, coaching his son’s basketball team, and attending his daughters’ ballet recitals.



# December 21<sup>st</sup>

## Luke 1:46-50

This is one of the most beautiful bits of scripture. Its well-known in all traditions. Much like Ave Maria many can't say all the words but they are aware of the sentiment.

Mary is overwhelmed with joy as she meets up with her favorite relative and they recognize in that moment that they have been chosen by God for a special purpose.

I hope you can relate to Mary.

She was an average girl, living a typical life. She was happily betrothed to a nice man who would support her. She had a secure future and all the necessities covered. AND THEN, she met an angel and everything changed. Her life was mixed up, jumbled... and beautiful. She would have a child who would change everything – as they definitely do!

I imagine many of us feel average. Like Mary, we have a nice home, a circle of friends, dinner on the table – all the necessities covered. AND THEN, somehow God touches us and our lives become mixed up, jumbled...and beautiful!

I hope you have had that experience. That's when your soul sings. That's when you know our God of mercy and grace. That's when you can't help but cry out, sing or witness to the wonder of God being with us. That's when you are so blessed that you can't help but share your specific gift with others.

I hope YOU can relate to Mary. I hope you will tell others about your experience during this advent time where we share the gifts of Holy Spirit as we all await the celebration of birth – just like Mary.

### **About the Author**

My name is Tricia Waldron, and I moved from Vermont to Tellico Village approximately 2 years ago and brought my part-time remote job with me. I work with the mailing dept of a family-owned print shop, preparing and sorting customers mailing lists. I keep up with the rules and regulations of the US Postal Service by serving on the Executive Board for the VT Postal Customer Council. My husband John and I have two adult children who live in Colorado and Vermont. John enjoys retirement and year-round golf.

It was difficult to leave my church in Vermont. The Methodists are having a tough time and need voices like mine. I was Lay Leader at my small church and served as VT District Lay Leader for the New England Conference of the United Methodist Church. In choosing a new church, I looked for diversity in worship. Happily, I found CCTV where every month we use a different communion liturgy, this is just what I need!





# December 22<sup>nd</sup>

## *Luke 1:50-55*

In a previous passage, we read that Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel who told her that she would give birth to a son, even though she was a virgin, AND that this son would “reign over Jacob’s descendants forever in a kingdom that would never end.”

It seems to us that this must have been a lot for a teenage girl to digest.

Having been told by the angel that her relative, Elizabeth, would also be having a son even in her advanced age, it’s understandable that Mary would visit Elizabeth for what would become a three month stay. Surely, the two of them had a lot to talk about.

But the thing we find truly remarkable is that, upon reaching Elizabeth, Mary spoke of God’s goodness and mercy, not of any concerns she might have had over her current situation. For the next half dozen verses or so, Mary glorifies the Lord, speaking of the great things He has done for her. She speaks of His mighty deeds, strength enough to bring down mighty rulers but compassion enough to uplift the humble. “He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.” She then ends this passage the same way she started it; by speaking of God’s mercy.

In examining our reaction to big news or problems, our first thought is usually not to worship God, but to start worrying about how to deal with a new set of circumstances. This Advent is a good time to reexamine our priorities and take a fresh look at how we deal with life, remembering that all we have comes from God, a merciful God who deserves our praise.

### **About the Authors**

Mark and Sue Shillingburg moved to Tellico Village from New Hampshire six years ago to escape harsh winters and an even harsher cost of living. They joined Community Church right after moving in. Over the years, they've belonged to Catholic, Lutheran, and Congregational churches, but have spent most of their time as United Methodists. They enjoy spending time with their friends, most of whom they met here at church.



# December 23<sup>rd</sup>

## Matthew 1:23

*The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means “God with us”).*

Selecting the name for a child is an extremely important decision. The process can take weeks and months as parents pour over lists of names, review family traditions, and practice hearing the name spoken from childhood to adult. The name assigned to a child also has power. How will the name impact his or her identity and character?

The naming of my 2 children did not follow this pattern. My daughter’s name, Nelly, was chosen by her father, after a special student in his high school English class at Flandreau Indian School in South Dakota. A slight change to the spelling was the only distinction.

Nicholas Justin was the name I selected for our son, inspired by the youngster I often cared for while a college student. His professor parents were raising a charming, affectionate, and obedient son who earned a place in my heart.

These children are now in their 40’s and demonstrating aspects of their names. I’ve since learned that Nelly means “light”. The positive attitude and engaging personality mark her character while, Nicholas has been “victorious” over addiction and is only a few credits short of an associate’s degree.

Let’s return to Matthew, who is quoting the prophet Isaiah as he describes the birth of the long-awaited Messiah. This becomes the first recorded gender reveal announcement!

Isaiah 7 allows us to step into a conversation between King Ahaz and the prophet Isaiah. Ahaz, King of Judah, and his people, are consumed with anxiety over the possibility of being overthrown by the united forces of Israel and Syria, who have aligned with the purpose of taking over Jerusalem and replacing Ahaz with their own king. Ahaz and his advisors are contemplating an ill-advised alliance with Assyria to withstand the attack. The Lord sends a message through the prophet, stating emphatically that the invasion will never happen! And reminding Ahaz to stand firm in his faith in God as the only strategy needed for success. In typical human style, Ahaz continues to doubt. Once again Isaiah is sent with a message from the Lord. Ahaz is to ask the Lord for a sign of confirmation. He is advised to make it as difficult as he wants, “...as high as heaven or as deep as the place of the dead.” (Isaiah 7: 11)

But Ahaz is frozen in his state of anxiety. In exasperation, Isaiah is quoted in Isaiah 7:14 as saying, “*All right then, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’).*” (NLT)



God with us. This message of encouragement is resoundingly appropriate for today. The anticipation of Christmas season brings a myriad of emotions, not all of them positive. Loneliness. Sadness. Depression. Reminders of past Christmases spent with a spouse, sibling or child who will not be part of this year's gathering. Anxiety over travel safety. Anticipation of old conflicts that arise when families gather.

God with us. This message of encouragement is appropriate for every day, for every decision, and every situation encountered. May the name Immanuel bring comfort and anticipation of God's presence in all life situations.

Below you will meet Terrian Bass Woods, an American Christian singer/songwriter from Memphis, TN. Allow her interpretation of "God with us" resonate in your mind and heart.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJbtWOSYjBM>

### **About the Author**

Bonnie Ingraham, a 10-year resident, was raised in a Baptist church in Minnesota. Her experience worshiping in a variety of denominations prepared her for our interdenominational church. She taught Youth Sunday School and has served on Council in several capacities.



# December 24<sup>th</sup>

## Titus 2:11-14

These verses of God's Word come from a tiny letter in the New Testament written by Paul to a fellow Christian leader. It acknowledges the struggle believers face living in "this evil world." Many scripture readings and Christmas carols of this season speak of the darkness of the world and how the birth of Christ will bring peace to all. Today's world does seem to be spiraling ever quickly and deeper into chaos and darkness. Some are cheering on the destruction, others shaking our heads in bewilderment, and many, including some Christian leaders, just "going along to get along." Still, we sing carols about peace, and we look desperately for moments of peace within the noise of the holidays. Sometimes, Christmas Eve offers that moment of respite, but it can also create an unsettled anxiety as we are reminded of loss, regret, or fears for the future. We struggle to find the hope we believe is promised. We haven't seen "peace on earth" happen.

We must remember that the birth of Christ is not the beginning of the story, or the end of it. It is somewhere in the middle of an epic battle between two kingdoms; The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan. It is a battle that has been going on since before creation and it will go on for literally only God knows how much longer. If we believe what Jesus says, there is a spiritual battle and we do have an enemy.

Christ's birth though, is a major turning point in the battle. As author John Eldredge writes, "from God's perspective, the birth of Christ is the beginning of a rescue mission. From Satan's perspective, it is an invasion." The life, death and resurrection of Christ completely changes the battle lines as the "Temple of God" is moved from an institution and geographical place to the heart of the believer. We are the temple of God. Christ lives in us. The Kingdom of God now has a beachhead in the world. With that in mind, Titus 2 reads differently for me: "The grace of God has been revealed, salvation has come, turn from Godless living, live in this evil world but with wisdom, righteousness and devotion to God, look forward with hope..." It is like instructions from headquarters, an encouragement to keep going.

This Christmas Eve, I'm looking for the silent night - the peace on earth. I'm pausing to reflect on the baby, the manger, and the star. But I'm also realizing that I'm not just celebrating a sweet, little Jesus-child. The push back against the darkness is not just something that happened with the birth of Christ, or something God alone is doing today. Christ lives in me even as I live in this dark world. I want to do my part. I want God's Kingdom to increase and God's light to shine through me to push against the darkness. Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin, not just with me, but with Christ through me.



## **About the Author**

John Orr was born and raised in Nashville, Tennessee where he began singing at an early age in school and church choirs. Beginning in grade school, he was a professional studio vocalist, recording children's music for various Nashville music publishers.

Dr. Orr studied choral music and percussion at William Jewell College in Liberty, MO where he earned a Bachelor of Science in Music Theory, Composition and Church Music. He received a Master of Music from Southern Seminary in Louisville, KY and the Doctor of Musical Arts in Choral Conducting from the University of Alabama with research on the effects of aging on the amateur singing voice.

An active church musician, Orr has also been involved in community music making through experiences such as directing a school of fine arts in Montgomery Alabama to conducting a home-school youth choir in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. As a graduate student at Alabama, Orr served as Assistant Director for the Tuscaloosa Community Singers and created a University Chamber Singers ensemble. He has created Fine Arts concert series at three separate churches and currently directs the concert series at the Community Church in Tellico Village where he has served as Pastor of Music and Worship since 2010. Dr. Orr has written three units of children's choir curriculum for Celebrating Grace publishing. Dr. Orr is also currently the Artistic Director/Conductor of the Knoxville Choral Society and Knoxville Chamber Chorale.



# December 25<sup>th</sup>

*Luke 2:1-20*

***“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and placed him in a manger because there was no room for them in the Inn”***

Today we celebrate the birth of our Messiah! It is on this special day that we experience the joy of family, favorite dishes, and opening the long-awaited gifts that have lingered beneath our trees for weeks. Christmas day is always exciting, yet in the midst of it all, I hope that we will pause and reflect on the beautiful picture revealed to us in scripture. The tender moments of a miraculous birth and how it changed our world forever.

One of my favorite Christmas memories occurred the year my sister Lisa received a Polaroid camera as a present. Most of you will remember these and how very cool they were! With the push of a button, like a high-tech vending machine, out came a photograph. Although it began as a lifeless gray square, it slowly began to take shape with the addition of color and familiar scenes or faces. I still recall the anticipation, wondering what masterpiece would be revealed.

Pictures tell a story. They are a time capsule of our memories, and although we do not have a physical picture of what that first Christmas looked like, we are blessed with scriptures that give us a beautiful description of those wonder-filled moments for Mary and Joseph. The moments that lived in their memories for years... an inn, a stable, swaddling clothes, a manger and a son...God's son. Memories that were joyfully passed on so that we too could join in the excitement of that blessed evening.

Today, as you celebrate with family and friends, take some pictures! Don't forget to revel in the joy of the moment! And remember the once gray backdrop that burst into full color as God revealed himself to us through the birth of Jesus the Christ.

***Joy to the world, the Lord has come! Merry Christmas!***

## **About the Author**

Dr. Stephen B. Prevatte is the Senior Pastor of the Community Church at Tellico Village. Since 2016 Pastor Steve and his wife, Kelli have resided in Tellico Village. The Prevattes have two adult children. Caleb Prevatte, and his wife Alaina, live in Charlotte. Anna Katherine Loper, and her husband Nickolas reside in nearby Chattanooga. Steve enjoys traveling, spending time in the woods hiking, and hunting in the fall. If there is a UNC basketball or football game on you will find Steve in front of the television rooting passionately for his beloved Tarheels!

