

A close-up photograph of a wooden manger, likely made of bamboo or light-colored wood, filled with dry straw. A white cloth is draped over the straw, partially covering the manger's interior. The background is a soft, out-of-focus natural setting with warm, golden light, suggesting a peaceful, rural environment. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

PREPARE

the way for THE

LORD

2022 Advent Devotional
by Dr. David Case
Faith Memorial Church

From the tragedy of the Fall through the tracings of the Old Testament, Dr. David Case masterfully leads us in fresh Advent anticipation. Although the Christ of promise and prophecy was sent to our world over two millennia ago, followers of Jesus live in the present-tense joy of Advent fulfilled and Christ to return. The grand story of Christ the Lord who came to seek and to save lost souls never grows old for it is the foundation of our eternal hope wherein we exclaim “Come, Lord Jesus.”

Jonathan W. Morgan, Pastor

Cover design by Debbie Zenoby

THIS IS NOT What God Intended!

Genesis 3:15

December 1

Our world today is not what God intended when He brought it forth by the word of His mouth. The sequence is plain: *He said...and it was.* God declared the perfection of His work when He said, *...it was very good.* (Genesis 1:31). It is obvious, something has gone terribly wrong since the early days of Genesis one. We don't have to read far to see the problem. Genesis three contains the events of temptation and ultimate Fall of humankind. In this chapter, we read of God's judgment on the woman, the man, even the earth. Sin has brought judgment on all of God's created world. Today, we live in a sin-cursed, broken world. And again, it is not the kind of world that God intended for humankind.

In the midst of the pronouncement of judgment (Genesis 3:16-19), there is a word of grace. The first good news (gospel) is heard at Genesis 3:15. *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.*

The antagonism between people and snakes is used to symbolize the outcome of the titanic struggle between God and the evil one, a struggle played in the hearts and history of mankind. The offspring of the woman would eventually crush the serpent's head, a promise fulfilled in Christ's victory over Satan on the old rugged cross outside Jerusalem one spring morning.

The Seed and the Sacrifice

Genesis 22:8, 18

December 2

The book of Genesis covers a great deal of human history. Chapters 1:1-11:26 provide information on Primeval History. Chapters 11:27-50:26 provide information concerning Patriarchal History. The life of Abraham is the first patriarch mentioned (Genesis 11:27-25:11).

The call for Abraham to begin a life of faith begins in chapter twelve. There, God promises Abraham that he will become a great nation (v 12:2). This promise includes numerical numbers. One problem, Sarah is barren; she had no child (v 11:30). Abraham is called to believe a promise from God that up until now has been impossible.

Finally, at the age of one hundred, God gave to Abraham and Sarah a son and his name was Isaac. Life went on from there and everything seemed normal, until. Until we read chapter twenty-two where God instructed Abraham and Isaac to travel on towards the land of Moriah and Isaac calls Abraham's attention to the fact, they have all the necessary items for sacrifice but one – where is the lamb for the burnt offering? Abraham responds that God will provide for Himself the lamb (Genesis 22:8). Satisfied that Abraham does indeed plan on killing Isaac, God does provide a ram caught in the thicket as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:13).

The angel of the Lord tells Abraham that in your seed (descendants) all nations shall be blessed (Genesis 22:18). Matthew's genealogy reminds us that Jesus was a *son of Abraham* (Matthew 1:1) and He came to give His life a ransom for many.

Christ Comes to His Rightful Kingdom

Genesis 49:10

December 3

Often called the *Blessing of Jacob*, this chapter contains the longest poem in Genesis. Its various blessings were intended not only for Jacob's twelve sons but also for the tribes that descended from them. To set the scene, Jacob is dying. Before he does die, he calls each of his twelve sons, individually, to his bedside for the purpose of telling them what will befall them in the days to come (v. 49:1).

Jacob begins with his first-born son, Reuben. It was the custom for the first-born to receive special blessings, being the first-born. Reuben is rejected due to moral failure (Genesis 35:22). Simeon and Levi are next in line. They were also rejected due to character flaws (Genesis 49:6-7).

The fourth-born son is Judah. The account of his blessing is recorded in Genesis 49:8-12. He receives Jacob's special blessing. He will be accepted by his brothers and become the leading tribe of the twelve sons. The tribe of Judah will become the tribe that rules over the children of Israel. This verse was initially fulfilled in David, when he became Israel's second king. After the death of King Solomon, the kingdom was divided into the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. The king for the Southern Kingdom also came from the tribe of Judah. On his death bed, Jacob saw that this would occur *until Shiloh comes*.

Though difficult to translate, this verse has been traditionally understood as Messianic, and was ultimately fulfilled in Christ, *the Lion of the tribe of Judah*.

A Prophet Like Me

Deuteronomy 18:15-19

December 4

The life of Moses is divided into three segments, each covering a period of forty years. The first segment covers Moses living in Egypt. The second segment records his life on the far side of the desert with his father-in-law, Jethro. The third segment of Moses' life is that part of his life that is recorded in Exodus through Deuteronomy. The last book of the Pentateuch contains three sermons given by Moses to the children of Israel just before his death.

Moses was to lead the people through the desert to the Promise Land. On one occasion, he led them to Mount Horeb to hear directly from God. For the people, it was a terrifying experience. The people requested that Moses take the message from God and deliver it to them (Exodus 20:19). This became the standard method of communication: God-Moses-People.

But now that Moses is to leave them, he says that another spokesman will take his place, and then another will be necessary for the next generation. This is, therefore, a collective reference to the prophets who will follow. As such, it is also the basis for Messianic expectation.

The preaching of John the Baptist gained wide attention. The Pharisees, on one occasion, asked John if he was the Prophet (John 1:21, 25). He emphatically denied being the Prophet. However, the words of Moses received a unique fulfillment in Jesus (John 1:21, 25, 45; 5:46; 6:14; 7:40; Acts 3:22-26; 7:37).

Today I Have Begotten You

Psalm 2

December 5

Psalm 2 is known as a Royal Psalm. It was originally composed for the coronation of Davidic kings, in light of the Lord's covenant with David (2 Samuel 7). Later, prophetic words of judgment against the house of David and announcements of God's future redemption of His people through an exalted royal son of David highlighted the messianic import of the psalm.

As the second half of a two-part introduction to the Book of Psalms, this second psalm proclaims the blessedness of all who acknowledge the lordship of God and His anointed and those who *take refuge in Him* (v.12).

From apostolic times onwards, the anointed King whom the nations reject has been *the Anointed* – in Hebrew, the Messiah, in Greek, the Christ, as is made clear when the New Testament quotes these verses (Acts 4:25-26; 13:33; Hebrews 1:5, 5:5).

Preparing the Way

Psalm 85:8-13

December 6

An analysis of the structure of this psalm makes for an interesting study. The psalm contains two main divisions: the prayer (v. 1-7) and a reassuring word (v. 8-13). Each major division is further divided into two subsections. Our interest is in the second main division. Verses 8-13. The first subsection speaks of mercies **soon** to come (v. 8-9), and the assurance that the prayer will be heard (v. 10-13).

The assurance that this prayer will be heard is based on the following words: lovingkindness, truth, righteousness and peace (v. 10), and righteousness (v.13). These words are expressions of God's favor towards His people. A special literary device called **personification** is employed by the psalmist. By definition, personification takes an abstract concept, like truth, and gives it human-like qualities. Notice at verse ten, lovingkindness and truth have **met** together. Righteousness and peace have **kissed**. The vivid portrayal of their meeting and embracing offers one of the most beautiful images in all Scripture of God's gracious dealings with His covenant people.

Verse thirteen tells us righteousness will **go before Him**. Acting as either herald or guide, righteousness leads the way and marks the course of God's engagement in His people's behalf.

Lovingkindness, truth, righteousness and peace, combined in a **Person** will provide the assurance that the prayer of Psalm 85 will be heard. We know who this **Person** will be as a Christian liturgical usage has often employed this psalm in the Christmas season.

A Priest Like Melchizedek

Psalm 110

December 7

This psalm contains two oracles concerning the Messianic King-Priest. This psalm frequently refers to Christ in the New Testament. Christians have generally held that this is the most directly *prophetic* of all the psalms. If so, David speaking prophetically, composed a coronation psalm for his great future Son, of whom the prophets did not speak until later.

The first oracle (v.1-3) has two main ideas. First, David begins in a very interesting manner: *The Lord says to my Lord*. The second Lord may be translated, *my sovereign*, indicated this Lord is superior to David. A paraphrase of the beginning may well be: *God, the Father, says to God, the Son*. The second key thought in this first oracle is the command in verse one, *sit at My right hand*. This represents the place of honor beside a king; thus, he is made second in authority to God Himself. New Testament references to Jesus' exaltation to this position are many.

The key idea of the second oracle (v. 4-7) comes from verse four, *You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek*. We first meet Melchizedek in Genesis, chapter fourteen, where we read of his conversation with Abraham. Melchizedek is king of Salem and a priest of God Most High. David and his royal sons, as chief representatives of the rule of God, performed many worship-focused activities but they could not engage in the specific priestly functions assigned to the Aaronic priesthood. This oracle makes the Son of David a Priest-King, a higher order of priesthood. What this means for Christ's priesthood is the main theme of Hebrews seven.

God is With Us

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-24, 28-29

December 8

With this psalm the conclusion of the third division of the Book of Psalms (Psalms 73-89) is noted. The author of this psalm is Ethan the Ezrahite. This psalm assumes the reality that ever since David was chosen to be Israel's king, there would always be a descendant of David that would serve as king over Israel. This is known as the Davidic Covenant established with David by God Himself as recorded in 2 Samuel, chapter seven. For hundreds of years this has been acknowledged by Israel.

The Davidic dynasty has come to an end. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, has invaded Jerusalem. Previously, he had taken into exile Jehoiachin, king of Judah in 597 BC. But the unthinkable has happened. The Babylonian army captured Jerusalem and carried many of the citizens of Jerusalem into exile. For those living in exile a basic question had to be addressed: How does one look at God's favor when it ends in humiliation and defeat? Psalm 89 seeks to provide the answer to this question.

Our title for today's reading is the first clue to the answer: God is with us! Even in exile, God has not forsaken His people. The second clue to an answer to this question is to remind Israel that God cannot go back on His word. The Davidic Covenant is still true. Someone greater than David will come and God will establish His seed forever. As a fulfillment of John 12:34, the eternal reign of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this promise.

The Everlasting Kingdom of the Son of Man

Daniel 7:1-14

December 9

Today's reading is from one of the major Prophets, the book of Daniel. This book divides into two major divisions: Biographical – mainly the life of Daniel, chapters 1-6; and Four Prophetical Visions, chapters 7-12. Today, our attention is drawn to the first vision.

The vision of chapter seven is identical to Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream recorded in Daniel, chapter two. The dream consisted of a great statue: head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, and legs of iron. The vision in chapter seven involved four beasts: a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a dreadful-looking beast. The four parts of the statue and the four beasts represent the same thing. They are four great world powers that are currently on the world's stage or will soon appear on stage. The Babylonian Empire, the Medo-Persia Empire, The Greece Empire, and the Roman Empire.

The vision of chapter seven takes place first on earth and then the scene changes to the heavenly realm. On earth, four world powers rule with cruel contempt for others, with beast-like intentions. Each world power will have their day of rule but ultimately, they will be overcome by another world power and pass from the place of leadership.

The scene now changes to the heavenly realm (Daniel 7:9-14). The Son of Man is given dominion, glory and a kingdom which will not be destroyed. This is the first reference to the Messiah as the Son of Man.

A Righteous Branch of David

Jeremiah 33:14-16

December 10

This text represents one of the most important Messianic passages in Jeremiah. It is echoed in Jeremiah 23:5-6. The entire book of Jeremiah makes for an interesting study. Usually, it is considered one of the most negative books in the Old Testament. The man, Jeremiah, is sometimes pictured as an angry old man proclaiming judgment and doom on the people of Jerusalem. However, chapters 30-33:26 do provide a ray of hope. This material is called Jeremiah's *book of consolation*, as the section depicts the ultimate restoration of both Israel and Judah.

From within a book of judgment, comes a ray of hope – days are coming! Better days ahead. From the Davidic line, the Messiah will arise. He will be known as *a righteous Branch*. The Messiah, unlike any previous descendants of David, would be the ideal King. He would sum up in Himself all the finest qualities of the best rulers, and infinitely more.

God's people will be reunited and restored. The deliverance will be both spiritual and physical. Jesus the Messiah would bestow on His people the abundant blessings that come from the hands of a King who does *justice and righteousness*.

The Lord is Coming!

Isaiah 2:1-5

December 11

Traditionally, the book of Isaiah is divided into two parts: Part One is the Book of Judgment (chapters 1-39) and Part Two is the Book of Comfort (chapters 40-66). Our interest today is in Part One. The book begins with the fact of God's people being in rebellion and God has had enough of their actions. Judgment is coming. But judgment will not be the last word concerning Judah and Jerusalem. The prophet spoke of what God would do *in the last days*.

In that day, a complete reversal of activity will occur. The mountain of the Lord will be established. Both Jews and Gentiles will come to Jerusalem in these last days. It will be a time of peace. Weapons of war will be turned into useful tools used in agriculture.

The reason for this change of events is the arrival of a **Person**. The peace described in this passage has been inaugurated through the coming of Christ and the preaching of the gospel, and will be consummated at the return of Christ. The desire to go up to Jerusalem is so that *He may teach us*, and that we may walk *in His paths*, and people will have that assurance that *He will judge and render decisions for many peoples*. Isaiah may have a message of judgment for Judah now, but better days are coming – The Lord is coming!

A Great Light has Dawned

Isaiah 9:1-2

December 12

Chapter eight of Isaiah makes reference to the Assyrian invasion of 722 BC. The northern ten tribes of Israel were taken into captivity, never to be heard from again. As northern Israel surveys their land, all they see is distress, darkness, gloom and darkness.

But gloom does not last forever! While the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali suffered greatly when the Assyrian, Tiglath-pileser III, attacked in 734 and 732 (2 Kings 15:29), God has a *later on* moment for them. God has a plan for these people – He will make them *glorious*. People who live on the other side of the Jordan in Galilee of the Gentiles, will see a great light. Those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them.

The reversal of circumstances was fulfilled when Jesus ministered in Capernaum – near the major highway from Egypt to Damascus, called the *way of the sea* (Matthew 4:13-15). Jesus spent most of His public ministry *in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali*.

Mark's gospel (1:21ff) identified Capernaum as Peter's hometown. Peter's house became Jesus' base of operations during His extended ministry in Galilee (Mark 2:1; 9:33).

Reigning on David's Throne

Isaiah 9:6-7

December 13

The Person who will fulfill the promises of verses 1-2 of this chapter will come as a child – a royal son, a son of David. Each of the throne names of the Messiah consists of two elements. However, these titles were not the normal Old Testament personal names. **Counselor** points to the Messiah as king (Micah 4:9) who determines upon and carries out a program of action. As **Wonderful Counselor**, the coming of the Son of David will carry out a royal program that will cause all the world to marvel. **Mighty God** – His divine power as a warrior is now stressed. **Eternal Father** – He will be an enduring, compassionate provider and protector. **Prince of Peace** – His rule will bring wholeness and well-being to individuals and to society.

In spite of the sins of kings like Ahaz (chapter 7), Christ will be a descendant of David who will rule in righteousness forever.

God With Us

Isaiah 7:1-16

December 14

Today's reading contains what many regard as the primary Old Testament quote of a messianic prophesy (Isaiah 7:14). Before looking at the text, a question must be considered: Does a messianic prophesy have a single fulfillment or is a double fulfillment possible? Our position is the second possibility: a double fulfillment is needed or Isaiah's message to King Ahaz will have no meaning. The first fulfillment of a promised child is fulfilled with a son being born to Isaiah (Isaiah 8:1-3). The ultimate fulfillment is in the promised birth of a son being born to Mary (Matthew 1:23).

The context of chapter seven is the Syro-Ephraimite War (735/734 BC). Rezin and Pekah invaded Jerusalem. Ahaz, king of Judah, was terrified (v. 2). The prophet, Isaiah, was sent to Ahaz to encourage the king and increase his faith in God. To indicate God was on the side of Ahaz, Isaiah told the king to ask anything of God as a sign that God was with him and he would withstand the invasion of the two kings. The king refused Isaiah's request. He failed to ask God to do something to indicate that God was on the king's side.

Instead, God gave a sign to Ahaz. *Behold a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel.* Within a couple of years, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken (v. 16). A young maiden (Hebrew *almah*) will give birth to a son (Isaiah 8:1-3). The virgin, Mary, is the ultimate fulfillment and she named her son, God With Us.

The Peace of the Messiah

Isaiah 11:6-10

December 15

Isaiah is very clear – the coming of the Messiah will be a time of **peace**. The coming of Jesus Christ into our world was the fulfillment of every Old Testament promise. The second advent will consummate these great promises. We live in between the two advents of Christ. We live in the Messianic age!

The peace and safety of the Messianic age are reflected in the fact that little children will be unharmed as they play with formerly ferocious animals. Such conditions are a description of the **future** consummation of the Messianic kingdom.

However, *that day* is assured. See for example Isaiah 10:20, 27; 11:10 as reference is made to the day of victory and joy, the positive aspect of the *day of the Lord*. Israel is restored and the people praise God as they gather around the root of Jesse.

*I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet, the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men!*

*I thought as now this day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rung so long the unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good will to men!*

*And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong, and mocks the song,
Of peace on earth, good will to men!"*

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
For Wrong shall fail, and Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men!"*

The Coming of Christ

Ezekiel 34:1-10

December 16

Today's reading relates Ezekiel's prophecy against the shepherds of Israel. Who specifically did Ezekiel have in mind? The prophet is speaking against those responsible for providing leadership, especially the kings and their officials, but also the prophets and priests.

Ezekiel had earlier singled out the princes, priests and prophets for special rebuke (chapter 22). To call a king a shepherd was common throughout the ancient Near East. As Psalm 78:70-71 reminds us, David rose from shepherd to shepherd-king.

What specifically did Ezekiel mention that made the shepherds guilty? Verse three mentions the actions of these individuals: *You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep* – all legitimate rewards for shepherds **without** feeding the flock. Their crime was that they did not care for the flock!

The tenth verse reports God's judgment on the shepherds of Israel. God is against them; he demands they return His sheep to Him; they will no longer be shepherds. God will deliver His flock. But how will this be accomplished? His sheep need a shepherd. God, in sending His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world will give His flock *the Good Shepherd* (John 10:11). Everything the Old Testament shepherds failed to do, His Son will achieve, and more.

The Suffering Servant

Isaiah 53:1-6

December 17

The coming Messiah and the messianic age that He will introduce, will be a time of peace. It will be a time of restoration. It will be a time of great joy and fulfillment. Today's reading tells the rest of the story. The promised Messiah was also to be the Suffering Servant. These two concepts seem to contradict each other. During His lifetime, Jesus was hesitant to announce His messiahship because of the wrong messianic assumptions surrounding the Jewish thinking about the promised messiah. Isaiah exclaimed, *Who has believed our message?*

With the exception of birth events (Matthew and Luke) and an incident in the Temple at age twelve, we know very little of Jesus' early years. The Messiah would grow from the *stem of Jessie*. His beginnings would be humble. Christ had nothing of the bearing or trappings of royalty.

Christ was despised and forsaken, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. The world misjudged what was happening in the life of Christ. They thought He was smitten of God and afflicted. But that was not the case at all – **our** griefs He Himself bore. He was pierced through for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

This is Isaiah's message! The good news about salvation, given by the prophets to Israel and the nations. Can you believe it?

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Micah 5:1-5

December 18

In the early chapters of Matthew's Gospel (2:1-6), he relates the visit to Jerusalem of visitors from the East. They represented a cast of men specializing in astronomy, astrology, and natural science. While studying the heavens, they had encountered a strange star, not an ordinary star, planet, or comet. They concluded it was a special star, signifying a special occurrence, perhaps the birth of someone special and it seemed to settle over Jerusalem. Upon arriving in Jerusalem, they asked, *Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?* The present king was greatly troubled with this question and gathered chief priests and scribes to find where this child was born. Their answer was provided by a prophecy given seven centuries earlier.

The prophet, Micah, prophesied sometime between 750 and 685 BC. This prophecy contains both messages of judgment and words of hope. As Micah understands the future, gloom will turn to triumph. It will take a special birth for this to happen!

Micah identifies the place of the birth of Christ as Bethlehem Ephrathah. A small village; too little to be among the clans of Judah! This village was to be distinguished from the town of the same name about seven miles northwest of Nazareth.

The Messiah will shepherd and rule in the strength and majesty of God the Father. Not only will He bring peace but He Himself will be our peace.

The Spirit Will Rest Upon Him

Isaiah 11:1-3

December 19

Isaiah, chapter ten, predicts the Assyrian invasion of Judah. This invasion all but destroyed Judah, but it was the Babylonian exile that brought the kingdom of Judah to an end in 586 BC. But God's Word tells us that judgment against His people doesn't last forever.

Chapter eleven begins with the hopeful word, *then*. Isaiah reminds his people that the same God who is a God of judgment is also the God of restoration. It doesn't appear to be very impressive at first. Isaiah proclaimed that *a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse*. Not very impressive. He had earlier stated that a son would be born to a virgin. Restoration will begin with the small child. How do we understand the success of this *branch* that will grow and bear fruit?

One way to begin to understand the restoration process is to recall who is this branch. He is *God with us*. He is the second member of the Holy Trinity. He is also the God-Man. He is fully God and fully man. But Isaiah provides yet another explanation for the success of the Branch.

The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him (Isaiah 11:2-3). The Messiah will be empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will endow Him with the wisdom to undertake wise purposes and with the power to carry them out. From the most humble of beginnings will come God's promised restoration for all nations.

The Messiah: King and Priest

Zechariah 6:12-13

December 20

Jewish life revolved around the Temple. As the children of Israel migrated from Egypt to the Promise Land, God dwelt in the Tabernacle, in the midst of the encamped Israelites. Now, in the Promise Land, things began to change. First, Israel wanted an earthly king, like the nations around them. Next, King David asked this question: *Is it right that the king should live in a house of cedar while God lives in a tent?* (2 Samuel 7). David's son, Solomon, was given the privilege of building the first Temple for Israel. It was destroyed in the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. With the return from exile, the desire to rebuild the Temple became a prime concern. However, materials were scarce, opposition was great, and after a while, interest began to wane in the rebuilding project. The chief purpose of Zechariah was to rebuke the people of Judah and to encourage and motivate them to complete the rebuilding of the Temple.

This brings us to today's reading. The prophet tells his reader that in the future *a man whose name is Branch* will come to His people (v. 12). It is He who will build the temple of the Lord. Now the Second Temple was ultimately rebuilt around 516 BC. It was destroyed with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD by the Romans. The man, whose name is Branch, will build God's ultimate Temple. He will occupy two positions. He will be King; He will also serve as a Priest. Such a combination was not normally possible in Israel. But the two offices and functions would be united in the one person of the Messiah (Psalms 110 and Hebrews 7).

God's Spirit is Upon Me

Isaiah 61:1-4

December 21

Today's reading comes from part two of Isaiah, the Book of Comfort. While the opening of the chapter may refer to Isaiah in a limited sense, it is clearly recognized that the main figure intended is the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

We know this is due to the fact that Jesus refers to this passage at two important points in His early ministry. The first reference is found in Matthew 11:5. John the Baptist had been put in prison by King Herod. John sent some of his disciples to ask Jesus a very important question: *Are you the coming One or should we look for another?* Jesus responded by relating what He had been doing: preaching to the poor, healing the sick, raising the dead, preaching the good news of the kingdom. In other words, the first three verses of today's reading are being fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus.

The second reference of Isaiah 61 is found in Luke's Gospel (Luke 4:16-21). After about a year's ministry, Jesus returned to his hometown of Nazareth. As was his custom, on the Sabbath, He entered the synagogue. He stood and read from Isaiah 61:1-2. He sat down and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. He then told the audience this: *Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing!* They were amazed. God's Spirit was upon Him.

God's Promise Concerning His Servant

Isaiah 42:1-4
December 22

Today's reading introduces the reader to the first of four *servant songs* from Isaiah in which the servant is the Messiah: Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12. The first *servant song* is quoted in part in Matthew 12:18-21 with reference to Christ. He is *Israel* in its ideal form (Isaiah 49:3) The nation was to be a kingdom of priests, but the Messiah would be the high priest who would atone for the sins of the world.

The Messiah is called My Servant. This is royal terminology! In the ancient Near East, *servant* meant something like *trusted envoy* or *confidential representative*. The Servant will bring forth justice to the nations as a righteous world order will be established.

The Servant will bring peace. He will mend broken lives. The Servant will be a new Moses (Deut. 18:15-18; Acts 3:21-23, 26).

The Lord is in Your Midst

Zephaniah 3:14-21

December 23

Zephaniah prophesied during the early years of King Josiah's reign (640-627 BC). The main theme of his prophecy is the coming of the day of the Lord, when God will severely punish the nations, including apostate, Judah. He portrays the stark horror of that ordeal with the same graphic imagery found elsewhere in the prophets. But he also makes it clear that God will yet be merciful toward His people. Like many other prophets, he ends his pronouncements of doom on the positive note of Judah's restoration by Yahweh, *King of Israel*.

Today's reading relates to this time of restoration. How is it possible that judgment can be replaced by restoration? The prophet gives the answer: *The Lord is in your midst!* (v 15 and 17). You will recall that with the birth of Jesus Christ, the messianic age was fulfilled. It will be totally consummated by His second advent. The messianic age is that period of time between the two advents of Christ.

With the birth of Jesus, and the beginning of the messianic age, the horrors of judgment are replaced with shouts of joy and triumph. The Lord in your midst will be a warrior who saved (v. 17).

Who Can Endure the Day of His Coming

Malachi 3:1-4

December 24

Today's reading comes from the last book of the Old Testament. It was his prophetic word from around 433 BC. Following this prophetic word, Israel would experience 400 silent years prior to the birth of Jesus Christ. The essence of this paragraph is this: *The Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple!* But the question comes: *Who can endure the day of His coming?* Again, *who can stand when He appears?*

Malachi announces the Lord's coming to complete God's work in history, especially the work he outlines in the rest of his book. His word is fulfilled in the accomplishments of the Messiah. When the Lord comes, it will be to purify (v. 3) and judge (v. 5). Those who desire the Lord's coming must know that clean hands and a pure heart are required. The Lord's work to purify and judge will be likened to a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. And so, the question remains: *Who can endure the day of His coming?*

While this *coming day* will be a day of judgment, mercy will also be evident. A messenger will come and he will clear the way before Me (v. 1). This is fulfilled in John the Baptist. His ministry was one of mercy. John's ministry was to prepare Israel for the coming of their Lord.

Here is Your God

Isaiah 40:1-11

December 25

With today's reading, Isaiah begins the *Book of Comfort*. Isaiah has God speaking words of comfort and kindness (Isaiah 40-66) rather than words of judgment (Isaiah 1-39). Why? Because Israel's warfare has ended, her iniquity has been removed, her punishment was enough. It's time to turn the page in Israel's history.

Three voices are mentioned (v 3, 6, 9), each showing how the comfort of verse one will come about. The New Testament links the voice of verse three with John the Baptist (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23). The message of this first voice is to *clear the way for the Lord*. The language of verses three and four has in view the ancient Near Eastern custom of sending representatives ahead to prepare the way for the visit of a monarch. The picture is that of preparing a processional highway for the Lord's coming to Jerusalem. For John, repentance is necessary to prepare the way for Christ.

The second voice appears to be that of Isaiah himself. He is instructed to *call out* the word of our God that stands forever! The things and people are like grass that withers and fades. But God's word stands. Even the power of Assyria and Babylon would soon vanish.

The third voice appears to be Israel herself. She is to proclaim the good news that *here is your God*. The Lord is returning to Jerusalem: the return from exile; the first advent; the second coming of Christ.