

**GLORY TO GOD AND  
PEACE ON EARTH**

**SLÁVA NA VÝSOSTECH  
BOHU A NA ZEMI POKOJ**



**ADVENT DEVOTIONS 2024**

**ADVENTNÍ ZASTAVENÍ 2024**

## ADVENT 2024 PREFACE

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Shepherds are tending their sheep. They stare into the sky in awe at God's messengers speaking to them...

### **GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, PEACE ON EARTH to ALL PEOPLE!**

God's messengers proclaim the birth of Christ, the hope of the World! The Shepherds follow the angels' directions and find The Infant, Jesus, in the manger, Joseph and Mary.

### **The Angels proclaim that Christ will bring peace as we read it already in the Old Testament (Zechariah 9,9-10)**

*See, your king comes to you,  
righteous and victorious,  
lowly and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.  
He will proclaim peace to the nations.  
His rule will extend from sea to sea  
and from the River[a] to the ends of the earth.*

### **Peace comes with humility and service.**

At this Advent and Christmas time, let us rejoice with the words of psalm 100

- <sup>1</sup> *Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.*
- <sup>2</sup> *Worship the Lord with gladness;  
come before him with joyful songs.*
- <sup>3</sup> *Know that the Lord is God.  
It is he who made us, and we are his[a];  
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*
- <sup>4</sup> *Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.*
- <sup>5</sup> *For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues through all generations.*

*(continued)*

## ADVENT 2024 PREFACE *(continued)*

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This year the cover of the Devotional guide is a photo of Alešek, who was a year and three months old. Today, he is 8. The family of Alešek is member of the ECCB congregation in Hrubá Vrbka in Southern Moravia. The photo is by Pavel Gráf. Little Alešek was ill and had to be in the hospital on Christmas Eve. His mother was there with him. The father and the sisters stayed at home waiting for the mother and Alešek to come back. Finally they returned home and all were very relieved and the true Christmas started. So Alešek became the most important present on this Christmas eve. And all were very thankful. And how happy was Alešek, we see on the photo.

This is about what we know about Alešek, his family and their Christmas story. We think that this is a story of the joy of Christmas, of hope, of love, peace and a real Christmas present.

Jesus, the child is born and become the hope of the world. And somehow every child is a new promise of God that he has hope for his world. We think, that this is also the message of this photo. We want for him to live in a world of love and peace, a world we are especially in the time of Advent and Christmas dreaming of. This message is so moving, that we are sure, that it does not really matter, that the photo is not in best quality. Like Jesus was not born in a nice hotel, but in manger.

The Advent Devotionals have been prepared for our churches by members of the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren and the Presbyterian Church USA partnership. The daily devotionals bring together our communities of faith and are bringing our hearts with one another as we prepare our individual journey to Christmas.

THE ADVENT DEVOTIONALS are possible through the gifts of love for many in our churches:

- Devotional Writers; Laity, Pastors, Professors, other;
- David Hancock, Editor;

*(continued)*

## ADVENT 2024 PREFACE (continued)

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- Kevin Miller, Publisher;
- Dora Ticha, translator;
- Gerhard Frey-Reininghaus, text selection.

We wish all of you an Advent Season filled with beauty, service, thoughtfulness and joy,

**As we sing together, “GLORY TO GOD  
and PEACE ON EARTH”,**

Gerhard Frey-Reininghaus, Betty McGinnis  
ECCB PCUSA Partnership Network Committee

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 1 (1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT)

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### **Zechariah 9:9-10**

Today we celebrate the First Advent Sunday. At home and in many churches, we light the first Advent candle on the Advent wreath. It is the beginning of the most beautiful season of the year, a time of joy and peace, or so we hope. However, we also know that it is a hectic period, a time of frantically searching for gifts, and many people feel more lonely than ever during these days. But Advent has an important message for all of us: Advent means arrival. The coming of a Saviour, the coming of light into the darkness, the coming of the Messiah into this world. His coming is anticipated and celebrated as far back as the time of the Old Testament, as we read today in the book of the prophet Zechariah (9:9-10): he comes as a very special king. He is righteous and he brings salvation. This is what is expected of a king. But he rides a donkey and he brings peace. And even more: he eradicates everything that serves war and brings peace to this world. Oh, how we yearn for the King of Peace to come and put an end to all the wars and injustices of this world! It is very painful and incomprehensible that we are not able, as Christians, to do more in bringing peace in this world. That is why Advent is always a time of repentance and prayer. It is appropriate to pray: Lord, have mercy. Let us pray for peace, let us pray for faith and strength, proclaim that the Savior brings peace and justice for all. When His peace comes, we have reason to rejoice and exult. God is a God of peace and his peace will have the last word. So let us rejoice and exult, pray for peace, and look for ways in which we, too, can contribute to foster peace in our families, in congregations, and everywhere in the world.

Lord God, King of Peace, I ask You for peace for Your world! Grant that we may be messengers of Your peace wherever there is hatred, violence, war and indifference. Amen

*Gerhard Frey-Reininghaus*  
*Prague, CZ*

### **Psalm 116:1-5**

The Psalmist declares his love for the Lord. Why? Because the Lord has heard his voice and his cry. It makes me pause to consider, why do I love the Lord? Like the Psalmist, I love God because I believe that God hears my voice and my cries. I also love the Lord because I believe that God is with me in times of trouble, shepherding me through dark valleys. I also believe God to be the ultimate source of hope, peace, joy, and love in the world. This too makes me love God. There are so many reasons why I love the Lord, however near the top of my list of reasons why is because of the promise that God so loved the world, that we are given a Son, Jesus. He is the one who not only saves us from the anguish of the grave and overcomes our distress and sorrow, he also is God's love incarnate with us, so that we might know that we are loved. In turn, may we love God, and may we love one another. This season of Advent, I invite you to consider why it is that you love the Lord. As you do, please also remember that the Lord loves you.

*Andy Kort*  
*Annapolis, MD*

### Psalm 33:1-5

Psalm 33 proclaims what lies at the heart of good news of all of Scripture, including the psalter as a whole and the preaching of Jesus: God lovingly and justly rules the world. But in the quiet dark of the Advent season, we may find ourselves more acutely aware of all that opposes God's rule. It isn't just ongoing war and disaster, violence and poverty, but humanity's constant endeavors to establish ourselves—our rule, our security.



The great irony as Reinhold Niebuhr says is that the very efforts to secure our own destiny and future have caused us to be even more insecure and vulnerable. Of course, neither Psalm 33 nor Niebuhr encourage passivity, but properly motivated activity. He explains this biblical view of human history: “The evil in human history is regarded as the consequence of man's wrong use of his unique capacities. The wrong use is always due to some failure to recognize the limits of power, wisdom, and virtue. Man is an ironic creature because he forgets that he is not simply a creator but also a creature.”<sup>1</sup> We are creatures. Our calling is to rejoice, to praise, to sing, to play, to make melody for our Creator.

In this season of lights may we respond to the wonder of God's daily provision and care with joy. May we work to establish God's reign of love and compassion in the world.

*Creator God, with our whole being we praise you and give you thanks. We love your word and work in the world, your faithfulness, your righteousness and justice. Guide us to love with your steadfast love. Help us to reflect your light with those who are in need of hope, of peace. In Christ's name, Amen.*

**Mihee Kim-Kort**  
**Annapolis, MD**

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<sup>1</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952) 156.

### Isaiah 32:15-20

We will probably read these words as confirmation of what we believe to be right. Justice and law are what come from higher ethical standards and apply equally to all, the powerful and the powerless. Applying and defending them is a prerequisite for being able to live in peace and security, which is what we all wish for. And not only in Advent.

But this image is disrupted by a scenario that introduces unrest and danger: “My people will dwell in the plains of peace... even if hail falls on the forest and the city is razed to the ground.” For many people, such a scenario has become a reality. This year’s floods destroyed houses, roads, parts of villages and towns. In Ukraine and the Middle East, entire cities are razed to the ground by bombs.

How, then, can God’s people live in peace?

They can, if we don’t associate it only with passive peace and security. The Swiss pastor Hermann Kutter wrote one hundred years ago: When pastors want to serve people with mere religion, people call out to them: Where is the true God? Where they ask like this, it is clear that “Sunday Christianity”, which is used and enjoyed only one hour a week, will not do in this world. It is not possible to shield ourselves with this type of Christianity when flood waters and waves of social insecurity, indebtedness, alienation, and inner emptiness are splashing around our churches.

The God who came down to the world in Jesus Christ is a God of peace in constant unrest and tension, a God who demands obedience to truth and justice. All possibilities to deceive oneself, to excuse one’s guilt, to conceal one’s sin and to placate oneself with substitutes disappear before Him. Faith means drawing a clear line between good and evil, truth and lies, right and wrong, it is reverence before God and struggle for the world. Faith means that I personally stand before God, render accounts to him, ask for his will, draw from his love and surrender to his grace. God cannot be deceived by any pretense and pleasant words. As Kutter writes: You are not allowed to be friends with God, you need to obey Him.

*Marek Zikmund  
Prague, CZ*



### Amos 5:21-24

*I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

I love all the trappings of Christmas. Our house is decorated throughout, but the most important part of the holiday decorations is the tree. Why? Because the ornaments all have stories, and I remember them as they are unwrapped each year. Many were given to me by my mother, who is now with God. Some I made as a child in Sunday school. Some were made by my children. Others are souvenirs from trips or gifts from friends. It is



natural this time of year to surround ourselves with beauty as a sign of God's love born in the Christ Child. These words from Amos, however, are a needed rebuke and reminder that God expects more from his people than trappings. God is calling us to abound in justice, righteousness, and peace, with not just in our homes but in the world around us. Glitter AND godliness? Can we make it so?

*Holy One, help me not to be distracted by the glitter of this season and instead to be focused on working for your justice and peace. Amen.*

***Alison Krahling Seed  
Philadelphia, PA***

### **Matthew 5:6**

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

This autumn in both the Czech Republic and the United States there were storms that sent an overabundance of water raining down on the land. We all watched prayerfully as the flood waters rose, took a deep breath when the waters crested, and then began taking stock to see how we could help as the waters receded. For those without electricity or with damaged homes, food and clean drinking water were at the top of their list of immediate needs. In our modern world, we get hungry if we have a meeting that delays lunch or we get thirsty while taking a walk on a summer afternoon, but these needs are usually fulfilled so easily that we forget how important they are to our very existence. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ reminds us that the need for righteousness is essential to our spiritual lives, that when we pay attention to and fulfill this yearning-filled connection to God, we will get what we need. This is reason indeed for hope, peace, and joy as we turn towards the Christmas season.

*Valerie Frey Stone*  
*Athens, GA*

### **Romans 14:12-19**

If we have put our faith in God, we ask what He expects of us. What does God want? How should we live? What is right, what is good in God's eyes? Faith binds our conscience. And everything we think, everything we say, everything we do takes on a special weight. We are not indifferent to what is happening around us and how people act, regardless of who it is, but especially those who make up the community of faith. God leads us to notice, to act. We have a responsibility to God for how we live, how we relate to his creation. Not being indifferent, seeking God's will and acting on it leads to conflict. Jesus often got into conflicts, and the apostle Paul chooses harsh critical words in many places in his letters. But here he calls for tolerance, for peace. What is important is the context. When and why should we enter a conflict, and when should we retreat, put ourselves aside? Paul speaks of the believer's own convictions here: what matters is what I personally consider the outcome of my faith, my relationship with God. Specifically, he talks about food and drink; it could also be about prayer or worship perhaps. Don't try to convince your brother or sister in faith of your conviction. Don't pass off what is for you an expression of your relationship with God as the only proper expression of faith. Do not judge others in terms of your faith and piety. The only thing worth going into conflict over is a person who is being judged and needs advocacy. Lord, teach us to discern when to speak up and when to stay quiet, teach us true consideration in the Spirit of Christ. Amen.

*Pavel Pokorný  
Prague, CZ*

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8 (2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT)

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### **Psalm 122**

Just as we are traveling through Advent with hearts full of anticipation and hope, so the Psalmist invites us to travel to “the House of the Lord” with hearts full of those same feelings. Standing before Jerusalem’s gates is like standing before Bethlehem’s manger: both are sites that emanate holiness and fund deep joy. And just as Jerusalem is a space within which people from all tribes may gather and find themselves transformed, so Christmas is a holy time during which people from all tribes may gather and find transformation.

Is it any wonder that the center of their desire—and ours—is a desire for peace? That what makes Jerusalem and Bethlehem special is that they point to the possibility that our differences lead not to dispute, but to unity? That our desire for peace means that we, too, must pray for peace? That our Advent greetings to each other might not only be “Happy Holidays” but “Peace be within you”? Or even that to genuinely wish someone “Happy Holy-days” must also mean wishing them “Peace be within you”?

We live in complicated and vertiginous times, seeing, daily, the realities of war and pestilence, famine and flood. During such times, focusing on our journey through Advent can become a means of escape. But if we remember the Psalmist’s call to pray for peace—perhaps, especially, in Jerusalem—our journeys can instead be the means through which we engage with persons of all nations in naming our need for holiness and pursuing our desire for peace.

*Mark Douglas*  
*Decatur, GA*

### **Isaiah 52:7-9**

*“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings...” (King James Version)*

Want beautiful legs? Proclaim God’s peace and hope. Recommended by 9 out of 10 experts!

But let’s be serious now. What is so beautiful about Isaiah’s messenger? It’s the fact that he brings words of hope in times of despair. It’s a call to not wait for our own idea of perfection, but to celebrate and perceive God’s presence in what is coming. The silence of a ruined city is transformed into the song of those who see hope.

*Hana Slámová, Stará Boleslav  
Prague, CZ*

### Isaiah 54:9-10

Our family has a mountain that is very meaningful to us. It is in the southeast corner of the U.S. state of Colorado. It sits amid an unusual rock formation in which giant natural walls like the spokes of a bicycle jut out of the ground. It is only when you are on top of this mountain that you can see the pattern of the spokes in the lower hills surrounding.



We spread the ashes of my husband's grandparents on this mountain, one of their favorite places. Every time our family goes for a hike, we think of them. We are refreshed by the beauty of the place, the connection we feel to them, and the steadfast love of the God who made all things.

The words of Isaiah echoed in my mind the last time we were there. Sometimes days feel long, but we all know, especially when experiencing a death of a loved one, our time here is short. While this mountain and the great natural stone walls below seem unmovable, even these will change over time, and have before. Yet the steadfast love of God does not depart from this world.

Steadfast love, peace, compassion – these are gifts God freely gives. God draws them closer than imaginable in the gift of Jesus Christ, one who will not depart, but promises, “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

### Prayer:

*Eternal God, we are in awe of the mountains and hills, the majestic places you have made. We are grateful for the gift of our lives, and all the life that surrounds us. These things are fragile, we know. In times of uncertainty or loss, we are held by your steadfast love, your covenant of peace, your compassion - these are here to stay, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Rev. Dr. Leah R. Hrachovec**  
West Chester, PA

**Micah 5:1-4a**

I asked AI to generate a picture on the topic of Micah 5:1 - 4a. This is what I got:

The image is supposed to depict a peaceful and spiritual atmosphere with the city of Bethlehem in the foreground, and a shepherd that symbolizes the coming ruler. What do you think of it?



Personally, I am most inspired by the beginning of Micah's text.

...though you are small. To me, this is reassuring: even though you are the smallest of the smallest, you can still take part in great things, even create them yourselves. I see great hope in that.

At the end, Micah speaks of peace – something that is very important in life. Peace of mind, peace of heart, peace among people, etc. There are many ways to participate in creating peace.

I asked AI to generate one more image. This time, the topic was “and He Himself will be peace”. This is what I got:

The image captures the one who brings peace. Let us participate in creating peace!

Come, Lord!

*Štěpán Brodský  
Prague, CZ*



### **Matthew 5:9**

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.”*

As we approach Christmas, the birth of our Lord Jesus, we read many scriptures describing who he is and how he will change our world. One of the best themes surrounding the coming of the Christ child is the advent of peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and in his most famous teaching he tells his followers to mimic his peaceful nature by saying, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” As an American living in a very contentious country, and indeed, a contentious world, I yearn for the peace that Christ brings.

On October 5, I will lead a group from Sewickley Presbyterian Church to Ireland to learn more about Celtic Spirituality. One of the places we will visit is the world-renowned peacemaking community of Corrymeela on the coast of Northern Ireland. I am hoping to learn about peacemaking while there.

Corrymeela was founded in 1965 by a Presbyterian minister as a way of building a more peaceful Northern Ireland. Its legacy extends far beyond Ireland, however. Its website says: “Peace is not a status to achieve, but a practice to carry out continually and communally.” People come from all over the world to learn how to be peaceful, to resolve differences without violence, and to achieve reconciliation when it seems impossible. Everyone reading this devotion can think of a place we know that needs such peace. As we move forward in Advent, let us carry the Lord’s peace in our hearts so that we, like those at Corrymeela, can be peacemakers in a world of unrest.

*Emily Miller*  
*Sewickly, PA*



**Luke 2:14**

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” (NIV)*

Ukraine, Israel, Sudan, and unfortunately a lot of other places in the world are still experiencing war and all the horrors that come with it; in short, this is everything but peace. The list of ongoing conflicts keeps growing. I've inserted a map from Wikipedia showing the current armed conflicts. Is it even possible that there would be peace on Earth among people? And how come God's favor still rests on us? Any normal person would give up on humanity after so many betrayals, violence, and all the ugly things people can do to each other. But God is not a normal person. God is “in the highest heaven” and has a different perspective, He sees a different picture. He sees love, beauty, all the nice things.



Peace on Earth does not come first, it is the second in line. Glory to God comes first; the order is not random. What

does it mean to give glory to God? I think glorifying God is different from glorifying other people. We usually do that to praise someone for something they have achieved. But glory to God involves, among other things, daily gratitude for the fact that his favor still rests on us, as well as respect and trust. Peace will come, I firmly believe that.

The angels used these words to announce the birth of Jesus. He is the Peace on Earth, given to us from the highest heaven given as an eternal embodiment of God's love, taking on all the ugly things humans can do. He has brought us peace on Earth, and He will do so again.

*Jan Dostál  
Olomouc, CZ*

**Hebrews 12:14-17**

Peace. If we were asked to pick one word to describe our world, it is quite unlikely that we would choose the words peace or peaceful to describe the world in which we live. However, in Hebrews 12, verses 14 through 17, God asks us to strive for peace. God tells us to “strive for peace with all men and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” We know that perfect peace is found in God’s presence. This path lets God lead us and allows God to be the center of our daily lives. We are called to place our faith, hope and trust in Him. Hebrews 12 confirms that God’s path for us is a path through prayer. God reminds us that we can experience peace through prayer. We know that prayer will strengthen our trust in God as our Savior, Lord, and Friend.

Oh God, who dwells in all times and places, we are reminded that you ask us to strive for peace. We know that you have prepared a place for us and that you call us to serve your purpose in the world. You call on us to be in service to others. Broaden our vision and make us more sensitive to the needs of others. Help us to live in harmony. Enable us to act responsibly, so that we can benefit not only the present generation, but future generations as well.

God, help us to live in peace and harmony with others. We claim no power in the world that does not ultimately belong to you. Help us to live peacefully and have respect for life. Guide us along our earthly journey that we may serve others. Help us to be a light of hope to all who seek your mercy, justice and goodwill. We pray in the Spirit of Christ, Amen.

*Charles Hargrove*  
*Annapolis, MD*

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15 (3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT)

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### John 3:16-21

As we are only 10 days away from Christmas, and we see a familiar passage today - one that often is quoted and used as a great refrain for all people. If we look at the full chapter, we notice that it comes at the end of a meeting Jesus is having with a Pharisee named Nicodemus, who enters this conversation in the dead of the night. It's a private, hush-hush meeting so that the other Pharisees will not know what Nicodemus is doing.

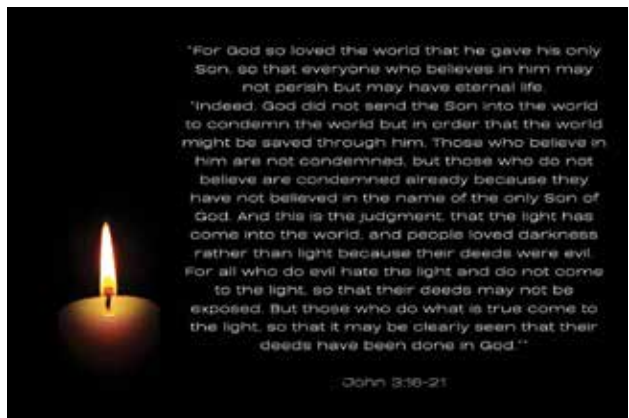
During this conversation they talk about being born from above - which does not make logical sense. In the flickering candlelight, they talk about things that are hard to make sense of and hard to understand.

Within the darkness, we wrestle to make sense of the things that show light.

With such much happening in the world around us, we continue to meet Jesus in moments of darkness to try and make sense the faith we proclaim. As we dialogue with Jesus we seek the light that can reveal so much about us - divisions, misunderstandings, failings, and our lack of grace toward others. Once we see clearly, we can move forward in the ways of Christ. May our lives show the expansiveness we find in this: "For God so loved THE WORLD" so that we can spread a little light into all the corners of our surrounding darkness.

Holy God, open us up to your truth so that we might reveal your light to our neighbors. May our relationship with you lead us into greater love and compassion for this world you love. Amen.

*Alison Peters  
Cumberland, US*



### John 13:34-35

*“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

How can you tell someone is a Christian? There are several ways: some people will probably think of the Christian symbols first – the cross, the fish, the churches... Others will probably think of the things Christians do – they pray, they go to church on Sundays, they read the Bible... Another answer might deal with religious teachings: they believe in the Triune God, they have received baptism,... All of these answers are correct - and yet Jesus considers the most important sign of his followers to be something else: *“if you love one another.”*

Christians may have different views on many things – what symbol they should use, how they should pray, what Sunday services should look like. They may not even be in full agreement on the issues of baptism or the Holy Trinity, and that is perfectly alright. But living together in love – there is no way we can evade that, and there is also no way we could ever make a mistake by doing this. In showing each other selfless love without prejudice, we enable people to come to know Jesus Christ through the church and accept him as their Lord. This mission is more important than preaching, missionary work, or charity.

Unfortunately, this commandment is where we tend to fail the most – prejudice, scorn, lack of solidarity and open hostility are all common in the Church. The presidential election in the United States has divided many Christians into two irreconcilable camps, so that even basic human decency, let alone brotherly love, have often disappeared from relationships. And in the Czech Republic, too, culture wars threaten the church, sowing mutual distrust in Christian relationships.

That is why even for us, many centuries later, this commandment of Jesus' is still “new”: in many ways, we still have to rediscover and learn what Jesus' words “as I have loved you” actually mean. Let this year's Advent season be inspiring in this regard!

*Lord, it's a crying shame how little understanding there is sometimes among Christians. Please transform our hearts with your love. Grant that Christmas may truly be a time of peace - for the Church and for the whole world.*

**Jan Lavický**  
*Klášter nad Dědinou, CZ*

### **Romans 12:9-16**

How would the Christmas Story have been different if the residents of Bethlehem had known of St. Paul's future message to Rome? The difference? The birthplace door is wide open, the bed is made and around are midwives eager to help the first-time mother. Her baby is wrapped in clean diapers and placed in a cradle, somewhere by the fireplace with someone willing to rock it while gently singing. Mom can relax and dream about the future without fear.

But Mary has a different experience. With the inn's door slamming in front of her, compassion and understanding are nowhere in sight. When Joseph finds a stable, Mary knows that she is not giving birth somewhere on the street and can at least lie down on a pile of straw prepared for some livestock. She doesn't know what will happen tomorrow, she can only hope that she will survive the next day in good health. Quite a contrast, isn't it? Black and white.

We get a similar feeling from the words of the apostle Paul to Rome, in which he establishes how it should be with the Christian church. While it is customary for the strongest, the most cunning, the most ruthless to win, Paul professes a different message. He says to give priority to others and not think highly or only of yourself. Simply serve the people around you. Paul emphasizes that you should not retaliate against someone who hurts you but pray for those who use or abuse you.

What's the point, we may ask? Are we not actually encouraging more ruthlessness and violence if we do not stand up to it? Have a look at Jesus' journey, which began one dark night in a stable outside Bethlehem. He was filled with mercy, steeped in compassion and self-sacrifice, his is not a journey for everyone nor is it an easy road. It goes against our human nature, experience, and we wonder where is it leading us? Do we even want to get into this?

What better time to look for an answer than during Advent. This is the time of promises and glorious expectations.

*Renata Popelářová*  
*Letohrad, CZ*

### I Corinthians 13

The love spoken of in the Bible is, in its meaning, more similar to will than to a feeling. It is more a matter of making a decision than of feeling an emotion. And as one Protestant pastor said, “faith is a style of living in the here and now, hope is an optimistic view of the future”.

Jan Amos Comenius (1592–1670), a Czech philosopher, theologian, and educator, once wrote: *“Happy, indeed overjoyed are the people who have disentangled themselves from the confusions of the world and their own hearts, and through faith and hope have settled in the centre of God’s mercy. For they are seated where no wind can uproot them, no snare can lure them, no threat can frighten them, nor can any pleasure entice them; neither fear, death, nor Satan can reach them. Blessed are they.”*

It is not easy to be optimistic and kind to people, to ourselves and to our surroundings. However, who else if not Christians, who are explicitly called to do so in the Bible, should strive to live in faith, hope and love?

*Prayer: Lord God, please help us to make conscious choices for you. When discouragement and hopelessness fall upon us, let us be reminded of you, give us courage. Make us instruments of your love. Amen*

*Vítek Sláma  
Prague, CZ*

**Song:** <https://youtu.be/MCeHXzkxIHw?si=Aw6-oSMW1P4b5m2X>

**2 Corinthians 13:11-13**

You are probably familiar with the Latin saying “Finis coronat opus”, meaning “the end crowns the work”. In today’s text, the Apostle Paul crowns his previous recommendations with a precious promise: “the God of love and peace will be with you.” However, for our lives to be “crowned”, there are some important prerequisites: to live in joy, to correct any shortcomings, to encourage one another, to be unanimous and peaceful. “How simple!”, we might say. Only then comes the important “and”... the God of love and peace will be with you. May we all live to see this unique coronation.



Amen

*Dan Žárský*  
*Vsetín, CZ*

### Hebrews 13:1-5

The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks in relatively complicated language about a simple thing - love. Biblical letters often conclude with a colorful summary of instructions on how to live the right way. Here, love is mentioned three times.\*

Verse 1. **“Let love of the brethren continue.”** Take care of the love in your immediate surroundings. It is not automatic! Do not look at your Christian congregation as a business, which needs, above all, to be well-organized, but as a community which, like a family, is built on love.

Verse 2. **“Forget not to show love unto strangers.”** Take care also to love your more distant surroundings. Strangers come into your life. Your basic instinct should be love, not fear. The Bible reminds us that besides xenophobia - fear of strangers - there is also love of strangers - philoxenia!

Verse 5. **“Be ye free from the love of money.”** Do not rely on money to solve everything. Money cannot replace people, whether they are our loved ones, or strangers. The most important moments in life happen through the love that we have for people, not for gold.

The fourth mention of love in the epistle is indirect. God’s love is hidden behind the threefold testimony of human love. **“I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee.”** (Verse 5) God comes to us with his love and so inspires us to true love.

*Jiří Tengler  
Polička, CZ*

\* *American Standard Version*



**1 John 3:16-20 (Cotton Patch Version by Clarence Jordan)**

*<sup>16</sup> Christ laid down his life for us and taught us what love really is. So we too should lay down our lives for the brothers.*

*<sup>17</sup> Now if somebody who has material thing sees his brothers in need and then padlocks his concern for him, how does the love of God stay in him?*

*<sup>18</sup> My little ones, let's not talk about love. Let's not sing about love. Let's put love into action and make it real.*

Clarence Jordan came to the University of Georgia in Athens in the 1930s to study Agriculture. Here he was called to become a serious follower of Jesus Christ. He later earned degrees in theology and New Testament Greek, and then cofounded the Christian community Koinonia Farm near Americus, GA, dedicated to putting the teachings of Jesus into action, including fostering racial justice with his poor black neighbors at great personal cost. A millionaire business man, Millard Fuller, and his wife Linda joined Koinonia in the 1960s, after giving away their wealth to join. They started a project to help their neighbors build decent, affordable housing. This ultimately became Habitat for Humanity, which has since built hundreds of thousands of homes across the world for people in need.

There is no greater testimony of Christian faith than to “put love into *action* and make it *real*”, as Clarence Jordan put it. “What we are speaks so loud that the world can't hear what we say. They're not listening to our talk. They're looking at our walk.” May we answer the demands of this scripture by striving to love one another and serve our brothers and sisters in the church and in the world, with love and care. As the song goes, will the world know that we are Christians by our love?

*Jim Anderson*  
*Athens, GA*

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22 (4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT)

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### Phillipians 4:4-7

*“Rejoice in the Lord always!”*

At all times, Lord?  
How am I supposed to do that, I ask, when  
A friend has betrayed me...  
I live in pain...  
I suffer in loneliness...  
I am afraid of getting old...  
Someone I hold dear has hurt me...  
I tremble with fear for...



*“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”*

I live answered prayers when  
I have food and drink...  
I have a place to sleep...  
I have someone to talk to...  
I'm free to go to church...  
I have someone to love...  
Someone loves me...

Thank you, Lord. I rejoice.  
Amen.

*Jana Vrajová  
Olomouc, CZ*

### **Galatians 5:22-24**

Gifts You Cannot Buy. As a young boy, I remember asking my mother what she would like for Christmas. Her answer was always the same: “All I want is for you to be nice every day to your brother and sisters.” Since I have one brother and four sisters, I realized that was too lofty of a gift and ended up buying her a new apron, or pair of slippers.

As I grew older, I understood the wisdom of her request. The best gifts are the ones you cannot purchase at the store or order online. They must come from that which is inside of you.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that the fruit of the Spirit lies within us. These gifts are not wrapped with ribbons and bows but wrapped with grace and the truth of God’s love.

Maybe this year we can offer those around us the special gift of the Spirit. Show love to one who feels alone and forgotten. Everyone needs joy and peace. An extra ounce of patience, kindness, gentleness goes a long way. So does the generosity of self-control, to criticize less and encourage more.

Is anyone still rushing to do some last-minute shopping? Anyone pondering the perfect gift for that hard to please person? Not to worry. The gifts you can give are already inside of you.

Prayer: “God of grace and God of glory, show us anew the truth of Christmas, that the best gifts we can share come from the presence of your Holy Spirit, which lies within us.”

*J. Thomas Kort*  
*Yardley, PA*

### **Luke 2:1-10**

“O Little Town of Bethlehem” One can hardly imagine Mary and Joseph’s journey to Bethlehem. They move constantly through great difficulties.... Caesar’s demands and power; questionable taxes; no comfortable room any place; no rest; resorting to a box where animals eat for the birth of their child. In the fields, humble shepherds, lowly men in society, watch their grazing sheep. Suddenly, with great surprise! God’s messengers overwhelm the shepherds singing “Glory to God in the highest and Peace on Earth to all.”

Through these humble and challenging conditions, a child is born under the lowliest circumstances. The outcasts receive the announcement of great joy before anyone!! a King!! Messiah!! Lord!! Prince of Peace! Savior!! The humble shepherd brings the realization that “Baby Jesus” Is for ALL people and fills everyone with unconditional love, mercy, justice.

On our life’s journey, we experience unexpected turns and even unimaginable difficulties. In God’s wisdom, our world is never as planned. Daily, the outcasts and poor surround us. At this time of year, we sing the songs of Bethlehem in our comfortable surroundings. Yet, the most important announcement in the world was made to the poor, not “Caesars”. God announced the birth of.... Savior, Lord, Prince of Peace, the Messiah, a symbol for love and mercy for all of God’s people. The Baby was even found born in a place where animals eat, a manger, and wrapped in strips of cloth. As we celebrate this Christmas Eve, let our hearts turn to these humble beginnings and search for the deepest meaning of God among all of us and our lives in today’s world.

Glory to God in the Highest! And on earth, Peace to all.

Prayer: On this Christmas Eve, as the angel sang to the Shepherds, let us sing Glory to God. Take us away from the glitter, presents, the artificial Christmas! Let us Celebrate the Messiah’s Birth showing the unconditional love to all. Let us know the true peace that passes all understanding and keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

*Betty McGinnis  
Annapolis, MD*

### Psalm 100

Dear brothers and sisters,

It is Christmas again. “A time of joy, merriment” as we sing in one of our Christmas carols. It should be a time of joy and merriment for all. But what if it isn't? What if we're going through a tough time?

What if even the festively laid table, the decorated

Christmas tree and the gifts under it do not help us to be able to rejoice? Or what if we are no longer physically able to prepare it all anymore. We can hear the answer in another song from our Protestant songbook: “Don't stop praising, no matter what happens, there is nothing better.”



We hear a similar motif in Psalm 100, which begins joyfully: “Sing to the Lord, all the earth!” He calls us to joyfully serve the Lord who made us, to give thanks to him with gratitude and to enter his gates with a song of praise. It is a thanksgiving song of pilgrims standing in front of the temple gates. It was certainly also the song of entire generations of pilgrims before us, our ancestors and our dear ones. Today, we have the same song before us, with a special reason for praise: nothing less than the birth of the Lord Jesus.

I hope many of you will agree with me that singing in the temple together with brothers and sisters, especially at Christmas, is pure joy. The Lord God does not grade our singing like in school, nor does he grade us. He doesn't blame us for making a little mistake somewhere. After all, we do not sing for ourselves, or to be admired, but to His praise. Songs, sung prayers and praises. And He rewards us with a joy that cannot be found anywhere else, that overcomes sorrow and fear. Therefore, let's sing unto the Lord!

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Editor/Vydavatel, David Hancock

Grafická úprava / Graphic design: Kevin Miller