

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL - WEEK THREE



Picture by ALC Online Contributor, Andrew Gulliksen

WEEK THREE: In Luke 2, we read, “In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.” The shepherd’s candle is lit in calmness and confidence that God will speak to us and move among us. The shepherds were ones who watched over their flocks. They made sure their sheep had green pastures, still waters and were safe in dark valleys. Like the Shepherds, we are not worried about the silence but glad for its peace. God will speak. God will move among us. It will come in God’s time. In that we can lie down and rest this night.



Advent Day THIRTEEN - Sunday December 13, 2020

Advent Wreath Candle Lighting

We praise you, O God, for this circle of light that marks our days of preparation for Christ's advent. As we light the candles on this wreath, strengthen our hearts with the shepherds' as we await the Lord's coming in glory. Enlighten us with your grace, that we may serve our neighbors in need. Grant this through Christ our Lord, whose coming is certain and whose day draws near. Amen.



Advent Day FOURTEEN - Monday December 14, 2020

Luke Chapter 2:8-18: I chose to share a devotion week as we light the Shepherd's Candle and reflect on Joy. I, like most average boys was a shepherd in the Christmas program. Little did I know God was preparing me to do His work as a shepherd in my adult life, using the gifts he had blessed me with. During my junior year at UNL going about my daily routine, same as those shepherds of long ago were doing, God sent an angel to me one night and told me to go the Lutheran Center on campus. No multitude of heavenly host, but the message was the same. The next Sunday I went to the Lutheran Center and God revealed to me his plan for me just as he revealed his plan to the shepherds of

sending his son, Jesus, into the world. Just as the Shepherds went about the land proclaiming the birth of Jesus, I was given the peace of mind and confidence from that time onward to use my gifts of organization and leadership to lead Bible studies, youth groups, Sunday school, and church council at Ascension. When God speaks to you, it may be scary, but he will give you peace through the Holy Spirit to do the task set before you.

Prayer: God, Reveal yourself to me as you did to the shepherds, and grant me peace knowing you will give me the confidence to proclaim your Word. **Amen.**

~Greg Gulliksen

Advent Day FIFTEEN - Tuesday December 15, 2020

The other day I was making dinner. I'd gotten a late start, the kitchen was still messy from breakfast and other projects, and the water was taking particularly long to boil. Zora, my daughter, was playing loudly and only adding to the mess.

"Daddy!" she yelled out.

"Zora! Do not yell!" I replied in a voice that was close to, but definitely not, yelling.

"But Daddy, look at the sunset! It's beautiful."

I paused. Took a breath, and put down whatever vegetable I was cutting. Together we walked out to the front porch and looked at the beautiful red and pink sky. Dinner was served later than planned. The kitchen remained a mess. But, it was ok. Panic gave way to peace.

~Pastor Daniel Smith

Advent Day SIXTEEN - Wednesday December 16, 2020

There have been many times when I've experienced God's peace and felt His presence, but the moment that comes to mind happened fairly recently. Just last week I was feeling pretty overwhelmed-and I was pretty confused about why I was feeling that way! See, for the last three months I've been swamped with deadlines. I had multiple books due for multiple publishers, which was a blessing but also stressful. However, I got all of those turned in. I also had the house decorated for Christmas, the majority of our Christmas shopping done, and the weather was even nice! Even more importantly, my family was safe and healthy. Life was good. I kept telling myself that I should be relaxing and content and happy...but for some reason I was on edge and unable to sleep.

I was also getting pretty annoyed with myself. I'm not usually the type of person to make up things to worry about. So, what was the problem? I kept telling myself I

needed to pray more. I had been, too! But, to be real honest, I wasn't actually feeling all that much better. Then, right in the middle of my Tuesday, I received a text from a member of our old small group back in Ohio. I had helped start a small group of six couples twelve years ago and the group was still going strong. Though we sent each other emails from time to time, I had been feeling their loss, especially during these last few months. Anyway, the text was from Carol asking if Tom and I would like to join the small group on Zoom to catch up. I couldn't respond fast enough! Last Sunday night, Tom and I sat on the couch in front of my laptop met with all our old friends. Almost instantly, my heart felt lighter. There was just something about being with the people who had been by our side while raising teenagers, had held our hands when we mourned family members, and celebrated with us milestones at work and weddings. As we went around and shared news, everyone joked and teased and asked questions that 'new' friends don't dare ask. Then it was time to pray. Janice led all of us in a group prayer. When she began, I reached for Tom's hand and held on tight and closed my eyes and just listened to her words. When I shifted, I opened my eyes and glanced at the computer screen.

There, in front of me, I saw all of our dear friends with their heads bent, listening to Janice's prayers too. And that's when I realized what had been wrong with me. I was lonely. I missed our old friends. I needed that connection and sharing that they brought to my life. Even though I wasn't sick, wasn't mourning a loss, and had much to be grateful for, I still needed them. God had known even when I had forgotten. Later that evening, long after we'd said goodbye, I realized that I felt at peace again. I would say that nothing in my life had really changed...but of course it had. God had given me an early Christmas present-a gentle reminder that even though I might be suddenly spending a lot of time alone, I wasn't alone at all. I had new friends, old ones...and most of all Him.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for being in my life in so many innumerable ways. Thank you for reminding me that you are always walking beside me and that I also have loved ones in my life who are just a phone call or a Zoom meeting away. I am blessed by Your presence. Amen.

~Shelley Sabga

Advent Day SEVENTEEN - Thursday December 17, 2020

In 2012, I was part of the group that went canoeing with members from Ascension in the Boundary Waters. It was quite the adventure - ask me sometime about our first portage! But the thing that made life the hardest was the bugs! Mosquitoes, flies, and no-see-ums all thought I was delicious - and they ate me up! I thought I would never have a moment's peace from those critters.

However, I got up early one day, and walked away from camp. I sat down quietly, and dared to take my hood off my head, so that I could hear the birds. And there, in that

space, for a minute or two, I found peace. The bugs left me alone, and I truly felt as if God was with me, guiding me through this adventure. Then the bugs found me, and the respite was over. But, for a brief moment, that peace was all around and through me.

Prayer: Lord, send us peace in quiet moments, and let it sustain us in crazy times like these. **Amen.**

Advent Day EIGHTEEN - Friday December 18, 2020

Prayer for today: Heavenly Father, thank You in Jesus' name for purposing to redeem mankind, by sending Him to be born in Bethlehem of Judea on that astonishing night, while shepherds watched their flocks. Thank You for the good news of great joy, which is for all people who trust in Christ for the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. Thank You that You did not leave us dead in our sins, but purposed from the foundation of the world, to give Jesus as the perfect Lamb of God, who would take away the sin of the world and become the good Shepherd of the sheep, for all who would trust in His holy name. Thank You that in Christ I have nothing to fear and everything for which to be thankful. Thank You in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Advent Day NINETEEN- Saturday December 19, 2020

Consider the words to the following Christmas Hymn, "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks By Night".

While shepherds watch'd their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around.
"Fear not, " said he, for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled mind;
"Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you and all mankind."
"To you, in David's town this day,
Is born of David's line
The Savior who is Christ the Lord,
And this shall be the sign:
The heav'nly Babe you there shall find
To human view displayed,
All meanly wrapped in swathing bands,
And in a manger laid."
Thus spake the seraph, and forthwith
Appeared a shining throng
Of angels praising God, who thus

Addressed their joyful song:
"All glory be to God on high
And on the earth be peace.
Goodwill henceforth from heav'n to men
Begin and never cease."

Amen.