Angels Among Us

Daily Advent Devotions

Week #1—Make Ready a People #morehope

Monday, November 30—An Ordinary Day. Luke 1:5–13

Reflection: Zechariah goes to the temple to do the work assigned to him. Outside, the people are praying. Inside, he is tending the incense when Gabriel appears and tells him that his prayer has been heard. I wonder how long it had been since Zechariah had expected an answer?

Advent begins in the middle of whatever we were already doing. We may be packing lunches, checking on a neighbor, or driving the same route to work. Today, give one ordinary moment a little more time. Ask someone how they are and stay long enough to hear the answer. You may hear a hope they've been carrying. You may find yourself carrying a little of it with them.

Thought for the day: God can meet us in the middle of what we do every day.

Closing prayer: God of ordinary days, give me ears to hear and time to pay attention. Amen.

Around Central: Today is the Baldwin Center Holiday Store deadline. Bring new, unwrapped toys to the table in the Narthex.

Tuesday, December 1—What Can One Person Do? Luke 1:14–17

Reflection: Gabriel tells Zechariah that John will help make a people ready for God. That is a great deal to say about a child who hasn't been born yet. And the work Gabriel describes is deeply relational. Hearts will turn toward one another. People will begin to live differently together. John's part is to help them get ready.

Think of someone who helped you get ready for a change you couldn't yet picture. Perhaps they noticed a gift in you or kept inviting you back after you'd lost confidence. Today, offer someone that kind of encouragement. Tell a young person, a friend, or a coworker one thing you've seen them do well and the difference it made.

Thought for the day: One act of hope can help someone else see a way forward.

Closing prayer: God of hope, show me one person I can encourage. Give me the words, and help me say them. Amen.

Around Central: The Food Pantry Reverse Advent Challenge begins today. Use the enclosed calendar and set aside one item for each day of December.

Wednesday, December 2—When Hope Is Hard to Hear Luke 1:18–23

Reflection: Zechariah has lived long enough to know what disappointment feels like. When Gabriel makes an astonishing promise, Zechariah asks how he can know it's true. When Zechariah comes out of the temple unable to speak, the people outside have to watch and wonder what happened. The story gives everyone a little time before the next thing becomes clear.

You may have a prayer you can hardly bear to say again. There's room for that prayer here. Give yourself a few quiet minutes to tell God what makes hope difficult right now. You might begin with, "God, I want to believe something could change, and I'm tired." Let that be the whole prayer if it needs to be.

Thought for the day: God's promises can hold us while we are still asking questions.

Closing prayer: Patient God, stay near when I struggle to hope. Help me trust that you hear the prayers I can scarcely put into words. Amen.

Thursday, December 3—Elizabeth's Own Words. Luke 1:24–25

Reflection: Elizabeth has spent years living with other people's judgments about a deeply personal part of her life. Luke gives her a moment to tell us what this change means to her. She speaks of being seen by God. Her own words matter because no one else can tell us what it cost her to carry those judgments or what it feels like to set them down.

How often do we hear a little about someone's life and fill in the rest ourselves? Today, ask someone, "What has that been like for you?" If they pause, leave a little space before speaking. One way to carry hope is to give someone room to hear their own voice again.

Thought for the day: Give people room to tell their own stories.

Closing prayer: God who saw Elizabeth, teach me to listen without deciding what someone else's story means. Amen.

Friday, December 4—Hope You Can Carry. Isaiah 40:1–5

Reflection: Isaiah speaks comfort to people who know the pain of exile. Then the prophet gives them something they can picture. A road is being made through the wilderness. Rough ground will be leveled. For people who have lived a long time with no clear way forward, a road is an image of hope they can almost walk on.

What makes the road harder for someone you know? It might be a lack of transportation, a stack of forms, or caring for someone with few breaks. Ask what would help and offer something you can follow through on. "I can drive you Thursday" gives a person something they can plan around.

Thought for the day: Comfort can sound like a promise and look like help.

Closing prayer: God of comfort, show me where my hands can help make the road a little easier for someone else. Amen.

Around Central: Clothe-a-Child provides new clothing for Waterford elementary students. Checks may be made out to CUMC with "CAC" in the memo. Matched sets of hats and mittens or gloves are also welcome. Please skip scarves.

Saturday, December 5—A Light for the Next Step. Luke 1:67–79

Reflection: When Zechariah finally speaks again, he blesses God. His words move beyond the joy in his own household to people sitting in darkness. He sings of dawn breaking and of feet finding their way into peace.

A winter morning gives us a feel for his song. First you can make out the window frame. A little later you can see the bare branches. The whole landscape returns by degrees. Think back over your week. Where did you see enough light to make out something you couldn't see before? Maybe a conversation opened a door, or you noticed that someone else was ready to help. Give thanks for that small opening. Then ask what step it makes possible.

Thought for the day: A little light may be enough for the next step.

Closing prayer: Tender God, thank you for the light I've already seen. Guide my feet toward peace. Amen.

Around Central: The Women's Advent Tea is today at 2pm. Come for a pause and time together before the holidays.

Week #2—Nothing Is Impossible #morepeace

Monday, December 7—Mary's Question. Luke 1:26–34

Reflection: Mary is troubled by Gabriel's greeting and wonders what it means. When the angel goes on to describe what will happen, she asks how. Luke lets us hear her thinking and questioning before we hear her answer. There is something deeply peaceful about being given room to ask a question when your life is changing around you.

We sometimes tidy our prayers before we say them. Try leaving the question in its original form today. "How am I supposed to do this?" "Why does this still hurt?" Sit for a moment after you ask. The question may help you recognize what you need from God or from someone who can walk beside you.

Thought for the day: An honest question can be a prayer.

Closing prayer: God of Mary, meet me in the questions that matter most to me. Give me courage to ask them honestly. Amen.

Tuesday, December 8—Let It Be. Luke 1:35–38

Reflection: Mary gives her yes while much about the future is still unknown. Gabriel has told her what God is doing and has given her news about Elizabeth. Mary has a promise and the name of someone she can go see. The next part of her story will unfold as she lives it.

Sometimes we spend so much energy wishing a situation were different that we have little left for the choices still available to us. What is one thing you can name honestly about your life today? Once you've named it, ask what a faithful response could look like in the next twenty-four hours. It might be a yes to help, rest, a conversation, or a boundary that makes peace possible.

Thought for the day: Peace can begin with one faithful yes.

Closing prayer: God of possibility, help me face what is true and take the step that is mine to take. Amen.

Around Central: The free Tuesday Musicale Concert is tonight at 7pm, featuring the Tuesday Musicale Chorus and Adele Thomas Bell Ensemble, with a gathering afterward in Fellowship Hall.

Wednesday, December 9—A Door Opens. Luke 1:39–45

Reflection: Mary makes the trip to see Elizabeth. When she arrives, Elizabeth greets her with a blessing. Before Mary sings about what God is doing, she has a place to stand and a person who is glad she came. Elizabeth becomes a messenger right there in her own home.

Have you ever walked into a room unsure whether you belonged and caught sight of someone genuinely happy to see you? The body remembers that relief. Make an invitation this week that someone can picture accepting. Tell them where you'll meet, what to expect, or where you'll save them a seat. A warm welcome often begins before anyone walks through the door.

Thought for the day: Peace grows where people are welcomed and believed.

Closing prayer: Welcoming God, make my words and my presence a place where someone can breathe a little easier. Amen.

Thursday, December 10—Peace Has a Song. Luke 1:46–55

Reflection: Mary's song begins with what God has done for her and widens to include people who are hungry, overlooked, and pushed aside. Her peace has a table in it, with good things for people who have gone without. Mary can sing of being seen by God and, in the same breath, ask us to see the people our world overlooks.

Think of a table you know well. Who is usually there? Who helps set it? Who has trouble getting to it or gets left out of the conversation when they arrive? Let one of those questions guide an action today. Bring something useful to a food pantry, offer a ride, or make room for a voice that has rarely been heard.

Thought for the day: Mary's peace includes a place at the table for those who are hungry.

Closing prayer: God who fills the hungry, give us courage to share what we have and to change what keeps others hungry. Amen.

Around Central: Through Fueling Kids' Futures, $160 provides a Waterford elementary student with weekend food for a year. Smaller gifts are welcome, and cards for honorees are available in the church office.

Friday, December 11—Listen All the Way Through. James 1:19–20

Reflection: James asks us to be quick to listen and slow to speak. That sounds simple until someone says something we disagree with or describes a hurt we had a hand in causing. We can spend the rest of their sentence preparing our defense. By the time they finish, we may have missed the part they most needed us to hear.

Choose one conversation today in which you'll practice listening all the way through. When you're tempted to jump in, take a breath. Ask, "What do you most want me to understand?" Give the person a chance to correct what you heard. Peace may begin with the relief of discovering that someone is willing to understand how the situation looks from where you stand.

Thought for the day: Listening can make room for peace.

Closing prayer: God of peace, slow my reply and open my ears. Help me hear the person as well as the words. Amen.

Around Central: Carols & Beer is planned for Friday, December 18th, 6:30 p.m. at Rustic Leaf Brewing Company in Waterford. Join us for a festive community carol sing.

Saturday, December 12—As Far as It Depends on You. Romans 12:17–21

Reflection: Paul's phrase "so far as it depends on you" is worth sitting with. Peace takes more than one person, and each person has choices to make. You can apologize for a remark you wish you could take back. You can stop passing along a story that keeps a conflict alive. You can make a clear decision about how someone may speak to you.

Think of a relationship that comes to mind when you pray for peace. Name one action you could take without first requiring someone else to change. Then name what belongs to them. Ask God for the courage to take responsibility for your part and the wisdom to respect the limits of what you can do.

Thought for the day: We can take responsibility for the part of peace that belongs to us

Closing prayer: God of peace, give me the wisdom to know what is mine to do and the grace to do it. Amen.

Around Central: You're welcome at the Parsonage Advent Open House tomorrow, December 13, from 2 to 4 pm Join Rev. Mary for holiday treats and fellowship.

Week #3—Do Not Be Afraid #morejoy

Monday, December 14—Quiet Mercy. Matthew 1:18–19

Reflection: Before Joseph hears from the angel, he is already thinking about what his decision will cost Mary. Matthew calls him righteous and tells us, in the same sentence, that he is unwilling to expose her to public disgrace. In a story that will turn on a dream, this quiet decision deserves our attention.

Someone's difficult news can travel quickly, especially when it's shared as a concern or a prayer request. Before you pass along a story today, pause to ask whether it is yours to tell. If someone wants prayer, ask what they're comfortable having shared. If a conversation starts to turn someone's pain into speculation, you can turn it toward care.

Thought for the day: Mercy can begin in the way we speak about someone who isn't there.

Closing prayer: Merciful God, help me guard another person's dignity as carefully as I guard my own. Amen.

Tuesday, December 15—Room for Another Possibility. Matthew 1:20–21

Reflection: Joseph has reached a decision when the angel comes to him in a dream. The angel calls him by name, speaks to his fear, and offers a way forward Joseph had never considered. He will take Mary into his home and name the child Jesus. The future he'd been trying to manage suddenly asks something different of him.

When we worry, we often rehearse the same version of tomorrow until it feels like the only one available. What are you assuming will happen? Who might respond differently than you expect? Make a little room for one good possibility today. You may find a conversation worth having while the larger outcome is still uncertain.

Thought for the day: God can open a possibility that worry has crowded out.

Closing prayer: God who came to Joseph in a dream, loosen my grip on the future I fear. Help me see what else may be possible. Amen.

Wednesday, December 16—The Joy of Showing Up. Matthew 1:22–25

Reflection: Matthew gives us a name for the child, Emmanuel, God with us. Then Joseph wakes up and makes a choice about being with Mary. Whatever questions still lie ahead, she will have a companion in the daily life that follows. Joseph's part continues after the extraordinary dream, when it's time to take responsibility for what he heard.

There's a particular kind of joy in finding out that someone means to stay. They remember the date of your appointment. They check in after the first wave of calls has ended. Who could use that kind of company from you? Offer a time you can keep. A simple "I can come sit with you Wednesday" can give someone a good thing to look forward to.

Thought for the day: Steady presence is a gift.

Closing prayer: Emmanuel, thank you for staying with us. Show me where my presence could make someone's day less lonely. Amen.

Thursday, December 17—Enough for Today. Matthew 6:25–34

Reflection: Jesus asks his listeners to look at birds and consider flowers. I imagine at least a few people looked up as he spoke. The bills, the harvest, and the people who depended on them would still need tending. For a moment, though, they could see a living thing doing what it was made to do.

Try giving one good thing your full attention today. Listen to a favorite song through the last note. Watch the sky change over the lake. Sit down with your coffee while it's still hot. When your mind goes back to tomorrow, gently return to what is in front of you. Joy can be as brief as the sunlight coming through the window. You can still be there to receive it.

Thought for the day: Give today enough attention for joy to find you.

Closing prayer: Creator God, help me receive the small goodness of this day. Hold what I'm carrying about tomorrow. Amen.

Friday, December 18—A Place for Tears. Psalm 126

Reflection: Psalm 126 remembers a time when people laughed with relief. Then it asks God to restore them again. By the end, people are sowing in tears. I love that those images belong to the same prayer. We know something of that mixture when a song makes us smile and then we remember who used to sing it with us.

If a name comes to mind today, say it. You might light a candle, look at a photograph, or tell someone a small story about the person you miss. If you're reaching out to someone who is grieving, share a memory they may not have heard. There's room for whatever follows, whether it's laughter, silence, or a fresh wave of tears.

Thought for the day: Tears have a place in a season that makes room for joy.

Closing prayer: God of laughter and tears, sit with us in what we miss. Give us companions who will listen and remember with us. Amen.

Saturday, December 19—Share the Good You See. Philippians 4:4–9

Reflection: Paul tells the Philippians to pay attention to what is true, just, and worthy of praise. That takes practice. A sharp remark can stick with us all day while a dozen quiet kindnesses go by almost unnoticed. Think about the person who explained something patiently, made space for a newcomer, or quietly did the work everyone assumed would get done.

Choose one act of goodness you saw this week and tell the person what you noticed. "I saw you go back and sit with her after everyone left" tells the person their choice mattered. That's a message you can deliver by text, in a note, or in the church hallway. The joy is in letting someone hear it.

Thought for the day: We can help someone see the good their life brings into the world.

Closing prayer: God of joy, sharpen my eyes for everyday goodness and give me generous words when I see it. Amen.

Around Central: Compassionate Christmas Cards are available through tomorrow, December 20, for a $5 donation per card supporting Central's missions.Purchase them through the church office.

Week #4—This Will Be a Sign #morelove

Monday, December 21—In the Middle of the Night Shift. Luke 2:8–10

Reflection: The shepherds are awake because someone has to watch the sheep. Luke takes us to the field, where people doing a night's work are among the first to hear the news of Jesus' birth. I wonder what it was like to hear that the joy was for all people while standing there in work clothes, with another hour of watching ahead.

Much of what makes Christmas possible happens while others are asleep or gathered with family. Think of the people keeping a hospital running, clearing roads, cleaning a building, or caring for someone through the night. Choose one person whose work you depend on. Thank them for something specific. If you can make their work easier by taking a turn, let that be part of your thanks.

Thought for the day: God's good news reaches people in the middle of their work.

Closing prayer: God of the night watch, bless those whose work carries us through the season. Help us see and thank them. Amen.

Tuesday, December 22—The Sign Is a Child. Luke 2:11–12

Reflection: The angel gives the shepherds a way to recognize the Savior. Look for a baby wrapped in cloth and lying in a manger. A newborn spends much of the day needing to be held, fed, changed, and kept warm. The sign asks the shepherds to look closely at a life utterly dependent on somebody else's care.

Most of us have more practice offering help than asking for it. What would it be like to let someone carry a bag, bring dinner, or sit with you while you wait for news? Think of a kindness you have received lately. Let yourself feel what it meant to be cared for. Then offer someone else a kindness that leaves them free to say yes.

Thought for the day: God comes close enough to need our care.

Closing prayer: God who came to us as a child, help us offer care freely and receive it with grace. Amen.

Around Central: Pray for the children and cottage parents of Methodist Children's Home Society and give thanks for those who supported Central's Christmas Wishes gift card collection.

Wednesday, December 23—Go and See. Luke 2:13–16

Reflection: When the angels leave, the shepherds turn to one another and decide to go to Bethlehem. They go together to see a family and a child. At the end of the walk, the story has faces.

Is there someone you've been meaning to check on before Christmas? You may have a pretty good idea of what their week is like, or you may discover that it's quite different from what you imagined. Call or stop by if that would be welcome. Give them room to tell you how things are. Before offering a solution, ask what would make the next few days easier. Love learns a great deal when it gets close enough to listen.

Thought for the day: Love can begin by getting close enough to see what someone needs.

Closing prayer: God of Bethlehem, move us from hearing to showing up. Give us the patience to discover what love asks of us. Amen.

Thursday, December 24, Christmas Eve—Do Not Be Afraid. Luke 2:1–20

Reflection: Tonight the angel's words reach people who are already afraid. The shepherds are terrified, and the first thing the messenger does is speak to that fear. Then comes the invitation to see what God has done. They only need enough courage for the walk from the field to the manger.

When we gather tonight, we'll bring all kinds of Christmas Eves into the same room. Some of us will be surrounded by family. Some will be thinking about a person we wish were beside us. Wherever you are tonight, hear the words as addressed to you. What might your own short walk toward the manger be? It could be accepting an invitation or walking through the church doors and letting someone welcome you.

Thought for the day: God's good news asks something of ordinary people, and ordinary people can say yes.

Closing prayer: Jesus, born among us, speak your good news into our fears. Give us courage to carry what we receive tonight into someone else's tomorrow. Amen.

Around Central: Christmas Eve worship at Waterford Central begins at 8pm. Invite someone to come with you or offer to meet them at the door.

Friday, December 25, Christmas Day—God Moved In. John 1:1–5, 14

Reflection: John tells Christmas with a sentence big enough to live in. The Word became flesh and made a home among us. Think about what happens in a home over the course of a day. People get hungry. Somebody needs a nap. Dishes pile up. There may be a room full of voices or a long, quiet stretch after the phone call ends. Christmas tells us God has come to live close to all of it.

Give yourself a little time today to notice the place where you actually are. What can you hear from your chair? What feels tender? You might bless the meal even if you're eating it by yourself. Let one ordinary moment hold the good news that God has come to dwell with us here.

Thought for the day: God makes a home among us.

Closing prayer: Jesus, make your home among us today. Bless the crowded tables and the quiet rooms, and draw near to everyone who longs for company. Amen.

Have a Wonderful Christmas!