

December 12th, 2021 Third Advent Christmas Season

Partners in Prayer

Dear Partners in Prayer Team,

*“But as Joseph considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call **His name Jesus**, for He will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel’ (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called **His name Jesus**.”*

Matthew 1:20-25 (ESV)

*“To the fatherless God is a father.
To the widow He is a champion friend and husband.
The lonely He makes part of a family.
The prisoners He leads into prosperity until they sing for
joy.*

This is our Holy God in His Holy Place!”
Psalm 68:5-6 (The Passion Translation)

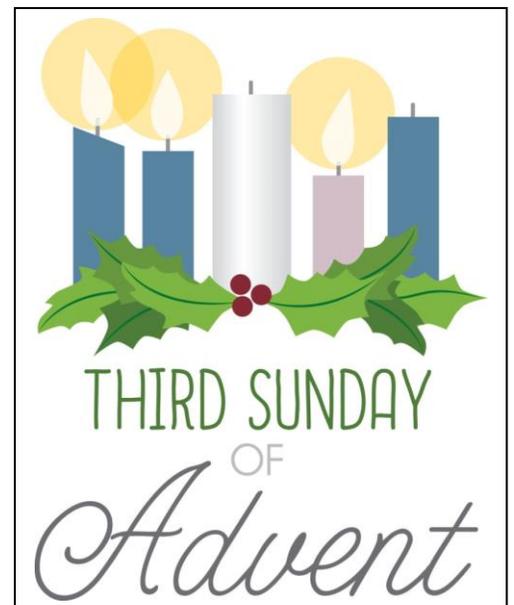
*“Deliver us! Then our homes will be happy.
Our sons will grow up as strong, sturdy men
and our daughters with graceful beauty,”*
Psalm 144:12 (The Passion Translation)

Are you still wishing and waiting for the feelings of Christmas to come? How many people do we meet each year at this time, and they are depressed, discouraged, or fighting through relationships and brokenness that has been in their homes all year? Often when talking to those individuals you hear, “I wish I could have that childlike feeling again, when I first had that wonder of Christmas. I’ve not had that for years. And this year doesn’t look any better, if only I could get that childlike Christmas feeling again!” That is why we entitle the message today: “Weary, Discouraged and Broken? It’s Time to Come Home!”

Here is a poem entitled **A Christmas Wish**, written by Debra Brown in 2018, that reminds us of those feelings:

*“I wish I could go back to the past,
of Christmases long ago.
I wish I could see my loved ones
who have passed on long ago.*

I'd love to be that child again



*who sat on daddy's [Santa's] knee.
Yes, all these memories that I have
decorating the tree.*

*I wish I could wake Christmas morn
to see daddy baking ham.
And to see my mamma making her yummy
famous candy yams.*

*I wish I could go to Grandma's house;
her cookies were the best.
The pies and cakes that she would bake,
she kept them in a chest.*

*Her house would smell like ginger,
with a hint of Balsam Pine.
She'd decorate the house with lights,
and it would surely shine.*

*All these Christmas memories,
it seems like yesteryear.
I'd love to go back to the past.
This is my Christmas prayer."*

(A Christmas Wish © Debra L. Brown More By Debra L. Brown Published: December 2018)



Yet, what adds to the discouragement is the reality that we can't go back to recapture those feelings while fighting the present dysfunctions that surround our families. Instead of going home to have a "Walton's" Christmas we feel more like we are having "The Hatfield's and McCoy's" Christmas. So, we need to know that there are many around us who are discouraged year-after-year. There will be many in our church who are suffering depression and fear because of the broken relationships they are constantly dealing with during Christmas. They often remember the days of old, and if they had a great wish, it would be, "Bring me the child-like fullness again of Christmas!" They may want to lash out at the insensitive exhortations we spout such as, "Cheer Up!" This is a time people will drown their sorrows with binge drinking and binge eating or binge TV-watching. Some people will not get an invitation from anyone in church to have a meal. Or they may be frustrated by the bills, that they don't have money to even buy gifts for family members. Pray that we come among them as family to understand.

This Christmas, give someone a call, or better, meet with him or her and talk about what he or she dreads during this season or what this person is fighting and up against. And don't be shocked when he or she is honest with you. Don't think that everyone will have a "merry" Christmas. Most people experience seasons of weariness from time-to-time in their lives, but Christmas

becomes even more depressing and lonely for many. If you are wearied by the burdens of Christmas without family or enduring the suffering with a broken family, remember that you are not alone! The Lord Jesus is with you! As a prayer team, let me challenge you to pray for these folks to find their way home for Christmas. I am giving you four ways to pray:

1. Pray and look back.

If you've been a believer in Jesus for very long, the story of the baby in Bethlehem might be so familiar that you don't quite possess the awe you used to have. You might even feel guilty for not feeling anything when you read or hear the history-splitting story of Jesus's birth. As we pray through the Advent season, we can admit it to the Lord if overfamiliarity has bred apathy in our hearts. He knows our hearts, and what He desires from us is humility and contrition (Ps. 51:17). There is no need to "fake it" before the Lord!

Pray that the Lord will help you to look back at the first coming of Jesus and its bearing on your relationship with God. Jesus is the only way to be reconciled to God (see John 14:6). If you are a believer in Jesus, you are so because He first condescended to be born like you before walking the path to the cross. Jesus' appearance at the end of Israel's long years of waiting was the culmination of all the promises God had made to His people in the Old Testament. Jesus' birth as a frail infant in a stable in the city of David was the kept promise of God to be with His people, to carry their sins and sorrows, and to save them from their sins (see Isaiah 7:14, 53:4, and Matt. 1:21). As you pray and look back, ask the Lord to renew your joy and hope that was secured in Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection (see. Heb. 6:19-20). Always go back and reclaim the name of Jesus!

Each December Sunday, our church family gathers around some candles and the Word as part of our Advent celebrations. We read about Jesus, we pray about Jesus, we sing about Jesus, we remember Jesus. The impact of the Name of Jesus is powerful. Charles Spurgeon started his message about how Jesus got His human birth name from Joseph with these words:

"BERNARD [A noted scholar and Pastor at Spurgeon's time] has delightfully said that the name of Jesus is honey in the mouth, melody in the ear and joy in the heart. I rejoice in that expression on my own account, for it gives me my share of the delight and leads me to hope that while I am speaking [referring to preaching from Matthew 1:21... 'Call His Name Jesus'], the sweetness of the precious name of Jesus may fill my own mouth. Here also is a portion for you who are listening. It is melody in the ear. If my voice should be harsh and my words discordant, you will yet have music of the choicest order, for the name itself is essential melody and my whole sermon will ring with its silver note. May both speaker and hearer join in the third word of Bernard's sentence, and may we all find it to be joy in our hearts, a jubilee within our souls. Jesus is the way to God, therefore will we preach Him! He is the truth, therefore will we hear

of Him! He is the life, therefore shall our hearts rejoice in Him! So inexpressibly fragrant is the name of Jesus that it imparts a delicious perfume to everything which comes in connection with it. Our thoughts will turn this morning to the first use of the name in connection with our Lord, when the child who was yet to be born was named Jesus. Here we find everything suggestive of comfort. The name of Jesus brings before our minds a vision of glory in the latter days when Jesus shall reign from pole to pole, and yet another vision of glory unutterable when His people shall be with Him where He is! The name of Jesus was sweet at the first because of the words with which it was accompanied, for they were meant to remove perplexity from Joseph's mind and some of them ran thus—'Fear not.' Truly, no name can banish fear like the name of Jesus. It is the beginning of hope and the end of despair. Let but the sinner hear of 'the Savior,' and he forgets to die, he hopes to live, he rises out of the deadly lethargy of his hopelessness and looking upward, he sees a reconciled God and no longer fears." (C. Spurgeon, Sermon "Jesus" #1434, Preached September 15, 1878; pg. 1).

2. Pray and look ahead!

Advent isn't just a season for looking back at the birth of Christ. It's also a season for looking ahead to His second coming. We are promised that Jesus will come again for us, and we eagerly await His return (see Phil. 3:20-21, 1 Thess. 4:13-17, Heb. 9:28). But, the busyness and "everydayness" of life can muddy our vision, eclipsing the future glory of our eternity with Christ. Advent is a good time to still our hearts and minds from their daily strivings and look to the glory that awaits us when we will be with the Lord forever. He will not leave us as orphans but will return for us (John 14:18). In Revelation 22, He promised three times: "I am coming soon" (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20).

It can be challenging to look ahead when our daily living feels more pressing than eternity. As you pray for the Lord to sharpen your focus on Christ this Advent season, pray that He will help you to look ahead to the promises of His return. He won't come as a fragile infant next time. He's coming as a warrior; faithful and true (see Rev. 19:11-14). His victory over sin, Satan, and death was secured at the cross and the empty tomb, but we will see its consummation when Christ returns. Life is busy and uncertain, and we quickly give our focus to daily worries and responsibilities. Pray that God will help you keep your eyes fixed on Christ and His promises. Our hope this Christmas isn't found in completing to-do lists or cultivating perfect holiday memories with our families. Our hope is found in the Savior who keeps all his promises.

3. Pray to point others to Christ!

I love the opportunities we're given during Advent to make new memories and remember old ones. Each year I look forward to the familiarity of gathering around our Advent candles, reciting the Nativity story, and singing carols with our children before bed. I anticipate the weekly services at church when I can remember Christ's coming and look to His return with my church family. There is a lot to love about this time of year.

From baking with kids to visiting neighbors, we have prime opportunities to point others to the hope of the gospel in Jesus Christ. Advent gives us an easy way to speak of the salvation offered by grace through faith! As you plan, shop, bake, travel, visit, and make memories, pray that the Lord will help you to see your Advent traditions as opportunities to make much of Him. Whether you're reading the story of Jesus' birth with children before bed or taking sugar cookies to your neighbor, the Holy Spirit can help you flood your Advent traditions with gospel refreshment. Pray that He would help you see every opportunity as an occasion to make His name great, for He is the "joy of every longing heart!"

While seasons change and memories fade, your hope in Christ is ever sure. Ask God to help you do one action of love, whether deserved or undeserved. Even if it doesn't change anything in your family concerning the circumstances and situations. You are doing it because Jesus didn't hold back to be right when it came to you, but loved you so much that even if you are the only person in the world, He would go to the cross for you. It mattered most to Jesus to reconcile our relationship with Him, then to be right and condemn us to hell.

Oh, that we regain that importance of the "Name of Jesus!" Like the hymn writer Lilla B. Long penned:

*"There have been names that I have loved to hear,
But never has there been a name so dear
To this heart of mine, as the name divine,
The precious, precious name of Jesus.*

Refrain:

*Jesus is the sweetest name I know,
And He's just the same as His lovely name,
And that's the reason why I love Him so;
Oh, Jesus is the sweetest name I know."*

Often it is hard to find any information about the writing of a song. Other times it is hard to verify that a story is correct. So I pass on this interesting story even though I haven't been able to verify its truth. I found it while googling "*Story of Jesus is the Sweetest Name I Know.*"

In the early 1900's, Lilla heard a medical missionary on furlough from China share the story of his work. Whenever someone came to him for treatment he would always tell them the story of Jesus.

One morning, before the doors of the clinic were opened, there was a knock at the door. There stood an elderly woman, stooped with age. He could tell by the dust on her feet and clothing that she had come a long way.

He treated her and as always, told her about Jesus. As she heard the beautiful story of Jesus' love, she opened her heart to receive Jesus as her personal Savior. Tears trickled down her cheeks as she accepted the gift of eternal life.

Quite some time had passed and there was a knock at the missionary's door. When he opened the door, he found the same old woman that had come to him several weeks before.

She said, "Sir, He has saved me and I know He lives in my heart. He has made my life so happy! But sir, I have forgotten His name. Could you please tell me His name again?" The missionary repeated over and over again the name, "Jesus," "Jesus," "Jesus." Each time the little old lady echoed that name, "Jesus."

Lilla's song has been a favorite. For most folks who are discouraged, weary, and depressed, their name is very special and they would love to hear it. But when we consider who Jesus is and what He has done for us, His name should be the one we love to hear. But, tragically, to many today the only time that they hear it is when it is used as a swear word. But to believers it is a name to be honored. And I love the reminder of the last verse that someday we will see Him face-to-face and thank and praise Him for His wondrous grace. What an exciting day that will be. Yes, Jesus is the sweetest name I know! Do you pray this for yourself and others this Christmas?

4. Pray for contentment in Christ, not just a feeling for Christmas.

Perhaps your calendar isn't full of seasonal plans. Perhaps this Advent is marked by loneliness or loss. Maybe finances are too tight to give your children or grandchildren what you'd like to give them, or perhaps at the end of all your efforts to enjoy Christmas, you still feel as though you're coming up short. Here is good news for you, Christian: "contentment isn't found in accomplishments, memories, or traditions. Your contentment is anchored in Christ, in whom there is no variation or shadow due to change (James 1:17)." You can ask Him to help you find joy in His constancy, His faithfulness, and His unchanging character. Pray that God will "restore to [you] the joy of [His] salvation" (Psalm 51:12). Ask Him to satisfy your soul as with the richest of foods, even if it's the leanest of times (Psalm 63:5-6). He loves to give good gifts to His children, and He takes pleasure in "those who hope in steadfast love" (Psalm 147:11). When we do that, the feelings follow. That feeling of discouragement, that depression, that anger, that anxiety, will go away, and then by the Holy Spirit, feelings after such a choice may turn toward finding that great peace in Jesus' Name.

The child born in Bethlehem has borne your griefs, carried your sorrows, and rescued you from sin, Satan, and death. While seasons change and memories fade, your hope in Christ is ever sure. As you await His second advent, you can be confident that He will keep His promise to return because He sent His Spirit to be with you now in the meantime. Pray that you'll grow increasingly aware of

the Spirit's presence in your life and that you'll find satisfaction and contentment in God's promise to be with you.

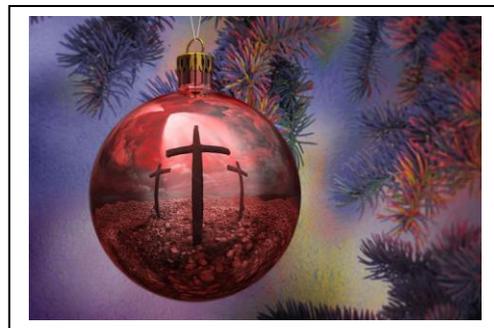
Our desire is that we, and many we know make their way "Home for Christmas!" I wish this Advent season will be reflective and worshipful but not quick to be overshadowed by the very routes we take for reflection and worship. As you pray during the days of Advent, ask the Lord to help you pause, look back, look forward, point others to Christ, and know where true contentment is found. Let prayer pave the way to reflection and worship as you come and adore Him! Loved ones, I wish you Jesus! Yes, the Name of Jesus and all that comes with His great name!

*"May peace dwell with you,
may prosperity huddle near.
May family gather together
without heartache or tear.*

*There is a star shining
in the night sky ... just there.
It is for you to wish upon
to keep you safe from care.*

*May everything you need
be yours to have and proclaim
as you're due; just close your eyes
and ask it in His precious name.*

*Merry Christmas to you, friend.
Let your season be a blessed one
filled with love and cheer and more.
Smile, laugh, and enjoy the fun." (Christmas Wishes For You, © Sherry Asbury
Published: December 2018)*



Will you pray with me this Christmas prayer which calls our discouraged broken hearts back home?

"Heavenly Father, full of strength and truth, many of us come before You today with troubled hearts and discouraged minds. We are fretful and fearful about our relationships, our finances, our families, and many other things. We have a hard time believing in You in a way that would bring comfort and contentment to our hearts. When thinking of the wrong doings of our family members, we relive those hurts. We suffer the pain of their attacks. We find confusion and discontent instead of those family feelings of yester-years gone by. Jesus, thank You for Your name! We speak it out today and claim its fragrant joys. Thank You, for Your fearless faith. Thank You that for the joy set before You, You persevered through far greater pain and suffering than anything we will ever suffer- in fact, through greater pain and suffering than we can even

imagine. Thank You that You will wipe away all our tears and bring contentment to our grieving and broken spirits. Holy Spirit, lift us up! Help us to believe in the sweetest Name of Jesus! Bring us home for Christmas. Give us the contentment that we can act rightly this Christmas season. We trust in the great sufficiency of Your grace to us in Jesus Christ's sweetest and greatest Name we could ever know! Amen."

Pastor Corvin ❖

Quote: "Know that you already have the truest friend. Everything we wish we had in friendship, but don't, we can have in Jesus. Jesus is the truest friend, the one who entered when everyone else left. He is the one who remembers when everyone else forgets. If you trust Jesus as your Great Friend, moment-by-moment, then you'll never walk into a room alone again. You won't need to seek friends as though you don't have any. You won't need to keep tweaking your mask to be more likeable to potential friends. Because you already have the friend of the friendless with you. And He knows you, the real you- not the you that tries to win friends by being someone you're not. With this friend by your side, you can take a deep breath, walk into any room, and finally focus less on needing a good friend than being a good friend." ... Drew Hunter