

Hope in the World

May the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

~ *Romans 15:13 (NIV)*

I was one day behind in reading devotionals from *Words for Life*. It always amazes me what God sets in front of you to read at the time you need it. It was a devotional by Kay Hutchinson called “Glorifying God.” She said, “Hope is found in the person of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

That year I had decided to get something new for my yard at Christmas. I was having quite a time deciding what it would be. My nativity had gone to pieces and couldn’t be fixed. With my mind on Ms. Hutchinson’s devotional, I came across something that went straight to my heart. Amazon advertised a yard sign that spelled out the word HOPE. It was a little expensive, but I thought, okay, I guess I can do this. Then up in the right-hand corner, there was an ad from Bed Bath and Beyond. That same sign was \$20 cheaper. Great! I ordered the sign from Bed Bath and Beyond.

The last sentence of Ms. Hutchinson’s devotional asked, “Are you listening? What is God telling you to do to glorify His name?”

He was telling me to put that sign up and to spread the hope around. My HOPE sign went up last year so all can see that there is hope for us, for this nation, and for the world. Hope was there when Jesus was born, hope was there when they hung Him on the cross, and best of all, hope was there for this world when He rose out of that grave.

Father, thank you that you sent us Jesus, your sign of hope for all. May we experience hope this Advent season.

Jane Koponick
Evangelical United Methodist Church

Messages from the Holy Spirit

And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.” ~ *Luke 1:35 (NKJV)*

In the first chapter of Luke, the angel Gabriel makes profound announcements — first to Zechariah, who as a priest had the unique opportunity of offering incense before the Holy of Holies. While doing this, his prayers could have been for himself and his wife Elizabeth to have a son or for his people to have a Messiah to provide their deliverance. Both of those were shortly accomplished.

Next, Gabriel announced to Mary that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her. She had found favor with God and was told that she would bring forth a son and His name should be Jesus. The message continued that He would be the Holy One, the Son of God. Unlike Zechariah’s questioning in Luke 1:18, Mary expressed no doubt and humbly accepted the will of God. Gabriel also told her that her cousin Elizabeth was with child. Mary immediately went to visit her cousin, who was filled with the Holy Spirit upon seeing Mary.

Later in Luke 1:67-79, Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaimed the remarkable prophecy of the coming of the Messiah and His forerunner, John the Baptist.

Another example of the Holy Spirit working at this time is that before Christ was born, the Holy Spirit told the “righteous man” Simeon that he would see the long-promised Messiah before he died. With the Holy Spirit’s precise timing, Simeon entered the temple as Mary and Joseph entered with their 6-week old child, the baby Jesus. Now Simeon could depart this life in peace. He had seen the coming salvation that would appear to Israel and the gentiles.

Like all of these examples of people touched by the Holy Spirit’s message about the coming of the Christ, may we glorify and praise God for that message throughout the Christmas season.

Dear God, during this Christmas season may we, and those we share your message with, experience the joy of knowing you like those in these examples from your Word.

Tom Bennett
Richwood United Methodist Church

Be Like Glitter

He said to them, “Go into the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”

~ Mark 16:15 (NIV)

Last year, during the week before Christmas, I worked frantically to sign and address our remaining Christmas cards. When I finished, I discovered silver and gold glitter all over the kitchen table, on my clothes, on my face, and in my hair. What a nuisance it was trying to get it all off! I decided no more cards with glitter. I have been instructed by my son-in-law and daughter that glitter is banned in their house as a result of the cleanup battles they have had with it involving their daughters. Yes, glitter “rubs off” on you.

As Christians, we are supposed to be a light to others (Matthew 5:16) — that is, putting our kindness and goodness out in the world for others to see. We are to live out the love and compassion that Jesus taught and hope it rubs off on others. By accomplishing this, we are doing what Jesus instructed us to do: we are trying to make disciples (Matthew 28:19).

Spreading the good news to others is no easy task. However, opportunities abound everywhere — at the workplace, in the neighborhood, at your child’s or grandchild’s athletic field, or at any social event. Imagine if every Christian “rubbed off” on one person every year throughout their lifetime. What an accomplishment that would be.

Who have you “rubbed off” on? Who are you trying to “rub off” on?

Be like glitter.

By the way, I have three free leftover boxes of Christmas cards decorated with glitter. First come, first served!

Father, you have shown us the road you want us to travel and told us what we are expected to do along the way. Give us the perseverance and stamina to do this throughout the life that you give us.

Ted Frett

Pitman Church of the Nazarene

A Light in the Waiting

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,
so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

~ Romans 15:13 (NIV)

While attending a Malaga Camp evening service this August, I looked to the side and was startled to see that it was already getting dark, though it was only about 7:30 p.m.! I do not like it getting dark so early — it seems like the day is over prematurely. The same is true as I watch the news filled with reports of unrest, senseless deaths, and people suffering. It sometimes seems that darkness consumes more and more.

Advent is a time of waiting — a sacred space between what is and what is yet to come. It speaks to something deeply human: the longing for light, for peace, for renewal, for hope in a brighter tomorrow. Hope is not just a feeling — it's a lifeline. It's what carries us through the quiet moments of uncertainty, the long nights of grief, and the gentle days of aging. Hope whispers that even in the waiting and darkness, something beautiful is unfolding. We all know what it means to wait. We wait for healing, for connection, for clarity. We wait for loved ones to visit, for strength to return, for peace to settle in our hearts. Advent reminds us that waiting is not wasted time. It is sacred time. It is the soil in which hope grows.

Think of a candle lit in the darkness. Its flame does not erase the night, but it transforms it. That small light becomes a beacon — a reminder that we are not alone, that something greater is at work, even when we cannot see it. The light and hope of Advent points us toward the One who is the Light — who forever pierced the darkness and who is in control and is always at work redeeming the brokenness around and within us. In this season, let us lean into the One who is the Light and let us be candles for one another. Let us share stories, laughter, prayer, and quiet moments. Let us hold space for each other's hopes and fears. And let us remember that hope is not passive — it is active. It is choosing to believe in goodness, even when the days get darker.

Lord of hope, in this season of waiting, help us to find hope in the quiet and peace in the unknown. Fill us with your light and hope so that we may be beacons of light and hope to one another, sharing warmth, compassion, and joy. Bless each heart who reads this with comfort and courage.

Pastor Kim Wecht
Pitman Manor

Pray as You Can

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.
~ Psalm 139:23 (NIV)

Dom John Chapman was an 18th century Roman Catholic priest who is credited with the adage, “Pray as you can, not as you can’t.” For some time, I was not sure what to make of that saying until one day when Don Juan offered a prayer at our “Lunch with the Lord” Bible study at work.

This was a study that I used to facilitate about once a month before I retired. I would buy some pizzas and soda and invite any who were interested to come and have “lunch with the Lord.”

Most of those who joined the study were young men from an inner-city background. Many, including Don Juan, were raised in dysfunctional situations that involved unstable families, out-of-wedlock babies, and environments where drugs and alcohol were readily present. During these meetings I would introduce various Bible topics, and in one particular meeting I spoke about prayer and the importance of communicating with God in a personal way through daily prayer. Afterward, I asked if anyone would be willing to say a prayer to open our meeting the following month. After a long pause, Don Juan raised his hand and volunteered.

Don Juan’s real name was James, but for whatever reason, he insisted that everyone call him Don Juan. Well, the next time we met, Don Juan offered up his prayer to open our meeting. As I listened, I first thought to myself that this has to be the crudest and coarsest prayer I’ve ever heard. There may have even been a swear word or two thrown in. But as he went on, I came to think that it was perhaps the most honest and sincere prayer I had ever heard.

Clearly, Don Juan was pouring out his heart. And isn’t that what matters? I felt myself choke up as I imagined the joy that our Lord must have felt listening to this young man pray the only way he knew how. Although unrefined and indelicate, Don Juan prayed as he could. He didn’t try to pray as he couldn’t. As with all of us, God knew what was in his heart and on his mind.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for being a friend who knows my innermost thoughts, concerns, and needs better than I.

Lee Duffield
Wellspring Church

Anticipation

And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.” ~ *Luke 1:46-47 (NKJV)*

Anticipation mounted in the early winter of 2015 as my husband and I thought we were close to rebuilding our house at the river where I'd summered since childhood into a retirement paradise. Abruptly, our dreams were deferred as we needed to care for my parents-in-law for the next 7 years, and our love and attentions were given to them.

By the spring of 2025, our house plans were renewed and hope returned while we awaited a sluggish county department's numerous permits to be issued. My garden at the river house mirrored my waning hopes since I didn't plant any flowers or herbs in case our construction would begin soon. Yet God planted my dreary garden with His sprouts of last year's re-seedlings! By June's end, amazingly, I had basil, oregano, and marigolds galore shooting up, enough for sharing with neighbors and brightening my garden bed.

Pondering these times of waiting, excitedly believing in plans being made and then facing setbacks, made me think of how Mary must have felt after receiving her message from the angel Gabriel and once her pregnancy became known. Her anticipation must have been great, yet did she have misgivings? Was she taken aback by the possibility of Joseph not wanting to marry her once he knew? No! Mary had the utmost praise in glorifying God and rejoicing in His mercy and might.

Mary waited patiently with her cousin Elizabeth for 3 months while their babies were developing, not feeling worried. Her full trust in her Lord and Savior created all the joyful events of her pregnancy, marriage, and the birth of Jesus! As Joseph's visitation by an angel confirmed the Lord's plan, he too fully trusted in God's plan for them and their Son, despite setbacks due to the census and King Herod's attempt to kill possible rival kings after Jesus' birth.

May we also have the deep faith of Mary and Joseph, knowing their anticipation of our Lord and Savior brought us all His great gift of love.

Father God, in this season of Advent, may we glorify you as we celebrate Mary and Joseph's anticipation of Jesus being born, and thank you for the gift of eternal life with you.

Barbara Buck
Wesley Church of Elkton

Prayer, Praise, and Thanksgiving

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. ~ *Philippians 4:6-7 (NKJV)*

Heading to church on a dismal October Sunday morning, with the predicted nor'easter bearing down on us, I sent up prayers for safety from the wind (an errant tree limb could really do some damage) but also gave thanks for everything — safe journeys, gorgeous weather, family visits — the list goes on and on.

We had just arrived home on the Friday before, after enjoying an excellent week's vacation in Ocean City, Maryland, with picture-perfect weather. We took another quick trip the next day to Baltimore for my sister-in-law's 70th birthday celebration and to see my older brother, who suffers from Alzheimer's. Our trip was almost rain-free until we ran into a bit on the way home Saturday night.

About a mile or two before arriving at church on Sunday, I saw something move in the car. Thinking it was a fly or spider (and sending a quick prayer for help), I was totally shocked but happily surprised to find a praying mantis on the inside of my passenger window! How wonderful it felt to be reminded that my prayers are always heard. It doesn't matter whether they are requests for help in time of need, or praises and thanks for His many blessings. I always keep the Philippians verses in my heart and truly feel His peace. I know He sent that little visitor to remind me once again to trust Him, keep on praying, and be grateful! So, when we arrived at church, I gently opened the car door and he hopped out and landed on my shoe! I then carefully helped him into the grass to continue his journey of sharing hope of God's grace and mercy with another.

If Dora (from *Finding Nemo*) can sing "Just keep swimming!" then we should be shouting "Just keep praying!"

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending a gentle reminder that you are always just a prayer away.

Kathy Chando
Zion United Methodist Church