

Penrallt Baptist Church

Advent Reflections 2020

During Advent we are going to explore the themes each week of Hope, Love, Peace and Joy. This devotional is an opportunity to do this in a deeper way and in a daily way. There is a short devotional and a set of readings (a few verses or short passage) each day.

We hope that you'll find this helpful alongside your existing daily readings or perhaps as an opportunity to try doing daily readings for the period of Advent.

These themes are taken in the order suggested in the North Western Baptist Association Advent reflections, so that we are reflecting on the same topics together with other churches in the NWBA. The Bible Project has produced a Bible Reading Plan – a week on each of these themes. These have been extracted here and presented in the weekly order to match the order of our weekly NWBA themes. The Sunday themes below are taken from 'NWBA Advent Reflections'.

The Bible Project also have produced short 4-minute videos to introduce each of these themes. We will be putting links to these videos on the Sunday service webpages, or you can find them on the Bible project website (<https://bibleproject.com/explore/the-advent-series/>).

You can also do this on the YouVersion Bible App on a phone or tablet or on the website using the Bible Project | Advent Plan (<https://www.bible.com/en-GB/reading-plans/13255>). If you are following this plan, do Hope week 1, Love week 2, Peace week 3 and Joy week 4 for days 1–5 up to 24th December.

Praying God's blessing on us as we reflect on these together. Any questions, ask Magnus in the Church Office or please speak to John.



Day 1: Sunday 29th Nov

Start of Theme: Hope in God's salvation

The word "advent" means arrival. This advent season, we invite you to reflect on the biblical meanings of hope, love, peace and joy to discover how these virtues have *arrived* in the world through Jesus.

For our first week, we will explore the biblical meaning of hope.

Read:

- Hebrews 10:23
- Romans 15:13

Hearing hope in the narratives of history.

Hope is something that echoes through our history, so it is not surprising that we attach to the candle of hope, the "stories of our ancestors". We can trace the story of God's salvation into some of the earliest narratives of the Old Testament, and see them echoed again in the early chapters of the New. We can also pause to remember stories of the early believers and stories from our own local histories of God's faithfulness. As we remember God's faithfulness in the past, and as we hear God's promises echoing from history and fulfilled on our Gospel narratives – so our hope for the future is rekindled.

Day 2: Monday 30th Nov

Devotional

Biblical hope relies on God's character as a basis for trusting that the future will be better than the present. The more a person gets to know God's character, the more hope they can have.

Read:

- Psalm 130:1–8

Reflect:

- What does the psalmist say about God's character?
- What do you say about God's character?
- What does the psalmist believe God will do for Israel?
- What do you believe God will do for you and your community?
- How do you want to see God's forgiving love at work in your life and your community this week? Form your answer into a prayer to him now. He's listening.

Day 3: Tuesday 1st Dec

Devotional

Optimism chooses to see how circumstances could work out for the best. Biblical hope, however, is not based on circumstances. In fact, hopeful people in the Bible often face difficult times with no evidence that things will get better, but they choose hope anyway. For example, Israel's prophet Micah lived in the midst of injustice and evil but looked to God for hope.

Read:

- Micah 7:6–8

Reflect:

- Notice some of the troubles Micah lists in verse 6 and how he responds in verse 7 and 8. What are some of the troubles around you right now? How does Micah's response encourage or challenge you today?
- Take a moment to echo Micah's prayer to God. He hears you.

Day 4: Wednesday 2nd Dec

Devotional

God's past faithfulness motivates hope for the future. We can look forward with hope by looking backward to remember how trustworthy God has been. If he was faithful then, why would he not be faithful again?

Read:

- Hebrews 10:23

Reflect:

- Remember three specific ways God has shown his love to you and your community in the past.
- How do your memories of God's faithful love provide hope for you today?
- Turn these reflections into a conversation with God. Share what his faithful love has meant to you and how you want to see him be faithful again today.

Day 5: Thursday 3rd Dec

Devotional

Biblical hope depends on Jesus because he alone is able to give “living hope” through his death and resurrection to all who trust in him. In other words, the hope that Jesus gives is “living” because he himself is alive and offers eternal life with him. When we put our hope in him, we will not be disappointed, and we will live with him forever.

Read:

- 1 Peter 1:3–5

Reflect:

- What do you observe as you read this passage?
- Notice how this passage is a blessing addressed to God. Take some time to bless God with a prayer of your own.

Day 6: Friday 4th Dec

Devotional

The good news reveals that Jesus' spirit can actually live within humanity and enable them to experience the magnitude of God's presence. The apostle Paul called this mystery, "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Read:

- Colossians 1:25–29

Reflect:

- What words or phrases stand out to you as you observe this passage?
- Ponder the mystery that Jesus' spirit can live within people who trust in him. As you think on this, turn your questions, wonder, and amazement into a prayer to God.

Day 7: Saturday 5th Dec

Devotional

Biblical hope is not just for humanity; it's for all of creation. Jesus' resurrection provided a glimpse of how the whole universe will one day be restored.

Read:

- Romans 8:18–39

Reflect:

- In this passage, what specifically do the children of God and creation wait to see realized? What will be completed on that day? What do you think creation will be like when this hope is finally realized?
- What are you suffering right now? How does this passage encourage you in the midst of your pain today?



Day 8: Sunday 6th Dec

Start of Theme: Love is God's message

In our second week of advent, we'll explore the meaning of biblical love and how it all leads to Jesus.

Read:

- Isaiah 54:10
- 1 John 4:11

Hearing love in the messages of prophets.

We often use the second week of Advent to particularly hear again the messages of the prophets – those who spoke of hope and restoration in the midst of exile. When everything else is stripped away, God's love remains – even in the midst of human circumstances of despair, God's message of love prevails. Even those prophets who spoke out in the years before exile, were expressions of God's love – pleading with his beloved people to turn again to embrace the love that was theirs to find. Whatever our own circumstances, God's love will outlast them all, and that we are called to love God and to share God's love within them.

Day 9: Monday 7th Dec

Devotional

When Jesus is asked about the most important command in the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible, he answers by quoting from the ancient prayer known as the *Shema*, “love the Lord your God with all of your heart.” But that’s not all. Jesus quickly follows up by saying that another command from the Hebrew Bible is also the most important, “love your neighbour as yourself.” So which is most important? For Jesus, both are vital because the first command cannot be obeyed without heeding the second. They are inseparable. A person’s love for God is expressed *by* their love for others.

Read:

- Mark 12:29–31, Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18

Reflect:

- Pay attention to what Jesus says after quoting from the Hebrew Bible. What questions, thoughts, or feelings come up for you as you reflect on his words?
- Review the passages from Deuteronomy and Leviticus. What do you observe? How does this impact you today?
- Turn your reflections into a prayer to God from your heart.

Day 10: Tuesday 8th Dec

Devotional

The Hebrew Bible records the history of God's people repeatedly neglecting the greatest commandment to love God and others. How can we hope to do any better? Jesus helps us when he adds a new commandment to accompany the greatest commandment. His new command shows how his own sacrificial love can empower his followers to love others.

Read:

- John 13:34, and review Mark 12:29–31
- 1 John 4:9–11

Reflect:

- Compare John 13:34 with Mark 12:29–31. What is the difference between these two commands? How does Jesus' own example renew and fulfil the greatest command?
- Review 1 John 4:9–11 carefully. What words or phrases stand out to you? According to this passage, why did Jesus give his life, and what should motivate our love for others?
- Take a moment to pray in response to what you learned today.

Day 11: Wednesday 9th Dec

Devotional

The God of the Bible doesn't just express love, he *is* love. As a triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit, he has always been and always will be an others-centred, self-giving, communal being. Love is not just one of his attributes. Love is the very nature of who he is. Jesus, the Son, fully embodies the love of God and demonstrates it most clearly when he gives his life on behalf of humanity. When people learn to trust Jesus' love for them, they join in God's community of love, and their very nature is transformed to love others with him.

Read:

- 1 John 4:8, 1 John 4:16, 1 John 3:16, John 15:9–13

Reflect:

- Review 1 John 4:16. Have you learned to trust that God truly loves you?
 - If so, describe your experience of receiving his love. What has changed in your life since you began to fully trust that God loves you? How can you share his love with someone today?
 - If not, describe how you have struggled to receive God's love for you. What do you think would change in your life if you fully trusted that God loves you?
- Review John 15:9. How much do you think God loves Jesus? Reflect on the idea that Jesus loves you just as

much. What questions, thoughts, or feelings come up as you reflect on this?

- Jesus compared his love to a place that you can live or “abide” in. To truly live somewhere, you first must move in, unpack, learn the space and how to operate comfortably in it. What else do you do when you live somewhere? How can this compare to what it’s like to trust in Jesus’ love for you?
- Let your reading and reflection prompt a prayer. Talk to God about how his love amazes you, be honest about how you struggle to receive it, and ask for what you need to trust his love for you today.

Day 12: Thursday 10th Dec

Devotional

Agape love is not primarily a feeling that happens to people. Love is an action. It is a choice people make to seek the well-being of others. The apostle Paul, in one of his letters, says love is more important than having spiritual knowledge or special abilities and that nothing really matters without it. He goes on to describe exactly how love thinks and behaves.

Read:

- 1 Corinthians 13:1–7

Reflect:

- Write out 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 on a piece of paper. As you write the passage in your own handwriting, what words or phrases especially stand out to you?
- Which aspects of love do you need to grow in most? Tell God and ask for his help.
- Using Paul's definition of love, consider how Jesus has loved you. For example, how has Jesus been patient, kind, humble, and selfless to you?
- Who needs a reminder that God loves them today? How does Jesus want to share his love through you this week? Take some time to pray about it. Jot down any ideas that come to mind while you pray and make a plan to actively share his love this week.

Day 13: Friday 11th Dec

Devotional

Jesus says that the ultimate standard of authentic love is how well you treat the person you can't stand, or in his words, "you should love your enemy and do good to them expecting nothing in return." For Jesus, this kind of love imitates the very character of God himself.

Read:

- Luke 6:27–36

Reflect:

- What do you notice? What questions, thoughts, and feelings come up as you read?
- Remember or tell a story of an experience you had when you, or someone you know, showed love to their enemy and expected nothing in return.
- What does Jesus promise for those who love in this way (see verse 35)?
- Note how God himself is kind to ungrateful and evil people. What does this say about God's character? Imagine a world where God was mean to people who were ungrateful and evil. Would anyone at all survive?
- Note how God is described in verse 36. What is the relationship between love and mercy?

- How do Jesus' words specifically challenge or encourage you today? What is one way you can actively respond today?
- Let your reading and reflections prompt a prayer. Express your gratitude to God for his merciful love and be honest about the ways you have withheld the same love from others. Pray for the people who have mistreated you, and ask for God's continued help to love like he does.

Day 14: Saturday 12th Dec

Devotional

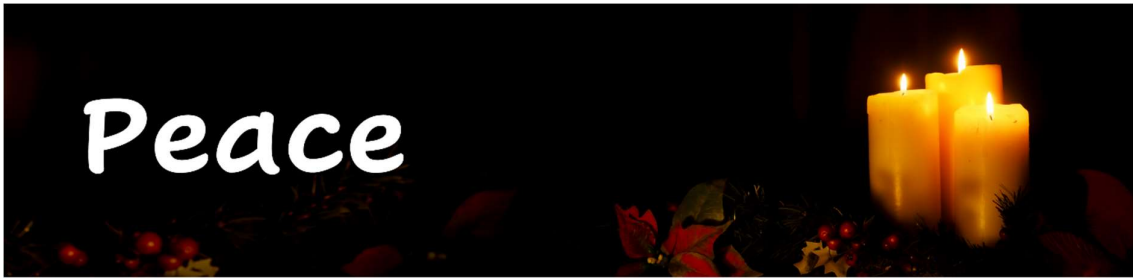
In Paul's letters, he reflects on God's love. He teaches about how it extends beyond the Jews to include the Gentiles and how nothing at all can separate God's people from its measures. In one letter, Paul recognizes that Jesus' love is so massive that people need supernatural help to understand and rely on it. Paul then prays for his readers to be strengthened with God's Spirit.

Read:

- Ephesians 3:14–21, Romans 8:38–39

Reflect:

- Read the passages of the day carefully. Pay attention to the words and metaphors Paul uses. What do you observe?
- Have you ever wondered if you (or someone else) have sinned too much to receive the love of God? Our sin might be tall and deep, but Jesus' love is taller and deeper or in other words, where there is more sin than we can recall, Jesus' love can forgive even more than we can fathom. We cannot earn God's love; we can only humble ourselves to receive it. Who else needs a reminder of this good news today?
- Turn your reflections into a prayer to God from your heart. Ask God to give you strength to understand and trust Jesus' love for you and for others.



Day 15: Sunday 13th Dec

Start of Theme: Peace is God's destiny

In our third week of advent, we'll explore the biblical meaning of peace and how it all leads to Jesus.

Read:

- Romans 5:1
- Numbers 6:24–26

Peace – finding peace through trusting God in difficult and unexpected experiences.

We often accompany the candle of peace with the emergence of John the Baptist inviting us to “prepare the way of the Lord”. This is a call to action, to not simply rest in passive expectation of the coming of God's Kingdom, but to seek its ways and by agents of its message. We reflect on how we identify ourselves as heralds of God's Kingdom, to display through our actions, our attitudes and our activities, our expectation of its coming. To work for peace by challenging the narratives of division and power – to bring peace by reminding those who feel abandoned and oppressed that God's Kingdom will one day come.

Day 16: Monday 14th Dec

Devotional

The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*, and it describes not only the absence of conflict but also the presence of completion, reconciliation, and justice.

Read:

- Proverbs 16:7

Reflect:

- Considering what you have learned in the Bible so far. Name five habits (thoughts, actions, or words) that you believe are pleasing to God.
- How do you think these habits could make peace even between enemies?

Day 17: Tuesday 15th Dec

Devotional

The prophet Isaiah looked forward to the arrival of a future King, who would make a covenant of *shalom* with his people. His reign would right all wrongs and heal all brokenness.

Read:

- Isaiah 9:6–7

Reflect:

- What words or phrases stand out to you as you observe this passage?
- Based on this passage, how does the Prince of Peace govern his Kingdom?
- How can you help bring about God's peaceful rule in the places where you have influence?
- Pray to ask the Prince of Peace to govern over and through you this week.

Day 18: Wednesday 16th Dec

Devotional

The prophet Isaiah looked forward to the arrival of the Prince of Peace, whose reign would lead to eternal *shalom*. Isaiah's words were fulfilled with the arrival of Jesus. This is why it is so significant that the angels described Jesus' birth as "peace on earth."

Read:

- Luke 2:9–15

Reflect:

- Why do you think God announced the arrival of the King to no-name shepherds? What does this tell you about the nature of God and his Kingdom?
- Imagine being there with the shepherds that night. How would you feel? How would you respond?
- Notice the words "highest" and "earth" in the angel's worshipful announcement. What came from the heights of heaven down to earth when Jesus was born? How is this good news? Let your reflections prompt a prayer to express your feelings of awe and gratitude.

Day 19: Thursday 17th Dec

Devotional

Biblical history shows how humanity has chosen its own ways apart from God and suffered as a result. But God wants to be close to humanity, and he knows how painful it is to be separated from him, so he sent Jesus to make peace. Through Jesus, all things can be restored to harmony with God again.

Read:

- Colossians 1:19–23

Reflect:

- According to this passage, what did God want to do and how did he accomplish it through Jesus?
- Consider all that Jesus suffered and overcame in order to make a way for humanity to be in God's holy presence once again. Let your reflections prompt a prayer to express your feelings of awe and gratitude.

Day 20: Friday 18th Dec

Devotional

The apostle Paul says Jesus himself is our peace. Jesus removed all the things that separate humanity from one another and from God and now offers his peace to others as a gift. Jesus' followers are called to receive, keep, and cultivate this gift of peace, which requires humility, gentleness, patience, and love.

Read:

- Ephesians 2:11–15, Ephesians 4:1–3, Ephesians 4:29–32

Reflect:

- According to this passage, how did Jesus make peace between two sharply divided people groups (Jews and Gentiles), and why did he do it (see verse 2:16)?
- Do you feel alienated from anyone in your life? Do you want to enjoy peace with this person again? Why or why not? Consider what Jesus did to make peace. What questions and emotions surface as you reflect on this?
- Review Ephesians 4:1–3 carefully. How do you think humility, gentleness, patience, and love help to maintain the unity Jesus made for his followers? What happens when one of these virtues is missing? You can't make choices for others, but what is one practical decision you can make today to cultivate peace?
- Review Ephesians 4:29–32 closely. How has Jesus forgiven you? Who needs your forgiveness?

Day 21: Saturday 19th Dec

Devotional

The apostle Paul writes his letter to the Philippians from prison. He knows hardship, but he also knows the peace of God. This is because biblical peace, like hope, is based on a person and not on circumstances. Paul calls followers to rejoice in God at all times, to pray, to give thanks, and to think on what is good and true. Paul shows how these habits can lead to experiencing the peace of God even in the midst of great difficulty.

Read:

- Philippians 4:1–9

Reflect:

- Make a list of all the instructions Paul gives in Philippians 4:1–9 (i.e. “stand firm in the Lord,” “live in harmony,” etc).
- Observe your list and imagine making each one into a habit. What would those habits practically look like in your daily life? How do you think those habits would eventually lead to an experience of God’s peace?
- Review verses 7 and 9. What do you observe? What do these verses tell us about the protective nature of God’s peace? Express your gratitude for his protection now.



Day 22: Sunday 20th Dec

Start of Theme: Joy is God's heart

In our fourth and final week of advent, we'll explore the biblical meaning of joy and how it all leads to Jesus.

Read:

- Romans 5:13
- Philippians 4:4

Joy – rejoicing in God's sustained presence, even when things are not easy.

On this final Sunday before Christmas, our mood becomes one of celebration. This is a week when we are likely to remember and re-tell the narratives of the coming of Christ. The fourth candle is sometimes called "Mary's Candle" – allowing one who was so central to them – to draw us again into those stories that remind us that God is with us. Joy has depth, and this is no mere call to frivolity and fun (though they can both be an expression of it) but for those for whom this will be a season of struggle – to find again those deeper threads of joy that can prevail even within their struggle. The story we share and celebrate is a story that is our gateway to eternity.

Day 23: Monday 21st Dec

Devotional

On page one of the Bible, God says that this world is good, so naturally people find joy in the good things God has made. But the biblical story also shows how this world has been corrupted by our own selfishness and is now marked by death and loss. How can anyone experience joy amidst so much chaos and sorrow? In the midst of this tension, the Bible offers a unique perspective on joy. The joy of God's people is sustained by God's promises over their future destiny, not on their current circumstances. For example, when God rescued Israel from slavery, they shouted for joy even though they were still in the middle of the wilderness, far away from the land God promised to give to them.

Read:

- Psalm 105:42–43, Exodus 15:1–3

Reflect:

- Which promises of God help you to rejoice today?
- In response, write or sing a prayer to celebrate God's promises to you.

Day 24: Tuesday 22nd Dec

Devotional

God's ways provide real joy and wisdom to humanity (see Psalm 19:7–8). But Satan aims to fool humanity into seeing their own ways as wise (see Genesis 3:6). It's easy to get tricked because Satan's deceptions usually reward us with a temporary pleasure. But when humans choose their own instructions over God's, they cannot find the true and lasting joy they seek.

Read:

- Psalm 19:7–11, Genesis 3:1–7

Reflect:

- Compare and contrast the two passages of the day. What words and concepts are repeated in both passages? What do you notice?
- Pray for renewed trust in God's good motives towards you. Be honest with him about the ways you have disagreed with him or doubted him and ask for what you need to follow his leadership today.

Day 25: Wednesday 23rd Dec

Devotional

Israel chose their own path apart from God. As a result, they were exiled from their land and ruled by foreign nations. But the prophet Isaiah knew that sorrow and sadness would not have the final word. He looked forward to the day when Israel's gracious God would raise up a redeemer to deliver them from oppression and lead them to eternal joy.

Read:

- Isaiah 51:11, Isaiah 49:13

Reflect:

- Identify areas of your life that feel heavy right now.
- Slowly review today's passages with your own experiences of loss or sorrow in mind. What thoughts or feelings come up as you reread?
- Pray for God to comfort you with a renewed view of his eternal joy.

Day 26: Thursday 24th Dec: Christmas Eve

Devotional

The prophet Isaiah looked forward to the coming of Israel's redeemer. His prophecies were fulfilled with the arrival of Jesus. This is why it is so significant that the angels announced Jesus' birth as "good news that brings great joy."

Read:

- Luke 2:9–11

Reflect:

- Why do you think the shepherds were afraid?
- What reason did the angels give for them to rejoice instead?
- What fears are you facing today? How can the angel's good news about Jesus speak to those fears today? Let your reflections prompt a prayer to God now.

Day 27: Friday 25th Dec: Christmas Day!

Devotional

Jesus came into the world as a light shines in the darkness. Jesus brings hope by his offer of salvation. Jesus is a gift from God – the message of God’s love. Jesus make forgiveness possible which brings peace. Jesus is joy in our hearts.

Read:

John 8:12: “Jesus said, ‘I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in darkness. They will have that light. They will have life.’”