



THE GREAT
RESCUE

↓
FORETOLD
↑

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL
2022

 **FIRST
PRES**



THE PEOPLE
WALKING IN
DARKNESS
HAVE SEEN A

GREAT LIGHT;

ON THOSE LIVING
IN THE LAND OF
DEEP DARKNESS

A LIGHT HAS

DAWNED.

ISAIAH 9:2

THE GREAT RESCUE

FORETOLD

This Advent, our sermon series spins around the great rescue as told throughout Isaiah. Some presume Christmas is merely ornaments and reindeer. God's people proclaim a different message: Christmas celebrates the arrival of Jesus the Messiah, God inaugurating His rescue plan of redemption by sending Jesus to conquer sin. Heaven's invasion has come; the Kingdom of God is at hand.

Did this great rescue come up out of thin air, with no warning? Unlike any event in human history, the arrival of the Messiah was foretold for thousands of years. Generation after generation, the clear and consistent word was echoed: one is coming who will rescue.

On behalf of the pastoral team of First Pres, I pray you see anew the astonishing kindness of the God who enters in and rescues us. This year, we hold up the lamps of our hearts to these foreshadows and encourage one another to keep listening to the movements of grace around us today as we, as one congregation, seek to follow the Messiah in being His Light and Life for the City.

The light of the world, foretold throughout the ages, has come. Our great rescue is at hand.

Yours and His,



MICHAEL THORNTON
PASTOR OF DISCIPLESHIP



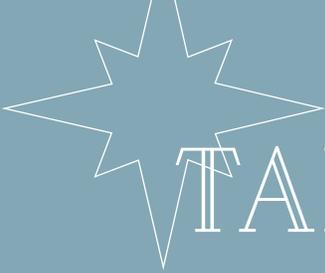


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ADVENT EVENTS

DEC
2



-  Friday, Dec. 2, 4:30 p.m.
-  firstprescos.org/advent
-  Worship Center

DEC
4



-  Sunday, Dec. 4, 3 p.m.
-  firstprescos.org/advent
-  Sanctuary

DEC
11



-  Sunday, Dec. 11, 2 & 5 p.m.
-  pikespeakcenter.com
-  Pikes Peak Center

DEC
15/16



-  Thursday, Dec. 15, 6 p.m. or
Friday, Dec. 16, 9:30 a.m.
-  firstprescos.org/advent
-  Worship Center

DEC
17



-  Saturday, Dec. 17, 9:30 a.m.
-  firstprescos.org/advent
-  Worship Center

FIND EVENT DETAILS AND REGISTER ONLINE
AT FIRSTPRESCOS.ORG/ADVENT

CHRISTMAS EVE

AT FIRST PRES



FAMILY SERVICE

10:30 AM

This 55-minute Sanctuary service is ideal for families with elementary-aged kids. Children are invited to help make the Christmas story come alive by singing in the choir loft and dressing up in provided angel, wise people, and shepherd costumes. Plan on arriving 30 minutes early to choose a costume before the service begins. Nursery childcare is not available.



CANDLELIGHT SERVICES

1, 3, 5 & 7:30 PM

Each Sanctuary service is filled with special music from our Sanctuary Choir and music ensembles and ends with a special Silent Night candlelight moment together. Nursery childcare is available for infants through 4 years old.

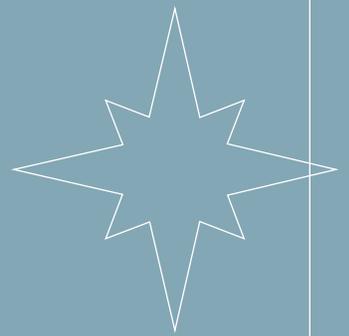


MIDNIGHT COMMUNION SERVICE

11 PM

This warm 55-minute communion service in the Sanctuary features acoustic Christmas carols and ends at midnight as we say, "Merry Christmas!" to one another. Nursery childcare is not available.

SERVE THIS CHRISTMAS



There are many ways to share God's love with others during our Christmas Eve services:

WELCOME TEAM

Help create a welcome environment for guests who come through our doors. This could mean serving in a variety of ways as a host, usher or part of the check-in team. Specific assignments will be provided closer to the day of the event.

EXTERIOR WELCOME VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers will be stationed at strategic positions outside the church helping to welcome, direct and guide those who arrive for services. Note this will be an outside volunteer position.

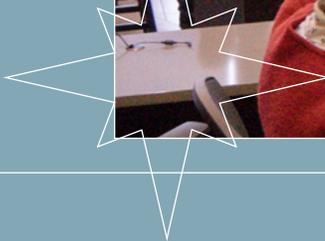
PARKING VOLUNTEERS

Be among the first to greet those who arrive for Christmas Eve as part of the parking team, helping people find their way, get settled and head in for Christmas Eve. Note this will be an outside volunteer position.



SIGN UP TO SERVE ONLINE AT
FIRSTPRESCOS.ORG/ADVENT

For questions, contact Christin Walls, Associate of Guest Engagement,
at cwalls@firstprescos.org or 719-884-6168.



1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DAY 1 | NOV. 27 | **ISAIAH 1:2-6, 11-20**

written by **JENNIFER HOLZ** SENIOR ASSOCIATE PASTOR

We enter Advent this season with hard and harsh words from the prophet Isaiah. His prophetic book opens with words you will likely not see on any Christmas card or party invitation this December: "Wash and make yourself clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong" (Isaiah 1:16). Isaiah's diagnosis is that we are sick, lost and unable to heal ourselves. From head to toe, we are a people of open wounds and uncleansed sores (1:6). Israel's sin runs bright red like scarlet and crimson (1:18). Ours does too. Unless God breaks into our world in a miraculous way, we are all doomed.

But God sends the prophets to call the people back to His heart and His way. That simple sending, in and of itself, is cause for great joy. For if there was no hope for us, God wouldn't bother Isaiah. But take heart: Isaiah's very voice indicates that the great rescue is underway. The sending of the One who will make all things right is in motion. Jesus is coming and has come. Joy to the world!

ADVENT CANDLE FAITH

written by **CLAIRE BERGER** PASTOR OF EQUIPPING MINISTRIES

For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

ROMANS 1:17



Where can God’s rescue plan be found? Is it charted on maps? Diagrammed with measurements? On blueprints locked away in a forgotten and over-stuffed cabinet? The people were walking in darkness. How could they even find the plan there, in the dark?

We can know the plan because rescue is found in the heart of God.

We can unfold not a glossy map, but the Word of God and see the lineage of promise. We can run our fingers from Genesis to Malachi and through faith see a path of rescue in the characters. We can relish the links unfolding from generation to generation. But the plan doesn’t begin or end once we get to Bethlehem. God’s heart still beats of rescue, and so the plan runs through our lives.

We see it, we sing it, in faith we rehearse it in our gathered worship. As it unfolds around us in our lives, we pray for fresh encounters with Jesus as we trust His rescue to continue.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

And to that end, this devotional wants to help you sing it, hear it, see it, and retell it in homes as the rescue plan unfolds in our lives. Because celebration is God’s rhythm, God’s way. He says rejoice with me. And so, we light our candles.

In the past, we needed candles for light. Now we don’t, but they bring people together because they are beautiful, they are sensory, and they are dangerous—and they are a way to interact with God’s rescue plan.

In addition to reading devotionals to engage with God’s Word, scan this QR code each day to interact with whispers of rescue a little bit more. And little bit by little bit we find our unfolding stories in God’s great rescue plan.



DAY 2 | NOV. 28

GENESIS 3:20-24

written by

JUNIOR MCGARRAHAN

PASTOR FOR ADULT EDUCATION

The human race has just begun life in God's created paradise and now it seems to have ended just at the moment it started. The Lord had created beauty and abundance and had placed Adam and Eve in the midst of all those riches and gave them purpose-filled work to do. How could anything go wrong? But it did. Thinking that they were wise, our first parents disobeyed a command of God and plunged us into a world that is broken. In response to their rebellion, God evicted them from a home that held so much promise. By closing and

shielding the Garden, the Lord is protecting his gift of the Tree of Life. God will not allow human sin to corrupt His offer of life. And so, we hold our breath. The Garden is now closed to them, and they are walking in darkness. *Will light ever overcome the darkness? Will they ever find their way back?* The answer to those questions is found in the promise we await in Advent—the way to Light and Life will be found in the pledged coming of the Son of God.



DAY 3 | NOV. 29

GENESIS 6:5-14

written by

ABI TOVAR

DIRECTOR OF KIDS MINISTRY

Have you ever had a car break down? It's the worst feeling when you're stranded. Those moments bring fear, disappointment and worry as you wait for a vehicle to save you.

In our story today, it wasn't a car but a people so wicked and disobedient who broke down. The Lord, although compassionate and merciful, was deeply troubled. He needed to wipe out humanity as He created it. Left to our own devices with no care, we can find ourselves feeling broken down just like the Israelites. Without God, we can feel so broken that even a tow truck can't save us.

The Lord could have ended the story there with a nation wiped out. But He did not. Instead, He offered a vehicle of salvation for His people. He instructed Noah to build an ark for himself, his family, and many animals. Although the ark did not save the whole nation of Israel, it did point the way for the Lord to save them in a bigger way.

Are you feeling broken down or stranded? Are you feeling in need of a lifeline, a vehicle of salvation? I've got good news for you! That vehicle is coming, and this time we are all invited to climb aboard.



DAY 4 | NOV. 30

PSALM 71

written by

GREG HARTNETT

PASTOR OF EVANGELISM AND YOUNG ADULTS

I love the second installment of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy largely because it features the epic battle of “Helm’s Deep.” Upon learning of advancing evil forces, the humans rush to their unconquerable mountain citadel. However, the fortress is ultimately not enough to save them. When defeat is imminent and it appears all hope is lost, the resurrected wizard Gandalf (who often functions as a Christ figure in the series) arrives to save the humans.

The author of Psalm 71 also faces challenges. Cruel people are after him, his enemies seek to kill him, and he fears he will be abandoned in old age. Amid these difficulties, the psalmist puts his faith in the Lord, for the Lord is his refuge. He is confident because he knows God has been with him all along the way. He remembers God’s faithfulness, even in his own birth. The psalmist rejoices, confident that his hope is not in something, but in someone!

Nothing of human creation—no fortress, no nest egg, no political organization—offers deliverance as the Lord does. May we recognize our deep need and, with the psalmist, place our trust in the Lord who is our mighty and living fortress.

DAY 5 | DEC. 1

GENESIS 11:1-9

written by

DAVE STEANE

TRANSITIONAL EXECUTIVE PASTOR

Most of us are familiar with the concept of mob rule. It happens when a group of people take matters into their own hands and disregard the rule of law or accepted policies and procedures. The psychological and sociological backbone of mob rule suggests that there is sufficient strength in numbers to accomplish the will of the mob.

Perhaps the earliest account of mob rule is found in Genesis 11:1-9, the account of the Tower of Babel. At that time, humanity had one universal language, and they aspired to make a name for themselves by building a tower that reached the heavens. When God saw what humanity was

intending to do, He confused their common language and dispersed them all over the earth.

The human heart is not much different today than it was in Genesis 11. We often aspire to make a name for ourselves and elevate our standing, seeking to be our own gods. But God's love for us is relentless and passionate, and He has repeatedly intervened into human history to correct our corrupted hearts. The greatest intervention was the birth of Jesus Christ as Messiah and Savior. Humanity desperately needed to be rescued, and God graciously provided!



DAY 6 | DEC. 2

GENESIS 12:1-5

written by

JOHN GOODALE

PASTOR OF CARING MINISTRIES

Would you ever begin a trip without knowing where you were going or how you'd get there? Neither would I. But that's exactly what Abram did when God called him to leave all that was familiar for a new land: "So Abram went, as the Lord had told him" (Genesis 12:4). Though details of the journey and destination were uncertain, Abram went because he knew he could trust the One inviting him forward.

With this instruction, we see more than Abram on the move. God was on the move. His decision to set aside a people through Abram started something

that would lead centuries later to His rescue plan for the world with Christ's arrival.

Our Lord continues in this rescue plan today, in your life and in our world. This rescue plan isn't always easily discernible: just as Abram had to trust where God was leading him, there are days when we trust without seeing evidence that God is still actively at work in His rescue efforts. So, we watch during Advent for glimpses of God's redeeming fingerprints in our lives and in our world. We wait for what will unfold. And we trust, as Abram did, in the One inviting us to be part of His rescue plan.



DAY 7 | DEC. 3

GENESIS 22:1-14

written by

GREG ZALOOM

MISSIONS DIRECTOR

At the center of this perplexing and thrilling narrative, Isaac says, “The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

Fire and wood, they are the preparations for a burnt offering. Later in Israelite cultic life, the burnt offering was an expression of complete dedication to God, the only offering with no portion withheld, also involved in making atonement, restoring relationship between God and the worshiper. (Robin Routledge’s *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach*)

The fire and wood were there. “But where was the lamb?” Where was the sacrifice?

When we observe a world in chaos, and the sin in ourselves, we might ask too, where is the sacrifice? Where is our rescue? Who will live before God in complete devotion and make atonement for our sins?

Genesis 22 captures a willing father and son, spared by an intervening God who provides a ram in the son’s place. In our story, the story of Scripture, a willing Father God in conspiracy with a willing and obedient Son, intervene on our behalf, providing our sacrifice. It is a sacrifice we could never provide for ourselves, but God did in His great love for us, a great rescue.

2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DAY 8 | DEC. 4 | ISAIAH 11:1-10

written by **TIM McCONNELL** LEAD PASTOR

Just a green shoot emerging from the deadened stump of a tree. Just a bud. Just a blade of grass pushing up from the dark soil. That is the image Isaiah uses to produce hope. When will there be actual justice on the face of the earth? When will you look at powers and authorities, and the decisions they make and the judgments they render and say, “Yes. That’s right. That was a just and true and good decision”?

At the end of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, after a great crisis, a conflict and an explosive resolution, the hobbit Sam Gamgee wakes up to find the wizard Gandalf standing over him. “Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to come untrue? What’s happened to the world?”

Is everything sad going to come untrue? Is everything wrong about to be put right? The Spirit of God is on the move. You can smell a change in the air. Let the hope of **The Great Rescue** of Christmas begin to blow through your spirit.



ADVENT CANDLE HOPE

written by **JUNIOR MCGARRAHAN** PASTOR FOR ADULT EDUCATION

***...but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.***

ISAIAH 40:31

In his sermon today, Pastor Tim preached from Isaiah 11, which tells us that the seed of God's rescue plan for us has been planted. This is something we hope for with all our hearts.

When we hope for something, we have to wait, and waiting is so often the hardest thing we are ever asked to do. It is, however, just a little easier to wait when we trust the person who is telling us to hope for better days.

But sometimes our faith and hope fail, and we wait because there is nothing else we can do. We are tired, weary and exhausted. Our own strength has come to an end, and we even begin to think that God is too tired to pay attention to us. We need to be rescued from our condition. Who will save us?

Isaiah tells us (40:28-30) that not only will our strength be *renewed*, it will be replaced with God's strength, not with new measures of our own strength. God alone is our hope...God alone is *your* hope.

Engage deeper with songs,
pictures and prayers
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DAY 9 | DEC. 5

EXODUS 12:21-28

written by

CLAIRE BERGER

PASTOR OF EQUIPPING MINISTRIES

Children ask the best questions. After Moses gave instructions for rescue and the command to keep rehearsing this plan for years to come, he knew some little voice would wonder aloud: “Why are we doing this?”

In the midst of great darkness, enslaved Israelites were told God’s plan. Then and there the plan involved a lamb chosen to be “the Passover lamb,” its blood above the door so the destroyer would pass over God’s people and defeat the captors.

There in Egypt, Moses said, “Keep doing this! Even when you are free in the land God promised you, keep doing this.” Why? Perhaps because in the little voice asking, “Why are we doing this,” we hear the shout of hope to come: it foretold Jesus, our great Passover lamb whose blood marks us as His, and the darkness cannot defeat us.

“For to us a child is born.” And as you light Advent candles or venture out for Christmas Eve service, do you find yourself asking, “Why are we doing this?” Hear the shout of hope to come: Christ has come. He is coming again. Christ shines in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it.

DAY 10 | DEC. 6

EXODUS 14:10-14

written by

MATT HOLTZMAN

PASTOR FOR CARE AND ENGAGEMENT

The Israelites had witnessed God's rescuing power before, but the cul-de-sac of hopelessness in Exodus 14 seems to be nothing short of a dead end for God's people. We see horses' hooves pounding the dirt as God's people cry out in fear. We see every chariot Egypt owned bearing down upon helpless, pinned-in people, trapped against the Red Sea shoreline. We see them in a death trap that is threatening total annihilation with no way out.

For any of the Israelites caught in this chaotic scene, I can only imagine how ridiculous Moses' directives must have sounded: "Stand.

See. Keep still." Don't do anything? Don't fight back or flee? No. Just watch your warrior God fight for you. Witness His miraculous might, and in stillness, receive your rescue.

When God's people are powerless to save themselves, the Lord God proves Himself mighty to save. When the enemy comes to threaten total destruction, God makes a way by splitting the sea wide open, allowing us as His sons and daughters to walk in victory and witness the enemy vanquished in drowning defeat. Hallelujah! King Jesus, our reigning Rescuer, comes to make a way!



DAY 11 | DEC. 7

PSALM 69

written by

CHRIS CULLINS

CREATIVE DIRECTOR/WORSHIP LEADER

How I wish I could have heard David, the great musician, play this psalm. Imagine the most famous musician in the Bible singing this song as a plea for rescue. Being a musician, there is a constant river of music flowing through my head, and this psalm takes the river on a stirring journey.

In Colorado, we are at the front steps to some of the best rafting and ferocious rivers as the waters cascade down the elevations in a fury to the sea. Rafting comes with great excitement but also great risk as the water, or what is unseen under the water,

can overtake the raft. Suddenly you are tossed in over your head and in need of rescue.

Just as a guide in the river knows the plan and knows what is to come, so our God has a plan for rescue. This passage declares our souls need rescued, and we see this passage declares the promise of rescue. The psalmist commits to the plan even if it means moments of shame, for the Rescuer will bring great restoration. In the hope of rescue, we join with creation in a wonderful song of praise!



DAY 12 | DEC. 8

EXODUS 20:1-21

written by

FLOYD SEBALD

DIRECTOR OF FIRST PRES FELLOWS

Exodus 20 brings us to the moment when the Ten Commandments were given to the Israelites. Though we all know these commandments well, I usually remember them out of the context they are given. They often stand in my mind as an isolated list which I highly esteem and discern in some part their value for personal and societal well-being. They also stand in my mind—and likely all our minds—as a pointer to my need for a Savior because I cannot keep even one of these commandments as I should.

These Ten Commandments sit as the centerpiece of the entire Law given by God in His goodness (Romans 2:4) to lead us to repentance. Yet, I often forget the context—the very dramatic moment—when these commandments were given (Exodus 20:18-21). This fearful moment was filled with lightning, smoke and thunder—and penetrating sounds of a great trumpet—all in a veiled display of the terrible and formidable presence of the Holy, Eternal God. That One as it says in Hebrews 4:13 “with whom we have to do.” In all our sin and shortcomings, we lay terribly exposed and bare before the Holy One. Give thanks this day for the atonement (covering) of Jesus Christ that is ours.

DAY 13 | DEC. 9

JOSHUA 1:1-9

written by

PAT HARTSOCK

ASSISTING MINISTER OF CARE

There is a fascinating “*already but not yet*” reality throughout Scripture. We *have* a promise, but we have *not yet* seen its full reality. In Joshua 1:1, Moses, who was to lead his people into the promised land, died before he could experience the promised land (Deuteronomy 34:1-12). We also have a promised land in Revelation, but unless the Lord returns, we will die *before* we experience that hope.

With Moses’ death, God kept Israel’s *future* hopes alive in Joshua’s leadership. Joshua’s name means “The Lord saves.” However, remember that the

Israelites were still on the other side of the river, the other side of their rescue, just as we are on the other side of our rescue. Thus, the Lord gave Joshua, his people, and us, a *future* promise in a *present* reality: “every place the sole of your foot *shall* tread upon I have *already* given to you” (Joshua 1:3). God was *already* moving in the *not yet* of their future, the promised land, and is moving in the not yet of our future rescue, our promised land. Therefore, in our *present*, we are to live by “faith, which is the *already* of things hoped for, the conviction of things *not yet* seen” (Hebrews 11:1).



DAY 14 | DEC. 10

JOSHUA 2:8-13

written by

MICHAEL THORNTON

PASTOR OF DISCIPLESHIP

Thick in the enemy’s camp, what does it take to be rescued? Do you have to fight your way out on your own? Does the fear of what your Jericho will do to you if they catch you, or the fear of what the Israelites will do to a Canaanite, paralyze you into inaction?

The story of Rahab is the story of a woman of faith moving from the enemy’s camp into fellowship with God. Rahab’s faith infuses the needed courage and strength to say yes to her rescue. Listen afresh to Rahab’s belief in God: “for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below” (Joshua 2:11).

Rahab was an enemy of God by birth but grafted into God’s rescue plan by faith. Rahab knew that her life was safe not through self-rescue, but through faith-filled God-rescue.

Rahab saw her need for rescue and leapt after it. O, may we be Rahabs of faith! May we be blessed with the eyes to see true reality this Advent. Rahab’s story of rescue foreshadows **The Great Rescue** by pointing to the need we all share to receive God’s rescue as a free gift by faith.

3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DAY 15 | DEC. 11 | ISAIAH 25:1-9

written by **TIM McCONNELL** LEAD PASTOR

Each year at Christmas I try to take time to read my tattered, two-dollar copy of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol." One of my favorite moments is when Scrooge is reminded of the great feast his boss, Mr. Fezziwig, used to put on for him and his fellow workers each Christmas. More than reminded, Scrooge is returned to the feast. He enters into it again. "During the whole of this time, Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self. He corroborated everything, remembered everything, and underwent the strangest agitation." The tastes and smells, the feelings and joys, the warmth and hope of that feast of the past began to penetrate his hardened, cold heart.

There is a future feast. A feast of rich food for all peoples. It is a feast whose celebration overcomes death itself. The tablecloth covers and swallows the power of death. The Lord is the Master of this feast. He will host it. He will keep it. He will wipe away every tear from all who come. This feast is not in the past; this feast is on the way. It will come. It is part of the grand narrative, the story of God's salvation, **The Great Rescue**. Take a minute to let the Spirit pull you into the smells and warmth and joys of that feast today. It is the strangest agitation, but it is most welcome.



ADVENT CANDLE LOVE

written by **CLAIRE BERGER** PASTOR OF EQUIPPING MINISTRIES

***Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the skies.***

PSALM 36:5

God's love reaches to the heavens and His faithfulness to the skies, skies that slowly get darker and colder on our December days. But even though the skies are lit with the light of the sun less and less, perhaps we know something else more and more.

The dark of Advent is an invitation to mystery—the mystery of Christ incarnate.

In the largeness of Christ's loving rescue plan, nothing is lost. The darkness is not dark to Him. It is fertile ground for growing our loves. I can't help but think of scenes of huddling around fires and heaters the darker the night grows. As the night grows, so does our hunger for the light.

Because while humanity was lost in darkness, love pierced the night. A babe born to die so we could find life in Him. If your body reacts with disease to the darkening days, let this Advent candle be a way to recall what the soul knows in the dark: there is One who is the source of all light, One who came to be with us in the dark.

Engage deeper with songs,
pictures and prayers
at firstprescos.org/advent



DAY 16 | DEC. 12

1 SAMUEL 8:6-18

written by

MARCOS HENRY

DIRECTOR OF STUDENT MINISTRIES

God's love and promise never ceases. In the time where Israel wanted a king like other nations, God said to Samuel, "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king." Even in the rejection, God still had a plan that would not change His course of **The Great Rescue**.

This passage is applicable today. We tend to follow culture because it's influential. Israel was looking at its surroundings and they were influenced by the success of other nations. They thought, "If we have a king like the other

nations, we might have what they have." However, God was not asking them to look at their surroundings; He was asking them to look up to Him.

God is the only one who can be our influencer. It might not look conventional, or trendy, but it is good for our lives. It is easy for us to fall into the influences of the world. But take heed, don't get stuck looking at your surroundings. Look up in prayer to our Rescuer who listens. He will influence you to His great plan of salvation. Amen!



DAY 17 | DEC. 13

1 SAMUEL 17:32-37

written by

ABI TOVAR

DIRECTOR OF KIDS MINISTRY

There is a saying that goes something like this: "When life knocks you down, you can choose to get back up." Well, after a while of being knocked down time and time again, it becomes harder and harder to get back up. That is how the Israelites felt in 1 Samuel 17:32-37. The Israelites and the Philistines had been battling for quite some time, and just when they thought the Philistines were gone for good, like a boomerang they would come back again. In our story, the Philistines are back and bigger than ever with a champion named Goliath. They were certain that with him they would win this long battle. The Israelites needed to be rescued from this opposition. They needed saving.

In comes David, the least likely hero of our story. Certainly not what the Israelites had expected "saving" to look like. Sending David to fight Goliath was sort of like telling a friend who is going through a hard time to "power through."

It wasn't just David stepping into this story however; God stepped in also. Just as God saw and delivered the Israelites from their struggles, God also sees our struggles. When life knocks you down, and the opposition feels too overwhelming, God has an unexpected rescue plan for your soul.



DAY 18 | DEC. 14

PSALM 40

written by

JAMAL SARIKOKI

SANCTUARY WORSHIP LEAD

The saints of Old awaited a promised Messiah spoken of through the prophets. Psalm 40:6–10 is a prophecy of the coming Messiah. In the case of a world longing for rescue, the Lord sent Jesus Christ into the world to dwell among us, to sacrifice for us, to bring us out of the pit of destruction which is our bondage to sin. The Lord heard the cries of the world and inclined Himself to us.

For Advent 2022, what are the cries of our heart? What are we longing for the Lord to rescue us from? Our son, Jeremiah, was born to two parents who spent close to two years crying out for a child. We had gone through a miscarriage followed by doctor visits and medications. Still no answer. But after a touch-and-go pregnancy, the Lord put a new song, a song of praise, in our mouths.

In the chaos of life, we can be assured that the Lord hears our groanings, He watches us wait on Him, and because of His great love, He gave Himself for you. He puts you on firm footing and nothing can separate you from His love. Salvation has come! What song of praise will fill your mouth this Advent?

DAY 19 | DEC. 15

1 KINGS 8:22-27

written by

DAVE STEANE

TRANSITIONAL EXECUTIVE PASTOR

In the film *Liar Liar*, Jim Carrey plays an ambitious and ruthless attorney who thinks nothing of lying to win a case. This also spills over into his personal life as he constantly promises his son that he will show up and be an involved and loving father, only to disappoint Max repeatedly. As the fantasy comedy unfolds, Carrey becomes unable to lie and a series of life lessons are learned. One of the lessons of the film is that we can discern a person's integrity by their ability to keep promises.

In 1 Kings 8:22-27, the Temple has been built and Solomon offered a prayer of dedication. In that prayer, Solomon asked God to keep the covenant

and promise He made with his father, David, that, "You shall not lack a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel."

Though Israel fell into deep disobedience and sin, God kept His covenant and promise when the King of Kings and Lord of Lords was born in the person of Jesus. The keeping of God's covenant and promise reveals the nature and character of God. God pursues sinful humanity with unconditional love and forgiveness. God's ultimate mission is to orchestrate **The Great Rescue** as we are redeemed and restored in and through Jesus Christ!



DAY 20 | DEC. 16

JUDGES 7:19-24

written by

GREG HARTNETT

PASTOR OF EVANGELISM

AND YOUNG ADULTS

God regularly calls the Israelites to engage in battle in bizarre ways, from marching around cities, to keeping arms raised high, to striking an army with blindness, to this incredible situation with Gideon. With a grand announcement (300 trumpets!), Israel startles the enemy and God inspires them to begin swinging their swords at anything that moves, namely their own soldiers! Panic ensues, the enemy is scattered, and Israel picks off the fleeing Midianites.

God repeatedly uses unexpected methods to rescue His people. In fact, there are echoes of this scene on the night of the great rescue. Like the night outside the Midianite camp, the night of the

incarnation started as an ordinary evening. But before long, there were hosts of angels announcing the presence of the saving God in the fields (which would have certainly rivaled the loudest trumpets)! There were shouts, but instead of rising from military personnel, they came from a mother and a newborn son. And, just as the Midianites fled from Gideon's men, evil was sent running as the Lord of Heaven and Earth rested quietly in a manger.

God's ways are not our ways. This season, may we learn to place our trust in our Lord, the unorthodox liberator, the unconventional deliverer!



DAY 21 | DEC. 17

RUTH 1:11-18

written by

JENNIFER HOLZ

SENIOR ASSOCIATE PASTOR

Naomi and Ruth. Two widows in grief connected by marriage. Naomi is an Israelite. Ruth is a Moabitess. Although these two ethnic groups are not supposed to intermingle, their stories unfold together as they lift each other up in their woundedness. Ruth is bound to her mother-in-law by love, devotion and responsibility. She chooses to care for Naomi, who is now old and bitter toward God: “Don’t urge me to leave you or turn back from you...your people will be my people and your God my God,” states Ruth (1:16).

In that decision, Ruth eventually becomes the great-grandmother of King David. She moves from exclusion to inclusion in the royal genealogy that leads to the birth of Jesus, our Messiah and Rescuer.

God’s great rescue plan cannot be undone. In the very story of Jesus’ family tree, we find that God’s heart for the outsider beats wildly with love. Ruth’s story, in many ways, is our story. We were once estranged from God, on the outside. But because of God’s great love for you and for me, our rescue has taken place, we are ushered into God’s family, and we rejoice that Jesus has come for us.

4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DAY 22 | DEC. 18 | ISAIAH 40:1-11

written by **TIM McCONNELL** LEAD PASTOR

When guests come to visit our home, there is a little work to be done to prepare. I sometimes forget this or overlook just how much preparation is necessary. There needs to be clean sheets. Towels must be washed, dried and folded. There is shopping for food. It would be nice if the bathroom got cleaned and the stairs were vacuumed. And how about some flowers? Sometimes the guests are unexpected. You might recognize from a popular Christmas movie the unexpected arrival of Uncle Eddie: "No! Don't be silly. You're not imposing. We have plenty of room, plenty of towels...we have plenty of everything!"

In ***The Great Rescue***, Isaiah now sees the Savior coming over the mountain. Like a city preparing to receive a royal visit, it is time to make the road clear! Jesus does not require a prepared heart. You don't have to have everything in your life squared away and prepared to receive Jesus. Just open your heart and let Him in. As the carol says, "No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin; Where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in." Welcome Him.



ADVENT CANDLE JOY

written by **JUNIOR MCGARRAHAN** PASTOR FOR ADULT EDUCATION

***The Lord is my strength and my shield;
my heart trusts in him, and he helps me.
My heart leaps for joy,
and with my song I praise him.***

PSALM 28:7

What would cause anyone to jump for joy? There are as many answers as there are people: recovery from a serious illness; a favorite team winning the World Series; finding a new job; getting into the college of your choice. All those things can make us happy, and all of those things are temporary.

The world offers so many things that promise joy and they all come with a price and an expiration date. So, after we spend money and energy on things which do not satisfy, where do we go to find joy and contentment? We need to be rescued from the endless cycles of disappointed desires.

We go to the Lord who is coming...we see Him on the horizon. He's on His way and His light will dispel the darkness that is in the pit of our cravings.

We find in Him strength for our days and defense and protection for all that assaults us. We can depend on Him to come to our aid. That is what causes us to leap for joy...and to leap for joy...and to keep on leaping for joy. Get the idea?

Engage deeper with songs,
pictures and prayers
at firstprescos.org/advent



DAY 23 | DEC. 19

DANIEL 3:16-25

written by

MATT HOLTZMAN

PASTOR FOR CARE AND ENGAGEMENT

Nebuchadnezzar, a tyrannical king within a pluralistic society, issues a decree for every tongue and nation to bow down to his 90-foot statue of gold. “Worship whatever God you want to behind closed doors.” But in public, “Worship *this* or die.”

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refuse, and as a result are thrown into the fiery furnace. The death of these three rebels would serve the king’s agenda well, further instructing the people as to where their loyalties should lie. But then, the human barbecue is interrupted. God to the rescue! Among the array of foreign false gods, the One True God intervenes and the three men walk out preserved, having no smell of smoke on their skin.

Nebuchadnezzar himself at the end of this chapter would proclaim that “no other God can save in this way.” The king was right! Years later, God would send the Rescuer once again. This time the furnace would be in the shape of a cross. Jesus faced the fire so that you and I might be delivered. Praise God who says, “The flames will not set you ablaze! For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, *your Savior!*”

DAY 24 | DEC. 20

2 KINGS 6:11-17

written by

MARCOS HENRY

DIRECTOR OF STUDENT MINISTRIES

This passage demonstrates faith and trust in our great Rescuer through the actions of Elisha. In our lifetime, troubles will present themselves as overwhelming, and impossible to manage. More often than not, we respond like the servant of Elisha. We are frightened from the trouble, we have anxiety, or we lose all hope. Yet, Elisha prayed and said, “Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Our prayer is that we ask God to open our eyes and see the protection that God has in our lives. Even though life hits us with very hard circumstances, we stand in faith like Elisha to pray so that we can see the chariots and horses surrounding us with protection. And may we have the posture like the blind man, who cried out to Jesus for help. Then, Jesus put dirt on his eyes so that he could see. May we be willing to let the Lord open our eyes to see the fullness of His plan and know that He is our Rescuer. Amen!



DAY 25 | DEC. 21

PSALM 80

written by

CLAIRE BERGER

PASTOR OF EQUIPPING MINISTRIES

In our texts for these devotionals, we have not seen some of the key figures we think of when we think Christmas. No Mary, Joseph, wise people. We have not seen a play-by-play of the shepherds. We instead have read of how things like lamb blood were spread across doorposts of old instead of the twinkling lights of our own Christmas setting.

But God’s dazzling light is spread through His Word. Psalm 80, the Message, starts, “Throw beams of light from your dazzling throne,” and from of old we hear God’s people saying, “Hear us, Shepherd of Israel.” Perhaps because it is a dazzling rescue foretold. A

rescue punctuated with the light from God’s throne coming to shepherd and rescue His people. It does not shimmer like we think it should, especially in the despair as you read on in Psalm 80.

But Christmas is good news that from the beginning, God wants to be with us. A plan He conceived, planned and executed; a Christmas hope that shimmers not just in our Bethlehem scene, but a Christmas hope spread from Genesis to Revelation because when God’s face shines upon us, when He smiles His blessing smile, that will be our salvation.

DAY 26 | DEC. 22

JONAH 1:1-3; 4:1-11

Have you ever thought someone deserved judgment instead of mercy? Why is it that we tend to demand justice without the slightest thought about mercy, without desiring restorative rescue?

The Lord called Jonah to preach the Kingdom of God to the city of Nineveh. Jonah ran away. Jonah became angry, wanting to see Nineveh judged. Jonah did not think it worth his time to tell people that **The Great Rescue** was coming.

I think there are at least two great rescues going on in the story of Jonah. One rescue is

written by

MICHAEL THORNTON

PASTOR OF DISCIPLESHIP

the sparing of Nineveh. The people in Nineveh hear the Kingdom proclaimed. Many, no doubt, will be rescued, since God promises that His word “will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).

The other rescue is the saving of Jonah. God would not let Jonah rot in his anger. God reveals His heart as “a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity” (Jonah 4:2). The story of Jonah foreshadows **The Great Rescue** whereby salvation will extend to every “Nineveh” outpost across the globe and to every “Jonah” trying to flee the Lord’s grace and compassion.



DAY 27 | DEC. 23

ISAIAH 9:2-7

We began our Advent reflections plunged into darkness and death as a consequence of a sinful deed. We wondered if there would ever be light on our way or a new life to live. There was a promise of a child to come—a child whose life would defeat evil and its effects in the world (Genesis 3:15-24). And here we are! The birth of the promised child has been announced and there is great celebration. The child becomes the King, light shines in

written by

JUNIOR MCGARRAHAN

PASTOR FOR ADULT EDUCATION

darkness, and a new life has begun under the rule of this great King.

But this King begins His life with us as a baby of humble origin, assuring us that this King knows and shares our human condition. And into that human condition He will bring the wisdom, peace, justice and care of a loving Father. So, the long night of darkness is over, and we will rejoice in the arrival of God our Sovereign and our Savior.

DAY 28 | DEC. 24

LUKE 2:8-18

written by

TIM McCONNELL

LEAD PASTOR

The Great Rescue begins. Jesus has come. The Ron Howard film, **Thirteen Lives**, tells the true story of the rescue of a boys soccer team from a flooded cave system in Thailand. Twelve boys and their coach were trapped in the cave in June of 2018. It took three weeks for an international team of rescuers to find a way to extract them. They did it only by sedating the boys and dragging them out lifelessly. You can only imagine the moment they first saw the headlamp of the first rescuer emerge from the water in the dark cave where they were stuck without food, in the dark, for 10 days. That light was only the beginning.

The birth of Jesus is only the beginning. **The Great Rescue** has only just started. Now we have to trust our Rescuer. Now we must put our lives into the hands of our Savior with full and total submission. That is the only way He can accomplish the mission, to save our lives and redeem our souls. Christmas is the great celebration! Into the darkness a light has shined. Into our stuck situation has come a Rescuer. He is Jesus. He is the Lord. "Come with me! You are saved!"

Merry Christmas!



CHRISTMAS DAY SNAPSHOT



WHERE DID I SPEND CHRISTMAS DAY?



WHAT WAS THE WEATHER LIKE?



WHO DID I CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS WITH?



WHAT TRADITION MEANT THE MOST TO ME THIS YEAR?



MY FAVORITE ADVENT SCRIPTURE:



MY FAVORITE CHRISTMAS SONG THIS YEAR:



A YEAR
IN REVIEW

HOW DID I SEE GOD AT WORK IN 2022?

UNEXPECTED JOY:

UNEXPECTED SORROW:

GRATEFUL FOR:

I'M MOST PROUD OF:

PRAYER FOR 2023:

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