

**Readings and Devotions for Thanksgiving,
Advent and Christmas 2023**

Zion Lutheran Church, Ridgeville Corners, Ohio (www.zionrco.org)

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Thanksgiving Reading

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them
their food in due season.

Psalms 145:15 (ESV)

Psalms 145 speaks of all living creatures looking to God. This looking to God happens in two ways. First, God is Creator of all and over all. Whether any person believes in God or not does not stop the existence of God or His power over all things. Every human, every creature on earth, every form of life depends on the Creator. As brilliant as some human knowledge and devices might be, it is evident both in history and today's world humans harm and kill as easily as help. It is a merciful Creator who is over all creatures that is needed.

This is the second way of looking to God. He is not just the Creator who exists, but the God who has mercy on me and can help me. He is a caring God to whom any person might turn for mercy in the midst of any kind of suffering. Thanksgiving to Him acknowledges He is the source of goodness. He knows all the ways of human health; we can turn to Him for help. He knows how deep humans might suffer in mind and soul; we can turn to Him. He knows our every sin; we can turn to Him. This God sent His Son Jesus to gain for us forgiveness, life and salvation as a free gift. He wants us to trust Him.

Prayer: Dear God, thank You for every good thing in my life. I know all is in Your control. Help me to call upon you. Please forgive my sins and strengthen my love. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

(Read Psalm 145:14-21)

Advent I Reading (Dec. 3-9)

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

Luke 2:1-5 (ESV)

God works right in the midst of human history. Consider Joseph and Mary. As they obeyed the government decree to register, God guided them to fulfill the prophesy that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem. Promises in the Old Testament from God to Abraham, King David, the prophet Isaiah and many others were fulfilled in the birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. At certain times and places God does a miracle, wondrously helping. But most times God is with us constantly guiding and helping us in our daily lives to be His people.

While God may grant miraculous help from time to time in our lives, it is vital to know He is always with us. Through good and bad He does not forsake, but asks us to call upon Him for guidance and assistance in all His ways.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for being with me every second of my life. You know I need Your help in everything I have to do. Please give me wisdom, day in and day out, to do Your will. Please forgive my sins and strengthen my love. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

(Read Micah 5:2-5)

Advent II (Dec. 10-16)

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. Luke 2:6-7 (ESV)

How could the promised Savior's family be so poor that the Baby Jesus needed to be laid in a manger, the feeding place for cattle? Our human perspectives often misjudge God's power and plans. God does not need humans to provide for Him, but rather to rely upon Him. Mary was the mother of Jesus, miraculously pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph was Jesus' father in charge of Him. Though Joseph was not Jesus' natural father, Baby Jesus was Joseph's responsibility. Mary and Joseph provided shelter and food for Jesus, protected Jesus as He was growing up, and brought Jesus up in the knowledge and obedience to God's words of the Old Testament. God provided for Mary and Joseph what they needed as Jesus' parents.

Our human perceptions and feelings are quick to doubt God's plan for us. But God is with us. We are tempted to fear what we think we do not have, so all the more we should pray. Help me Lord in this situation!

Prayer: Dear God, thank You for watching over me every day. Help me see how I can serve You and my family in my own situation. Please provide the things I am lacking. Please forgive my sins and strengthen my love. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

(Read Galatians 4:4-7)

Advent III (Dec. 17-23)

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace,
good will toward men. Luke 2:8-14 (KJV)

How many times this scene has been printed on cards and books, painted in pictures, described in poetry and hymns, manufactured in little nativity sets and broadcast on radio, TV and the internet! The angel gave the Good News to the lowly shepherds – the news is for them (and for all people). What should they look for? A baby in swaddling cloths and in a manger. And then an angel choir sang! Glory to God and God's peace and good will to all people!

How have your Christmas preparations gone so far? Are your plans working out? Or maybe you can't get everything done? Or maybe some bad event has unexpectedly taken up your time? And yet... the angel clearly told the shepherds this Baby is for all the people! You and me, your family and mine. This Christmas Eve, this Christmas Day, if at all possible, take time to go to church and give God glory. Hear and receive His peace and good will. It is His promise.

Prayer: Dear God, thank You for all the good plans and events so far this Christmas season. Give me strength to endure the troubles. Send Your Holy Spirit into my heart to give me faith and joy to celebrate in worship with fellow Christians the birth of Your Son. Please forgive my sins and strengthen my love. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

(Read John 3:16-21)

Christmas (Dec. 24 & 25)

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. Luke 2:15-16 (ESV)

It's true! The angels were not a false vision and not sleepy shepherds' imagination! The Baby was really there in a manger. Like the shepherds, so have God's people believed since Jesus lived, died and rose from the dead. He is real. He forgives and cares. He gives life everlasting.

4 O holy Child of Bethlehem,
descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin and enter in;
be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas angels,
the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
our Lord Emmanuel! *(verse 4 of O Little Town of
Bethlehem)*

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for sending Your Son Jesus to be my Savior, and the Savior of all people. Help me to worship and obey You. Help me to love and serve my family and all people. Please forgive my sins and strengthen my love. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.
(Read Philippians 2:5-11)

New Year (Dec. 31 & Jan. 1)

And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. Luke 2:17-21 (ESV)

January 1st is the eighth day after the night of December 24-25. On the eighth day the Baby was circumcised and named Jesus because the angel told Joseph, "He shall save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20-21). What better way to start the New Year than trusting in the Name of Jesus? In Jesus we have forgiveness, new life and salvation from all evils.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for Jesus Your Son! Help me believe that in Jesus' Name I am Your child and I can always call upon You. Please forgive my sins and strengthen my love. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.
(Read Jude 1:17-24)