



2021

*Advent Devotional*

*Week 2*

*December 5 ~ December 11*

*First United Methodist Church  
Bella Vista, Arkansas*

*Cover graphic by Gerald Hatley*



First United Methodist Church of Bella Vista  
20 Boyce Drive, Bella Vista, AR 72715

[hello@fumcbellavista.com](mailto:hello@fumcbellavista.com)

[www.fumcbellavista.com](http://www.fumcbellavista.com)

[facebook.com/fumcbv](https://facebook.com/fumcbv)

## *Week Two*

### *2021 Advent Devotional Writers*



**BROC HITE** has been our Organist and Associate Director of Music since 2012. He also teaches piano privately and at the Shepherd Music School, based at Central United Methodist Church in Rogers. Prior to moving to Arkansas in 2010, he was the Organist and Music Director at St. Timothy's Episcopal Church in Fairfield, Connecticut.

He earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Piano Performance from Purchase College in Purchase, New York, studying under German Diez. He earned the Master of Music Degree in Piano Accompanying at The Juilliard School, studying under Margo Garrett and Marshall Williamson, and performance classes with Samuel Sanders and Jonathan Feldman. In conjunction with his other career in business, he achieved the Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Connecticut.

**JILL HALE** was born in Nebraska and moved to Prescott, Arizona, with her family when she was eight years old. She worked as a legal secretary and then as a paralegal for the same law firm during her entire professional career. Jill and her husband, Richard, moved here from Arizona after retirement, almost a full circle from where she began. Jill serves as church historian and as secretary for Sarah Circle and for UMW. She is a member of the Praise Team, sings in the Chancel choir, plays hand bells, and is so grateful that these activities have begun again.



**CYNTHIA AUGSPURGER** and her husband, Terry, moved to Bella Vista in October, 2017. There was no question about which church they wanted to attend. Terry's parents retired to Bella Vista in 1987, and Terry and Cynthia had attended FUMC often, when they visited. Music is one of Cynthia's passions. She is the bassoonist who has played at the traditional worship services during the pandemic. Other opportunities Cynthia enjoys are Bible Study groups, Trunk or Treat, the Wesley Shepherd Group, Midweek Manna, and getting to know the church family. This is Cynthia's first year writing Advent Devotions.



**CHET CAMPBELL** and his wife Cheryl moved to Bella Vista in 2003 from Wyandotte, OK. While living in Wyandotte for 26 years, they were members of the Methodist church and were long-time educators. Upon arriving in Bella Vista they immediately joined FUMCBV. Chet did not grow up attending church. He started going to church after he and Cheryl were married. They have always gone to the Methodist church wherever they lived. Chet was baptized on December 24, 1989 at Wyandotte UMC. Since moving here, he has been involved in several ministries and activities including United Methodist Men, Board of Trustees, several church golf and bowling groups, Missions Committee, Habitat for Humanity, Bella Vista Recycle Center, and has gone on numerous mission trips with UMCOR and other groups.



#### **ALLAN & NAOMI HAGAN**

We love each other. We love our church. Most of all we love God. We hope our writings will encourage and bring hope to others through the holiday season

Sunday, December 5, 2021



**RENEE VAN DYKE** began serving as our NextGen Director in December 2020. She moved to Bella Vista from Northeastern Minnesota's Iron Range region in the fall of 2018. She grew up in the United Methodist Church, transferring to the Presbyterian Church in her mid-30's where youth opportunities were offered for her teenage children. She worked in the Presbyterian Church for a number of years as Parish Associate while completing her ecclesiastical education. Renee is an ordained Ruling Elder and Commissioned Lay Pastor with the PC (USA). She served as solo pastor for 7 years at a church in a very small mining town. She has also served in Hospice and Hospital Chaplaincy. Renee has two children: Neva, who resides in Chicago and Siri, who lives in Jefferson City, MO. She shares her home with her beloved dogs: Rocky Racoco – a 12-year-old mini Schnoodle and Angel Bean – a 7-year-old not-so-mini mini poodle.



**ARTHUR & MARIAN LAWLESS** moved to Bella Vista in July of 2017 from Massachusetts. They joined our church in September of 2017. Marian is originally from Iowa where most of her family still lives. She is presently Secretary for the Martha Circle and loves gardening on the church grounds as well as at home. Artie is the current President of the United Methodist Men's group and is involved in several Veterans' organizations locally.

**SCRIPTURE: Luke 3:1-3 (NRSV)**

*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*

The Bible seems to never miss a chance to describe who begat who, but sometimes leaves us hanging as to the thought processes of its leading characters. Thankfully, we know a lot about how the Virgin Mary was approached by the angel Gabriel. How did John know what his role was to be? Did an angel visit John the Baptist as well, and we just didn't hear about it? Or, was the calling just intuitive?

In reading a bit outside the Bible, there's some evidence that John's family was a member of a Messianic sect, so he was open to the idea that a Messiah could appear in his generation. When John baptizes Jesus, as described in verses 21 and 22, the sky opens, a dove descends onto Jesus, and a voice from heaven proclaims him to be God's son. Still, how did John know he should be the one to pave the way for Jesus?

Perhaps he just figured it out. It seems obvious that he was the right person for the job, historically. However, that really shortchanges human nature. After all, he was being asked to take a secondary role, much like anyone who is recruited to be the Vice President of the United States. In my lifetime, no politician actively campaigned for the role. In most cases, it's tepidly accepted after that candidate failed in his own attempt to become the party nominee.

What's worse, this secondary role carried the same risk of death as the head job. Pun intended. It's clear that God needed a very specific person to serve in this limited capacity,

with little to no chance for earthly glory. It's the type of role that few people would even consider, much less agree to do.

When looking at John in this light, I find new respect for him. He not only discerned his calling but also the capacity of the role. I've always excelled at music, so when I got rejected by several consecutive roles in corporate life, I left that work for good in favor of trying to make it as a freelance musician. I can't say I enjoy the struggle to make ends meet, but it's clear that music is what I should be doing.

There have been times in both my software and music careers where I've loved my job but wanted a bigger role or more control. Sometimes we are exactly where we need to be.

Have you struggled in your life to figure out your calling, especially when what you're doing might be much more comfortable than pursuing what you really should be doing instead?

**PRAYER:** Lord, help us to have the courage of John to discern our calling, and be accepting of whatever that brings to our lives. Also, help us to understand where we are being called to serve: as a leader, a specialist, or maybe just as part of the crew. Thank you for giving us the clues, now help us to interpret them correctly.

**Broc Hite**

**Monday, December 6, 2021**

**SCRIPTURE: Luke 3:4-6 (KJV)**

...as it is written in the book of the words of Esias [Isaiah] the prophet, saying: *The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'*

This week we are looking at the foretelling of the coming of the Messiah. As you will recall from yesterday's reading, the first three verses of this chapter of Luke introduce us to John, the now adult son of Zacharias (aka Zechariah in some versions). John is the man we have come to know as "the Baptist" or "the Baptizer." Remember, John is in the wilderness baptizing and preaching repentance.

The quote that is part of this scripture comes from Isaiah 40:3-5. It is impossible for me to read this chapter in Isaiah without singing many of the verses with the music from "Messiah" by George Frideric Handel. I have to use the King James Version of the Bible because those are the words that speak to my heart from the songs that I love. The words in Isaiah are just a little different from those quoted in Luke but say basically the same thing. The other three gospels also use a shorter version of this scripture in relationship to John preaching and baptizing in the wilderness or desert (see Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:3, and John 1:23). The apostle John sets out a direct quote from John the Baptist: "He [John] said, 'I am a voice crying out in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' just as the prophet Isaiah said."

In chapter 39 of Isaiah, Isaiah has just told king Hezekiah of Judah that his household--including his sons--and all that he has will be hauled away to Babylon. Isaiah is foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the people of Judah to Babylon. Then in chapter 40 (verses 1-3), Isaiah starts with "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." Isaiah goes on to say that the iniquity of Jerusalem, of the people of Judah, is pardoned. I'm certainly no Bible scholar, but to me these first five verses are referring to the return of the Jewish exiles to Jerusalem after the 40 years they were held captive in Babylon. The way back was made "smooth" when the Babylonian king gave the exiles permission to leave and provided them with assistance and even the items that had been previously taken from the Jerusalem temple.

How did this scripture come to be a prophecy of John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus Christ? Several commentaries I read, advise that there are scholars who say that the Isaiah prophecy applies to both the king of Babylon's paving the way for the exiles to return to Jerusalem and also to the one who would announce or pave the way for the coming of the Messiah. The writers of the four gospels make it clear that they believe John the Baptist is indeed the voice crying in the wilderness to prepare the way for the Lord.

I know this has gotten a bit long, but I did read an interpretation of the scripture that spoke to me. *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary* from biblehub.com states: "Here is the fulfilling of the Scriptures, Isa 40:3, in the ministry of John. When way is made for the gospel into the heart, by taking down high thoughts, and bringing them into obedience to Christ, by levelling the soul, and removing all that hinders us in the way of Christ and his grace, then preparation is made to welcome the salvation of God.

**PRAYER.** Gracious and Holy God, prepare the way into our hearts to receive Your Word and recognize its truth. Prepare us to welcome Jesus Christ into every part of our life, keeping this blessed season honoring His birth holy and keeping Your Son at the center of all our gatherings and celebrations. Amen

**Jill Hale**

**Tuesday, December 7, 2021**

**SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:68:75 (CEB)**

*Bless the Lord God of Israel, because he has come to help and has delivered his people. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in his servant David's house, just as he said through the mouths of his holy prophets long ago. He has brought salvation from our enemies and from the power of all*

*those who hate us. He has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and remembered his holy covenant, the solemn pledge he made to our ancestor Abraham. He has granted that we would be rescued from the power of our enemies so that we could serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness in God's eyes, for as long as we live.*

Why does Zechariah pray this song to those around him? Because he hasn't spoken a word for 9 months? Because he is filled with the Holy Spirit and can't help but praise God? Because he has some very important things to say, especially as a Jewish priest?

Let's back up and revisit what happened to Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth.

The couple was old now, past the age of childbearing. Luke clarifies for his readers that Zechariah and Elizabeth were, "righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord." While Zechariah is performing his priestly duties at the Temple, he is visited by the angel, Gabriel, who tells him his prayers have been heard, and Elizabeth will conceive a child who will be named John. Gabriel explains that his son, John, will be filled with the Holy Spirit, be great in the sight of the God, and prepare the people to be ready for the Lord.

There are some promises that seem too good to be true. Zechariah questions Gabriel, "How will I know that this is so?" Gabriel says, look, I'm no human messenger with this good news. I am an angel from God, and I'm striking you mute until what I have told you is fulfilled.

Zechariah is put on hold, unable to speak, for nine months watching and waiting as Elizabeth's pregnancy comes to term. Finally, Elizabeth gives birth to a son. On the eighth day after John's birth, his parents take him to the Temple for naming and circumcision. When asked what name is given to this child, Zechariah writes "John" on a tablet. Gabriel's promise is realized and Zechariah can speak again.

It is no surprise that his first words were blessings and praises to God. Zechariah continues in those 8 verses pointing backward, to God's long-established covenant with God's people. He speaks of the savior for us in David's house, the truth of the prophets of long ago, rescue from their enemies, mercy promised to ancestors, and serving God without fear. The 75th verse reemphasizes that God remains faithful to God's promises.

An appropriate prayer for the time, but what do we do with it? The time for silence has ended. Something life-giving and holy is about to be born. We are the God-appointed "priests" or messengers to speak of God's grace for all people. Maybe our life-giving words will reach people riddled with fear, depression, and abandonment. Speak out and say that God has not forgotten those who think their prayers have not been answered. We can speak praises to God. Tell everyone that God remains faithful to His promises.

**PRAYER:** Dearest God, thank you for your faithful promises to us. Nudge us to speak to others about Your mercy, compassion, salvation and especially Your unconditional love for all. Amen

**Cynthia Augspurger**

**Wednesday, December 8, 2021**

**SCRIPTURE: Luke 1: 76-79** Zechariah's Song (NIV)

*And you my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.*

In these verses, Zechariah is talking directly to his son, John. He tells him the purpose of his life and what he is to do to achieve this. His purpose is to tell the people of the One who is coming after him. He is to tell them that through the forgiveness of their sins they will receive salvation because of the mercy of God and because of this mercy, all will see the light from heaven even those living in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide them along the path of peace.

**PRAYER:** Kind and gracious Father, we thank you for sending John, The Baptist, to prepare the way for Your son, Jesus. Help us to receive and accept the teachings of both John and Jesus to achieve our personal salvation and be able to spend eternity with You in Heaven. We ask this in the name of your son, Jesus, our Lord and Savior. AMEN

**Chet Campbell**

**Thursday, December 9 2021**

**SCRIPTURE: Philippians 1:3-8**

*Paul writes, I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart, and you are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and establishment of the gospel. For God is my witness, how deeply I miss all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.*

During Thanksgiving, I found that preparation was a vital part in making the day a success. I also learned that procrastination, for example waiting to the last minute to do your shopping or not fully understanding the recipes, leads to unwanted stress and anxiety. I learned that sharing the tasks at hand, from cooking to cleaning, goes a lot smoother when I allow others to help and become a part of the joyful occasion.

We need family, friends, co-workers, church communities, and even strangers to help lead us, grow us and prepare us. Like Thanksgiving, there is a lot of preparation that goes into being a good disciple, follower of Christ. There is no room for procrastination of the soul. Who wants to take that bet of the last-minute Christian? We certainly don't. But it is not always an easy road. Paul understood this. His warmth and Joy for the Lord help create the very community that we rely on today for fellowship and direction, worship. Amen.

**Allan & Naomi Hagan**

**Friday, December 10, 2021**

**SCRIPTURE: Philippians 1:9-11** (New Living Translation)

*I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation – the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ – for this will bring much glory and praise to God.*

In this passage Paul begins his letter to the church of Philippi with a prayer. Now, this is not your typical Sunday morning pastoral prayer. Rather than praying for safe travels, the health of his neighbor's cat, or the infamous "unspoken," Paul prays in a way that is both selfless and keenly biblical. He prays for the Philippian believers' spiritual growth, and in

doing so he models for us what our prayers should look like. His prayer is especially striking as Paul is writing this letter from a Roman prison cell. Instead of asking for prayer for his deliverance, he prays for the growth and sanctification of the church. The example of Paul's prayer should revolutionize the way we pray for one another, especially for those in our churches and communities.

Paul prays specifically for four results in the lives of the Philippian believers. He prays that the Philippians would grow in love through knowledge, that they would live a life of maturity and discernment, that they would be found pure and blameless at the return of Christ, and that their lives would be marked by the fruit of righteousness that comes from being in a relationship with Jesus.

In a nutshell, Paul prays for their spiritual growth with the end in mind. His desire is to see believers grow and live up to their full spiritual potential so that when they stand before God, they would be found to have lived a life pleasing to Him, a life well lived, a life that mattered.

Likewise, our prayers should be the same. We must pray selflessly, even in difficult circumstances, for the spiritual well-being of those in our churches. This week set out to pray that those in our church would grow in love and faith maturity that they might be found pure and blameless at the return of Christ, having lived a life marked by the fruit of righteousness.

As we grow in Christ's love, our hearts and minds must grow together. Are your love and insight growing when you pray?

**PRAYER:** Precious Lord, I lift up my brothers and sisters in Christ to You. I pray that their love for You and for others would abound in their knowledge of You. May they continue growing to become mature believers, so that at Your return they would be found blameless in Your sight. I also ask that You would enable them to live a life that honors you and bears fruit for Your glory. Amen.

**Renee van Dyke**

**Saturday, December 11, 2021**

**SCRIPTURE: Malachi 3:1-4**

*Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His Temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. 'Behold, He is coming,' Says the Lord of hosts.*

*But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like launderers' soap.*

*He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness.*

*Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the Lord, as in the days of old, as in former years.*

There's an old saying that goes "Be careful what you wish for". Now, you might not think that would fit in the Bible but that is exactly what Malachi is warning the people of Israel. For clarity (Mal'aki) in Hebrew means "messenger". 3:1 says "Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me"

By all rights this message should be a joyous announcement. The Lord is coming, and Malaki is telling the people that a messenger is on the way so prepare yourself for his arrival. The Lord is not coming to conquer nations or fight wars. The Lord is coming to Purify and refine.

He's coming to prepare the people for the worship of God. As 3:2 speaks of, "He is like a refiner's fire, a launderers' soap". Judgement is to cleanse and purify not punish. It is to bring restoration and new life. In 3:3 Malachi states there needs to be changes so they will be able to offer righteousness to the Lord.

Malachi had voiced his concern, for the people of Jerusalem had strayed away from righteousness, and they needed to change their ways and return to those values. He warns them in 3:2..." Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?"

Ask yourself those two questions of Malachi... Would you be ready to receive Him if he came today? You may not like the answer. The good news is, we can change. If you feel you're not on the right path, ask the Lord for guidance. Get back on the righteous road. There is still time, but remember the message...He is coming...Are you Ready?

**PRAYER:** Lord of all. Help us to prepare for your return. Guide us so we do not stray from the goodness that pleases you. Enable us to make the changes in our lives, so that we will be able to offer righteousness to you as we seek restoration and new life. **Amen**

**Artie & Marian Lawless**