

## Willerup "Spiritually Close" 2020 Advent Devotions – Week One

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### Are You Ready for Christmas?

Psalm 137: 1,2,4 - *By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps...How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?*



Do you feel disorientated during this holiday season?

All our familiar celebrations have been upended- concerts, cookie walks, craft fairs, shopping in crowded stores with a lunch break at a restaurant, sporting events, churches packed with worshippers, masses of people traveling to visit family members..... All replaced by masks that muzzle both verbal and visible communication, social distancing that subdues physical expressions of caring, and days of "sameness" that bend thoughts toward depression. Our comfortable routine is gone.

The Jews felt this way when they were captured and exiled to Babylon leaving behind all the customs and ways of worship that they knew. "How can we sing God's songs in a foreign land?" they asked. They just wanted to hang up their harps and mourn their losses.

Living through the Covid pandemic is much like being taken captive and removed to a foreign land. How can we celebrate Christmas under these conditions? How can we sing our familiar carols and celebrate in our usual ways?

Maybe the usual is not what God wants? Maybe it's time for something different, and yet, something more.

Are you ready for Christmas? Let's see what some members of Willerup's congregation have to share that may help us.

Judy Vasby

Micah 5:2. *But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. (NIV)*

Luke 2:1-7. *In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius [kwer-in'-ee-us] was governor of Syria. And everyone went to his own town to register.*

*So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (NIV)*

## Are You Ready for Christmas?

Our Bible passage in Micah states "Out of you will come for Me one who will be ruler over Israel." Notice the statements, "will come" and "will be." Advent means "expected coming, knowing in advance." God in His fore knowledge tells us to anticipate what is coming. We call that prophesy. One third of the Bible is prophesy. God does not want us to guess or wish what is to happen. He tells us in advance in His Holy Word, the Bible.



God promised two comings of Jesus as our Savior. The first prophetic promise was to Adam and Eve after the fall into sin. Time after time He endorsed His first Advent promise to believers such as Abraham, David, Isaiah and Daniel. When the time was right, God set into motion the coming of the Savior by pointing the way through Elizabeth and Zachariah and then through Mary and Joseph. God fulfilled His prophetic promise by choosing all kinds of people and events.

God chose humble Mary to be the mother of Jesus. He chose a small village to be the birthplace of Jesus, providing a lowly manger. He appointed shepherds to be a witness to Christ's birth. However, God used the high and mighty people to fulfill his Advent promise, directing Caesar Augustus to set in motion the first coming of our Savior. God can and does use all kinds of people to fulfill His will. Whether we are lowly or humble, or in positions of power we can serve the Lord.

As Christian believers we are entering Advent season. Looking back on the first coming of Jesus we recognize Him as the Lamb of God our Savior. The Christian church has set aside a day of celebration of Christ's birth called Christmas. We use Advent as a season of worship recognition that God has fulfilled His first promise in the coming of Jesus.

However, God has also prepared a second Advent promise that in the future Jesus will come a second time. This time as judge for the world to bring eternal fulfillment of His saving grace.

Let us use this Advent season to recognize the fulfilling of His first prophesy of sending Jesus as our Savior. In addition, let us use this season of Advent as a time of anticipation for the second and final arrival of our Lord. He will bring eternal fulness and everlasting joy in our heavenly home. God always keeps the promises He makes.

Glory be to our Triune God forever and ever! AMEN

Pastor Tom Smrcka

## Are You Ready for Christmas?

### God's plan

Do you think Joseph and Mary were thinking that they would spend a night in a stable rather than an inn? Do you, for a second, see Mary planning the birth of her "first" in a barn among animals? It was enough for Mary and Joseph having to explain their baby as not really theirs! For them to claim that their baby was of and from God was a reach into story time for their family, friends and neighbors. Now, added to their claims, were spending a night in a barn, giving birth to their baby and laying Him in a manger. Why didn't God do some extra special things for Joseph and Mary, making their claims more believable? A space in a stable isn't nothing, but it is close! Is the lesson here that God always makes His way worth it, but not easy?



We think, "Lord, I'm being faithful, living your plan, leaving You to take care of the details. But space in a stable doesn't appear like You're on top of things. When God's way and will feel heavy and not fair, we often become miffed and stubborn. We accuse God of being asleep at the wheel. God should be helping but no matter how hard we try it feels like we are on our own. Our heads spin with thoughts of "God, where are you?" "God, you're late!", "God, are you watching?" and "God, don't we deserve better?" We think that God's plan has lots of room for improvement. We don't feel that God is giving us His best.

And God says, "Just watch." Watch for my special effects: a star spotlighting My Son; an angel chorus inviting shepherds to come, see, believe and witness; wisemen from the east validating My Son's birth and a forewarning for escape from Herod. We think motel arrangements; God thinks lives being changed. We dwell on the inconveniences of a stable. God highlights His Son. We want some perks; God gives a chance at His way.

A Christmas prayer for us: Lord, help us to depend on your plan. Don't let us miss seeing You in the details of our lives. Even when doing your will feels and sounds like a stable, help us to trust your plan. When we are sure that You have us at the end of the line getting leftovers, give us eyes for seeing that we are receiving your wonders, your blessings, your special touches. Lord, do not let us go after a plan of our own making rather than discover that You turn stables into 5-star faith moments. Amen.

Bob and Donna Kenas

## Are You Ready for Christmas?

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie...

I have a new friend this Christmas. We are enjoying each other's company, and she enjoys learning more about God. I asked God for a new friend, and He was speedy to reply- with Holly.

I talked to another acquaintance, Sarah, who lost her mother a year ago, and she was depressed, but she had the idea to bring Christmas early to her house. She put up the tree and lights on November 20<sup>th</sup>, and it was beautiful to behold. It lighted her spirits so. There's something about the tree, the lights, the anticipation of time with family and friends and counting our blessings together over the past year.

Covid has come, but we can't stop living. We need to slow down. My heart and prayers go out to those in nursing homes. Some have been able to have visitors through open windows or outside during the summer and fall. Some people have Zoom and I-Pads to talk to loved ones, but that is not the same as having the loved one near and being able to hold hands.

Florence Nightingale, where are you? We need many, many more people to work, and feel the call to be trained to work, in the medical field. Ask God, "What do You want me to do?" EMTs, nurses, doctors, nurse practitioners, LPN's, aides...

O little town of CAMBRIDGE- Are we ready to help heal the world? With Jesus, we are.

Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world." (John 8:12) Don't stumble around in darkness, for Jesus is as close as the mention of His NAME. He will help you to be a helper to those in need. Jesus is the Living Light, and when we acknowledge our sins- our shortcomings- and put Jesus in charge, He is there to show us the Way. In John 14:6, Jesus said, "I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

There was a span of 400 years between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Micah prophesied in the Old Testament that from Bethlehem would come, for God, someone who would rule over Israel, someone whose beginnings were from ancient times. That person was JESUS.

People were waiting and watching for the Light to come. And it came to Bethlehem: the new Star marking the Way, the angels proclaiming His birth, the Child born to save the world from their sins and bringing "*Peace, Peace, wonderful Peace, coming down from the Father above. Sweep over our spirits forever I pray, in fathomless billows of love.*"

Are you ready for Christmas? Are you ready for Jesus to take over? At Christmas we celebrate the birth of the Eternal One, JESUS, Emmanuel, which means "God with us." (Matthew 1:23 and Isaiah 7:14) Get ready, because Jesus is ready for you.

Let us pray:

*Dear Jesus, forgive me my sins. I want to follow your instructions every day, and I pray for those who have yet to come to You. Be with us during these trying times. Give us all Peace, Joy, and Hope that only You can bring. In Your Name. Amen*

Peggy Korth





Carol for Advent Week 1

**O Little Town of Bethlehem**

1. O Little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie;  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;  
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

2. For Christ is born of Mary and gathered all above,  
While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.  
O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth,  
And praises sing to God the King, and peace to all on earth.

3. O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin and enter in, be born to us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!