

HE WILL BE  
OUR PEACE

Advent Guide 2018



He has told you, O man, what is good;  
And what does the Lord require of you  
But to do justice, to love kindness,  
And to walk humbly with your God?

**MICAH 6:8**

**The Park Community Church**

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# ADVENT

Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus* meaning “coming” or “visit.” During the season of Advent, we prepare for and anticipate the coming of Christ. We remember Israel’s, and our, longing for a Messiah, to save and deliver us.



Even as we look back and celebrate the birth of Jesus in a humble stable in Bethlehem, we also look forward anticipating the second coming of Christ as the fulfillment of all that was promised by His first coming. This year we will be studying through the book of Micah to see how it prophesies and points towards the coming of Jesus. The title for this guide comes from Micah 5.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
who are too little to be among  
the clans of Judah,  
from you shall come forth for me  
one who is to be ruler in Israel,  
those coming forth is from of old,  
from ancient days.

Therefore he shall give them up until the time  
when she who is in labor has given birth;  
then the rest of his brothers shall return  
to the people of Israel.

And he shall stand and shepherd his flock  
in the strength of the LORD,  
in the majesty of the name  
of the LORD his God.

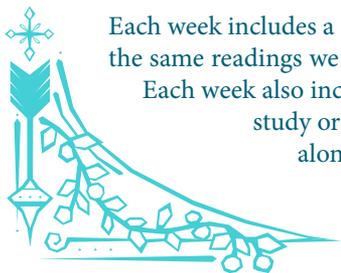
And they shall dwell secure,  
for now he shall be great  
to the ends of the earth.

*And he shall be their peace.*

We know that during this season that there are many things competing for your attention and your time. We pray this guide helps you to celebrate the season, to let Jesus be your peace.

Each week includes a candle lighting scripture and prayer. These are the same readings we will be doing each Sunday during the season.

Each week also includes a devotional for use in your personal study or in missional community groups along with discussion questions.



# THANKSGIVING TABLE LITURGY



**Welcome to the table.** Beautiful holy things can happen when family and friends gather around the table. May this short liturgy help you open up space for gratitude, prayer, and deep connection with God and each other.

*Leader:*

May the peace of Christ be with us as we gather in his name and give thanks. Before we begin our meal together, lets read some scripture and pray together. Join me by reading the bold text.

Psalm 67:4-6

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
for you judge the peoples with equity  
and guide the nations upon the earth.

**Let all the peoples praise you.**

**let all the peoples praise you.**

The earth has brought forth its increase;  
God, our God, has blessed us.

**Let all the peoples praise you, O God;**

**let all the peoples praise you.**

James 1:17-18

**Every good and perfect gift is from above,  
coming down from the Father of the  
heavenly lights, who does not change like  
shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth  
through the word of truth, that we might be  
a kind of first fruits of all he created.**

Let's pray for our world.

Father, we come together now on behalf of our broken, beautiful, hurting world. Shine your light into the heart of every person who is lonely and feels disconnected. Touch the sick with your healing hand and relieve their pain and suffering. We pray for the hungry, that you would provide food for their bodies and nourishment for their souls. For those who have no home in which to gather and give thanks, make your presence known. Show us how to bless our enemies and welcome the foreigner in our midst.

Let's take a moment of silence. {pause}

Let's pray this together now

**Lord, may your peace reign over all the earth.**

**May all our thanks be to you alone. Amen.**

Sing: *Come Thou Fount*

*Prayer:* Father in heaven, we give you thanks for life  
and for all of the experiences that life brings us.  
We give you thanks for joy, hope, peace, and answered prayers,  
but we also give you thanks in our trials, sorrows, and pain.  
**Praise be to you, Father of the heavenly lights,  
who gives and gives and gives.**

We give thanks for our land,  
for the beauty of the landscape,  
for the riches it provides for our living,  
for the people and cultures among us.  
**Praise be to you, Father of the heavenly lights,  
who gives and gives and gives.**

Above all things, we give thanks for our hope in Christ,  
the life and freedom that will ultimately be ours.  
Teach us to cherish all your gifts.  
Teach us also to use all these resources  
for the good of society and for glory to you.  
**Praise be to you, Father of the heavenly lights,**



*Mealtime Discussion Questions:*

- ◆ What are three things you are most thankful for today?  
How have these things impacted you this year?
- ◆ How do you sense God calling you this year to share what he has  
given you with those who have less or are struggling?
- ◆ Invite each person around the table to share why they are thankful  
for one other person around the table.

*Closing Prayer (after the meal):*

May God the Creator fill you with gratitude for your creation.  
May God the Savior fill you with gratitude for your salvation.  
May God the Comforter fill you with gratitude for your new life.



# PRAYER OF EXAMEN

Examen means examination of the conscience and was first written about as a spiritual practice by Ignatius of Loyola in 1548. This practice helps us with daily reflections where we review our past to find God and God's blessings. During Advent try to set aside 15 minutes every day for this practice. Review the last 24 hours using the prayer of examen.

## INVITE THE HOLY SPIRIT'S GUIDANCE.

Position your body in a posture of attentiveness, but not rigidity – feet flat on the floor, sitting up straight so you can breathe freely. Take three deep breaths, breathing in God's blessing and breathing out all that is not of God (your fear, your anxiety, your anger). Pray this simple prayer, *"In your grace, Lord, I want to see the truth of my life through your eyes. Please reveal it to me."* Breathe in God's blessing and breathe out all that is not of God.

## REVIEW THE DAY WITH THANKSGIVING.

Once you have invited the Holy Spirit's guidance, name the blessings for which you are thankful in the last day. As you do this, remember, this is not a time to "count your blessings," but rather a time to savor your blessings. As you savor your blessings, picture Jesus before you, smiling and delighting in you.

## REVIEW THE FEELINGS THAT SURFACE.

Now ask yourself what feelings surfaced throughout the day. Did you feel frustrated? Ashamed? Disappointed? Excited? Joyful? Pained? Name the negative and positive feelings.

## CHOOSE ONE OR TWO FEELINGS AND PRAY FROM IT.

Choose a negative feeling and a positive feeling and simply talk to God about those feelings. Then listen to him. As you do this, go ahead and let God surprise you. Behold Jesus beholding you as you present your feelings to him.

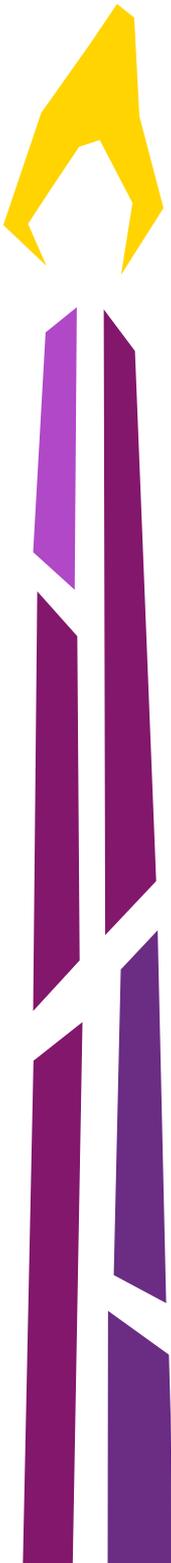
## LOOK FORWARD TO TOMORROW.

Now, look forward. Tomorrow is a new day and God's mercies are new each morning. Ask yourself what you learned today in your prayer of examen and then end your time by asking God for the grace you need to move forward tomorrow.



FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 2ND - 8TH





## CANDLE OF PREPARATION

**T**oday is the First Sunday in Advent. To help us celebrate, we will be lighting the candles of the Advent wreath. The candles signify that Jesus is the Light of the World. The evergreens remind us that He is life and brings life to us. All these are arranged in a circle because life in Christ has no end. On this second First of Advent, we light the Candle of Preparation. It signifies the way that the Israelites were longing and preparing for a coming savior.

*A voice cries: "In the wilderness  
prepare the way of the LORD;  
make straight in the desert  
a highway for our God.*

*Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.*

*And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
and all flesh shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

*Isaiah 40:3-5*

**Candle Lighting** | Light a blue Advent candle; as you light the candle say:

Today, we light the candle of preparation. In our hearts, Lord, prepare the way for the coming of the Lord.

**Prayer** | Merciful God, you sent your prophets to prepare the way of our salvation. Your voice echoed through the years with messages and warnings to your people. Give us grace to listen to their wisdom even now, so our hearts can fully accept the wonderful work of your Son, our Savior. ***Amen.***

## DEVOTIONAL

Jesus came into a world much like our own. The people of Israel were waiting for a king to set all things right. The prophets had told them that another king would come and fix what was broken.

How is this different today? We're all waiting. For someone to fix it. Our lives are unfinished, and history is as well, and it's all broken. This Advent season has come again, and how many of us feel an emptiness, a lack, a longing for something that the Christmas we celebrate cannot fill. What does it mean then to celebrate Christmas?

We pull out the decorations and the tree and get ready, and we celebrate a holiday but, what are we truly meant to celebrate? Jesus, Mary's son who was also God, Yahweh Incarnate, was born into this messy world so that though we are all lost, we may be found.

Though blind, we may see. Truly see the amazingness of this incredible and so beautiful and more real than any reality we think we know so that we too must be knocked off our feet to worship as angels sing a new creation into the dark night. Our dark night. He gives us light and sight for it is not his purpose that we grope through life but rather dance to the music of His song, His singing in us.

So, as this season begins, ask, do I truly see Him and who He is to me? Ask, How am I dancing this dance, singing this song of redemption and hope and in all parts of my life? Ask, where am I sharing the joy in this celebration of new life, no longer blind but now seeing His beauty?



*Hear, you peoples, all of you;  
pay attention, O earth, and all that is in it,  
and let the Lord God be a witness against you,  
the Lord from his holy temple.*

*For behold, the Lord is coming out of his place,  
and will come down and tread upon the high  
places of the earth.*

*And the mountains will melt under him,  
and the valleys will split open,  
like wax before the fire,  
like waters poured down a steep place.*

*All this is for the transgression of Jacob  
and for the sins of the house of Israel.*

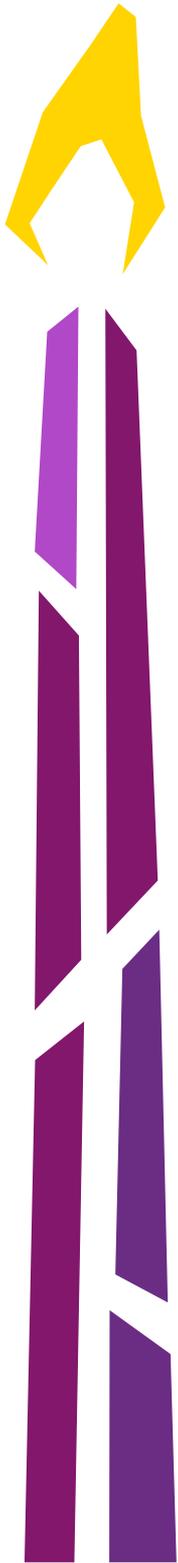
MICAH 1:2-5A

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ◆ Read Micah 1. It seems like a very harsh and hopeless indictment of Israel. However, the events of this book lead us into the story of Jesus' birth. Do you find yourself, the Church or the world in a similar predicament?
- ◆ How do you feel God calling you into His song of redemption and hope this Advent?
- ◆ How do you celebrate Christmas?

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 9TH - 15TH





## CANDLE OF HOPE

**T**oday is the Second Sunday in Advent. To help us celebrate, we will be lighting the candles of the Advent wreath. The candles signify that Jesus is the Light of the World. The evergreens remind us that He is life and brings life to us. All these are arranged in a circle because life in Christ has no end. On this second Sunday of Advent, we light the Candle of Hope. It signifies the hope of a coming promised Savior.

“The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior.”

Jeremiah 33:14-16

**Candle Lighting** | Light a blue Advent candle; as you are light the candle say:

Today, we light the candle of expectation and hope. May it remind each and everyone one of us of God’s great promise to us. He is our hope, He is our Redeemer, and He is Savior.

**Prayer:** Father, during the Advent season may we be reminded of your promises to us and your fulfillment of them. Help us to prepare our lives for His Advent within us. In the precious name of Jesus we pray.

*Amen.*

## DEVOTIONAL

Our expectations don't always play out the way we think they will. If we look at God's people during the era of the Kings, we see that the state of Israel swings wildly between good kings versus evil kings; It even gets so bad that exile is foretold. But no matter how bad it got, it never meant that God didn't have a great plan for them; one that was even greater than the prosperous time of David's reign as king.

In Micah 4 there are two distinct parts: the first part where God tells Micah what the last days will look like, and the second part where God contrasts it to God's plan for his people after exile. Setting it up this way is brilliant because God starts off with the final outcome of his plan. In the last days, the nations will come in droves to God's temple, they will travel far reaches to learn his teachings, and God will bring peace and justice to the nations. Beautiful right? Well, that's great because how God takes us there is way different. God shares that the people will be drawn out of exile and they'll be reviled by the nations at first, and yet, God's plan is always in motion.

The prophecies are filled with imagery and recollection of King David's rule because of his place as the most revered king in Israel's history. While David isn't mentioned in Micah 4, we get the idea that God has someone better in store for Israel, and that's where part of this beautiful plan is revealed to Mary by the angel Gabriel. He tells her that she'll conceive Jesus; Son of the Most High; the one who will be given the throne of David and reign over the house of Jacob; the one they've been waiting for to restore Israel after their time of exile. There were many expectations of what the Christ would do.

Israel expected a mighty king to overthrow their political enemies, but they got a mightier King to defeat sin, restore themselves to God, and even be filled with His Spirit.

Israel expected to have a great place among the nations, but it turns out that God's people (the church) have become greater in number and influence than any nation.

Israel expected that the temple would be the centerpiece for the world to come to worship God, but God's temple goes from a single static location to any person who calls upon Jesus as Lord.



*It shall come to pass in the latter days  
that the mountain of the house of the Lord  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and it shall be lifted up above the hills;  
and peoples shall flow to it,  
and many nations shall come, and say:  
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob,  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.”  
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.  
He shall judge between many peoples,  
and shall decide disputes for strong nations far away;  
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war anymore;*

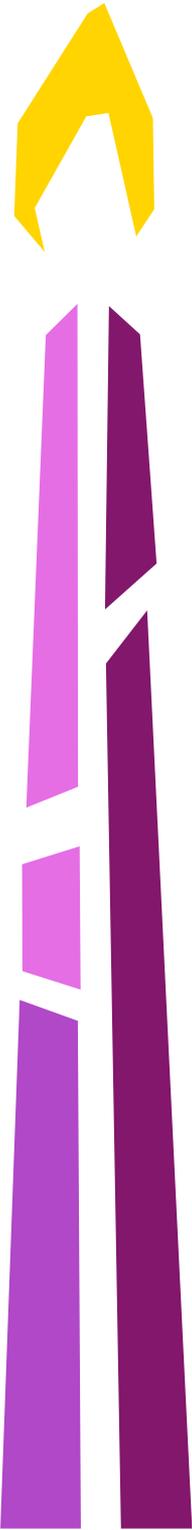
MICAH 4:1-3

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ◆ When you think of the last days, what emotions does that evoke? Try reading Micah 4:1-5 again and see if there is a difference between your thought of the last days and how they're portrayed in the passage you just read.
- ◆ Let's think about Mary receiving this news for a moment. When it comes to our greatest hope and expectations, how do we see ourselves in that picture? Passive recipient? Active participant? Something else perhaps?
- ◆ Now let's think about things we've hoped for in the past that could possible be of God. How did it turn out? Were there difficulties? Was it better than you expected?
- ◆ God has great plans for us. He has also given us great hope. How can we find the intersection of these great plans and our greatest hopes to then move towards greater restoration in our community?

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 16TH - 22ND





## CANDLE OF JOY

**T**oday is the Third Sunday in Advent. To help us celebrate, we will be lighting the candles of the Advent wreath. The candles signify that Jesus is the Light of the World. The evergreens remind us that He is life and brings life to us. All these are arranged in a circle because life in Christ has no end. On this third Sunday of Advent, we light the Candle of Joy. It signifies the joy we have because of Christ coming.

And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and 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 among those with whom he is pleased!

Jeremiah 33:14-16

**Candle Lighting** | Relight the first and second candle (both are blue). Then light the pink candle; as the candles are being relit say:

As we relight the candle of expectation and hope we recall God’s promise to send a Savior. As we relight the candle of preparation we remember the voice crying in the wilderness, “prepare ye the way of the Lord.” Now we light the candle of Joy. May our hearts be forever filled with the joy of His coming.

**Prayer** | Father, we are filled with joy because we have hope and peace that you have sent your son for all that believe. Help us to be the voices that proclaim grace and truth. In Christ name we pray. *Amen.*

## DEVOTIONAL - REWRITE

The people of God are subjected by their sin to be handed over to the Babylonians. In Micah 4:9, God says,

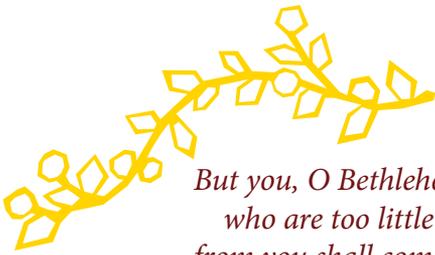
“Writhe and labor to give birth,  
Daughter of Zion,  
Like a woman in childbirth;  
For now you will go out of the city,  
Dwell in the field,  
And go to Babylon.  
There you will be rescued;  
There the Lord will redeem you  
From the hand of your enemies.”

God could have used any place. Most would assume that he would have used the capital city of Israel, Jerusalem. Yet He chose Bethlehem, this tiny town - too small to go out with the clans of Judah - and there, he chooses to bring forth the one to be a ruler in Israel.

Bethlehem literally means “house of bread.” As such, is it any surprise that the bread of life, Jesus, is born in the small and simple town?

When we think of the saving power of God, we often caricature his might and his power. The picture we so clearly receive from scripture is one of a powerful God choosing the lowly and the unseemingly. There is no coincidence that “Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child” (Luke 2:1-5)

Israel so desperately wanted God’s power and His might on their side, but God had a more beautiful picture in mind. He wanted to give them His Son, Immanuel. God with us.



*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,  
from you shall come forth for me  
one who is to be ruler in Israel,  
whose coming forth is from of old,  
from ancient days.*

*Therefore he shall give them up until the time  
when she who is in labor has given birth;  
then the rest of his brothers shall return  
to the people of Israel.*

*And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the  
strength of the Lord,*

*in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.*

*And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great  
to the ends of the earth.*

*And he shall be their peace.*

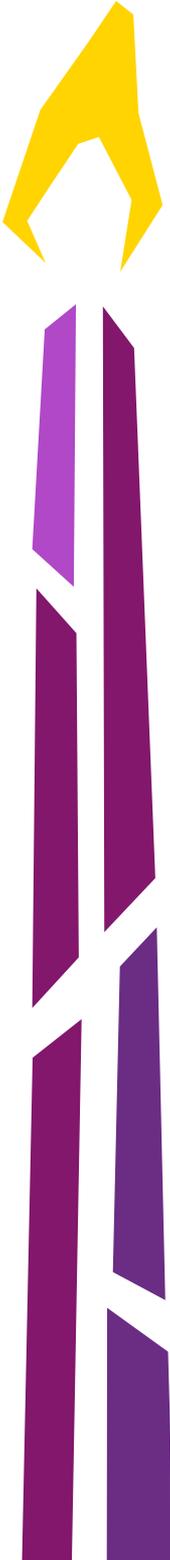
MICAH 5:1-5

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ◆ How are you asking the Lord to open your heart this season? Is there something you're holding onto that he is asking you to give up?
- ◆ Where do you find yourself fighting God for control of your life?
- ◆ What makes us God's people? How can your Missional Community remind you of that truth? How can you remind them?

FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 23RD - 29TH





## CANDLE OF LOVE

**T**oday is the Fourth Sunday in Advent. To help us celebrate we will be lighting the candles of the Advent wreath. The candles signify that Jesus is the Light of the World. The evergreens remind us that He is life and brings life to us. All these are arranged in a circle because life in Christ has no end. On this Fourth Sunday of Advent, we light the Candle of Love. It signifies the love that God poured out on us in sending his son Jesus to us as an act of love.

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4:9-11

**Candle Lighting** | Relight two blue and one pink candles. The light another blue candle. As the candles are being relit say:

As we relight the candle of Expectation and Hope we recall God's promise to send a Savior. As we relight the candle of Preparation we remember the voice crying in the wilderness, "prepare ye the way of the Lord." As we relight the candle of Joy may our hearts be forever filled with the joy of His coming. As we light the candle of Love we are reminded that God sent his Son to earth to save us, because He loves us.

**Prayer** | In this Advent season of waiting on the Lord, we trust in the Lord's goodness. We rely on his mercy. We find shelter in his steadfast love. In this Advent season of waiting on the Lord, we walk in the Lord's way. We follow his example of love. We keep our covenant promises. In this Advent season of waiting, Lord, forget our sins. Remember your love. Remember each one of us. Remember your people everywhere. In this Advent season of waiting, Lord, we wait for your salvation. We wait for your leading. We wait for your coming. *Amen.*

## DEVOTIONAL

One of the interesting aspects of following Christ is this concept of now, but not yet. Christ is absolutely, presently, now, without condition...the full manifestation of every promise of reconciliation God ever gave. Jesus is the single solution to sin and a relationship between believers and the Father. There is nothing else that needs to be accomplished. Christ is it. He is the avenue to the Father. He does not have to wait for an Earthly election, he's not waiting for a check to clear. He's not holding off for a new phone to be invented. Christ is the present Messiah and savior. King of kings, Lord of lords.

And yet, there are some things not yet fulfilled, as we perceive them in the course of time. Believers still live with a sense of expectation and yearning, wondering when God will return to Earth and restore Creation, purge sin from the world and make all things right. Revelation talks of this in great detail, as do passages from the Old Testament. Micah 7:7-20 is one of these OT passages that explains the plight of Israel, the sins and failures of God's people, but then of how the Lord will one day lay low the offending powers of the world, right all wrongs and realign creation to the intended perfect will of the Father.

Both aspects of Christ are true. He is present now, in all of his power—but he also will one day do certain literal things on earth to establish his Kingdom.

It's important to keep both aspects of Christ in our hearts, not neglecting the present forgiveness and fulfillment of our living Savior today, but also not overlooking the work that is yet to be done, the work that keeps us praying every day and interfacing with our neighbors and being light and grace to the world. For it is when we interface with both the 'now' aspect of Christ and the 'not yet' aspect of his fulfilled Kingdom that we, ourselves, are given opportunity to contribute to God's assigned work to us.

Take as an example, Simeon from Luke 2:22-35. He went about his life in full devotion to God, spending time at the temple, participating (we assume) in all of the rituals and customs that would have kept him in good standing with the Jewish community, and yet every moment he aged, he yearned to someday meet the physical Messiah.

And he did. He was there when Mary and Joseph brought their infant son to consecrate him to God. Simeon, in his own journey, embraced the complete fulfillment of God's promise in the celebration of the birth of Jesus. But Simeon also spoke a prophecy about some of the work to come.



*But as for me, I will look to the Lord;  
I will wait for the God of my salvation;  
my God will hear me.*

*Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity  
and passing over transgression  
for the remnant of his inheritance?  
He does not retain his anger forever,  
because he delights in steadfast love.  
He will again have compassion on us;  
he will tread our iniquities underfoot.  
You will cast all our sins  
into the depths of the sea.  
You will show faithfulness to Jacob  
and steadfast love to Abraham,  
as you have sworn to our fathers  
from the days of old.*

MICAH 7:7, 18-20

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ◆ How does the idea of simultaneous fulfillment and yearning for fulfillment sit with you? How do you explain it to others when you share your faith?
- ◆ Do you view your personal salvation as a finish line or a starting line in ‘the race’ described by Paul in his letters?
- ◆ Knowing there is much more work to be done by the Church to establish God’s Kingdom here, how does that make you feel? Discouraged? A part of it? Wanted? Overburdened? Talk about why.

# ADVENT INVITATIONS

- DEC 23 All Parish Sunday Morning Worship Service  
at Mark Twain Middle School
- DEC 24 Christmas Eve Service  
at The Pearl Stable
- DEC 30 No Service
- JAN 6 Services Resume at Parishes
- JAN 13 All Parish Gathering  
at UIW Rosenberg Skyroom

