

**First Fifteen: December 6-10 Advent 3**  
**Scripture for Sunday December 12 – Zephaniah 3:14-20**

**Monday: Isaiah 35:1-10**

**Going Deeper:** During the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of Advent our focus moves from hope to peace... this is a natural shift, without hope peace is hard to find. What images and ideas come to mind as you consider the meaning of peace? Within Advent peace is far more than the absence, or cessation of conflict and hostility. The peace Advent invites us to consider, is a lasting peace that requires us to move through places of conflict, hardship, and hostility in our lives. The peace Advent offers challenges us to open our eyes and see what we have not seen or refused to see. The peace Advent brings comes to us through listening and hearing the truth others share from their experience without the need to defend our own. The peace of Advent is an invitation to trust the One who is peace, and whose son we know as the Prince of Peace. Isaiah's words tell us of God's desire for our world and our lives to be set right, and by that, I mean balanced, where we are not living at the expense of another, but instead in harmony with others. Isaiah uses the imagery of a highway, where we will live and move in safety and within the mercy and grace of God. As this week begins, I encourage you to ask the Spirit of God to not only give you peace, but also show you how and where you can join the movement of the Holy Spirit to help bring peace into the lives of those around you. I invite you to ask God to show you where you have been blind, unable to see, as well as deaf and unable to hear the needs of others that will help set things right in our lives knowing God's desire for you is peace, deep peace that brings wholeness into your life and our world.

**Prayer:** My God my prayer is for your peace to settle on me, but not just me, but on all of us. I ask for your peace to begin to take root in my life opening my eyes and heart to how and where I can be an agent of peace for others. I ask this knowing your desire is for me to travel the highway Isaiah called the "Holy Road" (The Message) of life lived with balance and an awareness of the needs of others. Help me to trust you... and know on this road your grace and mercy will lead me into your love and bring me into your peace. Amen.

**Tuesday: Matthew 11:2-11**

**Going Deeper:** One of the things that draws me to study the Bible is its honesty! The writer of Matthew's Gospel could have omitted this questioning from John and yet it was kept even though it may make us uneasy, why was John the Baptist questioning if Jesus was the Messiah. John was no different than you and me. He had expectations, dreams and desires for what God was going to do and how and when God was going to get it done! So, when Jesus' ministry was not moving as quickly as John expected (my interpretation) he was simply asking from a sincere place of questioning... possibly mingled with a little doubt... a place I suspect we are all familiar with. Jesus is clearly not offended by his cousin's question, and his response I am sure was meant to clarify his own understanding of what God's desire and direction was for him. It is quite a list... *The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised,*

*the wretched of the earth learn that God is on their side.*" (Matt. 11:5 – The Message)  
What do you hear in Jesus' response to John? As we consider our own questioning mingled with our own doubt I wonder if we don't have our own questions for Jesus and what his ministry means for our lives. Jesus seems to know his words and his work as the Messiah would not be good news for all of us, I suspect he knew we all have our expectations, dreams and desires for what God needs to do and not do... so he added these poignant words... *"Blessed is the one who does not fall away on account of me."* (Matt. 11:6 – NIV).

**Prayer:** Jesus, come near to me. I pray that you will guide me into a deeper, richer faith and understanding of who you are as my savior and who I am as your disciple. You are called the "Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6) and yet your teaching and ministry created peace for some and disturbance for others. Come into my questioning, speak peace into my doubt and show me how to be among those who now see, hear, are cleansed, and raised into a new life so I may not merely walk, but run to share your love, truth and call upon us all. Amen.

### **Wednesday: Psalm 146:1-10**

**Going Deeper:** Lasting peace comes from enduring hope. These words of the Psalmist create a theophany for our understanding of the foundations of a lasting peace. The Psalmist is not being critical of human leadership, they are simply speaking honestly about our finite and limited understanding against the infinite and limitless understanding of God. We cannot create and sustain enduring hope, it is not within our abilities outside of our faith in God. Sure, we may try, and we are tempted to trust in the efforts of human leadership, but ultimately our human efforts will not be able to sustain what only God can do. As you read this short Psalm you will notice the thread that has run through this week's reading guiding our focus on the gift of peace within Advent. But in these words of the Psalmist notice God is not only the "creator" of the world from ages past, but God continues to be active in balancing and caring for the wellbeing of those who have been left behind or overlooked within God's beloved creation. The Psalmist begins and ends with a jubilant shout of "Hallelujah!" (The Message) Let us join our voices with the Psalmist... Hallelujah! May our faith lead to enduring hope creating lasting peace in the one who was and is and will forever be!

**Prayer:** Hallelujah my God, I will praise you, this day, and every day! I will give thanks for all my blessings, and I will lift my praises to you... even when I am not sure how to live joyfully from a sincere place within me through every ebb and flow of life. Lord, I thank you for your grace and mercy. I am grateful for your love, and I ask for a deep understanding that flows from within me that I am your beloved child... even as I find myself distracted and pull one way then another by the words and promises made by others when it is easier than trusting your love and guidance will come as I am called to wait. I will praise you my God, for you are faithful. I will give you thanks for all my blessings... and I lift my voice to praise you... Hallelujah my God who was and is and will forever be! Amen.

#### **Thursday: Ezekiel 34:11-16**

**Going Deeper:** As I write, I am looking at a display in my office of the Nativity. Most likely you have one in your home as well. The one I see was handmade, given to me several years ago. My gaze led me to a figure on the outside of the scene, a shepherd carrying a lamb under one arm while carrying a staff in another. Without overly romanticizing this image, the image of the shepherd or shepherding is prominent in our preparation during Advent. It reminds us of God's care for people who are lost, or scattered, or pushed aside and forgotten. The imagery used by the Hebrew prophet Ezekiel is deeply personal in nature and speaks to God's compassionate heart, as well as God's desire for wholeness to be restored to all of God's creation. Ezekiel tells us that God is not unaware of our need. His words reassure not only of God's awareness, but also God's intention to be personally engaged in righting the wrongs of our world, binding up the wounded and providing strength to the weak. They are words of comfort and care, telling us God will be actively engaged in seeking to bring restoration to those in need. As you read these verses notice how many times you find "I" statements. As I said I do not want to romanticize this image or idea... and yet the world we live in, our own community is filled with lives that are on the outside looking in... as we work our way through Advent with its message of hope and peace, you may find yourselves wondering when, and how all these promises will finally come to fulfillment... Quite honestly that is the point of Ezekiel's prophecy in 34:16. We who have much and have heard the message of God's desire are called to join God in this work of creating hope and peace. Listen for it... God will lead each one of us to how and where you and I are called to join God's work of healing redemption and care.

**Prayer:** My God, thank you for your care and desire to restore this world to wholeness. As my Good Shepherd lead me as one who has heard your call and knows your voice so I may join you in your work to bring hope, healing and peace into our world and community. Thank you for my many blessings, help me to trust your promise of abundance and care that is promised for all your sheep as I listen for your voice and leading to how and where I am called to join you. Amen.

#### **Friday: Philippians 4:4-9**

**Going Deeper:** If you have a copy of the Message, I encourage you to read these words of instruction from the Apostle Paul from that translation as well the one you may use more often. These words that bring us to the end of our week are glorious! They call to us from above the fret and fray of life encouraging us to lift our eyes and focus on the promise of God's love, and God's presence which is nearer than we expect. The work of this week has been to help us become more deeply aware of how the message of Christmas which naturally lifts our hearts and spirits, is also a call to reconnect with how and where God wants to use us. Our lives are to become vessels through which the love of God, hope and peace for all reach out into our community, touching the lives, hearts, and spirits of those around us. As we shift our gaze, open our minds, and trust our faith in Christ... peace will begin to flow into us. *"Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's*

*wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.” (Philippians 4:7 – The Message)*

**Prayer:** Lord of light, truth, hope and peace shine down upon me! Shine brightly upon my community. May your peace flow into and through me as I focus on what you are doing in my life and in our community. Guard my heart, help me stay focused on your presence and care allowing me to shake off and disregard all that would steal my peace and joy. I lift these challenges to you right now... even before they come, trusting you will provide what is needed to lead me through and beyond them. Amen.