

GROW ~ PRAY ~ STUDY

Main Street UMC — Weekly Guide — December 11, 2011

The Advent Conspiracy

Christmas Cantata ~ *How Great Our Joy*

Scripture References: Isaiah 12:1-6, Luke 2:6-12, Revelation 11:15

You will say in that day: I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, and you comforted me. Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth. Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel. (Isaiah 12:1-6)

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:6-14)

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever." (Revelation 11:15)

Monday December 12 ~ Isaiah 12:2-6

The first two challenges of the Advent Conspiracy are to “spend less” and “give more.” The third challenge is to “worship fully.” Each of this week’s assigned readings will show God’s people singing or instruct God’s people to “sing to the Lord a new song” (Isaiah 42:10). These verses do not say sing *if you have a good voice*, or sing *if you like the music*. We sing because we love God and God loves us.

- The Bible teaches us to sing in all circumstances, even when we don’t feel like it. When do you most feel like singing? When do you least feel like singing? What song are you singing today?
- Prayer: *God of music, thank you for giving me songs to sing. Help me sing your song every day of my life. Amen.*

Tuesday December 13 ~ Psalm 98:1-9

The Psalms are the Bible’s prayer-book. They are also the Bible’s song-book. For centuries, God’s people have been reading, praying, and singing the Psalms in corporate worship and private devotion. Many people read, pray, or sing one Psalm everyday. Psalm 98 is rich with praise of God, calling us to “make a joyful noise.”

- The Bible teaches us to sing songs of praise, even when we don’t feel like singing. What can you do to “make a joyful noise” amid life’s pain and disappointment?
- Prayer: *Loving God, I don’t always feel like singing. Teach me to sing, even when I feel sadness and despair. Amen.*

Wednesday December 14 ~ 1 Chronicles 16:7-36

Not all of the Bible’s songs are in the book of Psalms. The song of David (which starts in verse 8) describes God’s past faithfulness and future promises. It is a song of salvation, recalling all that God has done and looking forward with hope to the fullness of God’s salvation. This is the primary reason we sing praises, because God has saved us from the power of the sin and death.

- Spend some time this week reviewing your life. When and how have you experienced God’s presence? What would be in your song of praise? Which life experiences make you want to sing?
- Prayer: *God of grace, when I think of all that you have done and promise to do, I am humbled. Thank you for salvation. Amen.*

Thursday December 15 ~ Colossians 3:12-17

The letters of the Apostle Paul that comprise much of the New Testament are either written to churches or about churches. In his letters, Paul teaches individual believers and church groups how to live as disciples of Jesus. He teaches about prayer and worship, sacrificial giving, and selfless service to others. Sometimes he quotes psalms and hymns (Philippians 2:6-11). Sometimes he just instructs the church to “with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.”

- Our worship services are designed to touch our heads and our hearts. We learn about God and seek understanding, and we also sing and pray. Are you more of a “head” person or a “heart” person? How might you balance your head and your heart?
- Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help me find the balance of head, heart, and hands you desire for my life. Amen.*

Friday December 16 ~ Revelation 11:15-17

Eugene Peterson (known for *The Message*) suggests that The Revelation to John is primarily a book of worship. Even in the midst of pain and suffering, the people of God can, and should, worship God on earth just as God is worshipped in heaven (see Revelation 4.) One of the greatest praise choruses ever written—Handel’s *Hallelujah Chorus*—is taken from Revelation 11:15.

- Listen to the Hallelujah Chorus this week. Doesn’t it make you want to sing along? This is the invitation of Scripture, to sing along with the heavenly chorus, praising God.
- Prayer: *Almighty God, thank you for the invitation to join the heavenly chorus. Give me the courage to sing along. Amen.*

Saturday December 17 ~ Luke 2:6-14

Much, if not all, of the Christmas story has been set to music. In Luke’s Gospel, we find several songs of praise celebrating what God has done. (See Luke 1:46-55, Luke 1:68-79, Luke 2:14, and Luke 2:29-32.)

- Prayer and worship, praise and singing is always a response to what God has done through Jesus Christ. Plan to join the Advent Conspiracy and “worship fully” at Christmas this year.
- Prayer: *God of salvation, thank you for Jesus. Help me worship fully as I celebrate his birth on Christmas Day. Amen.*