

## My Prayer Journal

*Use this weekly prayer to help you begin your time with God each day.*

### Prayer of Confession:

God in this season suspended between hope and fulfillment, let us never forget what You have done. May we be overwhelmed by Your mercy, which flows in wave after wave. May we be honest about the darkness within us, and perceptive of the light around us. May we make straight the path for the Lord, that together we may see God's glory revealed. In Christ's love, Amen.

### My Prayers this Week:

### Family Time:

Last week we talked about preparing ourselves for the excitement of Advent. As a family we encouraged you to make a plan for Advent and how you could celebrate that together throughout the season. Advent also becomes a time where everyone is busy and we overlook the true reason of Advent. We have to proclaim who God is and how He impacts our daily lives. Take time this week to talk about God's love and how He reconciles turmoil in your life. How can you as a family work through difficult moments when you call upon God to lead you through them? The hope is each week for you to see the gifts of the Advent season that God gives us.

### MONDAY 12.6.21

### Isaiah 40:1-11

While the season of Advent is all about awaiting the arrival of the Messiah—Jesus— we sometimes forget that according to Scripture, John the Baptist also played a vital role in preparing the people for His arrival. This week, we will look at several passages from the Old Testament that led to the expectation that before the Messiah's arrival, someone else would arrive whose role would be that of God's messenger. According to Isaiah, before God arrives to save His people, a prophet will come to announce "Here is your God!" This prophet would "clear the way," ensuring that obstacles to God's reception were cleared ahead of time. Note in verses 10 and 11 how Isaiah joins together images of a triumphant warrior and a compassionate shepherd to describe this God who is coming. Not only will the Messiah defeat the enemies of God's people, but He will also care for God's people, and lead them in the paths God lays before them. In his Gospel, Luke refers to the ministry of John the Baptist as fulfillment of the prophecy in today's reading (Luke 3:4-6). Indeed, John called the people to repent of sin—the one obstacle that stood between them and God—preparing them to meet God in Jesus.

- How does today's message bring "comfort" to you (verse 1)?

### TUESDAY 12.7.21

### Malachi 3:1-6

Malachi prophesied as many as 300 years after the prophecies of Isaiah. Yet he, too, proclaims that God is "sending my messenger who will clear the path before me." After that day, Malachi says, God Himself will "come to His temple." The day of His coming will be a day of refining and purifying, and a day of judgment and reckoning, as those who reject God's will by oppressing the laborers, the widows, the orphans, and the foreigners will find God Himself testifying against them. The imagery used here by Malachi was adopted by both John the Baptist and Jesus to describe how God was acting, in Jesus, to finally restore people to a right relationship with God. In spite of Israel's continual rebellion, God had persevered in His grace toward them, and because "I, the LORD, do not change," it was this same grace that would characterize God's coming. Imagine the impact on those familiar with Malachi's prophecy when John the Baptist identified Jesus as "God's Son" (John 1:33), and when Jesus then entered the Temple to cleanse it (John 2:13-17). The Messiah's coming was a day of joy for those aligned with God, and of judgment against those who were not.

- Why would the proclamation of God's coming cause some to rejoice and others to be afraid? How would you respond?

### WEDNESDAY 12.8.21

### Malachi 4:1-6

In concluding his prophetic writing, Malachi again affirmed that the day of God's coming was imminent. He reiterates that it will be a day of judgment, on which the wicked would be crushed under the soles of God's feet. But now, Malachi is explicit about the identity of the messenger who will come ahead of that day. It is none other than Elijah, the great prophet from the 9th century BC (Malachi was writing in the 5th century BC)! Because Elijah had been taken up into heaven by chariots, with no mention of his death, it was believed he could—and would—return in bodily form. In the years following Malachi's prophecy, known as the "intertestamental period" (the time between the Old and New Testaments), it became a firmly held belief in Judaism that before God arrived on the Day of Judgment, Elijah would return as the forerunner of God's Messianic King. Elijah—the "messenger" of Isaiah 40:1-11 and Malachi 3:1—would play the vital role of "turning the hearts of the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parents." This is Old Testament language of healing and peace, and a call to reconciliation with not only our relatives, but with God as well.

- Why was a call to reconciliation necessary before God came?

### THURSDAY 12.9.21

### Luke 1:5-25

Many who read the Gospel of Luke for the first time are surprised to find that Luke spends as much time on the foretelling and actual event of John the Baptist's birth as on that of Jesus! But having read from Isaiah and Malachi earlier this week, perhaps it is not so surprising after all. The words of the angel Gabriel to John's father Zechariah echo those of Malachi 4:1-6—John will be "equipped with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children." But they also echo the prophecy of Isaiah: "He will make ready a people prepared for the Lord." We should not be surprised, then, when the angel Gabriel's next stop is the house of a young virgin in Nazareth named Mary, whose child will be "the Son of the Most High," who will be given "the throne of David his father" (Luke 1:32). Luke spends as much time on the fulfillment of prophecy in John the Baptist as he does on the fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus because the Jewish people trusted the words of the prophets of God that before their Messiah came, a messenger with the spirit of Elijah would come to prepare the way. Luke wants us to know, at the outset, that this promise, too, is being fulfilled.

- How is Zechariah's fear central to the story? What are the consequences of an unwillingness to receive good news?

