2022 Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional

2022 has been a year of challenges and blessings. Due to inflationary pressures, our nonprofit partner agencies have seen an average increase in need of 25%. Catastrophic flooding and Hurricane Ian allowed us to live out the Disaster Relief part of our mission. A five-year drought in East Africa and political and economic instability in Haiti gave MFB the opportunity to show the love of Christ by alleviating hunger.

Thanks to the solid support of our donors and volunteers, MFB continues to help those struggling with food insecurity. Generous donors stepped up and provided funds to support our operations. Dedicated volunteers gave of themselves in the service of others. Prayer warriors covered our operations in prayer. These, combined with the blessings of God, have allowed the Midwest Food Bank mission* to be fulfilled.

We’ve prepared a new Advent Devotional for 2022 to encourage our partners and thank those who support us. We have included many distinct voices of MFB’s nonprofit partners, volunteers, board members, and employees. These aren’t all uniform - one day’s devotion will differ from the next. They are designed to display the unique hearts of people engaged in our mission.

We hope these thoughts and prayers will be a blessing to all and encouragement for the days ahead. May God fill you with His wonder as we celebrate Jesus’ birth. Thank you for your support of the mission of Midwest Food Bank.

*As a faith-based organization, it is the mission of Midwest Food Bank to share the love of Christ by alleviating hunger and malnutrition locally and throughout the world and providing disaster relief; all without discrimination.
They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42 NIV

After Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came to indwell all those who put their faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior, we see a clear picture of what God’s people are to be focused on to reap the rewards and impacts of their redeemed life in Christ.

They devoted themselves to collectively understanding Jesus’ teachings through the apostles who knew Him on earth. They gathered together in fellowship as we do in church services today. They celebrated and remembered Jesus’ sacrifice through the sharing of communion elements, and they gathered to pray.

Participating in Bible study, praise and worship services, communion, and prayer are all critical elements in the lives of Christ-followers. Each can be done on our own or without much real personal interaction, but what is essential to see in this verse is that the early Church reflects the value of community in our lives as believers in Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, open our eyes to the opportunities to grow closer to you through shared participation in the study of your Word, times of praise, sharing of communion elements, and in prayer. Show us how to grow our communities of faith and how to be increasingly willing to share our hearts with others for your glory. Encourage us to “go and grow.” Amen.

Ann Kafer, MFB National Board Member

Midwest Food Bank Advent Devotional
Throughout the Bible, God’s love for us is evident. Many people refer to the Bible as God’s love story. Evidence of His love for us came first with creation, and He gives it freely to us until the end of time. God’s love is represented through Jesus Christ who came to earth, lived a perfect life, died on a cross, was buried, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven to make a way for us to join Him in eternity.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” - John 3:16 NKJV

This love can transform everything about our lives, including our identity. When our lives are too busy and bustling, or we get spiritually lazy, we tend to forget who we are and look to the world’s tools of self-improvement, self-reliance, self-love, self-promotion, independence, and self-worship. If we look to God for answers to tough questions like “who am I?” or “why am I here?” he will answer us with loving confirmation that defines us as His. And that’s all the identity any of us needs.

Delighting in God’s life-changing love should transform us as we humbly seek to love Him in return. We can trust His perfect love and the plans He has for us, and we can rejoice and rest in the loving work that God is doing in us - transforming our identity in Christ. His love is unfailing and never-ending.

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. - Romans 8:38-39 NKJV

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for sending Your Son to die on the cross so we could live in freedom. Father, some days this sinful world seems discouraging and overwhelming. I pray that I can keep my eyes fixed on You and know You did not intend for me to do life alone but to live by the Holy Spirit’s power. Father, I pray for strength, wisdom, and courage along the journey. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Monica Scheuer, MFB Peoria Executive Director

Midwest Food Bank Advent Devotional
So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you. - Isaiah 41:10, 13 KJV

As you look at the world today everywhere, there’s a cry for help from everyone. Everyone you meet is talking about how prices have gone up on this and that, how someone meeting their needs must work extra hard.

God knew this would happen; nothing gets Him as a surprise. We who are His children must trust Him fully. When troubled and dismayed, we should pour our hearts to Him as a good father who has promised to help us Himself. Let’s learn from Paul and Silas when they were in prison. They never looked at the circumstances. They kept on praising the Lord and praying. When we go through storms, to whom do we run? Do we run to people to give us counsel, or do we run to God to guide us and deal with it?

To give a short testimony of my life, I run an orphanage/rescue home and a free education school in the slums of Kenya. I don’t have lots of funds to meet the ministry’s needs, nor do I have big donors with lots of cash every month. I trust God for money for rent and salaries, among other expenses. Sometimes I become very anxious and in despair, but God comes through for me in His time. The amount is $2,000 every month. Most people wonder how I make it, BUT GOD. Look to Him and draw near to Him. He will do so much more.

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. - Ephesians 3:20-21 KJV

Beatrice Malika, Director, Glory Christian Center and Rescue Home
MFB East Africa Partner Agency

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30

But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, “You are my God.” My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.
- Psalm 31: 14-15, NRSV-CE

When I started the day, I had my time carefully lined up to accomplish all necessary and important tasks. I did not plan on the thunk-thunk-thunk of a bolt in my tire as I drove away from home. I did not schedule the tire deflating in the 1 mile it took to drive to the nearest tire center. There, I was annoyed to learn that my time would be spent waiting two hours for my tire to be repaired or replaced. There was no doubt that my enemies, boredom and frustration, would persecute me all morning.

While waiting, I hoped to accomplish something of value. I resigned myself to catching up on email. Looking up from my screen, I was surprised by the entrance of a fellow Midwest Food Bank volunteer. This almost centenarian man and I had worked side by side, loading food for our nonprofit partners. He had moved out of town, and I had not seen him in many months. He also had a flat tire. My morning of aggravation became a divine appointment as he and I kept each other company. He shared stories of his long and interesting life. I was able to be of service as I helped him understand what the tire shop staff was telling him, bridging the challenge of his hearing impairment. Our fellowship and shared faith in God illuminated the bland waiting room, as the birth of Jesus must have transformed the humble stable where he was born.

In this Advent season, I hope to be especially open to the blessings of waiting. My times are always securely in God’s hand when I allow him to deliver me from the petty enemies and persecutors of my own narrow agenda.

Prayer: Dear God, May my trust in you increase in this season of waiting. Please help me to see how securely you hold my times in your hand and free me to serve and uplift others in all circumstances. Amen

Sara Severn, MFB Georgia Volunteer

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1

The Light shines through the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.
- John 1:5 NLT

It was early morning, and all was dark and still as our children and grandchildren slept peacefully in a big old house we rented at the beach for our family vacation. As planned the night before, three of us crept out the front door to make the short walk to the beach, capturing the beautiful, breathtaking sunrise. It was a brand-new day, the particles of light penetrating deep into our beings, a sense of joy filling our hearts. Light overcoming darkness!

Imagine that holy night when the Son of God was born into a dark world. The One who was with the Creator in the beginning when He said, “Let there be light,” now came to earth to deliver mankind from the dark clutches of the curse of sin. After the horrific darkness on Golgotha, the sunrise of His resurrection has forever marked our lives with light. Light always overcomes darkness!

What an honor and privilege we have at Midwest Food Bank to be the sunlight in the lives of the hungry and broken! We hear the cry and answer with hope. As ones with this great hope, we face darkness, knowing that our Sunrise from On High will light the way! The Light in us extinguishes darkness!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Jesus, the Light of the world, who rescued us from the curse of sin and darkness. Thank you for the privilege of being Your sunrise to humanity in dark and difficult places, bringing hope as the hungry are fed! Shine into our lives and families this holiday season, overcoming any darkness we face. Thank You for your promise that we will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of our Father! In Jesus’ Name, we pray, Amen and Amen.

Sue Horst, MFB Pennsylvania Advisory Board Member

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2

So let’s not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up. - Galatians 6:9 NLT

I’d guess I’m not alone when I admit I truly enjoy seeing the fruits of my labor. I appreciate it when my efforts are noticed, and I even feel highly encouraged if they result in any praise. Outside of a husband’s and father’s everyday endeavors, I’ve occasionally done a few things well in the eyes of others and been the recipient of appreciation. However, navigating our days with a witnessing mindset doesn’t always yield a quick return. Sometimes, we may not see the fruits of our labor.

While that can discourage us, we should not be surprised when we do right and receive no word of thanks or see no tangible result in return for our investment. While there is no mention of us reaping a harvest of blessings for our undertakings, Paul challenges us in Galatians 6:9 to keep doing good and trust God for the results. At the right time, we will be blessed. But maybe we shouldn’t expect it. Maybe it will be in Heaven as we enjoy eternity with our Father. We don’t know when, but the God-inspired word of Paul tells us it will be the right time! I invite you to keep one of my favorite scriptures in mind as you work to produce some God-honoring fruit.

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. - Colossians 3:23-24 ESV

Prayer: Father, please build or strengthen a passion in our hearts that allows us to find joy and fulfillment in simply doing good when you give us the opportunity to advance your Kingdom. Help us protect our hearts by letting us see discouragement from lack of recognition as a potential ploy from the devil to deter us from loving each other well and honoring You as we do so. We ask this in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Rich Beasley, MFB Bloomington-Normal, Illinois, Operations Manager

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” - Jeremiah 29:4-7 NIV

At the end of the book of Jeremiah, the Hebrew people have lost a war. Their country has been conquered, their people killed, and their temple destroyed. Many of those who remained were taken into exile in a foreign country. Their instinct is to resist - to begin to form an insurgency so they can one day enact revenge. But the prophet Jeremiah says, no, don’t do that.

Jeremiah tells the people to release their desire for vengeance and not to harbor ill will against these people: the very ones whose military just destroyed their homeland and killed their families. Jeremiah knows that violence only leads to more violence. And that the only sustainable way forward, in any situation, is peace. A true, lasting, peace cannot be found through war or revenge. He tells them to seek the good of the city and peace. Build houses. Plant gardens. Marry their sons and daughters. Model the path toward peace and perhaps even toward God’s own heart.

Just like in those ancient days, the world’s notion of “peace” continue to call out to us. They beckon us to respond with anger or rage, violence or hatred. They call us to shun those with whom we disagree and pursue our plans above those of others. But Jeremiah and Jesus call us toward peace.

Prayer: Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let your love increase, Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Walls of pride and prejudice shall cease when we are instruments of peace.

Cory Glover, Senior Minister, Tapestry Church, MFB Indiana Partner

Midwest Food Bank Advent Devotional
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. - Jeremiah 29:11 ESV

I had the privilege of visiting the Sistine Chapel and Vatican Museum in Italy, where wall-sized tapestries depicting Biblical events amazed me, a simple Midwest-born dairy farmer’s son. When I stood close to the tapestries, I could see individual threads. Some threads ran parallel. Others were perpendicular. There were different color threads; some very ornate, others ordinary. There were knots and imperfections on the backside of the tapestries. Up close, I could only see a portion of the art. But standing further back, all those variations became beautiful artwork woven into the tapestry – all by design.

That’s what comes to mind when I think of God’s plans. We are like individual threads in God’s beautiful tapestry. We are all different. Our paths may intersect with the lives of many other “threads” while running parallel to even more. Why did He select us for this particular part and function of His design? Why did He choose to send His Son in the form of an infant baby? Why was that child-Savior conceived by an unwed virgin? One obvious answer to those last questions is to fulfill prophecy like that found in Isaiah 7:14 – “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.” KJV

God knew our need for a Savior. He planned when and how salvation would come into this world. You and I are also part of His beautiful design. May we do our utmost in whatever role we have to bring glory to the Designer.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you are the perfect Planner and Designer, and you have chosen us to be part of your beautiful tapestry. Although we have only a limited perspective, we are thankful that you always had, and continue to have, the bigger picture in mind. Help us to serve others with the same humility and grace demonstrated by your Son, Jesus, who came into our world as an infant to bring eternal life to those who put their faith in Him. In his name we pray, Amen.

Dan Verhoef, MFB Georgia Volunteer

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional
You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. - Psalm 145:16 - NKJV

Christmas has always been full of joy for me as the world celebrates the greatest gift ever given when God opened His hand and gave us the birth of our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Through this season, when we give gifts to others, we understand the truth of the scripture, “it is more blessed to give than to receive” - Acts 20:35. Whether it is a kind action, a word of appreciation, the “perfect” gift, or a prayer for a blessing on those we love, there is a great satisfaction in being able to lift the spirits of those around us. We can experience the joy that must have overwhelmed our Heavenly Father when he gave the gift of eternal life to all who would believe in Him through the Son He sent.

We sing in one of my favorite Christmas carols, “How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given.” The gift is so wonderous that it caused two enemy armies to stop their warfare during World War I and sing together, each in their own language, “Silent Night, Holy Night.” It’s a gift we need to consider when we read, “Freely ye have received, freely give” - Matthew 10:8 - KJV. What a blessing it is to be part of a ministry that gives the gift of food to a hungry world!

God has truly opened His hand and continues to open it today. Let’s continue to praise and worship Him, the One who opens His hand, and every living thing is blessed.

Prayer: God, help me to grasp the wondrous gift you gave when you sent your Son as a babe in the manger who grew and became the man on the cross and gave me the hope of life eternal through his death and resurrection. Amen.

Bill Leman, MFB National Board Member

Midwest Food Bank Advent Devotional
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6

For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. - John 3:16 NKJV

Every day I go to work at Midwest Food Bank, I am greeted by our amazing volunteers. They work hard, helping to do whatever needs to be done to help meet the needs of people they may never meet or see. They expect nothing in return, and they are dedicated to serving God and others. They are selfless indeed. I have so much respect, love, and gratitude for every one of them. No matter what I am going through, it lifts my spirit and gives me joy to see them sharing the love of Christ daily.

I am reminded of Jesus and how he voluntarily gave up his position to come, serve, save, and demonstrate his love for people who are undeserving. He gave his all to whoever would believe and trust in him. This should cause our hearts to overflow with joy and gratitude this season. Our volunteers at Midwest Food Bank Texas demonstrate and truly exemplify the spirit of Christ.

Prayer: Father, no matter what we are going through or what we may face, help us continue to reflect the heart of Christ as we all serve him in all we do. Grant that we can be filled with joy, and peace and bring light to a hurting world in need of a Savior. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Rhonda Revels, MFB Texas Community Development Coordinator

Midwest Food Bank Advent Devotional
And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew (them).
Exodus 2:24-25 ESV

The Exodus story is humanity’s story. People stuck in slavery were powerless to do anything. The only thing they could muster was a groan. We can feel that way sometimes and wonder if God still cares. These two verses give us the heart of God. He heard. He remembered. He saw. He knew.

God heard. Scripture is full of God hearing his people. What’s most impressive is not who or when he hears but that he hears at all. The shame is that so many don’t live with this understanding. They think God doesn’t listen. He does. The proof is Jesus.

God remembered. It seems like a strange phrase. Can God forget? No. It simply emphasizes his faithfulness to complete what he starts. He didn’t make the promise without the expectation that he would make good on it. If you feel God has forgotten you or lost sight of your situation. He hasn’t. The proof is Jesus.

God saw. El Roeh - the God who sees - is his name. Sarah used this name when she was given a son. The widow with two mites probably came to know this name. So did Lazarus. So did the thief on the cross. This requires closeness. He sees because he chooses to, because he’s close enough to take notice. The proof is Jesus.

God knew. Literally, the word here means “he knew them.” He knew what was needed to set them free. And you know what? He did it. Not just then but now and forever. The proof is Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, we celebrate the coming of the One who shows us Your heart and leads us home to You. Thank you, Jesus, for demonstrating God’s incredible love for us. Thank You for knowing our struggles and setting us free. Amen.

William Kitchen, Executive Director, Teen Challenge Southeast Region, MFB Florida Partner Agency

Midwest Food Bank Advent Devotional
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8

We have entered a season when we become acutely aware of how short the days are. Some of us leave for work when it is dark and come home when it is dark. Some of us may dread this time of year because we yearn for the light.

The good news is that soon all of that will change with time and the change of seasons. The days will become longer. Commuting back and forth from work will take place when it is light out. Moods will change because the sun is shining while we are on the go.

We have come to live in a time where it seems the whole world is permeated by darkness. Unfortunately, there is no natural remedy for this darkness.

The good news, actually the best news of all time, is that while there may not be a natural remedy, there is a supernatural remedy. Our Father has sent His Son into the world. Jesus shared what this means with His disciples (and us) when He said in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” ESV

The light we get from the sun changes with time and seasons. However, the light we have in the Son is unchanging. It will never dim but only shine brighter in our lives as we draw closer to Him.

Prayer: Holy Father, we give you thanks and praise for how we don’t have to walk in darkness because You sent Your Son into the world to be our light. Please grant us grace that we might carry Your light wherever you lead us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Brad Crumrine, MFB Volunteer Truck Driver

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9

In everything I have pointed out to you, (by example) that by working diligently in this manner, we out to assist the weak, being mindful of the words of the Lord Jesus, how He himself said, it is more blessed (makes one happier and more to be envied) to give than to receive. - Acts 20:35 AMP

Our motive to give to the poor must be to demonstrate our love towards God and please Him, and make him known more. When we do this, it shows our maturity in faith as well as knowledge of God. If we intend to draw people’s attention to ourselves, we rob ourselves of God’s blessings.

By doing this, it does not mean that we can’t give openly. Not all types of giving are supposed to be anonymous. As explained in the Book of Acts, we know that Barnabas sold a field and gave the money to the Apostles. In Acts chapter 4, we learn that this was a regular and customary practice. The difference was motive and heart intention. The contrast of this is in Acts 5 with Ananias and Sapphira. They labored to use their gift to look more spiritual than they really were.

Therefore, any time you give, do so with a heart after God and his approval. Be desirous that God would use the gift to bring glory to himself and not to enthroned your ability. Allow your giving to be driven by what God has given you! Give and pray that the recipient would see Jesus and not your gift.

Prayer: Lord, gives us resources, goodwill, and grace to continue stewardship in Your kingdom through our gifts. May we bless society and the world at large. Amen.

James Nyamu, Kapu Africa (MFB East Africa) Advisory Board Member

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional
These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.
- John 16:33 KJV

“The struggle is real” or “I am on the struggle bus” are a couple of expressions used to make light of when we are having a bad moment or tough day. We each go through tough times, whether for a short period or what seems like a long season. Jesus is saying we will, without a doubt, have tribulation in this world, but we can have peace knowing that He has already won the battle.

As I have been through a variety of personal trials, from grieving loss within my family to my own serious health challenges, whenever I have given the struggle to God and trusted His promises, I have been able to rest in this unending peace that only He provides. Don’t get me wrong; I’ve tried to fight the good fight on my own many times, but with little success. I have floundered whenever I’ve rested on the word of man or my own will. When I truly give it over to God, I find calm in the storm. He wants us to experience His peace! (Jeremiah 29:11)

True peace from God passes all understanding (Phillippians 4:7). Peace is defined as cheerfulness, optimism, or confidence. Another definition of peace is that it means being free from disturbance. Bind God’s word to your heart with faith that while we are in the midst of the storm, we can be confident and know we will receive His perfect peace.

Prayer: Thank You, God, for Your perfect peace that we can experience amid tribulations. Thank You for Your promises, faithfulness, and mercies that are new every day. We praise You for your Glory and that You never change. You are our rock in the storm. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Temple Roe, MFB Human Resources Director

Midwest Food Bank Advent Devotional
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11

But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. - 1 John 4:8 NLT

Love, a fruit of the Spirit, should be an outward expression of action. Around the holidays, especially Christmas, we tend to show one another love through the gifts that we give. God’s expression of love toward us was the gift of His beloved son, Jesus. Jesus showed us love, by giving His life.

This season, as followers of Christ, let us pause and think about how we show love to others. Giving of my resources and being of service to my immediate and extended family, friends, neighbors, and community is how I show others that they are loved. The Word says, “But if we love each other, God lives in us.”

Remember, the greatest commandment is LOVE. This reminds me of the song “What the World Needs Now is Love,” which is still fitting today.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for showing Your children what it means to love. We know that the more we get to know You, Your Son, and Your Word, the more love develops in us because You are love. As we live on this earth, we still encounter hatred and war, but Your hedge of protection is around us, and you teach us to fight back with the greatest of all weapons, LOVE. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Veronica Kelly, ROCK Manager, Eastern Star Church, MFB Indiana Partner Agency

Midwest Food Bank Advent Devotional
For great is the Lord! He is most worthy of praise! He is to be feared above all gods. The gods of other nations are mere idols, but the LORD made the heavens!
- I Chronicles 16:25-26 NLT

**Prayer:** Lord, Praise is our natural response to Your greatness. It is not unusual for us to burst into spontaneous applause when a head of state or a celebrity enters a room. And when we enter into Your presence through worship, our natural response will be praise. You hold all creation in Your hands and yet care deeply for the details of our lives; that is amazing!

You alone, Lord, are worthy of our highest praise. When we consider what You have done for us, praise is the only possible response. We lift our voices to You now, and we glorify You. And we long to give You glory our whole lives. Amen.

**Joy to the World, lyrics by Isaac Watts**

Joy to the world! the Lord is come; Let Earth receive her King; Let every heart prepare him room, And heaven and nature sing.

He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the nations prove The glories of His righteousness, And wonders of His love.

Mary Sheldahl, MFB Arizona Volunteer

**Midwest Food Bank**

*Advent Devotional*
Prophets. Kings. Disciples. No one in the history of time has had or ever will have a more up close and personal experience with the Messiah's arrival and life than Mary. God's plan for and through Mary is amazing.

But Mary was also a mom and a person very much like us. An angel delivers a radical message. She has a few very good questions but commits herself to God's plan. Then, she ends up giving birth in a stable and had to think, “this can't be right.” And then uninvited, over-enthusiastic, inappropriately clad guests arrive, which she “treasures up and ponders in her heart” (Luke 2:19).

Later in Luke, twelve-year-old Jesus is left at the temple (Side note - if you ever doubt yourself as a parent or caregiver, take heart. Mary, the greatest mother of all time, headed home, not realizing she left her son behind!). What does she do? She returns, listens to her son, and “treasures all these things in her heart.” (Luke 2:51).

Almost 20 years later, Jesus, an adult, is at a wedding with his mom. They run out of wine. In John 2:3, Mary says to Jesus, “they have no wine.” Jesus responds, “why do you involve me? My time has not yet come.” Mary, the mom, tell the helpers around him, “do whatever he tells you.” She knows her son, understands he has the power to fix the problem, and trusts him to do so!

Mary’s faith is an inspiration and example. Her humanity is relatable. God uses the most unlikely of people and takes what we have, however humble and meager that may seem, to accomplish his purposes. So when confronted with the chaos of life (and the holidays!), look for those reminders. An angelic chorus in the sky? Probably not. More likely, some uninvited guests, a huge parental fail, or an event mishap. All opportunities to treasure, ponder and remember, He's got this. He's got you.

**Prayer:** Lord, You don’t need to use us, but You choose to use us. Thank You for that. Please help us to treasure You and Your unique, eternal plan for us, our children, friends, and family. Not our will or way. But Yours. Amen.

*Kathy Anderson-Martin, MFB Pennsylvania Executive Director*

*Midwest Food Bank*  
*Advent Devotional*
At that time, John summoned two of his disciples and sent them to the Lord to ask, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” When the men came to the Lord, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?’”

At that time, Jesus cured many of their diseases, sufferings, and evil spirits; he also granted sight to many who were blind.

And Jesus said to them in reply, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.”

Luke 7: 18-23 NAB

Do you have times of doubt? This passage deals with doubt, where John the Baptist asks if Jesus is the Messiah. We are full of doubt and curiosity in our faith throughout our lives, usually caused by different expectations. Doubt can come into our lives in many ways: sickness and struggles with family relationships, but how we deal with the doubt will make a difference. You see, doubt flourishes in the dark. It thrives on the cold, dark loneliness of the human spirit.

In solitude, the questions seem larger, more ominous, and more hopeless. When John begins to doubt, his faith begins to waiver; he reaches out to Jesus for answers. So, when in doubt, go to where the light is. Do not neglect time with God. Do not ignore your Bible reading or going to church. When in doubt, get as much light as possible into your life. When in doubt, turn to Jesus.

You see, doubt is not the opposite of faith. Doubt is the opportunity of faith. Doubt is the growing pains of an eager, seeking, learning spirit.

Prayer: Dear God, touch the people around me, and keep them happy and safe. Give them love, compassion, and care. Bless them with good health, peace of mind and kindness in their hearts. Amen.

Tonja Amos, MFB Texas Volunteer

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional
For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. - Psalm 139:13-14 NIV

In life, we don’t get to choose where we’re born, what family we’ll be in, what race we will be, or what skin color we will have. We don’t get to choose our facial features: the color of our eyes, the size of our nose, or the height of our cheekbones.

Even though you didn’t have the opportunity to choose some aspects of your life, the Bible still declares that we are wonderfully made. God is so powerful that He thought of you before you were born. He created you in His image and likeness. While in your mother’s womb, He was forming you! God knew your eye color and the family who would raise you before you were born!

As we wrestle with struggles, we often compare our lives to the lives of those around us, wishing we looked, talked, and walked like them. But your identity is found in Jesus Christ! Everything about you and your life is part of God’s plan.

A mother once attempted to abort her son five times. Every time she went to the clinic, something happened. Either the doctor’s office would take too long to admit her, or the doctors forgot her as she waited. On the 5th try, the procedure was about to begin. Suddenly, she heard a voice saying, “Don’t follow through! Leave!” Thank God she listened. If she hadn’t obeyed, I wouldn’t be writing this devotional!

God’s plans are better than ours. His love for us is greater! You are fearfully and wonderfully made.

**Prayer:** Father, when you look at us, you see your Son. You see your child. In a time when life isn’t valued, where many perish without fulfilling their calling, I pray that we say “Yes” to You and “Yes” to who you’ve made us to be. We choose life! We choose to live for You! In the mighty name of Jesus, Amen!

William Cordero, Senior Pastor, New Life Worship Center, MFB New England Partner Agency

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional
“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her. - Luke 1:38 NIV

Imagine Mary’s unbelief when the angel visited her and explained she would give birth to Jesus. As irrational as the news seemed to the young virgin, she answered the angel with, “May your word to me be fulfilled.” She trusted in God’s plan. He was about to rewrite her story and the story for all mankind.

But what do we know about writing stories? Do you remember the process of learning how to write a five-paragraph essay in grade school? It likely started with creating an outline, followed by an introductory paragraph with a thesis statement, three “body” paragraphs, and a conclusion.

We tend to view our lives in the same manner. It seems human-natured for us to desire control over every aspect of our lives. We are dictating the outline, thesis, main points, and conclusion of our life’s story. But when we trust and follow God, He is able to shape our story into something far different than we may have ever imagined. Just like He would do for Mary.

But wait, there is more! God can add entirely new chapters to our stories that we thought were already finished, regardless of our choices or the shortcomings of our autobiographies.

May your celebrations of the birth of Jesus this Advent season remind you that He came to rewrite your story. Hope and trust in Him! God is not finished with you yet.

Prayer: We thank You, Lord, for the gift of hope through Your birth, death, and resurrection. We place our daily happenings and future plans into Your hands and invite You to take control. Please fulfill the promises of Your Word in our lives. Amen.

Tara Ingham, MFB Bloomington-Normal, Illinois, Executive Director

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional
If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!
- Matthew 7:11 NKJV

When our Lord Jesus Christ came to earth, one of the greatest things He revealed to us about God is that God is our Father. From the scriptures in the four Gospels, He always referred to God as His Father. The only time our Lord referred to God as God is when He was crucified on the cross, taking the sins of the world.

What image do you have of God in your mind? Beloved, I encourage you to see Him the way our Lord Jesus Christ showed us. He is your Father, and you are His beloved daughter or son. God loves you because of the greatest sacrifice that our Lord Jesus paid for at the cross when He took away all our sins. When you received Jesus into your heart, you immediately became a child of God.

A father usually takes care of his children. How much more will our good heavenly Father take care of you? He cares about you, from the things you consider big to those you think small. I love 1 Peter 5:7 - Amplified Version, which says, “casting all your cares [all your anxieties, all your worries, and all your concerns, once and for all] on Him, for He cares about you [with deepest affection, and watches over you very carefully].”

Today, I urge you, beloved, to read this scripture and meditate on it until you believe it, because it is the truth!

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for reminding me of Your love for me and that You care for me with the deepest affection and watch over me very carefully. Therefore I will be confident in Your love for me and believe in Your good plans. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Sandra Ayiera, Kapu Africa (MFB East Africa) Volunteer

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional
As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. I Peter 4:10 NKJV

Have you ever been through seasons where life kept knocking you down? It can be easy to start questioning why you said “yes” to God when things don’t seem to be getting any better. But when you decide to follow Jesus and serve others like He did, you’re choosing the life God intended for you all along — and He blesses your obedience. He never promised that it would be the easy road, but He did promise that His presence and provision would be with you.

KeArah is a volunteer at Elevation Church, who learned that true life is found in Christ as you surrender your desires and pour yourself out in support of others. She was single mom battling addiction at the time, but she wanted her son to be exposed to a Christ-centered community to learn the value of serving others. Since then, KeArah has continued serving and brings Sam to church with her each weekend. She was baptized at Elevation a year later.

KeArah shared, “Life without surrendering to God was sheer torture. I struggled with addiction, unbelief, unforgiveness, and deep despair. But God called my name. He showed me His grace and mercy and rescued me from the grave that my poor choices had led me to. I have now released rage, hatred, and unforgiveness and surrendered to God’s will for my life. In getting connected to serving others, I have found acceptance, fellowship, and love.”

Volunteers like KeArah have served across the MFB footprint and continue to make a difference around the world.

**Take action:** Serve at a community outreach event in your area or virtually with Midwest Food Bank. Jot down some notes on your experience. Ask yourself: What desires might I need to lay down so I can be filled up with God’s presence and provision? Who can I share God’s love with this week?

*John Nichols, Online Outreach Director. Elevation Church, MFB supporter*

**Midwest Food Bank**
One thing that often bothers me about Christmas - Jesus’ birthday; there’s never a gift under the tree for Jesus. But then again, what could you buy for Him who owns everything? What would He love to have as His gift?

More than anything, Jesus dearly loves people. That’s why the incarnate Christ came to earth in the first place. But I can’t wrap him a gift, so what could I do for that which He loves most - people? One thing I can do for Him is in His Word - help people who are in need.

Jesus said: Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,” ... Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?’ ... The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ - Matthew 25:34-40 NIV

Jesus loves this kind of gift because He loves people so very much! And being a part of a Christ-centered ministry such as MFB, long past Christmas, we’re still a part of giving that gift that pleases Jesus so much! And yes, it takes time and effort to use our talents, but remember, Jesus sees every aspect of everything we do for Him, big or small.

My exhortation for us all is in Galatians 6:9-10: Let us not become weary in doing good, ... Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” NIV

Thanks for your time and efforts in an ongoing Christmas present for King Jesus that keeps on giving in pleasing Him!!

Darrell Pine, MFB Peoria Volunteer

Midwest Food Bank Advent Devotional
This situation is uncomfortable. I have the justification to call it quits. This isn’t what I expected, not the way I planned this; it is not fair. Have you found yourself thinking these thoughts, focused on changing your situation to be comfortable again? Joseph wanted the unpleasantness to end - the quicker, the better.

While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God’s angel spoke in the dream: “Joseph, son of David, don’t hesitate to get married. Mary’s pregnancy is Spirit-conceived. God’s Holy Spirit has made her pregnant. She will bring a son to birth, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus- ‘God saves’- because he will save his people from their sins.” This would bring the prophet’s embryonic sermon to full term: Watch for this- a virgin will get pregnant and bear a son; They will name him Immanuel (Hebrew for ‘God is with us’).” - Matthew 1:20-23 MSG

Joseph was engaged to Mary, and it was his right to break it off when he found she was pregnant. Engagement was serious in their culture, and what an embarrassment for him. Would people whisper behind their backs and think he had married someone immoral or that he was the father and had committed a sin before they married?

To nail home what God wanted, in the dream, the messenger quoted Isaiah. Growing up, Joseph would have known that Isaiah had predicted 700 years earlier that God would come to live with humanity; God with us.

Don’t allow discomfort and your obsession with ending it cause you to miss out on something amazing. Joseph was allowed to be the earthly father to Jesus. He was chosen to know the Savior of the World intimately. He was witness to the many miracles around His birth and His growing up, but he almost missed it.

Prayer: Lord, open our eyes to You working in our daily lives. When we are uncomfortable, remind us to look for what You are doing. Lord, helps us to release comfort. Please show us what our role is in Your work. Let us stay in situations and be a part of something amazing. Amen.

Marcie Luhigo, MFB Indiana Executive Director

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ Revelation 7: 9-10 NIV

A well-known quote from an unknown source says, “The beauty of the world lies in the diversity of its people.” Many passages in scripture support this sentiment, perhaps none more poignantly than Revelation 7. The Bible commands us to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” It doesn’t say to love the neighbor who looks and acts like you or holds the same value systems as you do; it just says to love them. In fact, Jesus says this command comes second only to loving God. His example leveled the playing field for all people and cultures. There are instances where Jesus chose to hang out with those deemed culturally irrelevant or inappropriate within the context of their day (Matthew 9). He chose to have some of his most memorable conversations with people from marginalized groups, like the woman at the well (John 4). He showed compassion and an interest in finding out more about people from all walks of life. He never condoned sin, but He always led with love. This season is a beautiful reminder of the heart of God for all humanity.

Prayer: Oh Lord, thank You for Your love. Thank You that you value me and desire a relationship with me. Please help me to see others the way You see them. Help me to be an example of Your love in my spheres of influence. May others look at me and see the light of our Savior, Jesus Christ, as I walk in Your truth and goodness today. Amen.

Kate Hughes, MFB Pennsylvania Advisory Board Member

Midwest Food Bank Advent Devotional
And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know in paths that they have not known. I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them.
Isaiah 42:16 ESV

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go: I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. Psalm 32:8 NIV

The first time this verse (Isaiah 42:16) was front and center on my radar was during a difficult transition when we moved our family overseas. I was left with our school-aged kids for many days to figure out life in a foreign land. I was going down a path I had not known before, and I felt like I was doing it blindly. A friend sent me this verse, and my heart latched onto it. God promises to guide us when we cannot see the path. He will light your path and make the rough places level.

This promise brings me hope even now. The Christmas season brings joy and reasons to celebrate. It also brings moments of stress, deep grief, and uncertainty. There may be questions in your heart, doubts in your spirit, and anxiety about the future. But remember, God will counsel you with his loving eye on you (Psalm 32:8). When I am hurting, I go to the promises of God because I know He is faithful.

When I focus on a promise from God, I am prone to say, “God, you said you would do it, and I’m counting on it.” Much like a child would say to a parent when promised something. If you encounter difficult days this season, I encourage you to search the promises God makes to us and let them strengthen you and light your path.

Prayer: Dear God, I am counting on You to instruct me and teach me where to go. I am thankful that You watch over me with Your loving eye. Please guide me through the dark days and make my path smooth. Your promises are true, and You are faithful. Please help me to find joy and peace during this Advent season, even through difficult memories or hard days. My hope is in You. Amen.

Stacia Emerson, MFB Texas Volunteer

Midwest Food Bank

Advent Devotional
If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important.”
- Galatians 6:3 NLT

We live in a world of ‘doing.’ This ‘doing’ is often perceived as a symbol of status or success. ‘Being able to juggle it all’ is a badge strived to be earned by parents everywhere. However, this passage reminds us of the humility that Jesus wants from all of us. Our importance is not defined by the number of activities the kids are in and how many clubs we participate in. It is inherent in us as a child of God. God has proven how important we are through his love for us, as described in John 3:16. However, we can often replace how important we are in the world by the amount scheduled on our calendars. The Enemy wants us to believe and value this, though it is against God’s teachings.

Also, with a busy schedule comes a lack of free time. Helping others is not only the money we can give to our favorite charity. It is giving something very precious to us - our free time. Let us be challenged this New Year to strive to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Simple acts of helping may involve your volunteer time, bringing a meal to a new mom, or helping an older neighbor rake leaves. No one knows the value of someone donating their time more than Midwest Food Bank. What wonderful things can be accomplished with our collective gift of time!

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us to navigate our schedules with margin for you. Help us to demonstrate to our families and friends the actions of your word and what it means to live more like Jesus. We thank you for the means to participate and expose our families to new things, but we ask for your continued help to be humble and aware of the needs around us. Amen

*Brittany Parler, MFB Morton Volunteer*

**Midwest Food Bank**

**Advent Devotional**
But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:8 ESV

My family and I are suckers for a great story. The Christmas season begins in our house with my wife reading the story of Jotham’s Journey to our kids. It’s the story of a boy named Jotham whose family vanished one day; the book takes us through the adventures he experiences to find them. There is plenty of action with kidnappers and thieves, but of course, Jotham is also part of a larger story involving all the details around the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. My kids go crazy as the story unfolds each day until finally, the climax arrives with Jotham reuniting with his family and (spoiler alert) our Savior being born.

Many of us forget that we’re part of a larger story. We can miss the forest for the trees of Christmas (decorations to put up, presents to buy, houses to clean, meals to prepare), and we quickly lose track of the unbelievably beautiful story that explains why we celebrate this holiday. We have a Father who loves us unconditionally. While we were trapped in bondage, He loved us. He loves us even now when we mess up - every single time. Even knowing beforehand all the terrible things we would think and do throughout our lives, God said, “I want you ... you are my treasure.” He loved us so much that it made sense for Him to send His Son to suffer and die in our place.

If you already know this story of God’s love, may this be a reminder of His goodness and grace. If you don’t know Jesus, may God draw you to Him this Christmas season. No matter what you’ve done or what’s happened in your life, God is ready to bring you into the greatest story ever told.

**Prayer:** Father, as the world encourages us to speed up, let us slow down during this important season. Fill us with your joy and peace, and make us remember the truth of the gospel. Allow us to celebrate friends, family, and everything that makes Christmas special for us. But especially, give heartfelt gratitude for the incredible gift of Jesus.

**Matt Knobloch, COO, Spread Truth, MFB Partner**

**Midwest Food Bank**

*Advent Devotional*
Thank you for reading, and we pray these devotional thoughts enhanced your Advent season. Thank you to the many MFB volunteers, partner agencies, supporters, and employees who participated in this endeavor. We invite you to learn more about MFB at midwestfoodbank.org.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.
- Luke 2:7

As a faith-based organization, it is the mission of Midwest Food Bank to share the love of Christ by alleviating hunger and malnutrition locally and throughout the world and providing disaster relief; all without discrimination. Our vision is to provide industry-leading food relief to those in need while feeding them spiritually.