



**Advent Devotional  
Do Not Be Afraid:  
Defeating Fear with Hope, Peace, Love, Joy  
and a Wholehearted Life**

**Introduction**

We're glad you are delving deeper into our Advent season together with this devotion! This is not traditional Bible study so while the scripture for the week is read at the beginning of each devotion, use the reading as a moment of centering and praying. The subjects of the devotion are more based on counteracting fear as well as the messages of hope, peace, joy, love and life that are highlighted in the Advent season.

Through these five devotions, we will journey with Dr. Brené Brown, who is a social worker, researcher, and best-selling author. Dr. Brown's work on vulnerability speaks to how we let fear—in many forms—affect our lives. Brené calls on us to live more fully into hope, peace, joy, and love through practicing vulnerability. You will hear some repetition in these videos but each one brings out a different point and we think you'll appreciate the chance to revisit these messages and go deeper each week.

We felt it was a perfect time of year to explore Brown's work, not only because it complements the worship theme but also because the holidays can bring up issues of perfectionism, unrealistic expectations, stress, sorrow and old or existing family conflicts. We are grateful for Dr. Brown's work and if you find it resonates with you, we highly recommend her books (you can just search for her name at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)).

This devotion invites you to respond with journaling, but we also invite conversation. You may wish to find some time to discuss your reflections with family or friends. If you have a Facebook account, you can also join the new Friends of College Park First UMC Facebook group, where we will post links to the videos and a place for conversation and reflection with others.

**Week 1**  
**Make Ready a People**  
**#morehope**

**Luke 1: 5-25, 57-80**

*The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold*

In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."

Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, "This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people."

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*The Birth of John the Baptist*

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

### *Zechariah's Prophecy*

Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.  
He has raised up a mighty savior[g] for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.  
Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,  
and has remembered his holy covenant,  
the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,  
to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,  
might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness  
before him all our days.  
And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
by the forgiveness of their sins.  
By the tender mercy of our God,  
the dawn from on high will break upon[h] us,  
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”  
The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he  
appeared publicly to Israel.

### **Prayer**

Gracious and loving God, as we hear the angel tell how Zechariah's son John will prepare people for the Lord, we hear the call to prepare our hearts and minds to receive a word today. Open us to see hope anew. Amen.

### **Introduction**

This first week's video is from a TED Talk that Dr. Brené Brown gave in 2011. In it, she introduces the background of her work and gives new insight into vulnerability.

### **Video**

The Power of Vulnerability (21 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMzIF7o>

### **Reflection**

What stood out for you in Dr. Brown's talk?

Was there something you heard that made you feel hopeful?

When have you seen someone be intentionally vulnerable?

How does the angels' call to not be afraid relate to living "wholehearted" lives?

How can one person living with more hope make a difference in the world?

**Closing Prayer**

Holy Living God, Blessed Jesus, Guiding Spirit, alight within us your flame of hope this day. Grant us openness to hear your message. Grant us courage to be your messengers in the world, creating more hope in the midst of fear. Amen.



**Week 2**  
**Nothing is Impossible**  
**#morepeace**

**Luke 1: 26-56**

*The Birth of Jesus Foretold*

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

*Mary Visits Elizabeth*

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

*Mary's Song of Praise*

And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

**Prayer**

God of peace, after the angel gave her such astounding news, Mary responded, “Let it be so.” Help open us to this radical and peaceful acceptance. Amen.

**Introduction**

In this 5-minute clip, Dr. Brown talks about choosing to be authentic, showing up and letting yourself be seen, and how perfectionism is about fear.

**Video**

On Faking It, Perfectionism, and Living Wholeheartedly (5 min)

[https://youtu.be/\\_YeulUgWNp8](https://youtu.be/_YeulUgWNp8)

**Reflection**

What stood out for you in Dr. Brown’s talk?

How does perfectionism keep us from being peaceful?

What different ways have you seen fear expressed, or expressed fear yourself that you may not have thought were fear before?

How does perfectionism keep us from peace?

How can one person living with more peace make a difference in the world?

**Closing Prayer**

Holy Living God, Blessed Jesus, Guiding Spirit, alight within us your flame of peace this day. Grant us openness to hear your message. Grant us courage to be your messengers in the world, creating more peace in the midst of fear. Amen.



**Week 3**  
**Do Not Be Afraid**  
**#morejoy**

**Matthew 1: 18-25**

*The Birth of Jesus the Messiah*

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,”  
which means, “God is with us.”

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

**Prayer**

Holy one who walks with us through fear and joy, as the angel told Joseph to not be afraid, help us hear the same message. Speak truth into our fears and breathe joy into our worries. Amen.

**Introduction**

In today’s video, Dr. Brown connects her research on vulnerability with our capacity for joy.

**Video**

The Price of Invulnerability (16 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoMXF73joc>

**Reflection**

What surprised you or was a new idea to you in this talk?

Do you have experiences of “foreboding joy?”

When have you gone to that mental place of fear instead of experiencing joy?

What are you grateful for that brings you joy?

How can one person living with more joy make a difference in the world?

**Closing Prayer**

Holy Living God, Blessed Jesus, Guiding Spirit, alight within us your flame of joy this day. Grant us openness to hear your message. Grant us courage to be your messengers in the world, creating more joy in the midst of fear. Amen.





**Week 4**  
**This Will Be a Sign**  
**#morelove**

**Luke 2: 1-20**

*The Birth of Jesus*

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 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.

*The Shepherds and the Angels*

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.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

**Prayer**

God of love and light, you sent an angel with the wonderful news of a savior born in our world – and surprised us that this mighty savior came as a tiny infant. One might have stood by his crib wondering how this little baby would be enough to change the world. Open us to understand that God has made us all “enough.” Amen.

**Introduction**

In today’s brief video, Brené talks with Oprah about our ego who tells us we have no inherent worth, and living in a culture marked by fear of “never enough.”

**Video**

The Two Most Dangerous Words in Your Vocabulary (4 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XTcB1evO8c>

## **Reflection**

What messages have you heard of “never enough”?

How have you filled in the blank? “Never \_\_\_\_\_ enough.”

When have you taken risks to fail, even when you felt you may not be enough?

How does love change the “never enough” language?

How can one person living with more love make a difference in the world?

## **Closing Prayer**

Holy Living God, Blessed Jesus, Guiding Spirit, alight within us your flame of love this day. Grant us openness to hear your message. Grant us courage to be your messengers in the world, creating more love in the midst of fear. Amen.



**Week 5**  
**Get Up and GO**  
**#morelife**

**Matthew 2: 1-23**

*The Visit of the Wise Men*

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men[a] from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

*The Escape to Egypt*

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

*The Massacre of the Infants*

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

“A voice was heard in Ramah,  
wailing and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

*The Return from Egypt*

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.” Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazorean.”

## **Prayer**

Gracious and loving God, as the angel told Joseph to “get up and go,” we, too, hear the call. Teach us to get up and go into life wholeheartedly with faith. Amen.

## **Introduction**

In our last video of this series, Dr. Brown speaks of what is needed when we go into the arena of life, and what choosing courage means.

## **Video**

Brené Brown: Ways to Start Living Bravely” (1 minute, 23 seconds)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYRtdoBMQyk>

## **Reflection**

What makes you afraid of showing up to life in your fullest way?

What does it mean to say that “you get from this life what you have the courage to ask for”?

When have you chosen courage over comfort in your life?

When has another person’s courage changed your life?

How can one person living courageously make a difference in the world?

## **Closing Prayer**

Holy Living God, Blessed Jesus, Guiding Spirit, alight within us your flame of life this day. Grant us openness to hear your message. Grant us courage to be your messengers in the world, creating more life in the midst of fear. Amen.

