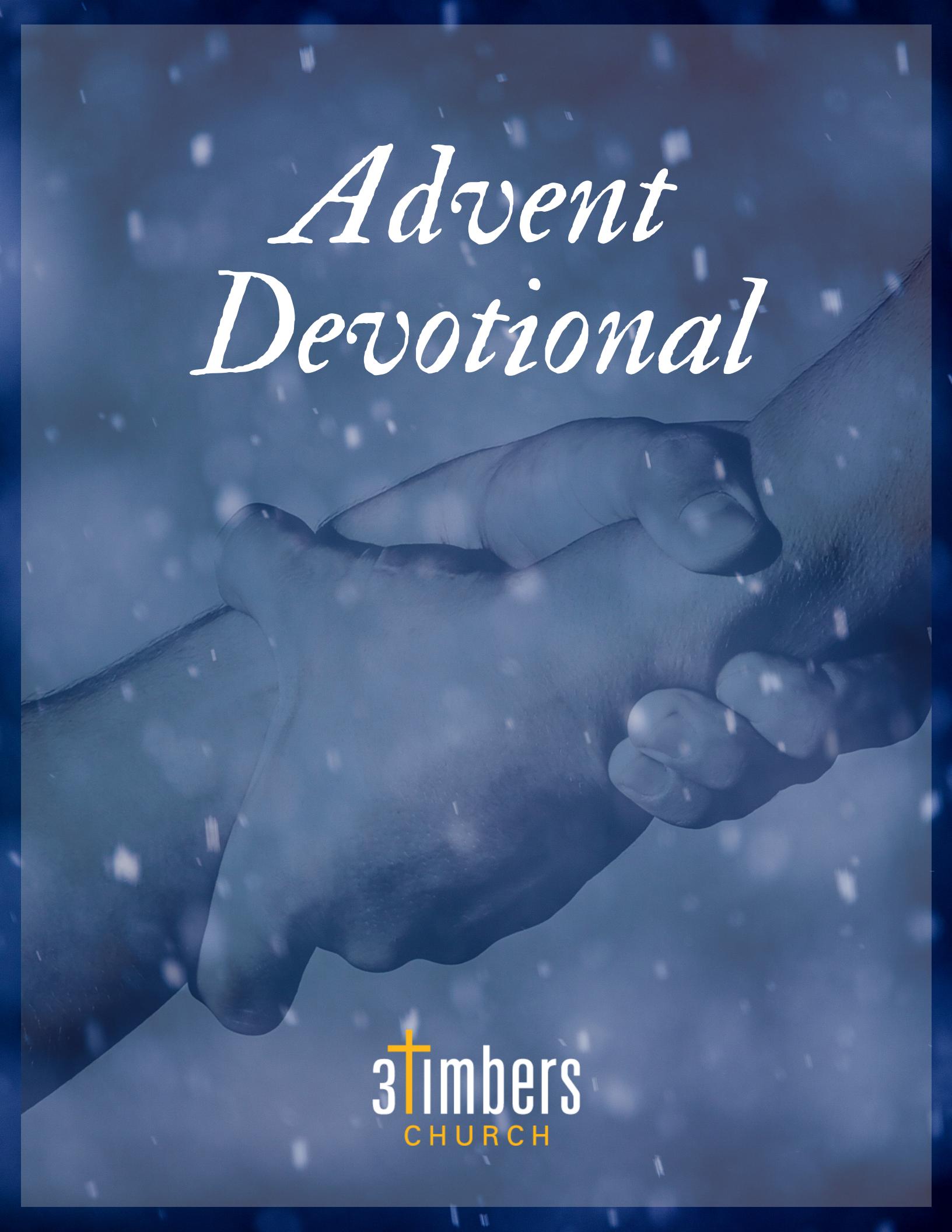


Advent Devotional



3Timbers
CHURCH

ADVENT SCHEDULE 2019



December 1:

Drop off gifts for ABIDE
Christmas store
partnership at Worship



December 8:

Children's Ministry prepares
candy filled stockings for all
local school staff



BETTER TOGETHER
Christmas Store

December 14:

ABIDE Christmas store
9:00-11:00 am



December 22:

Ugly Sweater Sunday
and Children's Play



December 24:

Christmas Eve service
at 5:00pm

Dear Friends,

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." -Isaiah 9:6

These words in Isaiah provide hope for a world filled with pain, anguish, uncertainty and strife, and they draw us to the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. We are entering a very sacred time in the life of the church, Advent. The word itself means coming, and the coming of Christ is the hope for the world then, now and always. Advent is a special season of preparation during which the church gathers to praise the coming of the one who would die for our sins.

There is even more to Advent than celebrating the coming of Christ, however. It is also a time to take action and share the news of Christ's birth with others. In a world that has commercialized Christmas, taking Christ out and inserting consumerism and all that goes with it from door buster sales to elaborate decorations and displays, we are called to proclaim what Christmas is really all about. As the world focuses on the presents under the tree, the church focuses on the presence in the manger.

To do this, to reframe the societal context of Christmas, we have to be intentional. Let's begin by remembering the words found in the book of James.

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." - James 1:22

With these instructional words in mind, this is an interactive devotional, not one we simply read and thoughtfully contemplate, but one which prompts and guides us to do what the scriptures call us to. This devotional is set up for individuals and families to actively participate in sharing the "reason for the season," the birth of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, after reading specific scriptures, you will be invited to take three steps toward being "doers of the word." First, you will be asked to pray, then you will be asked to prepare a list, and finally you will be asked to practice what has been proclaimed in the word of God. Pray, Prepare & Practice will allow you to do more than merely listen to the word of God; it will let you experience the word of God come to life within and through you.

My prayer is that this devotional will help you grow closer to God and better understand the Christmas story, our story, and the hope for the world.

Blessings and Merry Christmas!
Rev. Jeff Ryan

1st Week of Advent

SEPARATING THE SHEEP FROM THE GOATS

As we begin the journey of celebrating Christ's birth, we must keep His return in view if we are going to fully understand Christmas. The joy of Christmas comes from the priceless and sacrificial gift that God sent to us in His only son, Jesus Christ, whose death on the cross would serve to pardon the life sentence each of us owes for our sin. If we only look to serve ourselves and no one else, then we really do not understand what it means to be a follower of Christ or truly celebrate Christmas.

Read Matthew 25:31-46

When we embrace Christ as our Messiah, we must also adopt His ministry to others, especially to those in need. When we do as Christ did and obey His commands, people will know we are followers of Christ. This passage reveals that when Christ returns we will be separated into two distinct categories with two extremely different destinations. When Christ returns, we will be declared a sheep or goat. The sheep and goats represent believers and unbelievers in Christ. Just because some goats run with sheep and graze in the same pastures, it does not make them sheep and those pretenders will be separated out. Though the sheep and the goat (believer and unbeliever) may look similar externally, their true identity will be revealed by their treatment of others. How do they respond to those in need?

Please do not misunderstand, we cannot make the mistake of believing that performing acts of kindness and showing mercy are means by which we can earn or garner salvation. On the contrary, when we accept Christ in our heart, these acts will manifest naturally as an expression of our relationship with Christ. A personal relationship with Christ comes first. Displaying characteristics of mercy and kindness are outgrowths of our faith.

God mentions the specific needs of others four separate times within this

passage. Some of the most basic needs imaginable – food, drink, company, clothing, care – are highlighted and repeated. All of the things mentioned do not require great effort or great cost, they do not require the mounting of a huge campaign, but rather they require that we personally take notice of and get involved in the lives of others.

Read Isaiah 58:7



Light the First Purple Candle

THE ACTION OF ADVENT:

- * *Pray for God to reveal to you the people in need you can serve this Christmas.*
- * *Prepare a list of resources (time, talents) you can offer to those He has revealed to you.*
- * *Practice what is proclaimed in these passages and you will change someone's Christmas.*

2nd Week of Advent

THE RIGHT STUFF

We are a people and a culture that likes "stuff;" stuff that glitters, stuff that computes, stuff that can take us places or stuff that looks good on us. We like stuff. All of the Christmas commercials appeal to our desire to get new stuff, better stuff, cooler stuff, faster stuff, just more and more stuff. So much so that people have begun to associate Christmas with stuff rather than with the celebration of our Saviors birth. People will do anything to obtain money to buy new stuff, and it is this greed that has led to every financial crisis our country has ever known, including the one we currently face.

We all need to remember the words of Proverbs 23:4 "Do not wear yourselves out to be rich; have the wisdom to show restraint." Sadly many have not shown and still do not show restraint and that is why we, as a nation, are experiencing difficult times. Remember what it says in 1 Timothy 7 "For we brought nothing into this world and we take nothing out of it." Yet we wear ourselves out thinking, what, perhaps we can take some stuff with us to heaven?

Read Matthew 6:19-24

When Jesus says do not store or lay up for yourselves treasure on earth, he is saying do not hoard, collect or selfishly keep things for yourselves. There is nothing wrong with having wealth, there is nothing wrong with having nice things, the problem is when we are unwilling to give them up. When we value money or things more than following God's commands, we are saying that we believe our "treasure" is here on earth.

Treasure that we lay up in heaven refers to our obedience to God through service to Him with complete dedication as well as serving those in need. It is understanding that God has commanded us to be generous to people and faithful in carrying out and supporting His work in this life. It is living for God and others, emptying ourselves of selfish ambition and vain conceit based up on the "stuff" we have or want. Where we store our treasure is all about our

heart, it's a heart issue. If our hearts are motivated by God and for God, we will give generously, serve cheerfully and love honestly.

Read Proverbs 28:22



Light the First & Second Purple Candles

THE ACTION OF ADVENT:

- * *Pray that God would reveal to you where your “treasure” is currently stored. It is on earth or in heaven?*
- * *Prepare lists of the treasure you are storing in heaven and the treasure you are storing on earth.*
- * *Practice giving away some of your earthly treasure to those in need this Christmas.*

3rd Week of Advent

GIFT RECEIPT

We all love gifts, every one of us, no matter how young or old we are. We love to receive gifts at Christmas as they represent someone's love and care for us. Have you ever received an interesting or bizarre gift from a family member or friend? You know the porcelain-elephant-juggling-chainsaws-while-standing-on-a-beach-ball kind of gift that leaves you wondering how they thought of you when they saw it. In cases like this, certain gifts can make us feel like people don't know us.

The only saving grace you hope for in that awkward gifting moment is the one thing that can save you from a Christmas present disaster; it is your ace in the hole, your trump card, your get out of jail free card, it is the GIFT RECEIPT. Ah, the gift receipt, it is the life preserver in the storm of bad, outdated, wrong-sized gifts given at Christmas. A gift receipt is something that shows proof of purchase, it shows someone gave you a gift and you have accepted that gift, and it is something we need to have when it comes to our dedication and service to Christ Jesus.

Read Ephesians 4:1-3

Paul was under house arrest in Rome for preaching the gospel; he was arrested for being a Christian and sharing his faith publicly. Instead of being bitter or angry about his circumstances, Paul proudly displayed his "gift receipt" for the world to see. Paul wanted the world to know he was in receipt of the greatest gift of all, Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord. His proof of receiving the gift of Christ was the way he lived his life, sharing and acting upon his faith in Christ no matter what others thought or did to him. He did not consider being imprisoned a bad gift or one that needed to be taken back, but instead considered it part of his calling before God.

Paul was also talking about hope, the hope we have in Christ. Paul is urging the Ephesians and each of us to live a life worthy of the calling of hope we have in Christ. Isn't that what we are celebrating at Christmas, the hope in the birth of our Savior and the promise He made to save us from our sins? Christ

is our only hope and Paul is urging, begging and pleading with the Ephesians to live a life worthy of being called to that hope. Since they have been called by God to receive this gift of hope, they need to live a life that shows they are in receipt of this priceless gift by their actions.

Read Colossians 1:10



Light Two Purple Candles & the Pink Candle

THE ACTION OF ADVENT:

- * *Pray for God to give you opportunities to show your “gift receipt of Christ” to others.*
- * *Prepare a list of how you could show your “gift receipt of Christ” to those families who are struggling during the Christmas season.*
- * *Practice sharing your “gift receipt of Christ” with someone in the next 24 hours.*

4th Week of Advent

HELP WANTED

Can you name all of Santa's reindeer? Go ahead, think about it and try. If you're like me, you have to sing Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer to even come close, and even then I sometimes don't get it. If you're having a tough time getting all of the names, let me help. Santa's 9 reindeer are: Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner, Blitzen and Rudolph. Maybe you knew them right away or maybe you just needed a little help to remember. Whether it's remembering the names of Santa's reindeer or something else in our life, we all need help from time to time, especially during Christmas.

Read Isaiah 52:7

The circumstances surrounding this passage in Isaiah are very similar to our current conditions. God's people were living in extremely difficult times. It seemed like things kept going from bad to worse, and they clearly needed help individually and as a nation. It would be very easy to give up hope of things ever getting better for the people of God then and the people of God today.

The message of Christmas is about the help wanted by those in captivity and the freedom we have in Christ. When we share this news we will be like those who bring good news over the mountain. Our feet will be like those who brought the news of our Savior's birth that first night; those God employed then implore the rest of us to have hope. He employed the angels to tell the shepherds of this great news, then He employed the shepherds to tell others and now He has employed us to go and bring the good news of Christ.

When we hear the New Testament references to preaching the "good news," this is where it comes from, the good news of God redeeming the world through his only Son, Jesus Christ. God made the feet of Christ beautiful with the good news of help as our Savior's feet were pierced for our transgressions. How beautiful His feet were then and how beautiful ours can be now.

Read Luke 2:10-11



Light all Three Purple Candles & the Pink Candle

THE ACTION OF ADVENT:

- * *Pray that God would open doors for you to share the Good News of what Christmas is really about with others.*
- * *Prepare a list of the people in your life who do not know or believe the good news of Christmas.*
- * *Practice getting your feet busy and beautiful by sharing the good news of Christmas with 3 other people in the next 72 hours.*

Christmas Eve

ACTION FIGURES

We teach our children that Christmas is about more than Santa and receiving presents, it's about Jesus' birthday. Can you imagine what it would be like trying to find the perfect birthday gift for Jesus? What do you get Jesus for his birthday? Or what if you drew God's name for your secret Santa? What store would you go to?

What if I told you the perfect gift to get for God and that you didn't have to run to Super Target or Walmart to find it? We see others who have given God the perfect Christmas gift within the Christmas story itself, and we can do the same. The truth is, God wants and loves "Action Figures". The entire Christmas story is about people giving God the gift of an Action Figure.

Read Luke 1:26-38, Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 2:8-20, & Matthew 2:7-11

Mary and Joseph were young and poor, but they were "Action Figures" for God. They chose the action of obedience to God over obedience to themselves or concern about what others would think. We can give God a gift for Christmas by being action figures, and the first characteristic of being an action figure is listening to and obeying God.

Shepherds were despised by most people, and their reputation was less than pristine due to their job of watching over smelly animals. The shepherds became action figures in the Christmas story by seeking Jesus with a pure heart and an open mind. God gave them a sign to seek Christ and they took action. The second characteristic of giving God the perfect gift this Christmas as an action figure is to seek Christ.

The final characteristic of an action figure is exemplified by the Wise Men. They were action figures by honoring Christ as their King. The wise men bowed down and presented Christ with the best of what they had.

The Christmas story shows us that when giving God the perfect gift of an Action Figure, it doesn't matter how old you are (Mary and Joseph), it doesn't

matter how well educated you are (the Shepherds), and it doesn't matter how much you have to give (Wise Men). We can all give God an Action Figure for Christmas.



Light all Three Purple Candles, the Pink Candle, & the White Christ Candle

THE ACTION OF ADVENT:

- * *Pray for God to place you in situations where you can take action in the name of Christ.*
- * *Prepare a list of the actions you can take to show others how Christ is working in your life.*
- * *Practice being an action figure and expressing your commitment to God by plugging in to the body of Christ through attending church, Sunday School, and Bible studies.*

OUR CORE BELIEFS



1

We believe in one God, the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To Him be all honor, glory and praise forever! (Genesis 1:1-3, 6, 9, 20, 24; Isaiah 45:18-25)

2

Jesus Christ, the living Word, became flesh through His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and His virgin birth. He who is true God became true man united in one Person forever. He died on the cross a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. On the third day He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven where, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He now is our High Priest and Mediator. (Colossians 1:13-20; John 14:6)

3

The Holy Spirit has come to glorify Christ and to apply the saving work of Christ to our hearts. He convicts us of sin and draws us to the Savior, indwelling our hearts. He gives new life to us, empowers and imparts gifts to us for service. He instructs and guides us into all truth, and seals us for the day of redemption. (Ephesians 2:1-4; John 20, 22; Acts 2; 1 Corinthians 6:15)

4

Being estranged from God and condemned by our sinfulness, our salvation is wholly dependent upon the work of God's free grace. God credits His righteousness to those who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation, and thereby justifies them in His sight. Only such as are born of the Holy Spirit and receive Jesus Christ become children of God and heirs of eternal life. (Romans 3:9-24; Ephesians 2:1-10)

5

The true Church is composed of all persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit are united together in the body of Christ. The Church finds her visible yet imperfect expression in local congregations where the Word of God is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered in their integrity, where scriptural discipline is

OUR CORE BELIEFS



practiced, and where loving fellowship is maintained. For her perfecting she awaits the return of her Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:11-20)

6

Jesus Christ will come again to the earth personally, visibly, and bodily—to judge the living and the dead, and to consummate history and the eternal plan of God. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20). (Revelation 22:7-21)

7

The Lord Jesus Christ commands all believers to proclaim the gospel throughout the world and to make disciples of all nations. Obedience to the Great Commission requires total commitment to "Him who loved us and gave Himself for us." He calls us to a life of self-denying love and service. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). (Matthew 28:16-20)



THREE TIMBERS CHURCH

We worship at 10am Sundays at:
Pine Creek Elementary School
7801 N HWS Cleveland Blvd
Bennington NE 68007

www.threetimbers.org



@THREETIMBERSCHURCH



@THREETIMBERS