



the real meaning of
Christmas

DAILY DEVOTIONS FOR THE SEASON OF ADVENT
NOVEMBER 29 TO DECEMBER 25, 2020

Written and illustrated by the members of
Mount Tabor United Methodist Church

Advent Prayer

Lord Jesus,

Master of both the light and the darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas.

We who have so much to do and seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day,

We who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us.

We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of your kingdom.

We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of your presence.

We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light.

To you we say, "Come Lord Jesus!"

Amen.

- Henri Nouwen

*Enter in
to the season of Advent
with intent to remember
“The Real Meaning of Christmas”*



Beginning on Sunday, November 29, we will celebrate the Advent Season together. We encourage you to use this book in two ways:

First, use the weekly readings to light your own Advent Wreath.

In all of our Sunday worship services, and on Christmas Eve, whether online or in person, we will light the traditional Advent Wreath. In doing so, we will remember God’s Hope, Joy, Love and Peace through the coming birth of Jesus Christ. The corresponding readings that will be used in all services can be found at the beginning of each week of daily devotions.

You are invited to light your own Advent Wreath, made available in your Advent To Go bag. If you are worshipping online, please have your wreath available during worship to follow along. If you are worshipping in person, consider bringing your book with you to follow along. Or make time before or after service to light your wreath at home.

However you choose to worship, set aside time each Sunday to follow the readings, light your candles, and contemplate what each candle represents.

Second, read and contemplate the daily devotions, written by church members, each day of Advent.

The daily devotions follow the worship theme of each week of Advent:

- Week One is focused on “What Christmas meant to the shepherds,” as well as the candle of Hope.
- Week Two is focused on “What Christmas meant to the wise men,” as well as the candle of Joy.
- Week Three is focused on “What Christmas meant to Mary,” as well as the candle of Love.
- Week Four is focused on “What Christmas meant to Jesus,” as well as the candle of Peace.

Set aside time each day for the readings. Consider the questions posed, or meditate on the scripture referenced. Speak the prayers aloud to God. Spend time savoring the pictures drawn by adults and children. Above all, remember “The Real Meaning of Christmas,” and share your thanks and awe with God.

Though we are separated, we bind our hearts together this Advent to get back to the heart of the season. May this book bring us together, and closer to Christ, in new and unexpected ways this season. May we truly know and trust the Real Meaning of Christmas.



First Sunday of Advent - November 29, 2020

Worship Theme: What Christmas Meant to the Shepherds

Advent Wreath: Lighting the Candle of Hope

Today, as we remember the shepherds, we light the candle of HOPE. The shepherds were first to hear the good news, and they went with hope to see the precious gift of God With Us. Having seen the fulfillment of God's promise, the shepherds rejoiced with the hope of salvation.

Scripture:

Jeremiah 33:14-16 "The days are coming, 'declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior.'"

Candle Lighting:

Light a candle; as you are lighting the candle say: *Today, we light the candle of hope. May it remind each of us of God's great promise to us. He is our hope, He is our Redeemer, and He is Savior.*

Prayer

Father, during the Advent season may we be reminded of your promises to us and your fulfillment of them. Help us to prepare our lives for His Advent within us. In the precious name of Jesus we pray. Amen.



Sunday, November 29

Written by Bobby Sharp

Who Heard First?

If you had been assigned the task of conveying the news of Messiah's arrival, how do you suppose you would have done it? In a cathedral with prominent religious leaders? In an auditorium with people who have the best social, economic, or political connections? Post an announcement on social media?

Messiah is here! Who would you tell first?

God chose shepherds to tell first. Chapter 2 of Luke's Gospel gives the account: ⁸That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. ⁹Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, ¹⁰but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! (NLT)

God chose shepherds, among the least in society at the time, to get the good news first. Those on the lowest rungs of religious, political, economic, and social ladders are told first that Messiah is here.

That doesn't make much sense to our worldly minds tuned to worldly values. It turns our common knowledge and accepted practices upside down, like announcing Messiah's arrival now to, say, migrant farm workers out in the fields gathering our food. That is not our way of doing things.

But that is God's way, and that is why Jesus said he came. Many who are last will be first, and many who are first will be last. Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the hungry. Blessed are the grieving. Blessed are the humble. The least among us are the exalted ones in God's Kingdom. Whatever we do to the least among us, we do to Messiah. The poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed, Messiah said, are his focus. Yes, that definitely is God's way.

As we draw near to Christmas and as we celebrate Messiah's birth, might we reflect on who got the news first? Might we ponder who Messiah said he came to reach and to save? And, might we listen for where each of us fits in God's upside-down Kingdom where the least are the greatest and the last are first?

Prayer

Come, Messiah, you are welcome here. Help me not forget, Emmanuel, who heard the news first of your arrival and why you came. Instill your Spirit in me. Open my eyes to see where you are working to bring good news to the least among us, and show me how best to join you there. For the gift of your Presence, I am truly grateful. Amen.



Monday, November 30

Written by Tammy Pell

“A Charlie Brown Christmas”

On December 9, 1965 half of all American households tuned in to watch “A Charlie Brown Christmas”. It was the first animated cartoon of the characters of the Peanuts Comic Strip. Cartoonist Charles Schultz’s plan had been to do a show about the true meaning of Christmas. To do this, Schultz found it key to add scripture from the Bible. When questioned by his animator and director-producer if they should be doing that type of thing, Schultz’s reply was that what would be the point to making the television special at all?

Charlie Brown’s journey to understand the meaning of Christmas is as relevant today as back in 1965. In the show, the animated character Charlie Brown finds himself disillusioned with the commercialism of Christmas. Frustrated, he asks the following question. “Does Anyone Know What Christmas Is All About?”

Animated character Linus’s speech directly quotes from the King James Version of Luke 2:8-14 rings true then as it is today. It’s a message of hope.

Here these words from Luke 2:8-14.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold, I bring you tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born in the city of David a savior which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, 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, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men.”

Charles Schultz felt so strongly about the good news of Jesus that he told his colleagues on the project that there would be no point to make a television show about Christmas without it. Ironically, Bill Mendelson, his director later called Linus reading from the book of Luke “the most magical two minutes in all of TV animation.” Despite reservations and its initial detractors, Charlie Brown Christmas is still watched by audiences answering the question of the meaning of Christmas.

Can you describe your core values and give testimony of the meaning of Christmas?

Is there anyone around me who is seeking hope and answers? Can you communicate that to them?

Prayer

Dear God, Thank you for the timeless message of the hope of Christmas. Help me hold steadfast to that message that not losing sight of it in these times that we currently live. Help me to be sensitive to, bear witness to and give testimony of “What Christmas is All About” during this Advent Season Help me be like Charlie Brown’s “Linus” and share the good news to a questioning world in these uncertain times in which we live. Amen.



Tuesday, December 1

Written by Susan Stimpson and April Surber

The first week in Advent is the week of Hope. Hope is defined as a feeling of expectation or desire for a certain thing to happen or a feeling of trust. We may have feelings of hope for a new job, a trip we want to go on, a blessing of a baby, the healing of a loved one, or even just to have two pinks in your starburst candy rather than yellow. We have an expectation or desire for particular things or events to happen in our lives. Sometimes this hope is what helps to drive us in our thoughts, words, and actions in our daily lives. This hope gives us security and comfort as we have that “trust” that these things or events may happen for us. That job we have hoped and prayed for is offered to us, the trip we have been planning and saving for is actually able to happen, we are given the wonderful news of growing our family, or there WERE two pinks in our starburst candy wrapper!

Jesus tells in the book of Mark 9:23, “If you can?”, Jesus said. “Everything is possible for one who believes.” He wants us to have hope, he wants us to believe, and have faith. But sometimes this hope can overcome our minds, thoughts, and actions so much that we can lose who we are and what we should have our hope in. The prophet Isaiah reminds us in chapter 40, verse 31 that our hope should be in Jesus, “but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” The feeling of HOPE should be put in the Lord and we TRUST that he knows what is best for us and will provide what we need when we need it. So we are reminded to have this hope, but also to “set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” As you continue your days and remain to have hopes as you should, please remember to look vertically for strength and trust for all that you need.

Hebrews 10:23 (NIV)
Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.”

Write Your Own Prayer



Wednesday, December 2

Written by Lloyd Eichorn

Travel back in time with me and pretend you are a shepherd who sees the angels who tells them to go to Bethlehem and give praise to Baby Jesus who will become the savior of the world. What are your emotions?

Doubt, fear, skepticism?

No. Your emotions are excitement, honor, and HOPE. Finally there will be a leader to worship and promise HOPE for a better world, both here and in heaven if we surrender our will to HIS.

Today we are still hungry for that same HOPE. Suicide victims lost hope. Struggling drug addicts don't know how to stop. Hunger for the next meal is a journey of hope. Mental health challenges need us to tell them there is HOPE.

So when you get depressed or anxious about today's bizzarro world, pretend you are a shepherd and have your HOPE restored. Then share that with someone who is in the dark. Be their angel that proclaims the good news that Christ was born, died for our sins, and will come again.

Works for me. To God goes the glory.



Avia Thielker,
age 7



Friday, December 4

Written by Bob and Virginia Diseker

The Real Meaning of Christmas

When we were very young, hope appeared late in the year as time slowed and Christmas approached. In those days, hopes and wishes could challenge us to be on our best behavior and by Christmas afternoon the results were known. Did the hoped for toys arrive? Hope has always been a very important part of Christmas.

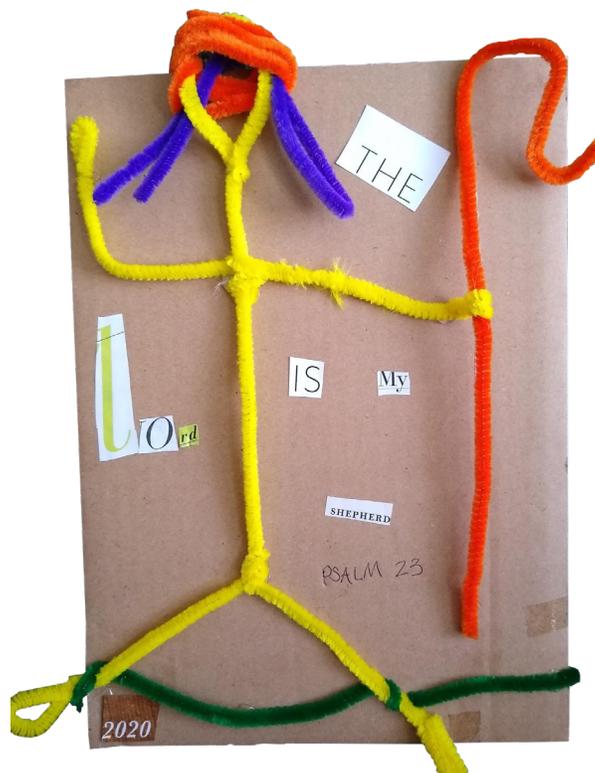
To date the year 2020 has brought many critical challenges and no easy answers. Our lives have changed. The future is uncertain and is likely to remain so. Our lives are disrupted and hope is more important than ever this Christmas.

Now, we begin the Christian Advent Season and light the first candle; the candle of Hope. Hope during Advent means looking forward to what lies ahead. We look beyond presents under the tree to the promise and joy of the birth of Jesus many years ago. Our hope rests upon our trust in a loving God who gave his son for us and upon our belief in life eternal. He is with us during this uncertainty as we hope for better times. We are all blessed by his love.

The beginning of Advent opens our lives to the many joyful experiences of the Christmas season. The carols, lights, lovely music and aromas all add to our anticipation. Be on your best behavior; Christmas is coming.

Despite the limitations that we all face during this pandemic, Christmas is coming. Our traditional family gatherings will be different. The economic uncertainty that many of our neighbors face will limit celebrations and add to food insecurity. This is truly a season for loving hearts and charitable giving. Give as you are able.

This Advent, we find Blessings in our beliefs as we anticipate Christmas. Have faith and look for small joys every day as we hope for better days ahead.



Arianna Boone, age 6



Saturday, December 5

Written by Janie Livengood

A Special Message for Shepherds

I love Christmas! I love every single part of the Christmas season, the decorations, the music, the excitement, the anticipation, and the memories of my childhood!

It was during our church Christmas pageants every year that my brothers and I learned the true meaning of Christmas. Dressed in costumes, we heard the story of Jesus' birth so beautifully written in the Second Chapter of Luke, recognizing the importance of each role, Caesar Augustus, Mary and Joseph, the innkeeper, the Wise Men, and the shepherds and angels!

Shepherds were certainly not of royalty! They were ordinary, hardworking, honest people when God sent the hosts of angels that frightened them! Stunned, they listened, "Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which will be to all people. For unto to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

Maybe we are like the humble shepherds today, simply going about our work and doing our jobs! They were called, as we all are, to be messengers, spreading the Good News of Jesus!

We might not experience a heavenly host of angels, but we can follow the teachings we know to be true to love and help our neighbors and strangers, too. As shepherds, we can give hope and encouragement to everyone we meet, not just at Christmas, but every day of the year!

Luke 2:8-12 (NIV)

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Prayer

Our gracious heavenly Father, know our hearts to reach out to everyone we see with a smile, kind words, or a calling to be Your hands and feet. In Jesus name,

Amen



Second Sunday of Advent - December 6, 2020

Worship Theme: What Christmas Meant to the Wise Men

Advent Wreath: Lighting the Candle of Joy

Today, as we remember the journey of the Wise Men, we light the candle of JOY. Though they were earthly kings themselves, the Wise Men journeyed from afar to experience the joy of the coming of the King of Kings, the One whose kingdom would have no end.

Scripture:

Isaiah 9:6-7 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. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Candle Lighting:

Relight the first Advent candle. Then light the second candle; as you are lighting the candles say: *Today we relight the candle of Hope. Let this candle remind us of the great hope we have in Christ the Messiah and in God's promises. Now we light the candle of Joy. May our hearts be forever filled with the joy of His coming.*

Prayer:

Father, we are filled with joy because we have hope and peace that you have sent your son for all that believe. Help us to be the voices that proclaim grace and truth. In Christ name we pray. Amen.

Illustration by Keith Huffstetler



Sunday, December 6

Written by Susan Henkle

Joy.

We all have moments in our lives we remember when we first learned a new word. And more than that, we remember when we first learned the meaning of that word.

I remember being perched on a corner cabinet in the big old choir room of Sam Jones United Methodist in Cartersville, Georgia. The choir was warming up for service and for some reason I was there instead of in a pew. “I’ve got that joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart, down in my heart to stay” they sang as they stood moving with the music and the choir director’s enthusiasm, green robes swaying, music folders unneeded against their chests. Their emotion was evident on their faces, in their voices and in the energy emanating through the room even to the corner with me on my perch.

Joy.

That was joy. I was bouncing and swaying and smiling. Joy, down in my heart to stay.

I am sure I did not go into that choir room expecting to discover a joyous event or to come away from it with an experience that would last so long. I am certain that my mother knew the joy to be found there. It was an experience she wanted and pursued. I am also certain the choir director knew the joy. He sought and guided his choir toward it. He knew, he imagined, he searched, he led and he encouraged the people before him because he knew the joy that music would bring.

Joy repeats itself. Just as Mary knew what lay ahead for her as a mother, she planned and anticipated the joy of motherhood. My mother sought the joy that came from comradeship, words and sound. The choir director, like the Wise Men planned, inspired, anticipated and guided his group to the joy that came from music. And there was myself. Instructed no doubt to sit and do my job of being a good girl when like the shepherds, joy found me.

Joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart to stay.

I believe joy is a gift. Perhaps it is the result of a goal reached after a long journey, perhaps it is the result of patience and planning, or best of all, perhaps it is a surprise bubbling up from an unexpected source like a baby’s laugh to lighten out hearts when our path grows dim.

Jesus was a joy that Christmas night. To each of us a different sort of joy to keep in our hearts to stay.

Write Your Own Prayer



Monday, December 7

Written by Jason, Tamara and Emersyn Levi

We are a family of singers. We don't always sing well or on key, but we will belt out a song on a road trip within the first few minutes of our journey. One of the first songs our daughter learned to sing was the chorus of *We Sing Joy (Joy to the World)* by Cloverton. We would hear her sweet little voice repeat over and over "We Sing Joy" for months on end whether in the car, in bed singing herself to sleep, while playing with her toys, and of course during Christmas. For her, joy is simply being happy. Giving and receiving presents, playing with friends, riding her bike, and eating her favorite desserts all bring her joy. She experiences happiness and joy with a childlike innocence often forgotten by adults.

As adults, we come to realize through experience that happiness and joy are not synonymous with each other. Instant pleasure does not always equal ultimate happiness even though we often wish joy would be easily obtained. We often think that happiness and joy can simply be purchased. We quickly find out, however, that our purchased happiness is only temporary and we are again faced with the troubles of the world. In fact, God can use unhappy events/circumstances for us to discover true, lasting joy. The Bible teaches us how we should learn to find joy in the hard times. Luke 18:16 states "But Jesus called them to him, saying "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God." A child's spiritual innocence keeps one connected with God. Children do not as readily feel guilt or shame and more readily believe faithfully even without seeing with their own eyes.

So, how can we experience joy with the innocence of children? Lucky for us, Jesus Christ restores our innocence and offers us forgiveness. He loves us and wants us to be joyful! This is how believers can "Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy" (Psalm 47:1) when we are faced with unhappy situations, long and hard days, or when we are expectantly waiting for something to satisfy our souls.

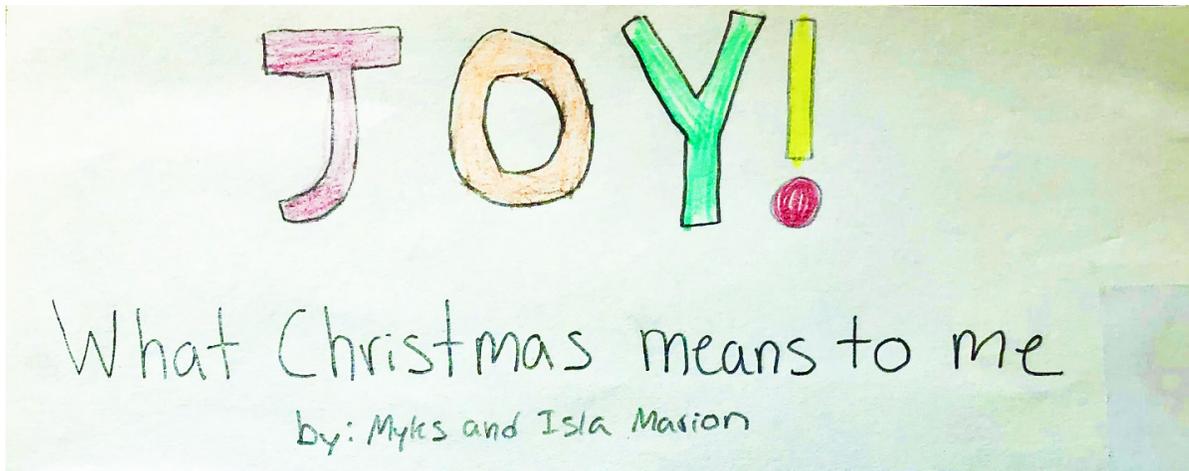
An important part of the Christmas Story involves the wisemen who studied the stars and wholeheartedly believed God's word. Their belief in the One who would be born king of the Jews led them through the desert on camels adorned with food, drink, and gifts for the king. The wisemen recognized the worth of Christ and made the journey with expectant hearts. They actively sought Jesus for a long period of time. Matthew 2: 9-10 states the wise men could hardly contain themselves when they arrived at the house where the star shown above. Their journey was over and they 'rejoiced with exceeding great joy!' They kneeled and worshipped him. They probably smiled and laughed, patted each other's backs, and could not wait to spend time with Jesus. I imagine their hearts grew with the joy and excitement of being with the King of Kings. Although the Christmas Story was beginning and they did not know what the future held, they were certainly gifted with one of the greatest gifts, the innocent and everlasting joy that comes from wholeheartedly following Jesus.

This advent season, while we are expectantly waiting to celebrate the birth of Jesus, simply keep the words "We Sing Joy, Hallelujah" at the forefront of your mind no matter the twists and turns your journey may take you. Allow yourself to approach him with innocence, knowing he has freed us from guilt and shame and wants us to come to him as children. Live for joy and believe wholeheartedly in what God will show us this season.



Tuesday, December 8

Written by Myles Marion (age 11)



Myles Marion,
age 11 and Isla
Marion, age 8

I feel like joy is being happy, excited and thankful for things that God and Jesus have given us like family, friends, health, safety, and God and Jesus themselves.

Christmas is a time to have Joy and to spread it around with family and friends.

How will you take time to have Joy today? How will you spread Joy today?





Wednesday, December 9

Written by Sam and Brad Wood

Face to Face Joy

2 John 12

I tend to doubt that many of us here today would dispute that 2020 has been a particularly difficult year, for a multitude of reasons. Without choosing a “side,” there has been much to quarrel over and worry about – politically, economically, racially, ethically, athletically, even spiritually. Many have lost loved ones near and dear. Even among those of us fortunate enough to have been spared this kind of personal loss, we have lost many cultural and national icons. Many are dealing with personal or family health crises, while others are struggling with financial troubles. Political tensions and disagreements are running high. What will 2020 leave behind? And what will 2021 bring in its place?

The hardships and turmoil of this year have been made worse by our inability to enjoy the personal company of one another – to eat together, go to school together, to laugh together, to cry together, to abide in one another. Matthew 18:20 reminds us that whenever two or more are gathered in His name, He is with us. Yet it seems like it has been a lot tougher for two or more of us to gather together this year, and the presence and comfort of the Lord may have often seemed distant as a result. I have certainly felt that way many times this year.

When we are not able to gather together in person, our distance from one another seems so much farther. While there are many ways today to express our thoughts and emotions, hopes and dreams (too many perhaps) – social media, youtube, texting, facetime, telephone calls, e-mail, etc., -- they do not bring the warmth of a hug, the mirth that comes from sharing a laugh, or the peace and reassurance that comes from just sitting silently next to a fellow child of God. In many cases, rather than bringing us together, “talking” without looking one another in the eye – a hateful Tweet, an opinionated letter to the editor, that e-mail which was written simply to vent but somehow got SENT – has fostered anger, suspicion, and dissension, tumult than often can only be resolved by a heart to heart talk at a table or on a couch.

Just as we know and feel it now, John the Apostle recognized more than 2000 years ago that impersonal communication was a poor substitute for the joy that comes with personal contact with fellow believers, stating to his fellow Christians in 2 John 12:

I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

His words of encouragement ring just as true today.

Prayer

Lord, we pray that our ability to visit and talk with one another face to face is restored, so we can look one another in eye – face to face – and talk out our differences – and when we cannot see eye to eye, to disagree without being disagreeable and to be reminded that others can have a difference point of view than we do and still being people of good conscience. Let us once again be able to visit and talk face to face, so that our joy in worshiping you can be complete.



Thursday, December 10

Written by Lisa & Mac Warren

We started looking for a small freezer and cannot find one to purchase anywhere. When we do see the sign that there is a small freezer available, we'll check it out. If it is the one we are looking for, we'll be a little like the wise men; we'll shout joyfully!

We know there were at least two wise men who shouted joyfully, but there could have been many, many more. Three gifts were given, but as to the number of wise men who saw a new star in the sky and followed the star to find the new born king of the Jews, the Messiah, all we have documented in the Word is 'they' and 'them.'

As we prepare for Christmas, we too can be shouting good tidings of great joy. How powerful a testimony our joy and confidence in the Lord will be as we celebrate the birth of Jesus during this dark, pandemic 2020 holiday season. Let's all be wise men making *the most of every opportunity in these evil (pandemic) days* and *win souls* with our shouts of joy!

Ephesians 5:16, Proverbs 11:30

Ephesians 5:16 (NLT)

Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days.

Proverbs 11:30 (NLT)

The seeds of good deeds become a tree of life; a wise person wins friends.



Christopher Guilbault,
age 15



Friday, December 11

Written by James & Jessica Campbell

Matthew 2:1-11

As I was contemplating how to write a devotion (for the first time), I was having a hard time putting my thoughts to paper. After we read Matthew 2:1-11 together, I decided to ask my son what joy meant to him. His answer was this: “Being happy in God’s presence, as long as you live in God’s presence you will have joy.” Then I asked him what Christmas means to him, his answer: “Spending time with one another and celebrating the birth of the messiah, which brought joy and peace to the world, like the song Mom, ‘Joy to the World’!” Well there you have it! Note- if you are ever having difficulty putting thoughts into words, ask an eight-year-old!

The wisemen knew when they saw the star that it would take them to the new King. Can you imagine having enough faith to follow a star and knowing what an amazing sight it would be to see the newborn King? What joy they must have had when they came to that place where the new King lay in a manger! They were in the presence of the new Messiah. Their hearts were filled with amazing joy! They showered him with gifts and praised his name!

So, back to my son’s words: “Joy is being happy in God’s presence.” This advent season we challenge you to slow down and sit in God’s presence and let joy fill your heart like it did for the wisemen on that wonderful night! Praise his name and share that joy with the ones you love this advent season.



James Campbell,
age 8



Saturday, December 12

Written by David Rigby and Marilyn Smith

What did Christmas mean to the Wise Men?

Read Matthew, Chapter 2, Verses 1-12.

The Christmas story we read in Matthew is much shorter than given by Luke, but it has its own richness and meaning. Chapter 2 of Matthew begins by telling us about the visitors “from the East”. While this might mean somewhere in modern day Iraq or Iran, the exact location – or locations – is not significant. Depending on which translation you read, they are called “wise men”, or “magi”, or “scholars”, or “astronomers”. In today’s terminology, they were probably a mixture of astrologers and astronomers. We can be sure: they were not kings but were wise.

When the Wise Men arrived in ancient Israel, it was probably months, perhaps as much as 2 years after the Birth. They first stopped in Jerusalem, maybe as a diplomatic courtesy, and asked King Herod and his advisors, “Where is the child who has been born King of the Jews?” This is a remarkable question because these are not Jewish men. This question tells us a great deal about them. First, they were familiar with the Jewish tradition, the Jewish promise of a Messiah. Second, they knew the Messiah would come as a child. Third, they were looking forward to this event with great anticipation, because they knew the King of the Jews would also be a king for everyone. It is important to note, as they told Herod, they came to find him and to worship him. Yes, the Wise Men were “not from around here”, but they knew exactly what they were doing.

We compare the poor and uneducated shepherds - the lowly - who visited Jesus in the stable (as Luke tells us) with the wealthy and educated Wise Men who visited Jesus later in “the house” (verse 11). Yes, Jesus was for everyone! Indeed, the Wise Men knew the Scriptures, and they knew the sign of the Star was a prompt for action. This event, this very day, was a momentous occasion to these men, and to all who travelled with them. Today, we should marvel with these men. Why? Because they show us the value of studying the Scriptures, the value of acting on God’s signs, the value of loyalty to the Christ.

These Wise Men also were changed by this visit. Verse 12 tells us they left “by another way”. Having found and worshiped something special, not even Herod’s evil could alter the change in themselves. Do we learn the same thing, does experiencing Christ change us?

They also gave us the most common characteristic of today’s Christmas, that of giving gifts. What did they take away? Verse 10 tells us they were “overwhelmed with joy”. Today, the giving tradition is highlighted by joy. Joy on the faces of children, joy on the faces of your loved ones as you share with each other. This comes from the joy each of us receives in the giving, just as the wise men felt joy in the presence of the baby Messiah, who is the King for everyone.

Third Sunday of Advent
December 13, 2020



Worship Theme:

What Christmas Meant to Mary

Advent Wreath:

Lighting the Candle of Love

Today, as we remember Mary, the one chosen to bear our Savior, we light the candle of LOVE. Because of her love for God, Mary was faithful to serve as she was called. And through Mary, God would deliver the divine and perfect love of our Redeemer.

Scripture:

Ephesians 3:17-19 “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Candle Lighting:

Relight the first and second candle. Then light the third candle; as you are lighting the candles say: *We relight the candle of hope, recalling God’s promise to send a Savior. As we relight the candle joy, let it remind us of the joy of the coming of God with us. As we light the candle of love, let it remind us that Jesus was sent because of God’s great love for us.*

Prayer:

O God, your love came crashing into our world on that first Christmas in order to permeate our lives. Lead us to experience the depth of your love and to allow that love to overflow to others.



Illustration by Ginny Martin



Sunday, December 13

Written by Karen Miller

Blessed To Be A Blessing

Someone sneezes and we automatically say, “God bless you!” Someone sits down to eat and prays the “blessing”. Someone has talent, fame, happiness, or wealth and we say she is “blessed”, meaning lucky or fortunate. Someone demonstrates he is ill-informed, lacks social graces, or does something goofy, and we Southerners say, “Bless his heart!” Someone tweets a photo of a delicious meal, an exotic vacation, or a shopping spree with the caption,

“Blessed!” or #blessed. Someone does a favor for us and we say, “Bless you!”

Blessed has come to mean privilege, comfort, or that all is going well in one’s life. In the case of Mary, the mother of Jesus, blessed had a far different meaning.

The dark-haired peasant girl was engaged to be married. She didn’t eat at a lavish table, or dress in finery. Into her simple life entered a messenger from God, who told her that she was pregnant with God’s son. At first she was afraid. When it dawned on her that she had been called to do something physically impossible, she didn’t say, “I can’t!” She said, “Be it unto me according to thy word.” She accepted her calling as a blessing from God. The angel reminded her that nothing is impossible with God.

In Mary’s day, a blessing could be divine favor, cherished status, or something for which to be grateful. A blessing didn’t always mean happiness would follow. Mary would witness Jesus endure rejection, shame and crucifixion. Though God had chosen Mary for the sacred task of bringing Jesus into the world and she considered herself blessed, she would not experience undiluted joy.

Mary raced to find her cousin Elizabeth after she learned her astonishing news, and Elizabeth discerned that Mary was carrying God’s son. Elizabeth offered her own words of blessing, “Blessed are you among women...Blessed is the fruit of your womb...Blessed is she who believed that

there would be fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.” Mary responded with a song of joy, not for her greatness in being selected by God, but for her lowliness and God’s greatness. She imagined what God would do through her and through her son.

God scatters the proud.

God removes the powerful from seats of power.

God lifts the lowly.

God fills the hungry.

God reminds Israel of his mercy and power.

Mary demonstrated that blessing originates in the love of God and in God’s desire to make creation whole. She imagined a God who disrupts power structures, saves the powerful from arrogance and pride, gives hope to the lowly and food to the hungry. She knew that God had not forgotten the people of Israel. Her personal calling and blessing extended to everyone, so that even today we can experience the Savior’s love that makes creation whole.

Mary’s blessing is a word of hope to those of us in the midst of stressful situations. Mary demonstrates that we don’t have to have all the members of our extended family sitting around a Christmas dinner table with exuberant holiday joy, or have had great financial success in 2020, or have lots of presents under the tree, in order to experience Christmas blessing. Like Mary, we are simply invited to allow the Christ child to be born into our lives. Our nation doesn’t have to be in complete harmony in order to stand before God and humbly ask for God’s help and blessing in the new year. We are invited to lean into God’s love, even when our nation feels like it is deeply divided. The pendulum of God swings in the direction of those who are in the valley. God’s deep desire is always to bless us, even when we face the impossible, the difficult, or the excruciating, because God loves us. God wants us and all people to experience divine blessing, wholeness, and peace.



Monday, December 14

Written by Alicia Bowman

What Christmas Meant to Mary

Luke 1:26-28 (NIV)

It's easy to spot the mother of king--regal clothing, crown jewels, parades of royal staff, not to mention the accolades of a crowd--but, Mary received none of this. Before the birth, she was turned away from the inn, and after the birth she and her fledgling family were forced into hiding. She had every reason to be afraid, even disappointed perhaps. This was no way for the Savior of the world to enter into His kingdom. As she fled from Bethlehem she must have been thinking, "Was this really what God had promised me?"

Scripture doesn't reveal much about Mary's latter years. What we do know is Mary exhibited an unparalleled love of God and an understanding of her role in the redemption of mankind. From the very familiar passages about the annunciation, the Magnificat, and the birth, we see what Christmas really means to Mary.

Obey God--both His written word and His revealed will In Luke 1:38, Mary says, "*I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled. Then the angel left her.*" The young Mary was destined to receive this great miracle and this great mission because of her obedience. When she accepted this role, she did not know her tears would one day soak the ground of Calvary and a sword would pierce her soul. She did not know that the calling God had placed upon her life would break her. Obedience, without knowing the full cost, requires great acts of love.

Be filled with praise at His many blessings "*Mary said, My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant*" Luke 1:46-48 (NIV). It is very clear Mary did not choose her destiny. To the Judeans, an unmarried, pregnant female was no cause for celebration. Mary sees herself as the recipient of the favor of God because He has tasked her with giving birth to the Son of the Most High. God takes her humble status and will use it to bless a thousand generations. Praising God, regardless of the situation, requires great acts of love.

Fix your eyes on Christ "*But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart*" Luke 2:19 (NIV). The stable was noisy that night with the labor cries, the animal sounds, and the chatter of visitors--hardly a place for quiet contemplation. As she held her baby near, she savored each moment and let it sink into her heart. Mary was able to block out all the temporal distractions and focus on the infant face of Emmanuel. Fixing your eyes on Christ, removing all worldly interferences, requires great acts of love.

Christ is God's gift to us, and how we show love to others is our gift to God. We can follow the example of love Mary laid out for us. Mary's story is like looking through a beautiful, stained glass window with all of its mosaics, colors, and designs. The light penetrating through the glass is love, reflecting onto mankind, shining for all the world to see.

Questions for reflection

- What areas of your life is God placing a calling on? How can you show obedience to His will?
- Why is praising God during difficult or unknown circumstances so hard?
- What kinds of distractions are you experiencing now that might cause you to take your eyes off of Christ? What are some ways or practices that will help you to refocus your attention on Him today?
- How can you be a witness of Christ's love to someone today?



Tuesday, December 15

Written by Martha Agnew

It is said “Love came down at Christmas.” When I was a child, my family visited an art museum while on vacation. There was a painting of the stable in Bethlehem illustrating Mary and Joseph. Their faces seemed so happy. The question was asked “Where is the baby?” We were told by the docent that Baby Jesus was protected deep in the manger. The artist painted Mary first and then Joseph. The baby was painted over and over again, but the artist was never pleased. The decision was made to place the baby so deeply in the manger, not to be seen. The painter decided to reflect the light of love by the new babe on the faces of Mary and Joseph. When we looked closely, we clearly saw the reflection of the Christ Child in their eyes. Mary had a loving expression on her face and a vibrant glow in her eyes. Jesus was born the Savior of our world – to light the world with His great love.

Now we can share this love by reflecting the Christ Child in our lives. We all want to be understood and we all want to love and be loved. What you are is God’s gift of love to you. What you reflect is your gift of love to God.

How do you paint your canvas?

How do you share your light of love?

Come Lord Jesus

Hailey Alford, age 5

*Kylee St. John, age 9 and
Katie St. John, age 7*





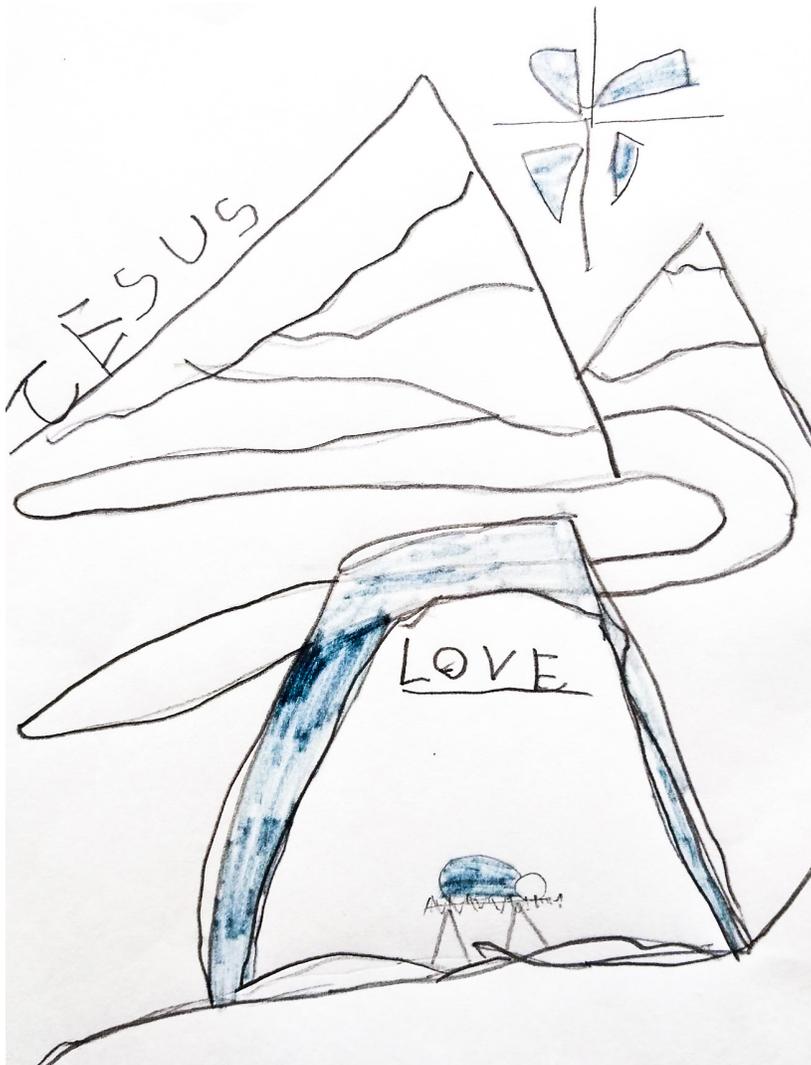
Thursday, December 17

Written by Todd Engels

L-O-V-E. Such incredible meaning in four simple letters. It is used 551 times in the NIV Bible. We are told in the Old Testament to 'love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind'. What does this mean? How do we do it? How can we apply this to our every-day life with our family, friends and all of those around us. Four simple letters with such expectations. Christmas ushers in the best example of God's unending love. He gave mankind a living, breathing symbol of His love. In the New Testament, Jesus showed the world time after time the manifestation of His love for us.

Through prayer, we show God our love for him and our recognition of the sacrifice He gave through His love. Christmas marks a time of the birth of this Love and allows time to celebrate those four simple letters with such meaning. The example He gave us, the mercy and grace He showed us...each key elements of love...need to be part of our love. At this time of year, we feel the Joy, the Hope, the Peace and the Love that Christ's birth ushers in.

It is this Love of Christ and one another that most exemplifies our Christian walk. Our love of others is easy to see. This Christmas season, let our love, like Bethlehem's star guide those around us to this advent of Christ.



Dax Harris, age 6



Friday, December 18

Devotion written by Leah Heitman (age 8)

Prayer written by Lindsay Heitman

Long ago, there was a lady named Mary and she met an angel and the angel's name was Gabriel. Gabriel said to Mary that she will have a baby. Mary was very surprised! Joseph was Mary's boyfriend. Then, some time went by, and Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem. Mary sat on a donkey because she had a baby in her stomach. Next, the baby was coming! So, Joseph looked at every inn but there was no room. And so the innkeeper offered a stable. So, Mary and Joseph went to the stable! There were three animals. There was a sheep, a cow and a horse. Mary gave birth to a baby boy! Then, Mary wrapped the baby in white cloth and placed him in a manger. Mary put a little hay in the manger so the baby wouldn't hit his head.

There were a few shepherds that were in a field watching their sheep and then an angel rose before them. The angel said, "A savior has been born!" The shepherds went to see Mary's baby.

Then, three wisemen came from far away to see Mary's baby. They brought three fancy gifts. The gifts were gold, frankincense and myrrh.



Mary's baby was named Jesus, and he is God's son. When Jesus grew up, he taught people about God and did amazing miracles. Then, he died on the cross to save us from our sins. Now, Jesus lives in heaven with God, his father. Jesus is always talking to me even when I can't hear it. I talk to him by praying. Jesus is my best friend!

THE END

A Mother's Prayer at Christmas

Dear Lord,

Thank you for all the good blessings you have provided for my family this year. Thank you for your provision, our good health and the love we share in our home. We are especially thankful this time of year because we are reminded of the ultimate Christmas gift, your Son, Jesus. Please help me remember this gift in all of my holiday preparations.

Lord, prepare my child's heart to receive the true gift of Christmas. Help her to unselfishly honor you in all of our Christmas celebrations and to be a witness of Christ's love in all she does, this time of year and always.

Lord, help my husband and I to honor our parents as we celebrate Christmas this year. Help us to remember the great sacrifices they made when we were young to teach us about Christ's love and to make Christmas feel magical. Help us to treasure the time we have with our parents.

Lord, bless our extended families and friends this Christmas. Help us enjoy our time with those we get to celebrate with and remind us of those who are faraway. Help us to always remember your place at our tables.

Lord, bless those that are less fortunate than we are. Comfort those who are sick, poor, lonely, or otherwise suffering. And most especially, reveal yourself to those who do not know you.

Thank you for extending your grace to us during this stressful season. Forgive us for all the things that distract us from your will.

Be present for all of us this Christmas!

In Jesus' name I pray, Amen

Illustration by Leah Heitman, age 8



Saturday, December 19

Written by Nicole Dutton

For as long as I can remember, I have always loved the Christmas season. The decorations, the lights, the sounds – to this day, even the slightest mention of Christmas instantly brings a smile to my face. Why? To me, Christmas is the ultimate season of love. It is an opportunity to spend time with family and loved ones. A time to spread joy to all those around.

While I appreciate all aspects of the holiday season, I especially love listening to Christmas music. Therefore, as I sit and reflect about what Christmas meant to Mary, I can't help but think about the classic Christmas song *Mary, Did You Know?* Some listeners, myself included, might try to imagine Mary's response to the questions presented throughout the song. Questions like *Mary, did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?* Thankfully, Luke 1 26-38 helps us answer these questions. The angel Gabriel came to Mary and announced she would conceive and give birth to a son. *He would be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God would give him the throne of his father David (v.32).* After receiving the shocking news, Mary reacts much like so many of us when we receive unexpected news. *Mary asked "How could this be?" (v 34)* The initial shock and disbelief led her to question God's plan for her. Fortunately, Mary ultimately placed her full trust in the impossible from God with her response *"I am the Lord's servant. May it be done to me according to your word" (v. 38)*

So what does Christmas mean to me? Yes, it is a time to be with family. It is a time to find joy in the small things like decorating the Christmas tree and listening to carols. But most of all, for me, Christmas is a time to remember, and be encouraged by, what Gabriel told Mary during her time of significant doubt: *"Nothing is impossible with God" (v. 37).* It is a reminder that God is using us to do His good work every single day. Mary initially questioned God's plan for her but upon further reflection, placed her full trust in the impossible from God. What would it look like if I did the same? What might I say "yes" to that could change my life, and that of those around me, forever?

Prayer

Lord, help me to remember that nothing is impossible with you. Just because it's Christmas doesn't mean the problems of this historic year have gone away. Give me a heart of faith to believe in your ability to do great things through everyday people like me. Amen

PEACE: 2020



Fourth Sunday of Advent - December 20, 2020

Worship Theme: What Christmas Meant to Jesus

Advent Wreath: Lighting the Candle of Peace



Today we remember Jesus, and we light the candle of PEACE. Jesus was born into the world to take our fears and replace them with the assurance of eternal life at peace with God.

Scripture:

Luke 2:10-14 “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

Candle Lighting:

Relight the first three candles and then light the last candle; as you are lighting the candles say: *Today we relight the candles of hope, recalling God’s promise; the candle of Joy, reminding us of the joy found in Him; and the candle of Love remembering that Jesus was sent because of God’s great love for us. Now we light the candle of Peace. We celebrate the announcement of the coming King and the greatness of God’s love revealed through the Christ child.*

Prayer:

Father, we thank you for revealing yourself through Jesus, and we praise you for the greatness of your love. Help us to share your peace with others and live our lives more like Christ every day. In His name we pray Amen.



Sunday, December 20

Written by Ginger, John and Mary Liz Elliott

Isaiah 9:6 (NIV)

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 55:12 (NIV)

You will go out in joy and be led forth in PEACE; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you.

Romans 15:13 (NIV)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and PEACE as you trust in Him.

Philippians 4:7 (NMB)

May the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and mind in Christ Jesus.

PEACE

The word exudes tranquility and security. The Old and New Testaments reassures us that PEACE was, is, and is to come! During 2020 we have all been faced with tremendous adversity. Decisions have to be made with guess work and imperfect information. With our decisions wrapped in prayer we can proceed with confidence and resolve to seek peace. We can strive to practice good stewardship of our time, skills, and finances... our ears, hands and feet.. In the here and now plus in whatever future unfolds. As John works from home, as Mary Liz manages her spring college semester doing very different things (class, working early election polls and recording HG songs), and as I continue to support my family and my mom in Burlington, I will be calling on His provision of everlasting PEACE with the confidence that OUR HEAVENLY FATHER ALWAYS was-is-and is to come!

Thank you Mount Tabor Methodist church for your treasures and leadership!



Monday, December 21

Written by Beverly Burton

“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you. Isaiah 54:10

I happened upon this verse in my daily devotional in October and the word peace jumped out at me. “Ah, there’s my springboard for the Advent devotion I’m to write”, I immediately thought. With all that has shaken our lives in 2020, including an actual earthquake (aren’t we all grateful the hills were not removed?!), it seemed a perfect prompt. As Christians, we all claim that God loves us without fail, that He has compassion for us, and that the promise of His peace is foundational to our faith. These are what living a sanctified life in Christ are about.

One thing I have learned as I’ve entered my senior years is to attempt to NOT take a Bible verse out of context. So, I began reading Isaiah 54 and I learned a great deal more than I thought I would. Yay, my senior brain can still learn! And learning as much as I can about God’s Word, well, that’s always a good thing, right?

The 54th chapter of Isaiah is about the prosperity of the church and was written in B.C. 706, long before Jesus was born. Long before the church was established. God knew what He wanted Isaiah to do. Isn’t that amazing?! Well, we DO have an amazing God!

God also knows what He wants us to do with this year and with this Advent season.

During this extremely frustrating, scary, taxing, beyond difficult year, the prosperity (and I’m not talking money) of our church and THE church has been tested. As I write this in mid-October, we are just barely back into the physical building. We’ve not seen most of our co-Mount Tabor members/friends in person since mid-March. We are

longing for Sheri and her crew to feed us on Wednesday nights at Tabor Table; we want to sing again with one another in the choir loft or on the Alspaugh stage or in the pews or rows of seats; we crave the in-person company of our small group or Sunday school class members. And those are the things that we typically do or have during the entire church year.

In the month of November, we missed our annual pre-Thanksgiving potluck meal. Adam and the Chancel Choir will not gift us with their lovely music that helps put us all in the “right Christmas spirit” a few weeks before Christmas Day. Higher Ground will not give us the annual Christmas play where John Giles or Harold Beaty give us all a good laugh at some point during the production. We will have a virtual Angel Tree instead of gathering around the usual one in the Welcome Center.

But mostly, we want to hug one another. Will we have to wait 706 years?! Even 706 days is too long...Boy, do I sound like a Debbie Downer?!

Advent is now upon us. Do we feel at peace in relation to our church? To THE church? Again, Isaiah 54:10, although not written about Christ’s birth, is still about Christ. And Christ IS the church. This verse reminds us that, yes, the mountains will be shaken, and the hills removed, but the LORD still loves us, still promises us peace, and still has compassion for us. Peace about accepting that we will (someday) go back to Tabor Table, and sing together, and study His Word together, and HUG ONE ANOTHER!

We will make it through this. And, I believe, we will come out stronger. The LORD has compassion on us. Don’t lose that covenant for peace during this Advent season. Or any season of your life.



Tuesday, December 22

Written by Brenda Wills

‘I’ve got peace like a river’

“Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me”

When my children were small and anyone would ask me what I wanted for Christmas, my answer would most always be, “Peace and quiet”. And when the Calgon commercial came on TV and the female in the commercial said, “Calgon, take me away”, I knew exactly what she meant. In today’s world there is so much noise, chaos, hostility, brokenness and anxiety. I need a reminder about what peace really is, today, as much as I did years ago when my children were young.

I go to the word and read the many Scriptures about peace. Hebrews says in 12:14 (NLT), “Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord.” Proverbs 16:7 (NLT) says, “When people’s lives please the Lord, even their enemies are at peace with them.” And from Isaiah 26:3 (NLT), one of my favorites, “You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!”

I found a story recently on www.alltimeshortstories.com that explains the meaning of peace through Christ Jesus most vividly: “Peace doesn’t mean to be in a place where there is no noise or adversity. It means to be in the midst of all those and still feel calm in your heart. There once lived a king who announced to prize the artist who would paint the best painting depicting peace. Many great painters sent the king several of their best art pieces. One of the pictures among the various masterpieces was of a calm lake, perfectly mirroring peacefully towering snow-capped mountains. Overhead was a blue clear sky with fluffy clouds. The picture was perfect. Most of the people who viewed the pictures of peace from various artists thought that it was the best among all. “But when the king announced the winner, everyone was shocked. The picture which won the prize had a mountain, too, but it was rugged and bare. The sky looked very angry, and there was lightning. This did not look peaceful at all. It looked as if the artist had mistakenly submitted his painting depicting a storm rather than peace. But if anyone looked closely at the painting, he could see a tiny bush growing in the cracks in the rock. In the bush, a mother bird had built her nest. In the midst of the rush of angry weather, the bird sat on her nest with peace. “Peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise or trouble. Peace means to be in the midst of all the chaos and still be calm in the heart. Real peace is the state of mind, not the state of the surroundings. The mother bird at her calmest, despite her chaotic surroundings, indeed was the best representation for peace.”

I leave you with this: “Now may the Lord of peace himself give you his peace at all times and in every situation. The Lord be with you all.” 2 Thessalonians 3:16.

Write Your Own Prayer



Wednesday, December 23

Written by Garry and Zella Fisher

Are You Willing?

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. -- 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

"I have a plan," said the Father. "A plan to redeem them from their sin and reconcile with them forever."

"I know," said the Son. "I always knew Your perfect love for them would compel You to do it."

The Father stared into the eyes of His Son for a long moment. His eyes glistened as He blinked back a tear. At last, He spoke--slowly, a tinge of sadness in His voice: "It will cost Us more than their human minds will ever be able to acknowledge or understand. Almost more than I can even bear to consider. Are You sure You are willing to become one of them? I don't mean to just to leave Heaven and confine Yourself within their frail flesh, to experience hunger and thirst. To suffer their illnesses and experience their pain. That is just the beginning." The Father gently placed His hand on the shoulder of His Son. "I mean, are you ready to suffer unjustly at the very hands of those whom We created? To experience the pain and humiliation they will mete out to you--to actually *become sin* for them and take upon Your own head My wrath that so rightly should be theirs? Are You even willing to let Me turn My back on You and forsake You—to be My enemy? That is what it will require."

"For the joy of Our again being one with them as You and I are One, I am willing," the Son replied. "I will gladly endure all of it."

No doubt, this will be a very different Christmas season for most of us. But even during this time of anxiety, discord, and perhaps even separation, we can still rejoice! Let us fill our hearts with gladness! We are children of the King—a king who loves us so much that He was willing not only to experience life as a human being, but to nail our sins to His cross and suffer the punishment that should have been ours! Are we willing to share this joyous message of grace and reconciliation with a world that desperately needs it, *especially now*?

Write Your Own Prayer



Christmas Eve Services: December 24, 2020

Worship Theme: What if there were no Christmas?

Advent Wreath: Lighting the Christ Candle

During Advent, we have reflected on what Christmas meant to the Shepherds, to the Wise Men, to Mary, and to Jesus. Today, as we light the Christ Candle in our advent wreath, we reflect on what Christmas means for us. We find that the real meaning of Christmas is the gift of eternal life with our Savior and King.

Scripture Reading:

Matthew 1:21-23 “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means “God with us”).

Candle Lighting:

Relight the first four candles, and then light the Christ Candle in the center of the wreath; as you are lighting the candles say: *On this most holy day we light all four candles in our Advent wreath, and we are reminded of the Hope, Joy, Love and Peace that came as a result of His coming. Now we light the Christ Candle, we rejoice that the promise of God has been fulfilled in the coming of the Baby born in a manger.*

Prayer:

Gracious and Mighty King, we celebrate your goodness to us as we join the triumph and joy of Christmas. As your love has been revealed in all of its fullness, we pray that love may abound in our hearts during this special day. Grant us the spirit of Christ that we may live in the fullness of his character every day. In His name we pray. Amen.



Thursday, December 24

Written by Mark Key, Senior Pastor

Luke 2:22-38

A little boy was standing at the bottom of a department store escalator staring intently at the movement of the stairs. A saleswoman asked, “Are you lost?” “Nope,” said the boy, “I’m just waiting for my chewing gum to come back.”

Christmas is about waiting. Waiting for family celebrations and get-togethers, waiting for Christmas Day. Advent is about looking for the coming (Advent) of Jesus. But Advent is also about waiting. We countdown the days until Christmas Day and we prepare and anticipate and wait.

Mary and Joseph waited. When they took Jesus to the temple to be dedicated, they found that Simeon and Anna had been waiting for Him, for the Messiah to come. The Hebrew people had been waiting for the Messiah to come. And then He came. The Messiah, the Son of God came, fully human and fully divine.

Our celebrations of Advent and Christmas are different this year. Many of our traditions will not take place exactly as they have in the past. But still we find that we can experience the real meanings behind those traditions. We can still wait in expectation for the experiences of hope, love, joy and peace and finally Christ Himself.

Waiting is an opportunity for faith. Waiting comes through hope. Without hope, we would not wait. Charles Allen said, “Life is full of glad surprises for those who hope.” Christ has come, Christ is here. Christ will come again. May we wait in expectation and faith and hope for his coming again!

Friday, December 25

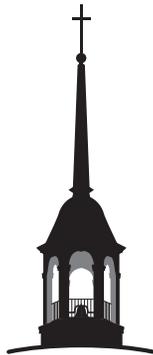
Written by Bob Richardson, Assistant Pastor

JOHN 1:14 (MSG)

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.

“Jimmy!”, she cried. “JIIMMMMYYYYY!” My little brother pulled a fast one on us all the Christmas of 1990, traveling overnight from Basalt, Colorado to make it to Merrimac, Massachusetts as we gathered for un-stuffing of stockings and the un-wrapping of gifts. Mom’s youngest had made it home, and her squeal of glee made all other expressions of joy, and there were many, pale in comparison.

2000 years ago in first century Palestine God pulled a fast one on all the world when He traveled through eternity to become flesh and blood, move into the neighborhood, and be born in a manger. Am I meeting that divine gift with the squeals of glee and expressions of joy and declarations of gratitude it so richly deserves? Now more than ever, what am I going to do about it?



Mount Tabor
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

3543 Robinhood Road
Winston-Salem, NC 27106
(336) 765-5561
www.mttaborumc.org