

Advent Devotional

Written by Members of
Bethesda UMC





REVERSE ADVENT CALENDAR

EACH DAY ADD AN ITEM TO A BOX. ON CHRISTMAS EVE
DONATE THE CONTENTS TO SALISBURY URBAN MINISTRIES.

- December 1- box of cereal
- December 2- peanut butter
- December 3- stuffing mix
- December 4- boxed potatoes
- December 5- macaroni and cheese
- December 6- canned fruit
- December 7- canned tomatoes
- December 8- canned tuna
- December 9- dessert mix
- December 10- jar of applesauce
- December 11- canned sweet potatoes
- December 12- cranberry sauce
- December 13- canned beans
- December 14- box of crackers
- December 15- package of rice
- December 16- package of oatmeal
- December 17- package of pasta
- December 18- spaghetti sauce
- December 19- chicken noodle soup
- December 20- tomato soup
- December 21- can corn
- December 22- can mixed vegetables
- December 23- can carrots
- December 24- can green beans

Confidence in Times of Distress

November 27, 2023

Psalm 46:1-11

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth gives way, and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her; she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come and see what the Lord has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bows and shatters the spear. he burns the shields with fire. He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

"I'm out of here!" Most of us will feel like crying out this way at some point in life. When a demanding circumstance feels overwhelming or when the pressure of the daily routine seems unbearable, a common reaction is the desire to escape. Whether the stress is related to a job, relationship, or other situation that seems too hard to handle, we want relief. So, we decided we would walk out. Moving on. Heading for anywhere but where we are now.

The Father has a powerful truth for us. The way to handle stressful situations is to cease fighting against them instead, be at rest. To the psalmist, this meant being still and knowing God is truly God (Psalm 46: 10 NIV). Jesus promises peace in the midst of trials when we let go of troubles and entrust them to His care. (See Matthew 11: 28-30, John 16:33) So, while human instinct clamors for escape, God calls us to draw near to Him. Then we can discover calmness of spirit as we absorb the truth of His Word. Most of all, the Lord wants us to know who He is. As we believe the truth of His sovereignty (1 Chronicles 29:11) and accept both the absolute goodness of His plans (Jeremiah 29:11) and His deep, abiding love for us (Ephesians 3:17-19), we will grow in our trust of Him. Then we will find it easier to be still and truly know He is God.

Our stress need not become distress. The better we understand our heavenly Father, the more we'll be able to walk through circumstances with calmness (Philippians 4:7) and confidence (Jeremiah 17:7 NIV). This is our privilege as God's children.

Let us Pray:

Every day we pray to God that our situation changes. We know that miracles happen every day, so help me to never stop believing, to always trust you, and you're timing. I yield my circumstances and myself to you. It is in Jesus' name, I pray. Amen

Written by Charles Stanley – In Touch Ministries
(Contributed by George Blankenship)

Be Prepared
November 28, 2023

Mark 13:33-37

“Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.”

“Therefore, keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back— whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

Bob and I were fortunate our children and their friends would gather at our house after school and on weekends. I would never know how many there would be for snacks or dinner, so I always kept extra in the pantry and freezer. My childhood Girl Scout motto “Be Prepared” often came to mind. In reading this scripture I know I must always be ready for our Savior to come. I must always be prepared in my heart and in my actions.

Let us Pray:

Heavenly Father, I pray that the wonder of your Son’s coming will capture my heart and make me truly prepared. Amen

Written by Carol Heller

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Golden Rule
November 29, 2023

Matthew 7:12

“Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.”

We know this passage from Matthew as the “Golden Rule”. As Advent season approaches, it recalls the humble situation in which God came to earth as Jesus and the teachings that He imparted.

My parents were devoted Christians and very active in their church. They always lived within their means and were content with their lot in life, enjoying all of their blessings. My father never ate that he didn’t thank God in a prayer before meals. My parents’ humble love affected all who knew them, and they were generous in their sharing, not only of their love, but earthly goods when they saw a need. To me, they were a true example of humility and grace and the “Golden Rule”.

Certainly, my sister and I benefited from coming from such a home. We often reflect on our blessing of being raised with such unconditional love and humility and we try to live up to their example.

Let us Pray:

Dear Lord, help us to live in humility and love as you lived and taught. Help us to treat others with kindness, empathy, and godly love. Amen

Written by Donna Wheelock

The Role of God's Servants

November 30, 2023

Corinthian's 3: 5-7

"What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? They are servants through whom you believed, and each has a role the Lord has given. I planned, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters are anything, but only God who gives the growth."

Having been raised in a loving Christian farm family, I watched my dear father on his knees many times scratching in the earth for sprouting seeds. This was the greatest example he could ever demonstrate to me of his total faith and love for God and all with which we have been so blessed. This quiet example of faith was reflected in all of his life. Let each of us be an example through our daily lives of our love for our Heavenly Father as well.

Let us Pray:

As we prepare to celebrate the wonders of the birth of Jesus, may we take time to appreciate the many gifts and examples that have been provided by God throughout our lives and all of eternity. May we strive to be worthy each day. Amen

Written by Jan Conway

Do Not Be Afraid

December 1, 2023

Luke 2:10-11

"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!'"

In this season of Advent, we are reminded of the angel's proclamation to the shepherds – a message of hope and joy for all people. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem marks the beginning of a new era, a time when God's love is tangibly expressed through the gift of His Son. As we journey through these weeks of anticipation, let us reflect on the depth of God's love for us. The birth of Jesus was a divine act of love, a demonstration of God's desire to be in relationship with humanity. This Advent, may we strive to cultivate a spirit of love in our hearts, imitating the example set by our Heavenly Father.

Let us Pray:

Loving God, as we gather in this Advent season, we open our hearts to the message of your great love for us. Just as you sent your Son, Jesus, to be born among us, may we also be bearers of love to those around us. Help us to embrace the joy of your love and to share it with our neighbors, friends, and family. As we reflect on the birth of Jesus, the ultimate expression of your love, inspire us to seek opportunities to spread love in tangible ways. In this time of waiting, help us to center our hearts on the love that came down to earth in the form of a child, a Savior, and the Messiah. May our lives reflect the love and light of Christ, drawing others closer to you. In His holy name, we pray. Amen

May this Advent season be a time of intentional love, where we not only receive the gift of God's love but also share it generously with those around us. As we anticipate the celebration of Jesus' birth, may our hearts overflow with the love that was born in Bethlehem.

Written by Rev. Zac Wheeler

Blessed for Giving
December 2, 2023

Galatians 6:7

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."

Anthropologists say the Agricultural Revolution began about 10,000 years ago. Man began to plant and harvest crops which allowed him to form towns and develop societies. Behind the revolution was a foundational principle of God's creation. God gives more than is given. We plant one kernel of grain and harvest hundreds of new kernels. Some are eaten, some are saved for next year's planting, some are sold, and some are shared with those in need.

That principle of abundance is illustrated throughout Scripture, most generally in Galatians 6:7. We reap as we sow. Paul expands the idea in 2 Corinthians 9: "If we sow abundantly, we will reap in abundance; if we sow sparingly, we will reap sparingly. The principle of abundant harvest makes it possible to (1) give generously and (2) glorify God. (2 Corinthians 9:11) The principle of abundant harvest is part of God's blessing on creation. Our part is to sow generously; God's part is to bless generously in return.

Look for ways to be generous with your time, talent, and treasure. Instead of an instinctive "No", learn to say "Yes" more often. God always returns more than we give.

Let us Pray:

I humbly ask for your divine intervention and the wisdom to build my life, my home and all my endeavors. Be the foundation of all my efforts, Lord, and the guardian of my soul. With you as my cornerstone, I trust that all I undertake will find purpose and meaning. In your name I pray. Amen

Written by George Blankenship

First Sunday of Advent
December 3, 2023

Isaiah 9:2

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined."



Today we light the first candle of the Advent wreath. This is the candle of HOPE. With Christians around the world, we use this light to help us prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of God's Son, the Savior Jesus Christ. May we receive God's light as we hear the words of the prophet Isaiah.

Let us Pray:

Lord as we look to the birth of Jesus, grant that the light of your love for us will help us to become lights in the lives of those around us. Prepare our hearts for the joy and gladness of your coming, for Jesus is our HOPE. Amen

Written by Connie Watson & Beverly Purnell

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The Best Gift of Christmas

December 4, 2023

Luke 2:11

"For unto you is born this day a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

Oh, the excitement of Christmastime! We concentrate on shopping for the perfect gifts, wrapping presents, singing carols, decorating the tree, and other family traditions. My favorite memory as a child was my family's Christmas morning tradition. No one was allowed downstairs before my parents. I remember the hugs and smiles as my two older brothers helped me contain my energy at the top of the stairs while my dad checked to be sure that Santa was gone. At last, Dad said the oldest could come down and then the next. It was so hard for me to wait until my turn to see the glimmer of lights and my family sitting around the tree. In my childish mind, the best part was that as the youngest, I was able to open all of my gifts first and then my brothers opened theirs in reverse order. We all watched as the boys and then my parents opened and revealed their presents. Each of us shared the spotlight so we could all see the joy and pleasure that the presents brought us.

After our gift sharing, there was a family breakfast where the discussions of our gifts subsided for reflection on the very best present of Christmas. As we talked about the story of Jesus' birth and the truly perfect gift God gave us on that first Christmas, my parents led us to a new perspective.

Through the years, our family continued this tradition. Even as we began our own separate families, my brothers and I carried it on. When we became parents and then grandparents visiting with one of our children, we were happy to see our tradition continue. Through the years, I am still blessed to be able to share the joy and lessons of many family Christmases with my children and grandchildren. It is not the presents that we opened that make Christmas special, but the time-sharing joy with our loved ones that is important. Once again, we realize with our families that God already gave us the best gift of Christmas, his son Jesus.

Let us Pray:

Dear God, Amidst the hustle and bustle of our Christmas preparations, may we take time to be truly grateful for the most precious gift of all, your son Jesus. Amen

Written by Carolyn Elmore

Strength Not Fear

December 5, 2023

Psalm 27:1-4

“The LORD is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; for whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD and to meditate in his temple.”

When life becomes uncertain, Psalm 27:1-4 serves as a guiding light. It reminds us that in a world filled with fear and adversity, we can find unwavering confidence and security in our relationship with God. Just as David declared, “The Lord is my light and my salvation, Whom Shall I Fear?” We too can face each day with courage, knowing that God’s presence is our stronghold, a sanctuary where we can find peace and the beauty of His grace. In the chaos of life, let us remember that seeking God’s presence daily can illuminate our path and banish the shadows of fear and doubt.

Let us Pray:

Dear Heavenly Father, life is full of uncertainties and can become overwhelming. Today, I bring my fears and anxieties before You, knowing that in Your presence, there is no room for fear to take hold. You are the fortress of my life and my refuge in times of trouble. As I face the challenges of each day, I find my confidence and security in You alone. Help me stand firm and steadfast, even when the world around me seems to crumble. Thank You for being my light and my salvation. Today, I surrender my fears and worries to You, trusting that Your love and grace will guide me through every storm. In Your precious name, I pray. Amen

Written by Melanie B. Smith

Love of Friends and Family

December 6, 2023

John 15:13

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

There are stories about friendships in the Bible including Jesus and Lazarus, David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, and Paul and Timothy. There are so many more examples. Recently I was reminded of the bond between three men who were aware of the power of prayer and support. (Read Exodus 17:12.) Their picture was on the cover of the May and June issue of the UPPER ROOM. It was a stunning depiction of Moses, his brother, Aaron, and Hur, by artist Wayne Forte. In the picture, only their backs were visible. They were each dressed in white robes and were facing a battlefield. Joshua was leading the Israelites in an attempt to win against the Amalekites. Moses, who was seated in the middle, held the staff of God. As long as he kept his hands in the air, the Israelites were winning. When he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. Moses was growing tired, but he knew he could not put his hands by his sides. Aaron and Hur took a stone and gave it to Moses so he could sit. The two men stood on each side of him and held his hands in the air since he was so weak. With their

help, Moses' hands remained steady until sunset. The Amalekite army was defeated. What a blessing. We are so fortunate to have family and friends such as Aaron and Hur in our lives.

Let us Pray:

Dear God, during this season of Advent, we thank you for those who stand beside us. We are grateful for their love, encouragement, guidance, and support. Amen

Written by Kay Layton

The Meaning of Peace

December 7, 2023

John 14:27

"Peace, I leave with you, my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid."

Peace! What a beautiful, comforting word. I have read that the King James Version Bible has about 429 times where the word "peace" is used. However, the use of this word could refer to other feelings than the one Christ gives us in the verse above. The dictionary defines the word "peace" as the absence of conflict, calm, quiet, tranquility. The "peace" Christ offers us is "the confident assurance that we have no need to fear the present or the future".

Jesus was born to bring us salvation and peace to the world. How often do we let the preparation of Christmas get in the way of enjoying the season of Advent? There is so much hustle and bustle all around us that we sometimes forget what we really should be preparing for – the birth of our Savior.

This doesn't mean we can't enjoy the lights, carols, and get-togethers. But we really need to take the time to think about our journey through Advent as a time to prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ into our lives, bring such love, peace, and joy that we cannot fully understand and share that with all around us. Let this Advent season be filled with the peace that only Christ can give and be sure to share that peace with others.

Let us Pray:

Heavenly Father, bless us all as we experience this season of Advent. Help us to open our hearts and minds each day for opportunities to share Your love with others. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

Written by Barbara Wilgus

Waiting with Hope

December 8, 2023

Isaiah 40:31

"But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar with wings like eagles: They will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint."

Life is full of waiting. Sometimes waiting is frustrating and sometimes waiting is full of happy anticipation. Advent is one of those times.

Do you remember when you were a child how unbearable the long wait before Christmas was? Do you remember being wild with anticipation for the boundless goodies and toys that were just days away? Going to sleep on Christmas Eve was nearly impossible. I could hardly wait!

I am still not great at waiting. There has been a lot of waiting in my life. Waiting to get married. Waiting for my babies to be born. Waiting for a new job. Waiting to retire. Waiting for God to call my elderly, infirm mother home to Heaven. Then there are all the mundane hours of waiting. Like waiting for laundry to get done, waiting in traffic, or waiting in the check-out line in a store. So much waiting!!

Isaiah 40:31 says, *“Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength”*. In other translations it says, *“Those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength”*. Hope and waiting seem like opposites. Hope seems so positive and uplifting, while waiting seems dismal and depressing.

But hope and waiting often go hand in hand. We can wait because we have hope. We wait on Jesus’ timing because our hope is in Him and Him alone. It is the very essence of Christmas. All that waiting for the Messiah. All that hoping. And then, there it was. Christmas. God with us.

I will never like waiting. Yet, I am filled with hope for all that tomorrow holds. Prayers answered, friendships relished, and miracles arriving. Like the One that arrived so long ago. A babe wrapped in swaddling clothes. Hope revealed. He was worth the wait!

Let us Pray:

Heavenly Father, your Son, Jesus, is your greatest gift to us, the greatest sign of Your love for us. As we prepare our hearts and minds for Christmas, this Advent season help us to wait with hope and to grow closer to each other and Your Son. Amen

Written by Tammy Taylor

Patience in Suffering

December 9, 2023

James 5:7-8

“Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.”

For me, Advent is the most wonderful time of the year – four weeks of anxious preparation! Four weeks of lights, decorations, music, and food! The most beautiful thing to me is the Children’s Christmas Program. When my boys were young there was always the memorizing of lines of a play, Bible verses, and songs combined with some practice (which we really needed “a lot of” but only had time for “some”) all culminating in the Children’s Christmas Program”. It was enjoyed by family and friends – and is there anything sweeter than children dressed as angels and shepherds retelling the story of the birth of our Savior?

I especially love the Holy Family and the manger scene – so much that I have collected several from many places I have visited – each one different but a beautiful reminder of that special event so many years ago. Each year as I put my many crèches out I thank God for another year to enjoy them. I have a special one that plays “O Holy Night”. It’s special because I bought it for my mom the year she passed away before I could give it to her. I wind it once, listen, and think about her and how much she loved Jesus and Christmas too – it’s a special and scared moment of my Advent. There are so many beautiful reminders of God’s love for us, and I try to take them all in during the holidays – while I wait, not so patiently, for Christmas Day.

Let us Pray:

Dear Lord, please help us to see all the beauty around us, not just during the holidays. but every day. May we be patient with ourselves, as well as with those around us, as we prepare our hearts to welcome baby Jesus once more. Amen

Written by Joyce Roberts

Second Sunday of Advent December 10, 2023



Isaiah 9:6-7

“For a child has been born for us, a son given to us, authority rests upon his shoulders, and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

John 14:27

“Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

Now we light the candle for the second Sunday in Advent. This is the candle of **PEACE**. As we prepare for the coming of Jesus, we remember that Jesus is our hope and our peace.

Let us Pray:

Gracious God, grant that we may find peace as we prepare for our Lord’s birth. May divisions in ourselves and in our families be peacefully resolved. May there be peace in our cities and in the countries of our world. Help us to see the paths of peace in our lives, and then give us the courage to follow them. Lord, let us remember that You only are the giver of lasting peace and that You are always with us. Amen

Written by Connie Watson & Beverly Purnell

Knock December 11, 2023

Matthew 7:7

“Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.”

As I look over my life, what I thought was scary was not with My Lord's help. No one in my family had completed college, but I applied to be accepted at Rutgers University. The odds of acceptance seemed impossible, three hundred students were accepted out of 3,000 applicants to Cook College, Rutgers University the previous year. My only job experience to offer was bailing hay and working in a hatchery. My only distinction was found in the little Presbyterian Church at the bottom of the hill as a singer, usher, and bell ringer. I put all my hopes in my Lord's hands and the opportunity to enroll was given to me.

A country boy going to freshman orientation in the city of New Brunswick, NJ, was seemingly impossible; yet, as I walked the college campus, I saw my cousin who became like a brother to me. I sought acceptance, though I felt scared and not worthy. I again put it in God's hands seeking acceptance in a completely alien environment and through God's love, I found acceptance and friendship with new friends.

After orientation day I prepared to pack up and return home. As I got near my Plymouth, the dim headlights told me that the headlights had been left on. I started to get anxious, then turned it over to my Jesus. I had nothing else in this strange city. Going back to the last lecture hall of my orientation, Dean Huff was packing up. Taking a deep breath I said, "Hi, I'm Ed Weeast, I liked your address. I was wondering if there is someone who could give me a jump?". He looked at this lost kid and matter-of-factly said, "I have cables, just give me a couple of minutes and a hand loading up". While we drove back to my car, he asked, "Are you the kid who submitted a five-page attachment to your application describing why you wanted to come to Cook?" I was shocked, and stammered, "That was me".

On the long ride home, I thought of all the blessings of the day. Knock and the door will be opened. God is good, all the time. All the time God is good.

Let us Pray:

God I cannot believe how many ways You have blessed me when I was most helpless. Thank you for creating opportunities and peace in the storms of life. Amen

Written by Edward Weeast

Jesus' Birth **December 12, 2023**

Luke 2:7

"And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in clothes and placed him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn."

How many Christmas programs have we been to over the years that depicted the above scene of Jesus' birth? A beautiful, tender scene in a stable to be sure and one we should treasure. Of course, no one would expect a "king" to be born in a stable (probably not a very sweet-smelling place). And yet as Jesus grew and started His ministry, there were many, especially those he called as disciples, who felt there was something very special about this man. Many followed him marveling at His powers to heal the sick and bring people back to life. He was a man of love for all people, kind and gentle. They wondered if this was their "King", the promised Messiah, born in a stable.



Then they watched as He was crucified; three days later he appeared to many, and those followers realized that Jesus was the Son of God.

As we make our way through Advent this year, may we keep the whole story of Jesus in our thoughts. I feel it will make the birth of the Christ Child even more important in our lives as we sometimes let slip away after Christmas is over. Let us make this year a time when we will always make room in our hearts and lives for the love of God, the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Let us Pray:

Dear Heavenly Father, You blessed us so unbelievably with the gift of your Son, Jesus. You brought Him into this world so He could experience the human side of life and thus plead for us when we sin and ask for forgiveness. No greater gift will ever be given, and we can only accept and be thankful. May we come to You this Advent with grateful and loving hearts as we anticipate the birth of that wonderful gift - Jesus. Amen

Written by Barbara Wilgus

Promised Hope
December 13, 2023

1 Peter 2:21-24

“Jesus’ blameless, sinless life could be used as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of the whole world! His sacrifice sets us free if we believe in Him and accept Him as our Lord and Savior, and our example, whom we can follow.”

Jesus rules the whole world, and His rule is one of peace. That news is light for a darkened world. As I think upon where the world is today, Jesus is the reason for the season. We must allow Him to work through us and make a better world for us. Keep Christ in us, not only during this beautiful season of Christmas, but all through the year.

Let us Pray:

Dear Jesus, as we celebrate Your birth may we begin to see the world in the light of the understanding You give us. As you chose the lowly, the outcast, and the poor to receive the greatest news the world had even known, so may we worship You in meekness of heart. May we also remember people less fortunate than ourselves in the season of giving. Amen

Written by Orville Nichols

Jesus Is The Reason For The Season
December 14, 2023

Matthew 4:14-16

“That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the Prophet. so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea,

beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”

I was blessed with wonderful parents who taught importance in this order: GOD, FAMILY, FRIENDS, COUNTRY. And at Christmastime when the toy catalogs would arrive, we couldn't wait to make our list and check it more than once because the most marks meant that was what you wanted the most.

My mother was the Girls Auxiliary Leader for 17 years. Most of all we were reminded “THIS IS JESUS' BIRTHDAY”, not yours. You are just invited to the party. There were still Bible studies and church. We enjoyed hayrides going from place-to-place singing Christmas carols and back to church for hot chocolate and cookies. The more children we invited the better and remember, we are celebrating Jesus' Birthday, and it was drilled into everyone that He came to save us from our sins. You can imagine the frowns and looks. Some of the responses were “What? I haven't done anything wrong!” These questions were answered as soon as possible. If she didn't have the answer, the pastor was consulted to help guide these young minds.

Christmas has become so materialistic. Never what God intended. May we always remember, “THIS BABY IN THE MANGER IS THE GREATEST GIFT EVER GIVEN!”

Let us Pray:

Father in Heaven, help us to remember why we celebrate Christmas. May your presence be a constant reminder of who and what you are to us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Written by Lynda Ward

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Where Is He? December 15, 2023

Matthew 2:1,2,8

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King, behold there came Wise Men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He that is born King of the Jews, for we have seen his star in the east, and we come to worship Him’ . . . and he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, ‘Go and search diligently for the young child.’“

As I reach an advanced age (86), I daily reflect on my memories and my loved ones who have died and created these memories for me.

My favorite Christmas memories are of grandmother and me trimming our small artificial Christmas tree and placing baby Jesus in the manger. My mother helped me fill in the details of a memorable Christmas which was very special. I was six. World War II was raging, and my father was in Norfolk working at the Navy Yard. Of course, I wanted a baby doll for Christmas. Mother could not find one she could afford in Salisbury. My father came home from Norfolk on Christmas Eve with a beautiful baby doll – blond hair, blue silky coat and bonnet and white cotton dress. I named her Virginia. I still have her and paper dolls that I later made.

Jesus will provide. What a wonderful Christmas it was! We were together, safe and with food and shelter.

Looking back at many Christmases past, I still look forward with anticipation to Advent devotions, the beautiful midst of the season, Christmas Eve services and gatherings of family and friends. May God's blessings be with us during the Advent season and in the New Year 2024.

Let us Pray:

Our Father and our God, we come to you in prayer. As we prepare for the birth of your son Jesus, may we reflect on the world around us and the needs of others. Be with us as we say a kind word to those we meet. Be with us as we prepare a warm meal for someone without. Be with us as we phone or send a card or note to friends we have not seen or talked to lately. Help us, dear Father, to be mindful of others and to be more Christ-like in our daily lives. Amen

Written by Ann Brittingham Suthowski

Waiting Patiently and Watching for Jesus' Arrival, Then and Now **December 16, 2023**

Galatians 6:9

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we do not give up."

Patience is an important virtue that enhances our ability to wait, allows us to stay calm when stressful circumstances arise, and better equips us to endure difficult people and situations without giving in to anger or giving up hope. We are to wait patiently upon the Lord for strength in times of hardship. We are also instructed to be patient when serving God and others, trusting that in due time, God will produce a harvest of blessings for those who are faithful and patient in serving Him. This trait isn't something we were born with or receive instantly at the moment of salvation. Rather, it is developed over time with God's grace and our intentional effort to live and walk by the Spirit.

Advent is a time of expectant waiting and preparation for the joy-filled, anticipatory celebration of the arrival of Jesus at Christmas and the return of Christ at the Second Coming. It serves as a spiritual "pause button" that teaches the wisdom of waiting and delaying instant gratification and offers us a choice to embrace persistent patience. It is a precious time to rest and find peace, a time to repent and remember the gift of salvation, a time to leave behind distress and fill our lives with hope, peace, joy, and love. Advent comes with these messages: Learn to be watchful as you eagerly await God and expect Him to show up in unexpected places.

Isaiah 9:6

"For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on His shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

During this season, as we open our hearts and minds to peace by experiencing the joy of Jesus' birth, we think about how God's faithful followers waited expectantly for a Redeemer. Their waiting was not

hopeless or in vain for the Lord declared, "The time is coming when I will raise up a righteous descendant from King David's line. He will be a King who rules with wisdom. He will do what is just and right throughout the land. And this will be his name: The Lord Is Our Righteousness." (Jeremiah 23:5-6) Jesus' birth was pre-ordained and well prepared. After centuries of eagerly awaiting, it was God's answer to the longings of countless hearts for the promised Messiah. He came the exact time He was needed in order to ensure all people would understand that God offers the gift of eternal life through the salvation that only He can give when they believe in His Son, repent of their sins, and confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior. This most important event in human history changed the world forever.

Hebrews 9:28

"So, Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him."

Isaiah 25:9

"It will be said on that day, 'Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation.'"

Like the Israelites, we wait in anticipation of an event we can only dimly imagine-an event where all that is right, good, and truthful will come to fruition in His perfect timing. As Christians, we believe in the second coming of Jesus. He will return as the sovereign King of Kings and Lord of Lords, cleanse the earth by fire, set up His kingdom, judge all mankind, both living and dead, and reward the faithful. As we wait in joyful hope for our Savior's return, we can prepare our hearts through seeking spiritual strength, accepting the teachings of the gospel, making them a part of the fabric of our daily lives, following His counsel, praying fervently, and keeping watch. It will be a day of sheer joy and perfect peace for the righteous.

John 14:3

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

Let us Pray:

Dear Jesus, we received the greatest gift of all when you came to this world as a baby, born in a stable on Christmas Day, to save and redeem us. Comfort us to find HOPE in your promise to be with us always. Fill our hearts with your PEACE which passes all understanding. Remind us that we have good reason to be JOYFUL today and every day. Reassure us with your pure, perfect, unconditional LOVE. Strengthen us to follow you. Guide us in our lives. Let us wait patiently and watch with deep hope for your coming a second time as we prepare for your arrival in our hearts and prayers. We need you to bring healing, heart-filled obedience, and light to our fallen world. In your Holy Name, Amen

Written by Susan Webster

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Third Sunday of Advent
December 17, 2023



Isaiah 65:18

"But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight."

Galatians 5:22,25

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit."

Today we again light the first two candles of the Advent wreath. The candle of HOPE and the candle of PEACE.

Now we light the third candle of Advent. This is the candle of JOY.

As the coming of Jesus, our Savior, draws nearer, our joy builds with our anticipation of His birth. From the Book of Isaiah, we read the words of our Lord. And, from the New Testament, the words of Paul to the people of the church at Galatia are also read.

Let us Pray:

We joyfully praise you, O Lord, for the fulfillment of Your promise of a Savior and what that means in our lives. Thank you for the gift of salvation through the birth of Your Son, Jesus. Create us anew as we wait and help us to see Your glory as You fill our lives with Your living Spirit. Amen

Written by Connie Watson and Beverly Purnell

Above All Else, Guard Thy Heart
December 18, 2023

Proverbs 4:23

"Guard thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

As I look back to my childhood, I remember my grandmother having an old upright piano. She was ready to give it to her grandchildren. My cousin, Claire and I were the only ones interested. My grandmother cut two straws – 1 short and 1 long. Whoever drew the long straw won the piano. That was me. As excited as I was, I soon wished I hadn't won. Music lessons and practice became a chore, but Mom and Dad insisted that someday I would be grateful.

Now, many years later, music is my life. Christian music and hymns, when all verses are sung, are a sermon in itself. The stories of Jesus and Christian service blossom into my heart and mind. More than 50 years later, with my mother in nursing care, she and I can still sing and remember those songs of long ago.

Music is a precious gift and the language of the heart – but how we use it is our choice. The Bible tells us to guard our heart. God wants the melody that plays there, to be the music of Heaven and songs of the redeemed.

Let us Pray:

Heavenly Father, thank you for scripture and music that guides my path. Remind me to build daily my foundation upon it. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Written by Lynda Ward

Home for Christmas

December 19, 2023

Psalms 90:1

"Lord, through all the generations you have been our home!"

This is the time of year when our hearts turn toward home and loved ones. We go about our lives for 330 days, December arrives, and "I'll Be Home For Christmas" on the radio brings back wonderful memories.

As children, we enjoyed Christmas with our siblings and extended families. There were pageants at church where we played the roles of angels, shepherds, and wise men. So many wonderful memories!

As adults, we looked forward to Christmas Eve and Christmas Day with each of our parents. Each of our mothers spent so much time and effort with decorations, that special gift, and preparation of Christmas breakfast and dinner for the family. The feelings of warmth and love they created for each of us endure to this day.

For our sakes, Christ left his home at Christmas. He left the glory of heaven to come to our sin-filled world. He came to bear our sin. He came to be cut off from the Father's love because of his love for us. He came to earth to bring us to Heaven. He paid our debt to provide the way home to the Father.

If you're homesick this Christmas, consider that Jesus knows how you feel. He spent 33 years separated from His Father on a long-term mission to bring God's grace to humanity. The day is coming when we will see God face to face, and our longing for home will be complete. Until then, we have the gift of His Spirit, who allows us to speak to God, hear from God, and feel his presence in our home and in our hearts.

Let us Pray:

Thank you, Jesus, for coming to earth to bring us home to our Heavenly Father. Deepen our love and may our lives reflect that we are children of God. In your name. Amen

Written by Nevette and Sue Muir



Waiting

December 20, 2023

Galatians 4:4-5

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman.”

The Advent season, of course, is all about waiting, something we hate to do and yet must do! We wait for the doctor or dentist; for some word from a loved one; for a friend who is late for a lunch date; for the arrival of a train or plane; for a letter from Social Security; for the team you love best to finally make it to the World Series, etc.

Although most of us are not good at waiting it can be a real blessing if it is done with the right attitude. The Scriptures tell us that Elizabeth and Zechariah waited patiently for the arrival of their son who would be John the Baptist, and Mary and Joseph waited with patience for the birth of the One who was to be the Savior. All of them waited with expectance and hope and were not disappointed because they believed in the promise of God!

Frederick Buechner has said that the real turning point in history was not the discovery of the wheel or the fall of Rome, but the birth of a Son to a poor couple from Nazareth! During the days of Advent may we likewise wait with expectation and hope for the One who is King of kings and Lord of lords!

Let us Pray:

Gracious God, Giver of every good and perfect gift, give us Your divine patience that we may wait with expectation and hope for Him who is the Savior of all!! Amen.

Written by Dr. Dan Rich

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What Shall He Be Called?

December 21, 2023

Isaiah 9:6

“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.”

As we begin this Advent journey, we turn our hearts toward the promise of a child born in Bethlehem – the Messiah, Jesus Christ. This verse from Isaiah reminds us of the profound gift God has given us, a gift that holds the weight of the world’s hopes and dreams. In the midst of darkness and uncertainty, we find a glimmer of light and a source of unending hope in the anticipation of Christ’s birth. This season invites us to reflect on the titles given to Jesus in this verse. Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Each title speaks to a unique aspect of His character and the transformative power He brings into our lives.

Let us Pray:

Gracious God as we embark on this Advent journey, we come before you with hearts full of anticipation and hope. Help us to embrace the promise of your Son’s birth with awe and wonder. Just

as the shepherds and wise men did on that holy night. Amid our daily challenges and struggles, may we find solace in the truth that Jesus is our Wonderful Counselor, offering guidance and wisdom. May we find strength in knowing that He is our Might God, capable of overcoming any obstacle. May we experience the comfort of the Everlasting Father who loves us unconditionally and may His peace reign in our hearts as the Prince of Peace. In this season of waiting, prepare our hearts to receive the gift of Jesus anew, that we may be transformed by His presence. In His holy name, we pray. Amen

Written by Rev. Zac Wheeler

Beyond the Manger

December 22, 2023

John 3:16-17

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn this world, but that the world might be saved through him.”

Growing up as a “PK” (that’s preacher’s kid!), I didn’t have a lot of choice regarding singing in our children’s and youth choirs! Beginning in first grade and continuing through high school, in three different churches, I was a member of the choir! Consequently, music became a very important aspect of my spiritual development and worship experience. Naturally, I didn’t appreciate it at the time, but how blessed I was to have parents that raised me in a faith filled church environment. How firm a foundation it has been for me in my adult life! Music is still very much an uplifting part of worship for me. Like most of us growing up, I suspect the music of the Christmas season was, and still is for me, very special and the most memorable. Sacred and secular music fills the air and our hearts during the Advent season.

While we may frequently hear the phrase “Keep Christ in Christmas,” we seem to inevitably get caught up in the material gifts, secular celebrations, and the “hustle and bustle” of the season. How easy it is to forget the sacrifice that Christ made for us. Let us remember that Christ died on the cross for our sins. In his Christmas cantata “Morning Star” composer Joseph M. Martin drives this message home in the song entitled “Just Beyond the Manger”.

Just beyond the manger,
I hear no lullabies, I see no golden hay, I feel no starlight.
Just beyond the manger,
I hear the hammer fall, I see a rugged cross, I feel the chill of night.
Just beyond the manger.

Just beyond the manger,
I see no swaddling clothes, I hear no angels sing, I feel no candle glow.
Just beyond the manger,
I see a lonely hill, the Savior crying still, I hear the thunder roll.
Just beyond the manger.



Martin then concludes the song with the following prayer. May it be our prayer today.

Let us Pray:

Forgive us, Lord, and grant us eyes to see every Christmas, Calvary; implant it in our hearts. Help us recall 'mid trees of red and gold, on another tree raised long ago we hung God's brightest star. Amen

Written by Stewart Soper

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The Shepherds and Angels

December 23, 2023

Luke 2:8-12

"That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. Suddenly 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.""

Christmas, what is the first thing you think of when you hear Christmas? I am sure for many it is as follows. Are all the gifts bought? Are they wrapped? But if we really think about the true meaning and most important reason for the season, it is the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Life and Christmas have changed since the night the angel was seen by the shepherds. We live in houses. They lived in the fields. We are afraid of all of the worries of the world. They were afraid of the angel, but the angel said to them "Do not be afraid". That message is for us as well. The Lord was with them as he is with us. As time has changed, that is one thing that has not. Angels have been seen by many. The angels came to Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds. The angels came to give them direction and comfort when fear and worry were amongst them all.

My Aunt Tammy saw angels when she was passing nine days after Christmas. She told my grandmother the Angels were all in the back yard. She was not afraid. She had true faith in our Lord through her illness. The Lord sent her the angels to take her home. God was there for the shepherds watching over them. He was there for Mary and Joseph through the hardships they had to bring us our Savior. He is there for us today. No matter what you are going through, remember what the angel said, "Do not be afraid".

So, as we celebrate Christmas, the birth of Jesus, our Savior, remember that God is watching over us and your angel might not just be at the top of your Christmas tree.

Let us Pray:

Dear Heavenly Father, as we journey through this season of Advent, we offer You our tribute and thanksgiving for sending Your angels to the lowly shepherds in a lonely field who were watching to protect their sheep all night. Grant us the courage to "Be not afraid", and to trust in Your guidance and love. Amen

Written by Shawn Taylor

December 24th has 3 Devotions and a Poem, as it is the Fourth Sunday of Advent, Christmas Eve day, and the lighting of the Christ Candle on Christmas Eve night.

Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 24, 2023



Deuteronomy 10:17-19a

“For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

John 13:34-35

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Today, we light the first three candles of the Advent Wreath – the candles of HOPE, PEACE and JOY.

Now we light the fourth candle of Advent. This is the candle of LOVE.

Jesus demonstrated self-giving love in his ministry as the Good Shepherd. Advent is a time for kindness, thinking of others, and sharing with others. It is a time to love as God loved us by giving us his most precious gift. As God is love, let us be love also.

Let us Pray:

Teach us to love, O Lord. May we always remember to put you first as we follow Christ’s footsteps, that we may know your love and show it in our lives. As we prepare for our celebration of Jesus’ birth, also fill our hearts with love for the world, that all may know your love and the one whom you have sent, your son, our Savior. Amen


Written by Connie Watson and Beverly Purnell

Glory to God on this Silent Night
December 24, 2023

John 1:14

“So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father’s one and only Son.”

My family and I enjoy spending our vacations at Disney World, experiencing the parks, the incredible food, the pools, the distinctly themed hotels, and the excitement of discovering new hidden treasures on the Disney property. Some of the most iconic events are the spectacular fireworks and laser light



shows at each of the theme parks. The music and the pyrotechnics combine for an incredibly inspiring presentation whether you view them from a sandy beach, a lake, Main St. USA, a restaurant patio, or even a hotel balcony.

If you were announcing the birth of a future king and savior of the world, wouldn't you expect the proclamation to be accompanied by the spectacle of a Disney firework show? Perhaps the news should be introduced to people who have paid a prime entrance fee, to the upper class, or to other important leaders of the world? This is not the way the birth of Jesus was revealed. Common, humble people—simple shepherds—were the ones who heard the news from the angels. “Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them” (Luke 2:9). They announced Jesus' humble birth in the nearby small town in less-than comfortable accommodations.

“Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others...praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased’” (Luke 2:13-14). Just like our beloved firework displays, we want the angels' announcement to sound like Handel's Messiah's “Glory to God” chorus movement. Perhaps the heavenly host proclamation was simpler in this remote setting to these humbly people.

Think about that night, was it quiet in the fields? It was indeed a holy night and ultimately inspired incredible music and special carols that we hold close to our musical hearts. The carol, “Silent Night” is very special to our congregation as we use this during the candle lighting part of our Traditional Christmas Eve service—usually right before the chiming of the midnight hour. The lyrics to “Silent Night” were written in 1816 by Josef Mohr, an Austrian priest, and the music was composed around two years later by Franz Gruber, a teacher and organist in Oberndorf, Austria. The context of the creation of the hymn is quite intriguing. The Napoleonic War had ended, and people were trying to reclaim the normalcy of their lives, healthy relationships with one another, and to build the political and social infrastructure that were affected by the 12 years of the war. Add to this a natural phenomenon of the eruption of Indonesia's Mount Tambora in 1815 which caused climate changes, crop failure, and famine. According to Sarah Eyerly, “Mohr's congregation was poverty-stricken, hungry, and traumatized. So, he crafted a set of six poetic verses to convey hope that there was still a God who cared.”

The carol was first sung on Christmas Eve in 1818 with Mohr accompanying the hymn on his guitar, a very simple and folk-like presentation to the congregation. Mohr had moved in 1817 to the St. Nicholas parish in Oberndorf and he had asked his friend the composer and organist to set the stanzas to lyrics. The musical style is called “*Siciliana*” because it has two beats split into three parts each. This is commonly written as the meter of 6/8 and has been considered to set a pastoral mood (relatable to shepherds in the fields). I have read common tales that report that the organ in the church was not functioning on a particular Christmas Eve and the song needed to be played on guitar. I believe that may be a sensationalized myth and that Mohr and Gruber intended “Silent Night” to be accompanied by guitar because it was a beloved instrument of Mohr's and the simplicity of the style, melody, and harmony would resonate with the congregation.

“Silent Night” conveys a message of hope, grace, and peace that transcends eras and nationalities. When we raise our candles during the last verse on Christmas Eve, may we all realize the power and significance of that simple night, the night of the announcement to common shepherds: That the

Savior of Our World, our Redeemer, our God With Us would bless the world with His Presence. And for all of us, "All IS calm, All IS bright." The simplicity of the candles from my perspective from the organ bench on Christmas Eve rivals any of those spectacular fireworks shows.

Let us Pray:

Dear Lord, in this most blessed season of Christmas, may we all realize the hope, grace, and peace you have given us through Jesus Christ. May we truly understand that we have a Heavenly Father who cares enough to be part of our lives through our joys, struggles, accomplishments, and relationships. Please be with us when we share the life-changing saving grace from the little Child, born in the humblest of settings. Thank you for our blessings and for being surrounded by your heavenly peace.

Written by Dr. Jeff Baer

Christmas Eve Night – Lighting the Christ Candle
December 24, 2023



Galatians 4:4

"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law."

On the eve of our Christmas celebration, Jesus' birthday, we light all the candles of the Advent wreath. First, we light the candle for HOPE because Jesus is our hope. Second, we light the candle for PEACE because Jesus is our hope and peace. Third, we light the candle for JOY because Jesus brings joy. Fourth, we light the candle for LOVE because Jesus is love. Finally, we light the center candle. This is the CHRIST candle. Jesus is born. Jesus has come. Jesus is our salvation.

Let us Pray:

Great God of love and light, we thank you now for the light of that special star over two thousand years ago that guided humble shepherds and wise men to the holy babe. Lead us now, by the light of your love, that we also may follow you to the new life in him. In celebration of the birthday of our King and our Savior, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen

Written by Connie Watson and Beverly Purnell



Christmas Eve at Bethesda

By Emma F. Graham (1977)

Christmas Eve at Bethesda is the loveliest time of the year
For it's when we get together – Jesus' story once more to hear.
The spirals are standing tall and proud against a midnight sky
The windows cast a welcome glow to people passing by.
Come in! The door is open wide so pause and say a prayer.
You'll find the nicest people are waiting for you there.
The Advent wreath glows brightly – lit with tender loving care
And children wait expectantly for carols in the air.
The altar is gaily decked with poinsettias red and white.
The holly wreaths and candle glow makes very pleasant sight.
The Good Shephard smiles on all from the picture up above
And we sense a sweet desire for God's own perfect love.
We have gathered for the Festival of Carols upon the joyous night.
God seems a little closer, everything a little more alright.
We hear the Christmas story – old, yet ever new
Of a Baby born in a manger – a Savior for me and you.
Angels sing an anthem "Peace on Earth" – of man's eternal dream
With Jesus, the hope of all mankind and love as its majestic theme.
The choir takes up the story with carols old and true
Of a shining star and an angel choir in a midnight sky so blue.
Beautiful music to touch the heart strings of the soul
To bring back happy memories of Christmases of old.
"Silent Night" will ring down thru all eternity.
And fill our hearts with gladness in this community.
The organ signs a last "Amen" as we each go our own way
Friends with us "Seasons Greetings" for now it's Christmas Day
The midnight stars are twinkling cold and clear and bright.
Enchanted Night! O Silent Night! When Jesus came the Prince of Light.
So good friends of Bethesda – I'm going to leave you here!
And wish you One and All "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!"

* * * * *

Home for Christmas

December 25, 2023

Matthew 2:13-14

"When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.' So, he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and left for Egypt."

Many of you may not know this about me but I have the privilege of being a military child. My father served twenty years in the Navy before retiring and taking his air traffic control experience into the Federal Aviation Administration. Between the Navy and the FAA, I had moved nine times before graduating from high school and another five times before moving out on my own. It took me an additional three chapters to find my place here in Salisbury.

"Hometown?" and "Where are you from?" are two questions that I dread answering and I never feel entirely comfortable with any possible responses. Do I answer with where I was born (Iceland), where I lived the longest (Mansfield, PA), where my parents currently live (Yukon, OK), or where I currently live? For me the concept of home changed from a tangible place to more of a feeling a long time ago. I feel most at home making music. No matter where we lived there was always a school band and a school choir to join. Through band and choir, I made friends and found a community.

The fall of 2018 I found myself again searching for a community since many of the friends I had made during my first year in Wicomico County had moved on to other jobs. I really missed singing and was actively looking for a choir when someone mentioned that Jeff was starting to prepare the Christmas Cantata and perhaps had a need for another alto. Through that first Cantata I found my community/family and never looked back. Bethesda became family and one of the most significant places I consider home.

May the music of the Advent and Christmas season strengthen the bonds you have with each other, the church, and God. May it also reach those who have yet to find their "home."

Let us Pray:

Dear Lord, thank you for your Holy Presence and for providing the distant, homeless, and traveling faithful children with a home in your heart. May the people who have faith in your saving grace be able to praise and worship others who are seeking sanctuary and identity with your Grace. Amen

Written by Laura LeBlanc

How to Keep Christ in Christmas!

- C** Is for the **Christ**, God's gift as a Child
- H** Is **humility** meek and mild,
- R** Is **receiving** His loving care
- I** Is the **interest** He has to share
- S** Is for **songs** the angels sang,
- T** Is for **Tidings** of great joy that rang
- M** Is for **Mary**, Christ's Mother, so mild,
- A** Is for **Angels** who sang to her Child
- S** Is for **Shepherds** who traveled afar and found the manger, following a star.

Christ has always been in Christmas. The word suggests it. It is a time of great joy. How one celebrates "His" birthday is of his own choice. (We pray in a "Christian" way.)

Great rejoicing of the Savior's birth is preferable with song, prayers, happiness and sharing. Happiness is created by fellowship, singing, and attending Church.

Helping someone in need or visiting a lonely "shut-in" is rewarding.

Written by Mrs. Warren Smith

Contributed by Mary Lynn Deckert in memory of Mrs. Smith who led my childhood Christian Endeavor group at Grace Reformed Church in Frederick, Maryland

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Thank You

An idea has bloomed! Thanks to all our friends who were willing to write a devotion for Advent! I hope you will enjoy using this during your devotional time each day. My very sincere thanks to Rev. Zac, who agreed with the project and guided us, to our fantastic proofreader Susan, and our very patient and efficient typist Lois. May you be blessed by the messages shared, and may you consider blessing those who rely on Salisbury Urban Ministries with your items of food using the Reverse Advent Calendar for suggestions.

Blessings to all in this very special season.

Mary Lynn



BETHESDA
United Methodist Church

GROW DEEP | BRANCH OUT | BEAR FRUIT

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