

Advent Devotionals

2017

Fenton First Presbyterian Church



God

Jesus

★ Christ

Gift of God

King of Kings

Alpha & Omega

The Lamb of God

★ Redeemer, Deliverer ★

Glory of Israel, Bread of Life

Anointed of God, Beloved of God

Son of God, ★ Word, Teacher of God

Son of Man, Eternal Life, ★ Word of Life

Morning Star, Servant, Witness, Holy One

Mediator, Advocate, Passover, Shepherd, Master

★ Jehovah, Nazarene, Messiah, Ruler, Son of David ★

The Life, Image of God, Prophet, Truth, Way Redeemer

Lord of Hosts, Messenger of the Covenant, Truth, Judge

Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting, Prince of Peace

Friend of Sinners, Finisher of Faith

Emmanuel

A Season of Hope & Expectation

Advent Hope★Peace★Joy★Love★Christ

For many of us, our Christian faith has its climax after we die, when we enter heaven and enjoy the very presence of God. Believers and martyrs have clung to this promise of eternal life for centuries and it remains as the stanchion of every funeral sermon that I write. We do not grieve like those without hope. As much as we hope to enter heaven, it is in the season of Advent and the celebration of Christmas that we remember and experience heaven coming down to us.

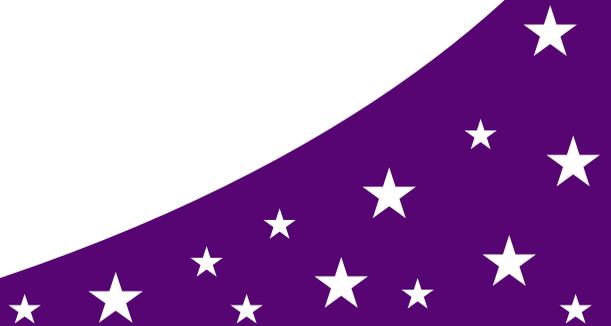
We call it the incarnation, God being in and among us.

We find it in Genesis 3 as God walks through the garden in the cool of the day. We find it in Revelation 21 as John witnesses the City of God descending to earth from the heavens. We also find it in the message of Gabriel the angel, speaking to Mary. The promise and prophesy are given to a young girl. That same promise is given to the Church as we should learn Christ's ways, our identity in Christ and incarnate that identity to the world.

Earth and heaven are not as inseparable as we might imagine. Heaven is always present, though not always visible. Remember the curtain that separated the sanctuary of Solomon's temple from the throne room—the Holiest Place? That curtain sometimes is blown aside, and for a moment we can see heaven. In Christ we find that curtain has been split right down the middle. In the season of Advent we wait, not to ascend to heaven, but for Heaven to come to us.

These are stories about just that, Heaven coming to us. Stooping down, humbly, softly and quietly; God with us.

Pastor Robbie



Advent Candle HOPE

Devotion: Waiting and Faith Go Hand-In-Hand

What's the longest you've had to wait for something? I imagine almost everyone has a memory of Christmas Eve as a child, squeezing your eyes shut, trying with all your might to go to sleep on Christmas Eve. For those of you with strict parents, you knew that even opening one present before Christmas morning was akin to sacrilege...And so you counted sheep and waited.

Waiting is still difficult. We expect everything to be at our fingertips the moment we have the desire for it. It's a world we're growing into and it's addicting. We live in a world of easy downloads, instantaneous email, on demand and food prepared in a few minutes. Yet God finds ways of making us wait. Waiting and faith go hand-in-hand.



Artwork by Jason Davis

Waiting is the embodiment of faith.

In Hebrews 11:13 we are reminded that faith involves trust in God's promise even if the promises of God are fulfilled long after we're gone. The writer says, "These all died in faith without having received the promises, but they saw them from a distance ..."

Application: Remain Faithful in Your Waiting

Advent is about faith and waiting. What are you waiting on God for this year? Remember the years of silence as God's people waited for the Messiah. The entire nation of Israel waited centuries before their eternal king appeared. Mary wasn't given a full-grown son.

The Wise Men from the east didn't see the Messiah appear at their front door.

Take time today, right now, to reflect on the fact that God's timing is quite different from ours. The story of Jesus' birth gives us assurance and joy because even though the waiting lingered for decades, God broke through at just the right time.

Are you struggling with a lack of faith? That's OK. Most of us try to grow a forest in one day. Jesus, however, invites you to begin with a tiny seed. Watch it grow and wait for it to become all that you dreamed it would be. Are you willing to plant faith and wait upon God? Nothing seems to be appearing on the horizon today, but just wait! God always keeps his promises, even to those who have little faith. Just wait

Take it into This Week: How Waiting Affects You

Share: Share with a friend or family member something you are waiting for.

Encourage: Encourage someone you know who is weary of waiting. Remind them of God's promises.

Evaluate: Take inventory of your relationship with God. Are you struggling with His silence?

Express: Create a decorative poster of things you have faith God will do for you, your family, and your church in the coming year. If you have kids, invite them be a part of the project. This is a great time to teach them about the concept of faith. Display it in a prominent place in your home.

Pray: *Lord, I remember the years of waiting and hoping for a Messiah. I'm often impatient with my life. Please teach me to enjoy You and not just the blessings I see in Your hands. Fill my days with laughter and joy through hardship and uncertainty. Remind me that when I think I'm waiting for an eternity, it really isn't. Life on this earth is infinitesimally smaller than a second in the light of true eternity.*



Growing up, my immediate family was very small. We could easily sit around an extended dining room table or gather together on couches and the floor to open presents on Christmas Day. Sometimes we got what was on our Christmas List to Santa, and other years we didn't always get what we wanted or needed.

As I imagine Christmas traditions for my own family with young children, there is something that we added to our family Christmas traditions. Before our children even begin to look at toy catalogs and imagine what they might want for Christmas, we turn our hearts to families and children less fortunate than ourselves.

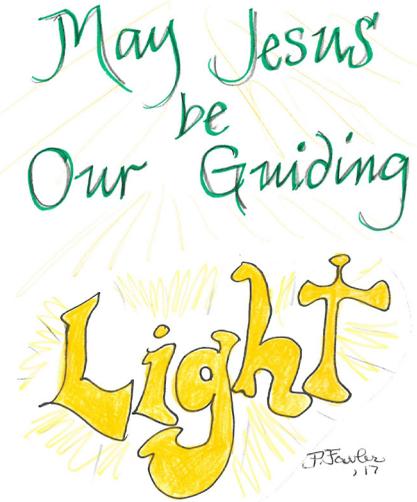
At church, on an Angel Tree, or through an organization such as Compassion International, we will pick the name of children about the same age as our own children. We'll imagine what they might be excited to receive under the tree. Sometimes there isn't enough money to buy Christmas presents for their own children due to financial hardship, medical bills, or lack of wages.

We have found that you can't give a gift with grace if you're thinking of yourself first.



As I consider the turbulent state of our world this holiday season, it is the teachings of Jesus that can give me guidance:

- *“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” Matthew 25:35*
- *“Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me” Matthew 25:40*
- *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” Matthew 7:1-2*
- *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:34-35*
- *“But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” Matthew 5:44*



Be generous and kind, especially to those in need. Welcome strangers. Don't judge others. Love one another.

These are the teachings of the man whose birth we celebrate on Christmas. I understand he also brought the good news of salvation, and that message gives me the comfort that one day I will be united with him and all the loved ones who have preceded me. That feels more abstract and "other worldly" to me. It is his teachings about how to live my life while here on earth that can guide my daily living.

This holiday season, as always, I will decorate the house, shop for gifts, and enjoy good food and the company of loved ones. I will also pray that He will help me and the world live by his teachings of kindness, generosity, hospitality, acceptance and love. May Jesus be our guiding light. Merry Christmas to you and yours.



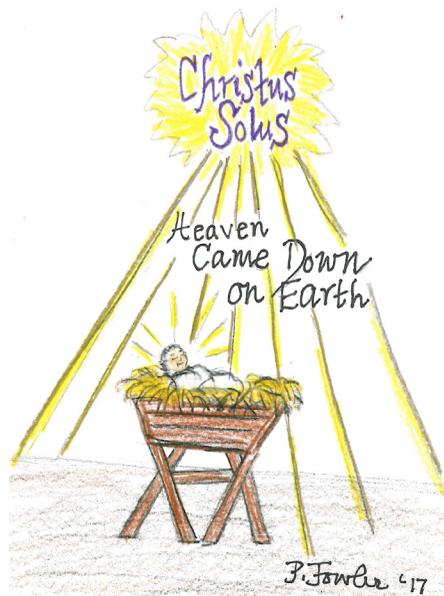
Inspiration from this writing came from Pastor Robbie's sermon and the hymn "How Great Thou Art" on Sunday, October 23, 2017

CHRISTUS SOLUS - CHRIST ALONE

Christ's earthly parents had traveled a long and lonely journey to a faraway town where they were denied proper lodging. Instead, they were lodged in a lonely barn. They were Alone and Alone they delivered the baby boy who, Alone would deliver us all from our sins.

HEAVEN CAME DOWN ON EARTH,

"How Great Thou Art" to send Your Son as a baby... a baby boy who would grow into a man... a man who lived his earthly life showing us **"How Great Thou Art"** God, who is Man on Earth, **"The Son not Sparing."**



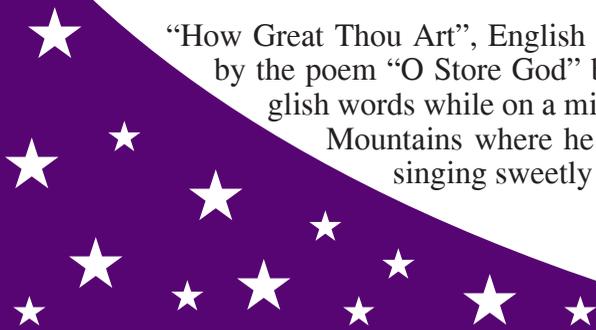
Jesus was born here on Earth, He Lived and Breathed here on Earth and was crucified here on Earth. Then, according to God's plan from the beginning, was raised and born again in his Creator's Heavenly Kingdom.

"He Bled and Died to Take Away My Sin" and Henceforth, Jesus will **"come with shout of acclamation and take me home, What joy will fill my heart!"**

WHAT JOY THERE IS IN HIS BIRTH...ALONE IN A MANGER...ALONE ON A CROSS.

WE NEED TO MAKE ROOM FOR HIM IN OUR HEARTS, MINDS AND SOULS. JESUS ALONE IN OUR LIVES - CHRISTUS SOLUS

"How Great Thou Art", English words by Stuart K. Hine who was inspired by the poem **"O Store God"** by Carl C. Boberg. Mr. Hine wrote the English words while on a missionary trip in the 1920's to the Carpathian Mountains where he heard the **"rolling thunder"** and **"the birds singing sweetly through the trees"**.



A Blessing of Love

As I grow older I've come to appreciate the many blessings I have received over the years and daily. Funny, how we choose to react or appreciate our gifts. The phrase "that God will not give me more challenges than I can handle", or should it be, than **we** can handle? Even when challenges seem "impossible" or not right or unfair, I know that with God's help I'll get through it and whatever outcome evolves, well, that's alright too. For instance, maybe the doctor's advice didn't "sit well" with me, but inside I knew he was advising me for my own good. Just as the disciples probably didn't think Jesus knew what he was doing when he gathered everyone to tell them about his Father's house and how everyone may gain entry. More to the season, how about Mary and Joseph going for a **LONG** donkey ride while she was pregnant, but they knew it was going to be okay because one of God's angels told them to go. Often times we may look up and say or think-"Is this really necessary, why me?" It's not a test, just a nudge from God, we still have the ability to decline or proceed. So many times when I've completed a task begrudgingly, I have felt better for having done it, but not sure why. Just as our reading from Luke 21 warns "watch out! Don't let my sudden coming catch you unawares" I guess I've just tried to make sure I wasn't wasting my gifts, but rather, using them as God had intended.

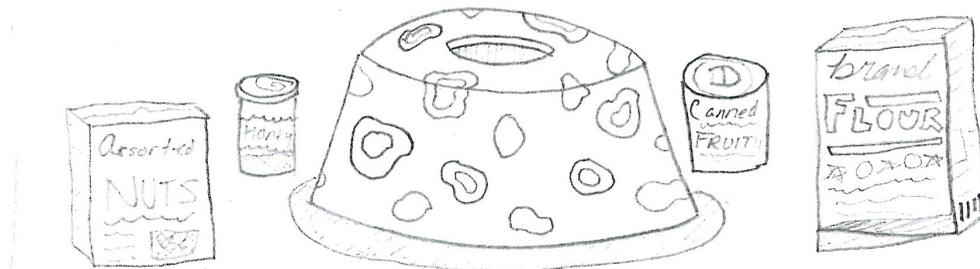


Artwork by Vera Thorton



Baking Season

For me the advent Season is also the Holiday Baking Season, when I make pounds of sweet treats to share with family and friends. At first there didn't seem to be a connection between baking and Advent; but I quickly realized there is.



Artwork by Skye Hodgkin

Fruitcakes are the first goodies I bake every year (this recipe is actually good!). The old Mennonite recipe I use starts with flour, salt, and baking powder – ordinary, basic; not tasty by themselves, but all necessary. Much of Advent may seem that way; just doing the necessary, unexciting activities in preparation for Christmas.

Added to the ordinary ingredients are honey, sugar, spices, and pineapple juice. These are the sweet ingredients that make the Season special. To create a tasty batter, butter is needed to blend the sweet and the ordinary together. The butter can be compared to love, blending the everyday with the special to create a wonderful Advent season. When I feel the less enjoyable tasks of Advent/Christmas are overwhelming the joy, I know it is time to add more love.

Finally I add those extra exciting ingredients: candied fruits, dates, nuts, and brandy. These are the special events that remind me of why I celebrate the season. Included are lighting the Advent Wreath, the wonderful music, and setting up the Nativity, and even a few “nutty” times – events that only come once a year and bring joy.

Taken all together the ordinary, sweet, and special time of Advent combined with love and mixed well, creates a wonderful experience to share with friends, family, and even strangers.

God grants you a sweet Advent.
Merry Christmas!

A Story for Everyone

As a child living on a dairy farm, the Nativity Story offered familiar images to me. Jesus was born in a stable and slept in a manger. The first people to receive the news of his birth were shepherds. I was in our barn every day, watching our cows eat from their manger, and herded them to and from milking. So, from that perspective, I easily identified with the shepherds in the Gospel of Luke and thought I understood it all.



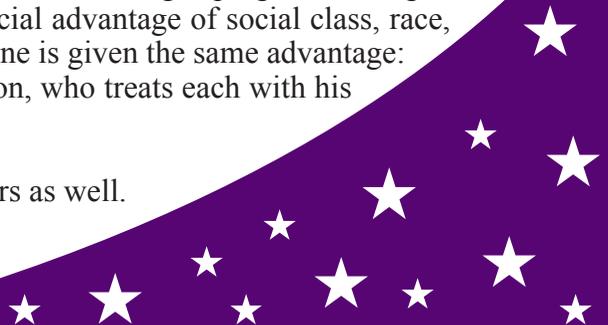
Artwork by Vera Thorton

Some years later, while studying the Bible in college and seminary, my focus shifted to the Visit of the Wise Men. I appreciated the role that scholarship can play in interpreting Scripture and understanding theology. From that perspective, I appreciated the Gospel of Matthew, hoping I might one day become a “wise” man myself and understand it all.

So what’s my recent understanding? Do I now think that as a senior citizen I have a special grasp on the story of Jesus Christ? Truthfully, I still don’t understand it all. Actually what I’ve come to appreciate from the Gospels is that there are no preconditions that give any of us a special advantage; and that’s not a problem. In fact, it’s a benefit. What becomes apparent in all of the Gospels is how universal the message of Jesus Christ truly is.

An amazing thing in the Gospels is the wide range of people to whom Jesus reaches out and affirms. What’s impressive is that there is really no single group to whom Jesus comes exclusively, or that has a unique inside track for grasping his message. On one hand, no one comes to Him with a special advantage of social class, race, or education; but, on the other hand, everyone is given the same advantage: the Grace of God brought to them by his Son, who treats each with his personal love.

This changes their lives; and it changes ours as well.



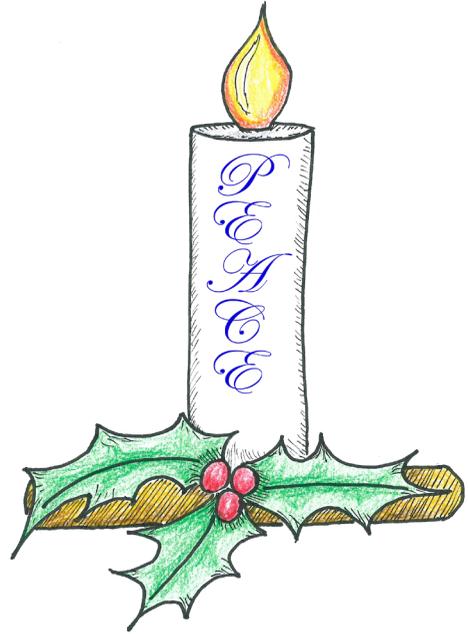
God works in our lives by many means, some mysterious, others more obvious, and many times through the people that touch our lives. It is so remarkable that sometimes a few small words from a friend can truly change the world around you. It has been a blessing for me to have a close mentor, since my sophomore year, that I can call upon for professional advice and when we are about to depart for a visit, he will whisper something to me and it is always the right thing to say. One time I was particularly struggling with a decision of where to move in my life and what to do as my career was changing, and I drove two hours to visit with him to try to sort life out. He and his wife listened patiently and as I was leaving the home he said, "Whatever decision you make will be the right one," and gave me a hug and sent me on my way. It was something simple to say, but filled me with the confidence I needed to make a major change in my life and without those few words, I would have continued to struggle. It was that boost in strength I needed to decide to leave all my familiar surroundings and come to Michigan. It was the start of a journey that led me back to participate at a church. Years later I was telling him all that I accomplished and at the end, he simply said, "I am proud of you," which meant the world to me. God works in strange ways and sometimes through us or through people we least expect. Our words don't have to be complex or our sentences long to be profound and life changing, sometimes a few simple words is all it takes. I will never forget the strength and power of words upon someone who is struggling and when it might have an impact. Say something nice to someone today; it could change their world and their lives.



*Advent Candle P.E.A.C.E.***Devotion: Peace—The Importance of Preparation**

Whenever we're on mission with God like Joseph and Mary were as they waited for the birth of Jesus, we have to prepare. No one plants seeds one day and expects a harvest in the morning. There are things to do. We are called to cultivate our lives and rest in the fact that God has our future in his hands.

In the story of the prodigal son, Jesus tells the story of a father. This father knew that he couldn't control the will of a rebellious, spiteful son. He just gave him what he asked for and let him go. But after the son left with his share of the farm in his back pocket, the father began to prepare for a celebration. He started fattening a calf. He bought a ring and a robe. There were things to be done. Their relationship was broken, but he still had hope as he watched every afternoon for a familiar figure to appear over the horizon.



Artwork by Jason Davis

Preparation is a statement of faith. It's committing to trust in the peace of Christ, even though you're hurting and heartsick. Every detail of the Christmas story tells us that Mary and Joseph endured more than their fair share of trials as they waited for the arrival of Jesus. Mary left town. Joseph refused to reject her on the basis of an angelic dream. We can just hear the neighbors gossip about the scandalous events of Mary's pregnancy. But they prepared and endured it all to be on a much greater mission than any carpenter's family could imagine.

Application: Preparing for God's Plan

As you prepare for Christmas and all God has in store for you in the New Year, be challenged to prepare for all that's in store in the following ways:

- **Eliminate distractions.** Don't allow the stress of the Christmas season to distract you from what is really important. Spend more time with the family and less time at the mall. Simplify your life. Be still and listen to God's voice. "... keeping our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith ..." (Hebrews 12:2). "You planned evil against me; God planned it for good ..." (Genesis 50:20).
- **Notice God's hand.** Reflect on this past year. Perhaps you, like many, have faced financial difficulty. Or maybe you've escaped danger or disease through an unforeseen miracle. Perhaps this year has been a time of suffering or relationship disasters. How has God carried you through all these things? Remember the words of Joseph in the Old Testament: "You planned evil against me; God planned it for good ..." (Genesis 50:20).
- **Discern God's will.** Ask God to give you direction. "A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord determines his steps" (Proverbs 16:9).
- **Unite in a mission.** Mary and Joseph undertook an amazing mission on the way to Bethlehem. It certainly must have strengthened their bond as they conquered many obstacles and challenges. There's nothing more powerful than a couple, a family, or a church rallying around a cause.

Take Peace This Week: Ways You Can Prepare

Share: Discuss ways your family or Bible study group can prepare for future challenges.

Evaluate: Identify distractions that will keep you from truly worshipping Christ this Christmas.

Express: Go on mission as a family or with a group of friends. Find a family or an organization you can help as they prepare to celebrate Christmas.

Pray: *Ask God to help you see what He wants you to do.*

Christmas traditions incorporate special sights, sounds, smells and tastes. Most folks think of an evergreen tree as one of their special Christmas aromas. We live in a very old house, and I am frightened of fire, so that is not part of our family's Christmas tradition. Our family cooks! While I love Christmas dinner, with every dish carefully planned and lovingly cooked, it is not the defining scent or taste of Christmas for me. Dessert is my favorite, it is much less formal than dinner and the smells and tastes are wonderful!

Baking is a family affair for us. Each type of pie has one cook in charge to make and bake it. But we use the assembly line method for preparing our favorite cookie recipes. Someone will make the batter and the rest of us will roll the dough and dip it in sugar. Another person is in charge of the ovens. We spend hours together in the warmth of the kitchen with sweet aromas floating through the air. As the cookies are come out of the oven, the family waits eagerly for any imperfect samples. Then someone will call out; "Eat the wounded!"

Every member of the family has their favorite dessert; Patrick loves the pumpkin roll, Sean has to have the chocolate crinkle cookies, and I desire John's homemade pecan pie. There are so many favorites that we can only make a couple every holiday. The best part of our baking tradition is sharing the bounty of baked goods, whether they go to coffee hour, a cookie party, an office party, or are put on a fancy Christmas plate for company. All the extended family leaves our Christmas celebration with a plate of cookies to take home. It is one way that we can share our Christmas joy and savor the tastes and aromas of Christmas for a few more days.



May the love of Christ fill your days and the hope and joy of Christmas bring you happiness!

Advent - The time of waiting and preparation for the birth of the Messiah

Isaiah 26:7-9 *The path of the righteous is level; O Upright One, you make the way of the righteous smooth. Yes, Lord, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts. My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you.*



Artwork by Sarah Martin-Fanone

Lord Jesus, we wait for the arrival of your birth. We prepare our hearts to receive you afresh. And I wonder, what would my life be like if waiting and preparing for you were my foremost desires each day? What would happen if I searched for your presence morning and night?

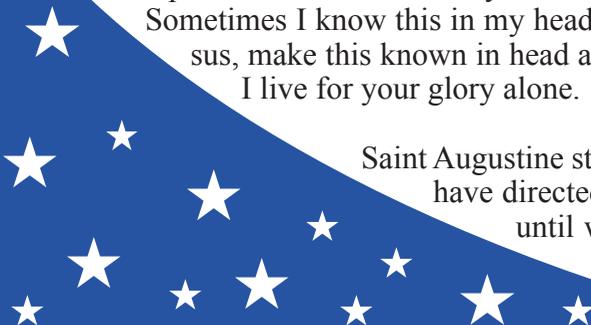
With my best efforts, I strive to be the person you, O Lord, would have me be; yet, my earthly desires cloud my intention to be close to you. My desire to get my Christmas to-do list taken care of can override time spent enjoying the wonder and beauty of this holy season. My desire to have a clean house can take away from spending time talking and laughing with my girls. My desire to say the right thing, get the right gifts, wear the right dress, eat the right foods, or simply stay home and rest can keep me from experiencing you if you are not what I desire most!

Isaiah 26:12 *“Lord, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us.”*

Desires are not the problem, it’s what we desire; and when you, Lord, are relegated to the back seat, my life goes awry. Help me break free of relying on my own efforts and remember that peace comes from knowing you, trusting and believing that it is you who provides all I need. Every accomplishment I’ve had is because of your hand.

Sometimes I know this in my head, and other times only in my heart. Lord Jesus, make this known in head and heart so that you are my only desire, and I live for your glory alone.

Saint Augustine states, “You made us for yourself, O God, and have directed us toward yourself. Our hearts are restless until we rest in you.” May you alone, dear Jesus, be our first desire so that we may know peace.



Silver and Gold

In “Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer,” Burl Ives sings of “Silver and Gold. Silver and Gold decorations on every Christmas tree.”

We decorate our trees, not only so they look beautiful, but so they will shine with love. It is one way of letting our love shine for others. The beauty of the ornaments on our trees shine with our love for God. They are our way of thanking Him for the gift of His son Jesus. He has given us the gifts of silver and gold, but most important He has given us the gift of His Son.

On that first Christmas, the light of the silvery star shown down. The gold that the wise men brought certainly did shine. And... I’m sure the faces of Mary and Joseph gave off shine also.

All for the birth of the baby Jesus.

So, let your love shine with the sparkle of “silver and gold” this Christmas season.

Merry Christmas with love!



Purple, purple, pink, purple.

She carefully lights the advent candles in the traditional order. The first purple candle is lit, touching our hearts with renewal of hope for God's world. The second purple candle represents God's promise for peace that passes all understanding. The pink (or rose) candle, a change from the purple associated with Advent's penitential preparations, is the joy candle and reminds us that we are to rejoice in the Lord always. And finally, the last purple candle calls us to love one another as God has so loved us.



After leading the Advent prayer, she sits with the congregation. She holds in her hands four envelopes. She had decided to make a special offering for each of the four Sundays of Advent.

For HOPE: Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA); 2017 has seen hurricanes, earthquakes, mud slides, flooding, and wildfires. PDA, the emergency and refugee program of the Presbyterian Church, focuses on the long term recovery of disaster impacted communities.

For PEACE: Presbyterian Peace and Global Witness Offering; enables the Church to promote the Peace of Christ by addressing systems of injustice across the world.

For JOY: Presbyterian Joy Offering; provides assistance to current, retired, and future church leaders who have/are dedicating their lives to God's will.

For LOVE: Presbyterian Giving Catalog; full of choices to make a difference in the lives of people around the world.

As the offering is received, she joyfully places her envelopes in the plate: As we anticipate the promise of God's righteousness, as we hope for healing for the afflicted, as we yearn for the Prince of Peace, as we wait so expectantly, may we also be inspired to act.

Let us discern how and where can we make a difference in our community and our world.

She is ready....ready to celebrate the Nativity of the Lord Jesus Christ: Let us all take advantage of this Advent season to discern how God is calling to each of us in hope, peace, joy, and love. Let us prepare our hearts and minds and take action to realize God's love in our world. A blessed Christmas to all!



I read a passage recently while participating in a Bible Study. It stuck with me and I remember it because it gave me an answer to a question I asked myself many times, “Can I be a good Christian if I don’t go to church?”

I used to answer myself, “Yes, I can. I am a good Christian. After all, I go to church when I can (which was usually once every few weeks and hardly ever during the summer), I pray to God, I read my devotional occasionally, I give my time to others who need help and I try to follow the 10 Commandments.” However, I started to feel that what

I was doing wasn’t enough. I still felt an emptiness in me that I couldn’t seem to fill, not with food or drink, not with keeping busy, work or play, and not with trying to “fix” every “crisis.”

That’s when something changed in me. I decided I wanted and needed something more. So, I began to get more involved in church. I started coming to church more often and soon every week. I volunteered to teach for Carpenter’s Corner. I became involved with a couple projects with Congregational Life and eventually became an Elder and now a Deacon. I continue to be active because I have found that my involvement connects me to a special group of people. People who also want to grow in God, to be filled with his light.

The passage I read recently is, **“Churches are meant to be places where we become equipped and fortified to minister out to the world.”** My answer to my original question now is, “Yes, we can be a good Christian, but we can be a BETTER one by allowing ourselves time to go to church regularly, enjoy the programs and get to know the people. We can all equip ourselves and fortify ourselves but we can do it BETTER by keeping God’s light shining in us. We can only do that by staying connected.

I could not have learned that without the programs, experiences and teachings from members and friends at FFPC. Because I chose to utilize my church as a place to grow, I don’t need to search for things to fill me up anymore. I have learned I am going to be all right, God has my back and so do the people at Fenton First Presbyterian Church.

As we are waiting and preparing the birth of Christ. Wait No More! Fill yourself with praise, glory, fellowship and education every week at church.



The rites and rituals of Christmas serve many functions. They help us to reconnect with Christmases of the past to Christmases of the present via the perennial displays, decorations, activities, customs, and observations of this holiday season.

We all have an inner voice that speaks to us about the good and bad in our lives. We remember. We remember at home and in our church. We remember the loss of a loved one. We remember the joy of a good community. We remember the wonderful smells and tastes of a shared feast. We remember the loneliness of a winter solitude. We remember the earmarks of our children. We remember the observations of an elderly grandparent.

And so we come back to ritual. Ritual to set things up one more time as they once were when life seemed simple and well-defined. Ritual to once more observe the customs that speak to us. And if we are fortunate enough, these same customs may also help us to reconnect to ourselves.



“The Completed Circle”

If I could paint I would picture a resurrected Christ:
luminous, radiant . . . kneeling beside the *Infant* in the manger bed.

I would picture a Nail-printed Hand touching the *Infant's* forehead
or the Incandescent Christ bending to kiss the *Infant's* cheek.

And the circle would be completed on the great *transfiguration* story
that weaves through the universe and the pages of our lives!

(“God is at the same time on the cross and in the Virgin Mary’s womb.” – M. Luther)

“Simple Miracles—Advent Love”

Tiny snowflakes dancing down—
Minute seeds of life,
Fairy-like to feed the ground,
So radiant, so white.

Sun shines on them—mystery!
Blue sky breaks above.
Still, tiny snowflakes tumble on—
In miracles of Advent Love.

“Heart-strings”

Love-Came-Down in heart-strings and sinew—
intimate, humble, ardent,
accessible, real, tender,
bone of our bone, at last, flesh of our flesh;
LOVE . . . CAME . . . DOWN!



(With reflection upon Lk. 2, Gen. 2:22 & C. Rosetti’s poem.)

Advent Candle Joy

Devotion: The Unconquerable Gift of Joy

Joy is trusting when you want to doubt. “Trust in the LORD forever, because in Yahweh, the LORD, is an everlasting rock!” (Isaiah 26:4). As Christ followers we aren’t pressured to do it all for everyone. We trust in Jesus to do the heavy lifting. The key is trust. We just need to have Mary’s response to the coming of Jesus, “I am the Lord’s servant,” said Mary. “May it be done to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38).

Joy is receiving what you want to reject. Can you imagine how the innkeeper would have felt if he said no to Mary and Joseph, if he knew who Mary’s child would grow up to be? We find joy in making room for people in need. Reflect on the mysterious words found in Hebrews: “Don’t neglect to show hospitality, for by doing this some have welcomed angels as guests without knowing it.” (Hebrews 13:2).



Artwork by Jason Davis

Joy is celebrating when you want to fear. What’s the first thing angels say to mortals?

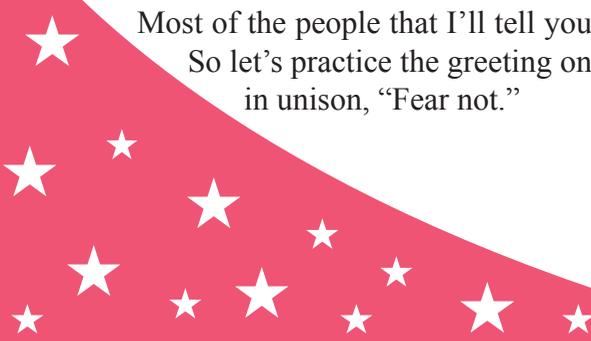
It’s standard protocol. In just about every divine encounter the angels say: “Fear not.”

I can hear Jesus instruct His most trusted angels, “Okay, let’s go over this again ...

Most of the people that I’ll tell you to speak to will be scared out of their wits!

So let’s practice the greeting one more time.” Then the angels would all say

in unison, “Fear not.”



Application: Understand Why We Can Be Joyful

The message is clear. God is not looking for ways to scare us into faith. He drew near to us to relieve the worries we have about crossing over the divide between heaven and earth.

He wants you to know that He's going to take care of you no matter what happens.

One of the names that He was called long before he ever stepped on this world's stage was Immanuel meaning "God with us." No matter what you go through we can whisper this simple truth: "Jesus is with me." Think about it. He is with you in your greatest victories and your most humiliating defeats. Jesus is with you at all times in all things.

Taking Joy into This Week: How to Choose Joy

Share: Invite each family member to share one thing that they're trusting God to handle.

Encourage: Write a note to someone who is experiencing fear and worry. Let them know you're praying that God will give them the courage they need.

Evaluate: Make an inventory of the things that bring you joy.

Express: Make the time and space to share a meal and a fun experience. This is such a busy week! Don't miss the joy of sharing the experience of Christmas with each other.

Pray:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is discord, union.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is darkness, light.

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love;

For it is in giving that we receive,

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

— Prayer for Peace of St. Francis of Assisi



Send Me

There is a place where we need someone to go. There are people here who have many belongings but live in despair. There are others who have little and also live in despair, wishing they had more. There are others who lie, cheat, steal and take advantage of others simply because they can. This is a place where they will know you but will not receive you. These people need your help but many will not listen. Even though you show compassion, love, kindness, firmness, and truth, many will come to hate you. They will betray you, accuse you, beat you, and even kill you. And all the while you will forgive them.

Send me; I will go.

We live in a world where evil finds its way into our lives and we see its effects on a daily basis. But this world is not all evil; there is also good and we see that too. We are, as believers in Christ, compelled to do as Christ showed us and share the Good News of who He is, what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do. As we see the bad things happen around us, we respond to these and help where we can. We do this because of faith in Jesus Christ.

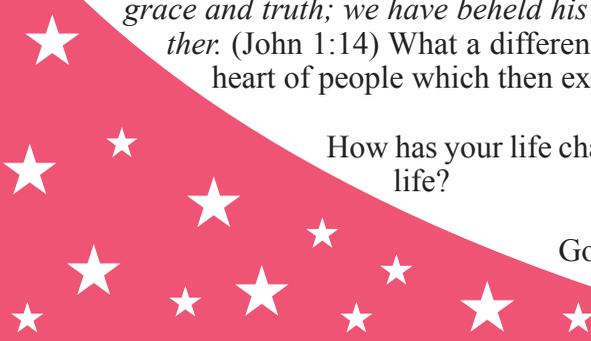


Artwork by Vera Thornton

What a wonderful gift God gave us when he sent Jesus to this world. What would your life be like without Christ? *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.* (John 1:14) What a difference Jesus makes changing not people but the heart of people which then expands from the inside out.

How has your life changed or is changing because Jesus is in your life?

God is Good!



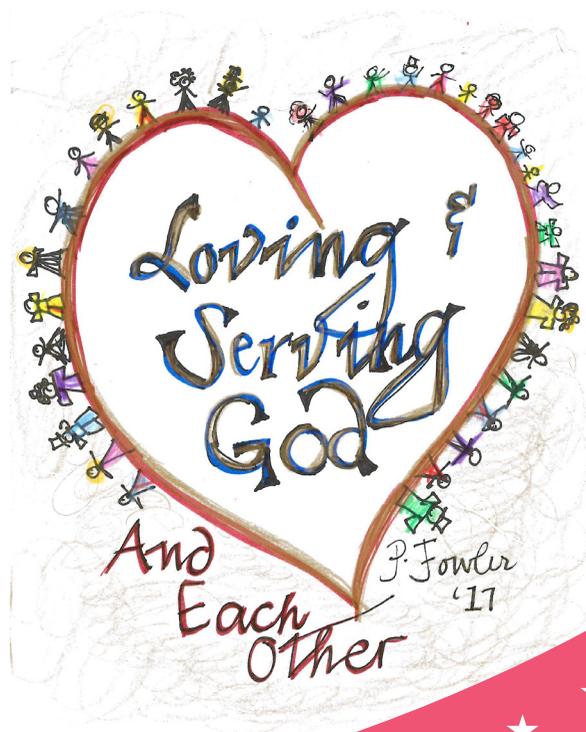
On a wall in my doctor's office is a picture with a characterization of a girl with pony tails and below is written:

You want to pay money for a dead tree
Not be freaked out by a fat man in a red suit
And eat candy out of my sock!

That pretty much sums up some of the best know traditions society commonly follows at Christmas.

How wonderful could it be if all society commonly celebrated the simple birth of a baby who grew into a man that lived and taught about the magnificence of God's Kingdom. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who inspired all people to know God's love for us and the importance of living each day of our lives loving and serving God and each other.

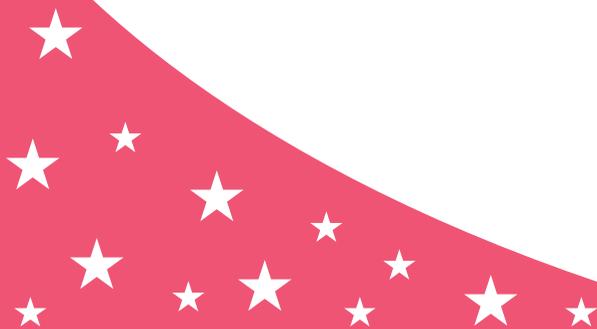
Peace and Love, Merry Christmas



Tuesday, December 19th
2 Kings 2:9-22; Acts 3:17-4:4

Kelsey Hoerauf

I can certainly empathize with Mary regarding preparing for a baby. There's just so much to do, so much to think about! Perhaps she didn't have to buy a new car seat and crib, but she did have to deal with the enormity of being wholly responsible for a new human life. For her, not only a human, but the son of God. Being pregnant now, I can understand the hopes, fears and dreams she must have had for her new babe. He could not only change the world, but save the world. I pray my baby will one day grow up and do great things as she must have as well. The anticipation for her and Joseph for being new parents must have been so scary and exciting. I'm sure they, like us, don't want to mess this up! There are so many things to consider, what school should he attend one day, how will we keep him healthy if he gets sick? I know we can't wait to have a son, and they must have anticipated meeting him on his birthday just as we do. We will likely not feel the true magnitude of our responsibility for him until the day he is born. I'm sure Mary and Joseph felt the intense, overwhelming love for their child in addition to becoming acquainted with their new role as parents on the day of Jesus' birth. We wait in excited anticipation for the arrival of our son and remember the birth of Jesus all around the same time of year. Here's to the hope of bringing a new life and a wonderful influence on the world into being very soon.



It was 1967 when we started the practice of an Advent Wreath in our home. There was only one baby then but the practice continued as the family became five.

In time, as the boys grew, it was the candle snuffer they argued about. We gathered at the dining room table and Dad or Mom read an age-related devotion.

Then, mercy, whose turn was it to snuff the candle!

Years passed, a new Advent Wreath was made and the practice continued, only now the boys also took turns reading a devotion.

Decorations were always out early so the Advent Wreath would be ready for that first Sunday, the week of Hope. Some years it was lit every night, some years only on Sundays, but the practice continued. Last year after many years of placing the Advent Wreath and continuing to light the candle(s) I decided it was not necessary after all as it was just for me, big mistake. This year there will be a new Advent Wreath in this house and the practice will continue.

They are only man-made wreaths with 4 or 5 candles, but it was a family time, it was a practice, it was a happy time, but is was and is a special time to remember what Christmas is about – Hope, Love, Joy and Peace.

Precious Lord I pray for Hope, Love, Joy and Peace for our families, our country and our world at this “KINDEST TIME”.

KINDEST TIME

Christmas-time is the best time because it is the kindest time. Nobody ever felt very happy without feeling very kind, and nobody ever felt very kind without feeling at least a little happy. So, of course, either way about the happiest time is the kindest time—that's this time.

By Booth Tarkington



'Twas a baby, baby, baby bright. He was born on Christmas night. The angels announced. Bold shepherds came. Eastern Starmen brought tributes.

The Full Inn Man, Seth, wondered why. "There sure is a bright star tonight. But it couldn't mean anything here in our burg. Jerusalem's where big things belong." Seth visited the stable after things calmed down. The baby boy was cute. Seth called him "my boy."

Tax time ended and Bread Town went back to sleep. Seth had time on his hands, and asked around about the Babe and commotion back then. Answers didn't come. Then there was an amazing Shabbat Experience. "She will bear a son..." (Isaiah 7:14) droned Rabbi Wise. Seth was so curious that Rabbi began a study for some men. Another verse jumped up for Seth. "From you Bethlehem...shall come one who is to rule Israel." (Micah 5:2) "Not 'My Boy,' he was common," thought the Empty Inn Man.

Seth enjoyed two more tax registrations over the years. Business was really good then. He took a vacation before Passover one year. He and his friend, Amos, were on Amos' roof watching crowds coming past. There was a man on a donkey. People were shouting something and laying down their coats for the animal to walk on. Seth burst out, "Why, that's MY BOY!" After Passover he resumed his Bethlehem life. He was dismayed to learn that "his boy" had been crucified. Must have done something really bad.



Artwork by Vera Thornton

At the next Passover, Seth heard Peter preaching outside the Temple. Peter said the "boy" was resurrected from the dead, that Seth's "boy" was Messiah. He wasn't criminal. The charges were false. Seth went to several sermons by Peter and James. He believed the resurrection story. His barn became a church. Seth even preached now and then. He always started with, "It was a baby, baby, baby bright. He was born on Christmas night."

In three days we'll celebrate the amazing baby bright anew.



Today is Dec 22, three days until Christmas. Over the years I've had many and varied feelings about this time of year. The season of advent, (from the Latin *adventus*, meaning "coming," a translation of the Greek word *parousia*), coincides closely with what our secular society calls the Christmas season; now more politically correct, the "holiday season."

Now I really love this time of year and there is just "something" about a white Christmas morning. Christmas means that my kids spend several days visiting from their homes far away.

December 22 is the anniversary of my dad's passing. Not a happy event by any means, but it was a tipping point in a year plus series that led me to finally hear God's calling. It is simply amazing the difference that comes from finding the correct piece to fill the God-shaped hole in our hearts that we are all born with.

I'm a December birthday, so is Mary. It's good to think that we share that commonality with Jesus. Sure, scholars can't agree even on the exact year of Jesus' birth, much less the month and day and there is a wealth of scholarly thought that argues against December 25 reasonably being the birthday of Jesus. Birthdays were not an important part of Jewish custom and celebrating the birthday of Jesus is even considered a blasphemous pagan worship by various sects. Jewish tradition honors the date a person dies (*Yahrtzeit*) -- honoring a birthday ties us to things of the earth rather than of the spirit.

We do honor the day that Jesus rose from the dead, a birthday of sorts, as Easter. But ascribing a day to honor the incarnation is also important in my view. It matters that Jesus was born, lived among men, taught, preached and healed. That he rose as the firstborn of the dead gives hope to those of us with faith in the promise of God, and gives fullness and meaning to life. God sees the heart, and to consider glorifying the beginning of Emmanuel as a pagan blasphemy is a legalistic stance that is Pharisaic.

To all my fellow congregants at FFPC, and to all my sisters and brothers in Christ, I wish you joy this advent and Christmas season and always. May the peace of God in Jesus envelop you always. AMEN.



Saturday, December 23rd
Judges 13:2-24; John 7:40-52

Rebecca Lawrence

My favorite Christmas memory would definitely have to be the tradition Bob and I had with our daughter Sarah since she was about 4 years old.

Together we would head to the tree farm in search of the “perfect” Christmas tree.

Cutting down our tree was a special day. We would search the farm until we found the “perfect” tree. Sarah would “hold” the tree as Bob cut it down. After the tree was all tied down, we finished with hot chocolate, then home to decorate. These memories are very special to us.

FFPC has become such a significant part of our lives and family, never have we felt more welcome, needed or part of a “family.” This congregation means the world to us. From day one, not only has our faith become stronger but our new family too.



Artwork by Sarah Martin-Fanone

Advent Candle LOVE

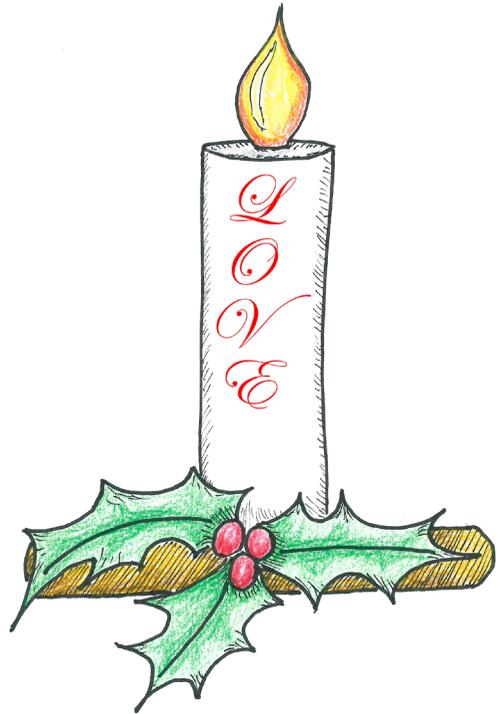
Devotion: A Love Like That

He couldn't do anything for himself. Born with cerebral palsy, he sat in the wheel chair loving every second of the Christmas musical. He faces challenges that I can't even imagine. The family sat in the back of the auditorium, perhaps not wanting to distract. And sitting next to him was a proud mother, I couldn't help stealing a glance throughout the evening, to see her stroking his hair, wiping his mouth and smiling all the while. She adored him. "He's my life. He's the greatest blessing that ever happened to me," she said.

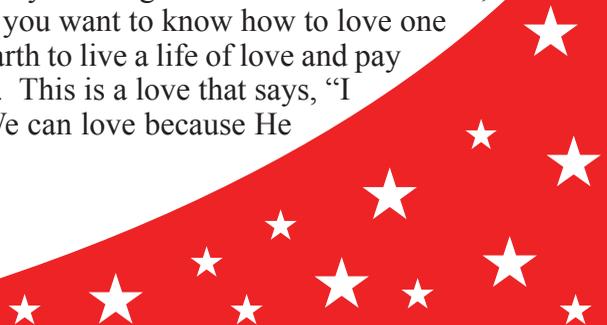
Application: He Taught Us to Love One Another

Amazingly, you are God's treasures and if you follow Him, He will be forever yours. "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). "But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ dies for us!" (Romans 5:8).

No doubt you've already heard the familiar words of "O Holy Night" this year. Don't miss out on the truth in the final verse: "Truly He taught us to love one another; His law is love and His gospel is peace." If you want to know how to love one another, look at the love that sent Jesus to earth to live a life of love and pay the price for all our sins. It's all about love. This is a love that says, "I am willing to love you no matter what." We can love because He first loved us!



Artwork by Jason Davis



Taking Love into This Week: Living a Life of Love

Share: Share a time in your life when you felt most loved by God.

Encourage: Invite a friend to your church's Christmas worship service. Most people become a part of a church because they are invited by a friend.

Evaluate: Are you striving to love people the same way Christ loved you?

Express: Create an ornament or present for Jesus to put under your Christmas tree. Put a picture of yourself or a heart inside. We can give our lives and hearts to Jesus, because that's what He wants the most at Christmas.

Pray: *Lord, I realize that your mission is all about love. You love us so much that you gave us the most precious One in the universe, your Son Jesus Christ. This is a season of giving, but it can also be tainted by selfishness and despair. Keep us away from the things that come in like thieves and steal the message and joy of Christmas. Surely you taught us to love one another!*



Artwork by Vera Thorton



When I was a kid I didn't like to decorate. I liked eating cookies better than making them. I rarely got anybody a present. But that didn't mean I wasn't excited.

My parent's house had a front parlor. It was the room that you weren't allowed into unless company comes. Rarely did I have any business in the room. It was this room that was set aside to prepare for Christmas. It was early December that the tree went up and slowly accumulated gifts underneath it. Some years, in the last week of Advent, we were excluded from the room entirely by the big sliding wooden doors so that gifts could be wrapped and placed under the tree.

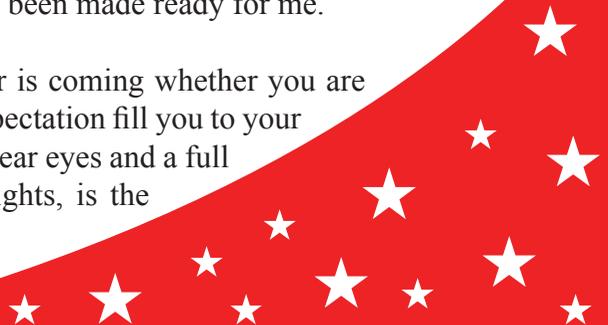
Every Christmas Eve, we went to a service at our church. It was strange to be in the sanctuary at night and sing carols. Everything had an eerie glow to it as the contrast between the light and shadows was intensified by dimly lit stained-glass windows. It seemed very hushed and quiet; or was it that the roar of what was coming the next morning drowned out everything else? Once, coming out of a Christmas Eve service, we discovered a homeless man had crept into the back of the family van to sleep the cold night away. We couldn't be angry, it was Christmas! There was license for mercy on Christmas Eve.

I fell asleep, having nary a concern about if I was ready. I fell asleep expectant that Christmas was coming and that meant good things. Peacefully I slept knowing that I was more than ready because it had already been made ready for me.

May you delight in the fact that our Savior is coming whether you are ready or not. May the excitement of that expectation fill you to your brim. And may you wake tomorrow, with clear eyes and a full heart, knowing that God, the Father of Lights, is the giver of all good things.



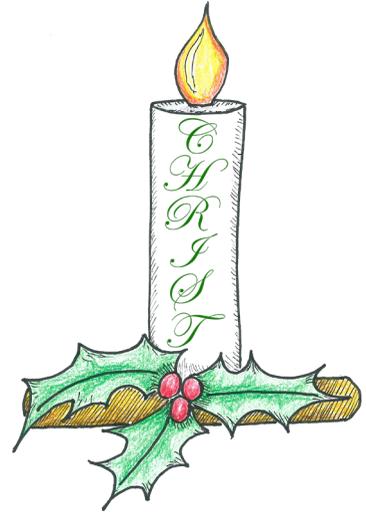
P. Fowler '17



Advent Candle C.H.R.I.S.T

Expecting and Remembering Christ

Advent is about expectation and remembrance. We enter into the story of a world in need of a new start. It's as much about the journey as it is the destination. And as we travel on this Christmas journey we remember. We remember Christmases of joy and hardship. We remember people we love who aren't around our table anymore. Some memories are sweet. Others are difficult. The Italian poet Cesare Pavese wrote, "We do not remember days; we remember moments." Another man at the end of his life said, "I've had my moments, but if I had my life to do over again, I would have more of them."



Artwork by Jason Davis

Can you imagine all the moments Mary had that first Christmas Eve? Luke tells us that she kept all these memories and treasured them in her heart. She saw and experienced things no one had before or will again. She wasn't selected because of her wealth, education, royal lineage or great deeds. In fact, the Bible is silent about the requirements for being the mother of the Messiah. We only know that God favored her highly among women. God's glory consumed her life from the moment Gabriel visited her. God's glory, His radiant love transformed her. She held the Son of God that night of which we sing. It was a holy night. God's glory came to earth and wrote a love letter to the world in the form of a newborn baby.

Application: Catching a Glimpse of God

What happens when you catch a glimpse of God? You treasure it. Mary could've had bitter memories about the travel arrangements, the lack of planning, the constant need to improvise. But in a barn full of visiting animals, horses, mules, stray dogs, camels, splinters, hay and horse manure, Mary kept all these things treasured in her heart.



That night she had to contend with Joseph's snoring and the shepherds, loudly recounting the amazing appearance of angels. They probably woke the baby several times that night. But just before dawn, when everyone except Mary and a mule was still asleep, she gathered a tapestry of memories:

- the beautiful colors of Gabriel's clothes
- the look on Elizabeth's face when she turned and saw Mary
- the busyness of packing for the dreaded tax appointment
- the "No Vacancy" signs
- the nervous, frustrated father
- the tiny hands of the newborn king

I would imagine she wept and smiled. She experienced an orchestra of emotions in concert with the breeze that swept through the Bethlehem hills like a newly released Spirit.

We each have opportunities to capture memories of Christ when we follow Him. Knowing that He became our Savior gives us a reason for joy. It's Good News worth celebrating and joy worth finding.

Taking Christ into This Week: Create and Cherish Your Memories

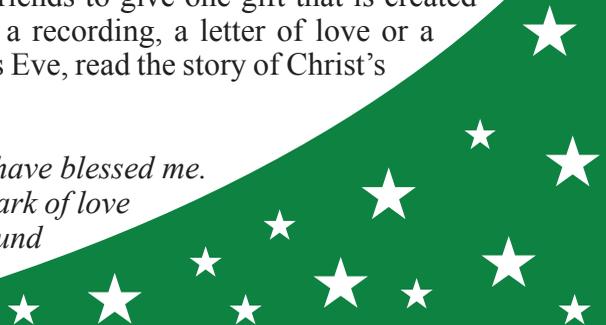
Share: Journal a favorite childhood Christmas memory and share it with someone.

Encourage: Challenge others to create memories of joy and love this Christmas.

Evaluate: What memories do you wish to make next year? Ask yourself this question: *If I were to live just one more year, what would that year be all about? Plan to live that way in the coming year!*

Express: Challenge family members and friends to give one gift that is created rather than purchased. It might be a craft, a recording, a letter of love or a baked good. Wherever you are on Christmas Eve, read the story of Christ's birth in Luke 2.

Pray: *Lord, remind me of all the ways you have blessed me. Teach me to number my days and leave a mark of love in the lives of people around me and around the world.*



Acknowledgement Page

With grateful hearts, we wish to thank all who contributed their thoughts, talents, and time to create this Advent devotional booklet.

Many thanks to those from our church family who contributed stories and poems to share their memories, traditions, and feelings about the meaning of Advent or Christmas and to enrich our Advent season.

Several others from our church family used their artistic talents to enhance the stories and poems. Our thanks to Annabeth Carnes, Jason Davis, Peggy Fowler, Skye Hodgkin, Julie Hussar, the Martin-Fanone family, Lucy Muesch, and Vera Thornton for sharing their talents. Additional thanks to Peggy Fowler for overseeing and coordinating the artwork.

Our appreciation also extends to Kelly Sunman-Davis and all the behind-the-scenes volunteers who committed their time to prepare and publish the booklet.

Blessings to all!



Artwork by Vera Thornton

*Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.
Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*

*The sun shall no longer be
your light by day,
nor for brightness shall the moon
give light to you by night;
but the LORD will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory.
Your sun shall no more go down,
or your moon withdraw itself;
for the LORD will be your everlasting light,
and your days of mourning shall be ended.*

From Isaiah 60



Advent Season Dates Worship, Learn, Serve

November 22: Community Thanksgiving Service at 7:00pm at St John the Evangelist Catholic Church. Followed by pie in the Activities Hall

November 26: St. Andrews Day Celebrating our heritage and witnessing to fullness of Christ's Church

9am Worship Service

10am Fellowship

11am Worship Service

December 3rd: 1st Sunday of Advent, Hope

9am Worship Service

10am Fellowship

11am Worship Service

5pm Blue Christmas Service - Fenton United Methodist Church

December 9th: Salvation Army Bell Ringing

December 10th: 2nd Sunday of Advent, Peace

9am Worship Service

10am Breakfast with a Christmas Angel

11am Worship Service

Intergenerational Caroling Party

December 17th: 3rd Sunday of Advent, Joy

9am Worship Service

10am Fellowship

11am Worship Service Choir Cantata, The Winter Rose by Joseph Martin

Youth Christmas Party

December 24th: 4th Sunday of Advent, Love

10am worship service

7pm Family Christmas Eve Service with Children's Pageant

11pm Christmas Eve Lessons and Carols Service

1st Sunday After Christmas Day

10am Caroling Service

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