

ADVENT 2018



Coming
Home

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
OF FENTON

P. Fowler '98

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Key Words for This Advent Season

As you begin to prepare your heart and home for Christmas, we hope this Advent Devotional will help you respond to your natural longing for the heart's true home during this season of joy. Christmas is about much more than physically coming home to celebrate with family and friends. Christmas is a spiritual thing—it's a God-thing, and it's a chance to Come Home to God in very powerful and profound ways.

Throughout the season of Advent, these next four weeks at church, we'll talk about coming home to the spiritual values of Christmas—coming home to hope, peace, joy, and love. All of these are greatly needed in our world right now, and probably greatly needed within our own spirits. They are the spiritual Christmas gifts that the birth of Christ can bring to us.

Even more than these gifts of hope and peace, love and joy, we need a real HOME—a place to belong, a connection, a purpose, and a welcome and meaning that lie far deeper than simply being in the right location. We need and we long for a home that transcends the physical world and travel with us wherever we go.

When we are in relationship with Jesus—wherever we are—whoever we are—whatever we might have done—we are in relationship with God...and we are truly AT HOME. The God of the universe says to you, “Today, and always, I am coming home with you, and in MY LOVE you will find your true home, with ME.”

Welcome home. Welcome home to the presence of God. Welcome home for Christmas.

On the first Sunday of Advent we light the first purple candle. As we light this candle we are reminded that faith involves trust in God's promises, even if the promises of God are fulfilled long after we're gone.



Luke 21:25 “And there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on the earth nations will be in distress, anxious over the roaring of the sea and the surging waves. 21:26 People will be fainting from fear and from the expectation of what is coming on the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 21:27 Then they will see the Son of Man arriving in a cloud with power and great glory. 21:28 But when these things begin to happen, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

This verse is from the Lectionary today, but what a verse to be reading during the Christmas season! On the other hand, it seems like there are many signs of distress and anxiety today. The whole world seems to be roaring and surging. It does not seem irrational to faint from fear and certainly it feels like the very powers of heaven are being shaken. From the Christmas Party next week to the Federal Financial Policies next year, it is hard to find a balance between what we can do and what we will certainly get swallowed up by.

It is as if we find ourselves, as a country and as individuals, on the playground; and we are at the top of the swing and we don't know whether we are completing one sweep, beginning another, or are just still unrooted without any grounding. We need a moment to remind us who we are and whose we are. We need a second of pregnant possibility. We need hope that there is a future for ourselves and our world.

We find this moment in the manger. The sweet infant breath on our cheek, the snuffle of a baby in his sleep; the searching shepherds and the wandering wise men. It is not a moment of fear or anxiety. The mother's labor is passed and the room is quiet. Yet it is a moment full of expectation for the future. It is a hopeful moment.

Jeremiah 33:14-16

33:14 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 33:15 In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 33:16 In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The LORD is our righteousness.”

Just as Jesus' birth is filled with the promise of God re-orienting the world to hope, may your advent, your Christmas Season, be re-oriented to hope. May that hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe that God came in Jesus to make our home His home. And may you abound in this hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.



O, Lord
You have Always
been our
HOME
Our Lives
Should Be
HOLY
And Dedicated
TO GOD

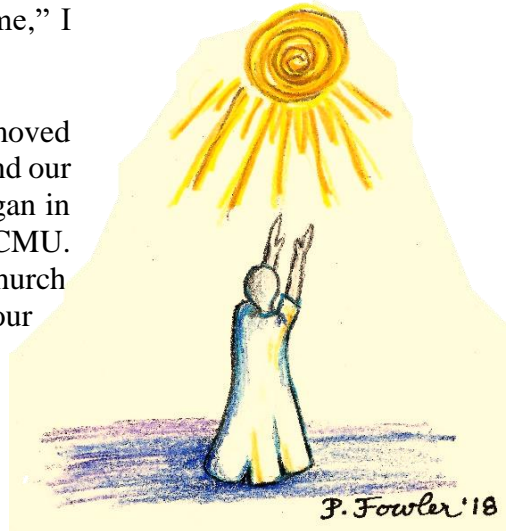
J. Fowler '18



When I think of this year's theme, "Coming Home," I think of Psalm 63, "Longing for God."

By the time I was 20 years old, our family had moved ten times. I was born in Niagara Falls, New York and our tenth and final move brought us to Fenton, Michigan in 1972. I was in my sophomore year in college at CMU. With each new move, we would search for a new church family. Fenton First Presbyterian church has been our church family for 45 years.

Robert Kelley, Pastor Emeritus, was our pastor at that time. He first made me aware of Psalm 63 during one of his sermons. It struck me deeply and it brings me home to God, always.



Psalm 63: 1-3

"O God, you are my God, and I long for you.

My whole being desires you;

Like a dry, worn-out, and waterless land, my soul is thirsty for you.

Let me see you in the Sanctuary; let me see how mighty and glorious you are.

Your constant love is better than life itself."

Vs. 6-8

"As I lie in bed, I remember you. All night long I think of you,

Because you have always been my help.

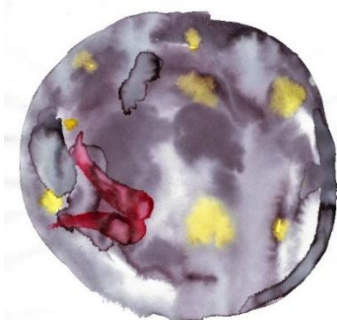
In the shadow of your wings I sing for joy, I cling to you

And your hand keeps me safe."

May this Advent Season bring us all Home to God and our Loving Jesus.



AN ADVENT QUESTION



Sarah Martin-Fanone

On a Winter Night
God's Son took flight,
From the stars
To the Human Sea.

Who would leave
the Heaven borne side,
For the lonely ride
From Bethlehem
To Calvary?



Lucy Martin-Fanone

Note:

I'm not really sure that I can actually claim to have written this poem because I'm not certain as to its origin. Oddly enough, it came to me in a strange dream this summer. In it, I was watching an old episode of the "Tonight Show" (back when Johnny Carson was hosting), and several guests were reciting this poem as a round, with each contributing a verse.

There are some logical possibilities. I may have heard or read it years ago; or it may have been some subconscious idea. Searches on line for the poem have not found a source; so, maybe, I did literally "dream it up." The more important question, however, is in the poem itself: who would make such a sacrifice; and why? That is where it connects with the theme of "Coming Home," and the question "When, and where, did Jesus come home?"

While the obvious answer is "At his Ascension—returning to his Father;" but a case might also be made for his Incarnation—coming to be with his people. A faithful response can be both. So, for this season let us welcome Christ as a loved one coming home to be with us.



HOME SONGS

I love music. I can't carry a tune, read a note, or play an instrument; but I can listen with the best of them. Music—especially sacred music—has the power to take me back to the many homes I have occupied. For example, when I hear *“When the Roll is Called Yonder,”* I am a child at home in and around Detroit surrounded by extended family. *“This is my Father's World”* carries me to a small Dutch community in Canada, and *“Here am I, Lord”* brings me to our home in upstate New York.

The music that seems the most powerful in flooding me with memories are Advent/Christmas hymns. Advent doesn't start for me until the first notes of *“O Come, O Come Emmanuel,”* *“Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence,”* or *“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus”* sound. The season ends when the last note of *“We Three Kings”* fades away. I don't think there is anything more beautiful than lifting a lit candle and joining friends and family in *“Silent Night, Holy Night,”* listening to our choir's voices soar in sacred praise, or singing *“Away in a Manger”* with loved ones around a Christmas tree.



P. Fowler '78

One problem I do need to guard against is just singing along without paying any attention to the words coming out of my mouth or letting my mind wander to all the things that I still need to get done while our choir sings. When I stop to really hear and think about the words I am singing or hearing, I am again filled with the joy, wonder, and holiness of the miracle we celebrate throughout the whole Christmas season.

My prayer for us is that we will all join together whole-heartedly in singing and hearing our praise, joy, hope, peace, and love in this wonderful season all the way from Advent to Epiphany. May the music carry us to places where we felt loved and inspire us to create places others will feel loved, too—home places.



December 25: What was the weather like that night when Jesus was born? Had it been a nice warm, sunny day or a bitter cold day with snow on the ground?

We know the sky was clear that night, and the stars shone down. Perhaps there was even a full moon to light up the sky.

The angels appeared to the shepherds in the fields, and the glory of the Lord shone over them.



Yvonne E. Thornton

What did the shepherds think about the brightness of this night? They were told by the angel that their Savior was born and where to find the baby lying in a manger. Did this brightness make the shepherds believe?

Would not that brightness have been seen by many others? The people in and around Bethlehem must have seen the bright lights. What did they think? Did they believe what the shepherds told them? Did they, too, push to the manger?

I'm sure the birth of a baby was great news. The people rejoiced in the birth of this baby. Yet, none of them knew (at that time) that He was the Son of God. More than 2,000 years later we still celebrate the birth of this baby—because “we know.”

Thank you, God, for the birth of your Son.

May your Christmas be bright with the heavenly light!

Love,

Bev & Jerry Welch



Christmas Past

We follow the time-tested traditions that connect us to what we know and what brings us comfort: the patterns of our activities that tell our senses that Christmas is soon to arrive; the colorful sights of our decorations; the smells and tastes from our kitchens; the sounds of carols; the feel of wool coats and mittens, and the heat of an open flame against the cold winter's night.

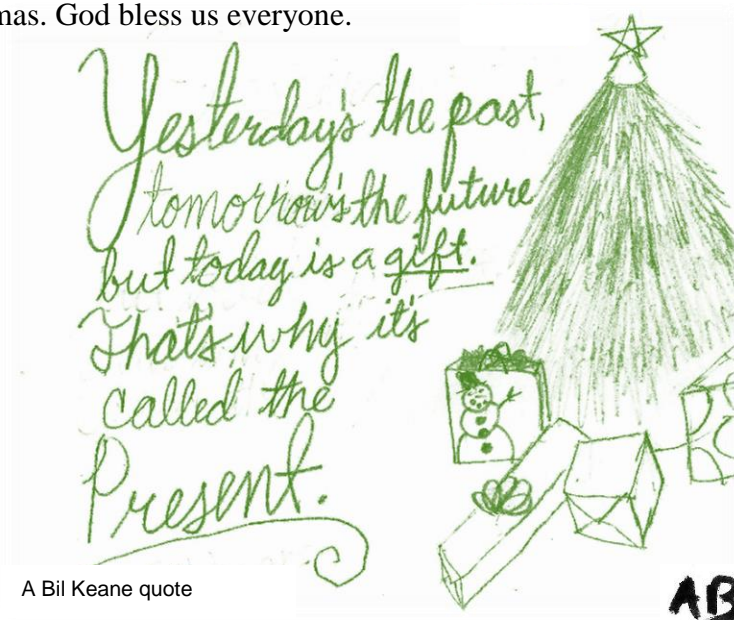
Christmas Present

Christmas present: talking to Santa or simply writing him a letter; visiting an old friend or relative to let them know one more time they mean something in your life; shopping, hopefully without stress, and finding new treasures; helping others who may need a hand up, to be fed, or some other life supporting aid.

Christmas Future

Finally, Christmas future: praying for a better time for all in the days, weeks, and months to come, that we find peace for all, including ourselves.

Merry Christmas. God bless us everyone.



On the second Sunday of Advent we light the first candle and a second purple candle. As we light the second candle it reminds us to trust in the peace of Christ. God has our future in his hands.



HE'S COMING

Suspenseful, anxious, and hopeful: a knock on the door. “Maybe it is the magazine prize people who have come to give us \$5,000 a week,” hoped Daniel. Sabrina said, “It could be Madison who’s come to play with me!” “Maybe it’s Bob coming home from Afghanistan!” yelled his twin Roberta. All eyes focused on the door as Mom opened it a crack and then swung it wide. There was a hush as all waited to see who was there.



The coming of the Messiah was suspenseful, anxious and hopeful. “Maybe I’ll be able to buy ten hectares of land and then raise crops to feed us and sell the extra,” said Hezekiah. Ruben snorted, “He’ll rub those brutish Romans’ noses in the dirt! He’ll set us free to make our own rules, levy only necessary taxes!” Anna sat on a wall, talking quietly to Rebekah, “Messiah is our spiritual savior, not a warrior. I’m praying that I’ll be able to understand and practice his teachings.”

What would an exciting, suspenseful advent be for us this year? Could I win the scholarship? The new job is mine. Should I take it? Can we go to Grandpa and

Grandma’s this year? What spiritual gift would make me a better Christian?

Today’s lectionary, noting John’s mission, is a quote from Isaiah: “*Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*” (Luke 3: 4-6)

These preparations are for a very important person. And “all flesh shall see the salvation of God” is an astounding assertion. Our faith forbearers had as much suspense, anxiety, and hope, as can be imagined, while waiting for the savior. Let’s pray that this year’s advent days will be exciting, suspenseful, and the beginning of new spiritual adventures for each of us.



As we wind down through fall to the beginning of winter and walk the path to the end of the year, it gets darker earlier. Summer gradually becomes a distant memory, but as the cold takes hold the expectation of the coming summer is nowhere near the horizon. As we near the shortest day of the year, many have joy in their hearts of anticipation of time with family and friends. It helps many of us to forget how darkness can arrive so early and stay so late.



Julie Hussar

The light of joy and love breaks through and for a moment the darkness is gone. It is like a door that cracks open upon a dark room. The light of Christ is inviting us to push the door open and receive him as our Lord and Savior.

Push open the door, hold onto this light and share it, for surely Christ's love will bring the troubled peace, the desperate hope, and the lonely joy. Hold onto the light, for the spirit of Christ, which allows us to forget the physical darkness of this season and will carry us through spiritual darkness of any season.

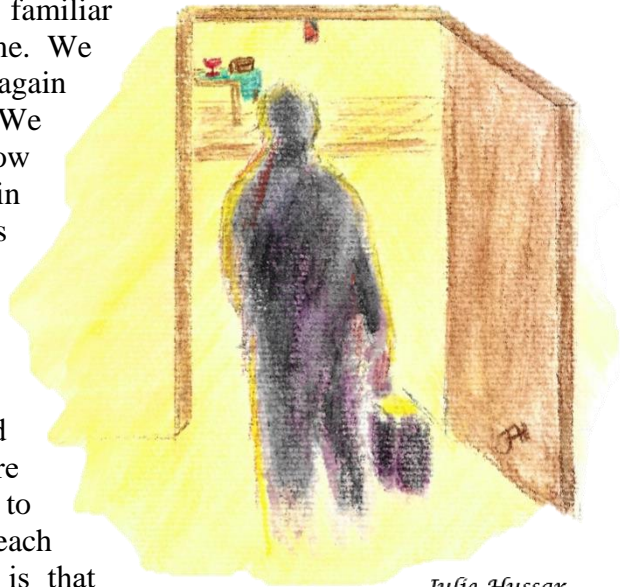


“Coming Home” has always been a special time for me to be with my family and share our unconditional love for each other.

Coming home from college at Christmas during my freshman year is my strongest memory. College started in August for me and my cooperative education experience was demanding. My first semester ended just before Christmas with 5 final exams during the last 3½ days of the term. Both the college and work experience challenged me to meet “adult” expectations.

So coming home to my family and familiar surroundings was especially fulfilling for me. We again shared family meals and stories. We again relaxed in front of a fire and played bridge. We again enjoyed special desserts and cookies. How I savored the love and laughter! And, we again went to the 11:00 pm candlelight Christmas Eve service at our church. How nice it was again to be a “child” in the family and a “child” of God!

Christmas Eve worship services still feel very special to me. God’s amazing grace and unconditional love for his “children” are overwhelming and yet so familiar. It is so nice to “come home” to God and my church family each year, each week, each day where “home” is that emotional connection and sense of belonging. I hope each of us feels God’s love and the love of our church family at Christmas and throughout the year!



Julie Hussar



Have you ever wished that you had Dorothy's ruby slippers? There's no place like home! There's no place like home! Nothing makes you appreciate home like not being able to go there.

In the last two years, John has twice suffered accidents that put him in the hospital for six to eight weeks. For me, that meant spending every spare minute that I was not working at the hospital with John. I missed spending my evenings at home! For John, it was even worse, living in a place where medical personnel popped into your space at all times of the day and night. While the food became all too familiar, it wasn't home-cooking. He didn't have his books, movies, or pet dog. John really wanted those ruby slippers.

Home: It is where you feel comfortable. It is the place where you enjoy working in your own kitchen, and you know the cupboard where the measuring spoons are kept. You know when to add cinnamon to your grocery list. Home is the people that you care deeply for, surrounding you. It is love, warmth, and refuge. Home is a place, it is a feeling. It is part of what we are.



“Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy.” Then it was said among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.” (Psalm 126: 2) As Christians, we have another refuge: Jesus Christ. He came for us. He gives us strength. He loves us! Matthew 23:37b describes Jesus like a mother hen: “How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.” This image of God speaks of home to me. It is the image of love, strength, protection, and of family—together. We may lack the ruby slippers to take us home, but we always have Christ with us.

Come home to Christ. Let us gather together in love, strength, and family.

Merry Christmas.
Janet & John Stork



It is the Christmas season beginning with Advent when we spend time enjoying and reflecting on family and friends. We visit each other and we party together with our family, our co-workers, and our friends. Come the holiday, we worship together and enjoy the company of our fellow travelers in this mortal lifetime—our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We also reflect on those that have passed on; that are no longer with us. We've lost many in our church family in just the brief time that Mary and I have been members of this church. Personally, we've each lost both parents and other friends and relatives that were close to us.

Today is December 13. December 13 is the birthday of my sister Gloria. She would be 71 years old this year, but she was taken away 41 years ago at age 29 in a brutal tragedy.

This year, perhaps more than other years, I'm feeling these losses more deeply than other years. More and more I remember my dad, my sister, my mother, various cousins, Mary's mom, and a long list of others—some that passed on after long full lives and others that were taken from us too soon, too young; naturally, or otherwise. Each ensuing year brings my own mortality into sharper focus and into stark contrast to others who departed younger than I already am. Bless their souls—God's will be done.

During this season of Christmas, we remember and celebrate the birth of our Savior and Redeemer, Yeshua, God's Messiah—that he was born for the sole and exclusive purpose that he would die a willing sacrifice for us all, so we might be saved. In him we have a great high priest who knows how we live, how we feel each day, and our joys and our sorrows. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows what it's like when a loved one dies, and he knows what death is like first hand. We will all reach the end of this life. No one gets out alive. But because of Jesus, we have the assurance of the promise of God that we will move on into eternal life with him. Advent means expectation, and while we use that expression in the context of expectation of the birth of God's son, so also do we expect that, in God's time, we will see our departed loved ones again resurrected in Paradise.

We comfort ourselves in this assurance and hope, and we are comforted in the certainty that our departed loved ones are awaiting our arrival. I love my life, I love my wife, I love my children and the life partners they've chosen. I love my church family, and I want to spend many years enjoying everyone. But, God's will be done; my soul belongs to the LORD and I serve at His command, now and always. Amen.





By: Lucy & Sarah Martin-Janone

Christmas is so many memories: memories of all the lights my dad would carefully hang outside our South Florida home; memories of watching the color wheel turn the silver tree red, green, blue and yellow; memories of the big box of cookies that would arrive in the mail from Grandma Battey in Rhode Island; memories of having trouble falling asleep Christmas Eve and waking up at the crack of dawn Christmas morn.

And then there are memories of Christmas in Michigan with our kids: wrapping gifts on the 23rd, and baking pies and attending the candlelight service on the 24th; Christmas morning was just as delightful with children as it was when I was a child myself; and memories of family gatherings of more than 30 when all 4 of Chris's siblings also had children.

I feel a little sadness at the loss of Christmases past with both our parents gone; but this year, there's a new excitement with little Caleb and seeing everything about Christmas through his eyes. Life is change.

Nothing ever stays the same, and we love those memories but are always making new ones, too. We are all so fortunate to live here in a safe community where most of us have plenty of food and a warm place to lay our heads. This Christmas I am grateful for all my memories and for my home and the people in my life. I pray that God gives strength and comfort to people who are struggling here and around the world and especially to the children who sometimes suffer most.

May God show us how we can make a positive difference in the world. Peace to you and yours this Christmas.



When I think of Christmas, I think of so many different things: family, friends, delicious food, laughter, and of course, Jesus. But the most exciting part of Christmas for me is when my Aunt Amy comes to visit from New York.

The night she arrives is full of hugs, decaf coffee, and conversation as we catch up on the few months we've been apart. In the next couple of days before Christmas, Aunt Amy often takes my sister and me shopping to finalize gifts for our families, or she helps us wrap presents while we watch Christmas movies. Several amazing meals are made—usually one with an expensive steak that only happens when Aunt Amy is here. Many kinds of Christmas cookies are baked: oatmeal chocolate chip, molasses, sugar, and snickerdoodles. What I love most about her visits are the little moments of conversation that we normally miss when she is so far away.

*Julie Hussar*

We are reminded many times throughout the Bible about the importance of spending time with family, and there is no better time to do it than the holiday season. To me, “Coming Home” means sharing God’s love with the people we appreciate most—our family—and it will always be one of my favorite parts of Christmas. My prayer for us all is that this season, we take some time to show our loved ones how much we care, and how glad we are to be home.



On the third Sunday of Advent we light the first two purple candles and the pink candle. Lighting the pink candle reminds us of the gift of joy we have in Christ. Jesus is with us at all times in all things.



I won't forget what it felt like to walk thru the door into the home of my childhood. I was walking into a space where emotions and thoughts took me from everyday normality to highs and lows in my life.

I Remember...As a child going into the house, I always felt safe. It was a place I could run to if I got hurt outside playing, a place I could fall asleep on the floor when I was tired from playing. It was a place my younger siblings and I played "communion." We argued over who would be the priest because that person gave communion. We raided the kitchen for saltines. The "priest" knelt behind the piano bench and the "people" knelt on the other side and received communion. The priest always received a few extra saltines. I still love saltines to this this day ☺.

I Remember...In my teen years, coming home was still a place I felt safe. I could slam the door as I came in from a bad day and instantly Mom or a sibling would come to ask what was wrong. It was a place where I could be in my room with a best friend trying on 50 different outfits before we went out. Often I had to hunt down my sister Debbie and demand the shirt I know she had borrowed.

As a young adult, coming home was more of a resting place than a safe place. I was so busy trying to build a career, make a living, or "be someone" that by the time I got home I just needed to rest!

A more spiritual adult these days, I often find myself coming home FFPC. I walk through the doors and I see family. I see the men's work group has put another coat of paint in fellowship hall. I notice the new quilts that have been hung throughout the church, new flowers on the alter, festive decorations, extra handicap parking, someone preparing food in the kitchen, and the people in the balcony.

For many years I have been "Coming Home," but the places I have been coming home to, change. I've realized it's not so much the places as it is the people I come home to. It's the memories I have made. The people that care to listen, that keep me accountable, that laugh with me, guide me to find answers for myself, and direct me to God. I have surrounded myself with those people and they are my home. I have my memories and I have found home.

Dedicated to my sister Debbie
I remember the shoes piled by the door.
I remember William.



Home is not a place ~
it's a feeling

“Coming home” makes me visualize a number of times and situations in my life, but a sign I recently saw summed them up for me in a simple statement: “Home is not a place—it’s a feeling.” Then I read an article by Pastor Richard Hong, who cited five basic emotional needs (**belonging, hope, purpose, feeling loved, and feeling assured**), and I could see “Coming Home” as the feelings that are the fulfillment of those needs.

Coming home is the feeling of a warm, comfortable relationship where I’m accepted and cared about, warts and all, and where I feel a sense of **belonging**. It’s where I can express love and caring openly and freely and accept it as well, which is often harder to do.

Coming home is a feeling of **hope** that casts out despair, makes every day feel new, and helps me see the promises of God. Bad things happen to all of us, but essential are those places and people who give us hope.

Coming home is a feeling of **purpose** and usefulness, of knowing that I’m using God-given gifts to better the kingdom of God on earth. There is so much need in our world. If I can help in some small area, that will be my little part. As Hebrew 16 says, “...and never forget to show kindness and to share what you have with others....”

Coming home is the **feeling of unconditional love**, the kind of love God extends to us and in gratitude we can extend to others. It’s loving others as we would want to be loved.

Coming home is the **feeling of assurance** and safety that God is constant, faithful, and always there for us no matter the situation. I think those people who help us feel this way are God’s hands and hearts on this earth.

We have many families—relatives, church, school, work, community, world—where all these feelings help us know we are coming home.

And eventually—for all of us—“coming home” will be into the loving arms of God.



If only we believe

You are God, the only God, the one who deserves our worship and praise.

There is nothing you cannot do, except what is holy and good, in your ways.

You spoke this world into existence, you made us by your hands.

And you told us how to live our lives, if only we had listened.

You lead your people out of Egypt, with miracles that showed your strength.

You gave them laws, and when they complained, you turned their censers into plates.

You came to earth as it was told, from a root of Jesse a branch would grow.

You showed us how to live our lives and changed us from within.

You told us no one gets to God; through you is the only way in.

After you had gone and Saul became Paul, he tried to convince the leaders of your ways.

Some believed and some did not, but all had walked away.

Then the word of God's salvation was sent throughout the land.

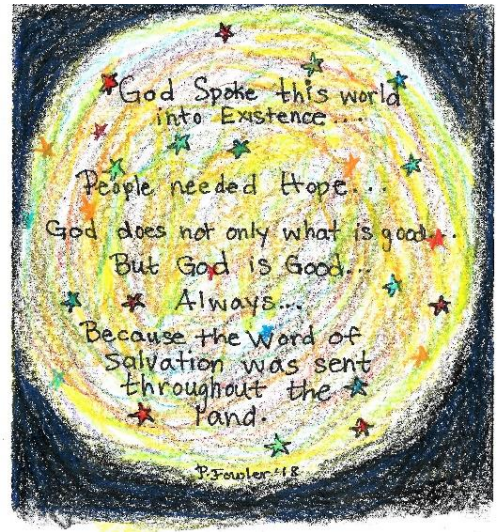
Because these people needed hope, and you knew they would understand.

When it's time for you to come again, for we will never know, you will not judge us by what you hear or see, but by your righteousness we will behold, if only we believe.

God is Good

All the time, yes he is indeed. God does not only do what is good, but He is what is good—not by our standards but by his. He is so good that he uses evil, from this world, for good.

We give you thanks for all you have given, and you deserve our worship and praise.



P. Fowler '18



I am a fan of the John Denver song *Rocky Mountain High*. The opening lyrics: “He was born in the summer of his 27th year, coming home to a place he’d never been before...” refer to being born again to a new life in a new place while experiencing the awesomeness of God’s creation.

Many of us have experienced starting over in a new location at least once in our lives. Families put down roots in many places; and we struggle with how to define “coming or going home” for Christmas. We travel to be with loved ones who may live in places we have never been before.

So where is “Home for Christmas?” How do we connect with the emotions we long to be experiencing? The hope, peace, joy, and love to be found at home?

Perhaps the answer is to look toward a different home. Our earthly homes are merely temporary as we are each called to God’s eternal home. Jesus has told us that he has gone to prepare a place for us there. How glorious that home must be!

Maybe coming home is not about our earthly destination. Perhaps coming home is connecting with God’s everlasting love...wherever we happen to be.

This Christmas Eve, let us gather together, whether with family, friends, or strangers, to read and hear lessons, to sing cherished carols, to worship and experience God’s love in our midst. For wherever and whenever we connect with God, it is home. Let’s come home.

Merry Christmas!



As years pass, more nostalgia creeps into my Christmas.

A fond memory is putting up our real Christmas tree a couple weeks before Christmas. We picked one, not too bushy and with some longer branches, to clip on real Christmas candles—one of several traditions I adopted from Tina and John's fraternal German grandparents. By the time the kids were around 2, we would sit by the lighted tree before bedtime (including several candles) and sing carols—always ending in German with *Stille Nacht*. We did this for many years.



AB

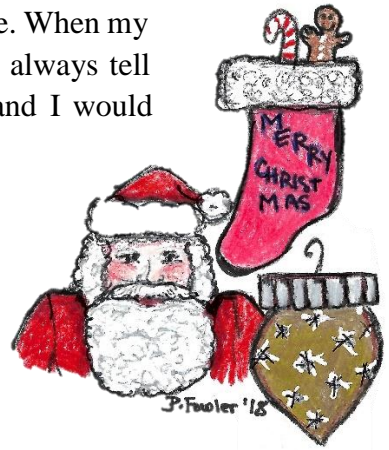
Another special memory is when Tina and John were in 4th & 5th grades, they and a German girl sang *Silent Night* with their classmates. Then the three stepped forward and sang *Stille Nacht* while the students in the deaf-ed class used sign language.

Holiday time with family and memories are precious. Enjoy your loved ones and time spent with them; and be thankful.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!



Every year I cannot seem to start decorating the house or the tree for Christmas until my daughter, Olivia, comes over to help me. When my girls were little we used to decorate together, but I could always tell that Olivia enjoyed it much more than Hannah. Olivia and I would decorate until all the decorations were put up throughout the entire house, inside and out. We would have so much fun talking and decorating.



Once she was in college, it was still easy to get her to help me. She had to come home from college and she loved to get everything out and reminisce about all of our Christmas decorations and where and when we got them. We'd have some spirited conversations about which bulbs and Christmas trinkets belonged to her, which belonged to her sister, and which belonged to her Dad and me. One of her favorite items to decorate was the mantel, putting the Santa Clauses up and then hanging the stockings.

Because she was always so busy, and away at school, I really enjoyed my time with her when she came home. We would spend the good part of the day decorating, laughing, and talking about everything.

Once she graduated and moved out of the house, it was more difficult to get her to help me decorate. We had packed up the majority of "her" decorations and she had taken them to her apartment. She now has her own place to decorate. I would have to trick her into coming over and help me. We would plan a Christmas shopping date and then she would notice that there weren't any decorations set up—or very few. She'd then tell me that was not acceptable, and she would stay to make sure everything got done.

Each year she seems to have less time to help out and less of our house gets decorated. I know that I will find some way to get her to come over and help this year.

Maybe I will even send her this devotional.



“Home is a world of strife shut out, a world of love shut in.
Home is a father’s kingdom, a mother’s world, and the children’s paradise.
Home is a place where our stomachs get fed and our hearts are held.”

Unknown author

Coming Home: For me it was the arms of my parents—the warmth and smells of the house where my parents were—the town I grew up in—my church—the friendships from youth—the arms of friends—then the arms of my spouse—the awareness and eventually the growth with new friends all over the United States—knowing that I was home for our first-born son—our church in Johnson City, TN. That was the beginning...

“Home, in one form or another, is the great object of life.”

Josiah Gilbert Holland

Over the years—so many moves—too many different addresses to remember—the births of two more sons—too many schools for our sons—too many new drivers licenses, doctors, grocery stores—houses to make into homes—but also many new friends found in so many new churches. And always I fondly remember their arms and their warmth. The houses became homes for us and the churches fed me/us spiritually, literally, and emotionally—with many substitute grandparents, aunts, and uncles standing in waiting...

Over the years we found ways to share our Christmas joy with new people. In our world there were often transient folks like us. One *Coming Home* memory was created by inviting new friends to come for dessert on Christmas evening.

Then my decision to return to this home town—tears—grieving—loss from leaving where we were. But need overtakes and then there is a new house to make into a home—a new school for our youngest son—a new driver’s license—not many old friends, but finally a few new ones—church hunting—loss of two parents—loss of spouse. Eventually, after a few years, I came full circle because...

I came home to my first church—in the winter of my life. I came home to continue my journey...

At this most precious time in our calendar year may we all know where home is and feel it deeply in the knowledge that our Lord holds us firmly in his arms as we journey on...



On the fourth Sunday of Advent we light all four candles, three purple and one pink. As we light the fourth candle we think about the presence of God and we remind ourselves of God's love for us. We can love because He first loved us!



I want to share this poem written by my friend.

A PRAYER FOR THE NEW YEAR

By Mary Lucille Martin

Lord, we find ourselves approaching
another New Year with apprehension,
anticipation and appreciation.
Without faith our dread of what might occur
would completely overwhelm us.
So, give us the gifts of faith and hope, we pray.

Help us to anticipate having clearer wisdom,
forgiving hearts, generous attitudes, and loving actions.

We praise and thank you for the abundance
we realize you have provided for us.

May we now find ways and means
to eagerly share and relieve the suffering of mind,
body and spirit that we encounter in others,
bearing one another's burdens
as we have been instructed in your word.

Help us to live with your promise:
"That you will never leave us nor forsake us."

Considering this, believing this:
How can we not find peace, joy, beauty and truth
in this New Year? Amen.

JESUS
brings us home with
gifts of
FAITH and HOPE,
PEACE, JOY,
BEAUTY and
TRUTH

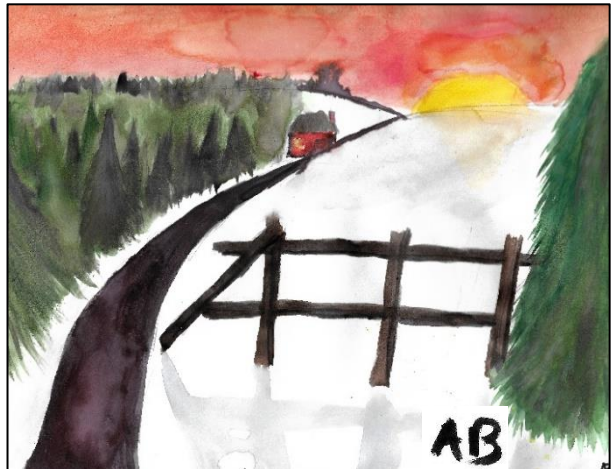
Calligraphy:
P. Fowler '18



When our oldest daughter Annabeth was little, Robbie and I were in graduate school studying to become pastors on the East Coast. We traveled to California for holidays. She was comforted by knowing that she could sleep in her bed again very soon. One summer we spent the entire summer in California while doing a chaplaincy internship at a hospital, and Annabeth was confused why we weren't able to go home and sleep in our own beds. It was difficult explaining to a toddler, but we finally said, “We're here for a little while, and home is where your toothbrush is.”

While we lived on the West Coast for holidays and the summer, we were there only for a season. We made that house our home, for however brief a time it was. She had her mom and dad, her favorite blanket “love,” and her toothbrush—everything she needed. It was safe, she was loved, and she could find comfort in knowing there was a plan.

While we may live here on earth for a season—this is only a temporary living situation. Our earthly home is not our true home because we have a better home, an abiding and everlasting one in heaven. As we are reminded in Philippians 3:20, “Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” If we love, follow, and serve Christ, wherever we live in this world, we know we belong somewhere else.



That doesn't mean we cannot treasure these four walls. God has chosen these walls, for these days, specifically for us. It does mean that we live inside these walls and care for these walls with hearts set on our final and everlasting home. As you enjoy this dwelling place, for this allotted time, prepare your heart to be Christ's home until the time that you are called to your “forever home” with the Lord.





PEGGY ALLEN

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all who helped create this wonderful gift to share with our church family. It takes a lot of people to make this project for God's glory and purpose. They all deserve our praise.

Twenty-two members of our family took the time to write a devotion and share their memories and thoughts with all of us. We are grateful to those who have enriched the Advent/Christmas season with their stories.

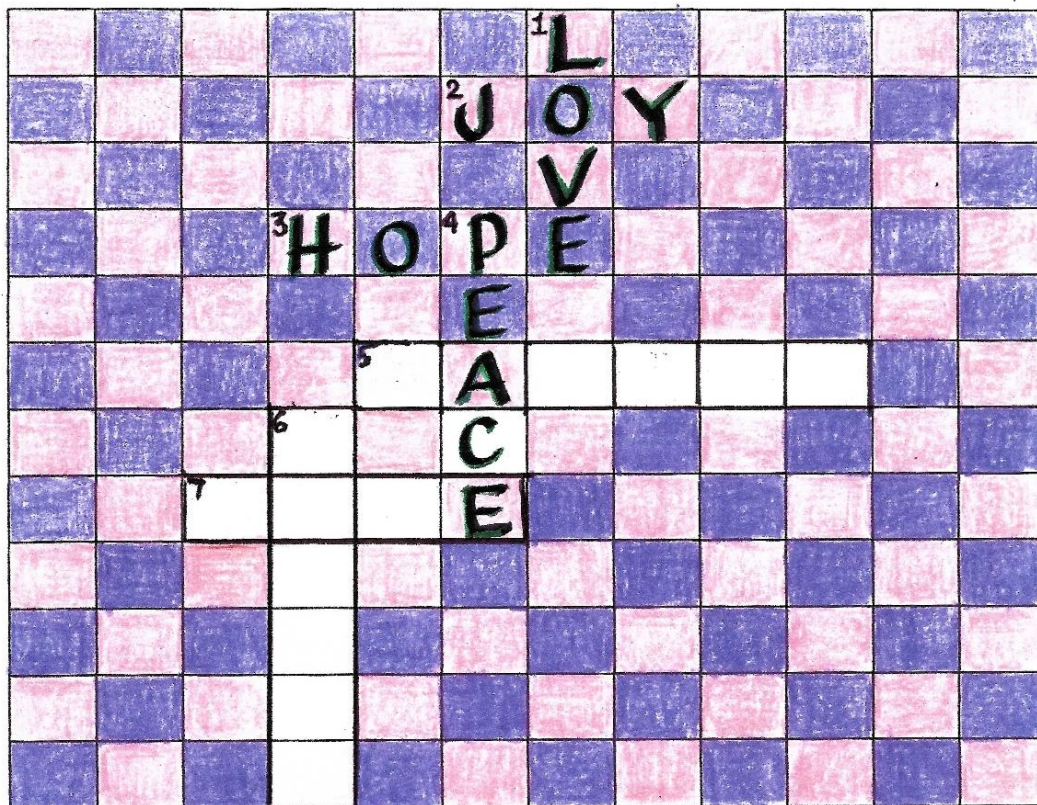
Several others from our church family added to many of the stories by creating all the artwork in this booklet. Our thanks go to Peggy Fowler, Vera Thornton, Annabeth Carnes, Lucy and Sarah Martin-Fanone, Julie Hussar, and Peggy Allen. Additional thanks to Peggy Fowler for overseeing and coordinating the artwork.

Also, thanks and appreciation go to the staff and all the behind-the-scene volunteers who committed their time to assemble and prepare the booklet for distribution. Additional thanks to PJ Collier for overseeing and coordinating this process.



P. Fowler '98

FENTON FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
ADVENT CROSSWORD PUZZLE



ACROSS

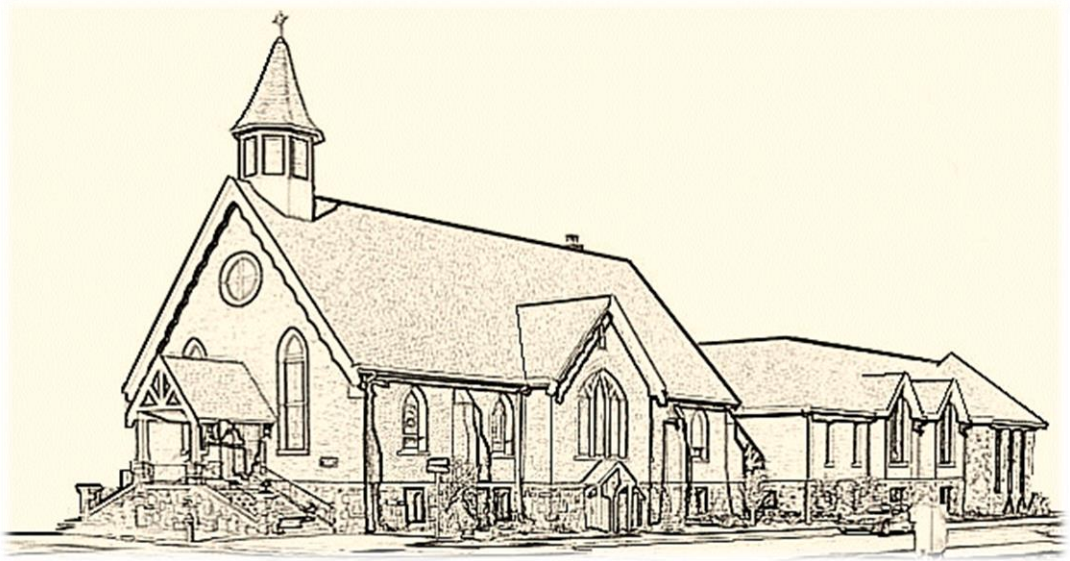
2. JOY comes from knowing
God's Grace in our lives.
3. Jesus brings us HOPE in His
Coming Home.
5. A group of people
caring for one another.
7. The place where one lives
or is cared for.

DOWN

1. God's LOVE is Amazing!
4. God's PEACE surpasses all
Understanding.
6. An arrival or approach;
Advancing upon

P. Fowler '18

Welcome Home



First Presbyterian Church of Fenton

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