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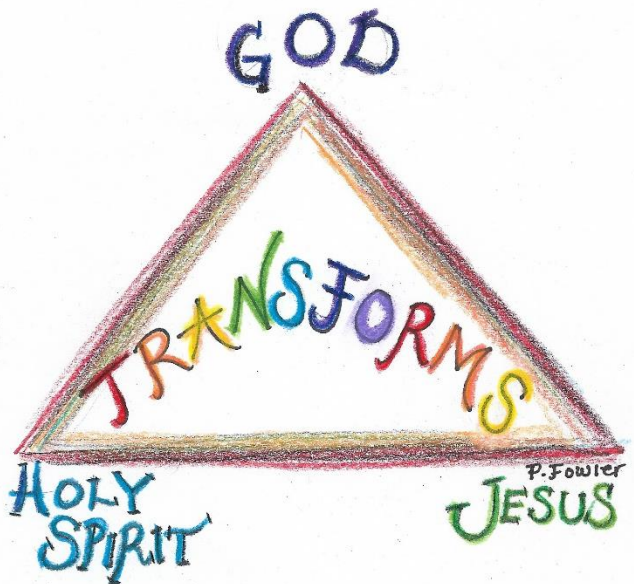
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As the Advent season begins and we look forward to Christmas and the New Year, I hope that you feel joy bubbling up as you make your celebration plans and worship our coming King. For many of us things other than joy bubble up. Some of us find the stress and business of the holiday coming to the forefront. For some grief might be a very real struggle. For some the Christmas season might be the loneliest part of the year.

Our plans and our perceptions, our emotional needs, and our grief can shape us in ways that we might not be aware of, sometimes in negative ways. All of this happens while we share the story of God reaching down to change the entire creation by the birth of Jesus.

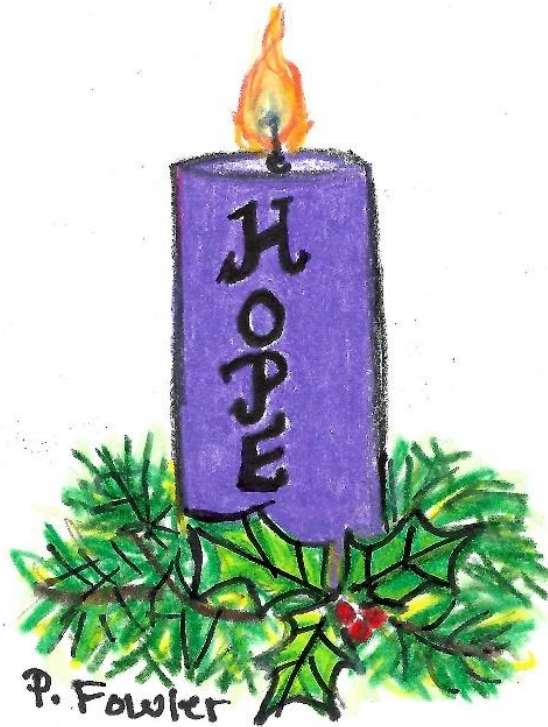
In Romans 12, Paul tells us to not be conformed to this present world and encourages us to be transformed. We do this by renewing our minds, dwelling on God's Word to us, and allowing the Holy Spirit to shape us. Like an expectant mother or a child waiting for Christmas Day, we look forward to discovering what God is transforming us into; and we won't be satisfied by anything less.

I hope that you will enjoy reading this 22nd annual FFPC Advent Devotional. As we spend time each day of Advent hearing from each other about God's work in our lives, let us discover how God has transformed us. Let us practice together living into who God has called us to be in His good and pleasing will. I pray that you all will come to know, in a deeper way, how the birth of our savior has transformed everything and how we can live renewed lives with our God who dwells among us.



Introduction: First Week of Advent

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.



Love is...

A cute series of comics appeared in the newspaper starting in the 1960s. Every Sunday the comic strip began with the saying, "Love is..." with a cherubic couple doing things for each other. It began as a series of love notes from the author to her future husband. "Love is...being loved back...taking one day at a time...never letting the sun go down on your anger...being able to say you're sorry."

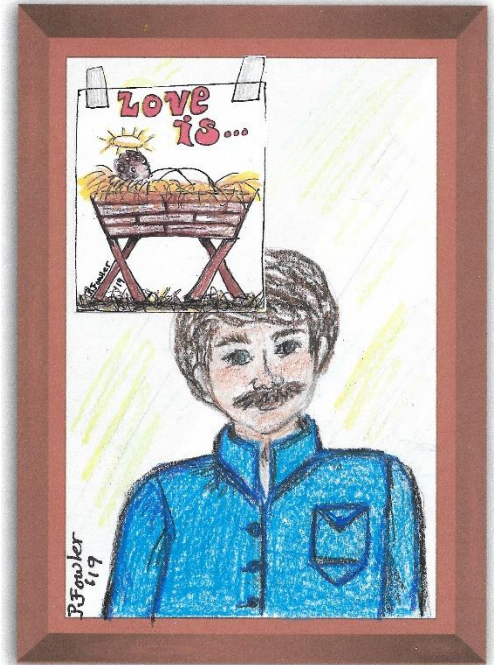
My grandparents would clip the cartoons out of the newsletter and post their favorites on the bathroom mirror with tape. It reminded them that love grows every day, that we have to work at it, and that we need reminders of how to love each other better.

The very first Christmas transformed love. At the Christmas, God's love became a person and love changed everything. We know what Christmas is all about because we got the best gift ever when Jesus was born. Now we could know true love, a love that would sacrifice for us, love us when we are unlovable, and love us even when we don't say sorry.

God's love changes the way we love. When we let God show us how much God loves us, we're then able to love others the way we've been loved.

We all have to work on loving ourselves and loving others better. When you give gifts, love and serve others during the holidays, welcome people into your home, connect with friends and family far away, and remember those Christmases long ago, let God's love infuse these special times. God is love and love is real.

1 John 4:16 God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in them.



During this season of celebrating Jesus, I struggle with how much our world is in conflict with His teachings. Teachings like:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. *John 13:34*

You have heard that it was said, “you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you. *Matthew 5:43-44*

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*

Let he who is without sin cast the first stone. *John 8:7*

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy. *Matthew 5:7*

Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. *Matthew 19:14*



I pray for our country. I pray for the children separated at the border and their families. I pray for people who have been victims of racism and hate. I pray this season of celebrating the birth of Jesus will show us the path of love we have been commanded to follow.



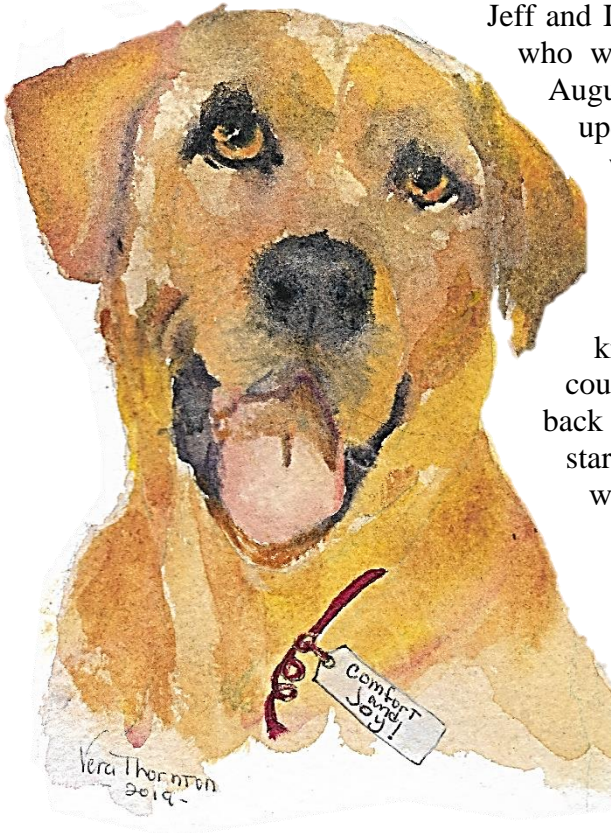
Talk about transformations! Who would have known that a fractured ankle could have transformed so many peoples' lives in such a short time. My mother, Peg Allen, suffered a fractured ankle on July 25th of this year. After two weeks at Hurley, two surgeries, a stay at Wellbridge, and a move to Young at Heart Adult Foster Care to continue her physical therapy, Mom made her final move to her Eternal Home on October 25th at 9:15 in the morning. During her stay at Young at Heart, Mom and I would talk about plans to strengthen her and help her to be able to go home and resume her concert, movie, travel-log, choir, and church activities. She acknowledged that she would have to work hard in order to be able to do that, but at 89 years of age, that physical strength was eluding her. I believe that the Beautiful Creator Father saw her fragile state and reached down to her the morning of her passing and said, "Dear Margaret, you are most welcome to come be with Me in My Heavenly home where you will be clothed in glittering angle wings and be jeweled halo. Come be with me." And mother answered, "Yes, Lord, I am tired and want to be home with you." My Faith in God's Promise through Jesus Christ has been strengthened by Mother's transformation. We praise you, Father, for the saving Grace that Jesus brought to Earth that Christmas morning so long ago.



Psalm 124

OUR HELP IS IN THE NAME OF THE LORD

My transformation happened the year my mom passed away; it was just a few days before Christmas. Christmas Day was a blur; I was still numb from the loss. The days following were very dark, hard, and difficult. I would wake up every morning reliving the pain and not wanting to get out of bed.



Jeff and I raised a Leader Dog puppy, Murphy, who we had to take back to Rochester in August before my mom passed. We received updates on his training, and he was placed with a client. Late December I received a call from Leader Dog saying Murphy was career changed because during the past week he was too anxious to work. They wanted to know if I wanted Murphy back. Yes! of course I did! So, a few days later he was back here with me. So now my mornings start with Murphy sitting by my bed wagging his tail. It's hard to stay in bed when he is giving me puppy eyes because he is starving for breakfast (lab thing).

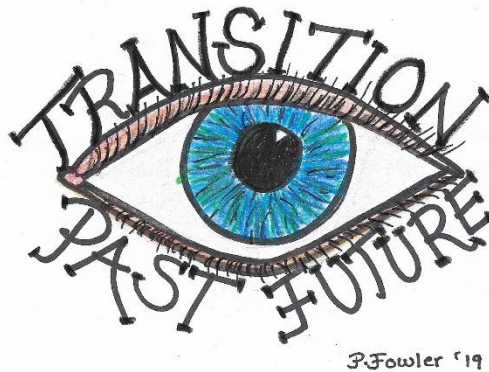
I know this is God and my mom taking care of me and transforming me out of depression into a caretaker. So, my advice to you if you are having Christmas blues, go out and take care of someone or something. It will put a smile on your face and make your Christmas a little brighter.



Transitions around the holidays. It seems lately life is full of transitions. Whether it's from a married couple to a family of three, or from a single person owned and operated business to something more, always transitioning.

I find myself wondering what direction life will take in the next year, three years, or decade. God knows, but I am sure that I do not. I rely on Him when I'm unsure. Or at least I try to. The holidays provide a time to look forward to new adventures (New Year's), but they should also be a time to reflect.

Reflect on Christmases past and look forward to the future. Traditions help me to reflect, remembering where each came from and doing things the way we've always done at Christmas time. I think there's also a place for new traditions, especially with a young child. He'll grow up knowing these and that makes me happy. We look forward to more transitions and hope for a full and happy future together at Christmas time and always.



These words are taken from the memorial folder at Jay Browder's funeral service. I would say it describes "transformation" quite reverently. As we pass from our earthly boundary to our eternal home, it's comforting to know how tranquil that time can be. And it's comforting to family and friends. It is so peaceful.



I AM STANDING UPON THE SEASHORE

I am standing upon the seashore. A ship at my side spreads her white sails to the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean. She is an object of beauty and strength. I stand and watch her until at length she hangs like a speck of white cloud just where the sea and sky come to mingle with each other. Then someone at my side says: "There, she is gone."

Gone where? Gone from my sight. That is all. She is just as large in mast and hull and spar as she was when she left my side and she is just as able to bear the load of living freight to her destined port. Her diminished size is in me, not in her. And just at the moment when someone at my side says: "There, she is gone," there are other eyes watching her coming, and other voices ready to take up the glad shout: "Here she comes!"

And that is dying.

Death comes in its own time, in its own way.

Death is as unique as the individual experiencing it.

Henry Van Dyke



MY CHRISTMAS TREE

Putting up my Christmas tree is something I really look forward to, way in advance. (Oh, I forgot, last year I had 16 trees up.) I'm talking about my main tree in the family room. I start thinking about the colors I want to use, and what theme I want. Usually by September I know what I want it to look like. This year's tree will be silver and white with gold ornaments.

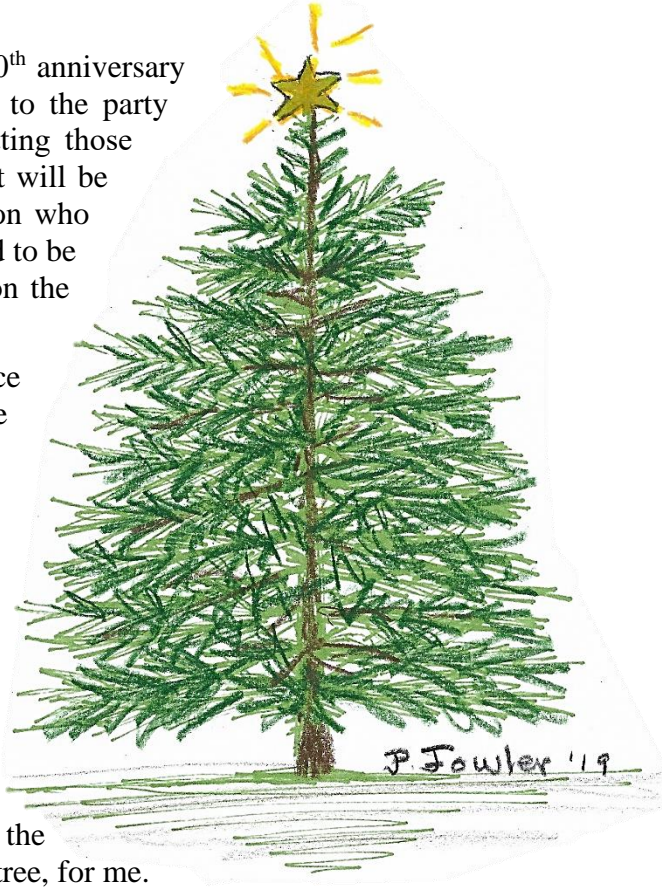
Six years ago, for Jerry's and my 50th anniversary everyone brought a gold ornament to the party for us. I'm looking forward to putting those gold ornaments on the tree again. It will be so much fun to remember the person who gave us the ornament and to ask God to be with each as I hang the ornament on the tree.

Some of the friends have died since those six years ago, but I still have fond memories of them, even if they bring a tear. The ornament they gave us will be even more meaningful.

Among all the glitter on the tree, I still see the true meaning of Christmas. God sent His son! When I look at that Christmas tree, I can see the cross beneath the branches, the sadness behind the Christmas story of Jesus' birth, and the miracle of the gift He left under my tree, for me.

May you find the gift of Jesus under your tree, amongst all the glitter and gold.

Merry Christmas



Introduction: Second Week of Advent

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.



In previous devotional books I have written about Advent being a time of waiting—waiting for remembrance of the birth of Christ. We wait with joy, hope, love and goodwill toward all people. There are all kinds of waitings! Some are joyous, some not. My situation of waiting for a heart transplant is both joyous and not. Someone has to give up their life so I may continue to live mine. Strange isn't it.

I have been very lucky to have my faith and my warped sense of humor to get me through this.

Faith is a precious thing and without it we would be lost. I have so many good faithful people of all faiths praying for me around the world. There is a saying, "Keep the Faith!" During this Advent Season, *keep the faith* that Jesus Christ born over 2000 years ago in Bethlehem will guide us all. Peace and Joy!!!



WHO AM I?



Angel wings, bathrobe shepherds, and gift bearing wisemen are a part of my happiest Christmas memories. Baking cookies, wrapping presents, and choosing a tree are all special times. My life changed a year ago. I am confronted with need to find a new way of focusing on the gift of God's son and those in our traditional version of the event.

I wonder which of those in the Christmas narrative I am like. Am I faithful enough to trust in a heavenly messenger and go to the child? Could I be like Mary willing to give what I love most to God's plan? Do I have the faith of Joseph to act against society's norms as he stood with Mary? Am I willing, like the wisemen, to bring my treasures to God?

When I ask these questions, in my quiet times, my answer is I can't begin to measure up to any of those in our nativity story. I share more characteristics with many of the frail humans who populate the Bible. I would like to think I might move closer to those who were faithful and try at times. I fail often! However, my comfort and joy rest in a God who loves us so much He gave us His most precious gift. My God is a God of love who does not look at who we are but who we can become.



While thinking about the birth of Jesus, the question came: Why would Jesus choose to come to Earth the way He did? I mean, a tiny human baby, born to parents who were not wealthy and had no connection to the King or other people in power at the time. And even though there were heavenly signs of His birth, they weren't blaring "in your face" signs. The angels appeared to shepherds, not to everyone in the region.

I know the prophecies of the old testament had to be fulfilled, but since God was the author, He could have had the prophecies read any way He wanted. He could have come in Great Glory, showing everyone on Earth who He was. Or He could have come with a great army to overpower Rome. (Many Jewish people expected Him to come that way.) But no, this quiet humble man, thru His birth, life, and death, showed us how He created us to live our lives, loving God and each other. He could have made us to worship Him without any alternative (like a robot), but He gave us free will. He made us in His image. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows the harder we have to work for something, the more we value it. If everything is handed to us, without any effort on our part, we think very little of it. He gave us free will because He wants us to choose Him, to seek Him, and to get to know Him by spending time with Him. By prayer and reading His book we uncover layer by layer the mysteries of His teachings. We find wisdom and insight into who He is and His nature (and even more about who we are). The more we learn, the more we realize how little we know, and that we will never fully understand God. We don't have the capacity to understand a fraction of who God is. Still by grace through faith, we believe.



We are grateful that Jesus was human. No matter what happens, we can relate to Him. He knows how we feel. He went through the same things more, and even worse, than what we face. We are grateful that He is our example, our guide, our light, our companion, our comforter, and our champion.

This Christmas my wish for all of us, is that, in a silent moment with Him, we will have an ahh-ha moment of insight that will bring us closer to Him.



It's time for another Advent devotion, and we are in a new place in our lives. We are moving from this house after 48+ years! It's with sadness and anxiety that we are moving through this next stage in our lives. Our kids are grown and on their own, so, just like Advent season, we are going with anticipation to our new location. To be

sure, it is an uneasy feeling; but we have faith that all will be well since we are in God's hands. Just as the scripture for today points out, a tree is identified by its fruit; so too are our lives by our offspring! It has been a good location, but that location does NOT determine our outcome; rather it is what we've done with this gift of life. The anticipation is huge, but we know we will go through it successfully with God's help and on to our next 'location in this life,' so that come the Judgement Day our lives will reflect a job well done as good and faithful servants!



SNEAKY

Today's pericope (I like to use big words. I paid for them. Pear-rick-oh-pee means a short excerpt from scripture.), from 2 Peter 3:10, got me to thinking "The day of the Lord will come like a thief..." He did already. His birth was as slick as a thief. Can anything be more anonymous than born in a barn? Of course, word got out and those who believed saw more than a manger boy. Suppose he's been sneaking into our world at other times and places?



He might come tonight at McClaren Hospital, tomorrow at Hurley, and Thursday at Ascension/Genesys. I wonder if anyone will catch him? For that matter he or she may be the carpenter holding that board you're sawing, or the electrician pulling those wires through the car you're building, or the plumber holding her nose while she plunges our stopped-up stool.

This thief in darkness savior is so invisible that we might have just missed stepping on his toes. He may be thinking, "Christmas? All that shopping, decorating, even some pageants, isn't me. I'm in ordinary worship that keeps on as faithfully as Ruth kept on with Naomi. I'm with the saints who sing in the choir every Sunday, and play the organ, teach Sunday School in my corner, and fill the pews." But they look so ordinary. There's a clue. You can't sneak in with a parade. He doesn't overwhelm us with fire and clouds. He's the quiet guy or gal who does the dishes. He's the monk who copied the Bible so we'd know Jesus' story.

I'd rather Psalm 146:5 said "blessed" rather than "happy." "Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God." We are blessed. Someone snuck that into our lives too. Seeking the sneaky savior is an Advent adventure.



TRADITIONS

As I read my good wife Jan's Advent devotion, I was reminded just how much our religious traditions vary within families, ethnic groups, and denominations. We might find some of these curious, quaint, or downright odd and wonder, "Why would people celebrate Christmas like that?"



Lindsay MacLean

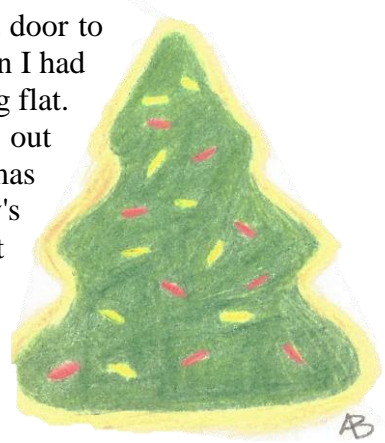
One short answer is that when Christian missionaries from the western cultures began ministering in areas of Africa and Asia, for example, they found it more helpful to new believers to not demand that they start over completely, discarding all of their cultural practices; but, rather, used some of the existing celebrations, giving them new meanings. This was similar to the practice of St. Paul. When ministering to Greeks and Romans, for example, he cited their customs, poetry, and philosophies as a means for connecting with them and helping them become more open to hearing the Gospel.

Remembering this, I'm sometimes tempted to think, "How nice that God found a way to coax nonbelievers along." Then, however, I'm humbled when I realize that that was the very way my own ethnic ancestors were brought into the Christian Faith. Some seasonal customs I enjoy, such as the Advent Wreath, Christmas tree, Hanging the Greens, and even a glass of Christmas cheer developed from Pre-Christian customs in Europe. It was because missionaries—some from the very regions where Paul and others had earlier brought the Good News—followed his practice of connecting with people that most of us who are of European descent have the privilege and joy of celebrating Christmas in hosts of special ways that are personally meaningful to us. May our traditions be faithful and joyful reminders of God's love in this, and every season.



THE RIGHT WAY

Just before Christmas, when I was seven, I went next door to play with Mary. Her mother, wearing the biggest apron I had ever seen, was with Mary at the table rolling something flat. I asked what they were doing. "Getting ready to cut out cookies. Don't you and your mother make Christmas cookies together?" When I replied that we didn't, Mary's mother invited me to join them—giving me my first experience baking. (If my mom baked, it was when we kids were at school or asleep.) "How can you celebrate Christmas without making and decorating cookies together?" Mary's mother wondered.



Later, going home, I spotted a fir tree tucked into a corner of our garage. Since our tree was already up and decorated, I was puzzled as to why it was there. I asked my mom what that tree was doing in our garage. "That's Mary's tree, but don't tell her. It is a secret." My mom explained that in Mary's family the tree was put up and decorated by the parents after the children went to bed on Christmas Eve. They were told Santa brought it. "How can you celebrate Christmas without decorating the tree together?" my mom wondered.

Our Bible says nothing about if, when, or how to celebrate the Holy Birth. Some churches almost ignore Advent and Christmas while others celebrate with rituals they have practiced for many decades. Too many believe the way they do it is THE RIGHT WAY and will even criticize believers who follow a different practice. It is easy to assume our way is the best and right way. I know I am guilty of thinking every family should have an Advent wreath, put up a Nativity scene on the first Sunday of Advent before any other decorations, and light Advent candles after dinner every Sunday after since that is how we do it.

How we celebrate the Advent season is not the most important thing—even though I do look forward to the hymns, decorations, readings, and candles that I know and love. Why we celebrate is what really matters. We celebrate because God loves us enough to become one of us in His son, Jesus. Hallelujah and Amen!



Introduction: Third Week of Advent

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.



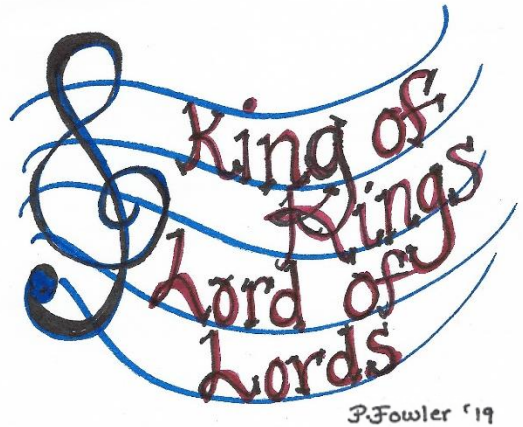
MUSIC TRANSFORMS THE SOUL

As I told Peggy Fowler

You have probably experienced hearing a song on the radio and then you are transported back in time. You most likely have had a musical line run through your head over and over. Have you ever heard a spoken line from a movie and heard the music that went with it? That is what I hear. I hear music in all kinds of things.

When I was in third grade, a friend asked me to come to choir with him and I was hooked. From then on music became a major part of my life. Everything reminds me of music...a bible verse, a line from a movie, a book, or a news story. The music we hear and sing at Christmas is especially moving. The Christmas Story as told in song brings a special connection to God. When one listens to Handel's Messiah one has to ask, "What says it better than that?"

For me, music transforms and transports us into God's word... His word that we should be listening to in our heads (like that musical line) and in our hearts.



This year we look at transitions, and certainly I've had many over the past several years. They say that change is the only constant, and I'll admit to having relished change; the more the better, to Mary's chagrin; but less so as I age. Funny how change can stop being exciting as we age. But all things mortal change continually. God does not change. No matter what comes to us or upon us, we can count on the almighty God to be there for us. Philippians 4:6-7 tells us "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." God is our anchor and our rock in our sea of change.

This year will mark my seventh Christmas season as a Christian. Over that time, I've lost both parents, dealt with personal health issues, moved my home, and moved my office. Later this year I will begin forcing myself into semi-retirement, and next year, God willing, I'll see my son marry a woman that I can love as a daughter, not just a daughter-in-law. The changes seem to never end, and they never will. I've spent the past seven years learning as much as I could about the God that I worship and building a relationship with Jesus; and He gives me true peace and strength.



Praise the LORD my soul; all my inmost being, praise His holy name. Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagles. Psalm 103



As I was growing up, I didn't always have a church to attend. We attended a church until I was about five years old. I'm not sure why, but we stopped going and did not find a new church.

Afterwards, my mom and I would go to different churches every Christmas Eve, but we never went to the same church twice.

Eventually, I had the opportunity to experience a great church. I had a friend Ron who invited me to his church during my senior year of high school. I ended up being baptized for the first time and joining the church, St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Livonia Michigan.

The church had what I would call a Christmas pageant during the Advent season. Most of the church was involved in some way or another. The high school youth all dressed up in olden day costumes and we put on skits and sang. It was quite a celebration of the Christmas season. This was the first year I experienced the love and feeling of what a church is and what it offered.

As a youth group, we went out caroling. We went to hospitals, we went to convalescent homes, we went to visit shut ins. It was quite a change from the holidays before this year.

Our youth group went sledding and shoveled driveways, along with many other events. I felt so included.

I would sing in the choir in the early service with the rest of the youth. During the second service the youth would attend Sunday school. There was such a feeling of fellowship and love.

If I ever had a transformation during the Advent season, this would be it. I learned what it is like to be part of a church, the fellowship, and what the church offered, and what I could offer the church and the people associated with it.



The following excerpts from the first two verses of Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “The Bells” related to me our anticipation and celebration of the Christmas season. Each year, from the moment we begin to move toward celebrating the birth of the Christ child, the sight and sounds of bells are prevalent everywhere we go.

THE BELLS



- I. Hear the sledges with the bells—
Silver bells!
What a world of merriment their melody foretells!
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,
In the icy air of night!
While the stars that oversprinkle
All the heavens, seem to twinkle
With a crystalline delight;...
- II...What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!
Through the balmy air of night
How they ring out their delight!
From the molten-golden notes,
And all in tune,
What a liquid ditty floats
To the turtle-dove that listens, while she gloats
On the moon!
Oh, from out the sounding cells,
What a gush of euphony voluminously wells!
How it swells!
How it dwells
On the Future! how it tells
Of the rapture that impels...



From *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe*, vol. II, 1850

I am always overwhelmed by the faithful response to God exemplified by His people in the written accounts leading to and including Jesus’ birth (i.e.) MT 1:18-25, LK 1:5-45, and LK 2:1-20. Every year when we hear the tinkle of bells and “how it tells of the rapture that impels,” I pray that it will serve as a reminder for each of us to act in Faithfulness to God’s word and exemplify the teachings of Jesus to help spread love and peace in our world.



I recently opened a Chinese fortune cookie and it said, "Welcome the change coming soon in your life."

Life is change. Some of us love it and long for uncertainty and excitement. Some of us go out of the way to prevent it or bury our heads in the sands instead of confronting it. God is always there for us; that will never change.

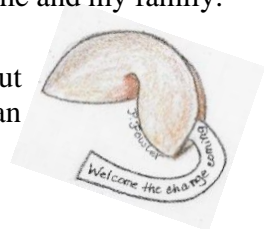
I am one of those that does not "welcome the change." I sometimes forget that God is always there for and with me. He knows and loves me even if I have doubts or failures, lose my patience, and worry about the changes.

When I was a little girl there was not too much change in my life. We lived in the same area, moved three times as the family grew, and attended 12 years of Catholic school and church. I learned about God and how He loves me and how to pray. I had my family which consisted of my parents, grandparents, two older sisters and two younger brothers. Then as I grew, I married; so I became a wife and remained a daughter and a sister. Then I became a mother to two and remained a wife, daughter, and sister. By the time I was married for five years we had moved five times. God was always there for me. Then, in 1985 major changes happened. My mother died of lung cancer at age 55, then the next year my grandmother died. We slowly started losing many loved ones. These were sad years full of changes. Larry and I raised our children and were very active in Girl and Boy Scouting. We did not go to a formal church but raised them on the "Scouting Religion."

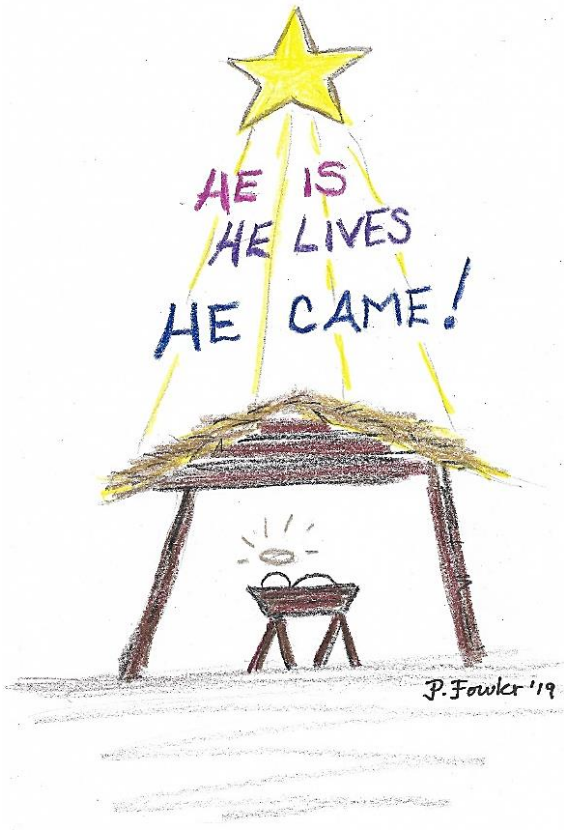
In 2012, Larry and I became members of FFPC. What a wonderful change! I saw my husband at 57 years old get baptized and transform from a nonbeliever to a Christian that knows God and knows that he is loved. I saw him return to some of his "Jewish" roots and teach and preach with the congregation. It is a great change, but he still surprises me after 38 years of marriage. God had a plan for him.

This Advent Season I must remember that God has seen me through many changes in my life. I have survived and become stronger for it, even if it was painful. I have "transformed." I have lost many loved ones, but their memories are in my heart. That will never change. Both my adult children live in Chicago, have good jobs, and are happy. We see each other often, but we have separate lives. Life is good, and God had a plan for me and my family.

However you handle your transitions, remember this Christmas Season that God is there through it all. He is there to guide us. Don't forget about Him. Don't worry about the changes to come. God is good and has a plan for us all.



My dear friend Mary Martin wrote this poem.



MESSAGE SIMPLE!!

There's quite some doubt about His birth
Like when or where He came to earth.
In Scripture can't be found a thing
To show that angels really sing.
You won't find lowing cattle there
Around the worshipped holy pair.
So much expert speculation,
Contradicting information.

Yet there are those who find no need
Of proof or complicated creed;
Down thru the years it's been the same
For those who pray in Jesus' name.
No addition, no deletion
Is required for completion.
A simple message they proclaim

**“GOOD NEWS!
HE IS—HE LIVES—HE CAME!!”**

By Mary Lucille Martin



Waiting is difficult for most people. Yet we spend time waiting for so many things in life: for a special birthday, for a child to be born, for a vacation, for retirement, in lines at the movies, at social events, and at the grocery store. We all have lots of experience with waiting—we should all be experts, right? However, it doesn't seem to work that way.

Advent is a time of waiting and preparation. In churches we all look forward to Christmas Eve night—which commemorates the birth of Jesus, our Savior, who came to earth in human form to die for our sins so that our sins may be forgiven and so we can be in relationship with God and spend eternity with Him in heaven. We prepare as we wait.

I have been blessed to be in a Bible study where I have recently learned something very interesting about waiting—something I had never really thought about before. In our textbook, "Unglued," the author, Lysa Terkeurst, writes about how to avoid responding in inappropriate ways when confronted by unkind and hurtful words. She recommended pausing and thinking/praying before replying. The word "pause" stood out for me and I quickly wrote out an acronym.

P (Pray for that person.)

A (Ask for God's help.)

U (Understand you are frustrated, and emotions push you to say things you may regret.)

S (Seek God's word.)

E (Express your feelings/thoughts in an appropriate way.)

Lysa writes that we have to watch our responses—that we must aim for "Soul Integrity"—words that are both honest and godly. Talk about life changing! Waiting (for me) has taken on a whole new meaning! Perhaps reading this—or studying her work/book in a Bible study—will transform your feelings about waiting (or "pausing") as well.

May God bless us all as we wait patiently and "pause" often, not only during this Advent season, but also in the years to come.



By: Lucy & Sarah Martin-James



Introduction: Fourth Week of Advent

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!



Our Advent theme is transformations. A transformation is a change, a major change. I cannot remember a time when I was not transforming.

I grew up in a wonderful family with two sisters, two brothers, and parents that loved us deeply. After I graduated college, I moved out on my own: my rent, my groceries, my car payment, repairs and insurance. Two years later I married John. I was transformed first into an adult with responsibility for myself, into a wife, and then into a Mom with responsibility for two small babies when Sean and Eric were born. I was a student and a career woman and became a full time mommy. Phew! I barely remember their first year, except that I was perpetually tired and busy.

The year that Donald was born was another transformation year. My twins remembered every toy and wanted to get them back from Don. We had a house and I was working again. My babies grew into toddlers and then into little boys. Suddenly, we were sending those little boys to college. At one time we purchased toys for Christmas; then it was microwave ovens and dorm-sized refrigerators. The gifts were more expensive and more needed.

My boys are men now. What a great journey! I have enjoyed every stage of motherhood; from playing on the floor with toddlers to having coffee and conversation with my men. Transformations carry on. My achy body reminds me of my age. I spend time caring for John and Lolli-pup. Christmas has shrunk. My need for elaborate decoration has diminished. There are fewer presents. We do not bake as much.

I know that God has more transformations for me. I do not know what they are, but I will celebrate the love of God at Christmas with whatever comes.

¹⁷ Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand,
the son of man you have raised up for yourself.

¹⁸ Then we will not turn away from you;
revive us, and we will call on your name.

¹⁹ Restore us, LORD God Almighty;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.

Psalm 80: 17 -19



Taken from Galatians 3 verses 6 through 14

At Christmas time there's always one present under the tree that catches my eye. I'm sure you have one that catches your eye as well. Maybe you want to open it first and solve your curiosity, or maybe you are like me and want to save the best until last.



All of us have something in common with Abraham in the Bible as well. He was not placed under a Christmas tree, but he was placed under the heavens in Bethlehem.

God's gift to Abraham was the promise of the Holy Spirit.

All believers share in God's blessing to Abraham. That blessing is that we who believe in Jesus will receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit by faith. We only have to believe that Jesus died in our place for our sins. We cannot live a godly life without godly help. We can try. We can promise ourselves and God that we will do better. Without Divine help we will suffer human defeat. It is only when we acknowledge and accept God's promises and provisions that we can truly grow in grace and wisdom.

So this Christmas season let us receive the ultimate promise with peace, joy, and love. Share this gift like it's the best present under the Christmas tree – because it is!



For some of us this Christmas is just like the last one and the one before that. For some of us it is the marking of another year and we are reminded what has been lost rather than what has been gained since we celebrated last year. For all of us Christmas Eve should be a marvelous moment of awe.

It is this night on which the world sat on the edge of history. It was this night that God in Jesus came to be born a human and bridged the divide between earth and heaven. On this night the world was transformed as the habitat of God.

No longer can we say that God doesn't understand us, because He became one of us. No longer can we claim that God is far off; God came as near as a baby's breath on its mother's cheek.

This is transformative, no matter what kind of year we have had, no matter who we have lost, or what we have gained. Tomorrow, it will be Christmas Day. Tomorrow the sun will rise and we will know that

the LORD is in his majestic palace.

The whole earth is speechless in his presence!" Habakkuk 2:20

Let us be like Ebenezer Scrooge who after a night of fearful dreams and dark terrors rises in the morning and...

Running to the window, he opened it, and put out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial, stirring, cold; cold, piping for the blood to dance to; Golden sunlight; Heavenly sky; sweet fresh air; merry bells. Oh, glorious. Glorious.

'What's to-day,' cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes, who perhaps had loitered in to look about him.

'Eh?' returned the boy, with all his might of wonder.

'What's to-day, my fine fellow,' said Scrooge.

'To-day,' replied the boy. 'Why, Christmas Day.'

'It's Christmas Day,' said Scrooge to himself. 'I haven't missed it.'

A Christmas Story by Charles Dickens, www.gutenberg.org

Let us not miss the marvel of God choosing to make his home among us and how that transforms us and all of creation.



Wednesday, December 25

Isaiah 62:6-12; Psalm 97; Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:(1-7), 8



PEGGY ALLEN
2014

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Acknowledgements

In 1998, Rhea Adgate, a former member of our church, suggested that we publish an Advent Devotional Booklet. Here we are 22 years later still preparing and distributing the booklet. Over the years, many members of our family have taken the time to write a devotion and share their memories and thoughts with all of us. We appreciate all those who have enriched the Advent/Christmas season with their stories.

It takes a lot of people to make this project for God's glory and purpose. The Worship Committee oversees the preparation of the booklet each year. We are grateful to Ellen Horton who helped organize and manage this project. As devotions were submitted, several others from our church family added to many of the stories by creating artwork to emphasize the devotions. Our thanks go to Peggy Fowler, Vera Thornton, Julie Hussar, Annabeth Carnes, Lucy Martin-Fanone, Sarah Martin-Fanone, Audrey MacLean, and Lindsay MacLean. Additional thanks to Peggy Fowler for overseeing and coordinating all the artwork. Also, thanks to Connie Morrison who created the digital files, printed, assembled, and prepared the booklet for distribution.

They all deserve our praise.



Why is there a butterfly on the booklet cover?

A butterfly develops through a process called metamorphosis, which is a Greek word that means “transformation.” The butterfly is often used as a Chrismon (Christ monogram) which displays a symbol of Christianity. The Chrismons you see on the cover are described below. There are many Chrismons, and depending on the resource, the description of the symbol may vary.



Butterfly—symbolizes the resurrection and everlasting for the believer



Chi Rho—the first two letters for the Greek word for Christ



Brazen Serpent on a Tau Cross—refers to John 3:14 “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up”



Five-Pointed Star—the great symbol of the Epiphany; the star that led the three wise men to the nativity



The Fish representing the Savior—ΙΧΘΥΕ is Greek for Jesus Christ’s, God’s son, and spells the Greek word “Fish.”



Cup—a symbol of the Mass, Eucharist or Communion; represents God’s forgiveness



Triangle—represents the Trinity: the Father, Son, and quality of Holy Spirit



Double Triangle—represents Perfect God and Perfect Man



Alpha and Omega—stands for Christ who says “I am the beginning and the end, the first and the last”



Three Circles—symbolize the eternity quality of the Trinity Holy Spirit



Tau Cross—symbol of reflection and contemplation