

# *All Things Made New*

*Fenton First Presbyterian Church 2023 Advent Devotional*



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## *Made New by the Holy Spirit*

When I left home for college, I was alone and new on campus. I didn't know anyone. I didn't have a friend or any family to be there with me. I had to build it all again. The sense of family, close friends, and community from the point of being far away from the comfort of what I had at home was preserved in me by the Holy Spirit. I came to realize, through experiences with others that I was not alone in many ways. As I started a new chapter of life, it was clear that the Holy Spirit and the experiential memories of those I love were with me. The Holy Spirit gave me strength and hope to carry on God's path for me and with those I would begin to create relationships. He is there for me.

Psalms 46: 1-6  
(The Children's Living Bible)

God is our refuge and strength, a tested help in times of trouble. And so, we need not fear even if the world blows up, and the mountains crumble into the sea. Let the oceans roar and foam; Let the mountains tremble. There is a river of joy flowing through the City of our God – the sacred home of the God above all gods. God himself is living in that City; therefore, it stands unmoved despite the turmoil everywhere. He will not delay His help. The nations rant and rave in anger – but when God speaks, the earth melts in submission and kingdoms totter into ruin.

The Holy Spirit lives in me. It is what gives me the ability to continue to create new relationships and the sense of community even when I am far from what I know. This challenge is coming again for me. I am starting a new part of my life as I graduate in December. I will be made new by the Holy Spirit throughout my life.

O Lord  
You have Always  
been our  
HOME  
Our Lives  
Should Be  
HOLY  
And Dedicated  
TO GOD  
J. Fowler '18

## *Celebrate Advent*

When my husband attended seminary, I had a chance to take a workshop that changed the way I viewed Advent. The topic was “Celebrating the church year at home.” Until then, like many people, we went right from Thanksgiving to Christmas decorations. At the workshop we talked about pausing that tradition and including a time of just Advent decorations and symbols at home - even if only for a week or so.



Symbols have been a way for humans to communicate important information since the first person slapped a handprint on a cave wall. Young children who have no concept of the alphabet often recognize the “M” – it means chicken nuggets and Happy Meals. Symbols are an easily recognized shortcut to share vital ideas.

Since that workshop, the symbols of Advent have had a special place in our holiday celebrations. We have a plastic bin for just Advent, and those items are displayed for a week or two before any signs of Christmas appear. We even have music devoted to Advent hymns before a single note of Silent Night is heard.

First is our Advent wreath – a circle denoting eternity – surrounded with greenery – a sign of faithfulness and life even under harsh conditions. There are 3 purple candles – the color of reflection and contemplation both of Jesus coming and His coming again. The pink candle is a reminder of joy, and the center of all 4 candles is the white one. White in the church year symbolizes Christ. Before each dinner, the appropriate candles are lit.

Another Advent symbol is a large felt banner Advent calendar made by a fellow student 40 years ago. Each pocket is large enough for a slip of paper with scripture and, when our kids were home, some candy. The children took turns reading the Bible verses and sharing the candy – a symbol of sweetness shared. Another suggestion for the workshop was to put up only the empty stable if your home nativity allows. The figures don't get placed in the stable until closer to Christmas (the wise men have to wait for Epiphany).

Celebrating Advent at home – even for week or so – has been a real blessing as well as a way to share our faith with anyone who enters our home during that time and sees those decorations. If you feel so led, try celebrating just Advent at home before rushing into Christmas. What symbols will you use? God bless your celebrations this year

There's a wonderful familiarity about celebrating traditions at Christmas time. My dad's parents brought European Christmas traditions, such as chocolate ornaments that hung on the tree alongside delicate glass ornaments of birds and tiny colorful mushrooms. My mom's parents allowed us to open Christmas pj's and a new ornament on Christmas Eve. My husband's family doesn't open their gifts until after they eat breakfast on Christmas morning, but they do get to open their stockings as soon as they each wake up.

When I became a Christian in high school, I added a new tradition of attending worship on Christmas Eve. It opened me up to the religious significance of Christmas and deepened my experience of Christmas. Fill in the blank: it wouldn't be Christmas without \_\_\_\_\_. For me, it's worship on Christmas Eve. It's something that I look forward to each year.

I love how Christmas Eve worship reminds me of all the other years before, and that's warm and comforting. And I also love how Christmas Eve worship is a little bit different and the Holy Spirit keeps surprising me. Something old is new again, each Christmas. The story and scriptures are the same, yet I hear the old story anew again. I'm different and growing, so different parts of the story impact me differently. I know all the carols by heart, yet I hear the lyrics differently because the Holy Spirit speaks through those old familiar words and tunes and puts a new song in my heart. Something old is made new again.

How is the Holy Spirit (ruach—in Hebrew) making Christmas new to you this year? Maybe it's a tradition that is infused with new meaning. Maybe it's something you pause to make room for something new. May we say, along with Mary, "Let it be with me according to your word." As we enter into these days of Advent, I pray that you will have profound ruach-filled moments, where in the silence God still speaks, where the hidden and unhidden work of the Spirit re-creates in you again.



During my childhood, I remember the beautiful, colorful Christmas celebrations. Mom and Dad purchased toys, clothes, and bikes for us. We toured downtown Flint every Christmas eve to see the lights. We put up two trees; the beautiful silver one in the living room and a real one in the family room. These are memories of perfect Christmases that only lack one thing: God. We were Christians; however, my parents didn't attend church regularly. My brothers and sisters would catch the church bus most Sundays.



My children and I attended church services regularly. My boys were Sunday School children. I thought it was important to teach about God during our family Christmas celebrations. Worship and singing are vital to finding the Holy Spirit. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Christmas music can move me to tears. John would spend hours at the organ playing carols. And as bad as the news gets at Christmas, hope and joy reign. In our family, love burns bright.

To keep Advent holy, it is helpful to have an Advent calendar. We have one that is a manger scene. Every day in Advent, the kids would add a shepherd, a sheep, or an ox. Later in the month angels and stars were added. The Christmas story comes together day by day. We also have an advent wreath. Sunday evenings we lit a candle and discussed hope, love, joy, and peace. These evenings around the wreath in family discussion are pleasant memories, joyful and peaceful.

Another necessity for our family Christmas celebrations was giving to charity. My workplace had an "Adopt-a-Family" program where each building had one family. I was often the coordinator for our building. Lots of folks would give money and it was my task to purchase gifts from the family's wish list. My guys usually went along to shop. After the necessities were in the basket, My guys picked out toys for the children in the family. I purchased those toys. My dream was that our charity would help my family to be more empathetic to the less fortunate.

Our family still puts up two Christmas trees; one in the living room and the other in the family room. We visit Frankenmuth to see the beautiful lights. The guys received clothes, toys, books, and bikes for Christmas. All this with one important addition: We give because God gave his son to us at Christmas.

"May the God of hope fill you all with joy and peace"

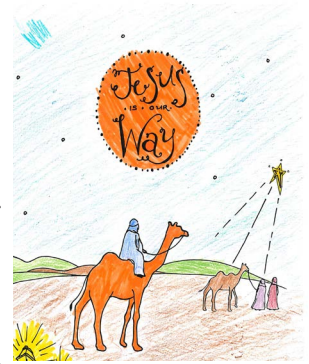
The Holy Spirit inspires us to have faith. Our life through our actions is a true measure of our faith. We often say faith is our anchor, but do we lean on God no matter what the situation?

When our faith is tested, we must ask the Holy Spirit to show us how to grow daily in our relationship with him. As we follow the teachings of God, we can experience peace and contentment in our life. If you do your part, the Holy Spirit will guide you to emulate his example of loving kindness and your joy will radiate to all those around you.



## *All Things Made New*

When Lindsey and I got married, we moved into a soggy two-bedroom apartment on the far end of town from my in-laws with my parents in the next town over. When our apartment became unbearably soggy due to a sprinkler leak, we moved a smidge closer to the in-laws. It was another two-bedroom apartment in a complex full of arguing couples, Bounty Hunters and Saturday morning Inca Flute aficionados. Because we lived so close to both of our parents, we spent the following few years bouncing between each other's parent's homes for Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Memorial Day, Labor Day, and many more.



It did feel like the holiday ping pong game and I am sure many of you know the feeling. It became impossible to fulfill everyone's holiday fantasies and we were run ragged trying to do so. After a few years, we moved to New Jersey for seminary and our first child was born. Suddenly, we got a choice in how we would spend our holidays. We could order in Chinese food. We could accept a friend's invitation. We could ignore the holiday if we wanted to; except when we went back home for school breaks. Then, the holiday tug of war began again.

I do acknowledge the dear feelings of grandparents and great grandparents who want their homes filled with family more than a thoughtful card or a fancy gift. I am getting to that stage in my life as well. Our trouble was that Lindsey and I had a concentration of grandparents and in-laws who all wanted us to be at different places at the exact same time. It was my mother who gave me this advice, "You need to make your own Holiday family traditions."

This was a very freeing statement. Even though the pressure remained, it was lovely to be given the grace to create new traditions surrounding the holidays. This became more important when we moved back to Los Angeles and came in close proximity to the family celebrations again. We said no to some things so that we could create something new. One of those things is that Christmas morning is at our house. We would happily come to Christmas afternoon, but for our family, we gather in our home for Christmas morning.

Jesus' birth is God creating a new tradition, bringing freedom, grace and newness. Jesus' life gives us an opportunity to see how life could be lived. His death and resurrection give us the freedom to live in Jesus' way according to our time, our call, and circumstance. What are the new things that you see forming in your life? Is this scary or wonderful? In what way could Jesus be hinting that "You need to make some new (Spiritual) Family Traditions?"

“Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth; Break forth in song, rejoice...Shout joyfully to the Lord the King” (Psalm 98). Wow, joy to the world! That’s hard, isn’t it?

We forget God came into this world to save his beloved children. Life is hard; I certainly know that. This year sure has been a challenge: health, wars, fires, tornados, injustice. God, when will it stop? We are human, and it’s hard to remember that no matter what happens, God has us! He loves his children.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish. Not to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3-16-17) paraphrased.

Remember to sing, shout, dance, and raise your hands in joy that God sent his son for us. He’s got us! Thanks to be God! Merry Christmas.



## *Resetting Priorities*

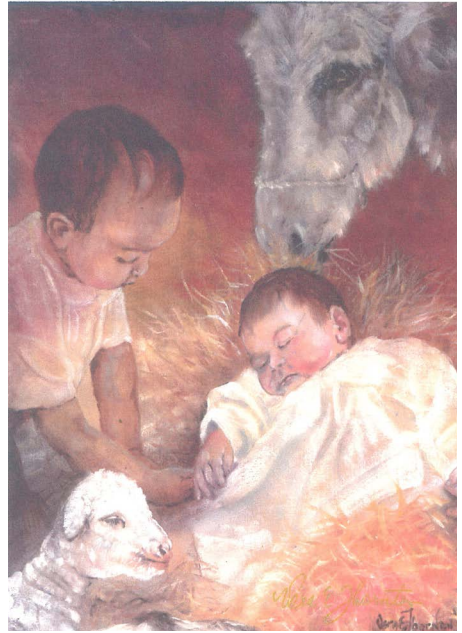
In my earliest memories Christmas was the high point of the year. In fact, I tended to regard the holiday as a marker that divided the year into two sections: BC and AC – “Before Christmas” and “After Christmas.” I have to confess that what made the event so special was my focus on my own wants – I.E., what presents awaited my expectations. In later years, as I began to look beyond my self-centered assumptions, I started to understand that the season is, indeed, a focal point for the year; but for reasons other than personal greed.

First of all, it wasn’t merely an event for me alone. It was also experienced by other members of my family. Next, I began to realize that it was important for a much wider community – including our congregation, the village, and even the rest of the world.

Christmas is a turning point for the year; but, more importantly, a turning point for humanity. It marks the special event of God becoming one with his people; not only spiritually and symbolically, but literally, in the incarnation of Jesus Christ: the realization of “God with us.” During the Season of Advent, we are given the opportunity to prepare for what can be truly called a “New Orientation” to the way we look at the flow of time and at ourselves.

The accounts of the Nativity in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke reveal the fulfillment of the promises God made throughout the Old Testament; and point forward to even greater hope that human beings can anticipate.

At the turn of the season, we can be encouraged that the work God began in us is continuing each day through the Grace of his Son. May this Advent Season be a gift that helps each of us to understand, a bit clearer, the love of God that has been given to us; and continues to be with us each day.



When I am fearful of what life is throwing at me, God's Holy Spirit brings me courage and strength to face what is ahead...

Lord God, when I hide from my fears or because I am ashamed, you send your Holy Spirit to seek after me. You call to me in a still small voice and comfort me. I tremble no more and feel calm and assured in your grace.

When I am in doubt, Lord, you send the Holy Spirit to settle me with truth, wisdom, and clarity.

When I am joyful, Lord, your Holy Spirit surrounds me in love through earthly angels.

In times when I feel alone, your Holy Spirit surrounds me in love through earthly angels.

Even in the darkest valleys, your Holy Spirit provides light, shimmering through the trees...light in the singing of birds.

If I am traveling through a dry and dusty desert, God, your Holy Spirit is there with me, leading me to springs of living water.



*Come Holy Spirit, come! Where is he coming from?*

The Holy Spirit is the third Person in the Holy Trinity. Why isn't he the 2nd person? These are some of the questions I have thought about. I don't think I will ever find the answers. It doesn't mean that I will quit questioning.

I never really thought about the Holy Spirit and Christmas. After all he is just there...right? So, I started doing some research. WOW! I found out that "Luke's Christmas Story" had a lot to say about the coming birth of The Christ Child. How did I miss all he foretold? Luke wanted his readers to know that God was heavily involved in the birth of his Son through the working of the Holy Spirit. I will continue my journey exploring who the Holy Spirit is.

The Holy Spirit is making my Christmas enlightened, I have missed so much about the 3rd Person of the Trinity. Come Holy Spirit, come.

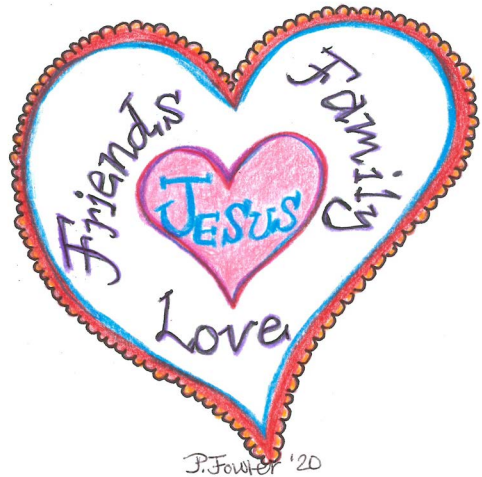


## *How the Holy Spirit Made Christmas New for Me*

Growing up I had a programmed Christmas. I had a small family. I had quite a few relatives on both sides; my father just didn't want them around. Christmas was boring. I grew up in the Assemblies Church - 3 days a week were church activities. I lived in church; I knew quite a lot of the bible so I was knowledgeable. Growing up around the Christmas holiday, we celebrated on Christmas Eve (opened presents) with no family other than Mom, Dad and 2 sisters. We always had a fake tree and my Mom would say that she would spend the same amount on each of us kids. But the argument was one or two of us would get more gifts. Mom would remind us she spent the same amount on each of us. I guess we never accepted that. There was no Santa, no stockings. Mom and Dad bought the gifts – a real bummer.

Christmas Day, we went to church and either went to my grandparents for dinner or Zehnder's in Frankenmuth. Same thing every year. When my parents divorced when I was 17, my Dad started another life with another woman. Christmas gatherings got worse. My Dad was invited over with his new wife wherever we were; very stressful.

When I met Julie, everything changed. Christmas was a celebration of Jesus and there were so many friends and family. We celebrated on Christmas Day. Santa came to fill 10 – 20 stockings hanging on the lit fireplace. There were Pinata's, we played football and games outside – snow or no snow, the smell of a real Christmas tree with all of the presents. We had Santa Claus hand out presents with ripped paper everywhere. I thank God every day for waking me up, and for giving me these wonderful non-programmed Christmases. It brings so much joy to me. The Holy Spirit has made a great new Christmas Season for me for a lot of years now, with and many more to come.



P. Fowler '20

*Peace*

Waiting can be a difficult thing for many. Whether you are waiting for a child to be born, a medical diagnosis, or even just to finish work for the day, it can be frustrating and I am not a patient person at all. Over the last years as I have been more involved in church and Bible studies, I am starting to realize that God has us waiting for things on purpose. He always has a reason.

God promises renewal. He shows many throughout the Bible how to start new, therefore renewing their promise to Him and his people. God promises us renewal through Jesus Christ. Jesus died on the cross for our sins. This allows us to be forgiven for our sins and transgressions. Jesus died so we can live! We are renewed daily with our hope. Isaiah 40:31 states, “but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint”. (NIV)

We need to remember that God loves us and wants what is best for us. He wants us to hope and love. By doing these things and trying to follow the path God lays before us, we are renewed daily. II Corinthians 4:16-18 says, “Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” How wonderful and amazing is this! Turn inward and be thankful this season, and find joy in being renewed day by day.



## *Christmas Every Day*

When I was a little girl, my mother would read to me in the evening before bed. One story was about a little girl wishing for Christmas every day, which I always found amusing. In the story the girl got her wish – but didn’t enjoy it as much as she thought she would. There was just too much of everything: toys, clothes, wrapping paper, ribbons, candy, trees, carols – piling up and never ending. She wished for it to stop and, when it did, was relieved – happy to have the holiday return to its normal once a year place in the calendar.

But – did you know – we do have Christmas every day? God gives us gifts every single day. He loves each and every one of us just as we are. He is our Father, the creator who made all things and all people, declaring each and every one to be “Good.” Then – because He loved us so much – He sent His only son Jesus, to live among us and model what we need to do and believe to be a Christian. Then – Jesus did the most amazing thing: He died on the cross, giving His life for us so that our sins could be forgiven. To complete this remarkable sacrificial gift, God the Father raised Him from the dead. He not only overcame death; He presented us with more gifts. Because our sins could now be forgiven, we could be in relationship with the Father and spend eternity with Him in Heaven: But – there’s more! When Jesus was preparing His disciples for his departure, He presented them, and us, with yet another gift: The Holy Spirit who would come to live in each and every believer until they departed this life. This Holy Spirit would be our Counselor, our Advocate, and our Guide. He would help us to pray, interceding with the Father when we needed assistance with our prayers. He would help us to be strong and loving Christians.

All of the gifts are ours; they are new every day. All we need to do is ask. Ask for forgiveness, for help, for guidance and – you will receive. These gifts are not wrapped up and stored away for one day a year. They are available every day for every person who believes in Jesus and what He did for us. Can you imagine? Do you believe? Christmas happens every day in the life of a believing Christian. So: stop (pray); look (ask) and listen (notice). It’s all there before you with the rest of God’s gifts and promises. (But, that’s another story!)



Gen 1:31

Romans 8: 26-27

John 3:16; 14:16-17, 26: 15-26, 16: 13-15

Galatians 5:22-23

It's Christmas morning and the presents are stacked under the tree wrapped in foil, topped with beautiful ribbons. One by one the gifts are opened. Hug, thanks, and exclamations fill the morning.

In the relative quiet of the afternoon, I take time to enjoy new things. The lovely vase goes in the china cabinet to be used on special occasions. The chocolate orange will be gone by bedtime. The wooden puzzle is too much work, stick it in a drawer for later; the pretty book on flowers sits on the coffee table where I'll look at it occasionally, and that scarf (not my colors) put aside to donate.

Finally, there is the small blue box with the fine gold bracelet with the letters spelling Faith. This I know I will wear every day.

Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see". The Holy Spirit has given us the gift of new life. Our question becomes what we will do with the gift we cannot see?

Will we only use it on special occasions like Christmas and Easter attending worship? Will we feel fired up by the Spirit today but burn out tomorrow? Will we decide the work of a Bible Study is too much and put the book away on a shelf? Will we simply say the whole Holy Spirit thing is just too hard to understand and say it's for others?

Or will I, will you, be open to receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit in every way and every moment as the greatest present ever given? The decision is ours!



The year is 2023 and the color is pink! The smash hit movie Barbie precipitated an all-things pink frenzy, much to the delight of my 5-year-old granddaughter.

During Advent, the color pink has the distinction of being the uniquely colored candle on the advent wreath. While the other candles are symbolic of penance, the pink (rose) candle represents the liturgical color for joy. As such, the pink candle is associated with Joy Sunday.



Joy Sunday provides a respite from the penitential tone associated with the rest of Advent; the Hope, Peace, and Love Sundays. As the third Sunday of Advent, we have reached the halfway point of the season and we are reminded of the joy associated with the birth of Jesus. A former pastor commented that the pink (color associated with girls) colored candle reminded her of the girl Mary as, on Joy Sunday, we have the opportunity to read the Song of Mary (Magnificat) as recorded in the Gospel of Luke.

We ponder Mary's great rejoicing -  
My soul doth magnify the Lord  
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.

For the fulfillment of God's promise -  
And his mercy is on them that fear him: throughout all generations.  
He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel: As he promised to our  
forefathers, Abraham and his seed forever.

and the transformation of the world -  
He hath shewed strength with his arm: he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of  
their hearts  
He hath put down the mighty from their seats: and hath exalted the humble and meek.  
He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich he hath sent empty away.

2023 has been a year of anxiety as the powers of evil, hate, exclusion, denial, and greed seem determined to push us into the abyss of darkness. And yet we can see the light of a single pink candle in the darkness. As Mary rejoiced all those years ago, we are comforted by the joy of God's promise still with us and anticipate God's continual transformation of the world.

So, think pink this Advent season! May your spirit rejoice in God our Savior.

Years ago, while I was talking to my Pastor, I said how God has blessed me. Everything was good in my life. My Pastor's comment was "maybe the true test of faith would be during times of adversity." "Will you find comfort in his name then?" "Will you still acknowledge him as your Lord and Savior?"

Well life happens; years later our son of 25 years suddenly died. As you might know, our world crumbled around us. God cried with us that day as we held, no, as He held us from slipping into darkness. Our faith was our only comfort.

Holidays would come and go, but even though we attended church services we avoided the celebration of holidays. They were just too painful with the proverbial empty chair at the table. We went through the motions of life but stayed home on Christmas.

Eleven years later our grandson was born. A spark was lit that year and we celebrated Christmas with new life. To be clear dear reader, our grandson didn't replace Aaron but enriched our lives just the same.

Avery is 12 now and we celebrate Christmas with a renewed blessing of celebrating our Lord's birthday.

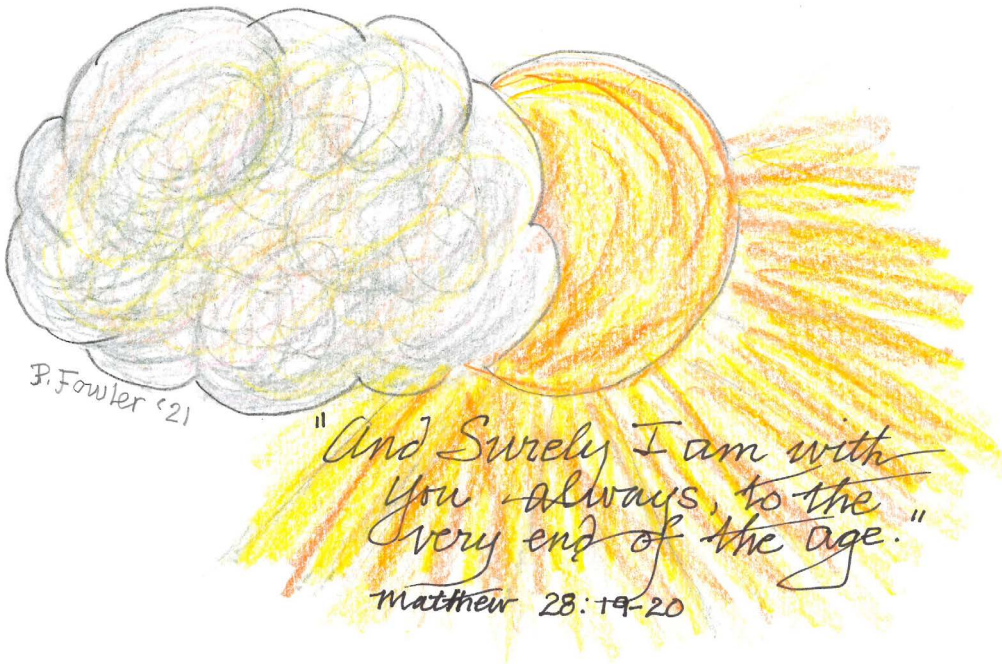
It has been a long journey but I now understand what my pastor told me so long ago.

Thanks be to God



When I think of the Holy Spirit, I feel a light that encourages me to pursue transformation, gratitude, and peace. In the past, I have found myself caught up in the hustle and bustle of the holiday season. Family members have different needs, a new year with new resolutions is coming (enter-self-criticism), and I am easily overwhelmed by the constant shopping ads that try to make me feel as if I'm missing out on yet another thing.

As I write this, horrific videos and images of war in Palestine and Israel have flooded social media. My heart is breaking for the world. These days, I spent a lot of my time listening to my professors and internship clients express their grievances with the world while I am deep in thought of my own. I often catch myself thinking, "Is what I want to do with my Social Work degree good enough? Am I even capable of creating sustainable social change?" And so, this year, now more than ever, I find myself relying on my faith. Through prayer, meditation, and a willingness to be guided by the Holy Spirit, I can experience Christmas in a new way – as time of gratitude, renewal, and rest in the message of hope and redemption that Christmas brings.



## *Freedom in Christ*

“You’re like two bulls constantly butting each other!” Hugh’s frustration with Fred and me was understandable, I guess. I felt more like a cow pursued by an over amorous bull. I tried to not hit Fred’s hot button. But he kept coming at me. The final time was when he told the church he had hired a different preacher for Sunday night services. I went to the church as a seminary student, and expected to stay there until I graduated. Then I would become a full-time minister. Fred said I didn’t need seminary. All I needed was the Bible. He felt I wasn’t doing enough to bring Christ to Hazelwood, and thought Sunday night worship would do it. I refused.

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

Calligraphy:  
P. Fowler '18

At an elder’s meeting Fred and I argued for three hours. His opening salvo was, “You don’t believe the Bible! For example, what do you believe about the Creation account in chapter one?” I said, “That chapter of the Bible tells the essential truth: God created the heavens and the earth. It is not a scientific account but it is a good story.” When it ended, I was asked to step out. Fifteen minutes later I was told, “Roger, we’re asking you to leave. Fred owns a home here. We can’t ask him to leave.” Ninety days later I moved.

Donn Beadle talked to me the next day. He said, “I wish Larry had heard that discussion last night.” His son, Larry, was in the Army. Donn Continued, “We have come home from church many Sundays and wondered how people could believe the stuff that was taught there. Your answers to Fred give me an interpretation of the Bible that helps me. I see a way of faith that doesn’t have to shut off my mind now.”

At my next church, I got another jolt in a men’s discussion. The church treasurer asked, “How can you sit in the same room with Methodists?” He had learned that Methodists attended our seminary, I said, “It’s not hard. We’re built about the same and we just sit down.” He said, “Do you try to convert them?” I answered, “No. We exchange ideas. They’ve helped me. I hope I’ve helped them.” Luckily no more was said. The treasurer did not try to fire me over that exchange.

Paul wrote the Galatians: “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. “(Galatians 5;1) Some want to interpret the Bible in a reasonable way. I’ve tried to share my faith in ways that are practical and honest. The Holy Spirit keeps helping me to do this. Each year, at Christmas, I find new faith through the Spirit’s leading.

*And now these three things remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*  
1 Corinthians 13:33

I have found at Christmas time it is easy to get so caught up with the decorating, shopping, wrapping, and cooking that I forget the real reason we are doing all this in the first place. God gave us baby Jesus out of LOVE. Sometimes the people we love the most get lost in all the hustle and bustle of holiday traditions. We need to take time to LOVE:

Love sets aside the decorating to kiss your spouse.

Love stops the cooking to hug your child.

Love is kind when we are losing our patience.

Love doesn't envy another home that has coordinated Christmas china, wrapped gifts, and outdoor lights.

Love doesn't give only to those who are able to give in return, but rejoices in the giving to those who can't.

Love makes us pause to take time to ring the Salvation Army bell.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

Love never fails: Toys will break, clothes will rip, tools will rust. But giving the gift of LOVE will endure.



## Joseph's Son

We all usually give thought “what was it like for Mary?” that first Christmas. But...what about Joseph? How did he feel? He knew this was not his son, but God’s son. Did that make any difference to him? Did he feel it was a lot more responsibility for him?

When he couldn’t find a room at an inn, did he feel like he had let God down by not providing right for Mary? Was he scared? Did he wonder “Is God upset with me?” Was he praying, “Please God, help me; it’s your son.”

Mary had no choice at that time. Did Joseph wish he could run away and hide somewhere from God? Yet the faithful servant of God stayed. He helped deliver the “Son of God!”



First make a soft place for Mary, a bed of straw. Then a place to lay the baby, more straw. The manger, a perfect cradle. Swaddle the baby and use Mary’s shawl to keep him warm. Now lay my cloak on Mary to keep her warm.

Then taking Mary’s hand, he offered a prayer. “Thanks be to God; He provided us with what we needed. God was with us all the time. (I should never have had any doubts.)”

Joseph was obedient to God. God knew that Joseph was a responsible, loving man. That he would take good care of Mary. He also knew, that Joseph would be a loving father to Jesus! God trusted Joseph with the care of His son.

Joseph and Mary, both, must have given “Thanks to God” on that night. Let us also give “Thanks” for the birth of Jesus on this night of hope and love.

I have had 90 years of “oldness.” Now I am ready to take on some “newness.” Every day is a new day. Every morning I start the day getting together with my Father, Son and Holy Spirit as I settle in my living room chair. I have a number of items I read from, and then the Bible whenever they refer to scriptures relating to a particular story. It starts my day off with many “new” thoughts.

My family ranges from age 10 to 66. They all live close and we get together often. In my nightly prayers, I pray the Lord will take care of them each new day.

At 90, most of my years have come and gone, so I look forward to new things in my life. I know I can’t do it without the Lord by my side. The Bible says when we live by the Holy Spirit, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. That’s how I want to live.



## *"A Christmas Eve Parable"*

Christina Rosetti Writes: "LOVE Came Down at Christmas!" But how do we truly understand these words? A story helps. A young pastor was in his study on the morning of December 24, writing a meditation for Christmas Eve. But he had writer's block.

There was a knock at his door. His church ran an orphanage: a worker was seeking his help with Billy, who had crawled under his bed and would not come out. Sur enough, the pastor found Billy under his bed—silent, withdrawn. The pastor sat on the next bed and began a one-way conversation with Billy.

Getting nowhere—with that meditation still to prepare—the pastor next sat down on the floor to get closer to Billy. But Billy was not to be persuaded. The pastor began to feel desperate: he didn't want to leave Billy, but he had to write that meditation. Upon inspiration, he decided to crawl under the bed—to get down in there beside Billy—to speak a few comforting words.

Billy's affect slowly began to change. He could hardly believe that this big man was here under the bed with him. The pastor spoke about the exciting celebrations soon to come.

Finally, Billy was willing to share his own story; his feelings of loneliness. But Billy also began to realize that he didn't feel quite as lonely now. The pastor had, after all, squeezed himself under his bed to be with him. At last, he felt ready to leave his hiding place.

The young pastor crawled out from under the bed after Billy, tousled his hair, and walked to his study. Suddenly, he realized that he did have an idea for meditation! There was likeness between Billy's predicament—loneliness and isolation—and our human predicament.

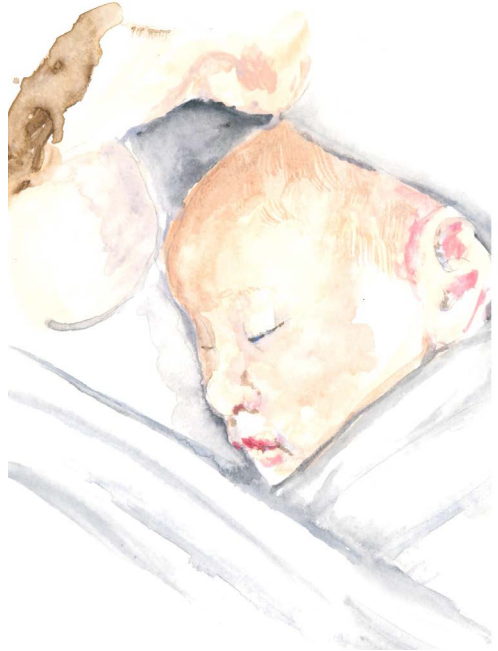
Smiling to himself he realized that in the event of Christmas LOVE humbled itself—a bit like he had. LOVE came in a child, born in a stable, laid in a manger, in a hidden way. Humbly, quietly—LOVE came to find us . . . in all our hiding places.



*(Kenosis)*

By Luci Shaw

In sleep his infant mouth works in and out.  
He is so new, his silk skin has not yet  
been roughed by plane and wooden beam  
nor, so far, has he had to deal with human doubt.  
He is in a dream of nipple found,  
Of blue-white milk, of curving skin  
and, pulsing in his ear, the inner throb  
of a warm heart's repeated sound.  
His only memories float from fluid space.  
So new he has not pounded nails, hung a door  
broken bread, felt rebuff, bent to the lash,  
wept for the sad hear of the human race.



In John of the Cross's thinking, kenosis is the concept of the 'self-emptying' of one's own will and becoming entirely receptive to God and the divine will. It is used both as an explanation of the incarnation, and an indication of the nature of God's activity and will.

## 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.

Blessings to all!





*And I will give you a new heart,  
and a new spirit I will put within you.  
And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh  
and give you a heart of flesh.*