

Daily Readings for Advent

2016



Park Lake Presbyterian Church

309 E. Colonial Dr., Orlando, Florida 32801

407/841-6550

www.plpc.org

Sunday, November 27, First Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Sunday School
10:30 a.m. Worship Service
5:30 p.m. Advent Worship (Sanctuary)

Friday, December 2

5-9:00 p.m. FAVO Christmas Event

Saturday, December 3

9:00 a.m. Hanging of the Greens (sanctuary)

Sunday, December 4, Second Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Sunday School
10:30 a.m. Worship Service
11:45 a.m. Lunch and Gingerbread House/Nativity Build
6:30 p.m. Concert (Sanctuary) Saint Saens Christmas Oratorio

Wednesday, December 7

6:00 p.m. P.L.O.W. - Park Lake on Wednesday Fellowship Dinner (Struble Hall)

Sunday, December 11, Third Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Sunday School
10:30 a.m. Worship Service
5:30 p.m. Advent Worship

Tuesday, December 13

11:30 a.m. Church Staff Christmas lunch (Dubsdread)

Friday, December 16

6:30 p.m. Koinonia Class Christmas Party (Jim and Sandy Bogner's home)

Saturday, December 17

9:00am Nativity Practice in sanctuary
6:00pm Disciples Class Christmas Party (Walk and Nancy Jones' home)

Sunday, December 18, Fourth Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Sunday School
10:30 a.m. Worship Service; Poinsettia Sunday, Nativity Pageant
5:30 p.m. Pizza and Caroling

Wednesday, December 21

6:00 p.m. P.L.O.W. - Christmas Play and Dinner

Thursday, December 24, Christmas Eve

5:00 p.m. Worship - Carols and Candles
11:00 p.m. Worship - Carols, Candles and Communion

Sunday, December 25, Christmas Day

9:30 a.m. Fellowship Hour
10:30 a.m. Worship Service

Have a blessed Christmas!



Introduction...

Some say that this yearly compilation of Advent reflections from members and friends of PLPC is one of their favorite gifts of the season. Many look forward to reading each day in our 4 week walk to Christmas. Others tear through the whole booklet right away because the 'gift' of each story is simply too tempting to wait until tomorrow, like a kid left alone under a Christmas tree of shiny packages.

Our Advent writers were given a text, from John 1 or from Luke 2, and were invited to go where the scripture took them and then to share their own story of how finding how Christ in the world is a gift to us all. I'm grateful for their writings.

This year's theme is Christmas: Where Heaven and Earth Meet.



In the Celtic tradition, places that give us an opening into the magnificence and wonder of God's presence are called "Thin Places." There is a Celtic saying that "heaven and earth are only three feet apart, but in the thin places that distance is even smaller." Many of our authors pondered those thin places in their lives where God has shown up. I've enjoyed reading every one.

A special thank you to Kathie Uhing for her thoughtful editing, and compiling of these Advent Readings. Kathie takes joy in reading each one and choosing appropriate placement and graphics. Her special attention makes this booklet come together each year!

It is my prayer that you find a special time each day of Advent to reflect on God's gift to the world in Jesus Christ. "A baby changes everything," I've heard it recently said. Indeed a baby does, and no where more evident than in the choice of our Creator to begin at the beginning with us. May you discover 'thin places' this Christmas Season. The Lord's waiting to meet us there.

Helen DeBevoise

HOPE

1st Sunday of Advent - November 27
Scripture Reading for today:

Winnie Nofsinger
John 1

To say that the writer of the Gospel of John presents us with a different initial impression (picture) of Jesus than the other gospel writers is an understatement.

John eschews the nativity story altogether - the story that is indeed the focus of our celebration of Advent - in favor of the story of Jesus' baptism and the beginning, or Advent, of his earthly ministry. Not only that, John invites us and urges us, to take a more expansive view of our Saviour, to see Him not only as the Son of God, but as God himself.

I count myself, a "shower singer," as very blessed to be a member of our wonderful choir here at Park Lake.

As such, I'm exposed to some incredibly beautiful music. I think of our great composers and ponder their thought processes as they put notes to paper. Surely they felt inspired to go beyond just chord progressions, key changes and the like!



In a similar manner, perhaps John invites us to see Jesus beyond His healing miracles and his parables. Even John can't fully define Him, but he offers us yet more knowledge and inspiration!

Prayer:



God, you became a human being in Jesus your Christ to assure us that you are the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. We thank you that in the birth stories of Christmas, we can get a glimpse of your divine plan. Amen.

November 28

Helen DeBevoise with Gene Simmons

Scripture Reading for today:

Luke 2

(This devotion was written by Helen DeBevoise following a conversation with Gene Simmons. Gene has loved contributing to the Advent devotional for years, but is limited by his health this year. I went over to help him tell his story - Helen)

Gene Simmons served in the U.S. Navy for three years, stationed in Washington D.C. for that time. One of his great memories during that time was attending the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church and singing in their choir. The pastor at that time was the Reverend Dr. George Docherty, who followed the famed Reverend Dr. Peter Marshall, who also served as chaplain of the U.S. Senate. Both were Scotsmen. Dr. Docherty is credited with the addition of “Under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance. Gene remembers Dr. Docherty being an imposing figure. In his deep brogue, he would roll his r’s at the end of each service, saying, “The congrrrrrregation will be upstanding forrrr the benediction.” Everyone could not help but rise to receive the blessing.

During a recent visit Gene and I talked about the Advent book. We began to recite the Luke 2 birth narrative of Jesus from memory together, fumbling along, each reminding the other of next verses. We laughed and smiled our way



through. When we got to the shepherds part, Gene took those lines: “shepherds in the fields keeping watch over their flocks by night.” Shepherds! He said. And Angels! He laughed. He remembered Dr. Docherty’s sermon on the Audacious, or was it Audacity... of Christmas? Shepherds? Wise men following a star? A young couple? It was as if Gene was sitting in New York Avenue Pres on that second Sunday of Advent, hearing that sermon once again. “This was not man’s plan. This was God’s plan. God didn’t come to high level business people. He didn’t come to leaders of the community or the country. He came to simple people. Farmers. Agricultural people. Angels appearing, Shepherds believing.” Gene’s excitement grew, laughing to himself. “It was

Unexpected, Unimaginable! God works with us at all levels. We have to be able to recognize him when he comes.” Suddenly we were both transported; he to a beloved place in his young adulthood, me to a time before I was born.

What a gift to share our stories in Advent. Try it. It might just take you somewhere.

Prayer: Storyteller God, thank you for weaving us together through the sharing of Your story and our stories to find glorious community in Jesus. Amen.

November 29

Scripture Reading for today:

Erin Cook

John 1:1-2

*The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word.
The Word was God, in readiness for God from day one. (The Message)*

From the beginning, we are created with family. From the beginning, we have purpose. From the beginning, we are being prepared. From the beginning, we are one. From the beginning, we are loved.

God's Love poured out for His Children. We are His Family. An all-encompassing Family – from our dearest friends, to our second moms, to our favorite nieces and nephews, to those whose names we do not know.

As we approach this beautiful Christmas season our feelings of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love are brightening. Just like Santa's eyes are twinkling, I think of Father and Son in the beginning and of my family, all of my families, and the JOY I pray that comes into their lives. In the space below, take a moment to create and draw what you are most praying for this Christmas season. Is it Hope? Peace? Joy? Love? And then share that feeling with your family, friends or the next stranger you see.



Prayer: Father, thank you for being there in the beginning, the middle, the end. We pray our hearts grow larger, our eyes twinkle more, our laughs grow louder and our spirits are lifted. Give us strength to be present to your Word. And as we hug our family, we thank you. Love and Hugs, Your Children. Amen.

November 30

Carol Bookhardt

Scripture Reading for today:

John 1:3

*All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being.*

God created everything. God created families. He created the space “Where Heaven and Earth Meet.” As a child of divorced parents, this meant feeling loved and the joy of spending time with family.

In that “thin place” my sister and I were loved and cared for by Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles and cousins. Mom counted on them more than I understood at the time. My Aunts and Grandmothers were our babysitters. My Grandfather and Uncles saved me many times when I ran out of gas or my car broke down. Our cousins were our first best friends in childhood.



Going to the Christmas Eve candlelight service together is one memory when I felt closest to God. At the end of Christmas day, the families would gather at my Grandparents house. We shared a meal, opened our gifts and enjoyed being together.

**Christmas
Traditions**

Throughout the years we went to church together, ate Sunday meals, we watched the Wonderful World of Disney, eating homemade ice cream, had sleepovers, celebrated birthdays, hunted Easter eggs and enjoyed huge bonfires in the back yard. My Grandfather and Uncles would take us hiking “in the woods” which we thought was a great adventure! Those memories were, for me, the place where heaven and earth came together.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, as we go through the season of Advent, please help us to know your love, the feeling of peace and joy with our families in the “thin place” between heaven and earth. Amen.

December 1

Scripture Reading for today:

In Him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

John Franklin

John 1:4

In our city, we shared one of those *thin places*; an enormous event this past summer that affected us all. For me, though I was not there, it was a horrifying and hurtful event. It brought back terrible memories. Thirty years ago, I could have been one of those men standing in that room, feeling the rejection of society, seeking a place, if just for a short while, that I could be who I really am, looking for someone to take away the loneliness, if just for a while. My heart was torn open for all those who were there that night. They were just trying to get time to relax and have some fun, but instead the hate rushed in, finding them and creating a horrible tragedy.

But out of this tragedy something began to happen that was different. It started in that thin place between heaven and earth where God brings all things together. It was not like the past, where *that* happened to *those people*, to *them*. The first thing to hit me was right here in our church. The very intimate and touching prayer service held right after worship was an outpouring of love and concern for all those souls involved, living, deceased or just frightened by the shooting.

Quickly, we began to see the love and compassion spread through our city like wildfire. It came from places I could never thought possible, and in ways that could only have been God inspired. The touching events continued to evolve and grow, reaching out to every part of our city, our state and on out into the world around us. It was a spreading show of love and concern, that to me at least I never dreamed possible, especially in this year of hate speech between friend, neighbor and even church members. It has been wonderful to see God emerge from one of those thin places between heaven and earth and show us how to love.



... be ye all of **one mind**,
having **compassion**
one of **another**,
love as **brethren**,
be **pitiful**,
be **courteous**.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, we thank you that in those times of deepest hurt and tragedy, you step in and create a place where we can envelope each other with your wondrous love. Amen.*

December 2

Nancy Jones

Scripture Reading for today:

John 1:5

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

In our current times, it is really hard to make place totally dark. When we turn off the lights to go to sleep, there are still lights glowing from the clocks, the Fitbit being charged, the cable box, the digital photo frame, and the street lights from outside. All of these passive lights can be constant reminder that God is with us at all times and you can not escape God and God's love for us. On Earth, we have a constant, daily reminder of a great light with the sun rising each and every morning. No matter how gloomy we may feel, that sun comes up each and every day to remind us that a new day is here. It is a time to rejoice and be glad in it.



As I am not a morning person, I have memories of my father waking me up for school as a child. I would first hear him whistling as he approached my room and then he would sing. "Fancy Nancy, it's time to wake up!" He was happy and joyful. I didn't want to wake up and couldn't imagine how he could be so happy? I had the privilege of helping with the care of my father the last five years of his life. I witnessed the struggle he had with his failing body and his mind. My goal was to keep him safe and comfortable. At the very end of his life, his transition into the next life was quick and peaceful and for that I am extremely grateful. My dad, the morning person, took his last breath at 5:00am. As Walk and I were driving from the Hospice residence to my mom's house, God created a beautiful sunrise, for me to be reminded that God is with me and it is going to be okay. God's got my dad, and he is free from his broken body.

Let us all be reminded, that it may seem dark to us, but that it really never is totally dark. God is with us. Thanks be to God.

Prayer:

Thank you Lord, for reminding us at least once day, that you are with us in the sun's rising. We most likely take it and you for granted, yet you continue to love us anyway. Help us to be that light and to share it with those who are in darkness. Amen.

December 3

Paige McRight

Scripture Reading for today:

Luke 2:1

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered.

This verse drops into the midst of the story of visits, angel visits and family visits, as Mary prepares for the birth of her Lord and ours. In the first chapter of Luke's gospel we learn about Herod as King of Judea, Zachariah and Elizabeth and the unbelievable news of their son, John, we are introduced to the angel, Gabriel, God's messenger to these good folks and to their cousin, Mary. It's all strange and amazing, and it's all pretty local, the little province of Judea where news gets around and a scared and pregnant teenager can set out and go to her older cousin's house, probably on foot and definitely alone.

With this first verse of chapter 2, we are reminded that all this takes place in a much larger world. Augustus, Emperor of Rome, has decreed that all the world should be registered. A census is being taken, likely for better tax records. The birth of Jesus takes place in a particular time and political situation. Well, doesn't everything? When you read this, the campaign season will be behind us, but as I write it, I cannot turn on the radio or TV or read news without being reminded that we live in a particular political situation. So in the midst of this season, I have found great comfort in this verse. The emperor could command that everyone (in the Roman empire, not really the whole world; the tendency of a politician to overstate his case is nothing new) should be enrolled in the census. In the verses to come, we see how Joseph and Mary responded to that order. We know that Mary and Joseph taught the boy, Jesus, to honor civil authority. Later in his life he would tell his followers they had a duty to render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar (to pay taxes in that case) just as they had a duty to give to God what is God's.

And there is the message in this verse for me. Christians, all of us, are citizens of the kingdom of heaven and at the same time citizens in a particular place and political situation. Sometimes as citizens, we have to flee as Joseph and Mary did with Jesus, refugees in Egypt when he was just a little thing and the political climate in Judea was too hot for the three of them. Sometimes we have to stand against an oppressive regime as some of our ancestors did here at the time of the American Revolution and as some of our nearer kin did in the world wars of the 20th Century. Jesus was born into a foreign empire in his native land. Most of us were born into a free land, the greatest nation on earth, one among that whole world of nations Augustus thought he ruled. In fact, the One who rules this world is that boy born in the time of Augustus' reign. Thanks be to God whose world it is and for the Christ who reigns over it all above all earthly powers.



Prayer: Almighty God of love and life, we are grateful for the life you give us and for the privilege of life in this place and time. Help us always to be faithful citizens both of heaven and of the nations where you place us, that in all we do we honor Christ, to whom be all glory in the church and in the world now and forever. AMEN

PEACE

2nd Sunday of Advent - December 4

Susan Kaney

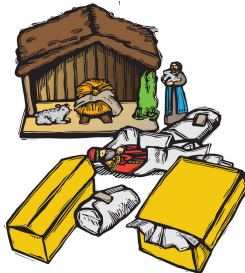
Scripture Reading for today:

Luke 2:2

This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

When I received my scripture assignment, I thought, oh boy, did I get a doozie. I then asked myself what is a “thin space?” I needed some answers before I could articulate my thoughts on this. I shared my qualms with a friend of mine and she explained that this verse was the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecy of our Messiah. The census is what created the necessity for Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem. It sets in motion so many signs that the foretelling of Jesus’ birth was unfolding.

Before talking to my friend I turned to the internet to see what a “thin space” was and I found a blogger. Reading her story brought to mind a story of my own. I was given a Hummel nativity by my maternal Grandmother; BIG leap, but stay with me. Luke 2:2 is the beginning of the telling of the birth of Jesus and my thin space is where I see God, my Grandmother, and this special memory.



After Thanksgiving I remember setting up the Hummel nativity with her in a place of honor, on the piano. I watched as she carefully unwrapped each piece. She would hand me a piece to place on the piano as she talked about who or what it represented. This year, I am going to add a new element to the tradition of positioning this heirloom in a place of honor in my home. I will begin with the reading of the birth story in the Gospel of Luke. Take some quiet time to reflect on how the birth of our Messiah changed the world as we know it forever. I hope this reflection helps you find your thin space this year.

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for infinite love. Sending your Son to live among us and ultimately die for our sins is the supreme sacrifice. We are grateful that you have given us another gift of “thin space” to spend time in relationship with you. Amen.

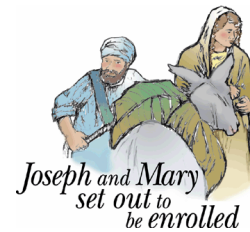
December 5

Scripture Reading for today:

“All went to their own towns to be registered.”

In this short verse loom two powerful realities in life: place and politics. Everyone, not just Joseph, had to go to their hometown, by order of the emperor. You had to be named and counted. If you didn't know it before, now you were reminded: You are from that family, that town, that place. Go there so we can count you; so we'll know who you are.

Dan DeBevoise
Luke 2:3



In “My Little Town,” Simon and Garfunkel sing about the longing to escape one's hometown:

*In my little town
I never meant nothin'
I was just my father's son
Saving my money
Dreaming of glory
Twitching like a finger
On the trigger of a gun
Leaving nothing but the dead and dying
Back in my little town.*

What did Joseph think as he made that hard trip, with a young pregnant girl, to his hometown to comply with the emperor's order to be enrolled? Resigned? Frustrated? Angry? Like it or not, sometimes life gets put on hold as you comply with powers beyond your control.

When Joseph finally packed things up to return to life in Nazareth, to return to normal, this time with an infant child, I imagine he thought over the days back home in Bethlehem and asked himself, “what just happened?” Could he sense that somehow his life, and even unimaginably the whole world had changed? Whatever powers in life had seemed totally in control before, now could be seen, had to be seen, in light of a new life, a new son, his son, Jesus. He went to his hometown to be counted. He left with a child whose life would make everything count in a new way.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, when we feel totally at the mercy of other powers, break into our lives with your power to make all things new. Open a way for us to see your power at work in our lives. Amen.*

December 6

Anne Vercheski

Scripture Reading for today:

Luke 2:4

“So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and family of David.”

Belonging is big in our house. Places. Family. We find where we belong, and God by His grace has met us there.

We are Floridians. In the beautiful sunsets at Venice where my family moved over 66 years ago, and in the majestic birds of prey that fly over the house where Dan and I started our family over 25 years ago, we have met God.

We are Park Lakers, and we are Geneva Knights. In our incredible loving church family at Park Lake where we joined almost 19 years ago, and in the sweet grace and care offered by our Geneva School family where we have been for over 13 years, we have met God.

We are Davidson Wildcats, and we are Presbyterian. Even though our family has only belonged to Davidson for a few months, we have met God in Catherine’s wonderful roommate and in the lovely family at the Davidson College Presbyterian Church that has adopted her and in that congregation that has welcomed her.

We are children of God. A frequent declaration in our house recently has been, “Everyone is a child of God.” We are all part of God’s family. This has been especially true as we have met refugee families from different countries and faiths. These families cannot return home, but our family can welcome them and show them God’s love as they now make their home here. For me, belonging and being rooted in places for so long, I just can’t imagine their journey. I hope they meet God here through us. We have met God through them.



Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank you for calling me your child and reminding me that I belong to your family. Thank you for those thin places where you meet me. Please help me to remember that we are all your children and to look for your kingdom always and everywhere. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

December 7
Scripture Reading for today:

Walk Jones
Luke 2:5

*He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged
and who was expecting a child.*

During my six years as chaplain at Westminster Towers, a multi-purpose room became a holy place because we would worship there every Wednesday morning. When I was a hospital chaplain I realized a cardiac care unit is a holy place, where the line between life and death was very thin. Heaven was close as the staff fought to preserve life and fight death for one more day, one more year, a lifetime.

Pregnancy and childbirth are thin times in one's life: a time when we may feel vulnerable and close to God. As a husband and expecting father, twenty-six advents ago, I waited, worried, and dreamed. I was more than a little afraid. Every first-time parent I've talked with is afraid when the time is near.

I try to imagine Joseph and Mary's thoughts and emotions as they trudged the lonely road to Bethlehem. They were walking away from her mother, her best friend, even the village midwife Mary had known since girlhood. Who would be with her, help her? They must have been so afraid. They did not know they were walking towards a stable, shepherds, and angels. But they knew they were walking with God, walking towards a thin place at a thin time in their lives and in the history of the whole world.



Prayer:

Dear Lord, be with me today. Give me concern for the people around me who may be afraid and worried as they walk through their thin places. I trust you are near whenever I am in mine. Amen.

December 8

Gayle Schmidt

Scripture Reading for today:

Luke 2:6

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born.



The concept of a place where heaven and earth meet brought memories of the many beautiful mountains, glaciers, rivers and lakes that have taken my breath away. To identify one very thin space is not easy. So I took a different path.

When our children were born we worshipped at the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) so they were not baptized. The children were dedicated as parents and congregation promised to rear them as children of God. Our children participated in every church activity available for young people before they left home.

Fast forward to 2015 when I found myself in the First Presbyterian Church Apopka watching as my daughter Laura was ordained as a Teaching Elder! WOW! Listening to pastors, her mentors and friends describe her new role and responsibilities was so moving. Then came the time for the laying on of hands to complete the service. I was proud and blessed to be one of those Ruling Elders. Dr. Dan Williams, our Executive Presbyter, had me stand by him and watch as so many Teaching and Ruling Elders in attendance came forward to lay their hands on Laura as prayer was raised. It was so humbling to feel the presence of God that day.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to take the time to be aware of those thin places in our busy lives. Your love is ever present as we seek to find our way in serving you. Amen.

December 9

John Daniel DeBevoise

Scripture Reading for today:

Luke 2:7

*And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth,
and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

I grew up attending the Montreat Conference Center in multiple facets. For each conference I can recall the president, Pete Perry, standing up to give his usual pre-conference/ “first day of” speech about the uniqueness of Montreat and how many describe it as a thin place where heaven and earth magically touch.

For so long I believe that I pinpointed thin places as tangible, physical locations on earth and I thought back to important landmarks in my life such as Montreat, Anna Maria Island, or Longview, my grandparents property in northeast Alabama, for real life examples of places I felt God’s presence strongest. After having considered the scripture of Luke 2:7 my understanding of thin places has significantly changed. The scripture tells us Mary wrapped Jesus and placed him in the manger because there was no room in the inn. A manger in a stable quickly became the first cradle for the Son of God, and how thin a place that must have been. So often I feel this is incredibly true in our lives and so very relevant to what a thin place is. When God is put somewhere or God’s presence surrounds an environment, that environment becomes a thin place. It is His presence that makes us feel safe, comfortable, recharged, and engaged. We must realize as Christians we have the power to create thin places in other people's lives through music, word, prayer, friendship, compassion, and showing Christ’s love in the world.



Prayer: Lord as we go through this Advent season, help us to see where you call us to show your light and bring your presence into this place. So often we feel so distant, but in this time help us to find where the places are thin. Amen.

December 10

Mike Bookhardt

Scripture Reading for today:

Luke 2:8

*And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby,
keeping watch over their flocks at night.*

Thin places. The first place that comes to mind is Montreat. Through Youth Conferences and Music Conferences as a teenager in a musical family, Montreat was a special place made even more so, by special people leading. But I'm sure others here will talk about Montreat.

I have to believe that the 'fields nearby', where the sheep were grazing, was a thin place for the shepherds. The quiet, peaceful countryside, the soft sounds of the sheep, in a comfortable, familiar setting, had to give the shepherds a sense of reverence and peace. The angel appearing must have been quite startling in the quiet of the night.

For me, those places that were 'thin' in my youth are still around, but I have new thin places. My Grandmother's house on the river in Edgewater is a thin place. I like to think that the good times I've experienced with my family there has contributed to that, and it brings reminders of those family members who have passed. I feel God is nearer to me there.

I also feel closer to God when in nature, near the ocean or in the mountains, where the magnitude of God's creation around me, humbles me, and reminds me of what the real priorities in life are.



A new thin place for me now, is not a place at all, but rather when my family (which will be distributed to different places soon enough, with their own families starting) is all together, laughing and enjoying each other's company in one place. I will miss those times, but I will thank God for them and enjoy them now.

Prayer:

*Lord, please open our eyes to see that you are always near,
and help us to remember and appreciate when we do see.
Amen.*

LOVE

3rd Sunday of Advent - December 11

Christa Hyatt

Scripture Reading for today:

Luke 2:9

An angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

It is a time where heaven and earth do indeed meet. In Luke 2:9, the angel, bringing news of a miracle, appears with bright light all around to the shepherds. The appearance of the angel and the bright light terrify the shepherds yet also reveal God's miracle. It is significant that the revelation of our Savior's birth is first revealed to those not of privileged birth. "It is the great thought of the Christian faith that we have a God who knows the life we live because he too lived it and claimed no special advantage over common men." (Barclay's Daily Study Bible) It is a time where heaven and earth do indeed meet.

My husband and I go bike riding on Sunday mornings. As we cross over the bridge over Semoran Boulevard on the Cady Way Trail, many mornings we see spectacular sunrises that God has made. It is a breathtaking experience and it speaks to me of God's presence in our world. Helen Hayes says that she discovered: "the revelation that I am a living part of God's world of people." I cannot look at the sunrises without realizing that God is speaking to me and that this is yet another example of where heaven and earth meet.



Prayer:

Dear God, please help me to understand what God is revealing to me through every sunrise, as He revealed Himself to the shepherds so long ago. Bless us all during these times of challenges as we struggle to serve You as You have taught us to do in the scriptures.

Amen.

December 12

Scripture Reading for today:

But the angel reassured them. Don't be afraid!, he said. I bring you the most joyful news ever announced and it is for everyone.

Linda Castle

Luke 2:10

From Our Pew

When Helen said the theme for this year's Advent Book would be *Thin Places*, I knew she was not talking about the area between my neck and my knees. I decided I should read up on this old Celtic belief shared by many Christians to this day. I learned these are places, times or experiences where the veil between Heaven and Earth is so thin we are able to glimpse the true glory and beauty of Heaven as a gift from God.

Our niece lost her daughter in a tragic accident this summer and has been sharing her beautiful photos of the sky. These photos include cloud formations, rainbows and golden colored skies she believes are shown to her by her daughter in Heaven. She feels much comfort and her faith renewed through finding these treasures in the sky.

I have been thinking about where or when I find these *thin places* in my life and I've found a simple answer. A few weeks ago we were sitting in "our pew" having our Sunday morning chat with one of Park Lake's dearest members, Woody Reynolds. He was talking about sitting in our pew earlier that morning. When I asked why he'd been sitting there, he told me it was where he and his dear Betty had sat every Sunday. I told him **I** felt blessed knowing that; he said **he was** blessed we now sit there. This started me thinking about my *thin place*. Later that day people were talking about how you should not "claim" a pew, but instead sit somewhere different every week. I don't think that's for me. I may have to lean over to see around a pole sometimes and the music might sound better near the center aisle, but this small pew is my *thin place* where God has allowed me to witness many events that show me how near Heaven can be. When a baby is baptized and Dan or Helen walk among us as we sing to them, how could I feel any closer to Heaven? When we sing old hymns I used to sing with my mother, I feel her close to me. I'm never closer to my Lord than during communion as we partake of the elements representing his broken body and blood sacrificed for our salvation.

I was never one to attend Christmas Eve candlelight services; times just never seemed to work out. However, last year we decided to come and I am so glad we did. As we stood in the darkened church with only the glow of candles, we joined with our church family to sing Silent Night. I believe this was another *thin place* where God gave me a glimpse of the glory of Heaven, right there from "**our pew.**" If you have never been to Christmas Eve at Park Lake or if it has been a while, please come this year. You may find it to be a *thin place* for you.



Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, during this special time of Advent we prepare once again to celebrate the birth of your precious son and our Savior. Please open our eyes, ears and hearts to those thin places where we may find that most joyful news you give to everyone. Amen.

December 13

Scripture Reading for today:

Linda Beaty

Luke 2:11

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

As any new mother or father can tell you, there is perhaps no greater evidence of God's power than the birth of a baby. The world rejoices at a baby. Pregnant women glow. People want to touch their bellies. Walk through a park with a baby; people ogle and ooh and aah over the baby.

All the world loves a baby. I felt it when I was pregnant with my first child, Jackson. As a reporter, you become used to being invisible, attending meetings, walking through crowds. You stand on the sidelines and interview people – or talk to them after some major event, good or bad (most often bad).

But when I was pregnant, everyone wanted to talk to me about babies – or their pregnancies. Men and women wanted to touch my belly, see if they could feel the baby moving. Once, as I was Christmas shopping at eight months pregnant, a Salvation Army bell ringer hollered at me from across a K-Mart parking lot. “You’re carrying a boy!” he yelled in a friendly bellow. “I can tell!”

The whole world, it seems, loves a baby.

But why?

In a cracked and fractured world, in times that are often mean and cynical, babies remind us that the most powerful force on Earth is love. They remind us how to love – and that we are loved. They are reminders that we are lovable too, that we were once the cuddly, wrinkly, giggling bundles of joy that lit up our parents' lives – or the faces of teachers and neighbors, friends and family, aunts and uncles.



To me, that is the thin place. It's not a place at all, but a feeling. A feeling of love and friendliness. A togetherness and the reminder that we are all a community - of babies and former babies. Of mothers and fathers and aunts and uncles and cousins and friends.

And at Christmas time, the birth of Jesus brings back that joy to all of us -- to remind us that God sent us a baby who would transform our world. Here was a baby who would die for us, redeem us, and forgive us.

But it all started with a baby. And the most powerful force of all. Love.

Prayer: God of Love, Wrap us in Your gift of Presence in this Holy Season so that we may know how your love changes everything. Amen.

December 14

Scripture Reading for today:

Rosalyn Russell

Luke 2:12

*This will be a sign to you.
You will find a baby wrapped in cloths
lying in a manger.*

When a baby is born into a family at Park Lake Presbyterian Church or there is a visiting baby on Sunday morning everyone gets excited. A glow fills those on lookers as they admire the miracle of birth.

This is definitely a time When Heaven and Earth Meet. God created us in his own image out of love that we cannot fathom, but we can surely feel it in those very special moments when God is so very near.



How do we use this love that God has given us during this Christmas season? We will meet many people, families, friends and those people who will not have a Merry Christmas. A smile does work wonders, so does unconditional love.

Along with food baskets and gifts for those in need, this Christmas let us share God's love for all humanity in humility and sincerity.

Prayer:

God, thank you for that precious baby, Jesus, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas time. Jesus taught us what it means to truly love one another. Amen.

December 15
Scripture Reading for today:

Bob Blue
Luke 2:13

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying..."

Have you ever had the experience of being in a situation where you feel lost? What should you do? Then a person or an event happens and shows you the way.

Many years ago, when I was 28 years old and working for the government, I received a call that my Dad had been killed in an industrial accident. All I could think of was that I had to get to my Mother who would be alone. Dorothy and I dropped everything, drove all night, and found Mom more upset than I'd ever seen her. Dad's company had selected a mortuary. We ended up staying for two weeks handling all that needed to be done.

There was a coroner's inquest. The man who caused the accident was, in my youthful judgment, an idiot. It never should have happened. My thoughts were less than Christian as we forged ahead and took Dad to his home town for burial. Mom still couldn't face the fact that he was gone.

We were at the funeral home and she could not bring herself to go in and see his body, when a man, neither of us knew, came in and asked if he could pray with us. With those wonderful words he reminded us that God loves us, that Dad is now in His care and we were blessed to have such a wonderful father. At that moment, Heaven came to Earth for us. The man left, never to be seen again. Was he an Angel? Perhaps.

Prayer:
Thank you Lord for finding a way to remind us that you are with us always.
Amen.



December 16

Scripture Reading for today:

*“Glory to God in the Highest Heaven
and on Earth peace to those on whom His favor rests.”*

Bill Warlick

Luke 2:14

Nancy and I saw the glory of God evidenced over and over during our years spent in Africa, especially during Christmas. We remember several



young barefoot boys carrying staffs made from palm branches walking down the aisle leading a couple of live goats. As they approached the manger filled with straw, the choir sang Christmas carols. The station mechanic, Lushimba Pierre, had strung a star over the crèche. The Glory of God filled the Presbyterian church at Moma, Democratic Republic of Congo, on Christmas morning.

In the past few weeks I have been studying different passages which describe God's Glory. Webster defines glory as "great honor or fame, or its source (God)" and glorify as "to give Glory to; to honor extol" and Glorifying as "to exult."

How can I (we) glorify God on a daily basis? I need to ask God to open our eyes to His marvelous works in creation and to enjoy being with His people in whom He has worked miracles.

The Apostle Paul described the meaning of Advent when he wrote, "For it is God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's Glory displayed in the face of Jesus Christ." (II Corinthians 4:6)

Prayer:

*Lord, open our eyes this Advent season that we may see your GLORY.
Amen!*

December 17
Scripture Reading for today:

Marian Price
Luke 2:15



“Let’s Go! Let’s See!”

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, *Come on, let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this wonderful thing that has happened which the Lord has told us about.*

Not every message from God is delivered by a band of angels, but God does tell every one of us about wonderful things He’s doing among the people of our town and our world. I wish I were always ready to respond, like the shepherds, “Let’s go! Let’s see what God is telling us about!”

In 2003, I was invited to go on a mission trip with the Outreach Foundation to Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Being a cautious soul, I took my time saying yes. But I’m so glad I did go and see the wonderful things God is doing in those countries, through faithful workers like Nedson Zulu and Sebber Banda.

It seems as if there is an invitation from God almost every day to go, see, and participate in God’s work. Isn’t that work a tangible place where heaven meets earth? Let’s go and see FAVO. Let’s go and see how the organ sounds after painstaking restoration. Let’s go to Montreat and see how our hearts are stirred by new interactive patterns of worship. Let’s go as far as Madagascar or as near as the Women’s Residential and Counseling Center to see God restoring lives and families. Let’s go and see God at work in the kids and adults at Vacation Bible School. Let’s go and see and hear God’s message in every Sunday’s worship.

Prayer: *Mighty God, thank you for being born as our Savior in Bethlehem. Open our eyes and ears to your wonderful things, and coax us to say, “Let’s go! Let’s see!” Amen.*

JOY

Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 18
Scripture Reading for today:

Sandy Bogner
Luke 2:16

*“So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph
and saw the baby lying in the manger.”*

What a contrast between this story of the shepherds in Luke and the one in Matthew of the chief priests and scribes of Israel when they heard the news that the Messiah had been born, that Heaven had come down to earth! The shepherds - poor, uneducated, humble - hurried to see this exciting, incredible thing that was announced! But the religious leaders of Israel didn't even bother to go the five miles to Bethlehem to see for themselves.

What a picture of the indifference of mankind to God! After all, we have important things to do, to accomplish - our careers, our families, our houses, our belongings, the laundry, etc.! We'll go see the Messiah some day, when we manage to get around to it! But some day usually means never, as it did for the religious leaders.

But the shepherds didn't just go - they hurried! They couldn't wait to see this wonderful, Heavenly thing! The story of the shepherds is just one of the many ways that God tells us in His Word that if we seek him, we will find Him.



It's the message from Jeremiah in the Old Testament -
“You will seek me and you will find me when you seek
me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13) The shepherds
found Mary and Joseph and the baby in Bethlehem even
though the barn was not decked out in Christmas lights
and there was probably not a sign over the door that said
“This is the place”! God promises us that we can too.

Prayer: *Lord, grant us the grace to hear your call and seek your face
this Advent season, when Heavenly voices and earthly voices praise you
together. Amen.*

December 19

Scripture Reading for today:

*When they had seen him, they spread the word
concerning what had been told them about this child...*

Leesa Bainbridge

Luke 2:17

We have a long holiday tradition in my family of reading “Davey And The First Christmas.” Davey is a sweet, if mischievous, little boy in Bethlehem whose father owns an inn. (You might see where this is headed.)

The inn is full and Davey’s father asks him to clean out the stable to keep him busy. After a few mishaps, including flying chicken feathers that Davey stuffs in a sack, the stable is clean and ready for unexpected guests, a very appreciative Mary and Joseph. A favorite line: “As soon as Baby Jesus came to use the manger bed, then Davey’s sack of feathers made a pillow for his head.”

It’s just one of many Baby Jesus stories told at Christmas – the true story in the Bible and the embellished ones in children’s books. They bring families, friends and congregations together in faith. We read and repeat them; we know verses by heart. But the shepherds took on an incredible storytelling task – spreading the angels’ word of the newborn Savior after seeing Him for themselves.

Just imagine the faith and the courage it took to do that! It reminds us how much easier it is for us to tell the story today – and how important.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, as we enjoy the stories and traditions of Christmas, help us to remember to tell our own stories of faith and remember all of the heroes in Bethlehem that night. Amen.



December 20

Scripture Reading for today:

And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

Vicky Nicoll

Luke 2:18

In the Eye of the Storm

We've all been there - chaos followed by calm, followed again by chaos. The ebb and flow of life. The doctor's diagnosis, the flurry of activity to find the right specialist, the tests, the treatment, the worry - and then, often, the calming knowledge that what can be done has been done, and finally, the turning to God.

Or, the case of an impending storm, the frantic preparations, the mad shopping for water, batteries, cans of tuna, the worry about whether the trees are strong enough, the sea wall high enough, the windows secure enough. Then the relief when the storm takes an eastern jog or when the noise and wind abate in the storm's eye. And that turning, once more, to God -- in gratitude or concern or supplication.

Or, Christmas. We make lists, drag decorations out of the attic, fill up the calendar, and promise every year that next year will be different, more manageable. We get caught up in the parties, the cards, the gifts, the lights -- until all the bits and pieces swirl around us and we lose sight of our purpose. Then comes, by God's grace, a respite: sitting quietly in front of the Christmas tree, pulling out memories of Christmases past and sharing them with loved ones, attending church on Christmas Eve. At last, in the midst of the storm, we find calm. We remember that God is the eye of the storm and that His peace, in our stillness, is always and forever available to us.



Prayer: Lord, like the ancient shepherds, may we look upon the Christ child with awe and bring news to the world that will amaze it. May we find the grace to do so by being still enough to let you in our lives. Amen.

December 21

Scripture Reading for today:

He was in the world and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Bob Larr

John 1:10-11

As I read the above passage from the Book of John, I was reminded of the first time I thought about religion and about church other than being a place my parents made me go to every Sunday. That occurred when I bought the album **Jesus Christ Superstar**. Listening to the album while reading along with the lyrics seemed to bring the story of Christ's story and final days into sharper focus.

The lyrics from the song **Superstar** were particularly intriguing to me.

*Now why'd you choose such a backward time
And such a strange land?
If you'd come today
You could have reached a whole nation
Israel in 4 B.C
Had no mass communication*

For a usually distracted teenager who had been going through the motions in Sunday School and at church, I for the first time actually spent time reflecting on what would happen if Jesus was to come during my lifetime. Would I recognize him? Would I be open to receiving his message. Or would I be like a lot of my peers at the time, jaded and cynical? I would like to say that at the age of 14 I had an epiphany and that everything became clear, but the only thing I remember is that because of these reflections, I started to pay more attention to the teachings of Jesus in the Bible and tried to be a better person and live the life that he taught. And while I know at times I still fall short, I continue to try to live that life.



Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, as we celebrate the birth of your son, please allow us to be reminded that sharing your love is the best gift of all and we have been blessed with this gift from you. Amen.

December 22

Scripture Reading for today:

But those who did welcome him, those who believed in his name, he authorized to become God's children, nor from human desire or passion, but born from God.

Jody Mask

John 1:12-13 (CEB)

On his third album, *Coloring Book*, Chancellor Johnathan Bennett, better known as Chance the Rapper, recorded a track called "Blessings." Like many hip-hop offerings, "Blessings" is a stew of sounds. Though Chance is not a "Christian artist" by the music industry's narrow parameters, when you hear the gospel refrains, chancel exclamations and a lone trumpet, you know that he is well-versed in church music!

Chance methodically raps--raptly, you could say--amazed that "blessings (like his infant daughter) keep falling in my lap." No doubt, his hard work, musical talent, and trailblazing attitude (he avoids record labels to maintain artistic control) have contributed to his success. But it's evident that he knows that his work ethic, talent and attitude are God-given gifts that have fallen into his lap, and all he can do is "praise Him 'til I'm gone."

In the same way, every Advent reminds us that the gift of a very special infant, prepared to be the Blessing of the World, fell through the thin space that separates heaven and earth, right into the lap of a God-chosen couple. "Believe in his name," John tells us, "and you, too, will be born of God."



"When the praises go up, the blessings come down" is the key hook of this track. But some closing refrains penetrate the heart of the Advent attitude: "Are you

ready for your blessings? Are you ready for your miracle?"

Our Blessing came down a long time ago. Are your praises going up?

Prayer:

"Praise be to you, O God! For the ultimate blessing fell into the lap of the world--Immanuel, God-with-us. Shape our minds and hearts, that our thoughts and actions reflect the gratitude of our blessing and miracle. Amen."

December 23

John Walker

Scripture Reading for today:

John 1:14-15

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'")



Like many of us, I spend a lot of time at work talking to people. I talk to students and coworkers, and read things that other people wrote, people who tried to put ideas into words.

Writing is a pretty mysterious thing to do. It seems like taking something alive and musical, and reducing it to scratches or ink. When the Word became Flesh and lived among us, I wonder if it was like that. The Word inhabits a universe that means something, while the flesh comes from a

place where things have to happen in a certain order, and yet they don't mean anything at all.

Those of us from that second universe really want to know about that first one, because we forget it is there, and think this is all there is. When this author sat down to write, they thought of an example from the world of family relations, of kinship. When is a baby not just another mouth to feed? When it continues a family, when it is hope for the future, not just a burden on the present. The analogy points us towards something else: a world of meaning has broken into this world, and it's not going away.

Prayer:

*Dear God, thank you for giving us your Word, and thank you for giving us your words. Help us learn from them both as we live in a world full of meaning, the meaning that comes from that moment when the Word became Flesh.
Amen.*

December 24, Christmas Eve
Scripture Reading for today:

Will Park
John 1:16-17

*From his fullness we have all received,
grace upon grace. The law indeed
was given through Moses; grace
and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

Christmas: Where Heaven and Earth Meet

There are many places where this holy meeting can occur during the Christmas season: Especially beautiful sunrises and sunsets; the twinkle of streetlights through a snowfall; the delicate patter of rain; the touch of a loved one; the dizzying swell of a grand choral; a sermon or a word from a friend that gives us special comfort and truth; the smell of cooking; kind words; a splendid ripple of lightning across a dark sky; the innocent laughter of children; a merry fire in the fireplace on a cold night; deep prayer, where the world falls away, and for a time, everything makes sense.



The best way to seek these moments out is in the hush of prayer. Prayer is an extraordinary thing; it can happen with no words forming – it can be just a feeling of closeness to God and goodness, and to the whole world.

It is good to ask for this experience – it may not come at the moment or in the way we expect. God is very close to us...waiting for us to turn to Heaven for love, guidance, help...hope. Then the touch of God's hand can transform everything.



Prayer:

*God, help us to find the way to open ourselves to the great
flow of your truth, and strength... and love.*

Amen.

December 25, Christmas Day
Scripture Reading for today:

Linda Wright Simmons
John 1:18

*No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son,
who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.*

I have noticed that men hold babies differently than women do. In general, of course. I've seen men hold a newborn baby like a football -- perpendicular to their body, as though to get a good look at the baby.

Women -- in general -- hold a newborn baby sideways, parallel to our body. Maybe this comes from feeding, cradling, or swaying from side to side trying to calm a fussing baby.

Male or female, God made our arms just the right length that the one we hold in our arms is close to our heart, and can see our face and hear our voice.

John proclaims that the Son of God is close to the Father's heart; this Son makes the Father known. Through the Son we can know God! Through Jesus we can envision God as a human person like us. Amazing!



In my chaplain training, I met a woman in the Emergency Department, hunched over in her chair just outside a procedure room. She was distraught because her son had just been taken inside for a procedure, and she could not go with him. We sat together and talked and prayed. One moment I looked over her shoulder and had a sense of Jesus sitting on her other side. It was extraordinary--humbling and moving to experience the presence of Jesus beside this suffering mother.

That the Father would become incarnate in the Son, in Jesus, *makes* Christmas. Through Jesus Christ, we can all be held close to the Father's heart, in God's everlasting arms.

Prayer: Emanuel, God-with-us, forgive us for keeping you at arms' length. Draw us near to your heart in these days of Advent, so we may experience anew your coming in Christ. Amen.

Park Lake Presbyterian Church
309 E. Colonial Dr.
Orlando, FL 32801

DATED MATERIAL

Dr. Dan M. DeBevoise, Co-pastor
Dr. Helen M. DeBevoise, Co-pastor

