

2020
Daily Devotions for Advent

A Different Kind of Christmas:
Finding the True Meaning of Christmas in Difficult Times



Park Lake Presbyterian Church
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All are welcome to worship on Sundays

Sunday School Classes and Men's Bible Study

A variety of classes and small groups are using Zoom to meet during this time. If you would like to participate with any of these classes, please contact the individuals below. If you prefer to participate by phone, you may email to connect with a phone number as well.

- ◆ **Disciples Sunday School Class - 8:45 am, Sunday** **Email Anne Vercheski - avercheski@cfl.rr.com**
- ◆ **Fellowship Sunday School Class - 9:00 am, Sunday** **Email Paula Nowell - nowellp@bellsouth.net**
- ◆ **Koinonia Sunday School Class, 8:25 am, Sunday** **Email Anne Gardepe - annegard64@gmail.com**
- ◆ **Men's Monday Bible Study - 12 pm, Monday** **Email Dan DeBevoise - danparklake@gmail.com**

**10:30 am - Worship - Live Stream (Facebook/YouTube)
and In person, register online at plpc.org (Sanctuary)**

**Special Christmas and Advent event schedule is located
in the back pages of this publication.**

2020 Advent Devotions

A Different Kind of Christmas: *Finding the True Meaning of Christmas in Difficult Times*

Dear Advent Journey-er,

We are glad to walk alongside you in your approach to the Christmas manger in 2020. Advent has been called a “mini-Lent.” A time of reflection on the birth of God's Christ and particularly a time to think about what that means for our lives and our world. Our lives and our world at the end of 2020 is different than we could possibly have imagined on January 1, 2020! What a year this has been. We can say that as individuals, as a nation, as a world community, that alone makes this an extraordinary time to reflect.

In August of every year, I have the task of “listening” for an Advent theme. The theme came this year through Howard Vincent Kurtz who came up with this year's Advent devotion book title. The contributors of this year's devotion are members and friends of Park Lake Presbyterian Church. They were given a scripture, the theme, and perhaps an Advent hymn to reflect upon. Carol Bookhardt and I have been celebrating Advent all November as we've formatted the booklet and read these wonderful stories. Thank you to our writers. Thank you to Carol for getting the booklet into usable format, to Anne Vercheski, Alice Schmidt, Linda Castle and Janie Black for being copy editors, and to you, our writers for sharpening your pencils and opening your hearts so that once again our own hearts can be stirred to prepare for the birth of Christ Jesus.

We are a people greatly blessed.

Happy Advent, Every one!

Dr. Helen DeBevoise, Co-pastor



First Sunday of Advent

Sunday, November 29

Erin Cook

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus!

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus!
Hope, desire, joy, release, deliver, live free.
Let us find our rest in Thee.

I picture the "rest in Thee" as getting a hug from Jesus. How comforting will that be! What brings you rest? A rainy day; front porch reading and rocking; making a pie; a cup of hot tea; throwing paint at a canvas; harvesting what you've sown?

A rest in music is defined as "a rhythmic silence in music." As a transitive verb, it is defined as "to cause to be firmly fixed." Noun, "something used for support."

That's Jesus. Silent as he listens, firmly fixed in our hearts and holding us as we wail.

I kept reading the song title as *Come, Thou Long-Unexpected Jesus*. More often than not, it's the unexpected, that surprises the heck out of us. I never would have expected a pandemic in my lifetime or that a pandemic would make my marriage stronger. Nights of playing battleship together instead of watching T.V. in separate rooms; more meals at home instead of out; taking walks; doing chores together!

Let's live unexpectedly with hope around every worry, desiring to live with joy in our differences and freeing our hearts to be still and rest in Jesus.

Prayer: *Father, Help silence our anxieties. We pray for Your world to be fixed. Give us strength as we support each other from afar. Thank you for the hope you gift us in the birth of Your son Jesus!*



Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus 82

1 Come, thou long - ex - spect - ed Je - sus, born to set thy peo - ple free;
2 Born thy peo - ple to de - liv - er, born a child and yet a king,

from our fears and sins re - lease us; let us find our rest in thee.
born to reign in us for - ev - er, now thy gra - cious king - dom bring.

Is - rael's strength and con - so - la - tion, hope of all the earth thou art;
By thine own e - ter - nal Spir - it rule in all our hearts a - lone;

dear de - sire of ev - ery na - tion, joy of ev - ery long - ing heart.
by thine all - suf - fi - cient mer - it raise us to thy glo - rious throne.

With its opening "Come," this hymn sounds the note of entreaty and invitation that characterizes the Advent season (from the Latin *adventus* = "coming"). Its blending of memory and hope helps us to give voice to our present faith as we stand between the past and the future.

Monday, November 30
Scripture Reading:

Julie Krasno
Luke 1:5-20

It was late in the evening during my stay at Moffitt Cancer Center. It had been a tumultuous and uncertain journey that brought me here. I was about to receive my stem cell transplant after a week of heavy chemotherapy. Sitting up in my hospital bed, I nervously fiddled with my soft fuzzy blanket spread smoothly across my lap. My room lights were low and the hospital was quiet, except for the usual hums and beeps from the IV equipment. The TV was on, but I couldn't focus. Dan was nervously checking his phone, and the wall clock was ticking more loudly than usual, it seemed. On this night, we were expecting my lifesaving transplant cells to arrive. Healthy stem cells that matched my DNA closely enough to give me a chance to live free of cancer were on their way. These stem cells were from an anonymous donor, being brought to me by courier, all the way from Germany. We were hoping and waiting for a miracle.

A nurse came through the door. She was unfamiliar to me, and I was startled. It was her first shift with me, so there was not the usual chit-chat and friendly rapport that I had developed with the other nurses. She was all business, and working alone. She carried a small IV bag, with a small amount of pinkish stem cells – less than one cup of fluid. I was surprised at the tiny, but lifesaving package. I was also surprised by the lack of fanfare - the nurse was alone; there were no support people, no aide, no doctor. She must have sensed my anxiety. She listened to my fears and with the expert care of a good nurse, she held my hand and said, "You'll be alright. I can always tell when someone will do well, and you'll be alright." "How did she know?", I wondered. I hoped. She asked if I wanted to hold the IV bag for a moment. I did, and it was surreal. I couldn't speak. It was the chance of survival that I had hoped for, right in the palm of my hands. Then she simply plugged that little bag of hope into my IV port, pushed some buttons on the machine and quietly walked out the door.

The birth of Christ is our hope and that hope is simply right in the palm of our hands. The Advent season reminds us of that each and every year. Especially this year, this tumultuous and uncertain year. God brings us hope through the coming of Jesus Christ. Hope is always right in the palm of our hands.

Prayer: Lord, we reflect on the scripture and remember the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah and brought the news of God's love and told Zechariah that his prayer had been heard. Lord, we thank you for hearing our prayers and reminding us that God listens and cares for his people, even in difficult times. God of hope, be the center, the focus of our lives always, and particularly this Advent time. Amen.



Tuesday, December 1
Scripture Reading:

Carol Bookhardt
Luke 1:18-25

I began writing my Advent Devotion during the middle of the summer of 2020, not knowing the theme or scripture that I would be given. At the time, I was thinking about needing to be at peace. As it turned out, I was assigned HOPE, and I think that hope is what I was really looking for and fits in with what my original thoughts were at the time.

It's July 16, 2020. In the middle of the summer heat, daily thunderstorms, thankfully no major hurricanes (yet), in the middle of you know what (do I even need to say the word, *Pandemic*?) I won't even mention all of the other things that are going on. We are all weary. Every day seems to be more bad news. Right now, I'm looking for some hope that our days will get better and hear some good news about the future.

As Christians, we know that reading scripture and praying really does bring hope. But we forget this. God's Word and the gift of Jesus Christ, are forgotten as our minds whirl around the events of 2020. It's hard to imagine those who do not know the hope of God's promises.



Ann Voskamp's, [One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are](#), inspires the reader to be thankful every day, even in the worst of times. How can anyone be thankful, and feel hopeful after a job loss, illness, death or during a Pandemic? Ann says "it's impossible to complain and be grateful at the same time", to be thankful right where we are, in the middle of these uncertain times.

Friends, let us be thankful every day, every day is a gift, even when everything in our world is turned upside down. God will gift us with hope, when we remember this, to be thankful and that our future is secure in believing God's promises.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, some will be thankful when the end of this unforgettable year of 2020 is finally over. We are grateful for you and the gift of Jesus Christ this Advent season. Help us to be thankful right where we are. Let us be at peace and be hopeful knowing that you have promised us eternal life. Amen.

Wednesday, December 2
Scripture Reading:

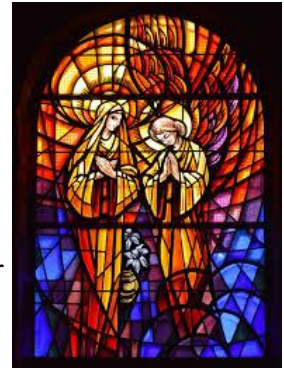
Vicky Nicoll
Luke 1:26-38

Hope. It is both the desire and the expectation that some event or thing will occur. So, I have been reflecting a lot on whether hope is even possible during days of uncertainty, fear, and disconnection. Where can we look for hope?

I have found hope by remembering that people have always been faced with things that “try men’s souls”: natural disasters, wars, pandemics, personal tragedies. And many people have put aside their own safety and comfort to work toward the greater good. The way people are feeling now must be akin to how my parents felt when they were young and separated by war—afraid and facing the unknown. Yet, they survived and lived out their lives together. Hope lies in that remembering.

I have found hope in the lives of young people who are inspired and passionate about this world and its troubles. I listen to their voices and see their courage. I watch them march and organize and move forward with determination and feel inspired myself. Hope certainly lies with them.

Perhaps my greatest source of hope comes from the biblical passage for today. The angel Gabriel approaches Mary and gives her some hard news: she will be visited by the Holy Spirit and will bear a son who will be the “Son of the Most High.” At first Mary is troubled—imagine being greeted by an angel—then she is puzzled, saying, “How can this be?” But ultimately, after being reminded that God’s promises never fail, she responds simply, “Here am I. . . . So be it.” Her hope rests with God and God’s promises.



I am finding that it is possible to look for and to find hope. To carve out a still space, to remember God’s promises, especially as we celebrate the birth of the Son and allow hope to enter in. So be it.

Prayer: Lord, like Mary, may we, too, find hope in your promises. Help us to recognize hope when it comes. Amen

Thursday, December 3
Scripture Reading:

Lauren Poore
Luke 1:30-45

These have been trying times. Hardships have fallen on people in ways never imagined. Normal is not normal anymore. We have been worn thin by so much change happening so quickly. It is exhausting. Community and fellowship have been shattered forcing us to twist and contort to find some sense of connection or routine – a new normal. We crave something to make us believe “it will be okay.”

When Mary visited Elizabeth, it was clear that Elizabeth was beyond excited. And she had reason to be. Mary was visiting and going to be the mother of her Lord (v. 43). Elizabeth exclaimed “you are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said.” Mary simply believed. Not just in a God who could do what he said, but in a God who would do what he said.

When news of my husband, Craig’s, grim prognosis was becoming clear to us, people sometimes asked about the faith I had through it all. I never doubted that God could cure him, but I had to put my faith in what I believed God would do: His presence would be with us; He would guide us; He would never leave us or forsake us. Yes, “nothing is impossible with God,” which brings me great hope and love for our Father. But he does not always save us from our suffering. If Craig had been cured, I would have shouted to the world what the Lord had done. But does God deserve less praise because Craig died? God is still my Father. He was always with us. He never left. Never.

Now, six months later in the middle of a pandemic, homeschooling Thomas, and grieving... Our Father is still with us! This is praiseworthy friends. Have hope. It will be okay.



Friday, December 4
Scripture Reading:

Jean Homrighausen
Luke 1:46-55

Hope as Resistance

Today's text is Mary's Song, also known as the *Magnificat*. Mary praises God for the great reversal – God “has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts” and “brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly” (Luke 1:51-52). Mary praises God even as she faces the reality of her pregnancy as an unmarried woman. As K.P. De Long suggests, Mary's song is an act of resistance - resistance to Roman tyranny, resistance to hopelessness, resistance to the status quo.

Mary's song exemplifies hope as resistance. Through her complete trust in God, Mary envisions a hopeful future, and her deep joy bubbles up in song. In the pandemic of 2020, let us follow Mary's example of hope as resistance:

And God's people stayed home. And listened to God, rested, exercised, made art, played games, learned new ways of being with God and each other - and were still. And they listened more deeply, meditated, prayed, danced, cooked and ate at home together. And they confronted their sinfulness. And God began to reform and transform the people. And they put down their devices and picked up their Bibles and lived for their neighbor - not for themselves. When the danger passed, the people joined together again, grieved their losses, and partnered with God in new ways to live and heal the earth fully, as they had been healed by God. And they lived in loving community in God's reign. (based on Kitty O'Meara's vision of the Pandemic, "And the People Stayed Home")

Prayer: *God of hope, May we praise you and place our trust in you as Mary did. Help us to resist despair and envision a hopeful future, even in the midst of 2020. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



Saturday, December 5
Scripture Reading:

John Rogers
Luke 1:57-58

This is the week of Advent where we focus on Hope. That hope is the centerpiece of this text seemed strange to me. This is, basically, the telling of the facts on how John the Baptist got his name.

Simply put, Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah, gives birth. On the ceremonial eighth day after birth, the family gathers for the ritual of the boy's circumcision. The name the family has determined to give the infant was Zechariah (which, aside, seems funny to me because he would then be called by local custom translated, Zechariah son of Zechariah). But before the naming occurs, the mother, Elizabeth, tells those gathered, "no, he is to be called John." Those gathered pointed out John is not a family name so they took the question to the father, Zechariah. Now this was most difficult as Zechariah had been struck mute by the angel Gabriel for doubting his message, i.e., the will of God. When asked by the family, Zechariah asked for a tablet and he wrote that the child was, indeed, to be named John.

A funny thing (to me, at least) about angels here. When they appear to humans, most often their first words are the same - "Fear Not" - just as Gabriel said to Zechariah. By contrast, when Gabriel appeared to tell Mary of the Holy Child she would carry, she was perplexed but not afraid. So that is the story of the text. It seems to me almost the entire first chapter of Luke is just chock full of hope . . . except for this text.



Let me roughly summarize the other verses of this chapter: Verses 5-23 - Zechariah and Elizabeth are informed (by an archangel no less) that they will have a son. Considering their advanced age this is a miracle. Verses 24 and 25 - Elizabeth, the aged mother, recognizes what the Lord has done for her. Verses 26-38 - Well, this is the biggest act/sign of hope: that same archangel, Gabriel, informs Mary of God's plan for her, even though she's a virgin. Verses 46-56 - The Magnificat, where Mary praises the Lord. So, lots of hope up to now in the chapter, but we come to this reading and it's just fact-telling about a naming... why should this be a basis for an Advent reading on hope? It came to me, finally, that there is a great deal of hope expressed here, specifically in the faith of Elizabeth and Zechariah when they stand up against the pressures of their culture, represented by the family. The family makes demands because it knows best what the miracle baby should be named and probably what his life will be. But Elizabeth has been told by Zechariah, obviously, of the angelic visit and knows if God's plan is to be accomplished the child will be named John. When she tells the family this, they, not listening to the mother, go to the father and make the same demands and he, having been silenced earlier for not believing in God's plan, this time writes out on a tablet forthrightly, "His name is John."

Having now shown his hope and faith, Zechariah's voice is returned and he immediately starts praising God. Verse 68 says he was filled with the Holy Spirit and said, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them." The chapter goes on to tell of a mighty Savior from the House of David, that the Almighty has raised up. In these, and any, uncertain times we can turn to the first chapter of Luke for hope and, indeed, certainty. For we know from the house of David, the root of Jesse, from a virgin, Mary, indeed our Savior was born.

Prayer: Almighty God, we give you thanks for the hope and the certainty of the life, birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Please help us to know the love and perplexing fear these humans must have felt. Help us to hear God's word and act on it by living lives that demonstrate this hope. The hope of the Kingdom of God to all people. Amen

Second Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 6

Linda Simmons

Come Now O Prince of Peace

All year during COVID, I resisted giving up my plans. I looked forward to a trip to see our son, a medical service trip, visiting my 94-year-old mom in Iowa, and seeing our daughter graduate from law school. Even now, I resist the idea of “a different kind of Christmas.” What is Christmas Eve without the congregation singing “Silent Night” and the growing glow of hand-held candles?

What is Christmas after a divisive election? What is Christmas with thousands of Central Floridians out of work? What is Christmas with loved ones lost, but their lives still not celebrated?

This Advent season, our family will miss Uncle Gene. He loved Christmas and brought corny, tissue-paper wrapped gifts by the dozens to family Christmas; quantity over quality! Red grits were his Christmas breakfast tradition, only they never reached red but merely pink. For years, Uncle Gene sweet-talked Park Lake’s Kathie Uhing to decipher, type and print his “New Year’s Letter” because he didn’t have it ready in time for Christmas. He was known for Christmas parties at his house in Maitland where he mingled long-time friends, elderly mothers, pastors, colleagues from Valencia College, Fred and Joanne Rogers, local friends, and his nieces and nephews, and great nieces and nephews.



The Advent carol “Come Now, O Prince of Peace” is new to me, but its message seems written for 2020:

Come now, O Prince of Peace; make us one body.
Come now, O God of love; make us one body.
Come now and set us free, O God our Savior.
Come, hope of unity; make us one body.
Come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile all people.

The hymnal notes that this carol was written for a world conference focused on peace and reunification of the Korean peninsula, broken in two by ideology, government, threats, fear and distrust. Families have members on both sides.

The coming of Jesus Christ is exactly what we need to celebrate. The birth of a Savior who crosses divides and brings healing through love. Jesus’ birth didn’t happen the way anyone would have planned, but Mary and Joseph made do, listened to God’s leading, and followed faithfully. We can, too.

Prayer: God of peace, reign among us this Advent. We need healing and hope, and most of all, love. Thank you, Lord, that you give us these very gifts. Amen.

Ososo / Come Now, O Prince of Peace 209

Capo 3 (Em) (Em/D) (C) (B no 3rd)
 G m G m/F E \flat D(no 3rd)

Korean 1 O - so - so o - so - so, pyong-hwa eui im - gum
 2 O - so - so o - so - so, sa - rang eui im - gum

English 1 Come now, O Prince of peace: make us one bod - y.
 2 Come now, O God of love, make us one bod - y.

(Am) (B no 3rd) (C) (Em)
 C m D(no 3rd) E \flat G m

u - ri - ga han - mom i - ru - ge ha - so - so.
 u - ri - ga han - mom i - ru - ge ha - so - so.
 Come, O Lord Je - sus; re - con - cile your peo - ple.
 Come, O Lord Je - sus; re - con - cile your peo - ple.

3 Ososo ososo,
 chayu eui imgum,
 uriga hanmom
 iruge ha soso.

4 Ososo ososo
 tongil eui imgum,
 uriga hanmom
 iruge hasoso.

3 Come now and set us free,
 O God our Savior.
 Come, O Lord Jesus;
 reconcile all nations.

4 Come, Hope of unity;
 make us one body.
 Come, O Lord Jesus;
 reconcile all nations.

Monday, December 7

Scripture reading:

Howard Vincent Kurtz

Micah 5:2-5a

Simple Little Things

The LORD says, "Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are one of the smallest towns in Judah, but out of you I will bring a ruler for Israel, whose family line goes back to ancient times."... When he comes, he will rule his people with the strength that comes from the LORD God himself. His people ...all over the earth will acknowledge his greatness, and he will bring peace.

Every Christmas Eve, my mother would wear a small handmade wreath made of felt, green sequins and beads, complete with a red bow. As the light in the church grew dim, we would sing the soothing, peaceful strains of Silent Night with lighted candles, and her little pin would reflect the candle's glow.

When I was older, I asked her why she wore such an unpretentious wreath, with its simple safety pin clasp. My mother had boxes filled with beautiful and expensive jewelry. She replied, "this brooch was made by my grandmother for my mother, and now I wear it because to me, in its simplicity and modest way, it reminds me of them."

Many years later, I was settling my mother's estate and found her simple brooch. I honor her by wearing it proudly on my jacket every Christmas Eve. When the lights dim and we sing the familiar hymn, I light my candle and see the same reflections in that wreath from Christmases past.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus this Advent season, consider what simple little things you have been given this year, what simple gifts you might present, what humble service you might offer during these difficult times.

Prayer: Lord God, open my eyes and my heart to the simple gifts that you've given me so that I might share them willingly, caringly, and humbly with others. Amen.



Tuesday, December 8
Scripture Reading:

Anne Vercheski
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Verses from The Message, *“You’re sons of Light, daughters of the Day. We live under wide open skies and know where we stand...Walk out into the daylight sober, dressed up in faith, love, and the hope of salvation.”*

I was born in Venice, Florida and have lived in Florida all my life. I have spent untold hours under wide open skies in the Florida daylight; at the beach looking for shark teeth, in the pool doing laps or playing Marco Polo, in the yard pulling weeds, sunbathing even though my grandmother told me not to. I even find myself feeling down if we have several cloudy days when I can’t see blue skies.

During this pandemic, I have found a different way to be in the light. Since Rebecca is doing online learning, I have been able to walk (with my new hip!) during the cool of the morning. It has been a prayerful and peaceful time for me. I am reminded that I am a daughter of the Day, a daughter of the true Light.

And with nowhere to go during the pandemic except Publix and Target, I have found a different way to dress. My shorts and tennis shoes are getting a workout. But as a daughter of the Day, a child of God, I am reminded to dress wonderfully in faith, love and the hope of salvation.

This will be a different kind of Christmas. I will miss many of the traditions of the season. But with Catherine teaching online from home due to the pandemic, she can help pick out our Christmas tree this year, and I anticipate having more time to celebrate the birth of God’s son instead of just celebrating.



God has been good even in these difficult times. I just need to remember to walk in his Light.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for your Light, the gift on your Son, the Prince of Peace. Help me to remember that I am a daughter of the Day and help me to dress daily in faith, love and the hope of salvation that comes from you. Amen.

Wednesday, December 9
Scripture Reading:

Cliff McKay
Isaiah 2:2-4

The Angels proclaimed,
"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace . . ."



Will the Prince of Peace be coming this Christmas? Is there a manger for him, safe from fire, and storm, and from the virus? Will Herod's police find him and take his life?

This year, Peace is in short supply. There's no Peace in California or Colorado, only the quiet stillness of charred timbers and sentential chimneys. There's little Peace in Louisiana only blue tarps struggling to keep the rain out, and the remnants of former lives piled in debris on the curb. There's no peace in Ames, Akron, Miami, Tulsa, Scranton, Raleigh, or Cheyenne . . . only an invisible virus striking randomly with devastating results, and the pain of loved ones separated from one another. There's no peace in the hearts of black people and all those who empathize with them, only dead family and friends and little accountability for their deaths.

God says, Fear not! . . . And Jesus has promised:

"Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you. Not as the world gives do I give to you." Peace is a gift, God's gift, God quiet and calm, God's freedom from turmoil. Seek it out, embrace it. God's peace is all around us . . . the world can neither give it nor take it away.

God's Peace is enough.

The auld Scottish Blessing:

"Deep peace of the running wave to you
Deep peace of the flowing air to you
Deep peace of the shining stars to you
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you
Deep peace of the Prince of Peace be with you now and always."

Thursday, December 10
Scripture Reading:

Christa Hyatt
Isaiah 7:10-15

10 Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, 11 Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. 12 But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test. 13 Then Isaiah said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. 15 He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good.

Have you (King Ahaz) ever had an agenda – a really good agenda (align your kingdom, Judah, with Assyria against the kingdoms of Israel and Syria)? Then some well meaning friend (God) shows up and throws a wrench (ask me for a sign, show your faith – He asked and then He asked again) into your best laid plans. Then another friend shows up (Isaiah) and tries to ease your fears (of destruction of your kingdom) by telling you that God will handle things.

If you could ask for a sign from God, what would you ask? What would you need to hear to ease your fears and help you keep the faith? Are we so caught up in our agendas sometimes that we fail to hear God's call? Are we telling God, "We've got this? Thanks."

In this COVID world we are living in today, what a relief it is to know that we can turn to God in our despair and know that He will deliver us. And that's the sign we have in this scripture. God's promise/sign is to send a child, His son, and He will be called Immanuel and he will be our Savior.

Prayer: God be with us in our constant struggle to keep our faith strong and ever present. Amen.



Friday, December 11
Scripture Reading:

John Franklin
Isaiah 11:1-9

Peace be with you, A phrase we speak almost without thinking about it, in our worship, as well as in greeting to one another. We are living in a time where real peace in our hearts is hard to come by. The news media, the action in the streets, the threats to our health, the contention in our politics are all around us each and every day.

Are these times really so different from that time long ago when God looked down on his world and realized it was time to send a Savior? A small child was born in a small backwater town to be that savior. His birth was heralded by Angels singing words of peace from the heavens. We worship that birth every year during this season. Yes, this season will be one like we have never seen before, but its hope for peace is just the same as it has always been. It is for us to seek that hope and that peace in our own hearts. You know the individual prejudice, fear and physical need you must confront this year. In Leviticus 26:6 God says I will make this country a place of peace, you will be able to go to sleep at night without fear.

We place ourselves in the hands of God, who brings joy and delight to our hearts. It may not be the season we have known before, but it will be a new way to praise and worship the Christ Child.

Prayer: Dear Lord, you know all that we are facing this year, we ask you to bring peace and health to your world during this holiday season. Open our hearts to the changes we must face and help us to face them with joy for a new holiday. In your name. Amen.



Saturday, December 12
Scripture Reading:

Anne Gardepe
1 Thessalonians 5:12-24

This has surely been a different kind of year so we can only expect a different kind of Christmas. We will likely miss the parties, pageants, and other live entertainment and even the congregational singing of carols. Perhaps we sacrifice lighting candles because, hey.... we shouldn't blow them out, right? But will we give up the peace and joy of the season? Absolutely not!

When I began thinking of this theme, I could not help comparing the coronavirus to the hard-hearted old Grinch who hated Christmas so much he tried to steal it from the Whos. (How the Grinch Stole Christmas by Dr. Seuss) Even after he took away everything he thought gave them joy, he found them merrily singing.



“He HADN'T stopped Christmas from coming!

IT CAME!

Somehow or other, it came just the same!”

The Grinch discovered that Christmas is not just about decorations, parties, feasting and presents: “Maybe Christmas.... means a little bit more!” (And, of course, we know it means MUCH more!)

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul tells them “Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens.” (The Message v16- 18) And he said they should keep “fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ.” So, we WILL be cheerful and pray and thank God for all our many blessings. Jesus Christ is coming.... despite the Grinchy coronavirus!

Prayer: Dear Lord, we thank you for giving us so much, sacrificing even your only Son to redeem us. Please put us together---spirit, soul and body---and keep us fit for the celebration of his birth even in these difficult times! (adapted from 1 Thessalonians 5: 23, The Message) Amen

Sunday, December 13

Bob Larr

Third Sunday of Advent

Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates

*A LOVE SUPREME God is all.
Help us to resolve our fears and weaknesses.
In you all things are possible Thank you God God will wash away all our tears...
He always has... He always will. Seek him every day. Let us sing all songs to God.
To whom all praise is due.
Praise God. No Road is an easy one, but they all go back to God.
(John Coltrane liner notes from the Album A Love Supreme)*

2020 has been a year. A year that started as many do, with hopes and dreams that this would be a year to remember. And it is. Just not in the way that we thought it would. Some were anticipating walking across a stage to receive their diplomas to the cheers of their family and friends. Some were starting new jobs and looking towards a bright future. And still others were working at their jobs, with the anticipation that one day they would retire and spend their time travelling, enjoying grandkids, or anything else they wanted to do. Instead these hopes and dreams were dashed by COVID.

Now we are about to enter the Advent season and times are still difficult. COVID has not gone away and everyone wonders when will it ever disappear. When will we be able to give a hug or a handshake rather than a nod or a peace sign. When will it be safe to go to church, school, sporting events or to all the things we did before COVID appeared.

In 1957 John Coltrane, a well renowned jazz artist was suffering from alcoholism and addiction to heroin. He was going through very troubled times of his own when he had a deep religious experience. He relates that "by the grace of God a spiritual awakening which was to lead me to a richer, fuller, more productive life. At that time, in gratitude, I humbly asked to be given the means and privilege to make others happy through music".

In 1965 he released the album [A Love Supreme](#). In the liner notes he wrote a poem entitled A Love Supreme. The quotes above are some of the lines in the poem. And his words help. While the road is rough, God is always there. He will carry us through difficult times. He will wash away the tears. Things will get better. We just have to trust in God.

Prayer: *God, all glory is to you. Your love sustains us through difficult times. Help us to weather these days. Please give us patience and understanding so that we can carry your word forward. Amen.*

297 Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates!

1. Lift up your heads, ye might - y gates! Be - hold the
 2. A help - er just, he comes to thee, his char - iot
 3. O blest the land, the cit - y blest, where Christ the
 4. Fling wide the por - tals of your heart; make it a

King of glo - ry waits; the King of kings is
 is hu - mil - i - ty, his king - ly crown is
 Rul - er is con - fessed! O hap - py hearts and
 tem - ple, set a - part from earth - ly use for

draw - ing near, the Sav - ior of the world is here.
 ho - li - ness, his scep - ter, pit - y in dis - tress.
 hap - py homes to whom this King in tri - umph comes!
 heav'n's em - ploy, a - dorned with prayer and love and joy.

5. Redeemer, come! I open wide
 my heart to thee; here, Lord, abide!
 Let me thy inner presence feel;
 thy grace and love in me reveal.

6. So come, my Sov'reign, enter in!
 Let new and nobler life begin!
 Thy Holy Spirit, guide us on,
 until the glorious crown be won.

Based on Psalm 24
 Georg Weiszel, 1642
 Tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1855; alt.

TRURO L.M.
 Thomas Williams, *Psalmodia Evangelica*, 1789

Monday, December 14
Scripture Reading:

Gayle Schmidt
Philippians 2:1-11

“It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas, everywhere we go...”.

We will soon be hearing that song often and numerous other songs, ads, hymns, etc. requests many times reminding us that Christmas is coming. But will it be the same Christmas we have loved and cherished since childhood? We know that businesses, schools, travels and churches will be different. But this is a time to remember why this is special.

As I consider this new Christmas I am reminded of a woman’s sincere request of her pastor, “Will we still have Christmas Eve?”

I understand her concern as the midnight service is one that I look forward to sharing. We sing the beautiful hymns, read the scriptures and participate in the Lord’s Supper with family and friends. As we share Paul’s words to the Philippians 1:1 and 7 remind me/us an important prayer.

Verse 1: I thank my God every time I remember you.

Verse 7: It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me.

This Christmas will be different but the real Christmas will still be in our hearts.

Prayer: As we celebrate our Lord’s birth may we be reminded that this birthday was just the beginning of that very special life. During this very different season may we remember to share our love with all. Thank you for your gift to us. Amen



Tuesday, December 15

Scripture Reading:

Linda Shrieves

Psalm 30:1-5

This Christmas season, as we are removed from family and friends, as we spend months working remotely or staying away from relatives whose health may be precarious, the story behind this psalm may feel a little familiar to us.

King David, having long enjoyed God's favor, has made a grave mistake – he orders a census of all the fighting men in the land, against God's wishes. Displeased, God gives David three options for his punishment: three years of famine; three months of devastation at the sword of his enemies; or three days of pestilence in his kingdom. David, like most of us, figures three days of pestilence is probably the least painful and opts for that.

What results shakes David to his core. God sends a plague and, after the angel of death passes over Israel, 70,000 of David's people die. David cries out to God, begging for forgiveness for his sins, and asking that his people not be punished for his mistakes.

Luckily for David, and for all of us, God is slow to anger and swift to forgive. A repentant David sings a song of praise, a prayer that is used in the celebration of Hannukah, as believers "turn mourning into dancing."

As we reflect on a year of so much strife and heartache, so much sickness and death, let's remember to be thankful for a God whose favor lasts a lifetime.

Prayer: Lord, as we embark on the holiday season, after a year marked by so much illness and death, so much loneliness and despair, we turn to you in praise, grateful for your mercy and forgiveness. Let us remain hopeful and joyful and let us pray that, in the coming year, we can turn our mourning into dancing. Amen.



Wednesday, December 16
Scripture Reading:

Carol Fisher
Psalm 84

*How I love your Temple, Lord Almighty!
How I want to be there!
I long to be in the Lord's Temple!
With my whole being I will sing for Joy to the Living God!
Even the sparrows have built a nest,
and the swallows have their own home;
they keep their young near your altars,
Lord Almighty, my king and my God.*

Wow, does this Psalm sound like the desires of our hearts! Being joyfully together! How great that sounds. Can we all think Joy? Our nests have been our bases, and God has been with us! What will Christmas bring?



2020 has brought so many trials to us! Singing for joy has been at a distance, and I must say that choosing joy has not always been so easy. Joy is a choice that one must make to stay in touch with God, and it certainly is a choice. Without joy, I feel like my heart is not in whatever is going on in my life. But joy will get me through. Of course, throwing in a lot of love adds to the joy!

Are you choosing to be joyful? All of October and even into November, I tested positive for COVID-19. I had a relatively mild case of coronavirus, so that was a blessing. The fatigue and quarantine were challenging. I do feel that joy brought me through. Prayers certainly comforted me. Cards and calls helped. Daddy used to always say that this too shall pass, but as I waited for the negative test, it seemed long and drawn out. Quarantine was necessary but unless I chose joy, it was easy to get down day to day. Family was here, and I had to stay at home instead of being at Fort Wilderness with the family. Plans changed, because I needed to quarantine.

What can we find joyful in all this? It was time at home, time to reconnect in different ways, and certainly time to turn to the Lord! But joy is still here, and Advent Joy will explode once again in our hearts. Choose joy!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I praise you for who you are and the great joy your son brought us when he came to earth. I thank you for the trials because then we can more thoroughly appreciate your joy! Joy to the World! You are with us! Amen.

Thursday, December 17
Scripture Reading:

Nancy Jones
Matthew 1:18-25

The Birth of Jesus Christ

Thinking of this year's themes: A Different Kind of Christmas and Finding True Meaning of Christmas in Difficult Times, I am sure the first Christmas was difficult for Joseph. His betrothed was expecting a child that was not his and while he wanted to quietly divorce Mary an angel appeared who immediately said, "Fear not." Fear not is found many places in scripture. Each time I see this command, it causes me to pause to reflect to what is going on in the story and what is going on in my life right now. Fear not - God is with you.

This crazy year we call 2020 is not what we all thought it was going to be. It started with hope of a new decade and great things happening. Things are happening, but not how we expected. This advent season is not like years past with gatherings of friends and family, the hustle and bustle of shopping in crowds, Christmas parades, Jingle Runs, Sunday school parties, and caroling. The pandemic is keeping us from doing these traditions that we find comforting and fun. We are all navigating what can we do in a safe way. This year has been difficult. It's not what we expected.



As the angel told Joseph, 'Fear Not, Jesus will be born and he will save his people from their sins.' It was difficult for Joseph. We are each now living in our own difficult situations. I am comforted knowing that God IS with us. Take a moment to hear the angel: Fear Not! It may be different, but it will be okay.

Prayer: Dear Lord, through this crazy year, season, week, and day, we are grateful to be reminded that you indeed are with us. Help us to find joy this season, even when it seems to be missing. Amen

Friday, December 18
Scripture Reading:

Doug Lawton
Luke 2:1-8

When Zebadiah of Bethlehem heard about the Roman decree requiring everyone to register in the towns of their heritage, he moaned to his wife, Sarah, "We're going to be inundated with sons, daughters, nieces, nephews, cousins, second cousins, and who knows what else. We'll have family coming out our ears!" Zebadiah and Sarah were not rich; their home, as was typical, had a manger attached to the house for his sheep and cattle with several rooms for guests above it. As he expected, members of the House of David, Zebadiah's family, started arriving to be registered. As family does, Zebadiah and Sarah would open up their home and provide food and shelter for their kin. One evening, with their guest rooms full, and children running around yelling and screaming, Sarah came to Zebadiah and said, "our second cousin, Joseph, is outside and he needs a place to stay. Oh, and the woman with him is VERY pregnant." Zebadiah looked at her and said, "what am I supposed to do? We've already got people sleeping everywhere in the house?" Sarah said, "they're family." So, Zebadiah went out to greet his second cousin and told him that he can make room for them in the manger. Joseph and Mary were greatly appreciative and relieved, thanking Zebadiah for his hospitality and graciousness. He replied, "that's what family does."

When preparing for this Advent contribution, I read several commentaries on this very famous passage of Luke which, I did not know, is the only gospel rendering of the birth of Jesus. I was struck by several theologians noting that the word, "katalumati," which is traditionally translated as "inn" in this verse is also used by Luke in 22:11 and translated as "guest room." So, the concept many of us have had that Joseph and Mary went to an establishment, an "inn," in Bethlehem and



were turned away may not be true. It is more likely that they went to family, like my short bit of fiction above, and were accommodated as best as could be done.

Rev. Dr. Richard Swanson of Augustana University in Sioux Falls, SD, argues that while the decree from Caesar Augustus illustrates the impact of Roman domination at the time of Jesus' birth, the overriding context of this gospel story is family the power and joy of family and it would have been family that took care of Joseph and Mary when they arrived in Bethlehem. It makes so much more sense to me that Mary would accompany Joseph on an 80-mile trip when nine-months pregnant if she knew there would be family around if she came to term. It makes more sense to me as well that a family member would take care of them when they arrived even when there was no room for them. That's what family is supposed to do. Then, Dr. Swanson talks about the larger family that includes the shepherds and us who are told by the heavenly host that a baby is born "to you." What joy and celebration there is in this.

I am struck with the similarities we are facing this year with the those endured by Mary and Joseph at the birth of Jesus. Certainly, Mary expected to be surrounded by her close family when giving birth to her first child; it's what family does. But, she's miles away and instead of aunts and uncles and grandparents coming by to oh and ah over the newborn, she gets ... shepherds ... dirty, filthy, scum-of-the-earth shepherds! The shepherds, though, not only cooed over the baby but told everyone of the glory and magnitude of the angelic visit and from that Mary received joy. Most of us have generational traditions of large family gatherings for Christmas and those are not going to happen this year. We can still experience the joy of Christmas and the warmth of family but just in different ways. Whether it's spending time with family by social media, Zoom, or Facetime, or redefining family to include the dirty, filthy "shepherds" of our time - the outcasts, homeless, and hungry, we can bring them the joy of Christmas and they can oh and ah over the baby in the manger. That's what family does.

Saturday, December 19
Scripture Reading:

Susan Frith
Luke 2:9-14

“Do not be afraid.”

This passage from Luke about the angels greeting the anxious shepherds the night Jesus was born seems appropriate for the time. Those shepherds were scared and confused about what was happening, just like many of us living through 2020. Over the past year I’ve found myself worrying about:

- The person who coughed two aisles over at Target.
- My mom-in-law in a senior-living facility where COVID cases have been popping up.
- Where I’m supposed to look during a Zoom call. (Seriously, help me out here.)
- The consequences of keeping kids home from school or sending them back.
- People coping with loneliness, grief, illness, unemployment, or the effects of racism.
- The future of our divided country.

We don’t know how or when these challenges will be resolved. Even some cherished holiday traditions, including gatherings with distant family, may look different this year. And yet say the angels, “great joy” is to be ours. In declaring the birth of a Savior for all the nations, they offer a broader perspective than the shepherds were able to see at first.

One of the times my anxiety falls away is when I’m outside watching God’s Creation go on about its business—especially the birds: The Sandhill cranes strut past with great trumpeting squawks. Swallowtail kites soar on the updraft. A congregation (the actual word!) of egrets roosts in the trees, white feathers fluffed out and eyes trained patiently over the pond below. When I stop to notice these things, I’m reminded of how we are part of a vast Creation, connected and cared for by the God who sent his Son to live among us. And even if much feels out of our control this Advent season, we can still find ways to experience joy and lighten each other’s burdens.



Prayer: Compassionate God, you continue to love us even as we worry about what the future holds in these unsettled times. Help us to remember and show others how your love flows through us and all of Creation. Amen

Sunday, December 20

Tom Pinnel

Fourth Sunday of Advent

O Lord, How Shall I Meet You?

Advent is my favorite season in the liturgical year. I look forward to the music filled with hope and expectancy, the biblical texts in which the prophets cry out to God to make things right and just, and the saving promise for us in the coming of Jesus Christ. Yes I love everything about Advent.

Yet there is a cloud over our preparation this year. It appears that our traditions will be held captive by the Covid 19 virus. Will there be Advent and Christmas concerts to attend? Will we be able to visit with family in New Jersey as we have for the past 12 years while living in Florida. There is so much uncertainty in our lives, we really don't know how to plan.

I am reminded of the plight of the Israelites held captive in Babylon. They were in a strange land. Everything that was familiar to them was gone. They missed the temple and their ancient traditions. And to make matters worse, they were taunted by their captives to sing the happy songs of Zion, as if everything was alright and nothing had changed. "How can we sing the Lord's song in this strange land" (Ps.137), and they cried as they lamented their present condition. At the same time they realized they could not forget Jerusalem. To forget Jerusalem would be to forget the faithfulness of the God who had delivered them in the past.



Even though in some ways we may feel in exile where nothing is the same, we cannot forget the Advent theme, that God comes to save and to "put death's dark shadows to flight." The promise for Israel and the promise for the church is, in Jesus Christ he has come and he will come again. "O Come let us Adore Him". In our Adoration we will find the Love we seek at Christmas, even in difficult times.

Prayer: Gracious God, we are in an unfamiliar place in our world and in our lives. Help us to remember your faithfulness and your love made real in the coming of Jesus Christ and rescue us from despair. Fill us with hope, peace, joy and love, so that we may truly celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

O Lord, How Shall I Meet You 104

1 O Lord, how shall I meet you, how wel-come you a - right?
 2 Love caused your in - car - na - tion; love brought you down to me;
 3 You come, O Lord, with glad - ness, in mer - cy and good-will,

Your peo - ple long to greet you, my hope, my heart's de - light!
 your thirst for my sal - va - tion pro-cured my lib - er - ty.
 to bring an end to sad - ness and bid our fears be still.

O kin - dle, Lord most ho - ly, a lamp with - in my breast,
 O love be - yond all tell - ing, that led you to em - brace
 In pa - tient ex - pec - ta - tion we live for that great day

to do in spir - it low - ly all that may please you best.
 in love, all loves ex - cel - ling, our lost and fal - len race.
 when your re - newed cre - a - tion your glo - ry shall dis - play.

Though many Advent hymns address Christ with entreaty and invitation, this more contemplative text considers how an individual prepares for and responds to Christ's coming. It also brings together a recollection of the First Coming with an anticipation of the Second Coming.

Monday, December 21
Scripture Reading:

Julie Estell
John 3:16, 17

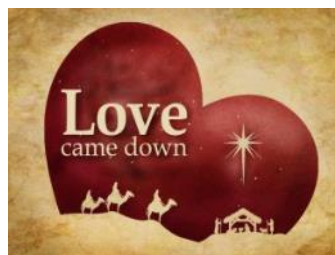
The corona virus pandemic of 2020 has given me a new perspective on just about everything. Throughout this long and crazy year, I have been impatiently learning to wait:

Waiting to find a store that actually had toilet paper.
Waiting twenty seconds while washing my hands.
Waiting for the next briefing from officials on TV.
Waiting for the stay at home order to be lifted.
Waiting six feet apart in another line at the store.
Waiting to get comfortable wearing a mask.
Waiting to visit my family in Houston, who I hadn't seen since last Christmas.
Waiting for a safe and effective vaccine to be developed.
Waiting for this crazy and difficult year to finally be over.

In the midst of all of this waiting, I wonder how Mary must have felt waiting for her baby to be born. I can imagine that she must have been terrified after learning that she was to bear the Son of God. On top of that, she and Joseph were quarantined to the stable because there was no place for them in the inn.

So, as we wrestle with our fears surrounding the virus, we can be assured that we have a God who identifies with our fears. But God overcame all fear by sending us His love in the person of Jesus. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son to save us from the pandemic of sin. And that is truly a love worth waiting for.

Prayer: "Patient and loving God, in this Advent season of waiting, we confess that waiting is very hard. Thank you that in You, our waiting is not in vain. Thank you for sending Jesus to save us from our sin. Thank you that in You, the power of love overcomes all fear. Amen."



Tuesday, December 22
Scripture Reading:

Casey Cox
Revelation 1:4-8

One Christmas season I was teaching a kindergarten-first grade Sunday school class. We always began with snack time during which I asked the kids if they were excited about Christmas. A dumb question for sure, but I was hoping to segue into the planned art project: a manger scene we'd color, cut out, and build together.

"I can't wait to see what Santa Claus brings me," said one.



"There I are so many presents under our tree," said another.

"There's no such thing as Santa Claus," said yet another.

"He isn't real." The shock and disappointment was immediate and profound. Lips quivered. All the eyes

looking at me began to fill, except for the smarty pants who looked very smug and triumphant. "The Santa at the mall is just some old man dressed in a red suit."

I remembered my grandmother saying: It isn't Christmas until somebody cries.

"The Santa at the mall may not be the real Santa," I said.

"But I believe in the Christmas spirit; and you know sometimes believing is enough." Faces brightened a bit. Then one said, "The real Santa lives at the North Pole and has a sled pulled by reindeer."

"There's no such thing as reindeer." The kids thought that over.

Then, "Aren't there some at the zoo?"

"That can fly?"

"I wish I had a flying horse."

"All right, kids; it's time to get busy. Today we're going to make a manger scene." I had a good-sized picture of a stable. Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus needed to be cut out.

"Who'd like to color the angels? The shepherds? The star?"

Prayer: Dear Jesus, please guide us and grant us the patience, wisdom, and perseverance to raise our children in your light. Amen.

Wednesday, December 23
Scripture Reading:

Leesa Bainbridge
1 John 4:7-12

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

I find this passage comforting at a time when we are navigating through divisiveness, fear and a deadly pandemic. Sadly, the negatives feed off of each other, keeping them alive as they thrive in their interconnectedness.

This passage is a great reminder that the love of God and our love for Him and each other are interconnected and self-sustaining, as well. That's great news and a blanket of comfort for the soul, especially during the holiday season.

God loved us enough to send his only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He knew we were sinners and he gave us every chance to save ourselves through that sacrifice. If we truly understand that, how can we not return that love to Him and pass it along to one another? When you think about it, He's asking us to do something quite lovely.

It's sometimes easier said than done these days, when, again, there is unprecedented turmoil, fear and, yes, anger. But it's often said that when you're down, don't give into it but rather reach out to help someone else. Health care professionals say it's good for your mental and physical health and relieves stress and depression. We help ourselves when we help others by sharing the love that lives in us. And I'd like to think that opens our hearts even more.



Let's pass that love on this Christmas season and into the New Year.

Prayer: Dear Lord, As we look forward to Christmas, help us remember it's all about love – love that is manifested no more miraculously than in the birth of your son. Help us serve you by being a light in a sometimes dark world. Show us how to demonstrate peace during crisis and the productive way to be heard without being hurtful. Thank you for your gifts and continued blessings. Amen

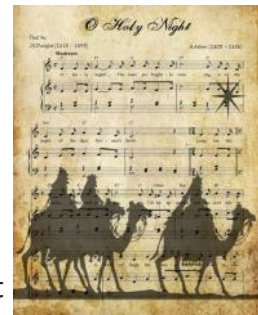
Thursday, December 24
Scripture Reading:

Dan and Carly Wray
Matthew 2:1-12

Christmas Eve

Since we became our own family, we have started a tradition each Christmas season. After spending time with each other, we make the drive from Tampa to Orlando to spend Christmas day with our family. We celebrate with our immediate family in the morning and extended family in the late afternoon. We spend the entire evening playing Christmas themed games and catching up with everyone. We spend months picking out the perfect presents for family members as if that is a measure of how much we love them. We all spend so much time making sure everything is perfect for the holiday.

This year we are looking at a completely different reality. 2020 has been full of making adjustments and adapting to constantly changing situations. Everyday there is something new we have to account for that no one has ever thought to prepare for. Classes are taught online, decorative masks are the newest accessory, and Zoom chat has become a verb. People are losing their jobs and starting to wonder if they can even afford to celebrate Christmas to the extent that they have in the past. This year has made us start to look at what is really important and the true meaning for the season. It isn't about how much time or money that you spend making the holiday perfect - Christmas is about spending time with those that you love to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Instead of focusing on getting the best presents for everyone, we've had to deal with the reality of how or if we will be able to see or talk to the ones we love while remaining safe and healthy.



We will not be seeing most of our loved ones and will not be able to share moments of joy with our family this year. So instead of focusing on the games, gifts, and fun times, we will be remembering the importance of following Jesus' light and love. 2020 has been a year that has made everyone take a step back, reflect on their lives, and redirect their efforts and desires. Jesus' path will guide us through the darkness so that we may follow God's will.

Prayer: Lord help guide us through our journeys. Whether 2020 has brought us joy, hardships, or major change, help us follow in your footsteps to lead a life full of love.

Friday, December 25
Scripture Reading:

Meredith Hampton
Luke 2:21

Christmas Day

After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Christmas memories quickly became the center of discussion on a Zoom call of the Walker cousins after the recent loss of our grandmother. My crafty aunts lived nearby my grandparents' Sun City, AZ home and their talents no doubt made each yuletide visit merry and bright.

One particular year, my Aunt Peg took on the task of having us over to her townhome to decorate gingerbread homes. Instead of graham crackers or store-bought kits, Aunt Peg prepared freshly baked gingerbread pieces. As a college sophomore, I enjoyed the company of my cousins as I placed the still slightly warm Gingerbread together with homemade frosting and decorated it with colorful candies and cereals. The smell of the freshly baked Gingerbread and the image of the large A-Framed Gingerbread homes we created that afternoon remain vivid in my memory.

As we returned to Grandma's, small group-by-small group, she would ooh and ahh over our creations and then proudly place them on the coffee table in her Arizona room. Then came time for my youngest cousin, Jabez, to return with his. My grandfather entered the front door with a comedic sneer, "Jabez ate half of his." Behind him, Jabez's little five-year old body appeared in the doorway. His face smiling so his dimples were displayed but you could tell behind his cheeks, he was feasting on some type of sugary cereal he typically did not eat. The smile did not dissipate as he presented our grandmother his creation.



The exclamation of oohs and ahhs were still appropriate for her youngest grandchild, and she took his otherwise poorly decorated and half-eaten Gingerbread house and displayed it next to the rest of ours. When it was time to take pictures of them all, his was included. The photograph was likely sent with Grandma's handwritten letters to all of her family and friends back home in the Midwest to inform (and boast) about the Christmas time spent with all thirteen of her grandkids and the beautiful Gingerbread homes we all made.

Prayer: Gracious and Loving God, on this Christmas Day, we give you thanks for baby Jesus and all the parts of his story. We thank you for our stories and memories of the Christ-like ways we have been loved and embraced by family – especially our Grandmothers. Comfort us as we remember and help us to walk with you in this season of our lives. Bring peace to all who yearn for it. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.



Sunday Advent Vespers 2020

Join us in person or virtually throughout for Sunday evening vespers and worship opportunities! Go to plpc.org to reserve your place for the in person activities.

November 29, 5:30 pm:

Advent Carol "Sing Along" - available in person and broadcast our annual tradition of singing in the season with carols will be a bit modified, but still very holy and joy-filled! We will gather in the sanctuary to hear of the origin and meanings of a variety of Advent Carols and then a featured soloist will sing through selected advent carols while we all hum along. **Please reserve your spot for in-person attendance at plpc.org**

December 6, 5:30 pm:

Advent Vespers - readings and prayer in West Transept.

A time of meditation and quiet reflection and sharing on the meaning of Christmas. We will offer a special time of prayer for those for whom the season is particularly difficult.

December 13, 5:00 pm -7:00 pm:

Vespers with Art - Our Art and Spirituality group will sponsor a time of reflection and art making. We will use watercolor technique exploring the meaning of the holly wreath in Christian tradition. Basic supplies will be provided. Meeting in Struble Fellowship Hall. Please pre-register before December 10. Registration is limited.

December 20, 5:00 pm -7:00 pm:

Vespers with Live Nativity - Come by with your children and grandchildren and those with child-like spirit to enjoy a walk-by nativity complete with pony, goats and chickens! Oh, and angels and shepherds and magi and Holy family too. A live nativity with readings and music will gather in the circle drive for your inspiration and enjoyment!

December 21, 5:00 pm -7:00 pm:

Carols and Cookie Delivery - Calling all cookies bakers! We will be delivering cookies and a song to our shut-in members in some hybrid of our customary Park Lake fashion. Look for more information in the Park Lake Up to date.

Christmas Eve Services

Thursday, December 24

5:30 pm, in person and Face Book live, Service of Candles & Communion

11:00 pm Recorded Christmas Service available on Park Lake Presbyterian Face Book page all evening.



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

*****DATED MATERIAL*****

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

