

JESUS IS THE GIFT

*that perfectly fits
the size of every heart.*



*2016 First Presbyterian Church
Advent Devotional*



Come and Worship, Come and Worship,
Worship Christ the Newborn King!



First Sunday in Advent "The Gift of Joy" Sunday Worship and Communion	November 27 10:30 am	Sanctuary
Midweek Advent Service Wednesday	November 30 6:30 pm – 7:15 pm	Sanctuary

Second Sunday in Advent "The Gift of Hope" Sunday Worship	December 4 10:30 am	Sanctuary
Midweek Advent Service Wednesday	December 7 6:30 pm – 7:15 pm	Sanctuary

Third Sunday in Advent "The Gift of Peace" Sunday Worship Children's Christmas Celebration Advent Workshop	December 11 10:30 am After Worship	Sanctuary Calvin Hall
Midweek Advent Service Wednesday	December 14 6:30 pm – 7:15 pm	Sanctuary

Saturday Blue Christmas Service (meal provided)	December 17 11:30 am – 1:30 pm	Knox Hall Dining Room
Fourth Sunday in Advent "The Gift of Love" Sunday Worship: Cantata "Journey of Promises" Annual Wassail & Carol Sing	December 18 10:30 am 7:00 pm	Sanctuary Knox Hall Dining Room
Midweek Advent Service Wednesday	December 21 6:30 pm – 7:15 pm	Sanctuary

Christmas Eve "The Gift of Light" Prelude and Candlelight Worship	December 24 4:30 pm (Prelude) 5:00pm (Worship)	Sanctuary
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Christmas Day "The Gift of Life" Sunday Worship	December 25 10:30 am	Sanctuary
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Please encourage friends and family to join you.
For more information on any of these call the Church office
at 402-345-5383 or visit the website at www.fpcomaha.org



A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway a highway for our God.." (Isaiah 40:30)

Advent is a time of preparation. As Christians, we prepare for Christmas in many ways. Some of these have little to do with the true meaning of Christmas: the birth of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. We hope this devotional booklet will help you prepare for Christmas by spending some time each day reading the Word of God and spending time with Him.

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift. (2 Corinthians 9:15)

Advent is also a time of gifts; we think of the gifts we will be giving and those we'll be receiving. We give this booklet to you as a gift as well. We hope it will help you to reflect on the blessed gift we have all been given as we count down the days until Christmas.

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. (Romans 12:6a)

Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the Church. (1 Corinthians 14:12b)

These devotionals were all written as a gift to you by First Presbyterian Church members and staff who were willing to use their gifts to "build up the Church". We are grateful to all of them.

**Have a wonderful Advent as you prepare to celebrate God's gift to
the world, our Lord Jesus!**

The Congregation & Staff of First Presbyterian Church

November 27 The First Sunday in Advent

Title: Still, Still, Still.

Scripture: *Be still, and know that I am God!* Psalm 46:10a

Reflection: I have a personal rule in my house that Christmas decorating must wait until after my birthday. The difficulty in upholding this rule is having a late November birthday which sometimes falls after the first Sunday of advent.

I think my rule originated in an effort to enjoy the moment and not feel rushed into the commercialism of the next season. It seems that every year the hustle and bustle of Christmas begins earlier and earlier. This year the calendar barely changed to November when I heard a radio station had already begun playing 24 hours of Christmas music and a few houses had their Christmas lights up and on!

This year, as Advent begins, before the calendar turns to December, I will break my rule and begin the process of unpacking Christmas by placing one of my favorite Nativity sets out on the shelf. As I do so, I will reflect upon what each of the pieces experienced that wonderful night as I place them gently on the shelf.

As Christmas goes into full swing with all the crazy schedules and activities it is important to keep focused on the reason we are celebrating and from time to time linger at the manger with the words of the Austrian Hymn reminding us to pause...

Still, still, still

One can hear the falling snow.

For all is hushed, The world is sleeping,

Holy Star its vigil keeping.

Still, still, still,

One can hear the falling snow.

Prayer: As we enter into Advent, Loving God, help us to slow down the frantic pace and reflect on the true meaning of the season. May we pause at the manger and enjoy time with our family and friends. Help us to experience all the gifts of Christmas which you have given to us. Amen.

Contributed by Pastor Jenni

November 28 The First Monday in Advent

Title: Water in the Desert

Scripture: *Wilderness and desert will sing joyously, the badlands will celebrate and flower—Like the crocus in spring, bursting into blossom, a symphony of song and color.*

Mountain glories of Lebanon—a gift.

Awesome Carmel, stunning Sharon—gifts.

GOD's resplendent glory, fully on display.

GOD awesome, GOD majestic.

Blind eyes will be opened, deaf ears unstopped,

Lame men and women will leap like deer, the voiceless break into song.

Springs of water will burst out in the wilderness, streams flow in the desert.

Hot sands will become a cool oasis, thirsty ground a splashing fountain.

Even lowly jackals will have water to drink, and barren grasslands flourish richly. Isaiah 35

Reflection: We often hear these verses quoted during Advent, perhaps most notably in Handel's "Messiah", but what do they have to do with the birth of Christ? Perhaps it is because we focus so much on His first arrival (Advent) that we fail to see the signs of His second Advent.

Recently I read an article outlining the stunning success that Israel has achieved in purifying water and making it available everywhere in its arid land. When I was in Israel in 2008 our guide pointed out the miraculous technology that was taking salt water from the Mediterranean, forcing it through membranes which remove the salt and minerals to produce pure water.

In 1948 Israel's first prime minister, David Ben Gurion quoted Isaiah 35:1 in telling of his vision of "making the desert bloom like a rose". It is not only Israel that is now fulfilling that prophecy, but countries like China, India, African countries, and even our state of California are now benefiting from Israel's water technology.

To me, this is an exciting reminder that during this Advent I should not celebrate only Christ's arrival as a baby in Bethlehem, but to look ahead to His second advent and to do what I can to hasten His arrival. There are many in this world who have never heard of His first advent, and our purpose on earth is to reach them with the good news of the Gospel.

The last verses in the Bible: "He who testifies to all these things says it again: "I'm on my way! I'll be there soon!" Yes! Come, Master Jesus! The grace of the Master Jesus be with all of you. Oh Yes! (the Message)

Contributed by Joyce Reimer



November 29 The First Tuesday in Advent

Title: God Will Provide

Scripture: *And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others.* 2 Corinthians 9:8

And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

Matthew 25:40

Reflection: Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, but not without God's help. They struggled for 40 years and there was a lot of grumbling and frustration (and God was even frustrated), but in the end, God provided them with a new way of life. When they were in the wilderness with no food or water, God miraculously provided them with manna and water throughout their journey. What a blessing to know God is with us in the good times and in the bad times. . . HE WILL PROVIDE!

Some people are born into families that don't worry about their next meal; they don't think about what they are going to wear because they have a closet full of clothes; they have beautiful homes and the best cars; they had the best education money could buy. They know whatever they want, they can obtain. God provided for them.

Some people are born into families that do worry about their next meal. They weren't born into a rich family, but they are survivors because God provides. They live their life the best way they know how. Maybe they weren't taught that there was a God to help them. Maybe their parents weren't willing to give them a loving home and teach them what was right and wrong. Maybe they took the wrong road because no one was there to guide them. Maybe they worked their whole life, but they made wrong decisions. But with all these circumstances, God provided them with what they needed.

The second group of people will probably never have the "material" riches, but when we help them, when we serve them, when we smile at them, when we respect them, when we give them food from the pantry, we are using our hands and heart to do God's work. The incredible volunteers at our Hand Up Food Pantry do all

these things . . . and there is no greater joy than knowing God is right there with us! Our motto is “Jesus is walking through the door” and that is how every client is treated. I believe it is one of the most important missions of our church.

Whenever either group of people has problems, worries, sorrows, despair, frustration, etc., they can depend on God’s faithfulness to get them through any of the events they face in life. With God, all things are possible. All we have to do is pray, believe and stay in His word; He will take care of the rest and He will hold us in the palm of His hands.

Prayer: Dear Lord, be with us when we count our blessings and when we are there to be a comfort to others. Let us remember: that it is more important to be “spiritual” rich than “material” rich; that you meet us where we are; that you love us just the way we are; that we should do unto others as we want to be done by; that we should glorify you for everything you give us; that we should be thankful every time you make our heart happy or when you give us everything we need; that we should share and show compassion to the lonely and the less fortunate; that we should never seek praise for what we do, but give you praise for giving us courage and allowing us to make the world a better place to live. When we know you approve, we are content. Amen

Contributed by Judy Money



November 30 The First Wednesday in Advent

Title: How a Mother Loves Her Child

Scripture: *The child in my womb leaped for joy!* Luke 1:44

Reflection: Even before Jesus was born, when he was just forming in Mary's womb, the mere presence of his Spirit caused John the Baptist to leap for joy in his mother's womb.

Then, the Gospel of Mark begins with John the Baptist proclaiming the Good News about Jesus. This news ties back to the prophecies of Isaiah. In Isaiah 49:8-10 and 13 (Voice) we are given a promise of salvation in Jesus the Messiah:

*I will watch over you, and give you
as a promise, a binding covenant to the people.
I will declare to the prisoners, "Come out. Now you are free";
To those who are held in darkness, "Come out into the light."
They will find sustenance wherever they are—
Along the roads or in the open hills—
with peace of mind, in comfort and security.
Wherever they are, they will be fine, never hungry nor thirsty.
They will be protected from oppressive heat and the burning sun
Because the One who loves them—as a mother loves her child—will
be their guide.
God will lead them to restful places, rejuvenating springs of water.

Oh joy! Be glad—sky! Take joy—earth! Burst into song—
mountains! For the Eternal, moved to compassion, has comforted
and consoled His people.*

This gives us a clear picture of the gifts of Christmas: hope in the promise of His peace and comforting love which gives us exuberant joy!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, your existence is not just good news, it is the best news ever. It gives me hope and shows me real love. Please guide and mold me into an instrument of your peace. Fill me with light. Quench my thirst. Free me from sin. Comfort and protect me. Because you can do all this, I will leap for joy as I sing and spread the good news of your Truth.

Contributed by David McBride

December 1 The First Thursday in Advent

Title: Family Christmas Traditions

Scripture: *Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. 1 Corinthians: 11:2*

Reflection: Moving around for twenty-two years in the Air Force gave our family a variety of places to call home. We quickly discovered that wherever we unpacked, there is nothing that makes a place feel like home more than Christmas traditions that stay the same no matter where you are living.

One of our biggest traditions is carefully unwrapping our beloved Nativity creche before any other decorations are hung. This crèche is particularly special in that it was made by a dear friend of ours and the godmother of our sons, Diana Rauch. Diana made each of the individual clay figures, painted them a lovely light cream, and fired them in a kiln to a glossy finish. Each character is scaled for the part with life-like features. The three wise men are ornately fashioned with regal camels carrying gold, incense and myrrh; while the shepherds and their animals are plain-looking yet so clearly express their love for baby Jesus while sitting amidst their sheep. Mary and Joseph are sublime and simple in their clothing and humble in their posturing. Baby Jesus is so beautiful and innocent (ready to be displayed on his birth night and then guarded carefully so neither of the cats could “catnap” him).

Warren and I, Diana and her husband, Dean, at church shortly after we arrived at Warren’s first B-52 squadron assignment at Loring AFB (located just outside of Caribou, Maine). Dean, Diana, and their daughter Dawn (who now has a lovely daughter of her own) were with us before, during, and after the eventful times surrounding the births of our twin sons Ethan and Gareth almost twenty-six years ago. They supported me when I was pregnant and Warren was deployed the entire time flying missions with his crew during the first Gulf War (Operation Desert Storm), and when Ethan and Garth decided to make an earlier-than-scheduled appearance, they helped care for all of us.

We are reminded of their steadfast love, support, and friendship every time we unwrap our precious nativity set and set our minds and hearts on the coming of our Savior.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, we thank you for the traditions that bind us to your Son and to all our family and friends. We need the reassuring hope of baby Jesus in this complicated world and look forward to celebrating Christ's birth year after year. Thank you for reminding us that our traditions bring us closer to you. Amen*

Contributed by: Becky and Warren Hines

December 2 The First Friday in Advent

Title: Miracles

Scripture: She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel (which means "God with us")...And he gave him the name JESUS. Matthew 1: 21 – 22, 25b



Reflection: We get so caught up in the “busy ness” of Christmas, the decorating, gift buying, and baking, that we nearly miss the reason we celebrate. We forget we have had the best life changing event in our lives, a gift that we either take for granted or ignore. That life changing event is the Birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Our God gave us His Son who died for us for our sins. We celebrate His birth at this time of the year. We need to share this news, this miracle with all that we meet. Let His birth be the center of our celebration and remember this miracle was given to us by God our Father.

Prayer: Dear Lord in Heaven, We thank you so much for your Son who was born for us and died for our sins. Let us always remember this miracle you gave us. Let us also look for the miracles of each day in our lives whether they are big or small, they all come from you. Amen

Contributed by Arline Oliver

Title: Our Love, God's Love

Scripture: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose.*
Romans 8:28

Reflection: Christmas is my favorite holiday of the year. I honestly wish Christmas lasted from the day after Thanksgiving until New Year's day. Even though it can be stressful because as a parent you want to fulfill your childrens' dreams; it is a feeling of deep love that fills me and seemingly everyone. Christmas is about love. We show love to others during this time and God showed us love by giving us Jesus.

I truly believe when we love God, good things happen. During Advent I am filled with love and wonderment more than any other time of the year. I take joy in expressing my love and appreciation for others by gift giving. As far as the rest of the year, I am still filled with love for and from God. I have experienced a lot of loss and sorrow in the past 15 years but also great joy. I have felt broken and prayed, then came through it. God loves me, this I know, even though I have had times I didn't understand why things were happening that caused me pain. I have come to know that if I thank God for my blessings when I am feeling down or having a bad day, the next day is better. In fact, my mantra is "tomorrow is a new day". Things seem to always eventually work out. Good has come to me by loving God. My goal during Christmas is to show love for others to show my appreciation for God's love.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for loving us. We can feel your love for us at Christmas time by remembering you gave us Jesus. Help us to love others as you love us. Fill us with strength, hope, and love so that we may know that tomorrow is a new day. Please show your love to those who may be alone during this time, to those who are in need, to those who are afraid, and to all others. Amen.

Contributed by Kameron Brooks



December 3 The First Saturday in Advent

Title: Care a Lot and Pray a Lot

Scripture: *Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

Hebrews 10: 22 – 25

Reflection: My friend Larry told me, “My worst sin is that I’m a procrastinator. It gets in my way and it keeps me from doing all that God created me to do.” I would have to say that I’m the opposite. My worst sin may be that I’m an “urgent-inator”. I want everything to happen right away, as in “Never put off til tomorrow what you can do today” – even if it means losing sleep and missing other good things in order to get it done. I like to write things on my to-do list and check them off at the same time. If an email is in my in-box, I feel I need to respond to it.

As I’ve grown older, I have learned that some things are better off if they’re left to sit for awhile – chili soup, angry words, home decorating, and, sometimes, God’s work. Scripture tells us that it is through challenges that we grow in our faith and our dependence on God. Paul writes about challenges and perseverance in nearly every one of his letters – Hebrews, Corinthians, Philipppians, 1 Timothy. It was true for them then and it’s true for us now.

Right now, there are a lot of things that make us afraid. And fixers, like me, would like to fix things up right away. A nice easy solution would be very nice! But God sees things with eternal eyes. The Apostle Paul talks to all the early churches about the need for struggles and perseverance in order to grow faith. As the writer Anne Lamont says, “It’s good to be afraid, when it mobilizes us to fight tooth and nail for what is right, when it pricks the balloon of our complacency, when it gets us back on our feet. A lot of us are both afraid and devoutly faithful at the same time... courage is fear that has said its prayers.”

We can respond to the things that make us afraid with fear, or we can care a lot and pray a lot. We can stick together and share and

listen and draw nearer to God knowing that we are loved and chosen and safe. We know the ending of the story, and it is this: In the end, God wins. Jesus came to tell us that.

Today I will pray to the God that loves us, and be at peace.

Prayer: Dear Lord, It seems like there are so many things to be afraid of, but I know that you tell us over and over again in Scripture to, “Be not afraid”, and to trust You. Protect me from my urgent-inator ways. I pray for peace in my soul as You slow me down and help me to remember to pray and to trust You while You work out Your way in the world. Amen

Contributed by Lori Snyder-Sloan

December 4 The Second Sunday in Advent

Title: One In – One Out

Scripture: *Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.* 1 Peter 3:9

Reflection: One of my sisters has a rule for her house: for every item taken in, one item must go. She uses this practice to prevent too much clutter in her life. Personally, I think it is a great idea. My problem is that if even I started now, I would have to remove 20 for every one item, just to get caught up.

I was thinking about this process when reading about a Reverse Advent Calendar. The Reverse Advent Calendar is gifting others everyday in Advent rather than treating ourselves. The idea is to find a box or basket and place something inside that can be given to someone who could really make use of it; then deliver the items on Christmas Eve to a pantry or a homeless shelter.

I plan to take this plan a step farther and imagine the container filled with things no one needs: self-doubt, impatience, rudeness, disbelief, arrogance...then purposefully “remove” the bad stuff and replace it with the good. I like the idea of cleaning my house and my soul at the same time; and there is no better time than Advent to do this.

Advent is the time of the year we prepare for the birth of the Savior. During this season, we should strive to prepare our lives, our hearts, and our spirits so that when Jesus comes, there will be

room. I'm sure that everyone has closets full of things we intend to use, but probably never will. Some of our "stuff" may be nice, practical and may have price tags still attached; but good stuff needs to go, too. God gives us blessings that He encourages us to give away to those in need; if we miss the opportunity, we may not have room for Him to shower us with more.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to prepare to receive You with my heart full and my closet empty; with my blessings shared and my short comings diminished.

Contributed by Sherri Petersen

December 5 The Second Monday in Advent

Title: Helping God's Lost

Scripture: *For the eyes of the Lord search far and wide across the whole earth, looking for people whose Hearts are growing or maturing in Faith and committed toward Him, He knows we the Children of the world are only dust particles so that He can show His Great Power in helping them. 2 Chronicles 16:9*

Reflection: It is our responsibility as children of the world and of the Light to help other lost children or people who are struggling in a dark world to find their happiness or greatness in this world that Our Almighty Father created, so we all can live with our Lord and relatives who has passed on from this world toward the next world when the time is right, according to Our Almighty Father.

Prayer: Lord, help us, Your children of the Light to be on the lookout to regard other people's interests above are own, so we all can live in the next world with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Contributed by Donald R. Brewer,

(I give the credit for this inspiration to Our Almighty Father who helped me compose it on February 24, 2016.)



Title: God Given Talents

Scripture: *Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.* Ephesians 3: 20 – 21



Reflection: Recently I have started a new business venture. Amongst the excitement of the new journey is also the excitement of SHOPPING! Oh, yes, the shopping! Last night in my alone time with God, He impressed on my heart to put a pause on buying new things and become more resourceful with the things he has given me. I have not a single unanswered need. I have many wants, but everything I need is available within my surroundings.

Although the stores are calling out to me, “buy the shiny new saw.” God’s still voice whispers, “you are blessed and have all you need.” God’s people are blessed so that we can be a blessing to others. Try focusing this season of life on how we can bless our family, neighbors, coworkers, leaders, and spouse. What gift have you been given which can be shared to bless another?

Prayer: God, in your generosity you have blessed me and provided all I need. Thank you! Instead of focusing on the things I want, help me to use the gifts you’ve given me to bless others. Amen

Contributed by Michelle Lynch

December 6 The Second Tuesday in Advent

Title: Have a Cloudy Day!

Scripture: *It happened that when the priests came from the holy place, the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD. Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said that He would dwell in the thick cloud. 1 Kings 8: 10-12*
And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. Luke 2:9

Reflection: This past week I considered an odd thought that only occurs to odd people like me: I wonder if Mary, when she was pregnant with Jesus, looked at any point like the character in 'Peanuts', Pigpen. I don't say that in a disparaging manner, let's stop and consider for a second.

In the Old Testament the glory of God, His presence, is depicted usually in the form of a cloud. Remember how God, in the cloud led the Israelites out of Egypt? It was so bright a cloud that during the night it appeared as a pillar of fire. How about the cloud that descended on Mt Sinai where God gave the Ten Commandments? Remember the cloud that filled the temple that Solomon built? The same bright cloud appeared at Jesus' baptism and His transfiguration. And when Jesus comes again, yep, it will be on a cloud of course. Maybe the haloed bright pictures we have of Mary with child, with God, should instead have portrayed her in a little bright rumbling 'Pigpen-ish' cloud I thought.

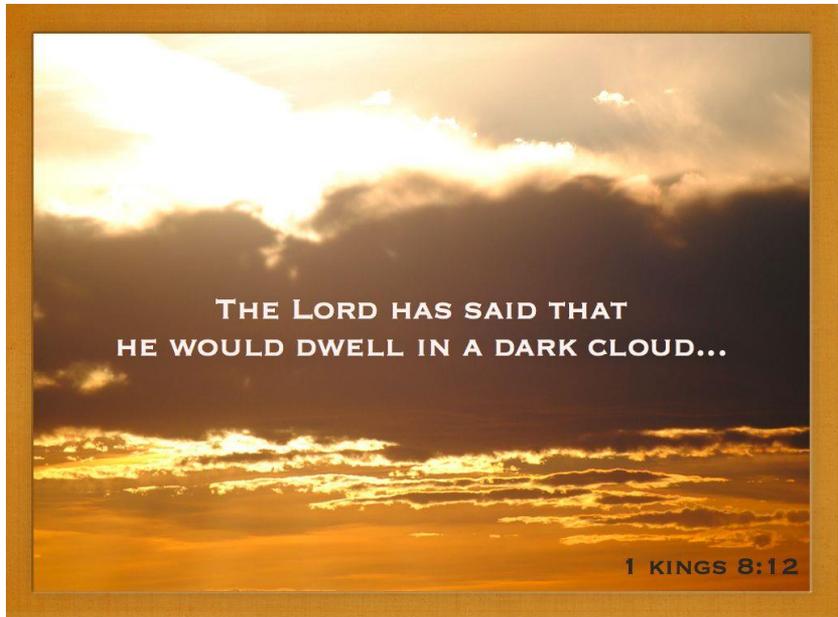
We've all seen towering cumulus clouds light up the sky in a prediction of a coming storm. It's an awesome sight really, so bright, at once concerning and spine-tingling. So maybe it wasn't a silent night where all was calm, all was bright, that the shepherds got the Good News. Maybe it was again a rumbly cloudy night that was so bright! Maybe this bright cloud filled with the glory of God and angels brought a ground shaking brilliant daylight to the night with the Good Gospel News.

We need to have our own bright cloud by spending time in prayer, in His Word, in His temple and getting out and doing the good works He ordained for us before time began. That means getting out and

bringing God's presence into the lives of others, bringing a bright cloud to their dark clear night. So to you on this day, I pray for you a bright cloudy day filled with God's presence and holiness and glory. May He turn your fears to a spine-tingling peace with a bright cloud of love.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we pray to be a cloud of love for others; and we pray Your presence, Your glory, Your holiness may never depart from us until we see You coming on a bright cloud to claim us as Your own bright cloud people. Amen, Amen and Amen....

Contributed by Keith Petersen



December 7 The Second Wednesday in Advent

Title: A Stranger in the Night

Scripture: *And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered right; do this, and you will live." But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor? Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10:25-37*

Reflection: This is a true experience that happened years ago before a rehearsal.

It was one of those cold November nights when you long to stay home with a good book. The rain had begun in the afternoon and the dropping temperature had changed it into treacherous ice everywhere. I was the director of the theater at a metropolitan high school and had scheduled a blocking rehearsal. Due to a very tight schedule cancellation of the rehearsal was not an option.

I had planned to make a quick trip to the fabric store for thirty yards of muslin so my stage craft class could cover some scenery and start painting it. I had gotten the material and was on my way back to school when I saw him standing in front of the J.C. Penney store.

He was at least six feet tall with long hair and a black bushy beard. Ice had formed on his beard and clothes. He signaled for a ride. To refuse him a ride in this terrible weather would be inconceivable. I stopped my V.W. Bug and opened the door. He heaved a huge wet duffel bag into the back seat then slid into the passenger seat. He completely overwhelmed the Bug's heater.

I turned toward him, "You know this is not a night to be hitch hiking. The streets are getting treacherous and very dangerous." He did not look at me nor did he speak. His eyes were rigidly focused on the street ahead. I broke the silence "I'm a teacher of drama here and I have a rehearsal tonight. My students are waiting for me." He made no response.

Again, I broke the silence. "You can go to the rehearsal with me and afterwards you could come to my place for the night. My wife will get you something to eat. She is used to having me bring students or people who need help. We have a spare room you can use. It will be warm. Perhaps morning will bring a better day to travel." There was no indication that he had understood one word I had said. He then turned to me and for the first time his eyes locked into mine and my heart almost stopped beating. I was looking into eyes that burned with a demonic fervor. I remembered seeing such eyes just a week or two before on the cover of Life magazine featuring a full-face picture of the killer Charles Manson. The impassioned saints and martyrs in El Greco's paintings had eyes like that.

My uncle had said more than once, "R. H., someday we are going to find you in a ditch and you won't be alive, and your car will be gone." I had never taken those words seriously until this moment. My passenger had turned away and once more was looking straight ahead. "I have to turn right here and I will go down the alley since I can't turn left off Broadway. My high school is the red brick building on the corner." I could see my students at the door of the building waiting for me. I crossed Broadway and then pulled over to the curb and stopped.

"This is it," I said. "Do you want to come with me and then spend the night at my house or are you going back out into this ice storm?" He turned away and opened the door, grabbed his duffel bag and swung it to the sidewalk.

I gave an inaudible sigh of relief and was just beginning to relax when suddenly he thrust his head and shoulder back in the car. He grabbed me by my shoulders and brought my face close to his bearded one. Mercifully I did not scream. I was paralyzed into immobility.

Now his eyes stabbed into mine as he rasped out the only words he ever said to me. *“Jesus Loves You Very Much.”* Slamming the door of the car he was gone, his bulky black form blending with the stormy night.

Prayer: Dear Lord, during this wonderful season of giving and receiving help us to remember those who may so easily be forgotten. Amen.

Contributed by R. H. Fanders



December 8 The Second Thursday in Advent

Title: My Crucifix

Scripture: *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose.* Galatians 2:20

Reflection: At the foot of my bed, on the wall, hangs a crucifix! Why should a Presbyterian Minister have a crucifix on his wall? Here is the story of “why”:

When I served the Grace Presbyterian Church in Green Bay, Wisconsin, I also served as a volunteer maritime chaplain for the Interfaith Seamen’s Ministry. Three chaplains (Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian) would visit the ships that came to the port via the St. Lawrence Seaway. It was our custom to not only visit with the seamen, but to give them gift boxes of cookies, books and magazines provided by members of our organization. One year a ship from Brazil came to port. We delivered our boxes, but the seamen also gave us a gift in return. It was a beautiful crafted crucifix made entirely out of straw by members of their family. It was their way of saying “Thanks.” I have always cherished that simple gift.

Each morning when I awaken I look at my crucifix and say: “Jesus, you died for me! How may I live for you today?” A good question appropriate for any liturgical season—Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost. A good question for any day of the year: “How may I live for you today?” My crucifix is a reminder of why Christ was born, lived, died and lived once again—It was for me, and I for Him!

Now you know why I have a crucifix hanging on my wall.

Prayer: “Great and good God, give us pure hearts that we may see you, humble hearts that we may hear you, hearts of love that we may serve you, hearts of faith that we may live in you, reverent hearts that we may worship you, here and in the world, out there, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” – (Book of Common Worship—Daily Prayer)

Contributed by Rev. William Osick

December 9 The Second Friday in Advent

Title: More Like Jesus

Scripture: *Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.* Proverbs 22:6

Reflection: My former Minister, Dr. Robson asked me if I would teach Sunday School. I thought and prayed about this for a while. I asked myself, "Could I teach three to five-year-old children about the love of Jesus as well as my Sunday School teacher taught me?" My answer was, "Yes, I can."

I spent several days at church decorating, planning and drawing. The bulletin board always had some decoration on it.

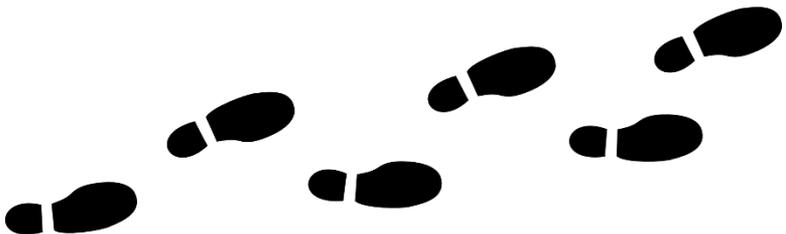
Our lessons consisted of: praying, drawing Christmas trees, drawing palm trees and learning about Jesus. We sang for the congregation many times.

One time I traced the children's shoes and asked them to "try" and be like Jesus for just one week. Some children said they were like Jesus all week and other children said that it was too difficult.

This Advent and always, may each of us "try" to be more like Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, Bless my former Students. Be with them and their Families. Be with All of God's Children this year. Amen.

Contributed by Nancy Girmus



Title: Could We Possibly Have Calm? Please!

Scripture: *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Psalms 23*



Reflection: Have you ever tried to herd sheep? It's not easy. When I was in college I belonged to a singing group at Hastings College called the Road Crew. We would go to towns in Nebraska and Colorado and our mission was doing church services. We would present dramas and children's sermons and music basically we would do the whole service.

Well, we had a wonderful sponsor, Georgia Goble. She lived out in the country and she and her husband had about 30 sheep. Our group was often invited to spend time at their farm and myself being an uninformed city girl did not have a clue what we were doing. We were asked to help move the sheep to a different pasture. We all said sure.

What were we thinking? You should have seen this. Panic everywhere. Leaping, bleating, shouting and tripping, I knew I wasn't made to be a sheep rancher. It was just chaos run amuck. It was an interesting experiment for a college kid to try at least once. This was not on my bucket list.

There are days at work that feel exactly the same way. My 2nd graders that I have during the day are my angels. The kindergartners at Completely Kids are a different story. Like the ad on TV it's like herding cats. They are sweethearts but they haven't been tamed yet.

We are so lucky that we have a God who will love us in spite of our reckless, disordered and crazy lives. We need Christ as our shepherd to lead us down the correct path so we can enjoy the uniqueness of his green pastures.

Prayer: Shepherd of our lives thank you for coming to earth as a baby in a manger. Shepherds from the hillside came to adore you. Let us have the same feeling of awe and wonder when we are in your glorious and gracious presence. Amen.

Contributed by Lindsey McKee

December 10 The Second Saturday in Advent

Title: Softly and Tenderly?? Not So Much.

Scripture: *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, made himself nothing and taking the very nature of a servant, humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.* Ephesians 2:5-8

Reflection:

*Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling, Calling for you and for me.**

These were the words going through my mind many years ago after our two dogs escaped from our yard in the countryside of northern Colorado. Sneakers and Bozo took off at a dead run across the rolling grassland. Chasing after them on foot and stopping just long enough to scan the horizon at the top of each little hill, I became increasingly fearful they were gone for good. They were lost! What if one got hurt? How could I ever find them? What if they never came home?

Come home, come home, Ye who are weary come home.



As I anxiously hurried along, I realized that there is absolutely no way that Jesus '*softly and tenderly*' calls his beloved lost children!! He must be shouting at the top of his lungs, waving His arms wildly and jumping up and down out of eagerness to be heard, to save.

And Christ did much, much more: He willingly died to bring His children safely home to spend eternal life with Him forever. As those compelled to diligently search for lost pets, what is our calling to help lost children of God find their way home?

Prayer: Dear loving Father, help us to recognize the urgency in bringing home your beloved but lost children, and help us respond accordingly.

* from the hymn, *Softly and Tenderly*, by Will L. Thompson, 1880.

Contributed by Amy Rodie

December 11 The Third Sunday in Advent

Title: Why Do We Know the Christmas Story?

Scripture: *Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.* Luke 1: 1 – 4

Reflection: This very long run-on sentence is the introduction to the Gospel of Luke. We usually start Advent reflections with the second chapter beginning “In those days”, etc., but the sentence that introduces the book tells us we are about to hear what Luke has been told by actual witnesses to the events; we are going to be told a true story.

We all love a good fictional story, but here we see Luke passing on to another believer the facts as Luke has been told they occurred. Luke wants us to know that what we are about to hear is the whole truth. Luke is making sure that what he knows will not be forgotten. The introduction is followed by the story of the birth and life of John the Baptizer then the story of the birth of Jesus. Luke tells us the truth of these matters, as he has been told of them. Now, Luke has passed the truth on to us with the introduction, giving us an orderly account from eyewitnesses. What are we to do with the truth? Hoard it? Keep it to ourselves? We are to share it with the world! We have been given the truth to pass on to others and bring them to Christ. Advent brings us to the start of the story of Christ and challenges us to live the truth and give an orderly account to others that they may also know and live the truth.

Prayer: Father, Help us to share the story of Christ and the truth with others that they may come to Christ also. Amen.

Contributed by Don Swanson

December 12 The Third Monday in Advent

Title: Hallelujah

Scripture: Psalm 150: 1 – 6

1 Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens.

2 Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.

3 Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre,

4 praise him with timbrel and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe,

5 praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.

6 Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Hallelujah

Reflection: November 7th, 2016, singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen died at age 87. Many people may not be familiar with the larger body of his music (myself included), but most people have heard at least one rendition of his most recognizable song, “Hallelujah”. According some sources, Cohen wrote eighty some versions of Hallelujah. The song has been covered over 300 times, with many artists using soaring vocals, orchestras and choruses; but Cohen’s own dark, gravelly voiced version is by far the most moving. To me, his performance make it clear that this is not necessarily meant to be a song of praise, but an introspective reflection on what a relationship with God is. And judging from what the lyrics say, Cohen doesn’t think that relationship is always an easy one to maintain.

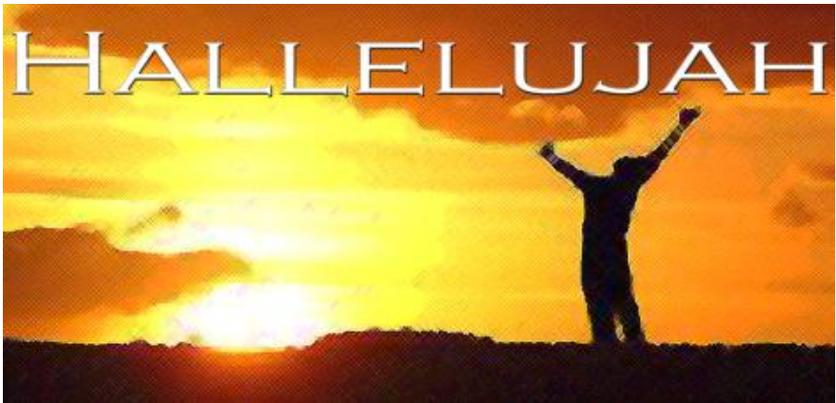
In one reference that I read, the word hallelujah is described as a summons for people to praise God. I think the most moving line of Coehen’s song is “The baffled king composing hallelujah”. A reference to King David; to me it speaks deeply to a human desire to understand what is happening in life, especially in sad, lonely, confusing times. The line also points out, that although baffled, the king is still reaching out to God, and calling others to do so as well. King David, by no means had an easy, rose colored relationship with God, yet is credited with composing many psalms of praise. David’s story points out that although imperfect, he still had a relationship with God.

This is what the poetry in Cohen's song suggest to me: that whether I come with "A holy or a broken hallelujah", I can still have a relationship with God. In a Christmas season coming after such a tumultuous year, I can be comforted that God reached out to a deeply flawed humanity by becoming human. I realize that I do not think about this remarkable aspect of our faith enough – that God left his glorified state to become a human in Jesus. Jesus Christ, fully God and fully human, bridges the gap between my imperfect hallelujah and God.

Prayer:

I did my best, it wasn't much
I couldn't feel, so I tried to touch
I've told the truth, I didn't come to fool you
And even though
It all went wrong
I'll stand before the Lord of Song
With nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah
Hallelujah
Hallelujah
Hallelujah
Hallelujah. By L. Cohen

Contributed by Karen Kroupa



December 13 The Third Tuesday in Advent

Title: Blessed are the Meek

Scripture: *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

~ Matthew 5:5

Reflection: It seems that current examples of sport events, politics and business deals salute the bold, the fierce, the powerful, the confident, define what it means to be strong; but Jesus reminds us that the meek shall inherit the Earth; meaning, that those who are meek (faithful Christians) have an inheritance here in this life, therefore "blessed are the meek". These individuals understand their spiritual poverty, mourn over their lost condition and are willing to submit their lives to the will of God.

The original language derivation of the word 'meek' helps explain what Jesus meant-

- 1) Greek word praus
- 2) Used to describe a soothing medicine.
- 3) Used by sailors to describe a gentle breeze.
- 4) Used by farmers to describe a broken colt.

Each definition describes great power under control or strength under control. A couple of scriptures helps illustrate this definition:

a. Matthew 11:28, 29 - "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Just as Jesus, the all-powerful, took upon himself the yoke of earthly obedience to His Father, so too does Jesus call on us to take on the yoke of submission to His will.

b. Ephesians 4:1,2 - "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love;" Meekness means walking according to the precepts of our vocation and controlling our attitudes toward our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Meekness curbs the "natural" desires to rebel, fight, have our own way, push ourselves forward, etc. We submit to the Lord in obedience to His will. As we study the scriptures, we become familiar with God's chosen people that experiences times of strength and meekness.

Abraham-God's chosen to be the father of the Jewish nation. Through him the Messiah would come, but he was also meek, instead of demanding his own rights, Abraham sought to keep the peace between his herdsmen and Lot's, Genesis 12:7-9.

Moses- God's chosen great leader. He stood up to the most powerful leader in the world, Pharaoh Ramses. He led God's people through the wilderness to the border of the promised land but in Numbers 12:3 it states, "Now the man Moses, was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth."

David- God's chosen to replace King Saul, whom God had rejected because of disobedience. He was a mighty warrior and a great leader, but David was also meek, 2 Samuel 1:11,12

Jesus- He could stand up to the winds and the waves. He chased the moneychangers out of the temple twice with a whip made out of chords, but Matthew 11:29 reminds us, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" or the meekness he exhibited in the Garden of Gethsemane when he knew that he would soon die on the cross. Matthew 26: 39, 42.

A.W. Tozer (an American Christian pastor, preacher, author, magazine editor, and spiritual mentor) wrote, the meek man is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. Rather he may be in his moral life as bold as a lion and as strong as Samson; but he has stopped being fooled about himself. He has accepted God's estimate of his own life. He knows he is as weak and helpless as God declared him to be, but paradoxically, he knows at the same time that he is in the sight of God of more importance than angels. In himself, nothing; in God, everything- THIS is our motto

Prayer: Help us to understand and strive for meekness in our lives. Amen

Contributed by Greg Caddy



December 14 The Third Wednesday in Advent

Title: The Canticle of Zechariah

Reflection: During my years at Central, morning prayer was offered most week days. Once I developed a routine of attending when I could, it held a special place in my spiritual journey. Often it was just Pastor Steve and me, but knowing the long tradition of morning prayers in the Christian church and that that very morning others around the world were saying the same words gave me a greater understanding of my place in God's kingdom.

One of my favorite passages is the Canticle of Zechariah. It is repeated daily during ordinary time of the church calendar. From Luke 1 it tells the joy of an elderly man who has just witnessed the birth of his son who would become John the Baptist. His prayer is a beautiful model. It begins with praise:

Blessed are you, Lord, the God of Israel;
you have come to your people and set them free.
You have raised up for us a mighty Savior,
born of the house of your servant David.

And then Zechariah traces Jewish history and God's promises to His people:

Through your holy prophets, you promised of old
to save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all who hate us,
to show mercy to our forebears,
and to remember your holy covenant.
This was the oath you swore to our father Abraham.
To set us free from the hands of our enemies,
Free to worship you without fear,
Holy and righteous before you,
All the days of our life.

We are so fortunate to live in a country that recognizes our freedom of worship. It should be our prayer that it continues and for others to know that freedom. Then he acknowledges the magnitude of the life of his son will lead:

And you, child, shall be called the prophet
of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare the way
to give God's people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of their sins.

The last lines are my favorite, giving me a feeling of God's comfort. They were particularly meaningful as I went through cancer treatments. It's a beautiful description of God's love for us:

In the tender compassion of our God,
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
to shine on those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Help us to find time to glory in your peace this Advent season. Thank you for the depth of our Christian heritage. We pray for Christians around the world who worship in fear. Keep them safe and guide us all into peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

Contributed by Kathy Stockham



December 15 The Third Thursday in Advent

Title: The Gifts of Christmas

Scripture: *They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they kneeled and worshiped him. Then they opened their luggage and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, myrrh. Matthew 2:11*

Reflection: Updating the website, I have written a lot about “The Gifts of Christmas.” But I would like to return to the years when I was teaching and discuss the gifts of Christmas back then.

When I was little, my parents had a big Christmas tree with many decorations. As time went by, the Christmas tree got smaller and smaller to the point where the tree was pre-decorated. I always said that when I was in my own house, I would have a big tree again, and that has happened.

My motto regarding my classroom was that we were a “family away from our family,” and we all shared things in our lives. Present in that room each day was joy, hope, peace and love. Back in the 1990’s I was telling my fifth grade class the story about my new six-foot Christmas tree and how excited I was to decorate it. The last day before Winter Vacation, I received some very meaningful gifts. Michael and his mother gave me a large red ball and a large gold ball for my tree. Over the years I received dachshunds for the tree and still do. I have a birdhouse made out of a communion cup, and a Nativity from Israel. I also have a crystal Nativity from my aunt.

Two years ago I had to get a new tree. The tree just wasn’t right. Missing were the two red and gold decorations and the Nativity from Israel. Where had I put them? I couldn’t find them. However, last year, I had the most beautiful seven and one-half foot tree because I found the red and gold balls from the nineties and the Nativity. All of these decorations represent gifts of Christmas because they have been given through joy, hope, peace, and love.

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for the birth of Your Son, Jesus. May we use Your gifts of Christmas not only at this time of year, but all year long. If we exhibit joy, hope, and love throughout the year, hopefully we will have a more peaceful world. Amen.

Contributed by Joyce Prohaska

Title: Christmas is Perfect, Even When It's Not

Scripture: *But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world.* John 16:21



Reflection: In reviewing my Christmas memories, why do I find little correlation between the best-remembered Christmases and the merriest?

(The deadline of this publication is forcing this review in early November, a time that can seem foreign to the true Christmas spirit. Last year, we were in Branson, Missouri, on November 1, and heard that day the announcement that its Christmas season was beginning. It seemed an opportunistic commercialism rather than the spirit that warmly builds as December 25 nears.)

Why do I remember most vividly some Christmases tinged with adversity? Opening presents in an Army barracks. Working on Christmas Day after traveling home Christmas Eve from my brother's wedding.

I believe I remember them because I want Christmas Day to be a respite from every day cares. When this does not happen, the memory becomes more searing.

I want Christmas to be perfect. When this perfection lapses in church, the experience is doubly memorable.

Such was the case during childhood. We were in the Sunday school room waiting to go on for our part in the Christmas pageant. We could partially hear the narrative going on in the sanctuary. Suddenly, silence. I later learned, to my mortification, that the silence came when my sister had forgotten her lines.

She went on to live a happy life, and her own children were never known to err on stage.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may we know that Christmas IS perfect, regardless of how it may seem. Amen.

Contributed by Bob Williams

December 16 The Third Friday in Advent

Title: Still So Much to Learn

Scripture: *A wise man will hear and increase his learning. A man of understanding will attain to leadership. Proverbs 1:5*

Reflection: When I was a teen, going through the paces to be confirmed, I thought surely I knew all there was to know about the Bible and God. I mean, look at all the books I read and the verses I memorized, what else could I learn?

The Pastor patiently explained to us that there was much to learn if only we would open our ears and our hearts to hear God's words. A couple of years later I joined the service and some of the experiences there caused me to look for new meaning in the words in the Bible. The stories were more than just stories, they were part of the history of Christians and required more in depth research into the meaning of the words. I was learning! God was talking to me and I was listening. The Pastor explained that much had been learned and yet there was much more to be learned.

Years later, back in civilian life, I was determined to gain an understanding of the Bible, why it was written, who wrote it, what is the message it contains for all for God's people. Following a Bible study that met weekly for 2 years the challenge was to teach a Bible study to the congregation members. I began to find that many of my questions began to be answered and an understanding of what I had learned. God was leading me to step out of my comfort zone and get more involved, teaching Senior High CE classes, leading youth fellowship groups and Adult Bible studies on Sunday morning.

I no longer think I have nothing more to learn, for I continue to learn from everybody I meet. No matter who they are or what their station in life is, they all have something to teach us.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father thank you for your presence in my life, for providing me with gifts that I can share with others to your glory. Help me to discern what your plan for me is at this time and allow me to learn what I need to know from those around me. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Contributed by Dennis Brown

December 17 The Third Saturday in Advent

Title: Through this Child

Scripture: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God. He was in the Beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was LIFE, and the LIFE was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.* John 1:1-5

Reflection: I often think about the actual, physical, and miraculous birth of God's Son, Jesus. Jesus, as a human being, seems to be my "doubting Thomas" point of contact with God, who seems to always meet me right where I am. God's love for me, through this child, goes full cycle. This child, Jesus, "The Word", has always been there. I now have a manifestation of God!

Through this child, God has purchased my salvation, my redemption, my sanctification, my righteousness, and my adoption as one of His special, holy and unique children.

Through this child, I have been given a perfect view of the character and nature of God our Father.

Because of this child, through this child, His life, and purpose for my life may be determined. My life was changed because of this child. His life, death on the cross, and resurrection for me have all led to receiving His Holy Spirit within me and has made me complete and full. Through the Holy Spirit I am being led and guided to a more fulfilling relationship with God.

Through this child, I have become a child of God, and I long to learn more of who He is through scripture. I learned of this child through scripture, and I am learning who I am in Jesus through scripture and prayer (communion with God). I talk to Him often throughout the day and renew my mind with His words. And, in everything, I am very thankful, especially for this gift He has given me. All this because of God's love for me through this child.

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for this gift of your Son, Jesus. Make us aware of your constant presence as we prepare ourselves for His birthday celebration. In Jesus' name. Amen

Contributed by Rebecca Horejs

December 18 The Fourth Sunday in Advent

Title: Christians and Travel

Scripture: *I have been on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my countrymen, danger from the Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger on the sea, danger among false brothers...* 2 Corinthians 11:26

But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion. Luke 10:33

You'll travel safely, you'll neither tire nor trip. Proverbs 3:23

The Lord keeps you from all harm and watches over your life. The Lord keeps watch over you as you come and go, both now and forever. Psalm 121:7-8

Reflection: Inspiration for this devotion came from an experience my cousin, Janice, had in October during the approach of Hurricane Matthew. She lives right in the middle of the area on the east coast of Florida that was targeted to be hardest hit by the hurricane. They received the order to evacuate, so they got into their car with their granddaughter, who had come from a nearby college, and their dachshund, Oliver, and headed northwest, hoping to find a place to stay in Georgia. Traffic was horrendous on the packed highway, and they were able to progress at only about 14 miles per hour. As they traveled Jan posted their situation to Facebook. She learned that there were no rooms available in northern Florida, southern Georgia or southern Alabama. A Facebook friend did some research and sent her a list of available rooms that she was able to find in Georgia. Jan called one of the numbers and a woman answered. Jan explained their situation and the woman in Bainbridge, GA, told her to come on and they were welcome to stay with her and her husband. It turned out that Jan had accidentally dialed one incorrect digit for a hotel number and got a private citizen. She had reached the home of a kind Christian couple who graciously welcomed all three of them and the dog to stay with them in their lovely home. The two couples became good friends and the Georgia couple is going to visit Jan and her husband in Florida in February. Jan stated in her Facebook post, "God sure blessed us with these people. If ever additional points are given for heaven's door they deserve them."

Jan's experience got me to thinking about the many ways that God is invoked or involved in travel. The people in the Bible traveled all over what we call the Mideast. Just the trip to Egypt with toddler, Jesus, would have been between 300 and 400 miles. Noah, Moses and his people, the Israelites, Jonah – there was a lot of travel in the Old Testament. The people of the New Testament traveled to begin or spread the word about Christ and Christianity. I read somewhere that Jesus' travels were comparable to having walked around the world at the equator. Paul describes travel during those times in the above verse from 2 Corinthians. I remember, as a child in Sunday school, looking at the maps in my Bible and wondering how they could travel such long distances. I still wonder how they did it. Most of that travel was on foot through desert, mountains, and other treacherous terrain, challenging water crossings, with the threat of robbers and limited lodging. They all prayed and trusted God to guide and protect them.

Modern travel might be safer than it was in Bible times, but it is still fraught with irritations, inconvenience, and sometimes danger. God is with us to keep us safe, give us patience, or to put new people in our lives. The Gideons International organization places Bibles in hotel rooms to spread the Word of God and provide comfort for travelers.

We have all had close calls in our travels and we tend thank God when disaster is averted. I felt the hand of God one evening when I was 21 and driving home from college for Thanksgiving. I drove over some railroad tracks, glanced in the rearview mirror and saw a speeding train. I had not noticed that train at all as I crossed right in front of it! God saved me that day. Most of us have had close calls in traffic and can be grateful to God for keeping us safe. I am not a nervous flyer, but I do say a little prayer upon takeoff. "God, please help this pilot use skills and wisdom to get us there safely." I say a quick thank you when we land. There was the time my family flew in a small single engine airplane into the Yuturi rain forest at the head waters of the Amazon in pouring rain, when the yellow masks came down because of low oxygen, and we had to put them on. The plane took some dramatic dips and turns as the pilot sought the best way through the storm. I found that I could say the Lord's Prayer 90 times in 45 minutes! We made it safely back to Quito.

About 20 years ago, a friend of mine, whose husband is a Presbyterian minister, was traveling alone on the Interstate in another state and her car broke down. A man stopped to help her, took her to his home where his wife visited with her while he arranged for her car to be fixed. From the minute he stopped, my friend had a feeling that there was something familiar about this man. It turned out that he was a Presbyterian minister. She felt God's presence as He sent this man and caused her to feel safe enough to go with this man and let him help her.

People often travel to engage in faith-based travel with religious vacations to holy cities. Christians make pilgrimages to Israel to visit the birthplace of Christianity and Rome to see the Vatican and the basilica of San Peter. There are those who travel to shrines and places related to the lives or activities of saints and martyrs, and some travel to sites of healing waters thought to be blessed by God. Many Christians travel as missionaries to follow Christ's teachings to help the needy and to spread the Word of God. There is a lot of travel associated with Christmas. Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem, shepherds and the three wise men travelled to see Jesus, there was Mary and Joseph's hurried trip to Egypt to avoid Herod's awful command. Families travel during the holidays so they can be together for the important religious holidays of Christmas and Easter.

Words we use to send travelers on their way include "go with God," "Godspeed," and in Spanish, adios and Vaya con Dios. In fact, goodbye is said to have come from the phrase, "God be with ye." There are literally dozens of pieces of scripture that refer to travel. I selected the four above as those that most related to this devotion.

Life is a journey that includes travel of many kinds to many places in varied circumstances. We need to remember that God is with us to guide, comfort, and protect us wherever and in whatever direction we go, and we must serve the Lord and honor him by following his word in all we do.

Travelers Prayer (by Julie Palmer): O Father, You are always there, For your love reaches everywhere. Above the clouds, Beneath the sea, I know your hand will cover me. Through the darkened starry night. Again at dawn when all is bright. Upon the heavens, or over bridges, Deepest valleys, rocky ridges. You

beside me, o so close, Knowing when I need you most. Through different lands of war or peace, Where suffering stirs or riches twist I choose to walk the path you tread. And carry your wisdom where I'm led. To leave your love in every place I rest my head or dine or wait. You keep me safe, watch over me. I choose to put my trust in thee. Amen

Contributed by Merryllen Towey Schulz

December 19 The Fourth Monday in Advent

Title: My gift, to Your Glory

Scripture: *In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well....If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging.* Romans 12:6-8

Reflection: From the moment I first held that shiny, metal stick in my hand, I knew that twirling a baton was my destiny. Of course, at 8 years old I didn't know what that feeling meant. But I knew that with that stick in my hand, I was doing what I was supposed to do—what God wanted me to do. He had given me this special gift that one day I could share with others.

As I grew in the sport of baton twirling, I discovered that I not only had the gift of twirling but also teaching. Because I excelled quickly, my baton coach would have me help the younger and newer twirlers. By the time I was in high school, I had my own twirling group and private lesson students. God had blessed me with the ability and knowledge to teach and encourage others.

God gives each of us our very own unique gift. For me, it is the gift of teaching and encouragement. I may not be a school teacher or teacher in the church, but I am not only teaching my students how to twirl a baton: I am teaching them life skills: how to cope with loss and disappointment, how to handle stress and anxiety, how to be gracious winners, how to be supportive of their teammates and competitors, and much more!

In my interactions with my students, whether at lessons or competitions, I share my gift—God's gift. And through my actions, words, support, and encouragement, I pray they are witnessing the work of God and his love.

What is your gift? Is it teaching, speaking, dancing, painting? Is it building, decorating, landscaping, cooking? If you have a talent, no matter what it is, "Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:11).

It's never too late to discover your gifts and use them to glorify God!

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for the wonderful gifts you have given me and for the opportunities to share them with others. I pray for continued guidance in my gifts and that I will grow more in the knowledge of you and how to best use my gifts to bring glory to your name for your purpose. Amen

Contributed by Melissa McBride

December 20 The Fourth Tuesday in Advent

Title: Let Us Be Prepared

Scripture: *Therefore, be on alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert, and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.* Matthew 24: 42-44



Reflection: The "Accident": In the summer of 1976, our family of 4 ½ were involved in a serious car

accident. Passing through the intersection at 72nd & Crown Pointe, our south bound car was broadsided by a westbound vehicle loaded with teenagers that failed to stop for their red light. The resulting violent collision caused both cars to spin totally around, and when the dust settled, our car came to rest on an island on the west side of the intersection. As was normal in those days, no one in our car was wearing a seatbelt. Bodies flew everywhere. My wife Sandi was pregnant with our 3rd child (Trisha) at the time. The force of impact

caused the gear shift lever (on the column in that car) to jam into Sandi's side and she ended up crammed on the passenger side floor with a possible broken back. We were very concerned about Sandi and what the impact might have on our unborn child.

Our two year old daughter, Tammi, was sitting in the middle of the front seat eating ice cream. Tammi flew up, gashed her head on the rear view mirror (requiring 42 stitches) and somehow broke her leg on the dash board (requiring her to be in traction for 10 days and a body cast for 8 weeks.) Our son Tommy, 4 years old at the time, was in a "car seat" in the back and was not injured. I was driving and was very fortunate to only have various bumps and bruises. To my knowledge, no one in the other car was injured.

At the time of the "accident" our family was not attending church regularly. Sandi and I had both grown up in the churches of our parents, but in the mid 1970's, we were sort of on "cruise control" as far as practicing our faith was concerned. We all miraculously recovered from our injuries, and our 3rd child was born without any problems as a result of the accident.

I believe God used this situation as a "wake up call" for me. I realized that I was not living my life, and leading my family, in a way that I should have been. In an instant, we could have all been killed, and probably been dead to Christ. We praised God for the safe outcome of the "accident" and decided God had given us a "second chance" to follow Him. We returned to regularly attending church, and started living and practicing the Christian life as best as we knew how. We have been doing that for the last 40 years. I am happy to say that all of our children and their spouses, are believers and are active in their respective churches. I wish they were at First Pres!

We never know when something unexpected might happen to any of us. Accidents, or other issues, happen all the time all around us. When God calls us home, let us be found safe and secure in our belief and trust in the saving power of Jesus. We all need to be actively seeking and doing God's work thru Christ, immediately, in the here and now. May it be so for all of us. There might not be any "second chances". Amen

P.S. I highly recommend the use of seat belts for everyone in the car. I have been a believer since 1976!

Contributed by Tom Helligso

December 21 The Fourth Wednesday in Advent

Title: Seeking Balance: Justice vs. Peace

Scripture: *He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To do justice, and love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8*

Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Isaiah 1: 17

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. Matthew 5: 9

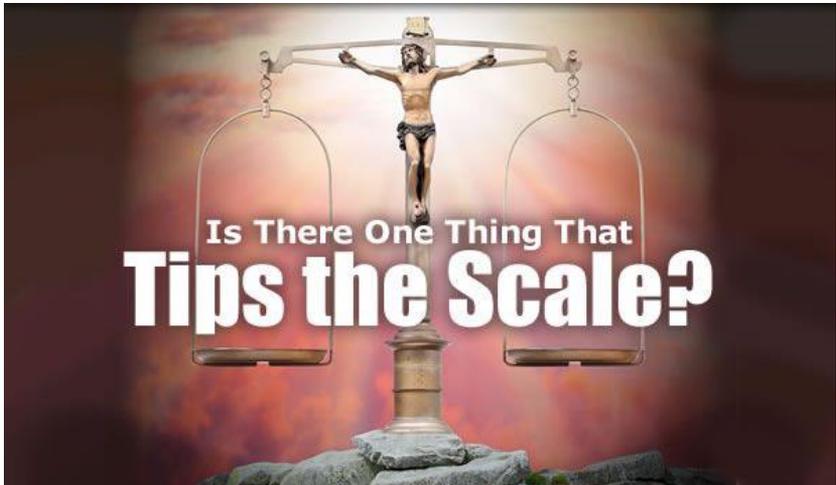
Reflection: Years ago I attended the funeral of a beloved aunt. The priest read a letter that was written by my uncle. One thing in the letter really stayed with me: my uncle stated that as far as he could remember, my aunt had never had a quarrel with anyone. She was at peace with all. I really loved that, and I think this was true; my aunt was a very kind person and I don't remember her ever being angry. I thought, "I would like to be like that, to have someone say at my funeral that I never had a quarrel with anyone." Then, a few years later I was listening to Dr. Laura Schlessinger on the radio; someone had called in to her show with the worry that if they confronted a family member about something they thought was wrong, the other family members would be mad at them. Dr. Laura said, "Well, if you've never made anyone mad, then you've probably never stood up for anything." Oh. Hmm. That really stayed with me, too, and I've been thinking about it ever since. How does one reconcile being at peace with all, but also having the courage to stand up for something at the risk of angering others? If everyone goes around crusading for justice 24/7 the world will be awfully noisy. Maybe it's good that there are both crusaders and peacemakers: a nice balance.

Maybe the best answer is in Romans 12: 9-11, 17-19 *Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord...Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."*

I take this to mean that we should do our best to stand up for justice on this earth without harming anyone, all the while remembering that God is ultimately in control.

Prayer: Lord, please help me to see clearly when there is injustice and to be brave enough to stand up and defend the persecuted. At the same time, please help me to be at peace with others and to always be forgiving, as I am always in need of forgiveness, myself. Even if I don't understand why some things are the way they are, I know that you are in charge, and that is enough.

Contributed by Julie Symens



December 22 The Fourth Thursday in Advent

Title: Unanswered Prayers

Scripture: The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps. Proverbs 16:9

Reflection: I am a big fan of country music and it often inspires me. One song comes to mind that has special meaning - "Unanswered Prayers" by Garth Brooks. The refrain has been helpful to me in accepting things that didn't go the way I had hoped and goes like this:

"Sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayers. Remember when you're talking to the man upstairs that just because he doesn't answer doesn't mean he don't care. Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers."

Years ago when I wanted to resume my career at IRS in Omaha, I hoped and prayed that I could return to the same division I had previously worked in. I was very disappointed when I was offered a job in another division which I reluctantly accepted. This new division ended up being a good fit for me and I thrived there.

Years later IRS decided to eliminate my department and I was really upset. I loved my job and was concerned about finding a new one. I was able to land a temporary job at IRS in another division but wondered what I was going to do when it ended? I applied for a few jobs and prayed I would get hired. I didn't get any of them. Then IRS created a new division, Taxpayer Advocate Service, and several new jobs were created in Omaha. I spent three days working on my application and was thrilled when I was hired as Sr. Case Advocate.

Looking back I am thankful some of those prayers weren't answered because better things came my way. My Advocate job allowed me to advance my career and achieve things I never thought I could do without a college degree. I made some life-long friends in my career and one of them, Jan Bostick, got me started helping in the Food Pantry and attending First Presbyterian Church.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, although I don't always understand your plans for my life, please help me to grow in faith and trust that your plans are what's best for me. Thank you for the many blessings you have bestowed upon me!

Contributed by Kathy McDonald

December 23 The Fourth Friday in Advent

Title: Terry's Heart Transplant

Scripture: *One day an authority on the law stood up to put Jesus to the test. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to receive eternal life?" "What is written in the law?" Jesus replied. "How do you understand it?" He answered, " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your strength and with all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do that, and you will live." Luke 10: 25-28*

Reflection: I first heard this story at the orientation for my job at UNMC. We watched a video about it, and I really liked it because it had a happy ending. Here is the story:

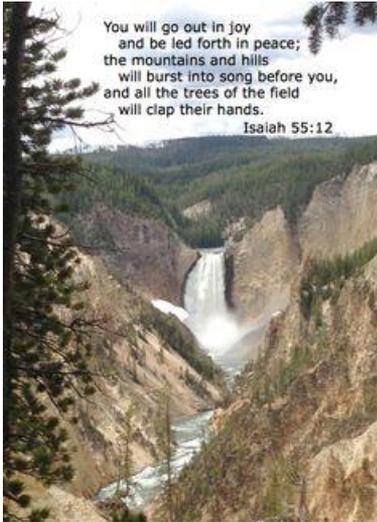
Lisa lives in North Dakota with her son. Her other son was killed in a car accident in North Dakota, his name was Levi. Her son Levi gave his heart to a man named Terry Hopper. They first met at the Med Center on the transplant floor. Terry hugged Levi's other brother, also he showed his shirt with a picture of Levi on it to them and said, "My hero. There's not a day when I don't think of him." "It's okay," said Lisa. They did an ultrasound of his new heart; there was the son's heartbeat inside Terry. Lisa burst into tears when she heard the ultrasound. "It's really good," Lisa said tearfully. Lisa said she gets happiness and sadness all at the same time: sad that her son's not here, and happiness that her son was able to help Terry. Terry gave Lisa a stuffed bear that had angel wings that played her son's heartbeat. Lisa looked at it in tears. Terry gave Lisa a hug. "Thank you," says Lisa, in tears, "It's awesome." Terry says, "You can listen to his heart all the time." "Yep. Every night, " Lisa says.

This story makes me happy, and it shows how one person, Lisa, showed love to another person, Terry, like it tells us to in the Bible. There is a video of this, if you would like to see it. Type Lisa Swanson on the internet and you can see it on You Tube.

Prayer: Dear God, We know that some people need a heart transplant to save their life. Please help Terry to enjoy his new heart. God bless Lisa's family, because their lives are different without Levi. Thank you, God for medical workers: doctors, nurses, and ultrasound technicians who help people. Thank you for this good story that shows us kindness and love. Contributed by Lily Symens

Title: For the Beauty of the Earth

Scripture: *You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.* Isaiah 55:12



Reflection: For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies, For the love with from our birth over and around us lies: Christ our God, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the wonder of each hour of the day and of the night, Hill and vale, and tree and flow'r, sun and moon, and stars of night: Christ our God, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise. For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child, Friends on earth, and friends

above, for all gentle thoughts and mild:

Christ our God, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

For thy church that evermore lifteth holy hands above,
Off'ring up on ev'ry shore her pure sacrifice of love:

Christ our God, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the joy of ear and eye, for the heart and mind's delight,
For the mystic harmony linking sense to sound and sight:

Christ our God, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

For thyself, best Gift Divine! To our race so freely giv'n;

For that great, great love of thine, peace on earth, and joy in heav'n:

Christ our God, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

poem by Follitt S. Pierpoint, 1864.

Prayer: Oh dear Lord, remind us to always thank and praise you for your generous and incredible gifts. Amen

Contributed by Amy Rodie

December 24 Christmas Eve

Title: Enjoy the Moment!

Scripture: Matthew 6:34, Jesus said, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own".

Reflection: In the above passage, Jesus was talking about worry and the principle he gave is one that is so important in life:

Live in the moment and let the next moment be for the next moment.

This is wonderfully illustrated in a story by Kent Crockett: "One day I was driving my car on a rural highway in Kansas. I was between destinations, with nothing to do but drive and watch the flat land and telephone poles pass by. Then God spoke to my heart, Enjoy the moment.

Enjoy the moment? What was there to enjoy?

I then realized that joy is a decision that I make. I need to take pleasure in every minute of life, not just the exciting times. God wants us to draw joy from every moment, every circumstance. Enjoy your fellowship with others. Enjoy spending time with your family. Savor the moments. If you don't, the life that God wants you to enjoy will pass you by, just like those telephone poles."

Isn't it amazing how the telephone poles of life can just zip by if we don't stop to enjoy the moment?

The Christmas season is one in which we can get caught up in "watching the telephone poles pass by." We worry about getting everything done just right for the perfect holiday. We run out and buy gifts for so many and have to wrap them just perfectly. We then put up the tree and decorate the house. Then comes the outdoor lights. Then the baking and decorating of our traditional Christmas cookies and holiday baking. Time then to head to the grocery store to shop for Christmas dinner for everyone.

During the holiday season, we spend so much time thinking about, planning, preparing and all in order to do the next thing. And in our rush to make Christmas "perfect", we miss taking time to sit back and enjoy the moment, to enjoy family, to enjoy friends and neighbors, to enjoy each other.

This Christmas season, let's not watch the telephone poles pass by, let's live in the moment and let the next moment be for the next moment. It's the life God wants us to enjoy.

Prayer: Gracious God, During this coming holiday season, slow our busyness of doing so much, fill our hearts with the joy of being with each other - help us to take time, to take the moments – to relax and enjoy the moment. Amen

Contributed by Trudy and Scott Darling

Title: Anticipation

Scripture: *The angel said to her, "Mary, do not be afraid. You have found favor with God. See! You are to become a mother and have a Son. You are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great. He will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the place where His early father David sat. He will be King over the family of Jacob forever and His nation will have no end."* Luke 1:30-33

Reflection: Back in the "old days" when I was having kids, my husband and I never knew if I was carrying a boy or a girl. Sonograms were used only if the doctor suspected a problem. In today's world, parents have a choice of being surprised or not. Some get their cake and eat it too...literally! They have the doctor's office send the results to a bakery. The bakery in turn delivers a cake, or cupcakes, to the expectant couple who discovers the baby's gender when they cut in or bite in to reveal pink or blue frosting hidden inside. The internet is full of pictures of the discovery moment through cakes, balloons, and other clever color-coded means.

All parents have dreams of their children: Will they will inherit mom's curly hair or dad's sense of humor? Will the child be tall and athletic like Grandpa Howard, or be a craftsman like Grandpa John? Will this child love to dance like Grandma Bette or love to read like Grandma Jerry? Even if we learn the sex of the child before birth, there are so many things that we will learn year by year.

I often wonder what Mary knew. With deep faith in only what the angel told her, she knew she was carrying a boy, she knew His name, she knew He would be a King...but what else?

Chances are that Mary was a good Jewish woman. She went to Temple, worshipped, she knew the writings of the early

prophets. Chances are that Mary knew, deep in her heart, that the future was not going to be without pain for her Son.

I assume she was feeling the onset of labor on the donkey ride into Bethlehem. As a young woman, she probably helped with the birthing of other babies in her family and town and was fairly certain that the time to give birth was near. She didn't get to take Lamaze classes, or tour a hospital. She didn't need to check with her insurance or worry about pre-registration. There would be no need



to start a college fund or search for the right pediatrician. She wondered where she would lay her new born, but was she already wondering where she would lay Him after the people who walked alongside her day after day turned on Him and gave Him to be crucified?

On Christmas Eve as many people anticipate the arrival of Santa Claus, I imagine a mother's excitement and desire to hold a newborn and feel the warmth of new life. I imagine Mary, full of the

joy of motherhood and the feeling of uncertainty, praying to the same God for the health and happiness of her Son, as I pray to for the same protection of mine.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for being there for Mary, for me, for mothers, for babies, for giving Your people the greatest gift of all...a helpless infant who grew to be our help and salvation.

Contributed by Sherri Petersen

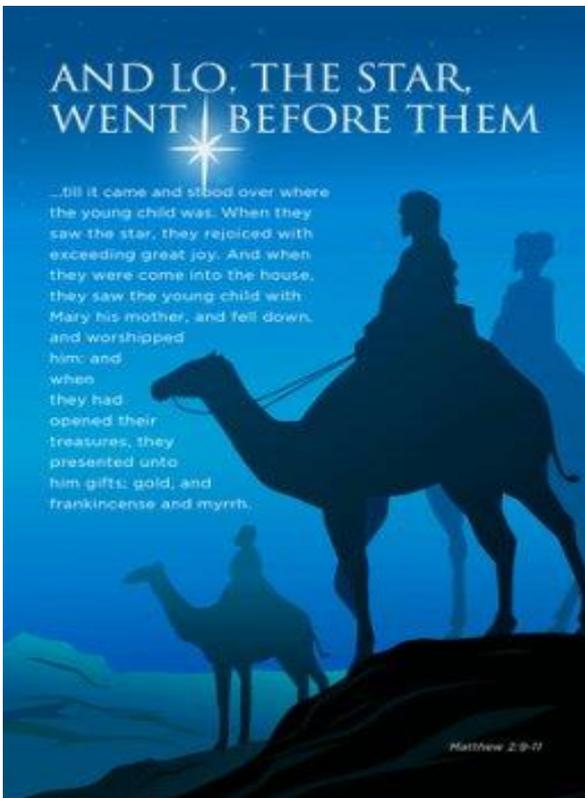
December 25 Christmas Day

Title: Christmas Worship

Scriptures: *When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. Luke 2: 15-20*

When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood

over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh. Matthew 2: 9-11



Reflection: Did you notice what is one of the first things people did when they find the baby Jesus? They worshipped Him. The shepherds glorified and praised God for what they had heard and seen and been told. The wise men fell down and worshipped Jesus upon entering the house. These people knew that they were a part of something special. God coming to earth to save it. They knew that the world would never be the same, and that humanity's story and relationship with God would improve as well through the coming of the Messiah.

So much has changed between that first Christmas and today's Christmas. Unfortunately, for many in this world, worship is the farthest thing from what happens on Christmas day.

Today's Christmas becomes a time that hardly seems to fit a celebration of the prince of peace. Instead Christmas is celebrated by...

- waking up early to prepare for the kids to come down.
- travelling madly to and fro between relatives' houses.
- kids tearing into presents with wrapping paper flying.
- cooking for hours to prepare for the Christmas dinner.

These are not all bad, but please take a moment and remember why we do these things. Let's remember the Holy birth that occurred which created a holiday. Make this Christmas different from how the world sees it.

Every time Christmas falls on a Sunday, I approach it with mixed emotions. On the one hand, it is tricky figuring out worship and family Christmas celebration both occurring on Sunday morning... on the other hand, what a perfect reminder of what Christmas is really about. What better way to celebrate the birth of a Savior, than through worship, this very morning?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your son to us, that we might find salvation through Him. May we truly worship His birth this day, like the wise men and shepherds. Fill us with a sense of awe and wonder, at the amazing story of you becoming one of us, so that we might be saved. Thank you for this day, and the incredible steps you took to give us this wonderful gift. Amen

Contributed by Pastor Jon

If you enjoyed this booklet of devotionals and would to include your own next year, please send your submission to Lori Snyder-Sloan at lorisnyder@lincolnwebdesign.com; or to Sherri at spetersen@fpcomaha.org.