



the
journey

**advent devotions:
a path to the light
2018**

Advent

*A Season of Hope
& Expectation*

*We invite you
to make time to reflect
and be inspired
by God and each other
as we journey through Advent
to the birth of the Christ child.*

A special thank you to each person who inspires us.

Faith Formation for Adults Mission Team, 2018
Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

Isaiah 60:1, NRSV

Our front yard is full of trees which have grown very large over the past 16 years we have lived in our house. We try our best to trim and take care of the trees, but this year we had to call for help. When the arborist came to give us a quote, he noticed two trees were being suffocated by the one large tree. He explained the two trees were not getting enough sun and therefore not being fed. Sunlight is a key component in photosynthesis, where light energy from the sun is transformed into chemical energy that trees use to feed themselves.

So, my trees needed to be fed. Thinking about my trees being fed led me to think how am I being fed in my life, my schedule and what is blocking out my sunlight? I am very similar to my trees, I receive my energy from the sun. I love to walk, soak up the sun and feel the warmth of God's love. As I walk, I pause to look up and close my eyes as I absorb the sun's warm rays to receive God's love. When I get very busy or stressed, I forget to take time to enjoy the sunshine and receive my dose of Vitamin D filled love.

Thinking about my fall schedule with its commitments and deadlines, I must ask myself if I am doing what I need...what my family needs...to be happy? Are we allowing our schedules and busy lives to shade us? Am I starving for happiness...love...God?

We made the tough decision to cut down our tall, beautiful, healthy, Japanese Sequoia to make room for the two struggling Maple trees. The sacrifice immediately allows more sunlight into the yard, and the trees are happy again- along with the grass and plants in the yard. EVERYTHING is now growing and flourishing beautifully because we made room for the sunlight.

Today, as we prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth, let us consider if we are making room for Him in our lives. Let's bloom with Christ! Clear away what needs to be cleared away to let the Son shine in your soul and be fed by God's Love.

Prayer

Lord, in this busy season, help me to discern what is truly important and make room in my heart for love. Help me to feed my soul and feed those I love. I want to grow and flourish! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

~Angie Tobey

MONDAY, DECEMBER 3

In this season of Advent so many of us get caught up in the decorating, shopping, and the Christmas parties. Let us not forget the reason we are decorating and buying gifts for our loved ones and of course going to those Christmas parties. ...

It is to celebrate the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

This year I have already made my New Year's Resolution. Some people want to lose a few pounds, stop smoking etc. I, on the other hand, have noticed how as a family (myself included) we do not express our love for one another openly. In celebrating Christ's birth, life, and resurrection, it is the ultimate statement of love to all of us from God. Let us all remember to tell our family members blood related or not, just how much we love them this Advent season and every day, just as God has and does for us through Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, In this time we celebrate your son's birth, let us remember how important our family is to every day, just as you have shown us through your love for us as our heavenly father. Amen.

~ Michael Roeder

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4

A prayer by Moses, the man of God.

Our Lord, in all generations you have been our home. You have always been God— long before the birth of the mountains, even before you created the earth and the world.

At your command we die and turn back to dust, but a thousand years mean nothing to you! They are merely a day gone by or a few hours in the night. You bring our lives to an end just like a dream. We are merely tender grass that sprouts and grows in the morning, but dries up by evening. Your furious anger frightens and destroys us, and you know all of our sins, even those we do in secret. Your anger is a burden each day we live, then life ends like a sigh.

We can expect seventy years, or maybe eighty, if we are healthy, but even our best years bring trouble and sorrow. Suddenly our time is up, and we disappear. No one knows the full power of your furious anger, but it is as great as the fear that we owe to you. Teach us to use wisely all the time we have. Help us, LORD! Don't wait! Pity your servants.

When morning comes, let your love satisfy all our needs. Then we can celebrate and be glad for what time we have left. Make us happy for as long as you caused us trouble and sorrow. Do wonderful things for us, your servants, and show your mighty power to our children. Our Lord and our God, treat us with kindness and let all go well for us. Please let all go well!

Psalm 90, CEV

Psalm 90 reflects on the short human life, God's vengeance and implores God to give us wisdom to see His works and grace in our daily life and holds up work as one means to serve Him.

And so life is a gift to be used wisely. Work not only means a job but home life, church, school, or community all of which should be viewed as a calling to serve others. The day does not have to be dramatic or of high energy but enveloped in love. This is not always an easy task but perhaps we don't recognize our opportunity to love or the love we actually do offer.

Joy in life is all around us ... the beauty of nature, the support of family and friends, the innocence of pets, the hand reaching out to others in need or in pain, the help to those less fortunate and the strength of God's presence which surrounds us. Use the gift of life well.

Prayer

Lord, I pray that my life with you on earth will be devoted to the joy of living in love. Help me to become aware of those who are sad and need love and let me be a source of uplifting support. Let my failures become a way to identify the means to serve you better. I ask this in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate as our Savior and Redeemer. Amen.

~ Edie Gliem

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 5

Psalm 90

Isaiah 1: 24—31

Luke 11: 29—32

Advent is a season of preparation, but preparation for what? As a result of the commercialization of this season, it is easy to become swept up in preparing for festive gatherings, decorating our homes, and the purchasing of gifts, all of which have traditionally been a part of preparing for Christmas.

Old Testament prophets and Luke's Gospel all were warnings to nations, people — a call to have us get in touch with who we are and what we are about. Psalm 90 states that the only thing that is eternal is God. We humans are finite; we have a beginning and an end. Moses asks God to teach the Israelites how to live their lives in such a way as to serve God choosing to accept the limits of our lives so that we might more purposefully live out our days. Luke's Gospel uses Jesus to remind us that just as Jonah forewarned the Ninevites of their need to repent, so to we need to be more self-aware and to organize our priorities more thoughtfully.

It is fitting that Advent, which calls us to make preparation for the coming of the Christ child, also marks the “beginning of the end” of another calendar year. We have the opportunity to reflect back on this past year, to celebrate our successes and to turn inward and think about those times when we may have fallen short or might have made different choices. We are however, continually reminded that God has always attempted to call his people back to him and for that reason he gave us an advocate—Jesus Christ!

Prayer

Lord, we humbly ask that you enter into our lives during this Advent season. Help us to enjoy the opportunities to spend time with friends and family and as candles bring light into our lives, may we be the vessels that help bring light into the lives of those who only see darkness during this season. As we prepare for the birth of your Son, may we turn inward to reflect on how we might live lives more pleasing to you knowing that in Jesus we have a true advocate. In your name we pray, Amen

~ David Evans

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6

Luke 1: 68-79 Zechariah praises the Lord

Luke 1:74-77... [God] would rescue us from our enemies. Then we could serve him without fear by being holy and good ... tell[ing] his people that they can be saved ...

Malachi 3: 5-12 Don't cheat God

Philippians 1: 12-18a What Life Means to Paul

*Philippians 1: 14-18a: ...the Lord's followers...are fearlessly telling the message ...
All that matters is that people are telling about Christ... (CEV)*

At the end of September, I was visiting Valparaiso University, my alma mater, for a class reunion. On Sunday morning, those from my class were seated at the front in the Chapel of the Resurrection during the worship service. In addition to participating in the worship, I was admiring the Munderloh (stained glass) Windows in the altar area. Two windows caught my attention, for what reasons I do not know. The first was among the Redemption (God the Son) windows and showed ministering angels. The second was among the Sanctification (God the Holy Spirit) windows and showed the United Nations flags of nations and medical symbols.

Then in November, I visited New York City with a delegation of Lutherans from what had been East Germany. We visited the United Nations buildings on that trip and we talked some about the Lutheran church in eastern Germany as it continues to emerge from the Communist era into an era of the apathy of some toward organized religion and a real desire among others to develop a deeper relationship with God.

As often occurs, I also thought about Tanzania and our missionaries there in the fields of "church" and health care. What exciting programs they have, ministering (angels?) to the peoples native to and visiting that developing country.

Fearlessly telling God's message – whether that is in the United States, in Germany, in Tanzania, or in a world full of other places. How much more could we possibly be blessed than to have the opportunity to tell of the birth of God's son and the impact that could have on our lives? Some persons in our audience may know that they are ready to hear God's message; others might not know they need to hear the message. As with the words of Paul, "all that matters is that [we, God's] people are telling about Christ".

Prayer

Lord, help us to see God's love shining upon us as we move through the Advent season and look forward to celebrating the birth of God's son. Help us to serve Him without fear, in speaking God's word and showing God's love to our neighbors. Make us into ministering angels to the world's needs. In God's name, Amen.

~ Rick Doty

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 7

Luke 1:68-79

Malachi 3:13-18

Philippians 1:18b-16

With the birth of Jesus, the Kingdom has drawn near. Give praise and thanksgiving, for God has kept His promise that Salvation would come into the world. By His mercy, our sins are forgiven. And so, out of reverence for Him, we serve without fear by living holy and righteous lives. And so, we encourage and pray for one another in the love of God, and ask His Spirit for help and guidance to proclaim the exalted Christ.

Prayer

Boast in Christ Jesus, so that others may see Him in us. The Kingdom is here, now. Tell others so they may receive it and enter it. And when He comes again, all shall be brought safely into His heavenly Kingdom forever. Amen.

~ John Mosovsky

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8

We often hear at the wedding ceremony "for better and for worse"

Jean Vigner is his name, my lovely biological father. He was born on November 13, 1935 in a family of 10 children in a village called "Cayes Michel" at 40 kilometers from the city of Jeremie in Haiti. He is the third born of the family. He married the only daughter of Sameus Saint Louis and Telicia Bellevue. He was married when he was 21 years old and his wife 19. Their first child (a daughter) was born in July 28, 1958. Currently she is 60 years old. Over the years of their marriage they had 13 children, one of them, the second died at birth.

He had to overcome all the obstacles and vicissitudes of life during the 60 years of his marriage to send to school and raise his 12 children. Without the support of his wonderful wife he could not have overcome the vagaries of existence. His wife was always on his side, as a housewife, then as a shopkeeper and more by doing odd jobs to the right and left. This brave woman trusted God. The only one, as she often says: "Nothing is impossible with the grace of God". He had to sell the only house he owned to provide for his children, which he said was most important to him. His children have all had the opportunity to go to school and learn trade. They now have 25 grandchildren and two grown children. They spent nearly 17 years working in the United States and now they have returned to their homeland (Jeremie) and live peacefully. He is now 83 years old and his wife 78. They celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary last August 22, 2018.

It is often said "Like father, like son" and "like mother, like daughter". The life of our parents has been a good lesson for us. It is a beautiful example of living together and their marriage has been successful. Our parents have always taught us the right path to follow from a very young age. And besides, the Bible says that it is advantageous to teach children from an early age: "Instruct the child according to the path he must follow; and when he is old, he will not turn away from it." *Proverbs 22:6*

When children are allowed to begin their lives by hearing about Jesus and his power, they are provided with a place to return to if they go astray and a foundation that will allow them to grow spiritually all their lives.

Consider how you could nurture a child's faith. Make him aware of God's plans in nature, tell him how God helped you one day, or invite him to thank God with you when things are going well. God can work through you in order to make known his goodness over generations.

Prayer

Lord, help us to love you with all our heart and soul, with all our strength and all our mind, and to love our fellow beings as ourselves. Amen.

*~ Margarete Saint Fleur
Director of the Orphanage sponsored by Hearts for Haiti
BRESMA, HAITI, W.I.*

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 9

*"...the dawn from on high will break upon us ... to guide our feet into the way of peace."
Luke 1:78-79*

How often do we look for a light to enter our lives when things seem chaotic? Perhaps if we think about the Advent season and all that the coming birth of Christ signifies, we will see such light. Perhaps if we look at the acts of kindness shared by others in our daily lives, we will see "the dawn from on high...that will guide our feet into the way of peace." Two people in my life continue to shed such light on me.

I have a special friend who ALWAYS reflects a positive outlook. Through many, many serious health challenges, she always remains positive. Her nurses comment to her and to her family that she is an exemplary patient: kind, respectful, always positive. How can this be when she has so many things to complain about? Could she be an example of the dawn from on high who guides herself and others into the way of peace?

The memory of a special aunt stays uppermost in my mind. She is no longer living among us, but her kind acts continue to be a part of my daily life. She ALWAYS came to a family visit with a shopping bag filled with goodies. This was usually on a Sunday afternoon when she would come bringing lunch meat, bread, and coffee cakes so that we could share these goodies for supper. She always would lend a sympathetic ear to a family member's concerns. She shared her light with the people of her community and her church as well.

Both of these women showered light on the people fortunate enough to see them in their daily lives. Isn't that what Advent is about...looking forward to the coming of Jesus and finding his light in and among our friends and family?

Prayer

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

~ Louise Davis

MONDAY, DECEMBER 10

In recent weeks, we as a nation have experienced several mass casualties shootings – Tree of Life, Thousand Oaks, and Kentucky. There are many opinions as to why these events have happened. But in all the different voices of the debate I have rarely heard perhaps we should approach one another and live as peacemakers and peace givers.

As a Christian, I seek to treat everyone whose lives I touch with respect, love and a genuineness of heart. We cannot be uncivil to someone for the differences that exist whether it be color of one's skin, a difference of religion, or political differences. We can't just wish for "Peace on Earth" during the Advent and Christmas seasons – we have to work to be peacemakers and peacegivers throughout the year.

Prayer

Let us pray. Lord, during this season of Advent guide us through our journey toward the light of Jesus Christ. May we be wrapped in the his hope, peace, joy and love and may we practice "Peace on Earth" throughout the year. Amen.

~ Sharon MacCabe

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11

Psalm 126

Isaiah 19:18-25

2 Peter 1: 2-15

Grief and sorrow is what I feel as I enter this advent season. It should be a time, as written, in the 126 Psalm; *then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy!* (NRSV, Lutheran Study Bible)

Last night (the day before this was due) Linda and I attended the Interfaith Community Vigil at the Allentown Jewish Community Center. It was an interfaith prayer session for grief support and community solidarity, in the aftermath of the synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh. It was a heartfelt serious moment in time as we all mourned the senseless loss of life.

Struggling to find answers to tragedy we often turn to our faith and to each other for support.

Reaching out to a Jewish friend of mine during this time he lamented, "When nationalism rises Jews will die." He based this sad conclusion on historical data showing this happening over and over. When will we grow up?

As it turns out the readings for today are perfect.

Psalm 126 is a communal prayer Psalm for us to celebrate God's gifts and as a community we came together at the Jewish community center. The hall was filled to capacity. The presenters were appreciative of the large support.

Isaiah writes about coming together, celebrating one God together, with a highway of peace running from Israel to Assyria, to Egypt, where all will speak one language as we praise God.

2 Peter gives us hope telling us we will defeat corruption and receive God's promise of a full enriched life as we follow his teachings.

Prayer

May the grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

~ Dean Black

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12

Go and Tell John

Isaiah wrote the words below to a people who faced imminent defeat and dispersal, even annihilation. God, through the prophet had warned them over and over to turn from their evil ways. God also warned them not to try to make political alliances, thinking those would defend them against impending doom. Yet, God's words through the prophet were not all gloom and doom. God promised that after exile would come a return to Jerusalem. They would see the majesty of God as they returned to their homeland. Even the wilderness would rejoice. Therefore, he cried out:

*Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong and do not fear!"
Here is your God. . . . He will come and save you."
The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
The lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
Isaiah 35: 3-6a*

We hear an echo of these words in chapter 11 of Matthew's gospel:

When John [the Baptist] heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

We're not sure why John sent his disciples to ask this question. Was *he* unsure of whether Jesus, whom he had baptized, was indeed the Messiah? Was he trying to point his disciples to Jesus, so that they would realize that Jesus was the promised one and, when John was gone, would follow him?

Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have good news brought to them." Matthew 11: 4-5

One of the great joys of taking mission trips is the opportunity to come back and tell the stories of what we have heard and where we have seen God's Good Spirit in action: houses and lives being rebuilt after disaster, medical care shared with the suffering, children and young adults engaging in education and experiencing hope.

In a sense we are all like the Israelites and John and John's disciples. We need to hear and see what God's Spirit is doing so that our weak hands will be strengthened, our feeble knees made firm, and our fearful hearts filled with hope.

Advent is not only a time to watch and wait, but also to witness how God is entering our world in the here and now. So, listen and look and then "go tell John" and Mary and all around what God is doing. Tell them, tell us, the good news. God is not only coming in the future. God is coming now, in our midst. "Go tell John!"

Prayer

Gracious Lord, when we are blind, restore our vision. When we limp along, help us to walk confidently. When we do not hear clearly, help us to discern your voice. When despair deadens us, raise us up with the good news of your presence and your love. Then give us the words to go and tell our neighbor what we have heard and seen. Amen.

~ Ruth Doty

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13

You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that by His poverty, He could make you rich.

2 Corinthians 8:9

Strange as it may seem to us, He loves us. He came down to visit us to lift us up to become like Him. God entered time and space. God, who knows no boundaries, took on the confines of a baby. The meaning of Advent and Christmas is the coming down of God's love, which revolutionizes our lives. The Word became flesh so that the same amazing life that broke into the world when Jesus Christ was born becomes realized in our own lives here and now.

His coming to Earth is quiet, simple, starlit, humble, poor, wondrous, in a place for animals, because there is no 'room' available.

May we make room for Him in our time, talents, and our giving, as we open our hearts to His love.

In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?

John 14:2

Prayer

Lord, thank you for coming down to us to fill us with your love. Help us to make 'room' to be filled with the 'stuff' of your gifts to us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, self-control. May we grow deeper into your love this Christmas. In Jesus' name, Amen.

~ Charlotte Gross

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14

Asking for Help

Late summer and early fall, I had been having a lot of pain in my legs. It always came after I had been lying down sleeping or resting. I'd have to lean on furniture and walking hesitantly. I could slowly walk it out gritting my teeth at times but after walking over a mile the pain seemed to lessen and I could walk normally. And then the major pain would disappear except for aching later in the evening and tingling in my feet. I tried new meds and was beginning rehab.

Being an active senior who loves to hike, dance, canoe, do zip lines, travel, etc. I started wondering if this was a new phase in my aging process and I would now have to curtail my activities. I had the office put my name on the prayer list. Then I read a daily devotional where a blind beggar called out to Jesus. Jesus stopped and said, "What do you want me to do for you?" *Mark 10:51*

The devotional said Jesus is a healer. Jesus wants to help us. I thought to myself I am usually praying for others to get well, to find peace, to get a hand on their problems and so on. But do I ask for help for myself like the beggar. The devotional stressed to tell God our needs. So I prayed for myself to find relief from my pain. The next day in exercise class I mentioned my problem to the instructor and she showed me a stretch which was very different

The following morning I woke up pain free. I thought how long will it last? It's been 5 weeks and I'm back to my old self. God and the Holy Spirit work in ways we don't understand. When we tell our friends our needs or problems why not take it to a higher listener who is just waiting to help us.

Prayer

Lord, I am not perfect and I try to be a better person. But there are times I need your help! Please help me with my needs and allow me to receive help from others. Amen.

~ Renee Wetherhold

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15

Isaiah 12: 2-6

Trust in the Lord's compassion. This passage is an invitation to live in the calmness of God's presence. When life wears you down – rest in him.

Amos 9:8-15

Sin separates us from God, but Amos' message is one of HOPE, that even when we become lost or get caught up in sinful behaviors, God does not give up and wants to restore us to a right relationship with him.

As I was reflecting on these two passages, it brought to mind all that is wrong with the world. There appears to be so much hatred. So many people are acting out their hatred for one another through social media, thru verbal abuse and thru physical retaliation. It is scary times we are living in. I just wish we could accept one another's differences without all of this abuse toward one another.

I keep saying, "Tomorrow will be a better day". And then one day I was praying and realized that tomorrow can be a better day because Love conquers all. If each person would just take time each day to say or do one kind thing for someone, we can change the world we live in. Because, there is more love than hatred in this world. Holding a door for someone, smiling at someone, saying thank you to someone, picking something up that someone dropped, giving someone a hug, etc., these are all acts of kindness which take very little effort. These small acts of kindness will definitely have an impact on someone. You will never really know what impact but, that doesn't matter. It matters that you did it and for that you should have a smile on your face. You are changing the world one small act at a time. Remember, we all can make a difference in this world, one small step at a time. This I truly believe. With the help of God all things are possible.

Prayer

Dear Lord, Please help us to find the good in all people. Help us to remember that our differences are what make us unique as individuals. Help us to accept our differences and embrace the good we have to offer in this world. We ask all of this with God's help. Amen

~ Diane Evans

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 16

Joy was not something that I experienced while growing up. The holidays, especially Christmas, were not joyous occasions, but times of emptiness and of being on edge, hoping that my parents could “keep it together” till the holidays passed. I remember Christmas Eves with the TV showing the yule log burning a constant, steady flame as Christmas carols were played.

I remember hearing cheerful voices outside as people parked near our home to attend Christmas Eve service at the church that was catty-cornered across the street. I wondered what it was like to be in that church service where musicians playing trumpets or string instruments welcomed you outside the front door with carols. And candles were lit so that they illuminated the stained glass depictions of numerous Bible stories. The giant star was lit in the belfry which cast a glow of light in the surrounding darkness of the rooftops of the town. And later, bells tolled, announcing with joy that Christ had come.

Philippians 4:4-7 says that we should not worry about anything but pray about everything. I had prayed, while growing up, that I could make good choices; better choices for my life that could include joy as those people going to church on Christmas Eve had experienced.

After my husband and I got married, we became members of that Lutheran Church that was catty-corner from my childhood home and we experienced the joy of belonging to a community of faith. In that community, I learned about His peace and how important it is to share that peace with others, joyfully.

Philippians also says that we should rejoice and be glad. It reminds me of the Christmas carol, “Good Christian Men Rejoice.” Good Christian men rejoice, with heart and soul and voice. Now we need not for the grave. News, news, Jesus Christ was born to save..... What JOY!

Prayer

May you shout it from the rafters and share with those around you, especially with those that may not yet know, the real JOY of the Christmas Story!

~ Marilyn Egner

MONDAY, DECEMBER 17

As I think about the season of Advent, the word anticipation often comes to my mind. Working with young children, provides a constant reminder of anticipation (especially during December.) Children bring a sense of awe and wonder when they are anticipating something new or something they have experienced before that they associate with great joy.

During December we often hear about traditions with which families participate to mark the Advent season. We often find ourselves quite overwhelmed as we try to do too much. Advent is not designed to be a sprint toward Christmas morning. Find traditions and experiences that allow you to focus on Christ's birth in the midst of the chaos that covers our holiday to-do lists. This Advent I invite you to take the opportunity to set aside special moments so that you can fully experience the joy and the miracle of Christmas.

Prayer

Gracious God, You come to us in ways we don't expect and give us hope for a world we have not known. As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, help us to slow down so that we can appreciate all that you have done in our lives. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

~ Karin Kahler

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 18

In Isaiah 11:1-9, we learn that the Messiah will come to set things right. Judah is filled with corruption, selfishness, and oppression. Things needed to change, and Jesus will be that change. He will sprout from the stump of Jesse - fresh new life born from withering decay.

I believe we can all relate to this scripture in some way. Possibly you long for peace between nations, or much closer to home, for peace in your own family. Is there a situation in your life where you were judged or mistreated and you still carry anger in your heart? Do you feel persuasion from evil forces? Have you ever contributed to someone's unhappiness? The GREAT NEWS is that each day brings a new opportunity to be the person God wants you to be. We can chop away at the rotten branches of our life and allow the new shoot to thrive, by following His word, and having faith in His promises. If we work at being the best version of ourselves, we can live the lives God has intended for us.

Numbers 16:20-35 - God had no patience left for the power hungry, greedy, unhappy Levites. They thought their lives would be better and their problems would go away if they had "more". Moses tried to talk some sense into them, but they would not listen.

This story shows the wrath of God's anger; honestly, I find it quite frightening. How many warnings were the Levites given?

What was the extent of their evilness and greed? If Moses showed up in our community, what group of people would he present a warning to, and would I be among that group? We all are sinners. God allows us the freedom to make our own choices, to live our lives as we desire. Our decisions, words and deeds, influence those around us - are we siding with good and building others up by sharing God's love or are we siding with evil which creates deep holes in our community, filled with negativity, greed, hate and despair? We are human; we make mistakes - ask for forgiveness and be forgiving. Keep your eyes and heart set on our Lord and Savior and he will guide your life, helping you to commit 100% to being on His side.

Acts 28:23-31 - Paul was in a difficult period of his life. He was exiled from Jerusalem, and as a prisoner, he arrived in Rome. He spoke of Jesus the Messiah and the Holy Spirit. Not everyone was ready or willing to listen. He stayed for two years and did not give up on his work as he felt it was his calling.

Life can be tough; do you agree? It's tough in different ways for every one of us. Do you feel blessed by God for the difficult "opportunities" in your life? There is always a lesson to learn or a reason why things are the way they are.

Prayer

*100% of every day we have God's love, support, and His guidance that is needed to make it through - just ask, pray, and listen. He is with you and He is with me, always!
AMEN!*

~ Dianna Olszewski

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 19

A Promise

Isaiah 11:1-9

Micah 4:8-13

Luke 7:31-35

I promise that when any two of you on earth agree about something you are praying for, my Father in heaven will do it for you.

Matthew 18:19 CEV

Today is a special day for Pr. Ric and me and maybe you too. Back in 1976, December 19 was a Sunday. For us, Sunday has always been a work day. Before work this particular Sunday I had packed my bags and the car to be ready for Christmas vacation from seminary. Pause. I just had a little more work to do before vacation would become a reality. I drove over the mountains from Gettysburg to Chambersburg in what was a routine 45 minute drive one way to lead music in worship for two worship services interspersed with several rehearsals in the morning and early afternoon. I did some more work in the afternoon and prepared for a wedding at 6 pm that night. The couple was married and all seemed normal and good. Vacation was about to begin. Ah...

But wait... After an already full day, we were driving from Chambersburg to Pittsburgh to Ric's mother's home that night. It was dark outside. It was quicker to drive Rt. 30 than the PA Turnpike, so that's what we did. Rt. 30 is a hilly, curvy road not at all like the straightforwardness of the PA Turnpike. Also, we were each driving our own car, going separate directions after Pittsburgh.

Have you ever driven an unfamiliar, winding road on a dark night? It reminds me of the Advent text about making the way straight. There are so many paths in life that are winding, that the way isn't straight or clear. We can't see clearly.

I became as frustrated as the Israelites. Which way was I supposed to go? I didn't know the road and couldn't see where the bends, curves, hills and valleys were. Help... I blinked my headlights. In 1976, we didn't have cell phones. So we stopped and I not so graciously asked Ric to go slower. Ric hesitantly acquiesced. I just didn't understand why he was in such a hurry.

How often in life we don't understand what God or someone else is asking us to do? Why should I follow them or their idea? What difference could it make to them or to me if I followed them? Oh, to think of something from the viewpoint of someone else.

By the time we arrived in Pittsburgh, I was exhausted and just so glad to finally be there. All I wanted to do was breathe a deep sigh of relief that we were finally safely there. It was a VERY LONG day and I was tired. Inside waiting for us however were Ric's and my parents, his sister, brother-in-law and my aunt, our whole immediate family. I was SO tired, it eluded me. Wasn't this nice to have everybody together?

How often do we miss the true meaning of a gathering or a conversation?

They said I should open this big box. So I did. There was a box inside it with a box of Kleenex in it. Next was Tylenol. Then a smaller box with smelling salts in it. Strange, I thought. Then a very small box. I opened and then I knew. This was our engagement, a day we promised to love each other.

While it reminds me of the deep and abiding love God has given us, it also reminds me of the circumstances of that day which at times mirror much of life.

How often do we miss the real meaning or significance of a situation? It was love. Yes, love. God comes to us in the baby Jesus to give us love, to love us no matter what, to love us forever. Wait. What? How often do we miss seeing, experiencing and knowing the love of God for us, the deep and abiding love of our family and friends for us?

Prayer

God, help us let go of our self-absorption and wait. Be calm. Open our eyes and ears. Something beautiful is about to be given to the world. Wait. The baby Jesus is almost here, waiting to fill our hearts and lives with his extravagant love. Yes, God extravagantly loves YOU! Amen.

~ Deacon Jane Elliott

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 20

The days are getting shorter, the time for Christmas is near. Our world is filled with hatred and violence. Where is the peace? Where is God in all the messiness of our lives today? I have struggled to write this devotion because every day the news brings more sadness, more grief and suffering. So, how do we rise above the anguish that we see around us? Do we isolate ourselves and our circle of family and friends and celebrate as usual? Or, must we always be mindful of what's happening beyond our front door?

In the midst of lights and decorations, a beautiful Christmas tree in the living room, can we open our lives to embrace the people of the world, those touched by violence, those close to death, those who are lonely and alone? What words can we say to comfort the heaviness we feel and bring some peace to our lives?

I would like to offer the following prayer to direct our thinking in these days before Christmas. May these words bring comfort and healing where there is pain. Perhaps we need to meditate and pray constantly during these days of anticipation and waiting, that, in the words of Jeremiah, *"I will write my laws on their hearts and minds. I will be their God, and they will be my people."* Maybe then, maybe then we will see the goodness of God all around us because our hearts will be filled with God's love.

Prayer from "A Gift of Peace"

by Richard Becher, in Shine On, Star of Bethlehem, 2004

*"May the love that breathes life into all of humanity
be born in us this Christmas season.
May the love that brings forth all of creation,
be born in us this Christmas season.
May the love that overcomes hatred and brings healing,
be born in us this Christmas season.
May the love that forgives and renews,
be born in us this Christmas season.
May the love that brings the fruits of justice,
be born in us this Christmas season.
May the love that brings the blessing of peace,
be born in us this Christmas season.
May that Peace now be the gift we share with all our brothers and sisters."*

~ Alice Mudge

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 21

For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet “in a very little while, the one who is coming will come and will not delay.”
Hebrews 10:36-37 (NRSV)

Advent is here...the time of anticipation, preparation, and waiting. When I read this text on the need for ‘endurance’ while we wait for ‘the one who is coming’ I thought of how odd that seems...the usual notions of waiting are that it is a passive act. So why the need for endurance? Advent is a time that God is teaching us to wait ‘*actively*’. For someone like me (patience is not my strongest virtue), *active* waiting is a true blessing! Active waiting means we prepare, we anticipate...with intention.

My first real understanding of “active waiting” was not in a spiritual sense, but quite literally - physical. A couple of years ago I ran a ½ marathon. When I signed up to run 13.1 miles, the furthest distance I had ever run in my life was 1 mile. I had 3 months to “wait” for race day. My wait was *very* active. It was training time and that required preparation and assessment...*every single day*. What’s the weather forecast? What route am I going to take to get my miles in? What do I need to adjust in my schedule to make the time to fit in my long run? Every step of every mile of every run was done with intention – to be prepared for race day – the big event.

Perhaps the greatest surprise came *after* the big event of race day. My muscles had been primed and conditioned so well that they were itching to move. Much to my amazement, I wanted to keep up with my running routine long after the big day. The training and preparation had become part of me.

Its Advent season...its training time. It’s time for us to do the daily assessment and carve our time. Time to pray. Time to reflect. Time to bless. Time to give thanks. Time to be with God. It’s time to prepare and condition our hearts as we actively await the birth of our Lord Jesus. Christ’s Light is near. Our Savior is coming and will not delay. May our hearts be so prepared and conditioned for the arrival of God’s Son that Jesus’ Love stirs us to keep moving...long after Christmas day. May our period of ‘active waiting’ help us to find the birth of Jesus in each and every blessed day. May Christ’s Light provide all the endurance we need to prepare for Jesus’ coming.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of this Advent season. Please give us the endurance we need to do Your Will. Give us the patience we need to wait, the hope we need to persevere, and the peace we need to be fully present in Your Love. Prepare our hearts for the most precious gift of all, your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

~ Vicar Tami

DECEMBER 22

Psalm 80:1-7

Isaiah 66:7-11

Luke 13:31-35

In our Advent readings today, some timeless truths are shared. The first: children will be children! The people of Israel have sinned and acted badly toward the Lord God. They plead, “restore us, O God of hosts, let your face shine that we may be saved.” (Ps. 80:7) God acts like a loving, forgiving parent and offers them protection.

Isaiah 66:7-11 gives us a kind of birth announcement. “Mother Zion:” will give birth to her new children and Jerusalem will be restored. “As a Mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you.” (Is. 66:13) God’s motherly love will not waver, even though the children stray.

Finally in Luke 13:31-35 Jesus laments over Jerusalem and describes his desire to “gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing.” Comforting and protective words.

Motherly, caring and protective images of God’s love. When our lives are filled with: suffering, pain, and sin, we can rely on God’s parental love, toward us – God’s wayward children.

Prayer

Gracious God, Thank you for loving us so much that you guide and protect us, in spite of our sinful rebellion. Your parental, loving care for us is such an unearned gift. Help us to tell others about your gracious love for all. Amen

~ Leesa Wimmer

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23

“ . . . he shall be the one of peace.” Micah 5:5a

The prophet Micah speaks not only of who will rule Israel but how this person will rule. This ambassador will reflect God’s will and a primary characteristic will be the ability to show and provide peace.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are God’s ambassador. When people see us, they see God. That is both an awesome and frightening responsibility. For according to Micah that automatically makes us people of peace. A person of peace stands out against a world of ill manners, rudeness, acrimony, prejudice, violence, hostility and fear. What a great gift and opportunity to be a person of God—a person of peace; to bring peace to a mind, a situation, a life. This is a gift for all times, all peoples, in all places.

Prayer

Loving, giving God, thank you for the gift of Jesus; thank you for the peace the Christ offers. Guide, strengthen and bless us that your gift of peace may become a blessing through us to all we meet. Make us daily gift givers; let it be said of us: “. . .s/he shall be the one of peace. Amen

~ Mark Wimmer

MONDAY, DECEMBER 24

The Music of Christmas

Isaiah 9:27

Psalms 96

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14

Each year, soon after our Thanksgiving celebration, our family, that is Jane and I and now, Jen, Greg and Ian gather to decorate our home for Advent/ Christmas. When we begin this decorating ritual, we listen to Christmas music. It simply seems more like Advent/Christmas when we hear the familiar carols and songs celebrating Jesus' birth.

For many of us, Christmas music is essential to our Christmas celebrations. We remember caroling as children or youth, recall family gatherings around the piano singing carols, replay images from college Christmas Concerts and we cherish memories of Christmas Candlelight Worship Services.

For centuries Christians have celebrated our Lord's birth with songs, special music and Christmas celebrations have ebbed and flowed. I have always been fascinated by the stories behind many of our favorite Christmas songs. For example, did you know that "Silent Night" was first performed at the Church of Saint Nicholas (note the name) in Oberndorf, Austria in 1818. Franz Gruber, an organist and a school teacher composed the tune to be played on guitar, since the organ was broken. He used words written two years earlier by Josef Mohr, an Austrian priest.

"Hark the Herald Angels Sing" is a combination of words written by Charles Wesley (whose brother John founded the Methodist Church) and music from a cantata written by Felix Mendelssohn written in 1840 to commemorate the invention of printing by Johann Gutenberg. Years later Dr. William Cummings put the words and music together, although it is believed that neither Wesley nor Mendelssohn would have approved!

The carol, "Away in a Manger" has been called "Luther's Cradle Hymn" causing some to believe that the words were penned by Martin Luther. However, the lyrics and music first appear in a Lutheran Sunday School hymnal in 1885. And two years later James Murray published the hymn calling it, "Luther's Cradle Hymn" and so the legend began.

And finally, the Christmas carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem" was written by Pastor Phillip Brooks in 1867 following an inspiring trip to the Holy land in which Brooks visited Bethlehem. A year later Lewis Redner, Brooks' organist, composed the music as a musical piece to be sung by the children's choir at Christmas.

Today we will gather again to celebrate Jesus birth. We will hear the story of the young virgin, Mary and the carpenter, Joseph. We will travel with them to Bethlehem, hear the angel chorus singing, journey with the shepherds to the manger.

It is an ancient story as fresh today which lifts our hearts and our spirits into joyful song. Join me as together we praise God for the precious gift of the Christ Child! "For unto us a savior is born, who is Christ the Lord!" And all of heaven and earth breaks forth in song!

Prayer

Most Gracious God, on this day we join our voices with the angels in heaven and sing the praises of your love, your grace, your forgiveness, your hope and your joy. Most of all, we sing to celebrate your coming among us in the Christ child, Jesus. May your Son be born anew this year in us, in our hearts, our families and our church. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

~ Pastor Ric Elliott

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 25

Luke 2:1-20

Jesus is the King of Kings, the Son of God, the Messiah and the promise of Israel for a king greater than David. Though, at first sight, the narrative of his birth does not seem very kingly. On the night of Jesus's birth his mother and father travel not by choice, not because they are on vacation or going to visit loved ones. Rather this journey begins because the Roman Empire commanded that all people return to their home town to register for a census.

And so Mary and Joseph find themselves in the crowded town of Bethlehem with no room to rent. We know the story; we know that they find a manger where they can stay for the night. Here among the animals of creation Jesus is brought forth into the world. While out in the wilderness angels appear to shepherds giving them herald of his birth.

Jesus's birth is not the story of a god born perfect commanding everyone and everything around them. Rather it is a story of God choosing the ordinary, the regular, and the downtrodden. God takes shepherds from the fields and turns them into Royal Guards to watch over his Son. He takes a manger and transforms it into the lavish nursery for the coming King. He takes the commands of a Roman Empire and uses them for the backdrop of the Gospels. In Jesus's birth God embraces the world in loving grace and breaks the very narrative of human power and authority. God chooses regular people to bring forth the promise of the ages the Messiah, the King of Kings, Jesus the Savior for our sake out of his love.

Prayer

Holy God, just as you chose Mary and Joseph to be the parents of Jesus, you also choose us to be part of the Christian family. We cannot earn the Grace that you have shown, no gift is worthy, no works would satisfy, and yet you give us all. You give us yourself in this infant child lying in a manger. Open our hearts to you as you did Mary's; open our ears and eyes as you did the shepherds so that we might know you in our lives. Make us your own, your holy people. Amen

~ Pastor Spencer Steele

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 25

WHERE IS THE BABY JESUS?

Each year at Christmas time, when I unpack the Nativity set and place the figures in the stable, it is our family's custom for Mom (Grandmom now) to hide the baby Jesus. It is then up to the children to look for Him. The child who finds Him has the honor of placing the baby in the manger. This continues until Christmas Eve when He is found lying in the manger.

When the children were smaller, it seemed that Baby Jesus was easily found. For the last several years it has not been so. I take Him out of His hiding place, and I place Him in the manger, because none of the kids has found Him, even though it sometimes becomes quite competitive.

So it seems with life lately. Many of us cannot find Jesus. Is it because life has gotten in the way?

In my childhood, I sang, "Into my heart, into my heart, come into my heart Lord Jesus. Come in today, come in to stay, come into my heart Lord Jesus."

Prayer

Dear Lord, Thank you for giving us the Baby Jesus. In the hustle and bustle of this season, help us to keep Him in our hearts to stay so that we do not ask, "Where is the Baby Jesus"? Amen.

~ Jayne Moxey

CHRISTMAS WORSHIP 2018

ALL ARE WELCOME!

Invite your friends, co-workers, neighbors, family.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 24 – CHRISTMAS EVE CHRISTMAS CAROLS AND HOLY COMMUNION

All children are welcome at all worship services.

Childcare at 3 & 5 pm Christmas Eve worship only

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 1:00 pm | Traditional Worship with Sermon |
| 3:00 pm | Traditional Family Worship with Sermon & led by Youth
<i>(childcare provided)</i> |
| 5:00 pm | Family Worship with Christmas Message & led by Children
<i>(childcare provided)</i> |
| 8:00 pm | Candlelight, Blended Worship with Sermon |
| 9:30 pm | Carol Sing and Special Music |
| 10:00 pm | Candlelight, Traditional Worship with Sermon |

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 30 – CHRISTMAS CONTINUES & NEW YEAR'S WORSHIP

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| 10:00 am | Lessons and Carols <i>(childcare provided)</i>
Christmas 1 and New Year's Worship |
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SUNDAY, JANUARY 6, 2019 – EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 7:30 am | Traditional Worship |
| 8:45 am | Spirit Alive! Worship with Praise Ensemble
<i>(childcare provided)</i> |
| 9:45 am | Sunday School, CFL, Catechism, Fellowship
<i>(childcare provided)</i> |
| 10:45 am | Traditional/Blended Worship with Adult Choir
<i>(childcare provided)</i> |