

Advent Reflections

2025



Advent

Advent, the first season of the church year, is a period of time beginning with the fourth Sunday before Christmas and ending Christmas Eve. This is a season when Christians prepare their minds and hearts to receive anew God's greatest gift. The word "Advent" means literally 'coming.'

Advent is a time for us to prepare ourselves to celebrate the great event, the first coming of Christ, and a time to get ready to celebrate in a new way that will be spiritually renewing to ourselves. In Galatians 4:4, we read that God had prepared the world for the coming of Christ. In the same way, Advent is not just a time of waiting expectantly but a time of preparing for the Christmas celebration.

Advent comes at a time when we have our shortest days with long nights of darkness, but we look forward to gradual lengthening of the day with its accompanying light. Likewise, Advent speaks of the darkness of sin, of our failures and unresolved conflicts, which prompted the form of Jesus, the Light of the World. The Fourth Gospel says: "In him was life, and the life was the light of men(everyone). The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:4-5).

Therefore, Advent is a time of planning and giving. Ask yourself questions like these: How can we share what God's love means to us? How can we share our Christian Christmas with others? What kind of decorations can be used that will show us how we feel? What kinds of cards can we send that will tell the story? How can we participate in our church plans for Advent? How can we as individuals and families create traditions making this season special?

Advent is a time of worship; a time of giving thanks, a time for seeking to understand our part in God's larger plan for the world. IF you would like to have family devotions or personal devotions but have not found the time or courage to start, Advent is a natural opportunity to worship in your home.

Advent can be for each of us the life-changing time when we accept anew the precious gift given by God and his Son, Jesus. As we accept this gift of love, may we search for ways to share the love of Christ with others.

*Reprinted with permission from the 1987 Advent Book
Roswell Presbyterian Church, Roswell, Georgia*

The Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath is one of the most symbolic traditions for the season of Advent. With its colorful candles lit on each of the four weeks of Advent, the wreath is a reminder of the hope and joy coming. Advent wreaths are not exclusive to churches; many families and individuals have an Advent wreath at home and observe the tradition of lighting the candles for each Sunday.

Sunday, November 30, 2025

GOD IS THE GIVER. GOD IS THE GIFT.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 NIV

Every Sunday we sing the Doxology in our worship services. We sing, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below; Praise him above, ye heavenly host; praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.” When we sing this song, we acknowledge that God is the giver. He gives us blessings: all the blessings we can possibly imagine come from God.

And every Sunday, we say the Lord’s Prayer. We ask God to give us “our daily bread.” This is an acknowledgement that our needs are met by God. He gives to us everything we need to sustain our lives.

At this time of Advent, we know God gave us a priceless, unimaginable gift: His Son. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 NIV. He didn’t give us his Son just so we have a teacher, a guide, or an example on how to live our lives—although Jesus was all of these things. He gave us his Son as a sacrifice so we can escape the rightful repercussions of our sins.

I’ve found it easy in my life to recognize that God is the giver. I’ve found it harder to recognize that God is the gift.

One day, I realized that trusting someone to “have my back” in all situations is a gift. “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:11 ESV.

But the gift of God in our lives is not just that he “has our backs.” He, himself, is a gift in so many ways. God, the great artist, is a gift to all of us. God, the intelligent creator, is a gift to all of us. God, the healer, is a gift to all of us. God, the provider, is a gift to all of us. God, the counselor, is a gift to all of us.

Just as children love what a parent does for them (providing meals, shelter, and love), children instinctively love their parents (even if a parent does not provide for them adequately). As we prepare ourselves to receive God’s transformational gift of Jesus this Advent season, let us focus on these aspects of God’s love for us and our love for God.

Prayer: God, during this season of Advent, let us realize all aspects of you and your son.

Jane Manning

Monday, December 1, 2025

SIMPLE WORDS

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Hebrews 11:1

Faith. Hope.

What simple words. Words we take for granted. Words we use every day.

“Hope you are feeling well!” “Hope everything turns out okay!” “I have faith in you!” “Hope that ...”. “Faith that”. Well, you fill in the rest.

In Hebrews 11, “faith and hope” don’t refer to our earthly hopes and dreams, Instead, this is the “faith and hope” of heavenly things, things invisible but real: the presence of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost with us every day, the assurance that Jesus’s birth and subsequent death on the cross was for us, the faith and hope that there is a life after this earthly existence with God and all our loved ones.

Simple words, yes, but they are also powerful words. Without faith, without hope, life is meaningless. But with faith and hope—hope for things not of this earth—life is literally limitless; we are assured of eternal life with our God. What an incredible promise and what an awesome God!

During this time of Advent, this time of waiting, let’s take time to think about what faith and hope mean in our daily lives. As we reread the incredible acts of faith detailed in both the Old and New Testaments (many are mentioned in the subsequent verses of Hebrews 11), and as we remember the faith and hope of Mary, let’s think about how we express faith and hope in our daily actions.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for faith and hope. Strengthen our faith. Help us unleash the power of hope. Help us to follow you, in whatever ways you ask of us. Help us focus on the important things, the unseen things, and not the things that are of this earth. For you are the living God, now and forever. Amen.

Lynne Sloop

Light the first candle, the
Prophets candle, representing Hope.



Tuesday, December 2, 2025

REMEMBERING LOVE THROUGH THE HOLIDAY CHAOS

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you. John 13:34

When I think of the Advent season as a girl growing up in rural South Georgia, I remember much simpler times. Television was just coming on the scene, and commercialism had not begun to bombard us from every direction. I, of course, was reared by parents of the Depression. We lived frugally. In saying all of this we knew that we needed to share what we had with others. Our Christian principles were foremost in the way we lived.

God's laws and teachings remain the same in my mind and heart today as they did then. As we are exposed to the chaos that exists in our world and responses to all of it, I remain very grateful for my roots and the values that remain a part of the person I am today.

Prayer: Lord, as we move through this Advent Season, may our hearts and minds stay attuned to the birth of our Lord and Savior and what it means for each of us. May we focus more on John 13:34 as we experience this special time in our church. Amen.

Jean Burnett

Wednesday, December 3, 2025

OPEN TO NEW CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

*"I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"
Isaiah 43:19*

Sara and I were married in November, so soon after our wedding we were celebrating our first Christmas as a married couple. I remember well discussing plans. After I suggested we go to my parents' house, I was surprised to hear her say, "Maybe we could start our own Christmas traditions." While I anticipated celebrating Christmas just as I always had, she was ready for something new. Resisting that new thing, I dug in my heels, thinking that Christmas hardly seems like the time to try something new.

Why was I convinced that the best way to celebrate Christmas was doing things exactly as they had always been done? The irony of a "Christmas tradition" is that the Prophet Isaiah promises, not a return to the way things used to be or the maintenance of how things have always been, but instead the reminder that God is always doing something new.

In 2009, Folger's Coffee aired a commercial in which a big brother makes it home from West Africa just in time for Christmas. It's early morning, so mom and dad are still asleep while his little sister is awake to greet him at the door. He quickly notices that while the coffee brewing smells familiar, his sister has changed. She's "not so little anymore." Likewise, the experience he's had in West Africa surely changed him.

God is present, not just in old familiar traditions, for Christmas is the new thing God is doing.

No doubt, there is something different about this Christmas for you. I invite you to look for God in the change rather than resist it, for our God is at work doing something new all the time. "Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

Prayer: Lord, help me to embrace change, trusting you to be at work in the many changes that surround me. Make me ready to let go of tradition, old habits, and my own expectations, trusting that the new thing you are doing in my life will refresh my soul. Amen.

Rev. Joe Evans

Thursday, December 4, 2025

GRANDMA'S GIFT

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Luke 2:16-20 NIV

The Christmas holiday and Advent season often evokes memories for many of us. Through our childhood lenses, these memories may be magical. Some may contain wonderful visions of all that fills the many Advent celebrations. And some memories may remind us of the wide variety of gifts received (or not received in a few cases) throughout life.

One of my favorite gifts of Christmas is the birth of Christ as told in Luke 2:1-20. This story was shared by my faith-filled paternal Grandmother Sara McConnell Freeman. Grandma grew up in a large family. She was the tenth of sixteen children. The McConnells were farmers and also had a lumber and sawmill business in order to support such a large family. Grandma became a single mother to four children in the early 1940's and often struggled to provide. While the family did not have much, Grandma reminded us that the gift of strong faith was all we really needed. She made sure that all of her children and grandchildren received the gift of faith. May we all unwrap this amazing gift every day and not just during the Advent season.

Prayer: Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for all the blessings in our lives. Each new day is a chance to show gratitude and your lovingkindness to others. Guide our steps on the path you would have us walk each new day. Amen.

LouAnn Sago

Friday, December 5, 2025

GOD IS GREATER THAN ANY PROBLEM I HAVE.

"Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit."

Psalms 147:5

This simple statement helps put my life in focus: 'God is greater than any problem I have.'

What and who is greater than God? None.

And to think he cares even for me? I feel emotions of awe and joy knowing our Lord is present in every situation.

The title for this devotional came from cards my late father would give to many of those he met. He was always reaching out to the poor, homeless and hungry individuals in his charity work.

How does that old hymn go? "O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear. Take it to The Lord in prayer."

Therein lies our solace in confessing all to him. He is always waiting for us to turn our faces to him. He created us and wants to take care of us.

Having a personal relationship with the Lord and trusting his ways for our lives, we can feel immense gratitude. I'm reminded of a message in another hymn: Jesus is all the world to me.' He is in us and we are in him.

Believing that 'God is greater than any problem I have,' implores us to trust in a power that holds the universe in his hand—his mighty hand.

Prayer: As we anticipate the birth of our Lord, help us to trust you, Lord Jesus, with the present and future. Help us live with assurance in knowing that you are greater than our fears, our anxieties and our fretful natures. Amen.

Fran Sommerville

Saturday, December 6, 2025

HOPE BEYOND ALL UNDERSTANDING

See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.

And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts. Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse. Malachi 4:1-6

At first blush, not much about this passage feels hopeful – burning arrogant people, the terrible day of the Lord – what on earth does this have to do with the contemplative hope of Advent? Upon reading again, we hear God's invitation to hope, an invitation to healing. God calls us to tenderness with one another in God's own name that we may help reshape our perspective as a response to Elijah's prophetic witness. Do you remember Elijah? Elijah, God's prophet, helped offer salvation to a widow and her son when food ran short in a famine; God used Elijah to revive the widow's son when he died; Elijah named the people of Israel and commanded them to revere God instead of limping about, trying to worship Baal and God; God spoke to Elijah not in the storm or an earthquake, but in a still, small voice on Mt. Horeb. In these days of divided opinions, where many seem more interested in victory than unity, let us refocus, stop limping, and look to the coming of our Messiah for the hope beyond all understanding. And let us turn away from the noise and actively seek out God's still, small voice that most surely will lead us toward healing and usher in a hope the likes of which we will never achieve by turning to the world.

Prayer: Dear God, remind us to keep our eyes trained on you so we may not find ourselves limping or our hearts distracted by storms. May we instead be emboldened by our hope in you to be messengers of your love, grace and healing in our world. Amen.

Rev. Meri Kate Marcum

Reprinted from the 2000 FPC Advent Devotional

Sunday, December 7, 2025

JOY ABOUNDING

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

Does this verse sound familiar? It should. We hear this phrase during the benediction almost every week in worship. Does it mean anything to you? Do you find joy through your worship experience?

We have a God who desires joy for us. God gives us a creation in which we can see and experience joy. God gives us people who can bring us joy. God gave us a Son, who brings us joy, by forgiving our sin. God gives us the Holy Spirit, so we can experience a heavenly peace and joy. How sad it is when we don't recognize them. How sad when we dwell on the sin in our life.

I don't want the burden of sin to steal my joy in life. I include a prayer for my sin in my daily devotion. I know I have more sin in my life than I can control. Do you find that to be true? Do you find that the more you try to correct your sins, the more sin you recognize?

Martin Luther struggled with sin and tried to live without sin. He found it impossible. He wrote, "It suffices that through God's glory we have recognized the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. No sin can separate us from him, even if we were to kill or commit adultery thousands of times each day." If living with sin was inevitable, what are we to do?

This answer comes as the gift of Advent: a gift which frees us from the worry and fear we have about our sinful nature. God sends us the Christ Child, who comes to offer forgiveness. Because of the gift of forgiveness, we should experience great joy. If you are concerned about your sins, fill your life with good actions. Then, you will find that you do not have time to be tempted by sin.

Examine your own level of joy. Are you coming up short? We practice joy in church every Sunday. It is joyful to come to a place of care, concern, and encouragement, even during our most difficult days. Church is a place where we practice for heaven. What are we to do? Pray for forgiveness. Give thanks for forgiveness. Then live in the love and joy of God.

Prayer: Holy Father, help us to find the joy you intend for us in this world. As we receive the gift of joy, help us to spread joy to others, so our own joy will multiply. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Paul Sherwood

Monday, December 8, 2025
AND STILL WE HOPE

Romans 8:18-25

For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

We bear the imprint of Christian hope in a world of deep distress and need. Our way is crowded with a sustained procession of grim events, our ears deafen by the cries of countless souls haunted with fears. But here we stand bearing the imprint of Christian hope. Some ask, "How, in such a world as this, can one dare to confess that there is hope?" And still we hope. We have a hope that the hardened world knows not of. And this hope is in the hope of the world.

The eye of hope holds fast the vision of a world where everyone honors each other's dignity, and everyone esteems God's creative diversity. Our hope holds the vision of a world where goods and services are equitably distributed, and poverty will be no more. Our hope holds the vision of a world where all God's children, who know not now what they shall be, will share the image of the Creator and live in the unity of kindred love. And still we hope.

Prayer: Mighty God, keep us mindful of the foundation upon which our hope is built. Shield us from the lure of seeking to save ourselves with the things that do not satisfy. But may we hold fast to the hope of the world until the healing power of your love makes all things new. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Samuel Stevenson

reprinted from his 2002 Advent Daily Devotional scriptures, Meditations, and Prayers



Light the second candle,
the Angels candle,
representing Peace

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

HAMISH, THE CAT ABOUT TOWN

*For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.
Psalm 27:5*

Are you a dog or a cat person? I am both. One thing I love about our furry companions are true stories that are inspiring and sometimes prophetically meaningful.

Recently, while travelling, I learned of Hamish, a famous cat, who lived in St. Andrews, Scotland. Marianne Baird owned Hamish, but the only care Marianne needed to provide to Hamish was his annual vet exam. For you see, Hamish the cat was nomadic, traveling around the village and being seen everywhere. He could be found basking in the sun at a coffee shop, sitting in the windowsill of the drugstore, or cuddling on a bench on the campus of St. Andrews University. Hamish earned his own Facebook page and has a bronze statute in the center of town! This long-haired, ginger cat brought about a feeling of gentleness, peacefulness, and quietness that enthralled the townspeople. He had an aura of calmness around him, and he found shelter everywhere he went.

We find shelter in our Lord, and we provide shelter for others whether by a visit, a phone call, a text, or a hug. We allow the Lord's patience and grace to roll over us and to settle us.

Receive the gift and give the gift.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to be more like Hamish and the citizens of St. Andrews and play two roles: by spending time with God for quiet love and grace, and by giving grace to others. May we point others to the Lord where they may gain peace and rest. Amen.

Mikel Vann

Addendum:

Hamish's spirit lives on. The Hamish Foundation was founded in his memory, a charity to raise funds for the good of the town. This foundation provides beach wheelchairs for visitors at West Sand Beach, the same beach where Chariots of Fire was filmed.

Wednesday, December 10, 2025

BE LIKE MARY

The angel said to him: “Do Not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord...” Luke 1:11-15 (NIV)

Every year after Christmas I wish we’d spent more time just enjoying the Christmas stories like the twin birth announcements that open Luke’s Gospel. The Angel Gabriel comes first to Zechariah, the soon-to-be father of John the Baptist and then comes a little later to visit young Mary and tell her she will be the mother of God’s Son!

Zechariah’s reaction to Gabriel’s tremendous announcement is one of skepticism and outright disbelief. “What!? Have a son? My wife and I both are as old as dirt!?” He flat out challenges the angel. “How shall I know this?” The angel puffs up in response, “I am Gabriel, Right Hand to the throne of Almighty God!” Then he lowers the boom: “You’ll have a month of total silence to think about what I have promised.”

Mary, on the other hand, starts her encounter and response to the angel’s wondrous news by essentially flattering the angel, “That’s so wonderful! How will this be?” She’s asking how the angel will do these amazing things. And with that kind of lead in, the Angel now gushes forth, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and...” The angel promises one thing after another because of Mary’s openness to his life-shaping, world-changing news!

So, here’s a tip for Advent—the season of God’s special coming: if the angel tells you something, it’s better to open your heart and listen on—like Mary. That’s one thing.

But then notice in closing the gracious movement of the angel’s ‘sentence’ on Zechariah. For the term of his wife’s pregnancy, his only choice is to stay home from his priestly duties, sit there in silence, while he and Elizabeth, in their twin rockers, watch this little bundle of blessing grow, little by little, day by day. God let him know who’s working through him, through his wife and through his family. God is every bit as good as his word!

Prayer: Holy God, open our hearts to every sign of your surprising work. Show us your will in our lives this season of Advent. Through Christ our Lord. Amen

Mark E. Durrett

Thursday, December 11, 2025

MARY, MARY, QUITE CONTRARY

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14

*"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."
Luke 1:38*

An innocent young virgin asleep in the night
awakened by an angel, shaken by the sight
a most unlikely vessel, this common peasant girl
chosen to deliver the Savior of the world

Blessed among all women, receiving heaven's nod
told that she will bear the very Son of God
troubled and perplexed at how this could be
even so, she answers, "May it be done to me"

Mary, Mary, quite contrary
how does a heart so faithful grow
such a fearless "yes" I dare carry
a life surrendered, ever contrary

Unmarried with child, ripples of scandal
a heavy burden for a young girl to handle
shamed and rejected, a consequence of faith
but steeled by the strength of an unrelenting grace

Mary, Mary, quite contrary
how does a heart so faithful grow
such a fearless "yes" I dare carry
a life surrendered, ever contrary

Lord, help me say, "yes, yes, yes" with every breath
help me say, "yes, yes, yes" my every step
help me say, "yes, yes, yes" and nothing less
help me say, "yes, yes, yes" forever blessed

An innocent, young virgin asleep in the night
awakened by an angel, shaken by the sight
a most unlikely vessel, this common peasant girl
chosen to deliver the Savior of the world

Mary, Mary, quite contrary
how does a heart so faithful grow
such a fearless "yes" I dare carry
a life surrendered, ever contrary

Scott Suhr

Friday, December 12, 2025

LOVING THROUGH GIVING

God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:7-8

In the years 2002 to 2023, we were members of a church on Sanibel Island. Now that we have returned to live full-time in Marietta, we are once again a part of First Presbyterian Church where our daughter was married in 1999. One of the blessings of being back is sharing stories with members. Recently when I was talking to a friend about giving, she told me that when her grandchildren reached a certain age, she told them that she would give them a certain amount of money for Christmas for them to donate to a charity. Their task was to research the places that they might give the money and make a decision as to where their donation would go. What a wonderful way to teach children the joy in giving!

Prayer: Dear God, Giver and Sustainer: As we give thanks to you for your marvelous gifts to us; teach us to give cheerfully and joyfully. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Dixie Bowden

Saturday, December 13, 2025
BELIEVING, THEN SEEING

“For my eyes have seen your salvation...And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” Luke 2:30; 3:6

Have you ever said, or heard it said, “It’s so nice to put a face to the name”? During my career, I often worked with colleagues who resided in different locations or states, often for years before having an opportunity to meet them in person. The meeting was always special, because of course we knew about each other, but did not truly know each other until we could see each other. God has always known and understood our human condition. He knew our human minds and hearts could not comprehend his greatness or holiness; it is why he appeared to the Israelites as a cloud by day and a fire by night as they journeyed from Egypt.

God also understands our human fears and doubts. From the beginning of time, he knew he would need to give us his son in human form, in order that we could see his face, and know him as a human is known, and to have a relationship with him. In his infinite wisdom, God knew we needed this connection of the physical in order to deepen our relationship with him. And it was the only way God could fully demonstrate the depth of his love for us, by coming to us in the form of a baby, who would as a man develop deep relationships with men and women. These men and women would learn that he was the Way, the Truth and the Life. It was these men and women who, after the sacrificial gift of his death on a cross, would be the first ones to spread his gospel of love and peace throughout the world.

Prayer: Holy Father in Heaven, You gave us the most perfect gift of yourself in the form of a precious baby, that we know You as a human, and also know that you truly understand our human frailties and weaknesses. You gave us yourself so we would see your perfect sacrifice That sacrifice would ensure we could know you and be in relationship with you forever. We give you grateful thanks, in the precious name of your Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Linda Bush

Sunday, December 14, 2025

GOD SEES US

*“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.*

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed...”

Luke 1:46–48 ESV

Advent is a season of watching, waiting, and hoping. For parents, those are familiar rhythms. Whether you’re expecting a child, raising one, grieving one, or praying for one, you know what it means to carry someone in your heart with longing.

For parents, and most often mothers, this time of year can also feel particularly stressful. We are navigating a whirlwind of responsibilities, high expectations, and the constant tension between the joy and the sacrifice of parenthood. It’s not easy. There are moments in parenthood that feel thankless. There are times when you give your heart, your time, your body, and your soul to your children only to feel invisible, forgotten, ignored or taken for granted. No one says “thank you” for staying up all night with a newborn, for packing daily nut-free lunches, or for organizing birthday parties, or for giving up a career, or for giving up time for ourselves in order to raise children.

But God sees it all, just as he saw Mary. She was humble and willing to say “yes” to the unimaginable. He sees the quiet sacrifices of all parents just as he saw Mary’s. Her life was completely derailed. And instead of fear or resentment, Mary sings a song of deep praise and trust.

Mary says, “He has looked on the humble estate of his servant.” In other words: God sees me. Isn’t that what we all long to know? In the exhaustion, the sacrifice, the unseen moments, God sees us. He doesn’t overlook your sacrifice of your own ambitions and dreams to pour into the lives of your children. And he doesn’t expect you to be a perfect parent.

So for the parents in the room, this Advent season remember: you carry light; you shape lives; you respond to God’s calling with your body, your time, your tears, and your trust. It is not thankless work; it is holy work. And God sees it all.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for seeing me, even in the moments that feel unnoticed. Thank you for choosing Mary and reminding us that parenthood is a holy calling. This Advent season, help me to carry Your love with the same courage and humility as Mary. Let me find joy in the small, sacred work that You’ve entrusted to me. And when I grow weary, remind me: You see me. You are with me. And you are faithful. Amen.

Stephanie Schmid, Lisa Stokes and Caitlyn Watkins

Monday, December 15, 2025

JOY

*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?
My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”*

*These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of
God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among
the festive throng. Psalm 42:1-4*

In Scotland, we sang “O Love”, by Elaine Hagensberg. In that song there is a line that states, “Joy that seeks me through the pain.” The composer of this song took the words from a hymn written by George Matheson. He wrote this hymn on the eve of his sister’s wedding when he was recalling a painful episode of trial and desertion in his life. When he wrote the hymn, he was able to see that joy was able to grasp him throughout his journey and not let him go. Joy was a constant for him and carried him through his deepest and darkest times.

Many times, we are quick to mistake the word happiness for joy, or the other way around. For me happiness tends to be a temporary feeling, and one that is dependent on external situations. However, joy seems to be a sense of wellbeing that can only come from God— a sense that does not change.

Prayer: Lord, you seek me through pain, through sorrow, through happiness, through whatever I am going through. I thank you for being a God who gives me a joy that is deeper than any temporal feeling, a peace that passes all understanding, and hope in you. Amen.

Cheryl Vanture

Light the Third candle,
the Shepherds candle,
representing Joy



Tuesday, December 16, 2025

THE GIFT OF LIFE

“But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.” Jude 1:20-22

To me, the most precious gift is the gift of life—plain and simple. For a dear friend and his family, the most precious gift is being given a second chance at life.

COVID hit my friend hard, twice. Weeks of isolation in the hospital and weakness in his lungs made breathing and walking very difficult. Scooters, oxygen tanks, tubing, and medicine took over their home, and fear took over their hearts.

Still, they remained strong in their faith, in their love for each other, and their confidence in the doctors who were trying to save him.

God blessed my friend with an organ donor. On December 16, 2024, my friend was gifted a second chance at life. What a wonderous gift from God.

My friend is recovering nicely after his lung transplant. Gone are the scooter, oxygen tanks, endless tubing and constant fear.

My friend and his family have much to celebrate this Christmas season. We are all grateful to the glory of God for giving my friend the gift of life. Happy New Birthday, Skip.

Prayer: Merciful God, thank you for giving us life, for letting us do the ultimate gift to others by being organ donors after we depart, and the ability to receive these gifts. Your wonder and love never cease to amaze me. Amen.

Frances Bogle

Wednesday, December 17, 2025

WAIT FOR THE LORD

“Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord.”

Psalms 31:24

I am a big fan of rollercoasters.

There, I said it. I'm sure you didn't expect that from one of your pastors, but it's true. Last summer, I rode all the rollercoasters at Six Flags in a single afternoon. And no, I didn't feel right for two days, but it was worth it.

My favorite part of a rollercoaster is the pause at the top of the first hill. For a heartbeat, the car stops – suspended between the safety of the station and the thrill of the track ahead. Then, the gravity shifts oh-so-slightly, and we are catapulted toward something new.

I would probably ride rollercoasters more often, except for the line. I don't like waiting in line. Maybe you dislike it as well. Most of us avoid waiting when we can. We leave early for work to avoid waiting in traffic. Or visit the grocery store at odd hours to avoid waiting in the checkout line. When waiting is unavoidable, we read the news, check email, and make phone calls. We do whatever we can to be productive, because waiting feels like a waste.

Is it?

As the Psalmist describes it, waiting is not inactivity; rather, it is anticipation. Waiting requires courage and discipline to keep our focus on the promise ahead.

Waiting for the Lord isn't being stuck in a Saturday afternoon Costco line. It's more like reaching the top of the rollercoaster hill. We are suspended between what has been and what will be. Then the gravity shifts, and we are catapulted toward the new thing God is doing.

During Advent, may we wait for the Lord with the same breathless anticipation.

Prayer: Holy God, in this season of waiting, give us patience and renew our strength that we might perceive the new thing you are about to do through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Rev. Cassie Waits

Thursday, December 18, 2025

AWE!

Let all the earth fear the Lord;

Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. Psalm 33:8

In the presence of God, silence is the soul's highest form of expression. Awe is the condition of a spirit standing so impressed with the majesty of God that words cannot adequately describe. - A.W. Tozer

Fifty-seven years ago, the United States was in the throes of a race to put a man on the moon. At the age of 9, I was so enthralled I wanted to be an astronaut. In December 1968, the Apollo 8 mission was to be the first manned mission to orbit the moon. It was thrilling and scary as the dark side of the moon would prevent any communication between the spacecraft and Mission Control. On Christmas Eve, the astronauts orbited the moon. As the spacecraft left the dark of separation, the astronauts were greeted with an awesome view memorialized in a well-known photograph of the earth called 'Earthrise'.

Soon afterward, the astronauts were asked to say something appropriate to mark the historic occasion. Frank Borman and the two other astronauts read Genesis 1:1-10. In Borman's autobiography, *Countdown*, he explains why they read Scriptures: "There was one more impression we wanted to transmit; our feeling of closeness to the Creator of all things."

Imagine the awe— the closeness to God—these men must have felt seeing this view of earth in person. I feel the awe just seeing the photograph of Earth in the dark void. Did the shepherds feel that same breath-taking awe when they saw the Star of Bethlehem and came into the presence of the baby Jesus?

What can you do to experience this same feeling of awe - a closeness with our God? Start each day expecting to encounter awe in your walk with God whether it be a sunrise, a sunset, a full moon, goodness in people, generosity or love. And during this season of Advent, think about your God who came down to earth to be with you.

Prayer: Father, during this season of preparation, help me see and feel your awe every day. Amen.

Erroll Eckford

Friday, December 19, 2025

FOR THE BEAUTY OF THE EARTH

God saw all that he had made and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. Genesis 1:31 (NIV)

Hanging on the wall of my home is a framed, ornately decorated copy of my favorite hymn, “For the Beauty of the Earth,” by Folliott S. Pierpoint. Every time that I stop to read and reflect upon it, I am reminded that God in all glory is before me, behind me, and beside me everywhere I am. The refrain of the hymn is a song of thanksgiving to God for the beauties and blessings, both physical and spiritual: the heavenly bodies of light and darkness, the flowering plants and trees, the variety of geological forms, human inspiration in music and visual arts, and the human love of family and friends.

How are we to use these blessings that God has provided? For help in this matter, I turn to the American Poet Laureate, Robert Frost. In his poem, “Choose Something Like a Star” (1916), Frost instructs us,

*...when at times the mob is swayed To carry praise or blame too far,
We may choose something like a star To stay our minds on and be staid.*

According to the poet, we will be the victims of negative events and thoughts some time in this life. The poet suggests turning to nature or any source of beauty for calming reflection. We can purposefully choose “to stay our minds on” one of God’s spiritual or physical gifts described in the hymn in the midst of our trials, tribulations, and supplications during the living of these days. Stop. Look around. Find one of God’s many blessings and stay your mind. Be thankful for God’s gifts.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to look beyond life’s distractions to see your handiwork in the beauties of the Earth, and may we see in your creation your blessed assurance that you walk beside us every day. Amen.

Nan Waters

Saturday, December 20, 2025

THE GIFT OF A CHILD

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus. Matthew 1:18-25

On Tuesday, December 6, 1969, 28 years ago, I gave birth to my first child—a daughter. I chose this date for my devotional because it was such a memorable and joyous day for me and I knew that scripture was about the birth of Jesus. On that day I was given such a wonderful gift from God, my child. The scripture verse states Mary was to conceive and give birth to the most wonderful of God’s gifts, the Christ child—Jesus—Emmanuel—“God with us”—our Savior.

I wonder if Mary felt all the emotions I did on that day—joy, excitement, fear (Motherhood can be that!), and anticipation of the future. I’m sure she did. She and Joseph knew the mission of their newborn son and I’m sure they were in awe of all that happened that day and as they watched Jesus grow.

Children are wonderful gifts from God and should at this time of year be excited about Christmas. But don’t let us, as Christians, forget to teach them the real meaning of Christmas—the birth of Christ. The child who, 33 years after his birth, gave his life on the cross to save us from our sins.

My daughter is now a mother herself; and because of the influence of Christians in her life she is raising her child in a Christian manner. My granddaughter knows who Jesus is and loves to sing “Jesus Loves Me.” Let us this day join with her: Yes, Jesus loves me, Yes Jesus loves me, Yes, Jesus loves me, For the Bible tells me so.

Prayer: Loving Father, thank you for your son, Jesus. Thank you for our children. Let us celebrate this season with joy, excitement, and reverence, ever mindful of your love for us. Amen

Jane Cofer

Reprinted from the 1997 Advent Devotional

Sunday, December 21, 2025

EMMANUEL—GOD’S LOVE IS WITH US

Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus. Matthew 1:19-25

God’s love is one of those things we “know.” Often it sits as background knowledge. Something has to bring it to an appreciation. When there is a demonstration of God’s love, our appreciation of that moment heightens. To be with my grown children who live in Guam and Syracuse is special. Both the effort to come together and the very fact of being together reinforces the love I know. Our love is then more real for the time we are apart.

Every time I hear an angel announcing Jesus to Joseph, I get a renewed sense about the powerful demonstration of God’s love in Jesus. Joseph and others waited a long time for a demonstration of God’s love in Jesus. The name given Jesus was Emmanuel, “God with us.” I am grateful to God for the Emmanuel moment of Jesus’ coming into the world, to be present with us as love. God’s love is no longer distant but is a life changing and life-redirecting knowledge.

Prayer: Dear God, For a love so real in Jesus, we are grateful and we seek to let the world know, really know, You who are true love. May your Emmanuel gift move us to love better and more. Amen

Rev. John Wells

Reprinted from the 1999 Advent Devotional

Monday, December 22, 2025
GOD'S LOVE GUIDES US

Thus says the Lord: Stand at the crossroads, and look and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.
Jeremiah 6:16

In a remote region of Tibet, the farewell that someone gives another is “May there be a road.” In that land where snow slides, rockslides and cave-ins are abundant, in that land where roads are casually made and bridges are usually hung from ropes, the wish: “May there be a road” takes on new significance. Of course, we have superhighways but metaphorically life does seem, as Robert Frost noted, “like a pathless wood,” and we spend our lives searching for the road. We move blindly at times yet knowing that we are not alone. God’s gift of love sustains us as we search, and supports us as we move forward— knowing that the road will appear at the time we most long for it. And we will find rest for our souls!

Prayer: Dear God, in the times when the way forward seems obscure, teach us to know that you are guiding us and will show us the way. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Dixie Bowden

Light the fourth candle,
the candle of the Magi,
representing Love



Tuesday, December 23, 2025

CHOOSE LOVE

Though I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. I Corinthians 13: 1-2

Today I heard the choir sing a stunning rendition of “Choose Love.” Their version was beautiful and moved me greatly with the music and these words: “In the midst of pain, I choose love; in the midst of fear, I choose love; in the midst of hate, I choose love.” And it made me wonder: How does one do that? When you are feeling pain or hate or fear, how do you choose love?

I have always thought of love as just a feeling, an emotion that overtakes you. I know better, now, that Jesus and the Bible teach us that love is always a choice, and very much an action, not some uncontrollable emotion. Choosing love is an act of our will — that we make premised on God’s love for us, and his commandments to us. It is a choice we must make if we are to be true disciples of Jesus. (John 13: 34-35) Choosing love then requires further action — choosing love requires showing that love with patience, kindness, perseverance, selflessness, understanding, and hope. It does not expect or require reciprocity. And as Paul warns us, without love, we are no good to anybody, no matter how much faith or hope that we have.

Prayer: Lord, grant me, every day, a bigger heart that I may always be led to choose love. Amen.

Rachel Byrd

Wednesday, December 24, 2025
MUSINGS ON “SILENT NIGHT”

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

Luke 2:8-14

Like many others, the Christmas hymn “Silent Night” has had powerful, evocative meaning to me since I was a child. Every Christmas Eve we would attend the 4pm service at our Episcopal church. The last song was always “Silent Night” by candlelight and I would be positioned right next to my dad as we sang. I cannot hear “Silent Night” without being reminded of him. Then we would go outside to a late December sky that had grown dark as we were inside worshipping. All would gather around the oh-so-high evergreen tree growing in front of the church and “3-2-1”, the lights would be illuminated! Absolutely magical for a young child... Christmas was here!

I lost my dad a few years ago, so Christmas Eve “Silent Nights” are harder for me to sing now. It was only in prayerful preparation for what I’d say at his memorial service that I realized what a true Christian he was... with the heart of a servant — in his church and his community, sharing light and love with others, being a quiet example of what it means to follow and model Jesus. Though his personality was hardly quiet!

I read one particularly miraculous singing of “Silent Night.” The words to the hymn were written in 1816 by a young priest in Austria, Joseph Mohr. The composition evolved and was translated into over 300 languages with many different arrangements for various voices and ensembles. It was sung in churches, in town squares, and even on the battlefield during World War I, when, during a temporary truce on Christmas Eve, soldiers sang carols from home. “Silent Night,” by 1914 known around the world, was sung simultaneously in French, German and English.

Prayer: Dear Lord, this year as we prepare for Christmas, may we each embody a spirit of peace in a world that is increasingly fractious. Your holy Son came into this world to bring peace. As his followers, let us do our part to get along, to stand side by side with others we may or may not agree with, as we spread the good news of his birth. Amen.

Sally Suhr

Advent & Christmas

ANGEL TREE through November 30

Choose a gift off the tree in the Gathering Space to purchase for a child in need.

LIVE NATIVITY Sunday, December 7 | 4-5:30pm

Join us at the manger in Bethlehem! Feed live animals and enjoy hot chocolate!

WINTER RECITAL Saturday, December 13 | 3-6pm

The Southeast School of Music (SSOM) will host a Winter Recital & Pet Adoption Event featuring performances by SSOM students, the Kirk Ringers, and choir members. Enjoy a post-recital reception with photos with Santa and adoptable pets from Cobb County Animal Services.

LESSONS & CAROLS Sunday, December 14 | 8:30am & 11:00am

Join the Chancel Choir, brass, and Kirk Ringers during our regular worship services as we celebrate the birth of Christ and joyfully usher in the Christmas season.

CONTEMPLATIVE CHRISTMAS Thursday, December 18 | 7pm

This quiet, reflective service offers a space of peace during the holidays, featuring music of the season with the Chancel Choir and guest musicians. Communion will be served.

POINSETTIAS through December 15

Honor or remember a loved one this Christmas by donating a poinsettia to decorate our worship space. Poinsettias may be taken home after Christmas. Forms are available at fpcmarietta.org/events and in the Gathering Space.

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

Wednesday, December 24

12pm Sanctuary - Communion

3pm Great Hall - Family Service

Children and Youth ages PreK 3-Grade 12 take part in telling of the Christmas story. *Baby gift items will be collected as an offering for the Georgia Division of Family and Children's Services.*

6pm Great Hall - Candlelight

A nursery is available for this service only.