

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

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