

2026

advent reflections

FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
MARIETTA

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.

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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.

Christianity.com

November 29, Light the Candle of Hope

THE LIGHT

John 1:5
The light shines in the darkness…

Traditionally, when we read "the Christmas Story" in the Bible, we go to the Gospel of Luke and hear about shepherds who were sent by an angel to visit the Christ child in a manger. Or we go to the Gospel of Matthew and learn of the kings who brought him gifts. Yet the Christmas story in the Gospel of John is very different. There are no shepherds, angels, or kings. Instead, the Gospel of John begins at the very beginning:

> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. John 1:1-5.*

Because of John's Gospel, when I think of Christmas, I think of light. And not just the lights in the trees. I think about the light of hope and the promise that the light of hope will not be overcome by the darkness. I think of children who hope for the perfect present under the tree, and I think of the bright light in the eyes of our church's oldest members who look with hope towards the future. I think of the recently divorced, who have walked through the dark valley, yet look on a new year with a bold optimism that cannot be explained. I think of all that has gone wrong, and the assurance from God that the wrong will be made right, for "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not/will not/cannot overcome it."

Almighty God, your Son is the light of the world. May He bring light to our lives, casting out each shadow of despair, guiding our paths in the ways of peace. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Joe Evans

November 30

KNOCK AND THE DOOR WILL BE OPENED

Matthew 7:7-8
Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

I remember seeing a picture about this verse in my Sunday school class when I was a child. A rustic door was tucked into a stone arch. But the door lacked a doorknob on the outside. The meaning was implied: One can't just open the door from the outside. One had to ask or knock, and then the door would open. But another meaning was implied as well: God must open the door. Something separates us from God until the moment we knock. God doesn't just come barreling down a tunnel and grab you by the shoulders.

All this to say, God wants to be asked; God wants to be sought; God wants to hear the knock.

The encounter is a quiet one. It's made with intellectual curiosity. It's made with a pang of longing. It's made with reverence. And the result is an encounter with the Divine.

Dear Lord, may we be ever-seeking You during this Advent season. Amen.

Jane Manning

December 1

ACTIVE ANTICIPATION

Jeremiah 29:13
You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Advent is a season of anticipation, a time for us to dial in more deliberately to what is ahead: the birth of Jesus, our Savior. The more active we are in that process, the more we will enrich our own faith lives as we hurtle towards December 25. This year's theme — "Wise Men Still Seek Him" — encourages that more active role in Advent.

The definition of seek is "to go to, go in search of, look for, try to discover, ask for, try to acquire or gain, aim at, make an attempt." All of these verbs are very active—unlike the more casual word look. Look (for) is used for everyday physical items. Seek is formal and used for abstract ideas, goals or deep needs, like our deep need for a savior.

Many Bible verses reinforce what happens when we seek the Lord. Jeremiah 29:13 says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

"All your heart." When we are actively seeking—anything—it requires our full attention. So, we may need to actively turn our eyes and attention away from other things in order to fix them on what we are seeking.

What are some things we may need to remove our attention from in order to truly seek Jesus this season? Approval, status, anxiety, striving, to-do lists, envy?

We are tempted to keep our mind and eyes on such things because we are human and seek a sense of control. But these do not bring us peace. We need to turn our eyes away from earthly distractions and fix them back on God. We are invited to look for and at God, to keep our gaze on Him, even if it takes some practice.

We are invited to seek.

You and I get distracted, but God does not. He fixes His eyes on us, and even when we are not feeling His presence, God wants to be with us in each step we take. He wants to stand with us in each fire. His presence is constant and overwhelming--it goes before us, follows behind us, and covers us. He seeks us even if we forget to seek Him.

Peace comes from looking in His direction, from listening for the whisper of the Spirit. He IS Emmanuel, God with us, in this season as always.

Dear Lord, this Advent let us intentionally set aside distractions in order to actively seek the God who loves and seeks us. Amen.

Sally Suhr

December 2

THE AGENDA OF THE STILL-SEEKING WISE MEN

Micah 5:2

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

One of the suggested scripture readings for December 2, 2026, is Micah 5:1-5, which addresses Bethlehem, a "little clan of Judah" being entrenched and besieged and left totally hopeless. But a ruler is promised to arrive from their midst, someone who would change the world, and "he shall be the one of peace." This verse falls shortly before one of my favorite Old Testament passages, Micah 6:6-8, which reads:

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

tried to convey the "thrill of hope" the coming of Jesus Christ promises, not only to the oppressed people of Israel, but to all of us who sit in darkness.

If Micah 5 conveys the Christmas story, then Micah 6 evokes the imagery of the Wise Men and their offerings before the manger. What does God really want us to present at the feet of the holiest of holies? The answer to this question lies within this famous poem.

“The Work of Christmas”
by Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among others,
To make music in the heart.

To continue the work of truly wise men, from the ancient Melchior to the modern Thurman, we must do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly. When we carry the spirit of Christmas in our hearts throughout the year—striving to live with generosity, compassion, and empathy—we bring the true offerings of our hearts to God. Those offerings far exceed any gold or perfumes.

Heavenly Father, we offer our lives to Your service as the wise men offered their gifts before the infant Christ. Guide us as we continue to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly within Your sight. Let the fire of the Holy Spirit keep us warm and continue to fuel our zeal to share Your love with as many people as we can this holiday season and beyond. Amen.

Katie Waters

December 3

THE POSTURE OF THE HEART

Luke 18:9-14

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people —robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

"The Posture of the Heart"
by Scott Suhr

His prayers ringing out, so proudly spoken
hard to imagine a life so unbroken
A blameless path, so dutifully lived
and me, in my sorrow, so far from this

His faith no doubt earnestly gained
chapter and verse so easily named
A lofty telling of endless deeds
and me, in my shame, dropped to my knees

Stand tall, play the part
strike a pose - it's not where grace starts
it's in humble kneeling, it's the owning of the dark
it's the posture of the heart

The way he stood, so little to suffer
his righteousness, unlike any other
and me in the shadows, my face in my hands
a life fallen short, a sinking sand

Stand tall, play the part
strike a pose - it's not where grace starts
it's in humble kneeling, it's the owning of the dark
it's the posture of the heart

Down is up, empty's full
last is first, push is pull
low is high, weak is strong
death is life, right is wrong

Our prayers laid bare, he moved toward the door
he silently passed, I rose from the floor
He turned as we walked, as if something to say
but once in the light, we went our own way.

Stand tall, play the part
strike a pose - it's not where grace starts
it's in no more hiding, it's the owning of the dark
it's the posture of the heart

Lord, grant us the wisdom to admit our brokenness and to never doubt our need for Your grace. On bended knee, with a surrendered spirit, may love and humility - always - be the posture of our hearts. Amen.

Scott Suhr

December 4

SING, CHOIRS OF ANGELS: THE VOICE GOD GAVE YOU

Psalm 150:6
Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!

I teach elementary school music, and one of my missions is to undo a stubborn idea that some people are born musical and the rest are not. Singing suffers especially from this misconception. Somewhere along the way, many of us became convinced that singing belongs to people with "good voices" while everyone else should listen.

I reject that entirely.

I love the Zimbabwean Shona proverb, "If you can speak, you can sing. If you can walk, you can dance." Many cultures understand this more than ours does. Singing and dancing are not reserved for a fortunate few. They are natural, human things to do. We were made to praise God with what we have, including the instrument God designed and built into each of us. Your voice is as individual, precious, and expressive as the rest of you.

Technical perfection is hardly the point. I can sing more correctly than Mick Jagger, Taylor Swift, Hank Williams, or Olivia Rodrigo in any number of measurable ways. But whom would most people rather hear? Exactly.

A voice moves us because it belongs to somebody. That is also why singing makes us vulnerable. We cannot put this instrument back in its case. The instrument is us.

Something remarkable also happens when we sing together. Our breathing begins to coordinate, and our cardiac rhythms can synchronize. Our voices remain distinct, yet together we create something none of us can make alone. That seems fitting and I think, intentional.

Dear Lord, You did not give us identical voices. You gave each of us our own, then designed us to listen, adjust, breathe together, and make music with other people. Music is a holy gift. And You, Yourself, designed the instrument. So, let's sing. We may miss a note. We may not be the best singers in the room—or even very good. None of that makes our voices less worthy to praise You. You gave us our voices. Let's use them! Amen.

Colleen Crotty

December 5

EMMANUEL: GOD IS WITH US

Matthew 2:1-2

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi[a] from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

What visual comes to mind when you close your eyes to imagine the Wise Men seeing Jesus' star in the East and traveling to see Him? My thoughts have always been of the three Magi dressed in harem pants, rejoicing, hopping on their camels, and heading to Bethlehem to find the new King of the Jews!

And I ask myself, what would this event look like today? Would any of us even pay attention when the news announced the birth of the King of the Jews? Would we be glued to our televisions watching the trek to a manger somewhere near Bethlehem?

Unlike the Wise Men, who followed multiple gods, we follow a single and almighty God. We no longer interpret stars in the East or any other earthly phenomenon as divine signs. We trust in our God who wants a relationship with each of us. Our relationship with God can grow through many avenues, yet I find simple prayer most effective for me. This same God is with us through the good times and the challenges if we allow Him into our hearts.

Dear Lord, as we celebrate the Advent Season, let us take a moment to remember that the birth of Your son, Jesus, is the highlight. May we all seek You, who sent us Your only son as a sign of Your pure love for us all. Amen.

LouAnn Sago

December 6 – Light the Candle of Faith

COURAGE TO SEEK

Joshua 1:9
I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

When I read this passage, I couldn't help but put myself in the shoes of Joshua. Imagine: your predecessor died, your people are expectant, and your God is calling you to a seemingly impossible task. Moses and the Israelites spent forty years trying to get to Canaan, and now I'm supposed to be the one who gets the job done? That would be my question.

I've felt like this in my own life. Standing at the precipice of any life change, I often find myself feeling inadequate, ill-prepared, and too weak for the challenge. But God never asks us to face those moments alone. He didn't leave Joshua alone, and He won't leave us alone. God equips us for the challenges ahead, even when we don't feel equipped ourselves.

Over the summer, I was facing some decisions. It was during a particularly stressful and expectant week that I went to my Club 3:30 volunteer shift on a Tuesday afternoon. That day, we played a game with the kids, a "would you rather" of sorts. One of the questions was, "Would you rather go back to the past or go ahead to the future?"

Of course I chose the future! I was fretting over decisions and, while I trusted in God, my confidence was shaky. One of the first graders stood there with me, and I asked him why he chose the future. In my head, I was thinking he had similar thoughts to mine—we want to see how everything turns out. Instead, he looked up at me, grinned, and said, "I want to see how many eggs the chickens will lay!"

In that moment, I challenged myself to have the faithful courage of a six-year-old: to have so much faith in where I am in life that the big problems aren't big and they certainly aren't too big for God. Instead, I need to focus on the beautiful things around me, trust in God's plan, and just focus on my next faithful step. Perhaps that is part of what Advent asks of us. We stand expectantly, waiting for Christ, while also living in the uncertainty of what comes next. Like Joshua, we may not know what lies ahead, but we know Who comes with us.

God, as we stand expectant in this Advent season, please open our hearts and minds to hear from You and trust in Your plans. Call us to continually seek You and provide us with courage in the moments that feel like too much. Help us remember that whatever lies ahead, You are already there. Abide with us always. In Your name we pray, Amen.

Sarah Caffrey

December 7

WHERE IS JESUS?

Matthew 24:30-31

At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

If it hadn't happened twice, I would have thought nothing of it. They were just small, plastic, inexpensive nativity pieces: Mary, Joseph, Shepherds, sheep, a donkey, Wise Men, a camel and, of course, the baby Jesus in a small trough. Jesus was the smallest piece, and I always built the scene around him and kept it on a small table in my office.

One day, baby Jesus was missing from the arrangement and I looked all around the table for the piece, with no success. Later that afternoon, a mother who had visited my office called and apologized because, when emptying the pockets of her toddler, she discovered the baby Jesus. I told her to let him keep the baby Jesus figure because, when I bought the set, I got two (they were really inexpensive). A few years later, Jesus went missing again. Sure enough, this time he was discovered in a little girl's purse who visited my office with her parents.

Truly, I think this says something more about the human drive to possess what is mystery than kleptomania. Even children want to hold Jesus. They could have had any one of nine other plastic figurines, but they took Jesus! Children recognize Jesus since they look at the world with their hearts, as much as their intellect. They see what is most important.

In so many ways this is why Advent is so special. It provides us an opportunity to stand near the manger – to stand near the mystery of Immanuel, "God with us." This is a season of great spiritual opportunity. It is a good time for reflection as we celebrate the birth of Jesus with family and friends. It's a time ripe for growth in the things of the Spirit: joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

But Jesus does not desire for us to put Him in our pocket or purse. No, the wisest among us know that Jesus desires our hearts, minds, spirits, and strength. Jesus wants to be in our relationships with others. Children may have a sense of the great mystery of Jesus and desire to possess Him. But do we desire that Jesus possess us? And by the great mystery of God's irrational love toward humanity, will He come to us once more? Not as a child celebrated in a manger, but will He return as the glorious Son of Man?

The Christian faith is best celebrated in tension between a child lying in a manger and an innocent man hanging on a cross. You see, the line from these two points extends to infinity as the mystery we cannot possess except by the grace of God. God's Kingdom is coming. God's reign will increase until all know Christ as Lord. It is both a great and sobering reality, and it is good news. Like innocent, expectant, awe-struck children, let us celebrate the mystery of Advent with our eye on both the manger and the cross.

Mighty God, as we approach the manger of our Lord this Advent, we are reminded that Your mysteries extend from the deepest recesses of our souls to the farthest constellations. Renew us, merciful God, so that with humility, we might gain wisdom in this season of anticipation. As we gaze upon His manger, fill us, and all who would call upon His name, with renewed joy and passion for our journey of faith in Him who is Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the living Son of God. Amen.

Conrad Sharps

December 8

THE OTHER MOSES

Exodus 3:11
But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

Americans regularly rank Harriet Tubman among the nation's greatest heroes. Nicknamed "the Moses of Her People", this escaped plantation slave risked her life repeatedly to help free others, conducting nineteen successful trips on the Underground Railroad. During the Civil War, she served as a Union nurse and scout and led an assault that emancipated 750 slaves. Yet her written words are nearly impossible to come by since Harriet didn't learn to write until late in life. But these spoken words tell us so much: "I prayed to God to make me strong and able to fight, and that's what I've always prayed for ever since."

All of us know how Moses, destined for death, was saved by an ingenious plan carried out by his mother and his sister Miriam. He became the one strong enough and brave enough to tell the Pharoah to let his enslaved people go!

During this time of Advent, may we be wise enough to know when to speak for others and brave enough to stand up for those who need our voices to be heard on their behalf. Let us refuse to listen to those loud voices that speak of hate and seek to imply that this or that group of people deserves demeaned status. Let us fight against injustice, wherever we encounter it. Like Harriet Tubman, we pray to God "to make [us] strong and able to fight"!

We thank You for all the things this church does to help people in need of food, of shelter, and a sense of belonging. We, like the Wise Men, bring our gifts to this place, knowing that they will be used to do the things that Jesus did for the people He encountered. We bring our money, our talents, and offer our prayers for those in need. Bless our gifts and give us wisdom for every day's tasks and interactions with others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dixie Bowden

December 9

THE MAGNIFICAT: PROCLAIMING THE GREATNESS OF GOD.

Luke 1:46-49
And Mary said:
My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.

I spend two weeks each summer helping with youth conferences, which means I get to spend time with nearly one thousand young people and their leaders. These two weeks are a highlight of my summer for several reasons: 1) I get to hear from new preachers and keynote speakers who help me hear God's Word in new ways; 2) I get the opportunity to witness our young people wrestling with faith and bringing complex insights to God's work in the world; and 3) I always leave with renewed hope in the world. The Magnificat, or Mary's Song, was one of the primary texts we explored during this summer's Wonder and Wander themed conference. And while I've always marveled at Mary's faith when I read this passage, one young person helped me hear it differently this year.

One youth asked the question: "I wonder if Mary was God's first choice to carry Jesus into the world? And if she wasn't, I wonder why the other women said no?"

I'd never considered that Mary wasn't God's first choice – I mean who would tell God no? And then, I realized I've told God no on more than one occasion! In fact, for twenty-plus years I told God no to God's call for me to go to seminary. And I finally said yes to God at forty-five years old.

That's a far cry from a teenager being called to carry a baby – THE baby – into the world to bring redemption and grace to all humanity! When I imagine Gabriel showing up in the room of an eighth grader, telling her she's favored by God, and the sign of her favor is being chosen to usher grace into the world so sin and death could be defeated, saying no seems completely reasonable. It's no wonder Gabriel's first words were, "Don't be afraid…" Indeed, the whole proposal had to have been horrifying! What if Mary was the first one brave enough to trust God in this surprising plan?

After her initial reaction of, "This makes no sense and I have questions…" (Luke 1:26-34), and after visiting with her cousin Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-45) whose own pregnancy was miraculous, Mary sings. I wonder if they cut out the parts of the story where there were eye rolls, and back-and-forth questions. I wonder if they just jumped straight to her being okay with this. Or did Mary just trust that God held her in God's own hand and a peace and calm just fell over her? Somehow, this adolescent girl had eyes to see and ears to hear of God's blessing despite the absurdity of it all. She embraced her destiny as God's favored one. What faith! So, during this time that often touts Jesus as THE reason for the season, may we also remember to include Mary in the conversation. For without her faithful, brave yes to God, the rest of this story we know so well would have been completely different. Mary's story, along with her words, remind us that "Nothing is impossible with God." (Luke 1:37)

Lord, may we imitate Mary's trust and faith in our Savior, knowing that a single yes to God can set into motion miracles that defy logic. And may we also remember that children and teenagers still lead us —sometimes with their questions and sometimes with their faithful answers. Amen.

Rev. Meri Kate Marcum

December 10

SEEKING

Psalm 105:4.
Seek the Lord and His strength. Seek His presence constantly.
Like the Wise Men, we still seek Him. We pray that our daily lives are reflections of His presence, and our actions are seen as an example leading others to His grace.

"I love those who love me, and those that seek me find me." Proverb 8:17.

That is our assurance.

Help us remember 1 John 4:8: "And so we know and rely on the Love God has for us. God is Love."

We can follow that simple roadmap to Him: Believe, Act, Love.

Realizing that God is love, one day may we all proclaim, "While I searched, Love found me."

Lord, guide us as we seek You out. Let us know that our efforts and our attempts to overcome roadblocks will be rewarded as promised. Help us continuously strive to improve our relationship with You and mirror those results in our relationships with others. We pray You help us recognize opportunities to share Your love. With this season, we pray we seek You in every person we pass, especially those that call out for help. The poet writes, "We give a dollar when we pass and hope our eyes don't meet," as if others were just stones in the road. Let us see all of Your children as worthy of our help and love. Help us, Lord, to seek You in them. And Lord, make this prayer more You and less me. Amen.

Ed Finnegan

December 11

LOST AND FOUND

Luke 19:10
For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.

Have you ever lost anything? I'm pretty sure you have. I'm always putting something in a "safe" place so that I'll be sure to find it. Then when I want that item, I walk around looking high and low. Then I give up. Eventually, the "treasure" is found.

Sometimes, we really do lose a treasure. When our children, Laura and Brian, were small, they got lost near their grandparents' mountain home. As night approached, we were near panic. Then the Pickens County Rescue Unit appeared at the driveway with good news: they had been found! They had wandered quite some distance to a highway and were found by a couple from East Cobb on a leisurely mountain drive. Laura and Brian would not get in the car with them, so the lady got out and stayed with them while her husband went for help. He came upon two men who were out looking for the lost children. Upon learning that the men knew their grandfather, they happily jumped into the truck with them. The lost were brought home.

In Luke 15, Jesus tells three parables about things that were lost: a sheep, a coin, and a son. These items had different values, but all were important to the owner. We can close our eyes and visualize the scenes. We see Jesus carrying the lost sheep across his shoulders. The lady is so happy when she finds the coin she throws a celebration party for her friends. The father of the lost son, oh my, that pain strikes us hard. The joy of reunion versus the tantrum of the older "good" brother.

What do we do when we seek Jesus? Wise Men came from afar to find Jesus. They followed the star, they asked questions, they brought gifts, they showed discernment when given bad advice by Herod. These actions model how we can seek Jesus. But the most amazing thing is that, while we seek Him, He has been seeking us. He is watching over us and taking care of us all the time, just as He was watching over my children all those years ago.

Dear Jesus, thank You for coming into this world to seek and to save the lost. Thank You for watching over us even now. May our lives reflect Your love to others.Amen.

Lucy Cooley

December 12

O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL: FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

Luke 1:50
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

I turned 50 this year! I put off adulting as long as I could, but I am deeply grateful to have made it here. Every lovely gray hair, wrinkle, ache, and stiff joint has a story. And most of mine are happy ones with laughter, children, music, beloved dogs, people I have loved, and meaningful work.

The part of growing older I would gladly have postponed is losing a parent. My mother died suddenly last fall, and that grief has felt like the final step into adulthood. Yet before she died, I had already been given what Paul called the peace that passes understanding. I deeply believe that we will be together again with all the saints, restored, forgiven, perfected, and cherished.

I do not need to understand how. The perfect love of God is what makes sense to me. I am profoundly grateful for the faith my parents taught me, not only in words but in how they lived: through generosity and forgiveness; patience and a willingness to confront injustice; heartbreak and perseverance; and the steady spiritual work of prayer, study, giving, and service. Churches have formed me that way, too, and FPC continues to do so.

At 50, I have noticed that some of the people I have always considered "the grownups", the saints and heroes of this church, are beginning to pass their responsibilities to me. I receive them gratefully, praying FPC will remain a dynamic and faithful place that nurtures spiritual growth and a place that keeps learning how to love people we do not like, agree with, or understand.

I am extremely grateful to have reached 50, and even more grateful to those who showed me what lived faith looks like. I look forward to turning 100 still singing with this congregation!

Dear Lord, following Christ shows us we were not designed to manage life alone. We need You, and we need one another's differences and strengths. Even our weaknesses remind us that none of us is sufficient alone, and our dependence on You and on one another does not diminish our worth; it is an intentional part of how we were made. Let Advent remind us how often faith is handed from one generation to another through those willing to carry it forward. Amen.

Colleen Crotty

December 13 – Light the Pink candle of Joy.

FINDING JOY

Nehemiah 8:10

Nehemiah said "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

One of the advent candles on the advent wreath represents joy. The Bible teaches us joy is a gift from God, and it is something to be celebrated and shared with others. We all probably remember joy is one of the fruit of the Spirit. We learn from scripture the source of all joy is Jesus. In trying to live a life for Christ, I want to be a source of joy for others.

We live in a world that bombards us with the news of chaos, war, conflict and strife and we might easily find it difficult to look for the joy that is also available to us. Let us remember to spread joy through our smiles, our hugs, our kindness and our acceptance of each other and by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus.

Dear Lord, bless us to remember that we were all created and wonderfully made by You. Help us to be reminded that "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever." We are comforted by the reminder that You are good, Your mercy is everlasting and Your truth endureth for all generations. Amen.

Jean Burnett

December 14

THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Isaiah 55:12

For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Around Thanksgiving, we start to think about Christmas trees. Whether or not we believe the old story that the Druids brought trees into their homes because they worshiped trees, we do know that Martin Luther and others Christianized the trees by adding candles. We cringe at the thought of having lighted candles on a tree, but the practice continued for many years.

Some of us will recall how years ago getting out the Christmas lights was a time of anxiety. We would untangle our lights and plug in one string. If the string lit, we would shout "Yes!" but, if it did not light, we would have to unscrew each bulb until we found the one that was faulty. That was because the lights were wired in a single series. Imagine how excited we were when the string finally lit up. And imagine how thrilled we were when lights were wired separately and getting them ready to hang on the tree was no longer a cause for anxiety. Yes, we thrill as we bring light into our winter homes!

Christmas trees have become things of beauty, but none thrills me as much as the ones my dad and I found in the little woods behind our house. By today's standards they were not at all attractive. Their shapes were irregular, but once the lights were on, the magic came.

Christmas is celebrated at the time of the Winter Solstice—when the days are short and the nights are long. We do many things to dispel the darkness. We light fires. We make cookies. We sing carols, even if some of us sing off key. We wrap gifts for family, friends, and people we do not know. We send cards. We invite friends over. We light candles.

We do all these things because we are waiting. We are waiting for the Light of God to illuminate the darkness. We are waiting to be able to say with Isaiah: "Arise, shine for thy light is come."

As we wait for the Light to come, help us to spread light to those we meet. Help us to be a blessing and not be harried by the tasks of the season. Let us offer smiles rather than frowns to those we meet while going about doing all the "necessary" preparations for Christmas! May we find ways to spread the Peace of Christ! In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dixie Bowden

December 15

OUR GIFTS

1 Peter 4: 7-11

The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

"The end of all things is near." Looking around, it is easy to feel that way. The world continues to look more and more fractured; there are riots in France and much of Europe. The United States feels more divided with each passing day.

But Peter wasn't writing in despair. He wanted to remind everyone that Christ is coming, and he wanted to answer the question: How do we live while we wait for his return?

Most division begins with the same internal question: What do I deserve, and how can I get it? However, the question is wrong, and Peter tells us a better question: What have I been given, and how can I give it? Everyone has received something. Maybe a skill, our time, our resources, or the capacity to love. All of this was meant to be shared and not to be kept selfishly.

Advent gives us a chance to practice the use of our gifts. When family gathers around our table this season, we can choose not to sow division or complain but instead offer hospitality "without grumbling." We should delight that people who love us have made time for us. When the inevitable comment comes that would normally start an argument, we can offer grace and let love cover it.

Ultimately, we have received gifts we did not earn, including Christ who is coming again. While we wait, we are all called to share the gifts we have and not sow discord. When we are selfish, division will follow. When we give, there will be peace and prosperity for all. When we love, we may find that old divisions we thought were permanent fade.

Lord, as we wait for your coming, help us wait well. Help us see the gifts we have been given, and open our hands to give them away. Help us love each other and welcome each other into our homes and hearts. Help us overlook offenses as ours have been overlooked. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Keenan Rogers

December 16

SEEKING AN ANCHOR

Jeremiah 29:13
You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.

As I pondered our Advent theme for this season, I came across the poem "A Noiseless Patient Spider" by the poet Walt Whitman (1819-1892). The poem is an extended metaphor comparing the spider's instincts to the human soul's search for a spiritual anchor. In the first stanza, Whitman tells how he observed the spider's actions.

"A Noiseless Patient Spider"
by Walt Whitman

I'd mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated,
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launched forth filament, filament, filament out of itself,
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them

Instinctually, the spider is in search of a place to build its web, and it sends out its filament to find a place to anchor its web. The web will be the spider's sustenance as it will trap the food for the spider.

In the second stanza, Whitman compares his spiritual journey to the spider's web-building:

And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

I believe that we have an instinct to seek a power within and around us that will provide spiritual nourishment as we carry out our mission on Earth. As Christians, we seek that nourishment in God and the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit guides us as we build the "web" of support that is necessary for the living of these days.

Be a spider. Peace be to all this advent season.

Lord, we week to know You and to follow you. Guide us as we send forth our filaments of spiritual searching as we anchor in Your Almighty Power. Amen.

Nan Waters

December 17

JESUS, DAVID AND US

Matthew 1:18-25

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph, her husband, was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

One of the things I had to do for myself as a young pastor was figure out how Jesus could be the "son of David" and fulfill the promise to David that his "son" would sit on Israel's throne forever if Jesus was humanly born to Mary and not at all the flesh and blood son of Joseph?

I studied Matthew's opening genealogy (Mt. 1:1-17) and it said plainly that David's line ran straight to "Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Messiah." (v.17) Doesn't that disqualify Jesus, if he's not the flesh and blood "seed of Jospeh"? Well, it turns out the succeeding story of Joseph and the Angel speaking to him in a dream explains everything. (vv.18-25)

When the Angel tells him not to fear to take Jesus as his son, this encourages Joseph to adopt Jesus and make him his legal son. Or as we would say, "to give him his own name." That's what Joseph does. He adopts Jesus and makes him, Mary's son, the true and legal son of his own in the Davidic line and heritage. And that adoption is not a second class kind of thing. It's the real thing, in every way true, legal and legitimately binding.

But here's something else, even more important to me. You and I can consider ourselves to be the true and legitimate sons and daughters of God in the same way. Your baptism and my baptism are the sign and promise of God that we are "adopted" into the family of God.

We are children of God, not by birth or by the flesh or by natural inheritance. In all those ways, we are sinners and outcasts to God. But through our faith in Christ, God adopts us as the true and legitimate brothers and sisters of His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus was adopted as Joseph's son and is thereby and truly a "Son of David." You and I are adopted as "Sons and Daughters of God" through Jesus Christ and so we are! Rejoice!

Living God, we thank You that the wonder and reality of Your eternal adoption is ours in Christ and grafts us into Your true and ever-living family. Thank You for the love that came down at Christmas. Alleluia! Amen.

Mark Durrett

December 18

Hope Has a Name! Let Us Sing to Him!

John 8:12
Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the World.Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Written and composed by John Henry Hopkins in 1857, "We Three Kings of Orient Are" was originally part of a Christmas pageant. This beautiful musical blessing also became the first notable Christmas carol to originate from the United States, becoming popular internationally.

What distinct message is found in the lyrics? HOPE. We have HOPE. His name is Jesus, and His birth in the manger that holy night was the greatest gift we could ever receive!

"We Three Kings of Orient Are"
by Joseph Henry Hopkins, Jr.

We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain
Following yonder star

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain
Gold I bring to crown Him again
King forever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign

Frankincense to offer have I
Incense owns a Deity nigh
Prayer and praising, all men raising
Worship Him, God most high

Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume
Breathes of life of gathering gloom
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb

Glorious now behold Him arise
King and God and Sacrifice
Alleluia, Alleluia
Earth to heav'n replies

O Star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to Thy perfect light

Heavenly Father, May the songs of our hearts sing melodies of hope, peace, joy and love as we celebrate this Christmas Advent Season! Thank You for sending Jesus, who is the Light of the World, to lead, guide and shine so beautifully bright FOREVER! For In Him Alone, our HOPE is found! Amen!

Karen Raymer

December 19

WHAT WILL WE SEEK THIS ADVENT?

Proverbs 1:7
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

In August, the Thursday Bible Study was looking at the life and leadership of Solomon. He is certainly a great historical figure, embodying the concept of wisdom. Yet Solomon eventually yielded to the temptations of this world. Solomon's wisdom yielded to the ways of this world as well.

In this world, we should distinguish the wise from the clever. I propose that the clever use their own faculties and the skills of the world to get ahead in this life. They may succeed in business or politics or money-making, so that they are recognized as successful people during this life. They know how to take care of themselves today. But do they have the wisdom to live a good life and prepare for God's Kingdom? As we think about the difference between a successful life in the world and living a good life, which one brings us peace at the end of our life? Which one brings us joy, amid hardships?

At Advent, we naturally consider the wisdom of the Wise Men. They followed the star to find the new king of the Jews: the baby Jesus. God demonstrates the ultimate love of sending a Son to live with us personally. Wisdom comes as a most humble being, a baby. This irony of Christmas is the wisdom of God.

Jesus astounded others with His wisdom. "He came to his hometown and began to teach the people in their synagogue, so that they were astounded and said, 'Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power?'" Matthew 13:54. Jesus was able to reduce the teachings from God to two primary directions: Love God and love people. It seems that God's desire is that we love.

Do we see the wisdom of loving? Loving God and others is the manifestation of God's wisdom for the world. Blessed with God's Word to find the heart and mind of God, wisdom allows us to see God in Earth's majesties as well as in the humblest actions of loving and serving others.

Proverbs 1:7 helps us contrast the wisdom of God and the foolishness of this world. God's wisdom leads to joy and peace. Are we foolish enough to ignore God's instruction? Surely, the more we know God's Word—through sermons, biblical study, reading, and prayer—the more we will understand God's wisdom. What will we seek this Advent? Are we foolish? Or will we seek God's wisdom?

Lord, let us recognize and follow Your wisdom, embodied in Jesus. We know You will bless us in more ways than we can imagine, both today and in the future.

Rev. Dr. Paul Sherwood

December 20 – Light the Candle of Peace

OUR PRINCE OF PEACE, LET US PRAISE HIS HOLY NAME!
Matthew 5:9
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

A resounding Christmas favorite, "O Holy Night", shares an intriguing, unique history that reminds us that our Lord is always at work in the details! It originated in France in 1847 as a poem by Placide Cappeau. The melody was composed for the poem by Adolphe Adam. This poem was written to commemorate the restoration of stained glass in a church, and was first shared at a Christmas midnight mass. The words that are presently sung were translated to English by American John Sullivan Dwight.

What distinct message is found in the lyrics? PEACE. "Truly He taught us to love one another; His law is love, and His gospel is PEACE." These words, found in stanza 3, lead us right to Calvary, reminding us of His unfathomable love found on the Cross. The unfailing love of our Prince of Peace shines peace that only He gives; peace that the world can never understand. Peace in Him compels us to live out His Love with joy this side of Heaven. Together, let's sing "sweet hymns of joy, in grateful chorus raise we, let all within us praise His Holy Name!" (stanza 3) throughout this glorious Advent Season and every day!

O Holy Night!
The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of our dear Saviours birth;
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn;

Fall on your knees,
Oh, hear the angels voices!
O night divine, O night when Christ was born!
O night, O holy night,
O night divine!

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming,
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand;
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,
Here came the wise men from Orient land.

The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger,
In all our trials born to be our Friend;
He knows our need,
To our weakness is no stranger.

Behold your King, before Him lowly bend!
Behold your King, before Him lowly bend!
Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is love and His gospel is peace;

Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother,
And in His name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
Let all within us praise His holy name;

Christ is the Lord,
Oh, praise His name forever!
His powr and glory evermore proclaim!
His powr and glory evermore proclaim!

Heavenly Father, May the songs of our hearts sing melodies of hope, peace, joy and love, as we celebrate this Advent Season! Thank You for sending Jesus, who is our steadfast Prince of Peace; He has overcome the world! May Your Peace that surpasses all understanding keep our hearts and minds on You, as we love, trust, worship and praise You, Lord, In Jesus's Name, Amen!

Karen Raymer

December 21

MAKING PEACE

Micah 4: 2-5

Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken. All the nations may walk in the name of their gods, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.

I recently saw a movie, a comedy called "Mayday." The two main characters had preconceived ideas about the other because they had not had the opportunity to truly learn about the other person's culture, traditions, or beliefs. As they got to know the other person, they became friends. It reminded me of a quote by Mark Twain,

> Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime.

When we learn about each other, really know others—their desires, their fears, their hopes, their dreams—we tend to have less animosity and more generosity. It is then that we understand and practice the grace and love that our Lord has commanded us to have toward each other. When we see with God's eyes the other person, we are able to be kind, patient, forgiving, and loving because we see God's child.

Lord, help us as we seek You. We seek to see through Your eyes each other. Help us to be the light in someone's world and cloak them with kindness and love. Amen.

Cheryl Vanture

December 22

A THRILL OF HOPE: WAITING FOR LOVE

Romans 8:25
But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Since 1992, I have spent nearly every summer at Special Camp, a weeklong camp in Alabama for adolescents and adults with intellectual disabilities. For many of our campers and volunteers, it is the best week of the year.

Caregivers have learned that campers look forward to returning to camp as soon as they get home, so December 26 has become the official earliest day to start packing for the next summer.

I have always treasured that detail. The waiting begins the day after Christmas. What my camp friends are waiting for is more than a week of activities. For one week, the rest of us are invited into their world, and we are better for it.

Differences are noticed and celebrated rather than merely tolerated. Fairness means that everyone gets what they need, not that everyone gets the same thing.

Our campers have an extraordinary way of knowing one another and us, and of recognizing what is true and what is not. And, when it is over 100 degrees in an Alabama summer and dinner waits at the lake at the end of a long hike, everyone learns quickly that we need one another.

There is humility in serving and learning from a community that has known cruelty and exclusion, especially when I recognize how often I have accepted those conditions rather than done enough to change them. Camp continues to teach me that love is not sentiment. It is attention, honesty, accommodation, dependence, delight in one another, and the willingness to give someone what they need.

Advent is itself a season of waiting. Hope is easier to understand when we have already known the thing we are waiting for. Our campers look forward to July with such joy because they already know they will find challenge, laughter, belonging, and the deep assurance that they are cherished there.
Advent asks us to wait from memory, too.

Dear Lord, may we wait for Christ not as strangers wondering whether Your love will come, but as people who remember that it already has, and who are still learning what it asks of us. Amen.

Colleen Crotty

December 23

IN THE SILENCE, A GODLY ENCOUNTER

1 Kings 19:12
But the Lord was not in the fire…

The prophet Elijah, overwhelmed and despairing, fled into the wilderness. He traveled all the way to Mount Horeb, the legendary mountain where the Israelites received the Ten Commandments. At this mountain, Elijah hoped he would also encounter God. As he waited for God's presence, Elijah endured a great wind, a terrible earthquake, and a raging fire. But God was not in these displays of raw power. When all was calm, Elijah stepped out from his hiding place, and only then did the Lord appear.

The Advent season brings with it a whirlwind of activity. There are gifts to buy, decorations to hang, foods to bake, socials to attend. How easy it is to get caught up in the feverish rush of preparations! How tempting it is to confuse busy-ness with faithfulness.

Enduring Advent can feel like enduring a raging storm. If that's where you are this season take heart, for God is not in the whirlwind.

Our God arrives in the dead of night. His attendants are livestock; his quarters are a manger. He speaks to us—not in a booming voice that splits the mountain—but in the still, small cry of an infant child.

Loving God, in this season filled with fanfare, draw our gaze to the quiet of the manger. For it is there that we encounter the Savior of the World. Amen.

Rev. Cassie Waits

December 24

WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM

Matthew 2:1-2
After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

"Wise men still seek him." Can you name the verse of the Bible from which this is quoted? Give up? The familiar verses from Matthew 2 which are addressed every Christmas season—the story of the Wise Men who made their trek by following that unique star to find and worship that one who they assumed was born King. Yet this phrase—wise men still seek him—has become the title of more than one song. It has become the theme of many a Christmas pageant. Let's look at each of the five words.

Wise. Now, this is a rather common biblical word. Consider the wisdom of Solomon. Consider that there is a specific biblical genre referred to as "wisdom literature". The book of Proverbs makes a habit of comparing the wise and the foolish. You get the impression that wisdom is something to be sought after, to be practiced.

Men. The Magi of the Matthew passage were surely all men. But for us the "men" of this statement does not apply to males alone. All "people" still seek Him. The Magi sought a baby. A baby? But the motivation was not driven by who that child was but who that child would become, and more importantly for whom He came: for all persons.

Still. Still: What? Still crazy after all these years? It's still going on. The situation has not changed. Wise people still…The smart money is in still seeking. Have you ever heard the bluegrass tune "Let the Church Roll On" by Flatt and Scruggs? After all these years, the church of Jesus Christ is still here. That should be no surprise. God wills it. We act it out. We still seek.

Seek. "Jesus came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10) Jesus is the original seeker. Jesus was the one out on the road seeking those whom he could serve and save. But seeking is really a two way street. Our seeking is real, in response to Jesus initiating the seeking process. Our seeking is motivated by the Holy Spirit, who was, I believe, also the motivator of the Magi's seeking journey.

Him. Who? Jesus, of course. We are the Church of Jesus Christ. Let us never forget that. At some point in each of our lives as Christians, we individually discover the love of Christ and commit ourselves to Him. That is just the beginning of our seeking. It is a lifelong search: Seeking Jesus, day by day.

Lord Jesus, may You give us the wisdom to continually seek after You, and especially during this holy season of Advent. Amen.

Rev. Pem Cooley

December 25 - Light the Christ Candle

WE ARE TRAVELERS ON THIS JOURNEY CALLED LIFE

Matthew 2:10-11
When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the young child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down, and worshipped him. They opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

"Wise Men Still Seek Him"
by Lynn Cooper

We are all just travelers on this journey called life;
Some walk in darkness, while others follow a light.
We carry our treasures so close to our heart;
Some we let go of while others never part.
And somewhere on this journey we encounter a King
That will change us forever, to Him our treasures bring.

And wisemen still seek Him, they follow a star
That leads them to Jesus as travelers a far.
Men of great nations and the poor of the earth
All join together to proclaim Christ's birth.

Sometimes we find ourselves with no room at the inn
Filled with hopes and dreams, none of them with Him.
Walk along a winding road, and can't find our way;
Look to the Heavens a star as bright as day.
And somehow He finds Himself in the hardest of hearts,
Whispers I love you, never more to part.

And wisemen still seek Him, they follow a star
That leads them to Jesus as travelers a far.
Men of great nations and the poor of the earth
All join together to proclaim Christ's birth.

Star of Bethlehem shine tonight
And lead us and guide us to His perfect light.
Oh come Lord Jesus, we ask Thee to stay
And renew our spirit on this Christmas day.

We are all just travelers on this journey called life;
Been through the darkness, and now we see the light.
We carry a treasure more precious than gold,
A gift of redemption, His grace we now hold.
And someday we'll find ourselves at the foot of the King
With all of God's angels, His praises we'll sing.

And wisemen still seek Him, they follow a star
That leads them to Jesus as travelers a far.
Men of great nations and the poor of the earth
All join together to proclaim Christ's birth.

May we present our gifts to You and worship You well after Advent is over. Amen.

Jane Manning

LIVE NATIVITY
Sunday, December 6 | 4-5:30pm
Pet animals, feed the camel, and enjoy a cup of hot chocolate & Christmas treat! FPC Youth will gather for a fun activity afterwards!
**cancelations due to weather will be posted at fpcmarietta.org/events*

CELTIC CHRISTMAS
Tuesday, December 8 | 7pm | The First United Methodist Church, Marietta
World acclaimed Irish Tenor, Emmet Cahill, hails from Mullingar, Ireland, and is the lead singer with PBS phenomenon Celtic Thunder. He will be accompanied by Pianist Seamus Brett with featured performances by the Chancel Choirs of First United Methodist Church of Marietta and First Presbyterian Marietta and the fabulous Glatter-Götz Pipe Organ. This Christmas concert will include stunning renditions of your favorite Christmas carols and sing-a-longs for the entire audience.

Online pricing is $48 per person. Contact lynnemclaughlin@mariettafumc.org. Children 12 and under are free but do require a ticket.

Nursery Staff will provide childcare for children ages 8 weeks to PreK. Please pre-register your child(ren) mariettafumc.org/events by November 28.

NATIVITY WALK
Sunday, December 13 | 9am-2pm | Gober-Corley Room
Come enjoy the Nativity Walk, sponsored by the Music and Fine Arts Committee, to reflect on the birth of Jesus.

If you have a meaningful Nativity that you would like to share with our church friends, please consider displaying it for all to experience. Drop off will be on Thursday, December 10 and Friday, December 11 from 9am to 5pm at the front desk. Please make sure to include your name and contact information with the Nativity. The Nativity may be picked up on Sunday after the walk from 3-5pm.

Please contact Jane Pratt at jane.pratt@yahoo.com or 404-580-7013 for any information needed.

THE STORY OF CHRISTMAS
Sundays, December 13 & 20 | 9:45am | Sanctuary
Every year, we revisit the story of Jesus' birth and God's inbreaking into the world. We remember the story. We re-enact the story. How do we tell the story? Join us as we explore what it means to tell the story of Jesus with guest speaker, Dr. Charles Wiley of Day 1.

LESSONS & CAROLS
Sunday, December 13 | 8:30am & 11:00am
Join the Chancel Choir, Church Street 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.

CHRISTMAS EVE
Thursday, December 24
12pm Sanctuary - Communion

3pm Great Hall - Family Service
Children and Youth ages PreK 3-Grade 12 take part in the 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 Service
A nursery is available for this service only.

ANGEL TREE
Now through December 6
Choose a gift off the tree in the Gathering Space to purchase for a child in need.

POINSETTIAS
through December 16
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 JOY OFFERING
November 29 - December 20
This PC(USA) offering supports church workers in need and funds leadership development and education at Presbyterian-related schools serving communities of color. Give online at pcusa.org/special-offerings/christmas-joy-offering or use the envelopes provided in the Gathering Space.



FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
MARIETTA

These Advent Reflections are sponsored by
FPC's Music & Arts Committee