

# ADVENT 2020



**First Presbyterian Church  
New Orleans, LA  
Advent Devotional Book**



This booklet is dedicated to the memory of a dear friend and Elder of First Presbyterian, who first proposed the project of writing our own Advent Devotional Booklet several years ago. Unfortunately, this did not come to fruition, but good ideas never die – they just wait for the right time.

During the Pandemic, the Worship Committee decided it was the “right” time to bring together personal thoughts from our own church members and friends, to be read during Advent of 2020. As you will see, many people shared their thoughts and artwork, to make this booklet a reality. We are grateful for each writing and drawing that made this project possible.

So, with heartfelt gratitude for her wonderful idea and for the inspiration of her life in our midst, we dedicate this booklet to the memory of our beloved  
Mina Lea Crais.

The Worship Committee:

Rev. Kathleen Crighton

Elder Bruce Robertson

May and Larry Ball

For  
Unto  
us a  
**CHILD**  
is born  
Unto us a Son  
is given, and the  
Government shall be  
Upon His shoulders,  
and His Name shall be called,  
Wonderful, Counselor,  
Mighty God, Everlasting Father,  
Prince of Peace!

Isaiah 9:6

## An Introduction to Advent

Advent is a church season that includes the first four Sundays before Christmas. It marks the beginning of the ecclesiastical year, and starts on the Sunday nearest the 30th of November.

Church liturgy speaks of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem as the first event in Advent, and His “return in glory” on the Day of Judgement as the second Advent of Jesus (St. Matthew 2:24).

Many Christians observe Advent as a solemn season of preparation for Christmas when expressions of the Advent Liturgy emphasize repentance mingled with hope and joy.

Purple vestments, symbolizing penance can be worn during Advent.

With love and joy,  
Dr. William Mackintosh



Artist: David Rabinowitz



## **Sunday, November 29, 2020. First Sunday of Advent**

Scripture: Mark 13:24-27

*“Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.” Mark 13:27*

Advent is the season leading up to Christmas and the birth of Christ. What a complicated season! In our weekly Scripture readings in church, it begins with the disciples asking Jesus when will the world end, and how will they know it's coming? Advent ends in a stable in Bethlehem, with angels singing and shepherds adoring the newborn Messiah. Go figure.

In our lives outside the church, the season begins with Black Friday sales which supposedly begin the day after Thanksgiving but really start sometime around Halloween. Or earlier. It ends with After Christmas sales, which start, online at least, on Christmas Day (maybe). In the world outside the church, the season is all about selling stuff. It's the time when retailers make their most money for the year. Giving gifts in the name of Christ kind of gets lost in the mix.

As a season, Advent seems to bring up more memories than any other time of the year. Times spent with family and friends in years past can seem as real as today. Traditions of the season help to nurture memories. They can be traditions shared by many: the lighting of a community tree, an annual Christmas concert, caroling in the neighborhood, a Hanging of the Greens celebration at church. Or they can be traditions of a family or an individual: that particular Christmas ornament from your childhood, a particular ritual of your family (baking cookies?), sending and receiving Christmas cards, an outreach you do every year (serving a Christmas meal to the homeless?).

Sometimes memories are comforting; sometimes they can be painful. One person can have moments of joy and moments of despair during this season, sometimes in the same day. Sometimes you'll hear of a “Blue Christmas” service during the holidays for those who find the memories overwhelming. In it, they can take comfort just in knowing their feelings of sadness are shared by others. It might not change things, but at least they know they're not alone.

For others, the season is so busy that they feel they don't have time to appreciate it. For students, there are projects due and tests to study for. The ones who teach have to grade all those papers and tests. At work, there are end-of-the-year deadlines to make. At church, oh, my, so many things to prepare! In the mad dash to Christmas Day, there's no time for decorating the house or putting up a tree or sending cards. For that very reason, some groups will postpone their “holiday party” until some time in January.

Meanwhile, as the saying goes, Jesus is still the reason for the season – at least for those who call him Lord and Savior. If you are reading this Advent book of devotions, perhaps you are one of them. Let's head down this Advent road with him.

*Lord God, in this complicated season called Advent, help us to keep you always at the forefront of our hearts and minds. Amen.*

Rev. Kathleen Crighton

**Monday, November 30, 2020**

Waiting...

Still waiting...

\*insert grumbling noises\*

***“Wait for the Lord;  
Be strong and let your heart take courage;  
Yes, wait for the Lord.” Psalm 27:14 (NASB)***

Who likes waiting? Certainly not me. Whether it's a small child waiting for their chance to get to play with a specific toy, or adults sitting in traffic waiting for the cars to inch along, or maybe you're waiting for news from the doctor, or waiting to figure out your life, none of us like waiting.

I once asked some kids during the children's time at church how many of them liked waiting and with big eyes they all shook their heads no. "It's no fun" and "It's really hard" they responded. Yet one little hand popped up and said "but sometimes I like waiting with Nana because we look at the birds and the clouds and play games."

From the one little three letter conjunction 'but' and the loving heart of a five year old, comes the lesson of which I need to be constantly reminded. Perspective. It's about having the eyes to see God in those that surround us in our frustration, pain, or struggles.

Whether you're waiting for big life changing things or in the small moments of everyday life, may you remember you are not alone. May we remember to wait for God and wait with God, turning our focus from the frustration of the wait to the small moments of peace and joy in the waiting.

Will you pray with me?

Sovereign God,  
The night feels long and the wait for dawn seems unending.  
But as we wait, we trust in your unfailing love.  
Your light is our hope in the darkness.  
Stretch out your hand, draw us close.  
Help us to see you all around us.  
In your holy name we pray, Amen.

Katie Brendler



**Tuesday, December 1, 2020**

*“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” John 15:12*

We live in a time of uncertainty. Health issues consume us. Our country’s leaders, instead of seeking to unite us, are bitterly drawn into partisan self-interests and political backbiting. The one-for-all-and-all-for-one ideal that used to dominate our spirit in decades past has all but disappeared today.

As we enter this Advent season let us be reminded of the words of our Savior given to us over 2000 years ago. In John 15:12 Christ commands us to love each other as he loves us. May we realize that truly all the answers to life’s problems begin with this simple request. Love will always triumph over hate....

*God of Love, let my life be a reflection of your simple request – to Love....Amen.*

Henry Kleinfeldt



Artist: David Rabinowitz

**Wednesday, December 2, 2020**

*"...how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language...God's deeds of power."  
Acts 2:8 & 11*

To Christians around the world, Christmas is the most magical, joyous season of the year. On a starlit night in a crude manger in Bethlehem, a King was born, yet a tiny Babe was He, the Son of God.

And life holds no sweeter thing than to teach a little child the tale most loved of all on earth—the story of a Babe whose humble birth became the loveliest of truths we know.

On Christmas Day in English speaking countries we greet one another by saying Merry Christmas. In some familiar countries around the world, the people there say Merry Christmas as follows:

The Netherlands: Zalig Keerstfeest

France: Joyeux Noel

Germany: Froliche Weihnachten

Italy: Buon Natale

Spain: Feliz Navidad

Christmas Traditions around the World

The DUTCH people in the NETHERLANDS celebrate Sinterklaas (St. Nicholas) Eve on December 5. This is an eve when Sinterklaas visits the homes of all children and leaves them some gifts and treats to enjoy. It is much like our familiar Santa Claus.

In FRANCE the main Christmas meal, called Re'veillon, is eaten on Christmas Eve very early on Christmas morning after families have returned from the midnight church service. Dishes might include roast turkey with chestnuts or roast goose, oysters, foie gras, lobster, venison and cheeses.

In GERMANY families typically decorate an Advent wreath with four red candles. On every Advent Sunday, one more candle is lit until all candles are alight to announce the birth of Christ.

To celebrate Jesus's birth, ITALIANS kiss the hand or foot of a statue of baby Jesus as they exit the church at Christmas Day Mass. After a light dinner on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day is all about feasting.

Most people in SPAIN go to Midnight Mass or The Mass of the Rooster. It is called this because a rooster is supposed to have crowed the night that Jesus was born. Most families eat their main Christmas meal on Christmas Eve before the church service.

*God of us all, thank you that even when we don't always understand each others words or traditions, we can still be one as we rejoice in the blessed event of Jesus birth. Amen.*

Mary Frances Brashears

**Thursday, December 3, 2020**

*"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" 2 Corinthians 9:14*

Many years ago a package appeared under our family Christmas tree for me. It looked just like an umbrella, but I was sure that my mother wouldn't wrap anything that was to be a surprise, to look so obvious.

As Christmas approached, I would look at that gift and try to imagine what it could possibly be besides an umbrella, but was stumped. I would mention it in front of my parents, and my mother would just smile.

On Christmas, when the gifts were opened, of course the very first one I tore into was the "umbrella" package, that just couldn't be an umbrella. Guess what – it WAS an umbrella! It was a very nice umbrella, and something that I needed, and actually, I was delighted and we had a good laugh about my curiosity.

As we travel through Advent, just like my umbrella, we know what the result will be. On December 25th, we will greet the day celebrating the event that, from the first day of Advent, we expect to happen. We may know the end of the story, but this year, let us look beyond the wrappings and decorations, and instead prepare our hearts and lives so that on Christmas morning, we can welcome with renewed surprise and joy, the unbelievable gift of the birth of the savior of the world.

*O God, help us never to stop being amazed by the gift of Jesus. Amen.*

May Ball



**Friday, December 4, 2020**

*So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. James 4:17*

*Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. Isaiah 1:17*

*Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy. Proverbs 31:8-9*

Most of us aren't spearheading a wildly successful non-profit benefiting 1000's of people. The opportunity to serve God usually presents itself as a request to perform a humble task to the benefit of someone else, at a time that is inconvenient. My early fundamentalist religious training taught that good works performed without "a happy heart" were not "to the Glory of God". When I had few responsibilities and still possessed the energy and enthusiasm of youth, it was not difficult to feel cheerful while helping others.

In adult life, however, I am overwhelmed with anxiety at the endless "to do" list that is my life. New additions are not welcome. My grudging performance of tasks was worsened by guilt at my lack of a willing spirit. However, my outlook changed based on a conversation with a fellow Presbyterian who astutely pointed out that it does not matter why we do the right thing, so long as we do it. Thinking it over, is not the New Testament replete with accounts of an exhausted Jesus, unenthusiastic regarding the tasks thrust upon him? Nevertheless, Jesus soldiered on and that is what made all the difference.

Following is my favorite (though secular) poem on this subject.

TO BE OF USE

BY MARGE PIERCY

The people I love the best  
jump into work head first  
without dallying in the shallows  
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.  
They seem to become natives of that element,  
the black sleek heads of seals  
bouncing like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,  
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,  
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,  
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge  
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest

and work in a row and pass the bags along,  
who are not parlor generals and field deserters  
but move in a common rhythm  
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.  
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.  
But the thing worth doing well done  
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.  
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,  
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums  
but you know they were made to be used.  
The pitcher cries for water to carry  
and a person for work that is real.

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Source: *Circles on the Water: Selected Poems of Marge Piercy* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1982)

*Almighty God, during this Advent season, we await the arrival of your Son, who came to  
show us work, and life, that is real. Help us respond to his leading. Amen.*

Sherri Hutton



Artist: Laura Fisher

**Saturday, December 5, 2020**

An Antidote for Stressful Times

*“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life...” Luke 12:22*

Today we are bombarded with issues-stressful issues-that were unknown to previous generations. We are reminded daily, if not hourly, of serious health concerns dominating the world, most notably Covid-19. Additionally, hostilities continue worldwide, including riots in our own country.

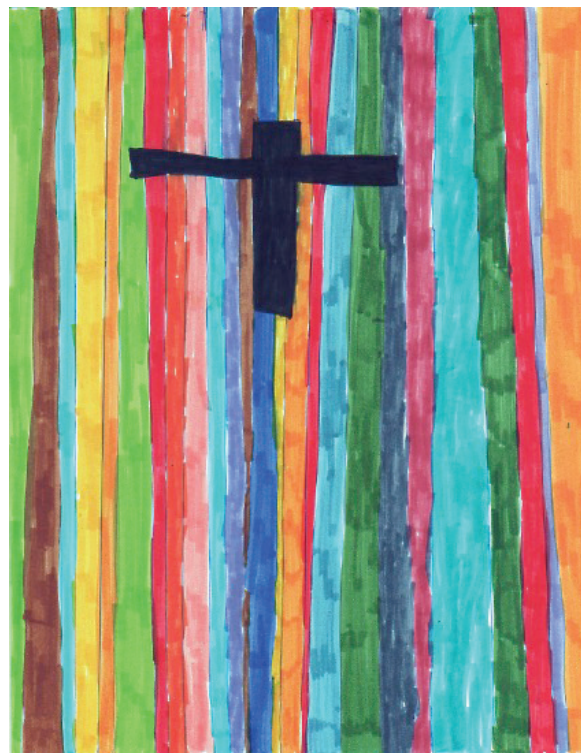
In parts of our own country, including our own state, citizens are overwhelmed with the aftermath of weather disasters such as hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, fires, etc. Additionally, we are reminded of the lasting effects of global warming on our world.

How is one to cope??

As we enter this new season of Advent let us be strengthened, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, by the words of Jesus. Our Savior reminds us in Luke 12: 22-28 to not worry about everyday life. God will most surely care for us. He is with us every step of the way, through good times and bad. Hold on to your faith!

*Compassionate God, help us to depend on your everlasting care for us. Amen.*

Diane Kleinfeldt



Artists: Charlie and Carrie Fisher

## Sunday, December 6, 2020. Second Sunday of Advent

*“they saw the child with Mary his mother; then opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts..”*

Matthew 2:10-11

As a boy, I was only vaguely aware of the split personality of Christmas. Yes, I knew there was the “Santa Claus thing” and the “Jesus thing”, but somehow they blended together into one experience of the Christmas season. Christmas was a gumbo of sensations, traditions and experiences that were inseparable in my mind.

The center of our decorations, as in most families, was the tree. The local college allowed people to venture out to the mountains near town and cut their own tree, which we always did. The tree was set up in our bay window that opened out at the front of our Victorian-age house. There were always the same decorations dug out of their boxes. There was a variety of them, and over the years they became like old Christmas friends. I still have a couple of those. There were Santa Claus decorations and Angel decorations next to each other (there’s that blending of meanings). There were the lights (I was particularly fond of the bubble ones), and of course the final touch of tinsel.

We knew not to expect dozens of presents. My parents, even with both incomes, struggled to make ends meet. We usually got one nice gift (one year I got a bicycle), and several smaller, inexpensive items. But we didn’t care. It was the mystery and surprise that excited us on Christmas morning.

But along with the presents, arranged around the tree, was the crèche scene. It wasn’t separated from the rest of the Christmas decorations. It WAS one of the decorations! Over the years, my mother began to collect nativity sets from all over. So the Jesus Christmas was never really separated, in my young mind, from the Santa Claus Christmas.

At school during the season, we would regularly gather on the steps leading up to the second floor and sing Christmas carols. These were mainly the traditional religious carols, but also included a few more secular Christmas songs. At home, we would also listen to Christmas songs on our record player. It all was part of the Christmas experience.

As I got older, the gifting part of Christmas became less and less important for me. And when I began to become active in the church, as a teenager and young adult, the “Jesus thing” became more clearly distinguishable from the commercial side of Xmas.

And of course when I had kids of my own, the gift-giving part of the season returned in another form, ceasing to be so much about gift receiving, and much more about gift-giving. Gift-giving is still part of my family’s Christmas tradition, but the gifts we give one another, is overshadowed by the greatest gift ever given, the gift from God in the person of Jesus Christ.

*O God, help us open our hearts and lives to accept the gift of Christ. Amen.*

Bruce Robertson

**Monday, December 7, 2020**

*"I can do all things through him who strengthens me." Philipians 4:13*

When I think about what religion means to me, the year 2020 will forever be an important one for me. It is the year of Covid that will forever change the way I think about things. I have always thought of myself as a spiritual person, growing up in the TX Bible Belt and attending a Baptist church at least twice a month. My parents had divorced when I was only 3. I am forever grateful to my Dad for introducing me to religion. I can remember that from the age of 4, he would bring my brothers and I to church. We would get M&M's if we were quiet and payed attention to the sermon. I didn't realize at the time that he would become a pillar of strength for me throughout my entire life. His pillar was of course: God. Even though I didn't live with him permanently, He got us every other weekend, and therefore, we got religion.

When Covid hit, schools closed and our children were sent home indefinitely. This brought up many "problems" for me. I loved having them home and being able to be with them all day. I had however, developed a problem with alcohol. I secretly knew that I could not kick the habit on my own, as I had tried many times to quit. Realizing that they would very soon see that Mommy had a drinking problem, I decided to ask for help. It was the scariest thing that I had done since giving birth. With the secret out and feeling the humility of it all, I decided to enter a 30 day treatment program.

I spoke to my children and told them that mommy didn't want to drink alcohol anymore but that I would need some help in order to be successful. We tried to make it a family event and even let the boys ride with us when they dropped me off. I was somehow able not to cry when they were leaving. The minute they were out of sight, I lost it. How could I have ended up here? I'd been successful at every thing I ever tried. High paying careers, healthy and long term friendships, and love had always come so easily to me. Alcohol had proved to be the one thing that I could not conquer.

On day one of treatment, I started reading "The Big Book" of AA. The first couple of steps came fairly easily to me. I had accepted that I was powerless over alcohol and that my life had become unmanageable. I also agreed that a power greater than me could restore me to sanity. Then came step three: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him." This meant that I needed to let go of control and turn my entire life over to God. I had prayed or many things throughout my life. It had never occurred to me that I needed to pray to God and ask him to remove my obsession with alcohol. This seemed like a selfish and insignificant prayer. With some reluctancy, I began to ask God to remove my lust for alcohol. In fact, the third step prayer reads:

"Dear God, I offer myself to thee to build with me and do with me as thou wilt.  
Relieve me from the bondage of self, that I may better do thy will.  
Remove from me my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those that I would help, of thy love, thy power, and thy way of life.  
May I do Thy will always.'



I prayed this prayer every day for the rest of treatment and I still pray it every day. You see, God took the obsession with alcohol completely away. I never thought that I could stop drinking and be happy about it. I couldn't even imagine a life without drinking. Yet, today I am happier and more at peace than I have ever been. I can go anywhere in the world and be around people that drink without wanting to join them. Most people can drink like ladies and gentlemen; I just can't. I still like to party, Just without drinking alcohol .

Now, I can look my children and husband in the eye. I can be present for them for the first time in a long time. I am working hard in order to mend my broken family. I have realized that when I give control over to God, things happen the way they are supposed to. I am living with great anticipation of how God will use me to do His will-not mine. I know that with Him, all things are possible – I am living proof of that. He loves all of us enough to send his only son to die on a cross so that we can be forgiven for our sins. He will always be there for us, if we seek him. I have seen the miracle and will never forget to seek Him, again.

*“Strengthening God, help us to ALWAYS seek your will for our lives, then do it! Amen.”*

Angela Horn



Artist: Jack Horn

**Tuesday, December 8, 2020**

## Open My Eyes that I May See

*“Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things...” Psalm 119:18*

Do you feel like God is always at work in your life? Like God is always with you? Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? I don't. I feel more like it's something in the background, a truth, but not a daily feeling. They say that you will become what you focus on, and so I am becoming a personal chauffeur, referee, cook, and grouch who is overwhelmed and TOO BUSY. The Covid lull was short lived. Working full or part time with two kids, husband, and a myriad of pets.... These are blessings that people yearn for. I have created this life, but I am too busy to enjoy it.

I am writing about my “God moment” for Advent, and I'm having a hard time remembering a good one, or noteworthy one that I can share to inspire people. Here is what I've come up with: They are there if we slow down and notice, and realize that God is not Santa Claus or the Wizard of Oz. God is Love: Love from other people and animals. I have experienced these things in many ways—a much needed compliment from an unusual source, seeing a woodpecker in the back yard and sharing that delight with my child, casual encounters with neighbors that leave you walking away smiling.

These interactions don't have to come from fellow Christians. There are examples all around us—individual people doing volunteer work and hurricane relief, food bank work done during Covid, and even a volunteer volleyball coach giving up his free time.

Chance encounters that lead to something positive and unexpected—is it all a coincidence? If you chose to see it, Love is all around us. God is all around us.

I love the saying, Be the Change You Want to See in the World. How about, Be the Love you Want to See in the World?

And, timing is everything. I have to share that I had really been bogged down as the stereotypical frazzled working mom, and of course I put this assignment off until the last minute. How did I find the time? Funny coincidence? The stars have aligned for me?

A casual acquaintance posted something on Facebook about a 40 day mindful eating program, and we joined up. It came at the perfect time, and Zane and I are doing well eating healthy and doing yoga, (not without personal meltdowns and hectic moments, but we're still doing it.) Pair that with...due to Covid I have a new work-from-home assignment where I have to be online at 7am and stay very busy until at least 4pm. I'm finally on a good schedule, my body has adjusted to waking up early, thanks to my job. Everyone who has told me to wake up earlier, it will change your life! They were right!

I am living that joke, about man waiting on his roof during a flood, with water up to the rafters. He turns away several rescuers saying, "God will save me." Of course he dies and at the pearly gates he ask God, "Why didn't you save me?" God replies, "I sent you 2 boats and a helicopter!"

How many of us are living inside of this joke?

My closing prayer are the lines of a favorite hymn:

*"Open my eyes, that I may see, Glimpses of truth thou hast for me; Place in my hands the wonderful key, That shall unclasp and set me free!" Amen.*

Carrie Fisher



Artist: Laura Fisher

**Wednesday, December 9, 2020**

Scriptures: Matthew 5:13-14 and 6:22-23

*“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.” From Matthew 5:13-14*

My mother and my younger brother and I were part of a very conservative religious denomination in the 1950s that did not celebrate or acknowledge important days in the Christian calendar. There was no Advent season in the church – no praise or happiness celebrating the birth of Christ. There were no songs of Advent joy, and simply no mention, that I recall, of the Christmas season during worship.

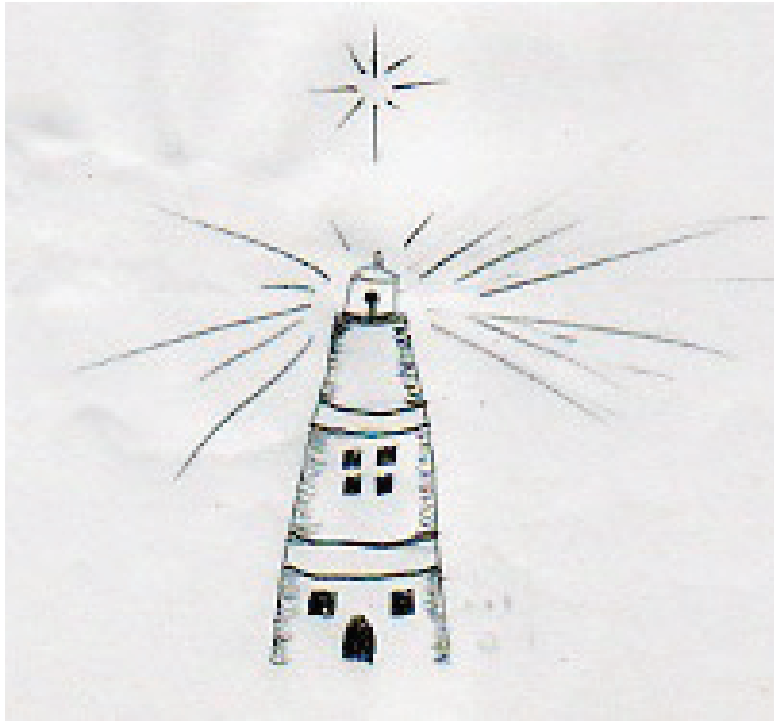
I was 8 years old when we moved from Chicago to Georgia, and the first Christmas there I saw, and questioned, why my schoolmates were so joyful and celebratory during the Advent season. Why did other churches have Christmas Eve services and Christmas carols sung? I asked my Mom, who advised me that our church did not recognize special days in the church because we “celebrated” every Sunday with communion. This bothered me because even at this young age I thought there should be special recognition of Christ’s birth, and I guess my grumpy mood convinced my Mom that a celebration of some sort, apart from the opening of gifts on Christmas morning, would be appropriate. My Mom asked us what song we would like to sing on Christmas, and my 6-year-old brother immediately responded “This Little Light of Mine” – not really Christmas but a hymn we both loved to sing.

On that first Christmas in Georgia, we started a family tradition of lighting a couple of candles and singing this hymn, a tradition that continued until I graduated high school. Now, when I hear kids singing “This Little Light” I get a warm feeling of love and satisfaction for the “old days.” I am thankful that I became a Presbyterian 50 years ago. But more importantly, I think of how much better life on this earth would be if we all realized we have this God-given light and to not hide the light under a bushel – it is the light of God that is given to us all to be happy and to treat everyone as a brother or sister, regardless of skin color or economics. Oh, if we just listened and lived according to words of this simple hymn, how much better things could be!

*Our Father, we thank you for the light of the world, Jesus. Help us to feel his light and know the impact of his life and the cross on all of us. Be with us and keep us from having to walk in darkness alone, but rather to walk in the light of gospel. We ask this prayer in Jesus’ name. Amen*

Bruce Mather

**“I am the light of the world.”**  
*John 8:12*



Artist: David Rabinowitz

**Thursday, December 10, 2020**

*“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.” Psalm 100*

Almost every Sunday morning, as the Prelude is being played, I race up the stairs that rise from the Narthex, across the rear balcony of the church and step into a small, rather ancient looking area under the tower of First Presbyterian and wait for the music to end. Then, grabbing the old, frayed rope hanging from the upper reaches of the tower, I pull and the glorious sound of the bell chimes out to New Orleans, the Broadmoor community, and the faithful who have gathered in the sanctuary, that worship is about to begin. I pull the rope three times, a peal for each – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The service to the glory of the three-in-one can start!

Do I think what I do is important? Yes! Sometimes I wonder if all the chattering Presbyterians would stop talking and know to find their pew and sit down, ready for the service to begin, if the bell didn't sound. But I also realize the ringing of the bell not only is a signal to my fellow worshipers, but is also proclaiming to the neighborhood the presence of the church in their midst. Bells do that, you know. They have rung for centuries to carry news of worship, of weddings, of funerals, of disasters. Our bell was used during the war between the states by the Union forces after the occupation of the city, to ring the nightly curfew. It survived the massive Hurricane of 1915 and was found resting on a huge pile of debris, standing upright and unharmed! It was rung 39 times, one chime for each year of his short life, to honor the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of his assassination. And, on Sunday, May 17th, I got to ring the bell telling New Orleans that First Presbyterian was BACK – when we worshiped in the sanctuary for the first time since stopping live services due to the Coronavirus Pandemic.

When I ring the bell during Advent this year, I hope that as it sends its message of music to all who can hear, that folks will stop and listen and be reminded of the season. Then on Christmas Eve, as I have done in other years, I hope to ring the bell to announce the joyous news, old but always new, that the savior of the world is to be born.

As you hear bells this Advent Season, whether they are from church towers, or the ringing of your doorbell – let it be a reminder to open your heart, just as church and house doors are open, to welcome in the best guest of all, the son of God, Jesus Christ.

*Three-in-one God, help bells to always be a sign for me to stop and give you thanks. Amen.*

Dave Rabinowitz



Artist: David Rabinowitz

**Friday, December 11, 2020**

*“The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come” Song of Solomon 2:12*

As a gardener, it's important to me to “spread the good news” about plants and their stories. As we travel through this Advent Season, a plant that we will see over and over, in shops and malls and our own homes and, of course, First Presbyterian, is the lovely Poinsettia which is especially seen as the flower of Christmas.

This association was made by an old Mexican legend that told the story of a poor girl, who had no present to give the baby Jesus at the Christmas Eve Services. She was told by her cousin that even the smallest gift given to the child in love, would make the baby Jesus happy. So, having nothing else to offer, she gathered a small handful of weeds from beside the road and made them into a bouquet. She was embarrassed because her gift was so small, but, remembering her cousins words, she knelt and placed the bouquet at the bottom of the nativity scene. Suddenly, the bouquet of weeds burst into bright red flowers, and all who saw them were sure they had seen a miracle. From then, the flowers were known as “Flowers of the Holy Night”.

The star-shaped leaf pattern is said to symbolize the Star of Bethlehem, that lead the Wise Men to the baby Jesus, and the brilliant red color represents the blood of Jesus sacrificed for us.

Although the plant has a history that dates back to the Aztecs, the plant was unknown in America, until Joel Poinsett (the flower now bears his name), saw them and had the flower shipped to his greenhouse in South Carolina. Their popularity spread and now they are used as a decoration, and symbol, of the Christmas Season.

The color bracts are often mistaken for flower petals, but are actually the leaves. The flower is small and unassuming, found in the center of each leaf bunch.

During this season, as we are dazzled by the beauty of the Poinsettia, we need to be like those worshipers in the mythical legend who were amazed by the miracle that they witnessed. Like them, let us also be amazed by the miracle, 2000 years old, but ever new, as we anticipate the birth of the REAL Christmas flower, Jesus Christ.

*Miraculous God, help us be reminded of the real Christmas flower, our Lord and savior, when we see a poinsettia. Amen.*

Lydia Pollard





Artist: Lydia Pollard

**Saturday, December 12, 2020**

### Beautify the Sanctuary

*“The glory of Lebanon shall come to you,  
The cypress, the plane, and the pine,  
To beautify the place of my sanctuary;  
And I will glorify where my feet rest.” Isaiah 60:13*

Several years ago, May and I went to New Mexico and met my sister for a short vacation. While there we decided to visit “OLD TOWN” in Albuquerque.

While exploring the town, we saw an old Spanish style church and decided to visit it. Inside were two elderly ladies decorating the church for the coming Advent season, since this was at Thanksgiving time. They were trying to hang wreaths on the walls at the end of each pew. The hangers were there but they were too high for the ladies to reach, even if they stood on the end of the pew and I was worried that they may fall if they tried.

So, I asked them if I could help. They quickly handed me a wreath and found that I could easily reach the hanger by standing on the end of the pew. One of the ladies asked me how long I could help them, and I replied that as long as those ladies (May and my sister) were looking around I could help. She looked at me and May and Barbara and scurried off to get another wreath. Since May and Barbara knew what was going on, they weren't leaving until ALL of the wreaths were hung. I'm sure there were more decorations to put up, but they were within reach. The ladies thanked me and we left to continue exploring “OLD TOWN”. I always wondered if the ladies thought that they were sent divine help to complete their decorating for the Advent season.

*Father, may we make your sanctuary beautiful in preparation for the coming of your Son Jesus in whose name we pray. Amen.*

Larry Ball



## Sunday, December 13, 2020. Third Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:39-55

*“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...” from Luke 1:46-47*

One of my favorite hymns is Canticle of the Turning. I first heard it as a youth at Montreat during a summer conference. During seminary, it felt as though we sang it often during chapel services. It was only after seminary that a friend of mine pointed out that it is a song sung during advent, as it is based off of Mary's Magnificat.

The hymn is not meant to be sung year round, but rather usually reserved for the third week in advent when we focus on the story of Mary. Now there are many Christmas songs and hymns that focus on Mary and her experience as the virgin carrying the son of God. Most famous among them might be Mary Did You Know? In this song, the singer asks Mary over and over again if she knew how wonderful her son was going to be for the world. Did she know he would make the blind see? Did she know that her son would walk on water and calm the seas with his hand? But what this song does not address is Mary's own magnificat, her own song she sings to the Lord.

In the verses listed above, Mary runs to her cousin Elizabeth to share the good news that she will give birth to the son of God. As she is telling all this to Elizabeth, she bursts into song and sings the glories of God. She sings about all the work God has done. She sings about what God is going to do through Jesus and she sings about being lifted up by God.

In the Canticle of the Turning, the singers lift these same praises to God. The Chorus goes like this; “My heart shall sing of the day you bring. Let the fires of your justice burn. Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near, and the world is about to turn!” Mary certainly knew that the world was about to turn. She knew that God's justice was entering into the world. May we prepare our heart for the breaking forth of God's justice and ready ourselves for the world to turn.

*Lord, help us to be “turners” in you Kingdom. Amen.*

Molly Morris

**Monday, December 14, 2020**

*"...just as you did it to one of the least of these...you did it to me." Matt. 25:40*

"Sir I've Gotta buy these shoes – For my mama, please. I don't have all the money. Gotta hurry up – before Christmas Eve... When Mama meets Jesus tonite..."

Country song is such a Christmas heartache story.

Son is in a store at the cashier. A man is behind him, a hit melancholy about the Christmas season. How commercial things have become. He listens to the boy...

"Sir I've Gotta buy these shoes – For my mama, please. I don't have all the money now. Gotta hurry up – anyhow it's already Christmas Eve...maybe...When Mama meets Jesus tonite..."

Knowing the boy's mother is sick...the man hands the boy the extra money...and he says: "At that moment, I truly found out...what Christmas is all about!"

*Generous God, when we see need, lead us to respond with caring love. Amen.*

Dave Capasso



Artist: Ethan Horn

**Tuesday, December 15, 2020**

*“Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them. Psalm 126:5-6 NIV.*

I love daffodils. I love how they bring cheer when they bloom in early spring after a cold and colourless winter. Every year, I add more to my church’s labyrinth garden. Last fall, it was already late for planting daffodils, and the day was cold and misty. The weather was predicted to get even worse, so I trudged out to my church’s garden, and planted daffodils. I was not having fun at all. I was cold; I was crouched on the cold, muddy ground; my jacket was getting wet from the mist.

But then I remembered why I was enduring this: the daffodils had to be planted then to obtain the promise of the flowers that I would need to wait for months to see. This year, everyone has had to endure unexpected hard times; and though we get weary, we need to pause and focus on the things that we can do now to be able to enjoy the “daffodils” that we hope and wait for.

*Our God, we thank you for giving us hope for the future, and for the strength to do what we need to do. Give us your grace to be able to share that hope with others. Amen.*

Nieta Nunn



Photo by Nieta Nunn

**Wednesday, December 16, 2020**

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

When I grew up in the Presbyterian Church in Carroll County, Mississippi, we had a week of Vacation Bible School, and a week of what was called meetings, when we had church in the mornings and at night. And of course we had Sunday School and Church every Sunday.

In my time we often memorized various Bible verses – John 3:16 was a favorite of mine then and now--

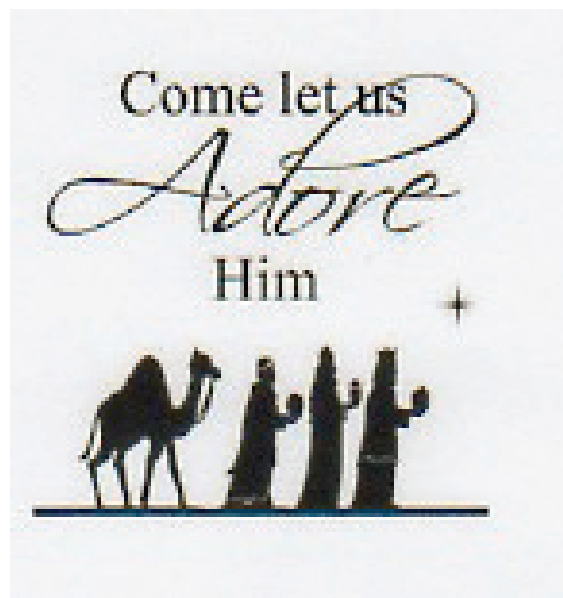
We looked forward to the Advent Season as much as because it was getting near Christmas with holiday time off from regular school, but it’s also when we began to sing Christmas songs. We heard them on the radio as well.

Today – though I don’t attend school except Sunday School at Church, Advent season still reminds me of those long years ago, and I feel lots of happiness from my past years.

Glory to God in the highest – Peace on earth and good will to men.

*Eternal God of our lives, thank you for memories, both those past and those still being made.  
Amen*

Carolyn Graetz



**Thursday, December 17, 2020**

*“Do not be afraid...I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people...” Luke 2:10*

### ***A Season of Joy!!***

1. Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy. Psalm 47:1 NIV
2. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. James 1:2-3 NIV
3. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. Isaiah 9:3 NIV
4. Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD. Psalm 27:6 NIV
5. I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. Luke 15:7 NIV
6. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people. Philemon 1:7 NIV
7. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:8-9 NIV
8. 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.” Nehemiah 8:10 NIV
9. and those the LORD has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. Isaiah 35:10
10. And again, Isaiah says, “The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope.” Romans 15:12 NIV
11. I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. 2 John 1:12 NIV
12. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13 NIV
13. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, Romans 14:17 NIV
14. A person finds joy in giving an apt reply—and how good is a timely word! Proverbs 15:23 NIV
15. The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing. Proverbs 10:28 NIV
16. For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. Psalm 30:5 KIV

### ***Jesus is the Fullness of Joy!!***

*Lord Jesus, will you please bring us your Joy during this Advent Season. Thank you!! Amen.*

Mark VanHala

**Friday, December 18, 2020**

*“Fear not, for I am with you.” Isaiah 41:10*

For the better part of 2020 the people of this world have lived in fear of a pandemic, the news pours out stories that would have most courageous folks trembling. People are worried about what’s happening. It’s a crazy time as our pastor Kathy Crighton is fond of saying.

Yet the passage says fear not! Come to think of it when the angels come to the shepherds to herald Jesus’ birth, the angels say the same thing: FEAR NOT, do not be afraid. Wow! If we keep looking we find in Matthew and in Luke passages with the headline “Do Not Worry”. Fear/worry must be a thing we humans indulge in quite a bit for there to be many verses encouraging us to FEAR NOT.

What do we do about this worrisome habit we have of worrying? As one who likes to analyze things I think we need to deconstruct it. Why are we worrying? Does it give us something to do—fill a void? Do we think (maybe unconsciously) that if we worry enough what we are afraid of won’t happen? What’s behind your fear? Maybe some of our fears are there not to make us afraid but to let us know that something is worth it. Like if we are afraid to speak up about some injustice...God puts fear in us so we know to speak up!

Then we might ask what does fear cast out? If love casts out fear. Does fear cast out love? Maybe that’s why the Bible is adamant about FEAR NOT. Towards the end of the Do Not Worry passages in Matthew it says “But strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all of these things will be given to you as well. It’s not like we are not ever going to fear. But when we fear we should remember the costs. Fear makes it difficult to do higher levels of thinking- being clear and being thoughtful; loving your neighbor, loving period. So we give up plenty of kingdom stuff when we worry. At this time of advent let us let go and surrender our fears to Jesus and take up kingdom attributes like kindness, righteousness, joy, peace, hope and most of all love.

*Dear God, At this time when the world is selling fear, let’s remember God’s kingdom and choose love. Let us be courageous as Jesus was and cultivate love in our hearts so that we may prepare for what is to come knowing in every fiber of our being that ‘God is with us’ every step we take. Be at peace! Amen.*

Tracy Helms-Capasso





Artist: Bruce Robertson

**Saturday, December 19, 2020**

## Faith

*“You can never please God without faith, without depending on him. Anyone who wants to come to God must believe that there is a God and that he rewards those who sincerely look for him.”*

*Hebrews 11:6 (TLB)*

Faith pleases God more than anything else. The Christian life is dependent upon faith. We stand on faith; we live on faith. Faith is loved and honored by God more than any other single thing. The Bible teaches that faith is the only approach that we have to God. No man has sins forgiven, no man goes to heaven, no man has assurance of peace and happiness, until he has faith in Jesus Christ.

You may be saying, “God, I believe you are a great person, but I do not believe your Word; I do not believe what you say.” In order to please God, you must believe in Him and Him alone with all your heart. Perhaps your faith is small and weak. It does not matter how big your faith is, but rather, where your faith is. Is it in Christ, the Son of God, who died on the cross for your sins?

*Lord Jesus, may my faith in You and Your abundant promises be increasing each and every day. Amen*

Laura Wagner



## **Sunday, December 20, 2020. Fourth Sunday of Advent**

*“...the angel Gabriel was sent by God...to a virgin...(whose) name was Mary. He came to her and said “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” Luke 1:26-28*

We have a bartender friend, we'll call him John. He recently related to us this true story.

He was helping his ex-wife move, and a bottle of prescription medication that they both knew she kept in the top drawer of her night stand, disappeared. She was sure that he had taken the pills, and he knew he had not! They both kept checking the drawer, but the pills simply weren't there and the situation became quite contentious.

Later that day, he went to work and a fellow walked up to his bar. John said that the guy was well dressed and had a smile that lit up the room. John asked him if he could get him anything, and the man leaned over the bar and said “can I tell you something?” Well, bartenders are used to people confiding in them, and he said “sure”. The man leaned a little closer and said “the medication..” and at that point John had chills run up his spine, and the man continued, “...is in the top drawer of the night stand!”

At that point, John was called by another customer, and he said to the fellow “I'll be right back.” He turned to see what the other customer wanted, but glanced back to look at the man again, and he had disappeared! John looked all over the room, but the guy just wasn't there.

The next day – moving day – John had already loaded the night stand on the U-Haul, but climbed one more time into the truck. With the haunting words of the stranger in his mind, he opened the drawer and, once again, could not find the pills. Then it occurred to him that he had never unscrewed the drawer from its supports, and when he did that, discovered that the pill bottle had managed to fall between the drawer and the wall of the stand and was wedged there. The pills WERE there! John looked at us and said “that man was an angel!”

Two Thousand years ago, a young girl greeted the day, expecting it to be like any other, but before the day was over, she was visited by an angel and the world has never been the same.

Have you ever met an angel? Keep your mind and heart open, and like Mary and our friend John, you might just meet one!

*God, help us to stay open to being amazed by angels! Amen.*

Larry and May Ball

**Monday, December 21, 2020.**

*“...so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” Hebrews 9:28*

Advent, that wonderful season of anticipation as we await the commemoration of the Birth of Christ at Christmas, the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, right? Well...Yes and No. It turns out that Advent has meant different things to different people through the centuries and, in fact, through much of that history, had very little to do with Christmas.

The earliest records of the celebration of Advent date to at least the fifth century, in Spain and the Roman province of Gaul (partly modern France), and originally consisted of a preparation time for the celebration of the Feast of the Epiphany. It was a time when new candidates for baptism engaged in fasting, prayer, and penance in preparation for the rite of baptism that was to be administered during the celebration of Epiphany. Symbolically, it was also a time of the expectation of Christ's coming, but it was the reception of Christ on an individual, personal and spiritual level, an internal reception of the Savior.

By the sixth century, Christians in Rome began to tie Advent to the coming of Christ, but it was the Second Coming of Christ that was anticipated; it was not a commemoration of Christ's birth. The word “Advent” comes from the Latin *adventus*, translated into Greek as *Parousia*. In the NT, the term *Parousia* term is used to refer to the Second Coming of Christ.

So today, we view Advent as time of preparation leading up to the celebration of the birth of Christ. But through most of its history, Advent had a three-fold meaning.

First, it was a time of personal and spiritual preparation, accompanied by prayer and sometimes fasting.

Secondly, as today, it was a time of eager anticipation of the celebration of the miraculous birth of Christ 2000 years ago.

Thirdly, it was a time of preparation for, and anticipation of, the Second Coming of Christ. As such, it was not just a commemoration of an historical event; it was an acknowledgment of the dynamic nature of our relationship to God! It expressed hope for the future, something to look forward to. God is still active in our lives and Christ will come again!

In this 2020 Advent season, we need hope...lots of it! Maybe it will help to expand our view of Advent, not just as the weeks prior to Christmas, but as a time for personal growth in our faith (a personal welcoming of God into our lives), a commemoration of Christ's birth 2000 years ago, AND as an opportunity to anticipate a future world in which Christ will appear again.

*O God, even as we await the coming of your Son this Christmas, may we also grow in faith and rejoice in your constant presence in our lives--every day. Amen.*

Bruce Robertson



Artist: Ethan Horn

**Tuesday, December 22, 2020**

*“Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and shield. Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you.” Psalm 33:20-22*

One of my favorite Christmas presents I ever received was a fuchsia lambskin rug from my Grandmother Opal. My grandmother was from New Mexico, and she and my grandfather lived on a mountain ranch far from town - they were remote. Trips to town were a big deal, and once a year they would go to the flea market to shop for family Christmas gifts. I imagined Grandma Opal going to a large New Mexico flea market with booths that sold everything from turquoise jewelry to poodle posters to stuffed animals made with real fur. I pictured her looking at all the merchandise, spotting that fuchsia rug, and thinking, “My granddaughter would just love that for Christmas.” And she was right. I enjoyed that rug for years to come. It was just my size, super soft to lie down on. Sometimes I would wrap it around my shoulders and imagine that I was a supermodel, walking down the runway in my exotic fur coat.

During advent, we eagerly await the gift of the baby Jesus, just as we anticipate opening our presents under the Christmas tree, hoping that at least one will be that perfect surprise. The baby Jesus is our perfect surprise waiting to live in our hearts and delight us, on Christmas Day and every day. He is our eagerly awaited special gift.

*Dear God, let the gift of your son Jesus grow in our hearts day by day. Thank you for the gift of your precious son! Amen.*

Amanda Bennett-Williamson



Artist: David Rabinowitz

**Wednesday, December 23, 2020**

*“God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world...”*

*From 1 John 4:7-12*

The Lord God gave the peoples of the earth a garden,  
And the people said: “That’s very nice, God, but that’s not enough. We’d like a little  
Knowledge, please.”

The Lord God gave them knowledge,  
And the people said: “Now that we have knowledge, we’d like things.”

The Lord God gave the people things,  
But they always said: “That’s not quite enough.”

So the Lord God gave them gifts unequalled:

The Sun

Lightning and Thunder

Rain and Flowers

Animals and Birds and Fish

Trees and Stars and the Moon

God gave them the Rainbow

God parted the Red Sea and gave them Manna

God gave them Prophets

And Children

And Each Other,

But still the people said, “That’s not quite enough.”

God loved the people,

And out of ultimate merciful goodness

God gave them the Gift of Gifts—

A Christmas present never to be forgotten—

God gave them Love

In the form of God’s Son,

Even Christ Jesus.

From [Reaching for Rainbows](#) by Ann Weems

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*Generous God, Thank you for all the gifts you have given to us, your children, but especially  
for the Greatest Gift of all – Your Son!! Amen.*

**Thursday, December 24, 2020**

A Little Child Shall Lead Them

*“The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.” Isaiah 11:6*

I sat down at my company Christmas party and pulled out my cell phone to turn it off. A call was coming through from a number I did not recognize. I answered the phone and stepped into the hall to take the call.

“Miss Hyder”? the woman asked. “Yes”, I answered. “We have a three-month-old baby boy for you”, she stated. I stopped dead in my tracks. “I’ll take him” was all I could say.

I had been in process for the foster-to-adopt program with the state of Louisiana since August of that year, completing the requirements in October. I had been called Thanksgiving weekend with a baby girl, but I was out of town and couldn’t take her.

I returned to the table very quiet (so unlike me). The details I had been given were that it would be a couple of hours because the baby was sick and had to go to the doctor. I would have to purchase a crib before they could leave the baby with me. I had been told they would bring me one. (Lesson number one). My mind was reeling.

I managed to text a friend under the table that I had received “THE” call and we kept things to ourselves throughout the lunch. As was our company’s tradition, we had the rest of the day off. I had to go shopping and somehow, I had the money for these new and unexpected expenses.

The caseworker was specific about the crib, the type of formula he needed, but she could not tell me how much he weighed or what size diapers he needed. It was a cold, rainy Friday and I went to one big box store. No one would help me. So, I went to another one.

I called a friend whose wife had a baby several months earlier to ask about the diaper size. He told me to get a size 3 and asked why I was buying diapers. I told him and he began to cry. Through his tears, he if I needed anything and I said, “YES! Come to my house right now and put the crib together”! He said he would.

When I got home, the caseworker was waiting and told me I could get the baby out of the car. I opened the door and there he was! He took my breath away! But, it was mid-December and he didn’t even have a blanket. I think I bought two on the way home. The caseworker asked to see the crib and I pointed at my car. She said she would return tomorrow because she had to see it set up and with that she was gone.

My friend arrived with his daughter, niece and nephew! They ooh’d and aah’d over the baby and I ordered pizza. We put the crib together without any problem and discovered it wouldn’t fit down the hall of my shotgun double. We disassembled it enough to get it down the hall and tightened it back together. They left and I looked down and the little baby was fast asleep in his car seat.



He was beautiful and perfect and everywhere we went, I noted how people changed when the baby was around. They got quieter and their voices changed. They became gentler versions of themselves and it occurred to me that this was why Jesus came as a baby – because babies change people.

My baby turned 13 almost three weeks ago. From the first moment we met, he has taught me about God's grace, love and mercy. He continues to teach me about God and I am grateful for every lesson.

*Lord, help us open our hearts to change, as we await the arrival of your son, the Baby of Bethlehem. Amen."*

Song: A Cradle In Bethlehem  
Andy Williams

Rev. Lynn Hyder



Artist: Jack Horn

## Friday, December 25, 2020. Christmas Day

Scripture: John 1:1-14

*“And the Word became flesh, and lived among us...” John 1:14*

There it is. For unto us a child is born. For us. And the world has never been the same ever since.

Jesus always was, always will be. That’s the paradox of the Advent season. Even as we await the coming of the Messiah, he’s already here. How do you hold both those ideas in your head at once? Doesn’t it make your head want to explode sometimes?

But maybe today is just a day to give thanks. Jesus is in our midst. A Savior has been born.

Maybe we are reading this in the middle of a room full of torn wrapping paper and children squealing. Or maybe we are alone and it’s quiet, except for the sounds out in the street: families or children talking as they walk past, playing with new basketballs, riding new bikes. Maybe we have a tree in our home, real or artificial. Maybe not. Maybe we have plans for the day to be with others, family or friends or neighbors. Or not. We may even be at work today, because the world goes on and we need to be at our posts, wherever we may be.

But today is Christmas, and it’s different from any other day of the year.

Somewhere, on this day, families are in awe of a newborn baby in their midst, because babies are born on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, just like any other day of the year. And their newborns are not Jesus, but they share with Jesus’ family the wonder of a new life. Sometimes the baby is the firstborn of its mother. She may be filled with amazement at what she has brought forth, and on Christmas, no less. She may name the child something that reflects the day: Noel or Christian or something else. And she’ll never forget the moment she first saw her child.

Somewhere, on this day, people are grieving the loss of a loved one, because people die around Christmas, just like they do any other time of the year. It may have just happened, or it may have happened years ago, but those who love never forget. May the promise of the Risen One help to sustain those who have lost someone they love, in this season and always.

Christmas is a day to give thanks for Jesus, who lived among us, full of grace and truth. Thanks be to God!

*Loving God, on this Christmas Day, may we remember the Light that came into the world when Jesus was born. May his light shine in our darkness. May we see his glory. Amen.*

Rev. Kathleen Crighton



Artist: Lydia Pollard

