

Daily Devotions For Advent

**Composed and Compiled by
Members of the**

**First
Presbyterian
Church**

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December 24

“You don’t have to be good,” Mary Oliver writes in her famous poem “Wild Geese.” “You don’t have to walk for a thousand miles on your knees through the desert repenting.” For some, these might be shocking statements to make. *Of course* you have to be good. Being good is the point! And of course you have to repent, preferably with blood, sweat and tears! But Oliver’s poem hints at a deeper truth.

I’m sure we would all agree that salvation is by faith and not by works, and that Jesus has paid the price and completed all the work on the cross. In that light, then, one doesn’t need to be “good” at all, for Jesus is our goodness. We can do no good thing apart from Him—and indeed, we can do no *thing* apart from Him, as He is our light, our sustenance, and our very breath. I love the image given by Julian of Norwich, a 14th century anchoress in England who wrote the first book in English by a woman, *Revelations of Divine Love*. The world, she writes, and humanity and all that is created, is held in God’s hand like a tiny chestnut. It’s shabby and plain and far from perfect, but it continues to exist because God-the-Mother loves it and nurtures it.

So this Advent season, my dear brothers and sisters, I hope you will stop trying so hard. I hope you will listen to Christ telling you: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). Like Paul, may you boast ever more of your weaknesses, so that the power of Christ will be made manifest in your life. Today, place your goodness in God’s hands. He is all the goodness you will need.

Erin Kingsley



Introduction

Greetings and peace in the name of our Lord, Jesus the Christ! We are so glad that you have chosen to walk with us through Advent by means of this devotional booklet.

For many of us, Advent is very familiar. We spend four Sundays every year talking about and anticipating the coming of the Christ child. Our liturgy and worship is pregnant with expectation. Our calendars quickly fill with events, cantatas and Christmas Eve services. The hectic pace of the season comes and goes in the twinkling of an eye; anticipation becomes reality, becoming memory once again. This is our life...

However, I would invite you to reflect on that word, “Advent.” It means coming, or the arrival of a notable person or event; Advent is far from familiar. Advent is the proclamation that something out of the ordinary is on its way. In fact, we could substitute the word “arrival” for advent. The One for whom we have longed has arrived and is arriving, and nothing about us can remain the same.

Strangely, I would suggest parallels here with one of my favorite movies of recent memory entitled “The Arrival.” I won’t bore you with the details other than to say that it involves contact with another form of sentient life. The film explores the profound alienness of such an event, and concludes that it would lead to a revolution in our thinking, forever altering the course of human history.

Despite our familiarity with this man Jesus and his arrival as the lowly infant born in a manger, the Gospel ought to disrupt how we see and understand the world and ourselves such that nothing can ever be the same. In order to recapture that wonder of meeting Jesus anew, we have prepared this booklet. We invite you to journey with us, with friends you know who share their heart and faith in these pages, and in so doing, see Jesus from different perspectives. It is only with new eyes -- fresh eyes! -- that we can recapture the wonder of the Gospel through which we are being saved.

In Christ,
Rev. Samuel Weddington

December 2

There's lots of WAITING in life! As a child, I waited for birthdays, Christmas, dad to get home. I'm still waiting— for my workplace to settle, my “home project” to be complete, that special trip. I've waited expectantly and joyfully, and anxiously and fearfully. During difficult seasons of waiting, I appropriated jail terminology, “*Doing the Time*”, to describe how I felt as I awaited a hopefully brighter future. You encouraged me during those seasons, told me it would get better, but would take a **LONG** time. Thank you!

Years ago, my kids urged me to watch a not-too-popular movie, “Click It.” The main character has this special device, and when life gets tough, or at anytime he chooses, he can “click it” and fast forward life, and he skips over time he wants to avoid. Well, as you can guess... he misses out... on the bad, the ugly and the good in LIFE!

It's Advent and I'm thinking about Christian Waiting. The Bible tells us to “Wait upon the Lord,” the disciples were to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. Paul often writes about waiting for the revealing of our Lord. Peter emphasizes the sort of people we ought to be: people who wait for and hasten the coming of God. I've read that one can ‘Learn How to Wait,’ learn how to cooperate with Time. It's not our enemy. God works... in us and through us... while we wait. The ‘spiritual giants’ describe our waiting as preparation — as prayer, fasting, and repentance followed by anticipation, hope and joy. What... fasting during the holidays? That's food for another thought.

What might God be doing during this season while we wait...and cooperate? Blessings as you reflect, or ramble... like me, for the Coming of our Lord, Jesus!

Jackie Burt

December 23

The Shepherd and the Angels: Luke 2:8-20 (*Please Read*)

“Let's go..... and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” (Luke 2:15)

As a child, young man, and then father, we always travelled somewhere for Christmas, usually to spend vacation with family members who lived far away. I envied my cousins who lived together in the same town with my grandparents. But for my me, there was always great excitement and anticipation in the trip and time soon to be spent with them: grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins, over the Christmas holiday. Gathering with other family members helped form who I am, and helped defined to whom I belonged.

Since we were the ones who typically had to “go” and visit, it meant planning, preparations, and packing. By contrast the Shepherds who have just heard, seen and experienced the incredible GOOD NEWS of the savior, go in haste to see him. They didn't pack, they didn't prepare; not dilly-dallying one bit. And surprise, surprise, they find him; the Messiah, the Lord...a baby wrapped in diaper, and probably swaddled, lying in manger. We don't even know what they did with the sheep in the fields for which they were responsible. That's not important. What is important is seeing the Savior, talking to Mary and Joseph, and confirming for themselves what they've heard. The result of their unexpected trip is forever transformed and reoriented lives, which glorify and praise God!

Amazement, surprise and wonder are all over this passage. From an army of angels singing to the most unlikely candidates, (some would even say *ne'er-do-wells*) who hear world shattering news, to the idea of the One, True God who shows up wrapped in a diaper, nothing is as we expect. Surprise!

What are you expecting this Christmas?

Rev. Dave Welch

December 22

The weeks before were filled with decorations, parties, treats, and all the busy-ness of Christmas. Mom had finished all of her music programs, and Dad had mostly wrapped up his year-end reports. Tomorrow would be the yearly trek to Mamaw's and Nana's, with two Christmas dinners and two rounds of presents in one day, 130 miles apart.

My early-teen self didn't feel those burdens. All I knew was that we were cleaning out the barn on Christmas Eve. Ever the silent type of grumblers, my brother and I wordlessly crammed feed bags into the trash, hurled tobacco sticks onto piles, and stacked the Styrofoam seed trays as loudly as we could. Nothing jolly or festive here, just trash and dust and cold drafts swirling through the cracks in the walls.

I imagined the fun things other families must be doing, indoors, wearing nice clothes. Stupid trash...Stupid barn...Stupid parents. This wasn't how it was supposed to be. What kind of **FAMILY** spends **CHRISTMAS EVE** in a **BARN**? Suddenly I knew, and felt ashamed. Mary and Joseph had done that, on the night Jesus was born, in a stable much worse than ours. I felt a little grateful to be where I was, with people I loved, and to share the Bethlehem story in the smallest of ways.

Luke 2:4-7

⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David...

⁵To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

⁶And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

⁷And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Laura Ong

December 3

Many of the difficulties we experience as Christians can be traced to the lack of Bible study and reading. We should not be content to skim through a chapter merely to satisfy our conscience. Hide the Word of God in your heart! A little portion well digested is of greater value to the soul than a lengthy portion scanned hurriedly. Do not be discouraged because you cannot understand it all. Go on reading. As you read, the Holy Spirit will enlighten the passages for you. Reading the Bible has a purifying effect upon the heart and mind.

Prayer for the day:

Let the enlightenment of the riches of Your Word sink deep within my soul, Lord.

Lou Hebb



December 4

Romans 12:6 – 8: “We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us; prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, the exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.”

Several years ago, we wrote about our daughters’ anticipation of Christmas morning and particularly the gifts to be found under the Christmas tree – gifts that had been carefully selected both lovingly and thoughtfully according to each child’s reasonable wish. This same air of anticipation and excitement abounds once again with the presence of grandchildren. Often times, however, before the day has ended, an atmosphere of jealousy and squabbling begins along with the temptation to serve one’s own selfish needs and ambitions.

Is this not often true of spiritual gifts? The Bible teaches that God distributes spiritual gifts to every redeemed person through the Holy Spirit. Yet, we are tempted to use these endowments to serve our own selfish needs and ambitions, and to form elite groups who look down on others. God teaches us to use these talents to speak and embody the gospel of Christ in the world. Love is the gift we should desire most of all.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, in this Advent Season, help us to realize that all gifts are given for the common good, to build up the community in love, and to equip it for its mission in the world. Amen

Graham and Sue Barr
(reproduced from the 1993 booklet)

December 21

Luke 1:35 tells us that Jesus was conceived in “the power of the Most High.” The same power drew the wise men from afar, placed the star in the sky to guide them, and brought the shepherds who spread the news about the Christ child in the manger, just as the angels had predicted.

This was the power with which Jesus reached out to find the lost sheep, brought back the prodigal child, healed the sick, fed the hungry, drove out the unclean, and released the prisoner. This is also the same power that draws us closer to Him, just as the shepherds and wise men were drawn to Him at his birth. The birth of Christ is what we celebrate, but it is our birth into a new life that was made possible by His coming. It is this birth that makes our life and all life like new and as innocent as a newborn babe. This is the celebration of Christmas.

But what about when this Christmas season passes, when we celebrate the babe no more, when the decorations are stored for yet another year, and the carols have ceased? When the packages under the tree are all opened, will God’s Gift remain neatly packaged as if it were unacceptable to those to whom he was sent? Will the cattle that were peaceful in the stable stampede us into a New Year where there still isn’t room for Him? Is the love of our Savior so capsulated within us by the jealousy, hate, or bitterness which we readily wear in our daily lives that we are limited to only a few brothers with whom we can share it?

Do we hold up the light of His love as a beacon in the darkness of this world, or do we store the Light of Christmas in the box with the Christmas candles? Will the power which is ours through Christ lay dormant and wasted because we simply did not plug in to it?

As this season draws to a close, we must assume the power of the Most High, the power that our King brought to those who choose to accept it, the power that we must have if we are to serve. Let us use this power to find the lost, heal the sick, feed the hungry, release the prisoners of fear or guilt or other emotions which bind us, raise up the lowly, shelter the homeless, bind up the brokenhearted, comfort those who mourn, and bring peace into the hearts of others. Let the real work of Christmas begin.

Peggy Hill
(reproduced from the 1994 booklet)

December 20

A Season of Gifts

Most of us probably have traditions for Christmas concerning presents and gift giving; a secret Santa at work, baked goods for the teachers, family exchanges, or maybe a Santa pal. Perhaps some of us make lists or drop those oh-so-subtle hints to others; however, do we really need another sweater? Another stereo? A new watch? While it is idealistic to suggest that everyone give up material gifts, I propose that we examine our habits:

*To whom are we giving?
What are we giving?
Why are we giving?*

Are we giving anything to Christ this season? What are we presenting Him who made the ultimate gift? Some may have the time, talents or money, which they can use to glorify Christ. For others, a white gift under the Chrismon tree is a true sacrifice. In the words of Christina Rossetti:

*What can I give him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd,
I would bring him a lamb.
If I was a wise man,
I would do my part.
Yet, what can I give Him?
Give my heart.*

I challenge you to be creative, giving something which furthers the Kingdom.

Meg Flannagan
(reproduced from the 1999 booklet)

December 5

Season of Favor

Scripture: 1 John 3:5

Most consider the advent season a favorable time of year. It is a time when the fourth Sunday, prior to Christmas, calls us to recognition of the manger, the miracle, and the promise of glory yet to come. The candles, the wreath, the devotions, and the songs unite us in celebration and renew our hope for transformation from human futility to celestial restoration. Just as the angel comforted Mary with the favor God had bestowed upon her, we too can be comforted by God's favor in the form of unlimited mercy and grace so perfectly planned in the Trinity before the foundation of the world.

To fully appreciate this favor, one must consider life outside the garden. Outside the garden is a world full of loathing, filth, murder, guilt, failure, and an adversary esteemed in proprietary deceitfulness. While this may sound dramatically dismal, it is nonetheless an important part of realizing the unfavorable and sinful condition of man. The reality of sin surrounds us like a rotting stench pleading for elimination and a return to cleanliness. The acknowledgement of this reality produces a sobering clairvoyance that catalyzes man's acceptance of his need for redemption and leads him to an understanding, that only through God's favor, man can experience wholeness and sanctification.

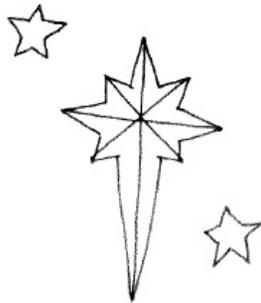
While the advent season may be celebrated once a year, its reminder of the birth and death of our Lord are to be celebrated until He returns in glory. Jesus came to defeat the devil, to seek and to save, and to take away the sin of the world. The real meaning of the advent season is wrapped in these truths. God's appointment of a perfect sacrificial Savior ensures that man, who is most miserable outside of His love, remains shrouded by His eternal favor.

Kelley Mayden

December 6

We tend to sentimentalize the "birth of the baby Jesus," not thinking much, for that season at least, about what lay ahead for him, his reason for coming. We know that he came to do the will of his Father, to procure our salvation -- which required suffering and complete trust, both during his everyday life and at the horrific end. I think that, though he didn't know any different, he suffered at the very beginning -- in the smelly stable! The "sweet hay" was likely the only nice smell among the odors that many of us avoid near certain areas of the county fair. Pewww! We talk about the "excitement" of Christmas; do we wonder where the excitement would be if it weren't for the pervasive gift-giving? We can focus on God's gift to us: himself, in the person of his own son, paying the price for our redemption. "Advent," really, is every day, when we answer the knock at the door, the Spirit's voice. "Merry Everything, and Happy Always" is not a Pollyanna view of life; it describes the eternal result of God's gift to us.

Selma Jennings



December 19

Matthew 8:20 - "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Have you ever been homeless? I never have been, though I once spent a couple of weeks sleeping in my car. That experience -- combined with volunteering with Family Promise - profoundly affected my understanding of our less fortunate brothers and sisters.

For the past 18 years I have helped lead a candlelit, carol-filled procession down State Street known as "Journey's End." Adapted from the Latino tradition "Las Posadas", the plight of Mary and Joseph is re-enacted as they go from door to door searching for lodging, for a safe place to give birth. The incongruity of the Lord of the Universe lacking the most basic of needs is mind-boggling. Knowing the Son of God intentionally gave up *everything* for the sole purpose of redeeming you and me, seems beyond belief, yet it's true.

Inspired by all this, I composed the following hymn during those two weeks I mentioned above. It will be sung by Mary & Joseph at the beginning of Journey's End on Tuesday, December 18, 2018. Perhaps we can sing it sometime in worship.

*Child of Promise, Child of Light,
Where will You be born tonight?
Must poor Mary wander so?
Is there nowhere she can go?*

*Jesus has no home on earth,
Save for His place in our heart.
Make Him room, now, let Him in.
May your journey now begin.*

*Faithful Joseph, strong and true,
There to help his Mary through.
Does he fully understand
What obedience demands?*

*Homeless Jesus, at Your birth,
You left glory, came to earth.
Holes for foxes, nests for birds,
Homeless Jesus? How absurd!*

*Borrowed stable, manger bed,
God incarnate lays His head.
Morning Star, how bright and clear!
Journey ended, God is here.*

Bob Greene

December 18

“O Come Let Us Adore Him, Christ The Lord”

That hymn that we sing at Christmas is so familiar to our ears. Many of us know all the words by heart. We sing word by word, sentence by sentence, but are we really thinking about their significance as we sing?

Do we really adore Christ the Lord? Do we really reflect upon what He has done for us? “While we were yet sinners, He died for us.” He paid a debt He did not owe for ME, for you.

“O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,” the hymn begins. Are we faithful? Do we honor the Lord by our lives, ever mindful of what He HAS DONE and is DOING for us?

Are we joyful? Do others see our joy and wonder where our joy comes from? Do we have a grateful heart from which an overflow of joy comes?

Is “triumphant” something you would use to describe your life? “But now we are more than overcomers through Christ Jesus.” Are we “quick to give an answer for the hope that is within us?”

This year as you sing these words, try to really reflect upon them. Ask the Lord to help you be faithful, joyful, and triumphant each and every day no matter what your circumstances may be.

Then truly we can sing, “O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord,” with a heart that overflows with great joy that comes only from knowing Christ the Lord.

Sandra Grubbs



December 7

*“Sing my soul, the greatness of the Lord.
Rejoice my spirit, rejoice in God my savior”*

*So tenderly has he regarded me. So wondrously has he exalted me.
All generations will call me blessed...”*

“Song of Mary” from *Celebrate Life* by Beryl Red & Ragan Courtney

Jesus is indeed the reason for the season. Nevertheless, my heart is drawn to Mary, chosen for God’s most important assignment. God’s plan for Mary’s life unfolds through life-changing visits. Her first visitor was the Angel Gabriel whose words and nature were terrifying. Gabriel told her “Don’t be afraid, Mary.” The details of the visit by the Holy Spirit are not recounted for us, but the contemporary audience of the New Testament was not unfamiliar with gods and humans having children together (Achilles, Hercules, Perseus, and Helen of Troy all had one immortal parent).

The shepherds, visited by an angel of the Lord were fearful, as Mary had been, and were also told, “Don’t be afraid.” These same shepherds visited Mary, Joseph, and the Baby Jesus and recounted the angels’ glory. The magi, “men from the East who studied the stars,” visited Jesus and presented lavish gifts. They had a visit from one of God’s messengers in a dream that warned them not to go back to Herod.

When Jesus was 40 days old, his parents took him on a visit to the Temple in Jerusalem where they encountered wise ones, Simeon and Anna, who told Mary and Joseph amazing things about their baby. Then, Joseph—angels visited him in dreams to explain that Mary’s unborn out-of-wedlock baby had been conceived by the Holy Spirit and to instruct him about fleeing to safety in Egypt and returning to Galilee.

Matthew and Luke present all these visits simply as *how things happened* in the greatest story every told. We see that Mary responds with fear, amazement, and above all remarkable equanimity. She praises God (Luke 1: 46-55) and she treasures the visits “pondering them in her heart” (Luke 2: 19).

Would that we, this Christmas, can be as open to God’s visits and God’s messengers as Mary was.

Katie Vande Brake

December 8

When I was a child, our family would trek from our Georgia home to my grandparents' house in the Arkansas delta. My grandfather, a Presbyterian minister, had a childlike impatience, but also a childlike delight in the simple pleasures of life. And nothing seemed to give him more pleasure than our visits. Pop was so excited about seeing his children and grandchildren that he could not simply wait patiently for us to make our way to their house. Instead he would calculate when he thought we might arrive and would drive his T-Bird several miles out of town in hopes of seeing us on the flat two-lane highway, headed in his direction. When he thought he had spotted us on the horizon, he would flash his headlights until my dad flashed his lights back to let him know it was indeed us. And then he would do a U-turn in the road in front of us and triumphantly escort us in for the miles remaining.

This was, of course, an expression of his great love for us. And for us as children it was a moment of grand excitement as we watched for those flashing headlights on the horizon, for it assured us we were indeed close to our intended destination and the all-enveloping love of our grandparents.

Each Advent I think of this part of my childhood because Advent is God "coming toward" us in the Incarnation. It is God taking the initiative, God meeting us where we are—wherever we are. It is God not waiting for us in all of our fallenness and clumsiness and distraction and self-deception to make our way to him, but rather his going before us, showing us the way, and bringing us to himself.

Presbyterians have always stressed this initiative and the irresistible nature of God's calling. It is irresistible not because God robs us of our volition so much as God overwhelms us with his inviting love.

This Advent, know that God is coming our way. He is flashing the light of his glory in our direction, signaling his great love for us. And God can hardly wait to be with us as he brings us to our true home.

Alexander Whitaker

December 17

An excerpt from the prayer, "The Day After Christmas" from The Prayers of Peter Marshall.

"We thank Thee for Thy spirit that moves at this season the hearts of men:

to be kindly and thoughtful – where before they were careless and indifferent,

to be gentle – where before they had been rough and unmindful of the weak,

to express their love – where before it had been taken for granted and assumed.

We are learning, O Lord, so slowly – life's true values. Surely Christmas would teach us the unforgettable lesson of the things that matter most – the ties that bind the structure of the family upon which our country and all the world rests; the love that we have for one another which binds Thy whole creation to Thy footstool, Thy throne. We are learning slowly, but, O God, we thank Thee that we are learning."

So may Christmas linger with us, even as Thou are beside us the whole year through. Amen.

The McRee Family
(reproduced from the 1999 booklet)

December 16

“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.” Luke 2:11

Luke has painted us this vivid picture of the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ, with this verse. We celebrate this event each year with songs and prayers of Thanksgiving using a descriptive old hymn, which portrays that marvelous night. We can envision a clear, crisp December evening when this miracle occurred as we repeat:

*“It came upon a midnight clear, that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth, to touch their harps of gold.
Peace on the earth, good will to men, from heaven’s all-gracious King,
The world in solemn stillness lay, to hear the angels sing.”*

Historical research of this hymn lists it as one of the earliest social gospel hymns written in the United States. In the third verse, which is not in many hymnals, we sense the difficulties of humankind.

*“Yet with the woes of sin and strife, the world hath suffered long;
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not the love song which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife, and hear the angels sing.”*

Even today, over 150 years later, we continue to see human suffering. We all observe some form of this distress as we go about our daily lives. As Christians, we work and pray for solutions especially during this Holy Season, and a ‘coming together’ which allows us to reap the joys given to each of us by our Creator.

The message of the Nativity is a symbolic urging for us to put aside our personal differences as we celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Within our family, our church, our state, and our nation, let each of us reach a realization that we are all children of our God with common needs and concerns. Through an understanding of the Christian principles He taught, we shall strive even more to *“love thy neighbour as thyself* (Mark 12:31).” Surely that message alone can allow us to work toward “Peace on earth and Good Will to Men” as echoed in that blessed hymn.

Anonymous

December 9

So much of our energy is consumed in waiting.

We wait for the next paycheck, for vacations, for the test results, or even for favorite shows on Netflix. Many people say that they’re terrible waiters; however, doesn’t it seem like being good at waiting is embedded in what it means to be human?

Of course, waiting is also embedded in what it means to be Christian. In its earliest age, the Church waited for Jesus’ immediate return. When the wait was longer than expected, they recorded his life and teachings so that future Christians could learn, grow, and be diligent, servant-like waiters. But, perhaps we have grown too comfortable with waiting.

Sometimes we hear about those suffering from poverty, injustice, or oppression and feel like an innocent bystander in the “badness” around us. “I’ll pray for them,” we say, “and God will provide.” It’s easy to wait for divine intervention to come in the form we expect. It’s not as easy to recognize that we are often the answers to our own prayers.

Allow me to share my favorite scene from *Call the Midwife*, a BBC series about nurses and nuns working as midwives in post-war London’s poor East End.

Late one night, a nurse returns from a difficult delivery and, distraught, confides in one of the nuns: “I keep going over it in my mind what I must have done wrong,” she says, “I can’t pin anything down.” The sister quotes Deuteronomy 31:8, saying that God will never forsake her. The nurse responds: “I really don’t want you to think I’m being impolite, but I don’t believe in God.” The sister smiles gently and replies, “That matters not one iota. You carried out your work, and one much wiser brought your labors to fruition. The hands of the Almighty are so often to be found at the ends of our own arms.”

During this season of waiting, let us remember that we need not wait to be God’s light in the world.

Mary Ellis Rice

December 10

**It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.**

Lamentations 3:26

Edmund Hamilton Sears, the author of the carol “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear,” describes the night when the angels announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds. He says, “The world in solemn stillness lay, to hear the angels sing.”

There is not often much “solemn stillness” in our jam-packed Christmas preparations. And so Sears admonishes us --- “whose forms are bending low” “beneath life’s crushing load” --- to “rest beside the weary road and hear the angels sing.” Believe it or not (O Lord, help us to believe), the angels are in fact still singing, still pronouncing, “Peace on the earth, good will to all.”

*And still their heavenly music floats o’er all the weary world.
Above its sad and lowly plains they bend on hovering wing.
And ever o’er its Babel sounds the blessed angels sing.*

Are the sounds of Babel -- calendar filling, happiness pursuing, and credit card maxing -- drowning out the angels singing?

Many spiritual mentors teach us of the importance of silence for spiritual health and wellness. Mother Teresa reminds us that we need to “practice internal and external silence” if we want to hear from God. And she promises us that in silence “we will find new energy and true unity,” “a new outlook on everything” (from Mother Teresa’s book, *In the Heart of the World*).

How might you find or create some external silence for yourself?

What would internal silence feel like for you?

This Advent, may we commit to lives that let us “rest beside the weary road and hear the angels sing.”

Rev. Elizabeth Patrick

December 15

Do You Hear The Greeting?

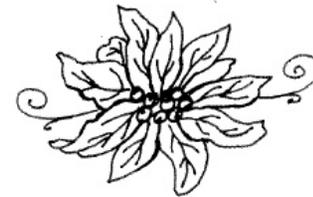
At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice, she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!” Luke 1:39-45

Do you hear the greeting? As the Advent Season is upon us, it is a good time to ask ourselves, have we heard Jesus’ greeting? Do our hearts leap for joy at His greeting?

As you ponder the many gifts of the Christmas Season, take time to reflect on the impact of this small baby on you and the world around you; and what a great gift this small still life represents to all mankind.

May you and yours be filled with the Holy Spirit this Holiday Season!

Anne and Jack Southerland
Emily and Louisa Patton
(reproduced from the 1997 booklet)



December 14

When we think of light from a physical standpoint we know that without it we would truly be walking in darkness. Is this who Isaiah is referring to when he refers to “The people walking in darkness?” What about the shepherds, who were observing the stars as they watched their flocks of sheep at night, and who were suddenly terrified by the awesome light of the angel Gabriel announcing the birth of the Christ child in Bethlehem – “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you: He is Christ the Lord.” The angel Gabriel made this marvelous announcement, not to the Roman emperor, the Rabbis, the wealthy, and elite of the world at that time, but to a band of nomadic shepherds. A “great company of the heavenly host appeared with Gabriel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.”

The proclamation in Is. 9:2 is truly proclaiming the great light of Jesus Christ, the light of the world, that burst forth into our dark world that night. “The land of the shadow of death” aptly describes the spiritually dark world, the culture and society, which we live in today. It is a world that is waiting to hear the amazing news that the angel Gabriel proclaimed that night to the shepherds: a “Savior has been born, and He is Christ the Lord.” My brothers and sisters in Christ, Matt 5:14-16 clearly reveals how we, together, have been called through faith in our Holy Savior Jesus Christ to go into all the world where He sends us, whether it be in our local neighborhood, a Sunday School class, our local community, our work place, a youth retreat, or beyond to proclaim this great news – that the light of Christ has overcome every form of spiritual darkness so that all people independent of color or creed may come to faith in our risen Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. Let us be the light of Christ and help transform our world from the shadow of death to a land where the light of Christ shines before all people, so that they may see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven.

To God be the glory!!

Tom F. King

December 11

To me, Christmas is more special because I share a birthday with Jesus, my Savior.

What makes it so special to me about having a birthday with Jesus is because he can relate to me and I can relate to him in different ways that other people that don't. Those ways are: I can talk to Jesus any time, he is always with me, he always knows what I do, he knows what I think at all times, he never stops loving me, and he can teach me how to be more like him when I read his scripture. My favorite part of the scripture that teaches me the most is the part of his life when he preached.

On my birthday, I really do not get too many presents because of Christmas. That doesn't matter to me because I am satisfied in my heart because sharing a birthday with Jesus and him giving his life for me is more than enough for me.

Wesley Foster

Age 13

(reproduced from the 1997 booklet)



December 12 & December 13

THE FRIENDSHIP CLASS WISHES YOU
A JOYOUS CHRISTMAS!

THANK YOU
JESUS FOR
YOUR ETERNAL
LOVE -
- DEBORAH

We wish you a
very good and
a time have a grace
happy Christmas
Stuart Gans

LOVE JESUS,
THE GREAT
PHYSICIAN -
Patty King

Good will toward men

Michael Bryant
THANK YOU LORD JESUS -
- Chris Winters
Violet Lansley

THANK YOU
LORD JESUS -
- Floramae Turner

JANE D'S

JESUS LOVES
ME -
Porter
Hillary