



Savior  
Christ <sup>the</sup> Lord

Advent 2014

# ADVENT 2014 . . .ARE YOU READY?

---

The “commercial” Christmas. It’s the holiday we eagerly anticipate but dread at the same time. Like kids waiting for Santa, we’re excited for the big day to arrive, but there’s so much to do. How will we ever be ready?

The sacred season of Advent. It’s the season we eagerly await the Christ child’s arrival. But will we be ready when he arrives? Are we ready to meet him?

This Advent, we want to help you get ready so when the BIG DAY arrives, you can welcome it with an open heart and open mind. Sing the carols, hear the stories, and get ready here!

## **1st Sunday of Advent (11/30):**

Rev. Joe Marting preaching on “And a Turkey in a Pear Tree”.

**Musical Offering: Faith Des Peres Choir will sing.**

## **2nd Sunday of Advent (12/7):**

Isaiah 40:1-11: “A voice cries: prepare the way of the Lord!”

How can we get our hearts and minds ready for Christ?

What can we do differently this year to be ready for Christmas?

**Musical Offering: Faith Des Peres choir will sing. Clare Dingus will accompany on the oboe.**

## **3rd Sunday of Advent (12/14):**

John 1:6-9 “John came to testify to the light so that all may believe”

How do we sing the Good News in our day and age?

**Musical Offering: Lessons and Carols will be presented by the Faith Des Peres Choir and soloists. Andrea Clark, flutist, will provide special music.**

## **4th Sunday of Advent (12/21):**

Luke 1:26-38 “The Lord himself will give you a sign...”

Only four days until Christmas. What do you have left to do?

What must get done, and what can you forgo?

**Musical Offering: The Carolbeth Trio will play Christmas music with a jazz flavor.**

**Join us for Christmas Eve worship at 5:30 pm Wednesday, December 24!**

We'll have a traditional candlelight service with violinist Christine Sasse, carols, and choir.

Sing the carols, hear the stories, and find hope here!

# INTRODUCTION

---

Welcome to the second Advent Devotion Book. This year's book has more writers and I couldn't be more thankful for that! I hope you enjoy reading everyone's submissions as much as I have, and I hope this book will help you to *get ready* for Christmas. We also hope and pray that this book will help you find some peace during this busy and sometimes stressful season.

On Sundays, there is a liturgy for lighting your Advent wreath at home. This liturgy is the same liturgy we are using on Sunday mornings at church. Whether you are a family of one or a family of six, I hope you'll take some time on Sundays to light the candles on your Advent wreath. Taking part in this devotion at home really does reinforce that in this season of darkness, Christ is coming to illuminate our world.

There's a "new" hymn in our new hymnal that reads:

*He came down that we may have love.*

*He came down that we may have love.*

*He came down that we may have love.*

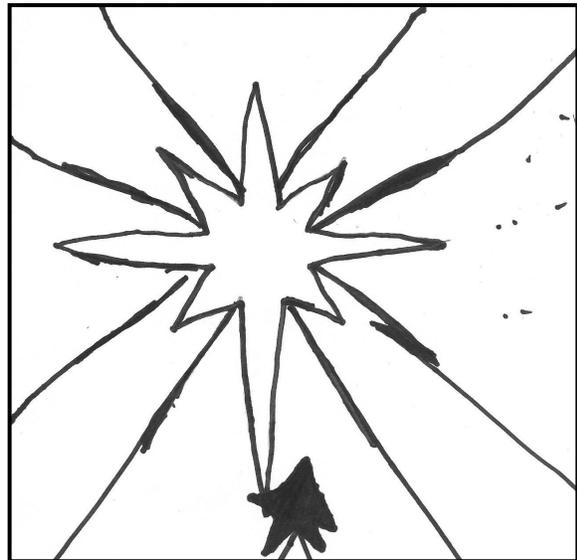
*Hallelujah forevermore.*

May you experience the love of God we see in Jesus Christ this Advent season and forevermore.

Blessings,

Annie Epling

Pastor



# SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2014

---

Isaiah 64:1-9 \* Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 \* 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 \* Mark 13:24-37

## **Lighting the Advent Wreath**

*But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.*

*Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*

*Keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come ... in the evening, or at midnight, or at dawn. Keep awake. (Mark 13:24-37, NRSV)*

Such amazing things happen in the sky to herald the return of the Son of Man:

...Jesus, coming in the clouds  
...the sun grows dark  
...the moon doesn't shine  
...and stars fall from the heavens

So different from that first coming more than 2000 years ago:  
...with angels singing of God's glory and peace on earth  
... with the single star guiding the way to the manger  
...with shepherds and wise men – rich and poor – coming to worship

And so we watch, and wait, and stay alert, waiting again for the coming of Jesus. And we light a single candle in preparation for that glorious day.

[Light the first candle on the Advent wreath.]

...And even if the sun should grow dark  
... even if the moon refuses to shine  
... even if the stars should fall from the sky  
...we will have Jesus, the Light of the World, to shine brightly in our hearts, lighting our way.

**ALL: COME, LORD JESUS. AMEN.**

# MONDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2014

---

Isaiah 1:10-20 \* Psalm 122; 145 \* 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 \* Luke 20:1-8

Christmas Pageants. They never quite go as envisioned. The sheep are crying, the angel Gabriel forgets his lines, halos are bent, beards fall off, and someone has an allergic reaction to all the hay. Even the most organized artistic visions and highest budgets succumb to the unpredictability and sloppiness of life. But after every pageant, no matter what a critic's theatrical review might entail, the congregation gathers for a reception. There are cookies and lemonade! Loving, proud parents and friends gather to congratulate the cast like it was opening night on Broadway! You hear "great job!" "way to go!" and "you make a great king/donkey/angel/lamb!"

What the story of Christmas means for our lives is found in the enactment of this universal church ritual. Just like we plan and rehearse for the pageant, we plan and envision our lives a certain way. For the cast member, the broken halo and forgotten line feel devastating and embarrassing. To the loving parent in the audience, the hiccups are endearing. I liken God to that audience member, full of grace and warmth for us, even as we falter through what was "supposed" to happen. The charming malfunctions of church pageants parallel the grave obstacles of "no room in the inn" or a "pregnant virgin".

The story of Christmas is told not only through the ritual performance of two poor nomads delivering a child far from home 2000 years ago, but also through the warm and fun gathering that follows. The essence of Christmas is found there, in the warmth, love, acceptance, grace, laughter, and joy of messing up and being loved anyways! The message of optimism, resilience, hope, and miraculous, wondrous happenings amongst the imperfections and difficulties of life is told in the plot of the Christmas story, manifested in its annual pageant, and is the reality of daily life. We all are the Christmas story.

---

---

## PRAYER

---

---

*High, Holy God, I see you here on earth. Thank you for the hope of the star in the sky, the optimism of a baby in the manger, and the reassurance of a chorus of angels that take so many forms in our present day world. Amen.*

*Ashley Marting*

# TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2014

---

Psalms 33; 146 \* Isaiah 1:21-31 \* 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 \* Luke 20:9-18

A light-hearted debate runs in our family over whether Easter or Christmas is the highest holy day. Both holidays point to the great mystery of God's desire for relationship with us and all creation. But I love Christmas! I marvel at the lights, thrill to the music, and am awed by the generosity in the giving and receiving of gifts. Throughout the year I anticipate the decorating, the food, and gatherings of family and friends in the darkest days of winter to hope for the coming of the light of the world: a baby, fully human – fully divine.

Christmas reminds me that the God of the cosmos was willing to come as love incarnate in the vulnerable body of a poor child to experience the world from a human



perspective. For me, God's greatest miracle is becoming flesh and living among us. The distance between the divine and humanity is too wide for us to span. We cannot become God. Yet God in love crossed that expanse by becoming one of us. I know Easter has its charms. But this Advent I'm pondering the God who cared enough for us to become one of us. For God so loved the world...

---

## PRAYER

---

*God, we thank you so much for loving us unconditionally and coming to us in the humblest way possible. Thank you for spanning the great distances of time, place and location to be with us. Amen.*

*Terry Epling*

# WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2014

---

Psalms 50; 147:1-11 \* Isaiah 2:1-4 \* 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20 \* Luke 20:19-26

Advent is a season of waiting, one of preparation. When I was child, my family held the tradition of lighting a candle each evening on our Advent wreath. I looked forward with eager anticipation to this nightly ritual. We took turns reading the Advent devotional and opening a window on the Advent calendar. It was a time of awe and mystery, a time to be still and center ourselves in the wonder of the season. As you prepare for the coming celebration of the birth of Jesus, take time to be still and renew within yourself the awe and wonder of waiting for the One who brings Hope and Love and Light into a dark world.

---

## PRAYER

---

*Be still and know that I am God.*

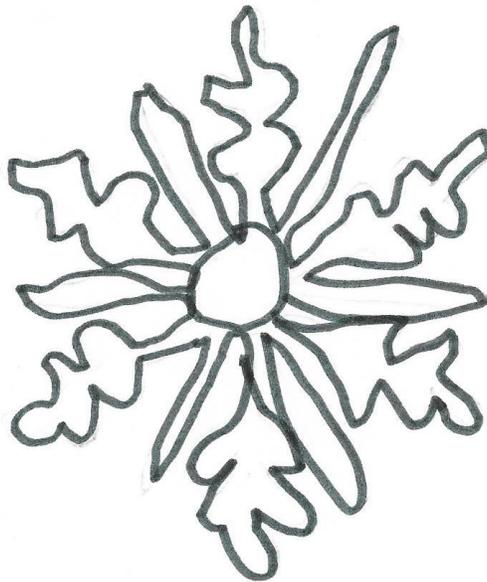
*Be still and know that I am.*

*Be still and know.*

*Be still.*

*Be.*

*Cynthia Williams Phelps*



# THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2014

---

Psalms 18:1-20; 147:12-20 \* Isaiah 2:5-22 \* 1 Thessalonians 3:1-3 \* Luke 20:27-40

*For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken.*

*Psalm 62:1-2*

I've been thinking about birthdays. A lot. Today is the first birthday of our youngest granddaughter, Molly Pearl Gerst. Jim and I have been amazingly blessed with nine grandchildren (number 10 is on the way) and of the nine, eight have birthdays between September and December. Our family does a lot of celebrating this time of year. As each of their birthdays approach, I can't help but think about how it was to wait for their arrival; a hodge-podge of feelings: joy, anxiety, excitement, longing. And then to finally be able to meet and hold that unbelievably beautiful expression of God's love—that feeling is impossible to put into words. Just as when my children were born, I heard the angels sing.

And so it is during Advent as we wait for Emmanuel, for God to be with us. I think about Mary waiting for the birth of Jesus. I wonder if she prayed Psalm 62, "For God alone my soul waits in silence"? Finally, the Word was made flesh and Mary was able to gaze in wonder at that incredible manifestation of God's love for us. We know that she too heard the angels sing when her son was born.

---

---

## PRAYER

---

---

*Good and Gracious God, we are so grateful for all the ways you manifest your love in our world. We are blessed with children, grandchildren and above all with the gift of your son, Jesus. Be with us during this Advent season as our souls wait in silence for the birth of Christ. Help us prepare our hearts and minds for his coming so that we can rejoice with the angels at his birth. Indeed, you are our rock and salvation! Amen.*

*Joanna Gerst*



# FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2014

---

Psalms 102; 148 \* Isaiah 3:1-4:1 \* 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 \* Luke 20:41-21:4

I have recently re-read the book “Practicing His Presence” by Brother Lawrence following a suggestion by a lay minister whom I got acquainted with. Brother Lawrence tried to establish himself in a sense of God’s presence by doing little things for the love of God in any work that he did. According to my lay minister friend, “He (Brother Lawrence) prayerized every moment of his day.” Nothing he did during the course of a day diverted him from God. He would move trays in the kitchen for the love of God. And with Brother Lawrence, the set times of prayer were not different from other times because not one human activity diverted him from God. He was fully established in God’s presence.

Since rereading Brother Lawrence’s book I have learned a great secret. And that secret is learning to give thanks and rejoice evermore regardless of what the situation in my experience is, and praying without ceasing notwithstanding the flurry and commotion of daily living. Simply stated, I have learned to pray and give thanks in motion. I make this resolve first when I wake up in the morning, and I renew it every moment of my ever hectic day.

I give thanks for waking up to a new day filled with new opportunities and possibilities. I acknowledge the vitality with which I run through my morning chores and then say a prayer of gratitude for the food on the table. However, as I listen to the news on my commute to work, I am immediately reminded that conditions are utterly different for some others. Cheerless news of homelessness, food crisis, accidents, shooting, abduction, burglary, and other acts of man’s inhumanity to man are brought to my attention. And instantly I know this is not for my information or entertainment. It is time to pray for God’s love and peace to come upon His children.

At work, at play and at home I make sure that every activity I am engaged in is for the glory of God and the benefit of mankind. I will watch my thoughts about people, about things and about places making sure that I am not judging or thinking or saying things that are ungodly.

And when I retire at night after my day is spent, I always find at least one thing to be thankful for even though conditions are not exactly as I wished them to be. I am convinced beyond doubt that through grace we all can truly rejoice evermore, give thanks in everything and pray without ceasing for this really is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

Try it and you will find the result simply marvelous.

---

---

## PRAYER

---

---

*Help me to give thanks in everything. Amen.*

***Tola Olayefun***

# SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2014

---

Psalms 90; 149 \* Isaiah 4:2-6 \* 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 \* Luke 21: 5-19

*Then because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, Jesus said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."  
Mark 6:31, NIV*

Although the days leading up to Christmas are special, they became particularly important to me and my family because each year the company where I worked closed just before Christmas until the day after New Year's. This holiday shut-down promised that every client and every business crisis was on hold until January 2nd. Knowing that there would be no "quick call" interruptions, no "Blackberry" distractions, no "jump on an airplane" mandate during our holidays was truly a gift. We opened that gift whenever we put up the Nativity, baked cookie stars, listened to Christmas carols, and marked off the Advent calendar. I admit I didn't fully take in the impact of this guaranteed peace time until my usually stoic offspring declared, "I love Christmas ... nobody bugs us."



---

## PRAYER

---

*Lord, we see the joys and obligations of the Christmas season coming at us in the distance. We view them with anticipation and anxiety because we do not fully embrace the meaning of this time. Help us to remember that even doing **all** things with a resentful heart is not worship. Please guide us this Christmas into the deepest meaning of Your birth so that it changes our perspective and our priorities forever. Amen.*

**Sabrina Wrenn**

# SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2014

Isaiah 40:1-11 \* Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 \* 2 Peter 3:8-15a \* Mark 1:1-8

## Lighting the Advent Wreath

[Light the first candle in the Advent wreath.]

*The prophet Isaiah wrote, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" (Mark 1:2-3, NRSV)*

*And John, the messenger of God, proclaimed to all the people who came to him in the wilderness that they must repent of their sins and be baptized. Many people heard his message, repented, and were baptized in the river Jordan.*

It has become our custom to prepare for the birth of the Messiah by decorating our cities and homes, hanging lights inside and out, singing "Frosty the Snowman" and "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer", and measuring the quality of our Christmas morning by the number of gifts we receive.

[Light the second candle in the Advent wreath.]

As we light this second candle in preparation for the coming of the Messiah, perhaps we need to listen again to John the Baptizer's message, preparing the way of the Lord:

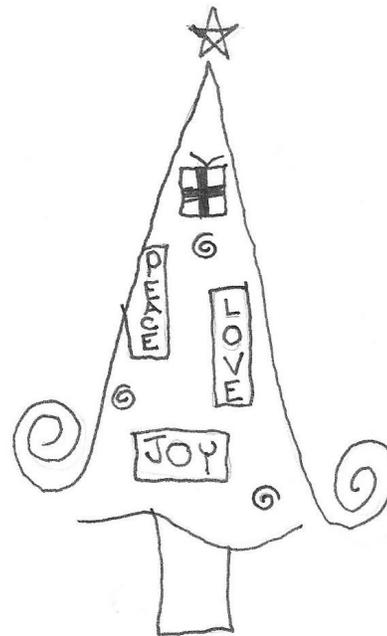
...make straight the paths

...repent of your sins

...be baptized

...and live holy lives devoted to God.

**ALL: COME, LORD JESUS. AMEN.**



# MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2014

---

Psalms 122; 145 \* Isaiah 5:8-17 \* 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 \* Luke 21:20-28

For me, traditional Christmas is worship at Faith Des Peres (of course), then to my sister's house for dinner and pictures and singing whatever Christmas carols are playing. Christmas morning begins at my mom's house for stockings, presents and brunch with mimosas. We try to throw in a nap because most of us were up late wrapping presents (and for me watching either Christmas at the Vatican or the Mormon Tabernacle-it is what is on TV at that hour!). We then have dinner at my sister's. My nieces make individual chocolate lava cakes for dessert.

This year will be quite different -- my brother is getting married on January 3 (for the first time at age 50). Jeff lives and works in Guatemala at a NGO called Common Hope and is marrying Flor who lives in Guatemala City and works part time at Common Hope. My Mom will travel to Guatemala on 12/21 and the rest of us will follow between 12/26 thru 12/28. All 12 of us will celebrate in Guatemala. It may take a bit of getting used to -- those in Guatemala tend to celebrate with fireworks -- not the showy kind, the loud kind and the later in the evening the better. Oh, well! This will be a year for different kinds of celebrations, our presents will be going to Guatemala and our food topped off with wedding cake (I guess they have wedding cake in Guatemala).

Do you have any new Christmas celebrations?

(For more information on Common Hope and the work they do improving the lives of the Mayan people google [CommonHope.org](http://CommonHope.org).)

---

---

## PRAYER

---

---

*Gracious God, thank you for celebrations with family and friends. Thank you for bringing new people and new ways of celebrating Your birth into our lives. Help us to welcome new traditions with open hearts and open minds.*

*Leslie Barnes*



# TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2014

---

Psalms 33; 146 \* Isaiah 5:18-25 \* 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 \* Luke 21:29-38

The season of Christmas is finally here! And we all have our own precious Christmas rituals, don't we...our Christmas traditions which are more precious to us than gold? For some of us, the kids will all be home--home from college, or home from some far off place that's taken them away. For others, the grandkids will be here... expecting to be spoiled beyond all imagination by Nana and Grandpa... and they will... they will!

What is it about Christmas that fills our hearts, again and again, with such wonder and childlike expectation? I'll tell you what it is—it's the traditional things.

You know:

-It's the neighbors homes all festooned with beautiful Christmas lights!  
-It's the Santa's helpers, in front of Schnucks, ringing the Salvation Army bells!  
-It's the Christmas carols we sing in church!  
-It's putting up the Christmas tree and hanging the ornaments...each one a memory in itself! It's leaving home in the cold darkness of a bleak midwinter night on Christmas Eve to sit in church and hear, as we do each year, "The Story"... "The Story" that lets us know that Christmas is so much more than what lies under the tree... that Christmas is what we believe in our hearts!

Christmas is going to the place where we belong... to the place where we feel safe and secure... to the place where we experience acceptance and unconditional love. Christmas is going to the place where the warmth of human love meets the glow of Heaven.

And you and I, we know precisely where that place is! That place is found in a manger, where long ago, a worried father, wanting to do what was right, made his way, along with his expectant fiancée, into the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, where in the cold loneliness of a stable a child was born to an innocent mother, barely more than a child herself. And it is in this new born baby, in this Jesus Child, that all the hopes and fears of all the years are met.

"How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.  
No ear may hear him coming, but in this world of sin,  
Where meek souls will receive him, still, the dear Christ enters in."

---

## PRAYER

---

*Let us Pray: "Oh holy child of Bethlehem, descend to me, I pray  
Cast out my sin and enter in. Be born in me today!" Amen.*

**Joe Marting**

# WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2014

---

Psalms 50; 147:1-11 \* Isaiah 6:1-13 \* 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12 \* John 7:53-8:11

“Whenever I get gloomy with the state of the world, I think about the arrivals gate at Heathrow Airport. General opinion's starting to make out that we live in a world of hatred and greed, but I don't see that. It seems to me that love is everywhere. Often, it's not particularly dignified or newsworthy, but it's always there - fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, boyfriends, girlfriends, old friends. When the planes hit the Twin Towers, as far as I know, none of the phone calls from the people on board were messages of hate or revenge - they were all messages of love. If you look for it, I've got a sneaky feeling you'll find that love actually is all around.”

Opening lines from the movie *Love Actually*.

---

---

## PRAYER

---

---

*Father, please remind us to help and encourage one another, to appreciate the special people you have placed in our lives, and to give thanks for this season of love. Amen.*

**Beth Willock**



# THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2014

---

Psalms 18:1-20; 147:12-20 \* Isaiah 7:1-9 \* 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 \* Luke 22:1-13

The Christmas season is celebrated in many different ways throughout the month of December, as we all count the days until finally Christmas Day arrives. We shop for or make gifts for our family and friends. We decorate our houses, play Christmas music, and bake Christmas cookies. Then there are the Christmas movies that must be watched during the Christmas season – you know what they are. Some of us may also have Christmas books that we want to read every year at this time. When my daughter was young, we had a shelf of Christmas books in her closet that we got out after Thanksgiving every year, to read during the weeks ahead. At the school library where I work, the Christmas books come out on display the first of December every year, and I still get to read them with my students and enjoy the wisdom within these picture books, bits of which I will share here.

- \* From The Berenstain Bears Christmas Tree, by Stan and Jan Berenstain: “This is a time to be thinking of others, mamas, papas, sisters, brothers. Nature’s creatures, great and small, fellow creatures, one and all.”
- \* From Auntie Claus, by Elise Primavera: “And darling, always remember my first and final rule... it is far better to give than to receive.”
- \* From How the Grinch Stole Christmas, by Dr. Seuss: “Maybe Christmas,” he thought, “*doesn’t* come from a store. Maybe Christmas...perhaps...means a little bit more.”
- \* From The Polar Express, by Chris Van Allsburg: “Though I’ve grown old, the bell still rings for me as it does for all who truly believe.”
- \* From Pete the Cat Saves Christmas, by James Dean and Eric Litwin: “At Christmas we give, so give it your all.”
- \* From The Night Before Christmas, by Clement C. Moore: “Happy Christmas to all and to all a good-night.”

---

## PRAYER

---

*Dear God, during this season of Advent, help us to focus on others more than on ourselves. Help us to enjoy the happiness we get by giving gifts, and not worry so much about what we receive in return. Help us to remember that Christmas means much more than the gifts and decorations that come from a store. God, help us to truly believe in your love, especially at this magical time of year. And as we give it our all, help us all to have a Happy Christmas. Amen.*

**Mary Dingus**

# FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2014

---

Psalms 102; 148 \* Isaiah 7:10-25 \* 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5 \* Luke 22:14-30

Psalm 130 [CEB translation]  
*A pilgrimage song*

*I cry out to you from the depths, LORD--my Lord, listen to my voice! Let your ears pay close attention to my request for mercy! If you kept track of sins, LORD--my Lord, who would stand a chance? But forgiveness is with you--that's why you are honored.*

When Presbyterians first began observing the seasons of the church year, Advent was viewed as a penitential time, a time when we remembered our sin and what God through Jesus Christ had done about our sin. What does it mean that “forgiveness is with God?” How do you experience that in your life?

*I hope, LORD. My whole being hopes, and I wait for God's promise. My whole being waits for my Lord--more than the night watch waits for morning; yes, more than the night watch waits for morning!*

Hope is one of the main aspects of knowing that God forgives. God's forgiveness means that our actions are not the last word. The relationships damaged by our sin may be repaired. The relationship God wants to have with us is renewed when we accept God's forgiveness and our hope begins to be realized.

*Israel, wait for the LORD! Because faithful love is with the LORD; because great redemption is with our God! God is the one who will redeem Israel from all its sin.*

But hope is also a matter of a transformed future. And we now understand Advent as not just a time of waiting to celebrate the birth of Jesus as a human being. Advent has become a time to renew our hope in the fulfillment of *all* of God's promises, looking to the time when the redemption of the world will be so complete that there will be no more sin, no more weeping, no more death. Advent is the time we look forward to the celebration of the second coming of Christ. How will we use our time in Advent to prepare our hearts and lives for that celebration?

---

---

## PRAYER

---

---

*Lord, during this Advent season give us hope. Help us to look toward the future when all of your promises are fulfilled. Amen.*

**Barbara Willock**



# SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2014

---

Psalms 90; 149 \* Isaiah 8:1-15 \* 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18 \* Luke 22:31-38

I'm a list maker. It helps keep me organized. There are lists on my smartphone and lists on paper stuffed in my pockets. For me there are two kinds of lists: shopping lists (milk, bread, OJ...) and to do lists (go to the grocery...). In the fall I begin making a shopping list for Christmas gifts. With advertisements that begin around Halloween and lots of hints dropped by our children, I don't lack for ideas. My written lists along with my Amazon Wishlist<sup>®</sup> explode by Thanksgiving. I pin ideas in Pinterest and favorite them on Etsy looking for the perfect present for every loved one on my "nice" list.

Yet somehow, after the purchases are made and the presents carefully wrapped, the doubts begin. It doesn't seem like much regardless of how much I've spent. Will they love it or will they thank me politely and move on to the next package in hope of something better?

A few years ago I determined to switch lists; to worry less about my shopping list and emphasize my to do list. I know that whatever I gave Annie last Christmas was carefully chosen and appreciated but at the moment I can't recall what it was. What I remember instead are choosing and putting up the Christmas tree; a cold carriage ride through the Tilles Park lights with blankets and hot chocolate; lunch with the girls all dressed up; dinner with the boys before a movie; staying up late with Annie waiting for Santa in the quiet glow of the tree as the wood fire fades; and, singing Silent Night by candlelight at the Christmas Eve worship service.

This year my to do list is growing with ideas for holiday experiences with family and friends. These are the gifts that last and are remembered from year to year forever.

---

---

## PRAYER

---

---

*Lord, during this season of joy, hope, and peace may we discover anew the treasure of family, friends, and faith. Amen.*

*Terry Epling*

# SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2014

---

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 \* Psalm 126 \* 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 \* John 1:6-8, 19-28

## Lighting the Advent Wreath

[Light the first and second candles of the Advent wreath.]

If Jesus comes to us again at Christmas this year, and if Jesus dwells within each of us, shouldn't that make a difference in who we are and how we live our lives? Hear these words from First Thessalonians:

*“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

*“Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of the prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.*

*“May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*“The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-24, NRSV)*

If we seek Jesus, who is born in the manger, shouldn't we:

...be at peace among ourselves?

...help the weak and the poor?

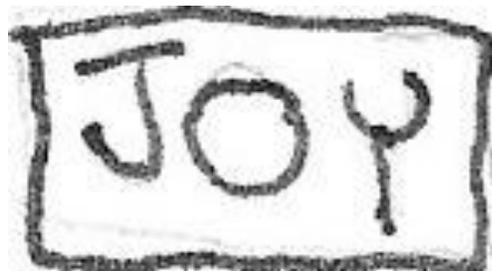
...not repay evil for evil, but always do good to one another?

...in all circumstances, give thanks?

[Light the third candle of the Advent wreath.]

As we light this third candle, let us remember that this is the will of God in Christ Jesus, who comes to us.

**ALL: COME, LORD JESUS. AMEN.**



# MONDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2014

---

Psalms 122; 145 \* Isaiah 8:16-9:1 \* 2 Peter 1:1-11 \* Luke 22:39-53

The opening verses of 2 Peter celebrate the grace and peace we have through “the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord.” But what are we to do with this knowledge? The author of 2 Peter offers practices that point us in the right direction:

*This is why you must make every effort to add moral excellence to your faith; and to moral excellence, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, endurance; and to endurance, godliness; and to godliness, affection for others; and to affection for others, love. If all these are yours and they are growing in you, they'll keep you from becoming inactive and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. - 2 Peter 1:5-9, CEB*

We are a little over half way through Advent. While we are preparing for Christmas, we are also practicing for the time after time when Christ comes again and all of God's promises will be realized, creation will be restored, and the love of God will have transformed all of life.

So ~ how do we live in the meantime? What practices can we start, as part of our observance of Advent, that will help us to be active and fruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ? To do all that 2 Peter suggests will literally take a lifetime. When first reading the list we may think, my goodness, I can't keep all of that straight, much less do all of it at once.

Which is why things on the list may be called “practices” ~ they are things we have to practice. When I am asked to play the piano for a group to sing, even though I practiced long hours as a child and teenager, I still must spend a number of hours practicing so that the group *can* sing with my accompaniment.

The Christian practices 2 Peter describes are no different. Moral excellence is not something any of us achieve just by reading the words. Knowledge ~ especially the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ ~ is something we gain in our interactions with other Christians as well as our own private scripture study and devotional time. Self-control, endurance, godliness, and affection are all practices we can develop through intentional effort.

This passage reminds me of Romans 5:3-5 which ends, “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” [Rom 5:5b, CEB] How will you allow that love to be expressed as you practice for the coming of Christ?

---

---

## PRAYER

---

---

*Lord, we are so busy during this season. Help us to express our love for you through our practices. Amen.*

**Barbara Willock**

# TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2014

---

Psalms 33; 146 \* Isaiah 9:2-7 \* 2 Peter 1:12-21 \* Luke 22:54-69

## Expectations

Advent is the season of anticipation. The full measure is that of hope, joy, love and peace. These things are fulfilled in Christ, Emmanuel – God with us.

Believers were looking for a “King of Kings.” How could this story of a humble birth in a stable result in what those believers were expecting?

As the story unfolds through the life of Jesus, it is revealed this was no ordinary King. Imagine some of the disappointment for those with a different vision of power and glory. This Prince of Peace was quite the opposite of ordinary power and glory.

What about our own expectation for living in Christ? Is some adjustment desired? Our own prayers might be for sharing hope, joy, love and peace with all.

---

---

## PRAYER

---

---

*Dear Lord, as we get closer to Christmas our expectations grow. Help us to slow down and enjoy this season so that it brings us joy even when we are weary and stressed. Amen.*

*Dianne Modrell*



# WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2014

---

Psalms 50; 147:1-11 \* Isaiah 9:8-17 \* 2 Peter 2:1-10a \* Mark 1:1-8

I have mixed feelings about the liturgical calendar. I get the logic of the cycle, from Advent to Christmas to Epiphany; Lent to Easter to Pentecost; Ordinary Time to Christ the King; and then all over again. It's the insistence on liturgical purity I have difficulty with. Maybe this is just a pastor problem, but you should know that there are those who think it inappropriate to sing Christmas carols during Advent! For the liturgically-minded each season of the church year has its own mood and theme. Lent is particularly somber, for example, because it is about repentance, so singing *Halleluiah* is not allowed. Advent is most decidedly about waiting and should not be impatiently infiltrated by the big event, therefore, no Christmas carols.

*Humbug*, I say! Life isn't like that. Why should the church be? So I humbly propose singing *Joy to the World* all year long. Why should we pretend that the Lord isn't yet come so that we can appear to wait? Let heaven and nature sing for Christ's sake, even in December! As in life we can handle the complexity of messages and emotions, joy and grief side by side, hope tempered by fear, peace broken by disagreement. After all, isn't this our experience at every extended family gathering during the holidays?

Whatever you're experiencing this time of year, know that God is there with you. I'm grateful for a community of faith that, while following the church calendar, allows for the full expression of who we are as individuals and meets us where we are in all its messy complexity.

\*This reflection is given with tongue in cheek irreverence.  
The writer regrets any offense to his friends in the liturgical purity community.

---

---

## PRAYER

---

---

*Lord, in the complex emotions, competing demands, and challenging tasks of our lives help us to focus our attention on the central message of the good news we have received from you, news of great joy to all people. Amen.*

**Terry Epling**

# THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2014

---

Psalms 18:1-20; 147:12-20 \* Isaiah 11:1-9 \* Ephesians 6:10-20 \* John 3:16-21

In late November 2012, I had a 13-month old, a 3-year old and a 6-year old. I was taking down Halloween decorations and recuperating from four spectacular birthday parties (all three kids' birthdays are within a 30 day period in the Fall), as well as preparing to host Thanksgiving. Not to mention dealing with the flu that washed over the family and stayed for over three weeks. I was drained and the holiday season, with all of its tasks, was darkly looming. I was actually considering the idea of not putting up the Christmas tree.

Skipping the tree is big for me. It was always a big deal in our house growing up and I think I've had one in every dorm, apartment or house I've lived in since home. But, I can say that for several years I had not been into it. I would go through the motions of getting everything out and then spend a few weeks looking at it, only thinking about



---

how much work it was going to be to put it all back away.

Then, of course, there was the knowledge that this giant sparkling tree full of delicate ornaments was going to be a magnet for my very inquisitive 13-month old who was into everything. His nickname at the time was "Monster Baby." Just the *thought* of wrestling with him all month to keep him away from it exhausted me.

I tossed this idea of skipping the tree out to a few trusted confidants who were absolutely horrified at the idea that I would deprive my kids of a Christmas tree. *Really? That bad?* But, two of these said individuals suggested, "Maybe just do a small tree and put it up on something so that Hayden can't get to it."

*Hmm....?* And there was born that year's decorating philosophy: just a small tree, put on something where Hayden can't get it, and don't get down all the boxes from the attic, just make some simple ornaments with the kids.

And it was.....absolutely perfect. The best tree ever. James and I strung popcorn & jellybeans for the garland, Morgan picked out colors and jelly beans as we worked. We made bead ornaments and colored some crafty ornaments. James made a bunch of construction paper ornaments and wrote our names on them with his newly acquired printing skills.

We placed it up on top of a pedestal table, but then barricaded it on the sides with the ottoman, a bench and a chair. Hayden was definitely flummoxed. He tried, but couldn't get to it.

The kids had so much fun decorating. Just the act of hanging ornaments on the tree was pure JOY to them. Oh, and when they said, "What about the star?" and I said, "Yeah, I'm not getting it down this year, we'll have to do without" - James went straight for the paper and crayons and whipped us up the best Christmas star ever. I still have it.

---

---

PRAYER

---

---

*Dear Lord, help us to simplify the season so that we may feel the JOY.  
Show us that there are lots of things on the "To Do" list  
that don't actually need doing and other things that really "Do." Amen.*

*Emma Dolley*

## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2014

---

Psalms 102; 148 \* Isaiah 11:10-16 \* Revelation 20:1-10 \* John 5:30-47

Our family has always loved dogs. In fact, I don't remember a time growing up that we didn't have a dog. Not every dog we adopted was well behaved or well trained, but we loved them and they loved us. They were always part of our family.

The first dog I can really remember was named Buddy. He was part Australian Shepherd and part Boxer. Buddy and his brothers and sisters had been found at the side of the road abandoned. Buddy was just the kind of dog a home with 3 young boys wanted... always ready to chase us, always getting into trouble and always chewing anything he could.

Buddy's favorite thing to chew on was our socks. He loved it when our socks hung loosely over our toes giving him something to grab on to. He would then yank them off our feet and run as we chased him. He would chew holes in almost every pair of socks we owned. We thought it was funny...mom, not so much. Every Christmas, there was a gift from Buddy to each of us under the tree - a large pack of new socks. Buddy was with us for 13 years. He died days after my twin brother and I left for our freshman year of college.



The house was so quiet that 10 days later my parents adopted their current dog, Baron, a Golden Retriever. Baron was adopted from "Flaw Dogs", a group that takes pure bred dogs that have been rejected by the breeders for

---

some reason. In Baron's case, he was oversized. At Christmas time, Baron also has a gift for all of us: a book. My mom says that since Baron is purebred, he is more refined and that's why he gives us a book.

We have always loved our dogs and treated them like family. They have a stocking under the tree and it is always filled with treats! My brothers and I have continued the tradition of loving dogs and as we have purchased our own homes, we too have adopted dogs.

Dogs love us unconditionally. Nothing can brighten your day more than having your dog greet you at the end of a long, hard day. They don't care if you are rich or poor, the color of your skin, if you are fat or thin or even what kind of job you have. They just love you. What a lesson they teach us.

During Advent we prepare to receive the most precious and unconditional gift that God has ever given us...his own son, Jesus Christ. What a lesson He teaches us. Let us strive to love each other unconditionally.

*"Dog" spelled backwards is "God."*

---

---

PRAYER

---

---

*God, we thank you for all members of our family including the 4-legged kind. Help us to love unconditionally, just like they love. And, help us to receive the most precious gift of all, your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Danny Mortimer*

# SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2014

---

Psalms 90; 149 \* Isaiah 28:9-22 \* Revelation 20:11-21:8 \* Luke 1:5-25

I remember when I learned that Christmas is about giving. I was around Julia's age and my dad was working at a coal mine somewhere far back in the mountains in eastern Kentucky. Not many families lived so far away from town. Those who did were among the poorest around. Somehow my dad got to know a family living in a tiny house on the winding one-lane road on the way to the mine. I suppose they were subsistence farmers, hardworking but unacquainted with wages. Maybe the father took odd jobs for a little cash. There were two daughters, younger than me. I didn't know any of that when my dad drove me up to their house.

In the back seat of our car were bags of groceries and wrapped gifts. I helped carry the boxes up the wooden steps to the front door. The father met us there, smiling, shaking my dad's hand. Behind him I saw the girls, barefoot on the rough floor, their eyes wide and their lips making a circle as they stared at the boxes in my arms. They trembled with excitement.

On our way home my dad did not make a point of talking about this lesson but the message was received. I suspect that my list of hoped for presents was particularly long. Probably I had complained that others would surely get more than I. That year some of the money that would have bought my presents instead provided a Christmas celebration for two little girls and their parents and I couldn't have been happier about that. That's when I learned that Christmas, and indeed the Christian life, is about giving; a lesson I hope never to forget.

---

---

## PRAYER

---

---

*For all that we have, we give you thanks, dear Lord. With those who have little, help us to share as a demonstration of our gratitude and care for all your children. Amen.*

*Terry Epling*



# SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2014

---

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 \* Luke 1:46b-55 \* Romans 16:25-27 \* Luke 1:26-38

## Lighting the Advent Wreath

[Light the first three candles of the Advent wreath.]

*After the angel came to Mary and told her that she would conceive the child in her womb and would call him Jesus, Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." (Luke 1:38, NRSV.)*

And Mary sings her Song of Praise:

*...My soul magnifies the Lord*

*...He has scattered the proud*

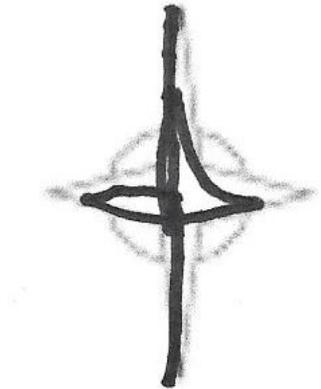
*...He has brought down the powerful from their thrones*

*...He has lifted up the lowly*

*...He has filled the hungry*

*...He has provided for the poor (Luke 1:46-55)*

We marvel at Mary, the mother of the Messiah, herself a single, teenaged mother, herself poor and powerless. But she understood that the baby she would call Jesus was sent not just to her, but to the world...



*...To the hungry*

*...To the weak*

*...To the very young and the very old*

*...To those who suffer or are in pain*

[Light the fourth candle of the Advent wreath.]

We light this fourth candle to remember Mary, the mother of Jesus. May the light of this candle also remind us that the light of Jesus shines for everyone.

**ALL: COME, LORD JESUS. AMEN.**

# MONDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2014

---

Psalms 122; 145 \* Isaiah 31:1-9 \* Revelation 21:22-22:5 \* Luke 1:39-48a (48b-56)

Research has shown that music is profoundly linked to personal memories. "Even for persons with severe dementia, music can tap deep emotional recall. For individuals suffering from Alzheimer's, memory for things--names, places, facts--is compromised, but memories from our teenage years can be well-preserved. Favorite music or songs associated with important personal events can trigger memory of lyrics and the experience connected to the music." (musicandmemory.org)

Robert McFerrin (the father of Bobby) was an opera singer as a young man. He broke racial barriers to become the first African American man to sing solo at the Metropolitan Opera. In his later years doctors suspected he was suffering from Alzheimer's. "He lost all of his memory except for his music. He could sing anything, but he just couldn't speak to you," said Bobby McFerrin (quoted in a Wall Street Journal article). A new documentary called *I'll Be Me* about singer Glen Campbell's struggle with Alzheimer's disease is now playing in theaters. A reviewer for the Hollywood Reporter said, "Although his difficulties are at times clearly evident and he's ever reliant on teleprompters to remember the lyrics, his singing and virtuosic guitar playing were right on target..." Such is the power of music.

Here are some of my favorite Christmas musical memories. When I was about 8 or 9, the adult choir at our church presented a Christmas cantata. My grandparents sang in the choir. My grandfather had a solo on *We Three Kings*. What is really striking about my memory of the cantata is that there was a certain musical motive which appeared at various times throughout the longer composition, and even now, so many years later, I can sing that. My parents had a Christmas album which contained a ditty called *I Must Go Nuts at Christmas* (a novelty song by a guy singing in a fake Swedish accent). That song is an ear worm. But I loved my parents' Nat King Cole album, and I can still imagine his silky smooth voice. Thinking of those songs makes me remember our family being together in our snug, comfortable home where I felt loved and cherished.

As a teenager, I had a crush on an older boy in junior high school. He had a changed voice and could sing the low "bohm" at the end of *Carol of the Bells*. At the time that seemed mature and sexy (?). My high school musical memories include my Spanish teacher annually playing a recording of *Feliz Navidad*, another song that sticks in your head. I recall the first time I heard *In the Bleak Midwinter*, sung by the high school select choir, a cappella. I thought it was absolutely lovely, and it is still a favorite hymn. Participating in the Madrigal Dinners during college years was fun. The

---

performances ended with the singing of *We Wish You a Merry Christmas*. The lyric "bring us some figgy pudding" from this song was quite appropriate, for after each madrigal dinner performance the choir and instrumentalists got to eat whatever food that had been prepared but not served to the paying customers. Several nights of good free food and the company of friends as a college student -- ah, bliss.

My first church organ gig was at the First United Methodist Church in Paragould, Arkansas. On Christmas Eve that church was always packed with worshippers. That evening the bulletin listed the hymn *Joy to the World*. I gave the organ introduction, and the cantor took a breath and formed his mouth for the J of Joy. One small problem. I suddenly stopped short. I realized I had just played the introduction for *Angels We Have Heard on High*. The WRONG song. Everybody, including me, had a good laugh.

There have been so many other memorable musical Christmas moments -- hearing the choir rehearse the Christmas hymn *O Magnum Mysterium* in Westminster Abbey; caroling with the Unity Singers group; my daughter's Christmas concerts; preparing and performing worship and concert music with various church choirs; teaching beginning piano students at the university and sharing in their pleasure as they learn to play *Jingle Bells*. What are your favorite Christmas musical memories?



---

---

#### PRAYER

---

---

*Lord, you are worthy of all praise; we thank you for the gift of music, especially for the music of this holy season. Thank you for music which is indelibly burned in our memories, music which we enjoy with family and friends in the present, and for the music we will experience in the future. Lord, may we come at last to the place where angels and archangels and all the choirs of heaven sing your praise forevermore. Amen.*

**Gay Spears**

# TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2014

---

Psalm 33; 146 \* Isaiah 33:17-22 \* Revelation 22:6-11, 18-20 \* Luke 1:57-66

## *The Birth of John the Baptist*

*When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy. On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John." They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."*

*Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.*

---

---

## PRAYER

---

---

*Lord, as I wait for Your coming this Advent season I ask that You grant me patience. Life is confusing and messy so I need Your guidance to follow Your way. Please grant me the patience to seek You in all things. Grant me the wisdom to see that You have cared for me even before my birth and that You have a plan for my life. Let me use this Advent season to reconnect with You. As I count down the days to Your coming, I pray that I may be strengthened by the knowledge that You are always at my side. Amen.*

**Rachel Neuner**



# WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2014

---

Psalm 96:1-13 \* Isaiah 9:2-7 \* Titus 2:11-14 \* Luke 2:1-20

## Lighting the Christ Candle

[Light the first four candles of the Advent wreath.]

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered.

Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

[Light the Christ candle.]

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. (Luke 2:1-20, NRSV)

**ALL: COME, LORD JESUS. AMEN.**

## **Faith Des Peres Presbyterian Church (USA)**

11155 Clayton Road, St. Louis, MO 63131-2548

(314) 432-8029 | [www.faithdesperes.org](http://www.faithdesperes.org)

Rev. Dr. Anne B. Epling, Pastor

Dr. Gay Holmes Spears, Director of Music & Organist



### **Parent's Day Out, December 6, 10:30-2:30**

Parents, get some shopping done or just have fun while the teenagers of the church babysit your child(ren) for \$10. Register by December 3 so we know how many babysitters are needed. Please pack a lunch or snack for your child.

### **Presbyterian Women Cookie Exchange**

**December 10** at 10:30am is the annual Presbyterian Women brunch and cookie exchange. Leila Davis will be hosting. Bring 2-3 dozen cookies to exchange. Please RSVP to Leila at 314-994-0039 or Yolanda in the church office at [adminasst@faithdesperes.org](mailto:adminasst@faithdesperes.org) or 314-432-8029.

### **TNT (20s and 30 Somethings), December 12, 6:30pm**

Join us at the Kirkwood Brew Station for a night out. Babysitting offered at the church for free. Make a reservation with Beth Willock.

### **Annual Gingerbread House Part — Register by December 7!**

Come decorate a gingerbread house on Saturday, December 13 from 10am-noon. This event is geared towards kids but all ages are welcome to decorate a house or to provide help. Invite friends to join us in Fellowship Hall for a fun morning together. Please sign up in the Gathering Space by December 7 so we know how many houses to prepare. The cost is \$13 a house. See Leslie Barnes if you have questions.