



Advent 2016

ADVENT 2016 . . . ARE YOU READY?

Welcome to the fourth Advent Devotion Book. I hope you enjoy reading everyone's submissions as I much as I have, and I hope this book will help you prepare for Christmas. I also hope and pray that this book will help you find some peace during this busy and sometimes stressful season.

This year, we're exploring the different names for the Messiah that we find in Isaiah 9:6: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Each week in worship we'll ponder these titles, how the people in Isaiah's time understood them, how Jesus did or did not fulfill them, and the expectations we bring to these names.

On Sundays, there is a liturgy for lighting your Advent wreath at home that focuses on each of these names. 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 candles (any candle will do) and remember that in this season of darkness, Christ is coming to illuminate our world. This Advent, may you experience the love of God we see in Jesus Christ who is a Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace.

Blessings,

Annie Epling
Pastor

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

We'll have a traditional candlelight service with carols and choir.

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

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2016

Isaiah 2:1-5 * Psalm 122 * Romans 13:11-14 * Matthew 24:36-44

Lighting the Advent Wreath

The First Candle—The Prince of Peace

Reader 1: Long ago, the people of Israel were being taken into exile. They were taken away from their homes, away from their house of worship, and away from the people they knew. The scriptures say they were taken into thick darkness.

Reader 2: People today live in war-torn places such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. We are reminded of the darkness of the world today, but we believe that God is bringing light into our lives and into our world.

(Light one candle.)

Prayer: Prince of Peace, come into our lives, bring your peace, and teach us how to be light in the darkness. Amen.



MONDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2016

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

When I was seven, a friend of my parents sent me an advent calendar. It folded out to reveal a 19th century English winter scene. For years I dragged that calendar out. In the first year I would open the proper day and then close it so I could open it again the next day with the new window. Fortunately I stopped that *before* I had broken any of the shutters off the calendar.

When I first began learning about Advent from the church, the “official” color was purple. While purple is a royal color, it is also a penitential color. I wondered why would a season of such anticipation that ends in such joy be focused on penitence? on confession? on repentance?

This year those who follow the daily lectionary begin reading the book of Isaiah. In the first chapters Isaiah warns the people that their bad behavior has been noticed by God and God is going to do something about it. But ~ wait ~ there’s still time, Isaiah writes.

Wash! Be clean!

Remove your ugly deeds from my sight.

Put an end to such evil;
learn to do good.

Seek justice:

help the oppressed;
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow. (*Isaiah 1:16-17 CEB*)

Advent is a time in which we both anticipate the birth of Jesus and the second coming of Jesus, the time when there will no longer be oppressed persons, the time when orphans will no longer need to be defended, the time when widows will not need someone to plead for them. Advent is a time to learn to do good ~ and then practice doing it just as Jesus did.

PRAYER

God of Justice, teach us to do good that we may faithfully celebrate your coming among us.

Barbara Willock

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2016

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

Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

Text Helen Lemmel, 1922

*Refrain: Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in his wonderful face;
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.*

PRAYER

Dear Father, I come to you humbly as we begin the season of Advent and ask that you calm my mind and open my heart in preparation for the coming of your Son. This season is so special but sometimes feels like a blur with all the obligations and commercial buzz. I ask that you help me block out the stresses and unnecessary noise so that I can focus on my relationship with you. Help me strengthen my spirit and find a joyful balance during this exciting time of the year. Thank you, thank you, thank you! Amen.

Rachel Neuner



WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2016

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

Reverse Advent Calendar

Since becoming a grandmother, I've made it a point to purchase candy filled Advent Calendars for my grandchildren. Each year I hand the calendars out after we finish eating our Thanksgiving feast. I'm sure most of my grandchildren open a little window each day and eat only the chocolate designated for the day. One grandchild has admitted to cleaning out all of the chocolate in one fell swoop as soon as he gets home on Thanksgiving night. It's so difficult to wait. Whatever their approach, the calendars are fun, and I'm sure the grandchildren enjoy having them.

I'm not going to purchase Advent Calendars this year. (I can already hear their groans and see their disappointed little faces.) I'm going to encourage the grandchildren to do what I'm doing instead - a Reverse Advent Calendar. I'm going to stress giving, rather than getting. Instead of eating a piece of chocolate every day of Advent, I want them to give something every day. I will show them the large basket on my living room coffee table. I will tell them I select a food, personal care, or household item to put in the basket every day. Maybe they will speculate on whether or not everything will fit in the basket. Who knows? On Christmas Eve, I will drive my basket of items to Circle of Concern and donate them so that others may have what they need to have a Merry Christmas. Hopefully, a few grandchildren will want to tag along and donate filled baskets of their own.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, instill in us a spirit of generosity during this Advent season. Help us demonstrate love for all of your children, those that have more than they need and those that need more than they have. In your name we pray. Amen.

Terry Baker



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2016

Psalms 102; 148 * Isaiah 10:5-19 * 2 Peter 2:17-22 * Matthew 11:2-15

We are in the process of moving. We have lived in the same house in Wildwood for 26 years.

It is amazing to me what we have accumulated in that time. So many things that I thought I wanted and/or needed are now in the hands of Goodwill. And, I still have far too much stuff. I have realized just how cluttered my life has become with things that are not important.

As we move out to Innsbrook, where life seems slower and more gentle, I have decided to try to de-clutter my life as well. I need to spend more time in prayer and with those I love. I need to take time to look out at nature and the beautiful earth that God has created. I need to be more thankful for all the blessings I have been given. I need to slow down and spend more time with God. I need to not only speak with God, but also take time to be silent and listen for His answer.

During this Advent season, when we are to prepare for the birth of the Christ child, let us take time to enjoy the people and beauty around us and not worry about stuff. God is waiting for us to slow down and spend time with him.

PRAYER

Dear God, calm our minds and allow us to enjoy all you have created. May our hearts be at peace to welcome your Son. Amen.

Yolanda Mortimer



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2016

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

The first year Mike and I were married our congregation introduced us to the Advent Wreath and thus began a family tradition. During Advent we eat by the light of the Advent candles. Which means that tonight ~ as we have every night this week, we will eat by the light of a single candle. All the other lights in the house will be turned off. It is very dark! And we are reminded of how much we depend on the light. I find I need that reminder every year.

We read Isaiah's invitation to walk by the Lord's light and celebrated that Jesus is the light of the world. Today's reading from Isaiah is tough. There's very little light in it and the ending is very dark indeed. In fact, this may be an R-rated text. Verse 10 promises blessedness to the righteous, but most of Isaiah's words are about the unrighteous, those who do not live in right relationships with their neighbors nor with God.

Advent spans the shortest days of the year, the time when, for us in the northern hemisphere, light is at a premium, a time to remember the metaphorical importance of light in our actions. Another new hymn echoes Isaiah's call:

(Come! Live in the Light!, GtG#749)

Come! Live in the light!

Shine with the joy and the love of the Lord!

The refrain has us singing:

We are called to act with justice; we are called to love tenderly;

we are called to serve one another, to walk humbly with God.

PRAYER

God of Advent, we thank you for the time to remember that you come as the light in our darkness to transform us into your people. May we walk in your light today.

Barbara Willock

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2016

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

Over the summer and fall, my family has been cleaning out the home of a dear family member who passed away. This is the home where I spent each Christmas Eve as a child. Though much has changed since the last time we all gathered there, I can still feel all those wonderful years. Laughter around the dinner table, wrapping paper flying as kids tore into presents, the smell of turkey in the air. There was a time when tissue paper floated a bit too close to the dining room table candles. One year a pipe burst and it rained on many of the Christmas cookies. The good and the unfortunate events are vivid in my mind. For our family, the Christmas tradition of gathering together looks a bit different now. My sister's home became the new venue and our menu has expanded because there are a lot more of us now. I hope my children will look back on all these great, and sometimes crazy gatherings, with the same fondness. No matter what the celebration looks like, or how many times it changes, I hope it will continue to shape their lives.

PRAYER

Good and gracious Lord, please be with families gathered this Christmas season. Also comfort those who cannot be with loved ones, or have no one to call 'family.' Bring peace to all this holiday season as we remember the birth of your son. Guide us to be his light and love for those around us. Amen.

Beth Willock



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2016

Isaiah 11:1-10 * Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19 * Romans 15:4-13 * Matthew 3:1-12

Lighting the Advent Wreath

The Second Candle—Wonderful Counselor

Reader 1: Long ago, when God's people were being taken into exile, they lost everything they knew. Hope seemed lost, and the people wondered if they would ever see their homes, their families, and their temple again.

Reader 2: In our world today, mothers, fathers, and children live on the streets and in shelters. People lose their homes and their jobs. Hope is hard to find, but God gives us resources to help bring hope to those in need.

(Light two candles.)

Prayer: Wonderful Counselor, help us to see hope in times of darkness. Help us to share your hope with those in need, and to do what we can to help build your kingdom. Amen.



MONDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2016

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

The first chapter of Isaiah describes the problems God sees in Judah because they have not been faithful to God and to one another. They worship but they do not do justice. In chapter 2, Isaiah describes the justice God has in mind for all creation. God will perform justice by judging between the nations and teaching them how to behave with one another.

Isaiah's vision is of a future in which God finally puts an end to wars and disputes between peoples and nations. As Christians we have seen that vision lived in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. And yet ~ like Isaiah, we still wait for the whole world to experience the life God's wants every person and all creation to live. In Advent our longing is heightened as we look around us and see all the ways in which justice is *not* practiced, all the places we and so many others desperately need the justice of God expressed in Jesus.

What kind of world do *you* imagine God wants? Make some notes around the edge of this page of your vision of how life will be lived in the kingdom of God. We continue to wait for Christmas ~ and for the second coming of Christ and the fully realized kingdom of God. While we're waiting, what one thing might you do to bring that kingdom a little bit closer ~ to your family? to the congregation? to your community?

PRAYER

God of all creation, we wait with impatience for the time of justice and the end of warring. Give us your vision of life as you intend and teach us how to live it.

Barbara Willock

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2016

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

Thessalonians 3:13

“But you, brothers and sisters, do not grow weary in doing what is right.”

The plastic tablecloth had been scrubbed so often there were patches where the table showed through the weave. That table cover, the smells of spice and Johnson’s floor wax, the toaster with the Campbell’s kids salt and pepper shakers standing guard made me relax: just enough to release a flood of tears. Grandma stopped slicing apples and said, “Tell me about it.” I took an apple slice from the bowl and spilled my story.

I’d been dumped. And it was my fault. He said I was a show-off and I talked too loud and too fast. He said it was cheap of me to bake a birthday cake instead of buying one. On and on I relayed the many things I needed to do better or different. What was wrong with me? Grandma looked at me and then into the bowl. It was empty. I’d eaten all the pie filling while lamenting my situation. She took her coin purse from the drawer and said, “The only thing wrong here is that we don’t have enough apples to get to the bottom of this story.” And we laughed. We talked on the way to the market and back. I helped finish the pie and we shared it after dinner.

Love is patient and kind and makes you smile in sad situations. Love doesn’t make you work more; it makes your work more significant. Love lets you eat all the apples because there is something more important going on.

PRAYER

God, help me put my energy toward what matters most. Help me correctly prioritize the things I do all day long. Help me put flexibility and compassion ahead of focus and accomplishment. Help me do better through this prayer.

Diane Asyre

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2016

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

Before the days of commercial Christmas yard displays such as blow up Santas, neighbors might decorate their front door or string lights in their pine tree. My family always had religious themed displays – to be expected of a pastor, I guess. My father, the original recycler, would find a picture of Bethlehem, or choir boys, or shepherds and sheep, and put the selected picture in an antique opaque projector, and shine it on the wall where a large sheet of cardboard, usually from a refrigerator box, was taped up. We drew the outlines, painted the figures, cut them out, shellacked them to protect them from the rain or snow, and mounted them on frames so they would stand up. The angels (or choir boys) went up on the flat front porch roof overlooking the manger scene or the Little Town of Bethlehem set up down below. The figures were used –mix and match- until they became disreputable, faded or weather worn, and then a new display would be created. Despite the special services to prepare for and the bustle of the Christmas Season, my father always made sure our house, with that special homemade touch, always visually proclaimed the joy of the arrival of Baby Jesus

PRAYER

Dear Lord, let us continue to honor your arrival - not only with our decorations, but also in our words and deeds. Amen.

Jim Baker



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2016

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

Why Joseph?

Matthew 1:18-25

“Mary was pledged to Joseph, but before they could wed, he learned Mary was pregnant. Her child was not his. Rather than expose Mary to public disgrace and possible stoning, Joseph purposed to divorce her quietly.”

We understand from Matthew’s account that Joseph is an innocent victim in Mary’s plight, yet he is led by the Lord’s angel to set aside his own humiliation and fears to take Mary home as his wife. When her son is born, Joseph is the one who names the child Jesus as the angel directed Joseph to do.

In these verses, God’s wisdom in calling Joseph as Mary’s partner in the home where the Son of God grew to manhood, is revealed. Although seemingly dishonored by this predicament which is not of his own making, Joseph:

- *Showed compassion for Mary and for her child;
- *Was open and obedient to God’s call;
- *Was loyal to Mary, protecting her in the face of perceived scandal;
- *Was unselfish putting Mary and the child before himself;
- *Accepted and trusted God’s direction despite the circumstances that urged him to do otherwise.

PRAYER

Lord, in this Advent season, keep before us the examples of those who loved Christ first so that we are instructed and inspired to do the same. Amen.

Sabrina Wrenn

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2016

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

How do we “seek justice” as Isaiah admonished us? How do we “help the oppressed” or “defend the orphan” or “plead for the widow”? Who are the oppressed and orphans and widows?

Isaiah gives us some clues in the next verses:

Zion will be redeemed by justice, and those who change their lives by righteousness.
(*Isaiah 1:17 CEB*)

Righteousness is a fancy word that can best be understood as right relationships. And Advent gives us the time, the opportunity, the imperative to consider our relationships ~ *all* of our relationships. Because Isaiah ~ and Jesus ~ were never concerned just about how we behaved with those closest to us, though justice in those relationships is crucial. Isaiah and Jesus were most concerned about relationships with the people least able to defend or provide for themselves.

Think about it ~ who are you in relationship with? At home? At school? At work? In the grocery store? What about the people who grow the food you buy at the grocery store? The people who made the shoes you wear?

Advent is the time we remember that Jesus said he would come again. It is the time we prepare for that return, changing our lives by righteousness, concentrating on what Jesus did in his life. Jesus' life and relationships provide a model for our lives.

Notice relationships that you are in today. What can you do to make them “right” relationships? It is as we work to create and maintain right relationships that we imitate the justice Jesus lived.

PRAYER

Righteous God, help me today to see all the people with whom I am in relationship; may they be the kind of relationships you desire.

Barbara Willock

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2016

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

When someone asks what I love most about Christmas, the carols and messages they bring us invariably come to mind. *Away in a Manager. Angels We Have Heard on High. O Little Town of Bethlehem. Oh Come All Ye Faithful. Joy to the World. Go Tell It on the Mountain.* There are three carols that top my favorites list because of the precious memories they bring.

When I was a child, I loved to hear my mother sing *Silent Night, Holy Night* in German (Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht! . . .) the way she learned to sing it as a young girl.

I can still see and hear the choir in the church where I grew up lining the aisles on Christmas Eve just before the lights were dimmed and the candles lighted -- *O Holy Night the stars are brightly shining. It is the night of the dear Savior's birth. . . . Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices! O night divine! O night when Christ was born!*

The Peace Carol, a gift that treasured Faith Des Peres member, Janet Boyer and her family (Susan, Joe, Becky and John), brought to us at Yuletide for many years, is also a favorite. Written by Janet's brother, Bob Beers, one of the stanzas and the refrain echo a perennial prayer: *A hope that has slumbered for 2000 years. A promise that silenced 1000 fears. A faith than can hobble an ocean of years. The peace of Christmas Day. The branch that bears the bright holly. The dove that rests in yonder tree. The light that shines for all to see. The peace of Christmas Day.*

PRAYER

Thank you, God, for the beauty of this season. For your son Jesus, the greatest gift of all. And for the songs musicians have given us to celebrate this season of love and joy. Amen.

Barb Abbett



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2016

Isaiah 35:1-10 * Psalm 146:5-10 * James 5:7-10 * Matthew 11:2-11

Lighting the Advent Wreath

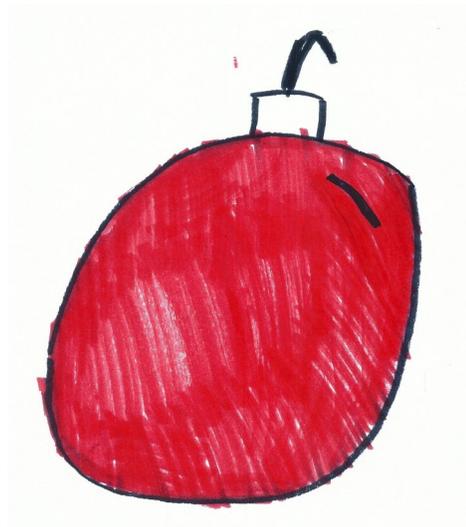
The Third Candle—Mighty God

Reader 1: When the people of God were taken into exile a long time ago, they sang songs of mourning, for they had lost everything.

Reader 2: During this holiday season, we know many people who miss loved ones, and who remember friends and family who have passed on. But God continues to bring us new life and renewed joy into our lives.

(Light three candles.)

Prayer: Mighty God, you will turn our mourning into dancing and our sad songs into songs of praise. Help us to sing your praise in all that we do. Amen.



MONDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2016

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

Christmas with Munnie

I knew my great grandmother, Mannie Baxter Jackson, very well. Sixty years have past since her death, but I still have a clear mental image of her. She was called “Munnie” by her great grandchildren and lived in a great stone house on West End Avenue in Nashville, Tennessee. She presided over Christmas dinners for the whole family that were legendary. She always included everyone’s favorite dish in the meal. My dish was fat plump lima beans, the really large ones, covered with butter. To be honest, I ate lima beans and I managed to consume a few every year but they were not my favorite food. I liked the rich, creamy vegetable soup, served on family china and sprinkled with chopped parsley.

PRAYER

Gracious God, help us to listen attentively so that we may hear, amid the uproar of the busy holiday season, a faint fluttering of wings, a gentle stirring of life and hope that only you can bring.

Will Ridley



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2016

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

Now that I have to share my boys with their in-laws at the holidays, I am discovering that it's OK to be flexible on what day we celebrate Christmas. I am a firm believer that children should wake up in their own beds on Christmas morning no matter what. So, every other year, when we don't have the boys and their families for Christmas day, we celebrate Christmas early.

There are many advantages to celebrating early. My shopping and wrapping are done ahead of time and the grocery store is always open if I discover I have forgotten something for our dinner. The boys and their families don't have to eat 2 dinners in a day and no one has to check the time to make sure they leave in time to visit the "other" family. It's so much more relaxing.

There is nothing I love more than spending time with my family. It is my greatest blessing. It doesn't matter what day we celebrate as long as we are together.

PRAYER

*Heavenly Father,
Thank you for the gift of your Son.
Thank you for the joy of family and for the abundant love You share with us.
May the joy and wonder of Christmas remain in our hearts every day.
Amen.*

Yolanda Mortimer



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2016

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

When I was introduced to Advent as a child, it was all about waiting for Christmas. For a child in a middle-class family in the 1950's there was simply no better day than Christmas. The excitement of anticipation could become unbearable. Even as a teenager, I continued my love affair with Advent and Christmas. I distinctly remember a December day in high school, close to Christmas, when I told Mother I'd really like a watch for Christmas. She snapped at me rather harshly for waiting so late to make such a request. On Christmas morning I discovered her supposed anger was to cover herself; the watch was already under the tree. She knew what I needed before I did.

As an adult, I've learned to appreciate Advent as a dual anticipatory season. Yes, we're waiting to celebrate the birth of God in human form in the baby Jesus, an event worthy of an extravagant and long celebration [so Christmas is 12 days not just one]. But Advent is also the time when we anticipate the "second coming" of Jesus, the time when all God's promises will be fulfilled, the time when all creation will experience the wholeness and harmony God has always intended.

Even more than my mother, God knows what we need and God has already set in motion the fulfillment of those needs. The first three chapters of Isaiah have described the need for radical change in the kingdom of Judah, a radical change God will enact if the people don't. Chapter 4 describes how wonderful it will be after the purification of the people. This is the other side of the Advent coin ~ our hope in God's future which we see begun in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

God of our future, we thank you that you have come to us in human form in Jesus. We look forward to his coming again as we seek to follow him today.

Barbara Willock

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2016

Psalms 18:1-20; 147:12-20 * Isaiah 9:18-10:4 * 2 Peter 2:10b-16 * Matthew 3:1-12

In the last 12 months, I have spent over 175 nights in a hotel. There are advantages and disadvantages for having a traveling position. The advantages are: the airline/hotel points, a new car to drive every week, every meal expensed, and best yet, having hotel staff to pick up my towel and make my bed. Traveling also has its downfall. In the holiday season, I spend more time with TSA agents, flight attendants, and hotel staff than my own family and friends. I have become a weekend son, brother, uncle, and friend. Friday nights have quickly become my favorite time of the week knowing I'll be coming home.

The song "I'll Be Home for Christmas" holds a new meaning for me. It shows me the importance of celebrating the season with my family, friends and church.

I'll be home for Christmas
You can count on me
Please have snow and mistletoe
And presents on the tree

Christmas Eve will find me
Where the love light gleams
I'll be home for Christmas
If only in my dreams



This year, I am excited to spend the entire Advent Season with my family. I will miss the convenience of hotels but my family means more to me than having someone pick up my towel and make my bed.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, please be with everyone who travels during the holiday, especially those who are unable to be home for Christmas. Amen.

Daniel Mortimer

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2016

Psalms 18:1-20; 147:12-20 * Isaiah 2:5-22 * 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13 * Luke 20:27-40

Come, house of Jacob,

let's walk by the LORD's light. *Isaiah 2:5, CEB*

We are marching in the light of God *We Are Marching in the Light of God, GtG #853*

Jesus the light of the world *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing/Jesus the Light of the World
GtG #127*

One of my new favorite hymns is *Siyahamba / We are Marching in the Light of God*, from South Africa. You can't sing this hymn sitting or standing still. Its joyous melody and insistent rhythm compel your body to move whether you want to or not!

I think Isaiah would have liked to sing this hymn with us. Its very nature transmits the joy of living life in the presence of God. However, the rest of the Old Testament lectionary reading for today actually describes the horrors that follow when we *don't* walk in the light of God.

There are Christian traditions that emphasize the terrible consequences of not "walking in the light of God." And Jesus himself voiced some of those consequences during his ministry. But his approach was much more carrot than stick. Consider the joy of relationship. Reflect on the satisfaction of working together to make life better for someone else. Remember the grace you have received. And share it. Paul [2 Corinthians 5:17] reminds us that in Christ we are a new creation. We have been given the grace to live life in a new way, walking in the light of God, in the light of Jesus.

Where will your walk take you today?

PRAYER

God of Light, we praise you that you care for us and guide us in all parts of our lives. Be my light today.

Barbara Willock

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2016

Psalms 90; 149 * Isaiah 10:20-27 * Jude 17-25 * Luke 3:1-9

One of my favorite Christmas traditions has always been getting the Christmas tree. When I was a girl my brothers and sisters and I would all pile into the station wagon with our father and go to a tree lot in town to find the perfect tree. When we became adults with children of our own we started a new tradition of going to a Christmas tree farm to get our trees. My siblings and I and our spouses and kids would meet at a Christmas tree farm the first weekend of December where we climbed aboard a hay wagon that took us to the fields where the carefully tended pine trees were growing. We would split up into family groups and go in search of the perfect Christmas trees. After sawing down our tree we dragged it back to the wagon for the trek down the hill to meet up with the rest of the family. We all have such fond memories of this annual event of 25 years. Our Christmas tree tradition has changed in recent years, however. The kids grew up and moved away to college or were just too busy. As we have gotten older, too, it has become more difficult to do all that climbing and trekking in search of a tree. This year, for the first time, we will be putting up an artificial Christmas tree. And it will be okay. Sometimes things change in our lives, not necessarily for better or worse - they are just different. I think as we get older we will find more changes in our lives. It is good to know that some things, like God's love, will never change. God has always been there and always will be and no matter what happens we can always depend on His love.

PRAYER

Thank you, dear God, for being that constant in our lives that will never change. Thank you for Christmas, the celebration of your Son's birth, which always comes at the same time each year, even when other things in our lives may change.

Mary Dingus

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2016

Isaiah 7:10-16 * Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 * Romans 1:1-7 * Matthew 1:18-25

Lighting the Advent Wreath

The Fourth Candle—Everlasting Father

Reader 1: When the people of God were taken into exile long ago, they were no longer able to worship together in the temple. They lost the center of their faith. They had to learn to understand that God was with them in a new way.

Reader 2: Many people have left their churches and houses of worship, some of them leaving painful memories, and some leaving a place that did not feed them spiritually. In this season of Advent, may the Holy Spirit continue to shine in us, so that others may find the light.

(Light four candles.)

Prayer: Everlasting Father, help us to share your love with all of your children that we may seek and find the lost, so that all may find a home in you. Amen.



MONDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2016

Psalms 122; 145 * Isaiah 11:10-16 * Revelation 20:1-10 * John 5:30-47

One of my most cherished Christmas traditions is a big box of children's Christmas picture books that I take down each year as we put up the Christmas tree. The books spend the month under the tree getting perused at leisure and our typical bedtime story time is moved from the bedroom to the living room in front of the tree. We turn down the other lights and the tree sparkles.

Time seems to stop a little bit during these magical moments. The children's bodies, which are almost constantly in motion, relax into each other. Their natural compulsion to aggravate each other ceases. I feel the weight of my day slide off of my shoulders and my heart fill with warmth. There is Peace.

Through the Advent season we work our way through our favorites. The Baby Jesus stars in several of our books. There's also a Grinch, Splat the Cat, Pete the Cat, Duck and Goose, Santa, a few different mice, a very magical train and various other animals engaged in holiday adventure.

One of my favorites, by far, is called *Room for a Little One*, by Martin Waddell. I stumbled upon it at the bookstore before James's first Christmas ten years ago. To this day I can't get through it without choking up on the last page — luckily James can finish it up for me now.

It's the simple story of Kind Ox in his stable at the Inn. One by one the animals come to him seeking shelter, to which he responds,

"There's always room for a little one here."

Old Dog, Stray Cat, and Small Mouse, usually afraid of each other and natural enemies, find warmth and peace in the stable, curled up together.

Last to arrive is Tired Donkey, led by Joseph and carrying Mary on his back. Kind Ox welcomes Tired Donkey inside. Mary and Joseph join the animals inside and a baby is born. Waddell writes:

*And so Jesus was born with the animals around Him;
Kind Ox, Old Dog, Stray Cat, Small Mouse and Tired Donkey all welcomed Him to the warmth of their stable.
That Cold Winter's night,
Beneath the star's light ...
... a Little One came for the world.*

PRAYER

Dear Lord, during this season of festivity, help us to create moments of quiet so that we may feel the warmth and peace of the stable. Help us to be brave enough to welcome those in need of shelter and acceptance. As we feel your love fill our souls with Joy, let us freely give it away to others, comforted by the security that you will keep us always full.

Emma Dolley

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2016

Psalms 33; 146 * Isaiah 28:9-22 * Revelation 20:11-21:8 * Luke 1:5-25

A family tradition for the Christmas season was to play Handel's *Messiah*. There were groans and gasps, but it was part of our holiday experience. Several live performances have come over the years with some including a sing-along for the Alleluia Chorus. Raise your voice, even if it wasn't among the most beautiful notes of all those joined together.

Isaiah 9:6 tells of a future ruler and is part of the *Messiah* story: "For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders. And he shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

As the chill of winter settles around us, it is time to pause and consider all the promises of peace given through this amazing birth to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Peace -- A peace that passes understanding.

In the still of the night, we can try to imagine what that kind of peace might be in our earthly environment. Another verse from Isaiah 26:3 suggests, "You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you."

Even New Testament letters readily spoke of peace to the followers of newly forming Christian communities. I am encouraged by Philippians 4:6-7: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

The words of advice in John 14:27 are affirming. We can look to the future secure in our faith that God, through Jesus Christ and continuing through the Holy Spirit, will not forsake our world. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

PRAYER

This holiday season, my hope and prayer is for peace, and may the peace of Christ be with you.

Dianne Modrell

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2016

Psalm 50; 147:1-11 * Isaiah 29:9-24 * Revelation 21:9-21 * Luke 1:26-38

In some churches, there's a tradition to hold a "Blue Christmas Service" on the longest night of the year, which falls on or about December 21, the Winter Solstice. Why? Because not everyone thinks Christmas is the "most wonderful time of the year", as Andy Williams sings. So some churches hold a blue Christmas service, as in "I am feeling blue," because not everyone is up and cheery for the Christmas holidays. Dealing with the death of a loved one, facing life after divorce or separation, coping with the loss of a job, living with cancer or some other disease that puts a question mark over the future, and a number of other human situations make parties and joviality painful for many people in our congregations and communities.

If you know someone who might be experiencing the blues this Christmas, I encourage you to reach out to them, today, and let them know you're thinking about them. A call, email or text can mean the world to someone who is hurting. And if you find yourself in a place of hurt, know that Christ came for you – to shine light into the dark places and to shine light into your life because, as the old hymn sings and as our faith attests to:

*O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

PRAYER

God of mercy, hear our prayer in this Advent season for ourselves, and for our families and friends who live with the struggles of illness and the pain of loss. We ask for strength for today, courage for tomorrow, and peace for the past. We ask these things in the name of Christ, who shares our life in joy and sorrow, death and new birth, despair and promise. Amen.

Annie Epling

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2016

Psalms 18:1-20; 147:12-20 * Isaiah 31:1-9 * Revelation 21:22-22:5 * Luke 1:39-48a (48b-56)

“You were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance” (Ephesians 1:13-14)

The Seal of the Presbyterian Church

The seal of the Presbyterian Church was designed by renowned graphic designer Malcolm Grear (June 12, 1931 – January 24, 2016) of Malcolm Grear and Associates. The basic components of the seal are the “cross, scripture, a descending dove at the upper part of the cross, and flames on either side of the lower part of the cross, and the name of the denomination, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), encircle the symbol.”

The seal adorns our Bible and the Church hymnal. It also enhances our Church program every Sunday. A complete description of the seal can be found on the official PC(USA)website. I have, however, been continually fascinated by this seal since my first Sundays at Faith Des Peres maybe because the dove and the flame are my favorite Christian symbols. For me, they symbolize the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. St. John saw the Holy Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and we are all familiar with the occasion of the descent of the Holy Spirit when tongues of fire rested upon the heads of the Apostles and other followers of Jesus Christ. So whenever I see the seal, I think of the outpouring of God’s love for His Church and His children. Before, during, and after Church services, I feel this outpouring of love in the stimulating exchange of ideas during adult discussion meetings, PALS, the joyful singing of the choir, the inspiring sermon of the Pastor, the smiling faces of the children, the warm handshakes of the adults, and finally in the hands of fellowship the entire Church extends to the sick and the needy. When I bring all these together, I know that the bond that connects us as one family in the body of Christ is not one of blood, but of love and respect in each other’s life.

Seals are the impressions left by solid subjects, and they often carry the actual engraving of the authority executing the process. Today, as in biblical times, a seal is used to guarantee security and indicate ownership. I sometimes think of the seal of God as the way God identifies and authenticates His children. It also shows how God protects those that belong to Him. And it is through the Holy Spirit that we are sealed as God’s children. In a nutshell, the seal of the Holy Spirit in the life of God’s children signifies the following: security, authenticity, ownership, and authority. It means God is endorsing each one of us as His child to carry out His mission with

authority and in safety. This is the same ringing endorsement our Father gave in Matthew 17:5: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”

The Holy Spirit is God’s seal on His people. And for me the symbols of the flame and the dove in our Church’s seal are constant reminders of the perpetual outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the life of every member and friend of this Church.

PRAYER

You are the child of the Most High God and you are forever secured with His inviolable seal. You have God’s seal of approval to have “dominion over...all the earth” and neither man nor angel shall break this seal.

Tola Olayefun



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2016

Psalm 102; 148 * Isaiah 33:17-22 * Revelation 22:6-11, 18-20 * Luke 1:57-66

For as long as our kids have been able to use a computer, they've tracked Santa's whereabouts on Christmas Eve using the Norad Santa Tracker (google it!). Every year on Christmas Eve, Norad tracks Santa Claus as he leaves the North Pole and delivers presents to children around the world. He makes his first stop in the Marshall Islands, way on the other side of the world. By the time he gets even remotely close to the USA, he's delivered billions of presents. Throughout the day, I'll ask the kids where Santa is, and they'll report back, their voices getting more animated the closer he gets to St. Louis.

One year, long after all of the kids had gone to bed, Terry and I were still awake when I checked the Santa Tracker. "He's in Webster Groves", I yelled. And like a couple of kids waiting for Santa, we rushed upstairs because, you know what they say, Santa doesn't come if you're awake!

Tomorrow, turn on the Santa Tracker. It's fun, and nothing beats waiting for Santa to come to your house. It will make you feel like a kid again!

PRAYER

Prayer: Loving God, Christmas is almost here and we can feel the excitement in the air. Help us to believe where we have not seen, and help us to be patient with our children. May their enthusiasm rub off on us. Amen.

Annie Epling



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2016

Isaiah 9:2-7 * Psalm 96 * Titus 2:11-14 * Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]

LIGHTING THE ADVENT WREATH

Lighting the Christ Candle

Reader: From the darkness of Creation, God brought forth Light!

All: That Light flooded over the waters of creation, sparkling and dancing!

Reader: From fear and alienation, God sent forth a leading Pillar of Light!

All: That Light directed people who were on the path of freedom.

Reader: From the cries of the people, God offered the lights of Hope.

All: Those lights beckoned people to God's presence.

Reader: From the yearning of the spirit, God's light was born again in a child

All: That Light shall never be diminished. Praise God for the warm light of God's

Incarnate Love. Amen.

Light five candles.

Prayer

God of Surprising Love and Hope, we come this evening to the manger, gazing lovingly on the Child born to bring hope to the world. Open our hearts tonight as we hear the story anew. Help us to be guided by the Light of Jesus Christ, that we may truly feel the power of your love and bring that love, with joy, to all we meet. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Faith Des Peres Presbyterian Church (USA)

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

(314) 432-8029 | www.faithdesperes.org

Rev. Dr. Anne B. Epling, Pastor/ Gail Robins, Director of Music & Organist



Gingerbread House Party Saturday, December 3, 10 am to noon

Join us on Saturday, December 3 from 10 am to noon in Fellowship Hall to decorate gingerbread houses. The cost is \$14.00 per gingerbread house. All children and adults are welcome. Please sign up in the Gathering Space no later than November 28. See Leslie Barnes with any questions.

Women's Cookie Exchange December 7, 9:30 am

The annual Women's brunch and cookie exchange will be on Wednesday, December 7 at 9:30 am. Annie Epling will be hosting. Bring 2-3 dozen cookies to exchange. Please RSVP to Annie or Yolanda at adminasst@faithdesperes.org.

Parent's Night Out Saturday, December 10 4:30 pm-9:30 pm

Parents, for only \$15.00 per child you can get 5 hours of babysitting by our teens here at the church. Please provide a nut-free dinner for your child. Sign up in the Gathering Space by December 8.

Christmas Eve Worship at 5:30 pm on Saturday, December 24

We'll have a traditional candlelight service with carols and the choir. Sing the carols, hear the stories and find hope here!

Christmas Morning Service 10:30 am

Come as you are! Wear your pajamas or your comfy clothes and join us for a casual service as we celebrate the birth of the Christ Child on Christmas morning.