An Introduction to Advent Waiting

As a child I remember counting down the days as Christmas drew nearer. It seemed as if the day would never arrive. Knowing that Christmas morning meant family, gifts, and the family tradition of hot cross buns, I couldn’t wait for that joyous day to arrive. It was a day to celebrate the birth of God into the world—a reason for unbridled joy.

As a child, I had trouble understanding why we couldn’t start opening the gifts a few days (or weeks) early. What was the point of waiting? If Christmas is such a joyful time, why not enjoy it sooner?

Obviously, this question is not unique to children. We in the worshiping community also have a tendency to rush things a bit. That’s why I understand when people wonder why we don’t just start our celebrating earlier since we know what’s down the road. Really, it’s a fair question. After all, we live in a world filled with the presence of Christ. But, the church’s season of Advent waiting serves to heighten in us the awareness of our need for a savior, a savior whose birth we will celebrate on Christmas Eve.

And so we wait.

And as we wait, we will hear again the beautiful visions of Isaiah about a child born to us that will bring peace. We will listen again to John the Baptist’s fiery sermons about repentance and the nearness of God’s kingdom. We will marvel once more at the splendor of Mary’s song about God setting things right. But, if we’re not careful, we’ll forget that Isaiah sang of peace in the midst of war. We’ll forget that John spoke in the wilderness. We’ll forget that Mary sang about the poor being lifted up while they were still being held down.

Make no mistake: There will be unbridled joy on Christmas Eve, but we in the church dare not rush past these important voices on our way to the manger.

May God enable our Advent waiting to be filled with expectant hope. And, as you consider what gifts to give those you love, remember to give the gifts which ultimately transform the world: offer peace; give hope; embrace forgiveness; show patience; share laughter. May God’s richest blessings surround you during these days of waiting which will soon give way to unbridled joy.

John P. Leggett
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What is the ADVENT SEASON?

ADVENT SEASON includes the four Sundays before Christmas and the days in between. It culminates on Christmas Eve/Christmas Day. It is a time of preparation for Christians to celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ: Jesus’ birth when He came to earth as a human being; His coming into the hearts and lives of believers; and His coming on the final Day of Judgment. We wait with Hope and Love for the coming of Joy and Peace. ADVENT marks the beginning of the liturgical Church Year. In worship we hear stories from the prophets foretelling the coming of the Messiah. The word, “advent”, comes from the Latin recalling “coming”. It’s a time of anticipation, waiting and preparation for the arrival of Christ. We celebrate the gift that’s already been given: God’s love for us in Jesus Christ.

The ADVENT WREATH in the sanctuary marks the four weeks of Advent as each candle is lit, Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. Candles are usually purple or pink (representing repentance/joy) or all blue in place of the purple. The white Christ candle in the center represents Jesus’ purity. The circular wreath symbolizes God’s unending love for us, and was an ancient symbol for victory and glory. Other candles and greenery in the sanctuary remind us of Christ as the Light of the World and His endless love.

The green CHRISMON TREE in the sanctuary also reminds us of God’s everlasting love. The white lights illuminate Christ’s purity, and the gold and white ornaments symbolize the purity, perfection and majesty of the Son of God, the Son of Man.

Chrismons [CHRIST + MONogram] are copies of symbols from early Christianity (often used as secret signs during times of persecution), from Scripture and combinations thereof. The idea of the Chrismon Tree originated in the 1960’s from women at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Ascension, Danville, VA, and has since spread across denominations and the world.

The Chrismon Tree is COMPLETE only when the viewer understands its meaning.

YOU ARE INVITED TO LOOK CLOSELY AT THE TREE in order to deepen your appreciation of The ADVENT SEASON.

Thanks to the many members of Second Presbyterian Church over the years who made these beautiful Chrismon ornaments and thanks also to those who put the tree up for our joy and enlightenment!
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Activities for Advent

- Listen to holiday music and sing along. Help children learn the words.
- Read parts of the Christmas story each night at dinner or before going to bed; let children be the story-tellers, retelling the story in their own words.
- Read Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55).
- Set up a nativity scene children can play with and tell The Story.
- String popcorn and cranberries for your tree.
- String cereal and cranberries to put outside on trees and bushes for the birds.
- Take walks outside to appreciate nature's winter beauty.
- Go outside on a clear night and talk about how the Wise Men might have been guided by The Star of Bethlehem.
- Share Christmas memories from days of old with family and friends.
- Take evening drives to look at Christmas decorations in the city.
- Visit the Kentucky Horse Park with its lights and activities.
- Go to church during Advent.
- Bake cookies/goodies with your family and deliver some to others.
- Talk about the “meaning” of the 12 Days of Christmas.
- Design your own Chrismorn ornaments using paper and/or beads.
- Make Christmas cards, using cut-outs from old cards, cookie cutters dipped in paint, glitter, original art.
- Make your own wrapping paper using shelf paper and potatoes cut out in holiday shapes, dried a bit, and dipped in colorful paint.
- Cut snowflakes from white paper to decorate around the house.
- Heat up cinnamon and cloves in hot water and enjoy the aroma.
- Start a list of blessings for each person in your house; add a blessing each day.
- Check out the Lexington Christmas Parade and Christmas Tree lighting events.
- Go to concerts and plays.

Not Just a Partridge!

The “12 days of Christmas” begin December 25 and end on Epiphany, January 6. The word “epiphany” means “manifestation” → the manifestation of Jesus to the Gentile world, represented in the story of the Magi. By the 16th century giving gifts was part of the 12 days, as well as singing songs that had a double meaning, such as this one. The giver of all these gifts is God. (James 1:17)

Another origin is that in 1500’s England, when Roman Catholics were punished by death, these believers had to teach their children about the faith in secret ways.

- Dec. 26 the partridge in a pear tree is Jesus (John 3:16)
- Dec. 27 2 turtledove: the OT and NT, Jesus’ baptism (Matt. 3:13-17)
- Dec. 28 3 French hens: faith, hope & love (1 Cor. 13:13)
- Dec. 29 4 calling birds: four gospels (John 21:24-25)
- Dec. 30 5 golden rings: the Torah, (Ex. 14)
- Dec. 31 6 geese a-laying: 6 days of creation (Gen. 1-2)
- Jan. 1 7 swans a-swimming: the gifts of the Spirit (Rom 12:6-8)
- Jan. 2 8 maids a-milking: the Beatitudes, (Matt. 5:3-12)
- Jan. 3 9 ladies dancing: the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)
- Jan. 4 10 lords a-leaping: 10 commandments (Ex 20:3-17)
- Jan. 5 11 papers piping: the faithful apostles (Mk 3:16-19)
- Jan. 6 12 drummers drumming: the Apostles’ Creed, the 12 basic beliefs of the Christian faith

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First Week in Advent — Hope

December 1, 2019

Genesis 15: 3-6 And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.” 4But the word of the LORD came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.” 5He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” 6And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Have you ever run a race and hoped that you would finish in First Place? Have you ever been late for an appointment and driven over the speed limit hoping you would not get a ticket? Christmas is coming. Are you hoping you will get a big gift that you have always wanted? These actions all involve Hope. What is HOPE? My dictionary says HOPE is a desire or expectations. Most people agree with that statement.

Advent is a season of expectations, of HOPE. During this Advent season you and I will be reading our Bibles more. We will discover that many Biblical people had hopes, just as we have today.

There is a story of Abraham and Sarah, an older couple that was childless. Abraham was a righteous man in God’s mind. God told Abraham that he would give Abraham and Sarah a child. Abraham was about 100 years old and found that hard to believe. Sarah just laughed. However, they both had learned that God always keeps His promises. They did have a Child.

What HOPES do you have this Advent season? Talk to God about them and realize that God does keep His promises.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this Advent Season. We pray that we will use our HOPE for your Glory and your Son Jesus. Amen

Betty Adkins

December 2, 2019

Romans 15:13: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit

Psalm 27:14: Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

I love sunsets. Sunsets cause me to pause and ponder God’s glory. They are a message of hope from God to us. This day is done, it is time to rest, and tomorrow will come with all its promise. The old sailor’s saying “red sails in the morning, sailors take warning; red sails at night, sailor’s delight” mentions this promise. God gives us many signs of hope in nature – rainbows, spring daffodils, babies. Advent is the season for pausing to ponder. Take time to think, listen, play, be aware of opportunities to help others, to laugh, to love, to dream and to pray. Take time to ponder the wonders of the world God has given us as we wait for the Christ child.

Prayer: Loving God, Thank you for the glory of your world and the signs of hope all around us. You are our hope and our strength. Guide us toward your will as we hope for a better future with love and kindness. Amen

Kathy Blomquist
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Kathy Blomquist
December 3, 2019

Jeremiah 29.11 “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Hope can begin as a solid, serious idea that is put into action and becomes a growing, inspiring, involving many people thing. We know a Liberian who epitomizes hope. His name is Mosoka Fallah, and we are honored to have been his host parents when he was a doctoral student in microbiology and immunology at the University of Kentucky and to be on the board of his NGO Refuge Place International (RPI), conceived right here in Lexington.

When Jack and I met Mosoka we immediately bonded because he had graduated in the last class (1989) of the school where we had been Peace Corps Volunteer teachers in the early 1960s. That school was destroyed in the 13 year civil war when Mosoka was working with Doctors without Borders and completing, little by little, his degree at the University of Liberia. After a master’s at Kent State University, he arrived at UK in fall 2005. A hard-working student, he also linked with International Book Project to send a sea container of 30,000 books to Liberia. Mosoka told us about his idea, his hope – a maternal health clinic in the Monrovia slum where he had grown up. And he acted; he found land in the community and began sending money from his assistantship to buy cement block to begin building.

We followed Mosoka after he finished his PhD, cheering his ambition and leap of faith to go to Harvard for a Master’s in Public Health, and then his return to Liberia. His hope, RPI’s first clinic, opened only a few weeks before the Ebola crisis began and then had to close. Mosoka’s emails about what he did and saw during the crisis were gut wrenching, honest, and compassionate. The headline under his picture on the front page of the September 14, 2014 Sunday New York Times said it well: “Back to the Slums of His Youth to Defuse the Ebola Time Bomb, For Liberian Doctor, Earning Trust is the Top Priority.” In October Mosoka reopened his clinic. His first report listed “107 pregnant women treated, three normal and safe deliveries, and 288 children under five years old treated, 200 of those for malaria.”

Time included Mosoka as one of the Ebola Fighters it honored as 2014 Person of the Year. In 2015 Foreign Policy named Mosoka one of its leading global thinkers in The Healers category, writing: “Fallah is a principal investigator in a five year study to understand Ebola’s aftermath; whether survivors become immune to the virus.” Since then Mosoka has received other awards, become a lecturer at Harvard Medical School, made many presentations at conferences, and met with people around the world. He recently offered advice on working with communities to Democratic Republic of Congo in their Ebola crisis. He is becoming the Dean of University of Liberia’s new School of Public Health.

But Refuge Place International, the hope that is the “growing, inspiring, involving many people thing” is the real story. Through May 2019 RPI had treated 57,867 patients. RPI now includes three clinics in underserved areas (one now a maternal surgical center and one with an eye clinic that since January 2019 had screened more than 7000 people and provided 200 pairs of inexpensive glasses). Three other clinics are being built on the co-investment model with villagers constructing the buildings. Only 24% of RPI’s budget is donations. In 2019 RPI organized training for General Community Health Volunteers and for teachers to conduct eye screening. Mosoka is most proud of RPI’s record of no maternal deaths – 1447 safe deliveries!

Prayer: O God, bless all who take hope from an idea to an action to something that makes a real difference in the lives of others. Especially as we await Christmas may we consider how we can make hope more than a limp verb. Help each of us to figure out how we can make a difference. Amen.

Angene Wilson

![Hope](image)
December 3, 2019

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Angene Wilson
December 4, 2019

Job 12:7-10 (NRSV) 7 But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; 8 ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. 9 Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? 10 In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.

In March of 2014, I embarked upon my first trip to the Grand Canyon in Phoenix Arizona with a dear friend. As I approached the mouth of the canyon, I was struck with awe at the beautiful sight that lay before me and I gasped for breath. The pictures of the canyon that I had seen previously could not adequately capture the spectacle of it and I imagined that God had chiseled this amazing work of art in earth and stone for all to see. The wonder of the experience was best captured by a little boy who had simultaneously arrived at the canyon with his family. “Oh Wow,” he exclaimed! “I know, right,” I responded with equal excitement.

In the hours that followed, as my friend and I trekked through nature’s wonder, we encountered a tree that had not yet received its spring foliage. Lighted upon the tree was a beautiful black bird whose fanned tuff of feathers around its head, and beautiful singing voice caught our attention. We stopped to listen to it sing and I couldn’t resist the urge to sing along so I launched into the song Simple Gifts. The black bird immediately stopped singing and cocked its head as if listening to me. Fearing that I had disturbed its song, I fell silent. The black bird began to warble again. Intrigued, I began to sing again too. The bird stopped its song, cocked its head curiously; so this time, I just kept right on singing for a while. As soon as I stopped, the bird resumed its musical discourse. Pretty soon a crowd formed around that tree as the bird and I sang our little duet. Eventually I had to move on but that moment felt divine. For just a moment I felt at one with nature and with God.

I said goodbye to the bird as I moved along, and thanked it for sharing such a wonderful gift with me. As an afterthought, I wondered what would happen to that bird, and then, I thought about all of the birds, and animals, and plants, and nature’s wonders that we humans carelessly attend and realized that nature was not just put here for us to use and enjoy; but that, we…that I was put here to care for nature.

Prayer: God of the trees and forests, rivers and seas, hills and vales, and the creatures that walk the earth, during this season of Advent help us to remember the earth in all of its fullness is yours, and that we are stewards of the abundant life you have given. And just as the star that shown over Bethlehem lit the way to the place where the Christ child lay, giving hope to a world in need, help us to be the lights that guide others to see that all you have created is truly precious.

Amen

Donna R. Phillips  (reprinted with permission from Advent Devotional 2018 Presbyterians for Earth Care)
December 4, 2019

Job 12:7-10 (NRSV) 7 But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; 8 ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. 9 Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? 10 In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.

In March of 2014, I embarked upon my first trip to the Grand Canyon in Phoenix Arizona with a dear friend. As I approached the mouth of the canyon, I was struck with awe at the beautiful sight that lay before me and I gasped for breath. The pictures of the canyon that I had seen previously could not adequately capture the spectacle of it and I imagined that God had chiseled this amazing work of art in earth and stone for all to see. The wonder of the experience was best captured by a little boy who had simultaneously arrived at the canyon with his family. “Oh Wow,” he exclaimed! “I know, right,” I responded with equal excitement.

In the hours that followed, as my friend and I trekked through nature’s wonder, we encountered a tree that had not yet received its spring foliage. Lighted upon the tree was a beautiful black bird whose fanned tuff of feathers around its head, and beautiful singing voice caught our attention. We stopped to listen to it sing and I couldn’t resist the urge to sing along so I launched into the song Simple Gifts. The black bird immediately stopped singing and cocked its head as if listening to me. Fearing that I had disturbed its song, I fell silent. The black bird began to warble again. Intrigued, I began to sing again too. The bird stopped its song, cocked its head curiously; so this time, I just kept right on singing for a while. As soon as I stopped, the bird resumed its musical discourse. Pretty soon a crowd formed around that tree as the bird and I sang our little duet. Eventually I had to move on but that moment felt divine. For just a moment I felt at one with nature and with God.

I said goodbye to the bird as I moved along, and thanked it for sharing such a wonderful gift with me. As an afterthought, I wondered what would happen to that bird, and then, I thought about all of the birds, and animals, and plants, and nature’s wonders that we humans carelessly attend and realized that nature was not just put here for us to use and enjoy; but that, we…that I was put here to care for nature.

Prayer: God of the trees and forests, rivers and seas, hills and vales, and the creatures that walk the earth, during this season of Advent help us to remember the earth in all of its fullness is yours, and that we are stewards of the abundant life you have given. And just as the star that shown over Bethlehem lit the way to the place where the Christ child lay, giving hope to a world in need, help us to be the lights that guide others to see that all you have created is truly precious. Amen

Donna R. Phillips  (reprinted with permission from Advent Devotional 2018 Presbyterians for Earth Care)
December 5, 2019

Jeremiah 29:11: For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

pretending in ¾ time
Along an arc of cosmic dust,
light fell out of darkness
like stars once over Bethlehem.
Since,
snowflakes dance a winter waltz
\ldots falling random \ldots
Pretending to be diamonds
destined for a crown, while others,
blessed to find
their place on a string of pearls
embracing time before its thaw.

Prayer: Dear God, In our random falling, to and through this Advent, breathe on us a kindness born in Hope at Christmas. May our arc be drawn by the hand of a long ago in Bethlehem.

Tony Stallard

December 6, 2019

Matthew 11:28  Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Advent Season Relaxers

Through these four weeks, it is easy to crowd out time for rest, contemplation and appreciation of what this Advent Season is all about.

Some ideas:

- Begin each day reading the daily devotionals herein written by folks at Second Presbyterian Church and say a prayer for the author
- pray often
- simplify traditions and meals
- involve others in cooking and decorating
- make manageable lists for each day
- practice breath prayer when stressed (breathe in “the Lord is my shepherd”—hold breath a few seconds—breathe out “I shall not want”)
- spoil yourself with a warm bath
- enjoy your decorations in the evening with a cup of tea
- get in touch with friends
- exercise as you are able
- listen to classical holiday music
- keep the Sabbath Day of rest
- come to worship services
- plan ahead being as realistic about your schedule as you can!

Prayer: Dear Lord, Still our minds as we remember that Jesus really is the reason for the season.

Karen May
December 5, 2019

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Along an arc of cosmic dust, light fell out of darkness like stars once over Bethlehem. Since, snowflakes dance a winter waltz . . . falling random . . . Pretending to be diamonds destined for a crown, while others, blessed to find their place on a string of pearls embracing time before its thaw.

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Karen May
Psalm 27:1  The LORD is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?

Matthew 5:16  In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

The Swedish Christmas (Jul) begins on December 13, known as Lucia Day. Early in the morning, households throughout the country are awakened by a "Lucia." She is usually the oldest daughter of the family, dressed in the traditional white robe with crimson sash, and wearing a crown of lighted candles. It is customary for her to carry a tray with coffee and special saffron buns or ginger cookies to each one in the family as she serenades them with the lovely old Sicilian melody, Santa Lucia.

The Lucia legend is said to originate in Syracuse on the island of Sicily. There the very first Lucia was born in the year 283. As a young woman, she proclaimed Christianity as her faith and gave her dowry to the poor. This drew the wrath of her wealthy family and her husband-to-be. She was reported to the Roman authorities, imprisoned, and burned at the stake on December 13, 304. Later, Lucia was canonized. Italian artists sometimes pictured her as a blind girl holding a lamp. In the many legends about her, she is portrayed as a symbol of light and hope for humankind.

According to the Julian calendar, December 13 was the shortest day of the year. It marked the solstice, the date upon which the sun “turned” and spring was once more on its way. This linked the legend with the Yule and winter festivals of pre-Christian times. Despite later calendar reform and movement of the solstice to December 21, Lucia celebrations have survived.

In Sweden, Lucia can be traced as far back as the middle Ages. Miracles were attributed to Lucia, as when she is said to have carried food and drink to hungry people in the province of Värmland during a famine. She was seen crossing Lake Vänern in a brilliantly lit ship, clothed in white with a crown of light encircling her head, accounting for the way that modern Lucia’s dress. Documents from the late 18th century tell of young girls dressed in white with crowns of candles.

Lucia was long a custom primarily in rural Sweden, but during the 1920’s, Swedish urban leagues took up the practice of Lucia processions. Each town would crown a Lucia bride. The traditions have passed from one generation to another, and from country to country. The other Scandinavian countries of Norway, Finland, and Denmark adopted the tradition of the annual Lucia celebration in the 1940’s.

Today, Lucia marks the beginning of the Christmas season not only in homes, but also in schools, offices, hospitals, orphanages, and public buildings. Assisted by younger “maidens” and “star boys” – a tradition that has evolved from a pageant about the three Wise Men - Lucia brings light and good tidings to all who are ill, poor, or lonely during the holidays. May her light and her song inspire you with the spirit of the season!

Prayer:  Dear God, During this Advent season, help us learn to be light and hope to each other and may we continue to serve others throughout the new year.  Amen

Kathy Blomquist

December 7, 2019

Prayer: Dear God, During this Advent season, help us learn to be light and hope to each other and may we continue to serve others throughout the new year. Amen

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Kathy Blomquist
Week Two of Advent – Peace

December 8, 2019

Philippians 4:6-7  *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, 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.*

Christmas Central

By 2010 I had recovered from the period of mothering that is governed by nights of stolen sleep and the smell of banana baby food. I traded bibs and baby coos for the curious and gregarious ramblings of a 4-year-old Avery. Christmas 2010 began sometime around mid-October and plotted ever so slowly toward December. For children, Christmas is a yeoman’s journey- paved with all the potential pitfalls of poor decisions. Within our walls, Avery’s 4-year-old perspective of Christmas brought back the tangible wonder and mystery that we typically only see in Hallmark movies. Her perspective also brought about a newfound interest in the birth of Jesus. Both at church and at preschool Avery was introduced to the true meaning of Christmas in the depiction of the nativity. School plays, children’s choir, and our own display of the nativity brought much discussion about Baby Jesus. Discussions about the men who take care of the sheep and where they might sleep at night…Questions about the angels who flew in the sky and whether they live in heaven with God and Granddaddy…Concerns about the wise men and why they brought nearly unpronounceable gifts for a baby. We talked about Mary and her long ride on a donkey. We talked about Joseph and why there aren’t ever any songs to sing about him. We discussed almost every imaginable scenario about what happened on that glory-filled night- whether Baby Jesus got slobbered on by the cows- and how they all actually slept that night in a stable- and wasn’t Mary worried about having a baby without a doctor? We talked and wondered and pondered until I felt certain we had covered every element.

Despite our thoughtful conversations I spent most of the early part of December in a frantic whirrr. Cards to send, gifts to buy, house to decorate. Somewhere between Thanksgiving and Advent Workshop, I decked the halls of our home with adornments of all kinds; and with a plié of satisfaction, I concluded the Christmas decorating by carefully placing our nativity on the table in our living room. At last it was finished. The stockings hung, the tree trimmed, and the nativity unboxed and placed frontward to complete our visual dance toward Christmas. It was 2010 and the Gabbards were chaotically gliding toward the finish line. Checked lists, wrapped packages, baked cookies. We. Were. Nearly. Ready. But oh, how we weren’t….I recognize with an inherent joy that Christ was born on Christmas Day to ultimately save us from our sins. I understand the gravity of how in His miraculous birth as a baby. He came to be our savior- nevertheless, when I place our nativity on our secular console I am concerned with symmetry and color- ensuring all of the figures are facing outward, visible and ready to welcome all who enter our home.

Yet, on a cold evening ever so close to Christmas I walked past our living room nativity and found it changed. Touched by tiny little hands. Moved and replaced in a way only a child- innocent and pure- could place them. In an instant it occurred to me that Avery understood the meaning of Christmas far better than I, as an adult, ever had. At some quiet moment she left the clatter of “Christmas” and decidedly altered our Nativity. She did not harm any of the pieces but instead carefully took each piece and centered them- all facing inward- toward the young Messiah. Joseph and the Wise Men were looking on together; the noses of sheep touched His head. Mary was as close as possible. The shepherd was pressed closer to give the donkey and the camel room to look upon Him. My console was empty except for this huddled mass of visitors-equal in class and compassion- all gazing intently on the most vital part of Christmas… and for the first time, our home was ready for Christmas. For the first time, our glitter-infused cloud of advent had settled to calm. Christ was finally, and literally at the center.

In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he offered “*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, 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.*” Philippians 4:6-7

In this advent season Paul’s words beckon us to seek peace that often eludes us. His words call us to seek calm amidst chaos. His words also remind us, much like Avery’s rearrangement of our Nativity, that Christ is not only our calm, but our true center.

**Prayer:** Heavenly father, we come to you as outward servants trying desperately to seek peace in a world of chaos. Help us pause. Help us simplify. Help us look inward toward the peace that only You can provide. Help us stay near and close by the manger, surrounded by the love of our Savior and guarded by the grace of our Father. Amen.

Melanie Gabbard
Week Two of Advent – Peace

December 8, 2019

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It was 2010 and the Gabbards were nearly ready for Christmas. For the first time, our glitter-infused cloud of advent had settled to calm. Christ was finally, and Literally at the center. In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he offered “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, 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.” Philippians 4:6-7

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Melanie Gabbard
Psalm 147:12-14  Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion!
For He has strengthened the bars of your gates;
He has blessed your sons and daughters within you
He makes peace in your borders;
He satisfies you with the finest of the wheat.

Our choir recently rehearsed a song many of us learned years ago in Sunday School:

I've got peace like a river,
I've got peace like a river,
I've got peace like a river in my soul.

On a family vacation to the Smokies soon after, I watched the Little Pigeon River as it splashed over boulders in the streambed, whooshed around others, and merrily hummed as it hurried downhill. "Peace like a river" – can this be what peace looks like?

If peace is continual stillness, then a pond would better illustrate it than a river. But ponds easily turn stagnant. Motion defines a river: swift though small in the mountains, then broad and powerful as it approaches its destination, the sea.

God’s peace comes in times of quiet contemplation and it comes in times of purposeful activity. Even when boulders impede, God’s peace sustains. For God calls all His children to deeply satisfying labor in the kingdom of heaven that Jesus proclaims – ever refreshed like a river after rainfall, not shriveling like a pond in the summer sun.

God’s peace includes the assurance that, like a river flowing to the sea, we are moving to our destination, heaven. Just as we await Jesus’ birth during Advent, we look to the day when God heals all hurts, redeems all injustice, and gives peace to all within and without.

Prayer: Loving and generous God, all good things come from You. We thank You for peace which You give in all circumstances. As ask You to equip us to spread peace in our daily lives, that all may enjoy this gift You supply in abundance, just as the rivers water Your earth. In the name of Jesus, Prince of Peace, Amen.

Catherine Hunt
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Catherine Hunt
Luke 2:3-7  
3 All went to their own towns to be registered. 4 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. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 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.

In December 1976 I was serving as a Volunteer in Mission through the Presbyterian Church, teaching English to Egyptian girls at Ramses College for Girls in Cairo. I learned to recognize the season of Advent in ways not before experienced. There were no stores laden with all kinds of decorations and preparations for Christmas, as I had known. No carols were played anywhere in public. The weather was cooler, but certainly not the icy temperatures of much of the USA in December. I regularly worshiped at an International Protestant Church in downtown Cairo. And the sounds from the downtown traffic and activity were as loud on Sunday mornings and in evenings, as they were during the day – VERY loud!

I often played the organ at this church, and did so that Christmas Eve. At the end of the service we all lit candles and singing, walked out onto the balcony, right on the main street. “Silent Night” could hardly be heard! But we stayed there for 15 minutes or so occasionally hearing “silence.” Then one person began singing “O Little Town of Bethlehem” and as I got to the second line of the song, I became silent. At that moment I became aware that I was a little over 200 miles from where the Birth had taken place! Tears in my eyes and a lump in my throat made it impossible for me to continue to sing! I do hope I never forget that precious experience.

Prayer: God of Love, thinking about the birth of your Son, should always give us pause. We may not be physically anywhere near Bethlehem. But let us think about that happening that Shepherds who WERE nearby were able to see. May we take time to sense the wonder and awe they must have felt in seeing, at His birth, the greatest Gift the world has ever known.

Linda Crawford
Luke 2:3-7  

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Linda Crawford
December 11, 2019

A Prayer

Most very special one, you give each life
so we give turns, a hand, give ear, our word,
and keep it, now, day by day more, and more,
much more than ken, or hopes or even dreams.

May we share food you give to all today;
may we share water, yours always, today;
may we share earth and sea and sky, today;
so may your earth give life in all its ways.

Lift up, turn to these givings all we do;
so may we turn to these what comes our way.
We know your presence now and in the rocks.
May we not cut off nor yet be cut off.

We dare to ask, who gives all turns? Who holds
all hands? Who hears all cries? Who keeps their word?
Ah, yes, may this be so.

Dick Shore
A Prayer

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Dick Shore
For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

We of course know this as a familiar passage in Handel’s beloved Messiah that we enjoy at this time of year. It got me to wondering just how frequently the Bible calls us to peace at other times of the year. It turns out that in the New Revised Standard Version the word “peace” or some variation of it occurs 330 times. The prophesy of Isaiah isn’t kidding when it suggests that the reign of the Prince of Peace is a zealous commitment on God’s part.

Which gets me to wondering about our zeal for peace these days. In an address to the National Council of Churches the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King said: “Peace is not the absence of war but the presence of justice.” I think that that is another zealous call to peace with fairness thrown in for good measure. In this current era fraught with conflict and inequity that seems a particularly apt sentiment and another word from God that demands our attention-- and our faithfulness.

It brings to mind another familiar and beloved song which provides my prayer for both this day, this season, and beyond:

“Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.”

David Holden
Isaiah 9.6-7  For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

We of course know this as a familiar passage in Handel’s beloved Messiah that we enjoy at this time of year. It got me to wondering just how frequently the Bible calls us to peace at other times of the year. It turns out that in the New Revised Standard Version the word “peace” or some variation of it occurs 330 times. The prophesy of Isaiah isn’t kidding when it suggests that the reign of the Prince of Peace is a zealous commitment on God’s part.

Which gets me to wondering about our zeal for peace these days. In an address to the National Council of Churches the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King said: “Peace is not the absence of war but the presence of justice.” I think that that is another zealous call to peace with fairness thrown in for good measure. In this current era fraught with conflict and inequity that seems a particularly apt sentiment and another word from God that demands our attention-- and our faithfulness.

It brings to mind another familiar and beloved song which provides my prayer for both this day, this season, and beyond:

“Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.”

David Holden
1 Samuel 16:12-13a  Jesse sent [for David, his youngest son] and brought him in. Now [David] was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, ‘Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.’…and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward.

December 13, 2019

Jesse was the father of King David—both Jesus’ ancestors! (See I Samuel 16:17-23, Matt. 1:5-6). A Jesse Tree with many symbols helps us remember those who went before Jesus. See the two versions of Jesus’ genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17, Luke 3:23-38)

Any type of small tree, with twigs or leafy branches works fine, even one cut from a paper grocery bag and put on the refrigerator. It will hold ornaments that remind us of the many people in Jesus’ lineage.

Make a list of names and check the Bible stories to imagine one thing that reminds us of each and make an ornament out of whatever materials you choose. Family conversations as ornaments are placed on the tree make these Bible stories come alive.

A few ideas:
- Moses—a basket
- a saw or hammer for Joseph—father of Jesus
- rolled up paper for prophet Isaiah
- a lamb for David—the shepherd—or a sling shot
- fruit for Adam & Eve
- a colorful coat for Joseph in Egypt
- a crown for King Solomon
- a ladder for Jacob
- a scarlet ribbon for Rahab
- a big fish for Jonah
- a rainbow for Noah—or a big ark
- a tent for Abraham
- wheat for Ruth
- an angel for Mary— and on and on!

Prayer: God of the Old and New Testaments, we thank you for giving us the ancestry of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew (1:1-17) and in Luke (3:23-38). These accounts affirmed Jesus as the Messiah, son of Abraham and David, to his early followers. We ask that you strengthen our belief in Jesus, son of God, through our Advent celebrations. May the Jesse tree ornaments remind us of our connection to the pioneers of the faith through the ages. Amen.

Karen May
December 13, 2019

1 Samuel 16:12-13a

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A Jesse Tree for Your Home

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Karen May
Colossians 3:15-17  And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

**Thinking of Others during Advent**

- Call a friend you haven’t heard from in a long time
- Clean out drawers and closets and donate good used clothing to local organizations
- Have a child pick out a new toy for a toy drive – e.g Firefighters or Marines or Veterans or Police or other
- Consider giving “alternative” Christmas gifts – contributions made to charities in another’s name
- Pray for those who have sent you Christmas cards and pray as you send cards to others
- Write a Prayer Calendar of other family members, church members and others for the family to use at dinner during Advent
- Offer to help another with inside/outside chores
- Offer to take someone shopping
- Bake food/cookies to share with others
- Pray for the sender each time you receive a card, and for the recipient each time you send a card

**Prayer:**  God of Mary and Martha, encourage our "Mary hearts" in these weeks of busy-ness. Let us make time to delve into the mystery and miracle of this Advent Season. And guide our “Martha hearts” away from distractions so that we may enjoy activities that celebrate Your love, given to us in Jesus Christ. Amen

**Note:** Jesus’ visit to Mary and Martha, Luke 10:38-42

**Shopping Fun with Very Young Children**

Among the many places we will “go” this Advent season is shopping for gifts. A joy-filled outing with a little one to a (true) Dollar Store can be a highlight!

Ahead of time write down names of those to whom the child wants to give gifts. Hand-made gifts are always a treasure, but by picking out his/her own special items the child may think more deliberately about each receiver! Take the list, the child, a pencil so the child can mark off names as he/she shops, and let the shopping begin!

The adult’s role is to get gift bags ahead of time (decorated by child or not), refrain from comments or suggestions about selections, and take care of the check-out!

This special "secret" between the adult and the child is to be kept until holiday gifts are unwrapped. The child can enjoy being the gift giver! In past years this has been a wonderful experience for me, too, remembering the gift of a large bottle of window cleaner chosen for this child’s dear one (not me!) who … “cleans windows a lot”!

Karen May
**December 14, 2019**

*Colossians 3:15-17*  
And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

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Karen May
Week Three of Advent – Joy
December 15, 2019

Matthew 5:47  Jesus said, “And if you are friendly only to your friends, are you doing anything out of the ordinary?”

One of the many pleasures of the season is attending a nativity play put on by children. A challenge for the little Mary and Joseph is encountering the No Vacancy signs posted at the inns. However valid the reasons might be for these signs, the little Mary and Joseph feel unwelcomed and discouraged as they trudge wearily from inn to inn. Sometime back, when Dr. Lowell Bush heard that I was looking for a church home, he urged me to visit Second Presbyterian Church. At the end of worship, as I was turning to leave, Dr Jim Drahovzal walked up to me, introduced himself, and then invited me to join him on a study of Genesis led by Rev. Bob Maynard. He then waved an empty mug and said that we had to first stop for some coffee.

Because of their invitation to participate in something that they cherished deeply, this led me to joining their church family; which is now also mine. Plus, from that very first day, I have always felt welcomed here at Second; confirming every day that I had made the right decision. You see, whenever I feel welcomed, this leads to a feeling of contentment, or joy; that I’m OK. During the season of Advent in 2011, to celebrate the invitations of Lowell and Jim to the start of my journey here, Scott Walz took a photograph of the three of us together. By the way, the coffee mug that Jim is pictured with here, is not the same mug that he was holding when he welcomed me, oh twenty years previously.

Prayer:
God of Joy and Compassion, Companion of the Lonely
We are thankful for the bountiful joy that you have bestowed upon us.
In return, show us how to spread this joy amongst our sisters & brothers.
Help us to take down our No Vacancy signs
And to reach out to those outside of our various circles.
We ask in Christ’s name, Amen

Lakshman Chelvarajan
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Lakshman Chelvarajan
December 16, 2019

Psalm 30:5  Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

John 16:20  Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but you pain will turn to joy.

“Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God”  Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Many years ago I was employed working with children living with single parents who often were still children themselves. Many of their situations were heart-breaking, and, understandably, the children presented many challenges as the staff attempted to meet the multitude of their needs. After one particularly trying day, I returned home hoping to center myself before beginning what needed to be done in order to get dinner on the table for the family. I sat quietly looking out the window facing a bleak winter scene, the trees offering only the bare drab wood of late winter. Eventually, a cardinal in vivid red mating plumage perched upon a branch and remained there. The scene was suddenly transformed; Joy, the presence of God, had appeared unbidden, uplifting me.

This experience underscored the affirmations in the words of Psalm 30 (“Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning”), and of Jesus’ comforting farewell words to his disciples in John 16:20 (“…. you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy.”) Sorrow and joy are inextricably intertwined.

Joy, this gift of God’s presence, often surprises us by appearing from beyond and then moving beyond us, including more than ourselves in its scope. This season, like all seasons, we will experience both sorrows and joys, but never cease to believe that God will increase our own joy and that of others as we walk alongside someone who is seeking a way to escape pain and find joy.

Prayer: Loving and Renewing God, On a dark night into a turbulent world you sent us Light in the birth of the Christ child, that the world could know Joy even in difficult times. During this Holy season, we pray that Christ be born anew within us, renewing our thankfulness for this Gift of Grace and increasing our Joy to share with others. Amen

Joan Bush
December 16, 2019

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Psalm 138: 1  I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing praise.

Christmas 2003
I was watching my children’s Christmas play from the balcony.
I wept.
My daughter, Rebecca Clay, had the role of Mary.
My Mom, Mary, had transitioned in June. If only she were here to see her grandchild.
But she was here in Spirit. I knew she was watching.
My tears then turned from sadness to JOY!

Prayer: Thank you for all the blessings you have bestowed upon me. Thank you for the children’s choir and the adult choir to praise you. Thank you for the blessings of my family and the JOY they bring. In Christ’s name, Amen

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Becky Edwins
December 18, 2019

Joshua 24:15. …as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

We Are So Glad On Christmas Eve

Christmas Eve was a very special time growing up in the Swedish Anderson and Edlund families in Moline, Ill. My grandfather, E.A. Edlund the patriarch, read the Christmas story from the Swedish family bible. While this was going on, the youngsters in the group were making fun of the taste and smell of the lutefisk on the Swedish smorgasbord. The Christmas Eve tradition continues, but with the Christmas story in English, and the lutefisk replaced by baked ham.

Prayer (from the Scandinavian Christmas Carol). I am so glad on Christmas Eve, the night of Jesus’ birth; the night the star shone like the sun, and angels sang on earth. (Jeg er saa glad hver julekveld Ti da bless Jesus født; Da list stjernen som en sol, Og engle sang saa sødt.)

Gary Anderson, Director of Music

This is my Grandmother Romig's Norwegian recipe which I have made every year at least once every Christmas since 1971 (my first apartment)

Gingered Date Nut Balls
(but for years I have left the nuts out)

BAKE @ 275 F for 30 minutes
1.5 cups sugar (white)
1 & 1/8 t baking powder
1 & 1/8 cups flour (white)
1/2 t salt (I leave this out too)
1.5 cups chopped nuts (optional)
4.5 T chopped candied ginger (I add more ... often double)
8 oz. chopped dates (I use more ... often double)
3 eggs separated and beaten separately
confectioner’s sugar for dusting the baked balls but I usually OMIT (more flavor)

Mix and sift dry ingredients (I skip sifting). Add dates, ginger and nuts (if using) & MIX. Beat the egg whites. First add the egg yolks and mix into the dry. Fold the beaten egg whites in and BLEND. It is rather stiff and sticky. Grease a cookie sheet with edges just a little. Scoop the dough onto the sheet. Wet hands or a wet spoon helps to “smouch” the dough in to a layer. Bake @ 275 for about 30 minutes. Cool a bit and form into balls. Dust with powdered sugar IF you wish. Store in a TIN with a small piece of bread to keep them from becoming HARD.

The number of balls depends on how large or small you make the balls.

This Grams graduated Summa Cum Laude from Wooster (Ohio) in 1920. She was SMART as well as a good baker !!!

Fondly (and proud of my Grams),

Kristan Lenning
December 18, 2019

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Psalm 96:1  Oh sing to the Lord a new song:  sing to the Lord, all the earth!

When I was in junior high, my Dad’s job took my family to England. For three years we lived in Hertfordshire, about 28 miles from London. Though most British Christmas trees were rather thin and spindly, other holiday traditions are full and delightful. I have fond memories of watching Alastair Sims in “A Christmas Carol”, hearing the queen’s annual broadcast Christmas message, and celebrating Boxing Day.

But the most memorable – and joyful – part of the holiday for me was the angelic sound of British choirs singing Christmas music. Through the years, I’ve continued to add Christmas music by English choirs – a favorite of mine is the Choir of King’s College Cambridge – to my collection. Almost nothing brings me greater joy at Christmas than singing and listening to Christmas music. One of my favorites, “What Sweeter Music,” is by British composer John Rutter with lyrics by poet Robert Herrick (1591-1674).

The words are:

What sweeter music can we bring than a carol for to sing the birth of this our heavenly King?  Awake the voice!  Awake the string!

Dark and dull night fly hence away, and give the honor to this day that sees December turned to May.

Why does the chilling winter’s morn smile, like a field beset with corn?  Or smell like a meadow newly shorn?

Thus, on the sudden come and see the cause, why things thus fragrant be:  ‘Tis He is born, whose quickening birth gives life and luster public mirth, to heaven, and the under-earth.

We see him come, and know him ours who, with his sunshine and his showers, turns all the patient ground to flowers.

The darling of the world is come and fit it is, we find a room to welcome him, To welcome him.  The nobler part of all the house here, is the heart.

Which we will give him; and bequeath this holly and this ivy wreath, to do him honor, who’s our King and Lord of all this reveling.

What sweeter music can we bring than a carol for to sing the birth of this our heavenly King?

Prayer: Loving God, we worship you, we praise ou, we love you.  Fill our hearts with song as we await the arrival of the King of Kings.  Amen.

Sally Scherer
December 19, 2019

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Sally Scherer
Song of Solomon 2:12  The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.

Luke 12:27-28  Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you.

Lucida was a poor Mexican girl who had no gift to present the Christ Child at Christmas Eve Services. Her heart was filled with sadness rather than joy. An old woman assured Lucida “any gift is beautiful because it is given. Whatever you give, the Baby Jesus will love, because it comes from you.”

Not knowing what else to do, Lucida knelt by the roadside and gathered a handful of common weeds, fashioning them into a small bouquet. Looking at the scraggly bunch of weeds, she felt more saddened and embarrassed than ever by the humbleness of her offering. She fought back a tear as she entered the small village chapel.

As she approached the altar, she remembered the old woman’s kind words: “Even the most humble gift, if given in love, will be acceptable in His eyes.” She felt her spirit lift as she knelt to lay the bouquet at the foot of the nativity scene and bowed her head to pray. Suddenly, the bouquet of weeds burst into blooms of brilliant red, and all who saw them were certain that they had witnessed a Christmas miracle right before their eyes. The manger glowed and shimmered as if lit by a hundred candles. When everyone went outside after the Mass, all the clumps of tall green weeds throughout the town were shining with red star flowers. Lucida’s simple gift had indeed become beautiful.

From that day on, the bright red flowers have been known as the Flores de Noche Buena, or Flowers of the Holy Night, for they bloom each year during the Christmas season. Thus, the legend of the poinsettia was born. The shape of the poinsettia flower and leaves are sometimes thought as a symbol of the Star of Bethlehem which led the Wise Men to Jesus. The red colored leaves symbolize the blood of Christ. The white leaves represent his purity.

Prayer:  Dear God, Thank you for the beauty of flowers that bring joy with celebration and comfort with sorrow. Help us take time to stop and enjoy the beauty of world you have so generously given us.  Amen

Kathy Blomquist

Adapted from Tomie DePaola’s Legend, 1994
December 20, 2019

Song of Solomon 2:12  The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.

Luke 12:27-28  Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you.

Lucida was a poor Mexican girl who had no gift to present the Christ Child at Christmas Eve Services. Her heart was filled with sadness rather than joy. An old woman assured Lucida “any gift is beautiful because it is given. Whatever you give, the Baby Jesus will love, because it comes from you.”

Not knowing what else to do, Lucida knelt by the roadside and gathered a handful of common weeds, fashioning them into a small bouquet. Looking at the scraggly bunch of weeds, she felt more saddened and embarrassed than ever by the humbleness of her offering. She fought back a tear as she entered the small village chapel.

As she approached the altar, she remembered the old woman’s kind words: “Even the most humble gift, if given in love, will be acceptable in His eyes.” She felt her spirit lift as she knelt to lay the bouquet at the foot of the nativity scene and bowed her head to pray. Suddenly, the bouquet of weeds burst into blooms of brilliant red, and all who saw them were certain that they had witnessed a Christmas miracle right before their eyes. The manger glowed and shimmered as if lit by a hundred candles. When everyone went outside after the Mass, all the clumps of tall green weeds throughout the town were shining with red star flowers. Lucida’s simple gift had indeed become beautiful.

From that day on, the bright red flowers have been known as the Flores de Noche Buena, or Flowers of the Holy Night, for they bloom each year during the Christmas season. Thus, the legend of the poinsettia was born. The shape of the poinsettia flower and leaves are sometimes thought as a symbol of the Star of Bethlehem which led the Wise Men to Jesus. The red colored leaves symbolize the blood of Christ. The white leaves represent his purity.

Prayer:  Dear God, Thank you for the beauty of flowers that bring joy with celebration and comfort with sorrow. Help us take time to stop and enjoy the beauty of world you have so generously given us. Amen

Kathy Blomquist

Adapted from Tomie DePaola’s Legend, 1994
December 21, 2019

Isaiah 60:13  The glory of Lebanon will come to you, The juniper, the box tree and the cypress together, To beautify the place of My sanctuary; And I shall make the place of My feet glorious.

1 Chronicles 16:33  Then shall the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth.

The evergreen fir tree has been used to celebrate winter festivals for thousands of years. Pagans used branches to decorate their homes during the winter solstice, as it made them think of the spring to come. The Romans used fir trees to decorate their temples at the festival of Saturnalia. Christians use it as a sign of everlasting life with God.

Other early Christmas Trees, across many parts of northern Europe, were cherry or hawthorn plants (or a branch of the plant) that were put into pots and brought inside so they would hopefully flower at Christmas time. If you couldn’t afford a real plant, people made pyramids of wood and they were decorated to look like a tree with paper, apples and candles. Sometimes they were carried around from house to house, rather than being displayed in a home.

The people of northern Europe celebrated the winter solstice, known as Yule. Yule was symbolic of the Sun God, Mithras, being born, and was observed on the shortest day of the year. As the Sun God grew and matured, the days became longer and warmer.

Huge Yule logs were burned in honor of the sun. The word Yule itself means wheel, the wheel being a symbol for the sun. Mistletoe was considered a sacred plant, and the custom of kissing under the mistletoe began as a fertility ritual. Holly berries were thought to be a food of the gods.

Legend has it that Riga, Latvia, is where the tradition of the Christmas tree began, although the people of Tallinn, Estonia, contest it. On a cold Christmas Eve in 1510, a squad of German merchants, full of holiday spirit, hauled a huge pine tree to the square in front of their Blackheads Guild house and smothered it with flowers and fruits.

They danced and sang around it. At the end of the evening, they burned the tree in an impressive blaze. Decorating the “Christmas Tree” became an annual tradition which spread across the globe, although the burning part never caught on. In the 1800s the Christmas Tree was introduced in the United States by German settlers.

Prayer: Gracious God, Thank you for beautiful symbols of joy that we make traditions of the season. As we decorate our trees this year, make us mindful of the bounty you have bestowed upon us and help us be generous with others. In the name of your Son who taught us to serve others, Amen

Glenn Blomquist
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Glenn Blomquist
Fourth Sunday in Advent - Love

December 22, 2019

Ephesians 2:10  For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

1 Peter 4:10  As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

1 Corinthians 16:14  Let all that you do be done in love.

A prayer shawl is lovingly hand knit or crocheted with soft yarn, blessed by the one who has made it, and wrapped around the shoulders of someone who needs comfort and love. As Janet Bristow says in the Prayer Shawl Companion: Prayer Shawls become tangible symbols of love when words can’t be found to adequately express one’s feelings. They can be warm hugs of happiness, empathy, and support; a private place of escape in which to rest, relax, and renew; something to hold on to when all else seems to be slipping away.”

Women from Second Presbyterian gather monthly to knit and crochet together. In this milieu of prayer, contemplation, and joyful conversation and fellowship, members of the Prayer Shawl Ministry make prayer shawls, lap robes, and baby blankets, booties and hats for members of our congregation and other organizations in Kentucky. Patterns are simple to complex, and there is help for beginners and awe over the creativity of experts. Other members make lovely cards to accompany the shawls. The fellowship and love of the Prayer Shawl Ministry participants is an important part of the creative process and nourishes us as we work and talk together. Advent is a special time to express our love through the work of our hands.

Prayer: Loving God, May the works of our hands express our love to others in times of joy and sorrow. Amen

Prayer Shawl Ministry
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Prayer Shawl Ministry
December 23, 2019

Psalm 136:25  He gives food to every creature. His love endures forever.

Revelation 3:20  Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

I Corinthians 10:31  So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Meals on Wheels is a unique, humanitarian program inspired by the desire to help solve the problems of elderly and handicapped people. Many people are able to live more independently in their homes with just a little outside help such as nourishing food from Meals on Wheels. Shopping and cooking no longer present problems.

Meals on Wheels of Lexington began at Second Presbyterian Church in 1969, so this year we are celebrating 50 years of service to Lexington-Fayette County. Meals are prepared and delivered from the kitchens of three sponsoring churches: Second Presbyterian, Trinity Baptist, and Trinity Hill Methodist. Each church serves a specific geographic area in Fayette County. Each unit serves 40-60 meals every weekday (including holidays) year round. Each day’s delivery includes: a hot meal to be eaten immediately upon its arrival, a bag of cold foods – a sandwich, cereal, salad, dessert, juice, and milk - to be refrigerated until eaten for supper and breakfast, and a brief friendly visit from a volunteer.

Meals on Wheels is a way for volunteers to express God’s love in our community. Love is the major emphasis of Christian life. During Advent we remember to express our faith in acts of love.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as we prepare food, deliver, and talk with the people we serve, help us to remember your provision and goodness with thankful hearts. Amen.

Volunteers for Meals on Wheels
December 23, 2019

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Volunteers for Meals on Wheels
December 24, 2019

Where are we going?

Matthew 2: 1-2  ...after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.”

These wise men, thought to be astrologers with knowledge of the heavens, followed a star, traveling a long distance with a very specific purpose. They wanted to see Jesus!

It can be a challenge today to have such a single-minded plan for our life’s journey. Days quickly fill with dog walks, home tasks, caring for others, fun meals with friends, grandchildren’s activities, worthwhile volunteer work, naps, grocery shopping and so much more! It is easy to lose focus. Putting God first by doing and going where God wants us to go often gets lost amid the confusion of the day. Priorities get tossed around. I sometimes feel like the little critter in this photograph, carrying his heavy shell, struggling hard to get… somewhere. But in which direction? Away from the pounding surf, yet not too far from the ocean? Busyness often distracts me from keeping my journey focused on God.

The example of the wise men’s journey reminds me of a familiar story found in Genesis. God told Abraham to pack up his family and belongings and go “to the land that I will show you.” With God’s promise to make of Abraham “a great nation,” Abraham obeyed. We learn the rest of the story of how God kept that promise and many more in Genesis 12:1—25:11.

God has given us a “promise” too, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Through Jesus’ actions and words, we see him strike a balance between serving others and making time and effort through prayer to enrich his relationship with God.

Prayer: God of life and light, as your beloved children, we thank you for your never-ending love encouraging us to put you first in our lives, every day. By doing that, we will better withstand the distractions and challenges that come our way. This prayer is offered in the name of Jesus the Christ. Amen

Karen May
December 24, 2019

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Karen May
December 25, 2019
Christmas Day

PreK and Kindergarten Sunday School Class:
Abby, Ben, Christian, Frankie, Austin, Aubrey, Lauryn, Anne Blair, Ellie, Delaney, Rush, Anna Claire, Henry and Grant

Teachers: MK Holbrook, Nellie Wilkinson, and Joyce Kermode.
December 25, 2019

Christmas Day

PreK and Kindergarten Sunday School Class:

Abby, Ben, Christian, Frankie, Austin, Aubrey, Lauryn, Anne Blair, Ellie, Delaney, Rush, Anna Claire, Henry and Grant

Teachers: MK Holbrook, Nellie Wilkinson, and Joyce Kermode.
Nativity Sets Featured in this Advent Devotional

- Needlepoint Nativity sets were made by Martha Deener.

- The stained glass Nativity was made by Eleanor (Ellie) F. Higgins and Mortimer (Bud) J. Higgins and gifted to the church in honor of their granddaughters, Beverly and Audrey Pugh, at the time of their baptism at Second Presbyterian Church. History from Janet Pugh.

- Creche figures shared with the church in loving memory of the Reverend Jack and Peggy Payne by their family

- Folk art Nativity from Joan and Lowell Bush

- Lenox Nativity and colored figures Nativity from Karen and Aubrey May
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Advent Devotions
2019

Second Presbyterian Church
460 East Main at Ransom
Lexington, KY  40507
859-254-7768