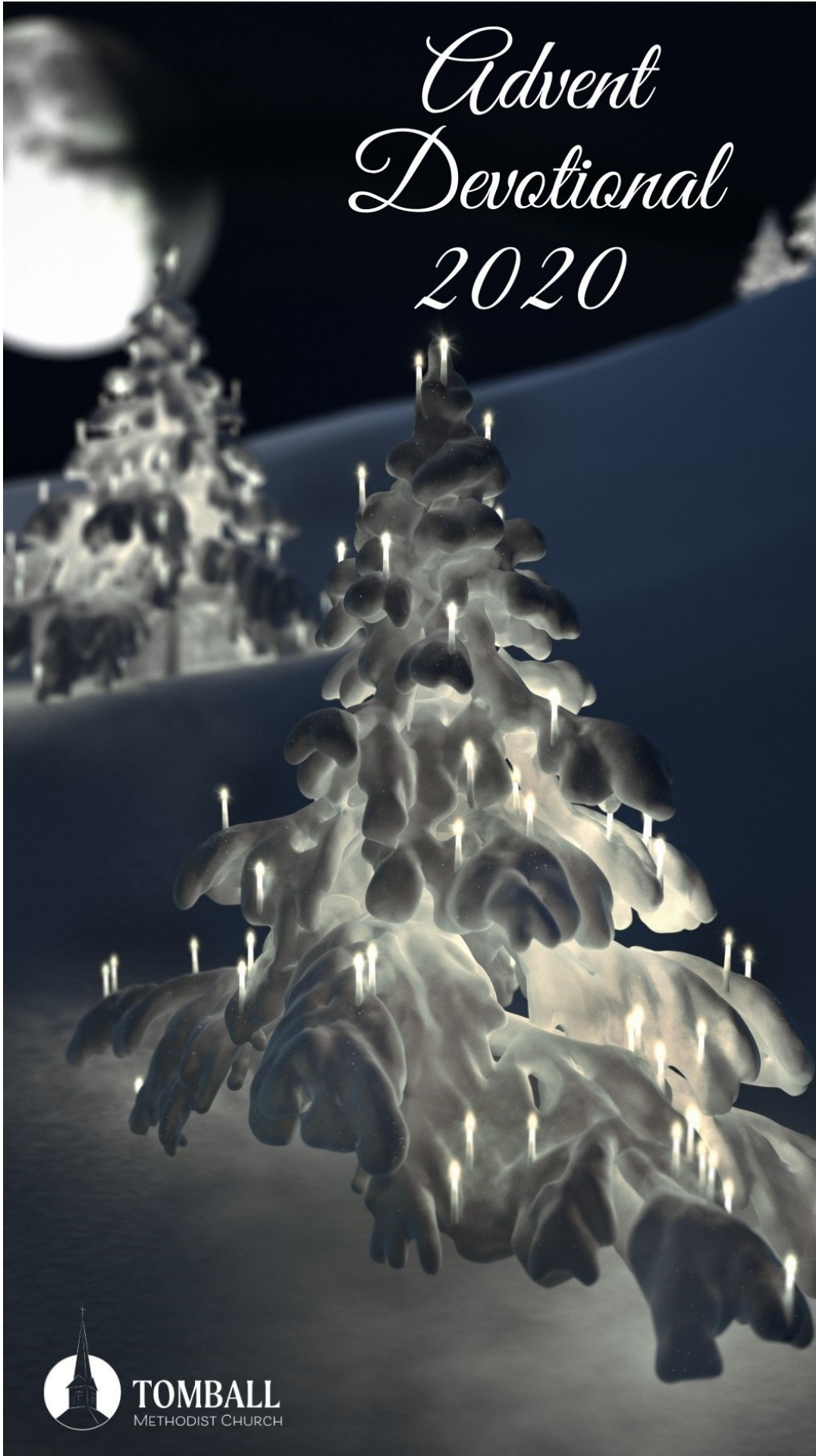
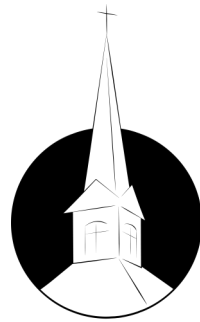


Advent Devotional 2020



TOMBALL
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An Advent Devotional booklet
prepared by members of Tomball UMC and
sponsored by the Discipleship Team



What is Advent?

Advent begins on the 4th Sunday before Christmas Day and ends on Christmas Eve. The word, “advent” means coming or arrival with the focus of the Advent season being on the arrival or birth of Jesus Christ, as well as the anticipation of His return in His Second Advent.

Advent is a perfect time to include children in the celebration by having an advent wreath at home and talking with them about the birth of Christ as well as the eternity of our relationship with Christ. It is a great time to share with them about gift giving and the gift we received from Christ with His death on the cross. Encourage your children to share with you as you read these daily devotionals as a family. Encourage them to ask questions and to seek the answers together as a family. Advent is a time to encourage them to be a part of the same activities going on at church in your home.



November 29, 2020

Waiting

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means God with us). Isaiah 7:14 (Matthew 1:23) ESV

Does it seem like you spend a lot of your life “waiting”? It often seems that way to me and even more so since our season of COVID began. We waited for the “lockdown” to be lifted. We waited on various items to appear on the grocery shelves again. We are waiting for a vaccine to be developed. We are still waiting for our life to be “normal” again! I have even waited for God to send me an inspiration for this Advent devotional.

Our word advent comes from the Latin word “adventus” meaning “Coming”. This is a time set aside for preparation as we wait on the coming of Christ.

If we find ourselves waiting (in this case for Christmas day), then we come from a long tradition of those waiting for the Messiah's arrival. The Gospel of Matthew quotes many Old Testament scriptures that show how Jesus' coming fulfills the OT prophecies! From Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we have become acquainted with the New Testament stories and those who waited for the imminent birth of Christ. Mary and Joseph are the first that come to mind. We know that Mary's kinswoman, Elizabeth, and her husband, Zechariah, were part of this waiting also. And don't forget about the Wisemen who came from a far country in anticipation of seeing the newborn king.

Our own times of waiting come with our own hopes and expectations. Our hopes and expectations often become realities. Sometimes they are realities that we do not like. They must, however, be squarely faced. In the case of our Messiah, He is a reality beyond what we can see. In the case of our earthly realities, we know with certainty that whatever they are, Immanuel will be with us as we face them.

Prayer: Jesus, please help me to place my hopes and expectations in you and not in the realities of this world. In Your Name, Amen.

Submitted by Dale Reid

Believe



November 30, 2020

A Spirit of Joy

Imagine this - two women, cousins in fact, and each chosen and favored by God. One named Elizabeth who was old and thought she could not conceive or bear children. The other named Mary was young, unmarried and around 14 yrs. of age. The angel Gabriel comes first to Elizabeth and tells her that she would conceive a child who would prepare the world for the coming of the Lord. Six months later, the same angel Gabriel visits her much younger cousin, Mary to give her the message that she too would conceive a child, our Savior, Jesus Christ. As Elizabeth hears of Mary's news, she travels far to visit her cousin and as she sees her, it is written

"Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, 'God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit with me? When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said.'" Luke 1:42-45

This story has captured me. I am the oldest cousin on my mother's side of all girls and struggled with infertility due to health problems for several years. We completed two cycles of Invitro-fertilization before getting pregnant with our son. I was 30 yrs. old when we had him. Simply said, I can relate to Elizabeth.

On the opposite spectrum, my youngest cousin is 13 yrs. younger than me. A few years ago, at a relatively young age, she called to tell us that she was pregnant. My immediate reaction was anger – I was angry she was pregnant, I was angry that she waited so long to tell us, I was angry that her future would look vastly different now – flat out angry. I remember soaking in the bathtub crying and praying, “But I’ve done everything the right way, God...WHY?” and at that moment I heard God audibly say, “Because it’s not about you. It’s about me.” My tears instantly stopped, and I immediately realized how wrong I had been in my anger. While I cannot go back and redo my reaction, I can go forward with the prayer and desire to be like that of Elizabeth. I want nothing more than both of our children to know God’s love and desire for them. I want them to know the love of a family that praises God for them daily. Elizabeth chose humility. She did not question God. Elizabeth rejoiced in God’s perfect plan.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, help us to see your blessings without comparisons this holiday season. May we put our trust in your plans rejoicing in you fully. Give us a heart of joy for others without anger or bitterness. Position us to see your will as Elizabeth did. Amen.*

Submitted by Ashley Carter, MomTRIBE



December 1, 2020

Awe and Wonderment

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." Luke 2:10-14

Did you know a woodpecker blinks at the exact time it pecks? This keeps his eyeballs from being popped out of his head from the pressure of the peck.

Did you know that a giraffe has a sponge at the base of his brain which soaks up blood as he bends over and disperses the blood to his brain as he stands up? This keeps him from fainting while his heart is pumping the blood back up that long neck. This keeps him safe.

From God's perspective creations are no big deal but from our perspective, each time we learn of a new part of creation, we should be full of awe and wonderment. We sometimes credit scientists for new discoveries but these discoveries have been there since the creation of the earth so really we should feel awe that our brains are built to learn and wonderment that our world is built for discovery.

We need to acknowledge that each discovery is a miracle for mankind.

As we enter this season of Christ's birth, I think we should feel the same awe and wonderment over the miracle of His birth. What an amazing plan God created that has changed the world forever... one small birth. God knew, man discovered. For me this Christmas, I want to renew my child like feelings of discovery for all the events that happened in just the right order and at just the right time to save mankind. It is a personal miracle for each of us.

As we start a new year, I want to see the news, read the paper, hear about new things and feel awe and wonderment over the creation of them at the beginning of time and not just for man's/ woman's discovery of them. I believe in modern day miracles and my goal, this new year, is to recognize them and spend grateful time in appreciation.

Prayer: Dear Father, Thank you for your creations, the birth of your Son, and the miracles that you bestow on each of us. May we acknowledge and thank you for each one. Amen.

Submitted by Lucy Harvell



December 2, 2020

Christmas 2020

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. 1 Peter 1:3

This pandemic year has affected everyone in unusual and many uncomfortable, unpleasant, difficult and at times life-threatening ways. With the loss of jobs or cut back in income this year, there may not be any money for buying presents. But here is a way to have a special gift for everyone in the family.

When everyone gathers by the tree, have them sit down in a circle so everyone can see each other. Starting with the oldest person and going age-wise to the youngest, ask each person to share the happiest, best experience he/she has enjoyed the most during the past year. That was a special gift, wasn't it?

Then, starting with the oldest and going clockwise around the circle, have each person look to his left and tell that person something special he likes about that person or a special experience they have shared, or a good thing that person has done—something positive, funny and loving. That will be a gift for that person.

Next, read about the greatest gift that has ever been given to each and every one of us: *Luke 2: 1-20* about Jesus, who showed us how to give love and care for each other.

Prayer: Thank you, Father God, for the gift of your son, Jesus, who showed us and taught us how to live and love one another. Thank you for the good times we have had this past year and for bringing us safely through the bad times. Thank you for the gifts of love filling this room. Amen.

Submitted by Jane Scott



December 3, 2020

That Christmas Glow

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." John 8:12

The candlelight service on Christmas Eve in my church growing up was always breath-taking. There was one year I recall where there was a bit of drama. I won't provide too many details, but suffice it to say that mixing 80's big hair, loads of Aqua Net hair spray, and children holding lit candles was really a recipe for disaster.

Also, I recall that if you didn't show up early, you would miss out on a spot in the balcony seats. That's where you wanted to be when all the lights in the building were turned off and the candlelight began to fill the room. As my eyes adjusted and the congregation started singing "Silent Night", I was always filled with a beautiful spirit. Part of the joy in this service was the overwhelming nostalgia of Christmases past, memories of my grandmother standing with us and watching her tear up with joy. But more important than the traditions we observe at Christmas is the reason behind them.

Christ is the light of the world. And in this service, we see a shining metaphor for His all-encompassing love and the brightness He brings to our lives. His warmth provides a joy that transcends the sadness and sickness that is pervasive in this world. For one glorious moment, we lift our candles in unison and proclaim that the life of Jesus has changed us.

Prayer: Father, help us to find comfort in the traditions of the season, but also find a renewed spirit in the reasons behind them. Let your light shine through us in a world that desperately needs your love. Amen.

Submitted by Drew Solomon



December 4, 2020

Words Make a Difference

“They began telling each other how their hearts had felt strangely warm as he walked with them and explained the Scriptures during the walk down the road” Luke 24:32 (TLB)

I read once that, on average, women speak 20,000 words a day and men utter only 7,000 words. One reason it's crucial for women to have close women friends is that men generally do not want to listen to our 20,000 words every day. But get a group of women together and we can chatter, exclaim, compare, complain, solve, reason, suggest, explain, advise, and sympathize while we all get our 20,000 words out.

One day, out of curiosity, I looked on the internet to see how many words there are in the Bible. It said 789,650 words in my preferred translation. If I used every one of my 20,000 words a day to read the Bible aloud, it would take nearly forty days. That said, I have to admit that one of my favorite discoveries was the poem, “The Bible in Fifty Words”. Whenever I'm stuck for a way to begin my daily prayers, I start with these fifty words:



“God made, Adam bit, Noah asked, Abraham split. Joseph ruled, Jacob fooled. Bush talked, Moses balked, Pharaoh plagued, people walked, sea divided, tablets guided. Promise landed, Saul freaked, David peeked, prophets warned, Jesus born. God walked, love talked, anger crucified, hope died. Love rose, spirit flamed, Word spread, God remained.”

That pretty much covers it, right?

At least, I've learned that words, whether a few or many, have a tremendous impact on the hearts and minds of those who hear them.

Prayer: Dear Lord, during this Christmas season and all throughout the year, help me keep my words to a minimum when I am upset or angry. When I am complimenting someone, help me say as many of the right words as possible. Amen.

Submitted by Elaine Nichols

Reproduced from Daily Guideposts 2020

December 5, 2020

Family

"We love because he first loved us." – 1 John 4:19

Growing up we had a family reunion every year around Christmas time. We usually went to my Dad's brother's house, Uncle Russell and Aunt Sara, in Greenwood, MS. Uncle Russell was my dad's older brother and sold Heinz Baby Food. Aunt Sara was a news reporter for a local newspaper and always had an opinion about the happenings of the world. She also made dolls from wine bottles as a hobby (this explains a lot more about life now than it did when I was young).

I remember going to her house and there was a large screened-in back porch surrounded by huge oak trees, perfect for climbing. I never remember being allowed to go in her house often but on occasion she would allow us to go into an upstairs area where she stored her dolls. However, we were only allowed to look at them; we could not touch them. As kids we coveted those dolls, and all wanted one of our very own. (I still have several of those dolls today – they are dressed in Christmas clothing and are put out each year at Christmas time.)

All of the family would come – aunts, uncles, cousins from all over the area – and gather together for a big dinner and a time of fellowship. Family was very important. The time together with our family was cherished. Thinking back on that time together there was always laughter and fun, the cousins played together climbing trees; this

was back in a time when we could play outside without adult supervision. We looked forward to that time together and spent an entire weekend together as a family. I truly miss those days.

Thinking back on that time in my life when everything was a wonder, new, exciting. I often wonder what Jesus' family was like – we know that he had brothers but there is hardly anything mentioned about a sister, or other family. We also know that there were often big gatherings of the community so I wonder was that more of the “family” for Jesus. Did he play games with friends? Did he play with his cousins? Did he gather with his aunt and uncles? Was he forbidden to play with things at his aunt's house?

To me Christmas is all about family. Family today for me is not necessarily because of blood relationship; family today has been family that I have created through the years with friends and co-workers. Family, blood family, remains important, and a part of my life but my family has grown. My family includes friends, neighbors, co-workers, church friends, and the list goes on! What an amazing life! What an amazing family! What an amazing time of year to be with those you love and share the love of Christ with others!

Prayer: Most Loving Father, thank you for our family, our biological family as well as our created family. Thank you for showing us love so that we may love others. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

Submitted by Pastor Rebecca Jones



December 6, 2020

Invitation to Light ...

"In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind, The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."

John: 4-5

Advent is our invitation and preparation for the Light. This Light is Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. We can be assured that Jesus will light our way through the darkness of this world in which we live. Scripture tells us:

*"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning... In Him was life and that life was the light of all mankind. **The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.**" (John 1: 1-5)
(emphasis mine)*

Jesus is the glorious light that never dims. What joy we believers have in knowing that the light of Jesus through His Holy Spirit dwells in us. We never have to fear the darkness because our faith in Christ banishes the fear that darkness holds. When darkness attempts to encroach upon us, Jesus provides the light that we need to overcome our trials, loss, illness, heartache, stress, and difficult



relationships and so on. It's clear, as clear as the skies on the night of Jesus' birth when the shepherds were guided to His birthplace, that Jesus' light assures us that we are never alone and the cross assures we are ransomed. His promise to never forsake or leave us is firm. We simply need to turn to His light and He will "lighten" our burdens and celebrate our joys.

The season of Advent is a time to prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth; a time to rejoice that God so loved us that He sent His only Son, the light of the world not to condemn the world but to save it.

Prayer: Father, we offer praises and thanks for the wonderful gift of light, your Son, Jesus our Savior. Help us to realize the true value of His light in our lives in both times of joy and times of trial. Let us be reminded that we are never alone or in darkness because in Christ we always have light. In Jesus' powerful and precious name we pray. Amen.

Submitted by Harriet Fether



December 7, 2020

It's All About Perspective

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people." Luke 2:10

When I was in third grade, my dad added a room onto the back of our house. He planned for it to be done by Thanksgiving, but it wasn't finished until a couple of days before Christmas. The couches my mom picked out arrived more than a month before the room was finished, so the solution was to pack two rooms' worth of furniture snugly into our existing living room. As an 8-year-old, I remember thinking it was kind of cool that my sister and I could each have our own couch to lounge on while watching television, but I'm pretty sure my mom didn't have my same level of joy. I also imagine my dad was highly encouraged to pick up the pace to finish construction as quickly as possible.

When the room was complete and the furniture was finally moved to its new location, it was December 23. My parents assumed they could convince my sister and me that we could just skip a Christmas tree that year, but you try telling third and fifth graders to skip something so monumentally important. So, after a little begging, pleading, and pouting, we headed to the nursery to pick out a tree.

The store normally had hundreds of trees in a large covered area, but with Christmas upon us, there were only about 10. Of those 10 trees, only two or three still had needles. One tree looked pretty good from one side but had a trunk with a serious case of scoliosis. We purchased the crooked tree anyway, and my ever-handy dad found a way to wire it to the wall so that it would stay upright in the tree stand. With the good side facing the room, it was actually a pretty nice-looking tree. Looking back, that is one of our more memorable holidays, and I know it was my favorite tree.

This Christmas will likely be very different for many of us. We can sigh and lament and wish it were different, or we can find ways to enjoy this season in spite of the challenges. When we look for the good, we usually find it. Just like our crooked Christmas tree, it all depends on the side you choose to view.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help us to find the joy in this season of your birth so that we can be your light. Remind us that we can deliver your gift of love to those around us, even if we can't be face to face. Amen.

Submitted by Laurel Frank



December 8, 2020

The Gift of All Gifts

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; Lean not to your own understanding, Acknowledge Him in all your ways and He will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3: 4-6

In this time of so many distractions and bad news all around us, we need to remember Who is really in control! I have something that I depend on when I'm at "my wit's end". That's just where God's power is shown, where Jesus loves to come, where the Burden Bearer stands.

Joshua 1:9 tells us, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." Precious promises to all His children, of any age! We always need Him!

There is a scripture that says, *"Commit your ways unto the Lord, and He will establish your thoughts."*
(Proverbs 16:3)

I have learned it's a great way to start my day! I'm inviting the One Help that I can depend on, and then putting my faith into action, by His Grace and in His strength. I am weak, but He is strong; so, going in His strength is vital. We sing "Standing on the Promises of Christ our King" for a reason!

And that reason includes the Season of Advent . . . a season of looking forward with JOY, not “what if” or “if only”; but toward the goals of making His birth the focus of the season, expectantly! The gift of His Love that exceeds anything that can be wrapped in paper and tied with ribbons. The gift of His Presence that exceeds any tree with all the tinsel, ornaments, and shining lights. The gift of His Light guiding us all year and in all to come; never ending at the close of the day ... But waiting for us every morning, fresh and new saying, “Come unto Me” and walk side by side. Never leaving or forsaking us . . . never! What a gift! What a treasure! What a promise!

Prayer: Dear Precious Lord of our life, we love you with an imperfect love, but you understand! By your grace and mercy, we will grow more into your likeness day by day. We confess that we don't do what we should, and often do what we shouldn't, but your forgiveness is always there as we humbly look up, waiting to move us forward. We thank you with deeds and actions, in your strength, pressing toward the mark of “Your will be done”. In the name of Jesus, we lift our prayer. Amen.

Submitted by Lee Cox



December 9, 2020

Mindset

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life & peace. Romans 8: 5-6

The vast majority of the time I live as an optimist, a positive mindset even in early hours of the day when most will not make a peep. While I tend to get stressed out easily, I also have a niche for cheering up others & finding the light at the end of the tunnel.

The arrival of the pandemic brought an unexpected end to everything and flipped my mindset upside down. I was locked in a mental cage of dread & worry. I naturally find ways to control things, but everything starting over Spring Break made this impossible. I got tunnel vision about what I could no longer do.

Despite this, I was able to dive deeper in my faith & involvement in youth programs both here & at another church. While most people wallowed in what they could not do, I took hold of God's opportunity for me in my circumstance. I found peace & a new routine through scripture.

As the coming school year neared however, I strayed away from my newest good habits. I was spending less time with God. This was reflected in my emotions as well. I had a few nights of emotional overload each time more bad news was released from the school district. I wanted complete control over my plans for me. I lost sight of His plans for me.

While I am still tackling my mental block daily, I self-remind myself Emmanuel, God is with us, "through it all." I try to inhabit a "Joseph" mindset. Joseph had his future ahead of him. A soon-to-be wife & a new future for them both. But the news of Mary's pregnancy turned his plans inside out & upside down as well. He easily could have taken a spiral mindset & lost all sense of direction. Instead, Joseph thought outwardly. He took the situation for what it was & moved forward with peace & the guidance of Christ.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father guide us to find peace like Joseph. So often we turn to our human natures & want complete control. But in these times, we need to give it to You. Give us the strength & peace of truly laying our struggles to You. In Christ's Holy name. Amen.

Submitted by Samantha Gaus-Schmidt



December 10, 2020



Santa's Prayer

Trust in the Lord with all of your heart. Do not depend on your own understanding. See his will in all that you do, and he will show you which path to take. Proverbs 3:5-6

The Bible says that we are supposed to trust God. We know this, but why is it so darn hard to truly and fully trust God? It's easy to think that we can control the outcome of our own lives...if we only do this or that, it will make things better...right? Nope! We know that's not how it works, even though we continue to try. Here's my "turning point" story about how I finally surrendered to God and let him lead me down my true intended path.

It was Christmas time. My oldest son was 13, my oldest daughter was about to turn 10 and my twins were 4 years old. Life was exhausting, just for the fact that my husband and I were raising four kiddos. I had hit a bump in the road of good health about three years prior. I had been dealing with chronic health issues that the doctors couldn't figure out. It left me in pain and exhausted most days, but I had to keep chugging along as best as I could because I was a mother of four.

This particular Christmas outing was our annual trip to go see Santa. I wasn't able to go the previous year because I wasn't feeling well, so this year I was determined to go. All of the kids were dressed in their coordinating outfits, of course. We stood in the long line in an attempt to have all four kids tell Santa what they wanted for Christmas, and to get this year's perfect Christmas card picture, all in a thirty second visit.

It was finally our turn. With my camera in hand, I waited patiently as Santa asked each kid what they wanted for Christmas, starting with the little ones. When he got to my oldest daughter, she whispered her request softly in his ear. As a mom, I wished I could hear what she was saying, if you know what I mean! That's when it happened... Santa turned and looked straight at me. He then proceeded to stand up from his big Santa chair and walked right up to me. I was puzzled. I can only imagine what my face looked like! He leaned in and asked, "Can I pray for you?". Naturally I said yes. Right then and there, with a mess of children waiting in line for their turn to see Santa, he took the time to pray for ME! And to be honest,

a prayer that at the time, I did not feel worthy of. He sat back down. Shaking like a leaf, I had the kids take their obligatory picture with Santa and we left.

As that day went on, my mind kept going back to Santa and to what my daughter said to him to make him stop everything to pray for me. I would later learn that she asked for her mommy to feel better, instead of asking for any toys for Christmas.

How many almost 10-year olds do that? How many Santas would do that... even with a long line of children waiting for him? It was truly an unexpected blessing, and a reminder that God IS working behind the scenes. He puts people in our lives for a reason. For me, on this special day, it was my sweet, thoughtful little girl and a God-loving Santa.

We just need to remember to stop trying to control outcomes and listen for His voice. After that day, I chose to truly surrender. A calm comes over you when that happens... when you can truly and fully trust in the Lord. I know this because that moment, with my daughter's request and Santa's prayer, I had my huge "Aha" moment. The moment when I thought to myself that maybe if I stop constantly trying to figure out my illness and put it in God's hands, he would lead me down the path that I was supposed to take... with a little nudge from Santa and my sweet daughter.

After that, all I needed to do was have faith and wait!

Life is filled with unexpected blessings, reminders and turning points. I encourage you to look to God when life isn't going exactly the way you imagined and trust Him to lead you down the right path.

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for your faithful involvement in every aspect of our lives. We know that we may never understand what or why You are doing something in our lives. Please continue to remind us to fully and faithfully trust in You by listening to Your voice and allowing us to let go of our own plans and expectations. Allow us to surrender to the plans You have for us. Amen.

Submitted by Sherry Montes

December 11, 2020
Reflections on Christmas as a POW

Let (us) give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind. Psalm 107:15 (NIV)

My dad, Peter Clarke, was a Glider Pilot during World War II and spent 6½ months as a POW after the battle of Arnhem in September 1944. He kept a diary during his time of imprisonment, as did many other POWs, and it's interesting to see both the similarities and the differences between these diaries and the one written by my dad. While these POWs weren't treated badly by the Germans, in comparison with those captured by other nationalities, they were still prisoners, far from home and family. Many of the entries in these diaries focus on their daily rations and then the excitement that followed the arrival of a Red Cross package.

My dad's diary was no exception and contains many references to the meager rations, the privations of prison life, and the thrill of receiving those Red Cross packages. He even kept some of the labels and they are included in the diary that can be found on the internet. The difference between Dad's diary and those of many other POWs is shown by his faith in Christ.

His entry on Christmas Day, 1944 shows this:

"Ray and I were able to save the majority of the fare that made up our Christmas Day menu but the arrival of a Red Cross parcel on the day before enabled the food situation to be doubly fortified! Thank God for all his benefits." "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness" Psalm 107 (KJV).



Dad then listed their full menu for the day and concluded -

“And so came the end of what was, in the circumstances a very happy, and for a change, a completely satisfying day's food.”

Dad's diary also contains many reflective entries. His reading during these months included his Bible and several devotional books. Dad even mentioned the day when his Bible, along with cigarettes and matches in an oilskin case, was stolen. However, within two weeks God provided a replacement. A few days later dad was hospitalized with a boil on his wrist; while in the “Revier” he met a US soldier, Kenneth Crawford. Like all US servicemen, Kenneth had been given a New Testament as part of his equipment; he gave his New Testament to my dad. That battered book is now a prized possession of mine.

Throughout this period of privation, my dad was sustained by thoughts of home, but even more by his faith in Christ. In 1990, one of my daughters interviewed him for a school project. The final question was “What one lesson do you think you learned from remembering WWII?” Dad's answer was “The chief lesson learned is that, put to the test, faith in Jesus Christ works in practice and is utterly worthwhile”.

During the last few months, we've all felt “imprisoned” in many ways by the threat and reality of Covid-19. May we echo Dad's words “*put to the test, faith in Jesus Christ works in practice and is utterly worthwhile*”.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for the gift of your Son, whose birth we will celebrate soon. Help us to remember and give thanks for all your blessings to each of us. Amen.

Submitted by Reverend Brenda Porter

December 12, 2020

Uncertainties

What can I say - 2020 has been the most difficult and trying year for many of us for many reasons; COVID didn't help in any situation. In our household this year we started out with a lot of anxiety and uncertainty that began with David's health. The doctors had mentioned to us that he needed to have a biopsy done to see what is going on.

As we approach Advent season, I keep thinking of Joseph. His plans of marrying Mary and then an angel came to him. The uncertainty that he must be thinking of being faithful or quietly divorcing Mary, but that would bring disgrace on her. The weight of that decision must have been enormous.

That's where uncertainty comes into my life and family now. The questions keep coming, with only anxiety to follow. As Mary trusted God with the responsibility of having the Son of God, Joseph must trust God also, so now I must trust God. I have to put my trust in Him to calm our fears of the journey we are going to be facing. That is very hard for me since I am what you would call a "control freak" and someone who plans everything out for our life, or when we will do ...or this is what I want to happen but when....I'm finding out that God has other plans for us. When David and I began our life together we never thought that our family would come from adoption. But we trusted and had faith in God that this will be our family. And yes, He answered our prayers. We also never thought we would be facing a bi-lateral lung transplant. Now we are having to trust in God that He will take care of David, put a team of doctors together, to get on the road to recovery and back to a somewhat normal life.

The journey we are facing is full of anticipation and many uncertainties just like the journey that Joseph was facing back when our Savior, Jesus Christ was born.

I found comfort and peace in reading and digging into the Word of God to help David and I on this journey. I look at how Joseph handled all the obstacles and how *“The Lord said not to be afraid to take Mary as your wife.”*

I find comfort in the verses.

“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save the people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”) When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him; and took Mary home as his wife. Matthew 1:21-24.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for all you have done for me. As David and I go through this journey, I have peace knowing that You are with us in each step we take just as You were with Joseph on his journey. Amen.

Submitted by Cindy Whitehead



December 13, 2020
The Man and the Birds

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 (NIV)

The man to whom I'm going to introduce you was not a scrooge, he was a kind decent, mostly good man. Generous to his family, upright in his dealings with other men. But he just didn't believe all that incarnation stuff which the churches proclaim at Christmas Time. It just didn't make sense and he was too honest to pretend otherwise. He just couldn't swallow the Jesus Story, about God coming to Earth as a man.

"I'm truly sorry to distress you," he told his wife, "but I'm not going with you to church this Christmas Eve." *He said he'd feel like a hypocrite.* That he'd much rather just stay at home, but that he would wait up for them. And so he stayed and they went to the midnight service.

Shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall. He went to the window to watch the flurries getting heavier and heavier and then went back to his fireside chair and began to read his newspaper. Minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound...Then another, and then another. Sort of a thump or a thud...At first he thought someone must be throwing snowballs against his living room window. But when he went to the front door to investigate he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the snow. They'd been caught in the storm and, in a desperate search for shelter, had tried to fly through his large landscape window.

Well, he couldn't let the poor creatures lie there and freeze, so he remembered the barn where his children stabled their pony. That would provide a warm shelter, if he could direct the birds to it.



Quickly he put on a coat, galoshes, tramped through the deepening snow to the barn. He opened the doors wide and turned on a light, but the birds did not come in. He figured food would entice them in. So he hurried back to the house, fetched bread crumbs, sprinkled them on the snow, making a trail to the yellow-lighted wide open doorway of the stable. But to his dismay, the birds ignored the bread crumbs, and continued to flap around helplessly in the snow. He tried catching them...He tried shooing them into the barn by walking around them waving his arms...Instead, they scattered in every direction, except into the warm, lighted barn.

And then, he realized that they were afraid of him. To them, he reasoned, I am a strange and terrifying creature. If only I could think of some way to let them know that they can trust me...That I am not trying to hurt them, but to help them. But how? Because any move he made tended to frighten them, confuse them. They just would not follow. They would not be led or shooed because they feared him.

"If only I could be a bird," he thought to himself, "and mingle with them and speak their language. Then I could tell them not to be afraid. Then I could show them the way to safe, warm...to the safe warm barn. But I would have to be one of them so they could see, and hear and understand." At that moment the church bells began to ring. The sound reached his ears above the sounds of the wind. And he stood there listening to the bells – Adeste Fidelis – listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas. And he sank to his knees in the snow.

Prayer: Gracious and Loving Father, Thank you for caring so much for our wellbeing that you would become "one of us" so that we could better understand. You gave up so much to give us what we needed most, forgiveness and eternal life with you. We cannot thank you enough for your gift of Jesus! Amen.

Submitted by Frank Johnson

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December 14, 2020

Koinonia

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42

Every Christmas as a child, I visited my grandmother with my younger sister and often cousin. As soon as Christmas break occurred, we would be so excited to get to my grandmother's to play games and bake. Every year we baked gingerbread houses, men, and women (I didn't like only having men cookie cutters, so my grandmother found cookie cutters to make gingerbread women)! We did not buy the pre-made gingerbread houses that you simply assemble from the store and cannot eat. We baked the gingerbread houses with molds and then assembled and decorated. The best part of it was we could then eat the house and it tasted delicious (not like cardboard)! I recently purchased gingerbread house molds in order to continue doing this within my own house and hopefully continue on the tradition for years. We also played a horse racing game that I have struggled to find a copy of. I came across it at a garage sale in the last month and bought it for \$2! Now, my Christmases will look similar to what they did when I was young!

This time with my family was so enjoyable and is often what we look forward to during the holidays. While the gifts and holiday spirit and decorations are wonderful, we love getting together as a family and friends and laughing, playing games, and just spending time catching up. I loved eating the gingerbread houses and betting on who's horse would win the race, but above all else I loved the time I got to spend with my family. This koinonia is essential to believers in Christ. Koinonia is the idea of sharing in fellowship and communion with other believers.

The holidays are a wonderful time to dive deep into koinonia with our family and friends and offers the joy and happiness that come along with it. This may come easy for some with big families or close family that live nearby. However, holidays are also a harder time for others as they do not have the family to spend it with due to death, living too far away, and more. Some spend time with family and view it more as a duty and do not enjoy their crazy family members.

Through Christ, we are all a family in faith and are instructed to participate in koinonia as often as possible. With this, comes looking after our family and ensuring all are being brought into fellowship during the holidays. It is important for us to share our time with others around us in need in order to create a sense of koinonia and have the holidays filled with wonderful memories of gingerbread houses and games.

Prayer: Father, we ask of You to open our eyes to those in need of fellowship, koinonia, this holiday season. We ask for You to guide us in understanding what we are being called to do and how we can assist the family in Christ around us. We thank You for the blessing of koinonia that we have in our own lives and pray that our time together in fellowship honors you in all we do. Amen.

Submitted by Pastor Katlyn Britton



December 15, 2020

The Perfect Gift

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. James 1:7

The 5 Love Languages is a theory espoused by Gary Chapman that suggests we all like to receive and give love in one of 5 unique ways.

- Acts of Service
- Physical Touch
- Words of Affirmation
- Quality Time
- Gifts

If I had to classify how I like to show my love for my kiddos, I would rank the giving of gifts pretty high. I like to put a lot of thought into the gifts my kids get during Christmas. We may not always be able to get the things they want most because budgets are always tight. More importantly, the kids will come up with things on their Christmas list that are not necessarily the best choice for them. Like Ralphie in "A Christmas Story" asking for a Red Rider BB gun, they will ask for something that really is not the best choice. Regardless of their Christmas list, I spend time really observing my kids to help determine what would make a difference in their lives.

Sometimes I know much better than my kids what they really need. The expressions on Christmas morning are always my favorite part of Christmas. The “oohs” and “aahhs” are music to my ears.

Now if I put that much time and effort and energy into finding the perfect gifts for my kids, how much more does God put into the gifts He provides us, His children? It turns out that He knew exactly the perfect Gift. He sent His son to atone for our sins. He sacrificed His son so that we could spend quality time with Him in heaven. And we should remember that gift this Christmas.

Prayer: Father, we are so grateful for your grace that you shower down on us, your children. Help us to be the gift to others in a world so desperate for your love. Amen.

Submitted by Pastor Lisa Solomon



December 16, 2020

Christmas Chaos

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." Luke 2:10

Have you ever had one of those Christmases (or the time leading up to Christmas) where everything seems to be in chaos? You are running here and there, trying to get everything done, looking for that perfect gift, decorating the house, yard, and church, gathering with family and friends, helping those who are less fortunate than you, going to special programs in the community, at school, and at the church. It seems that everyone is pulling at you in a different direction. You are being asked to do a million new things, and you feel obliged to say yes!

Well, yes, we have all allowed ourselves to get in **that** Christmas spirit where we truly do not enjoy the season. We forget what the season is all about! We probably do not give our 100% attention to anyone or anything. We just rush from one event to another, from one store to another, from one activity to another. We are exhausted and tired so when we are with our family, we are too tired to participate in their lives, their needs, their day because we are just too tired. Is this really what Christmas is all about?

I remember one year just like this year I have been describing. We had gone to the Scott's Christmas Tree Farm, mom and dad had a craft booth out there and we had helped them for the afternoon, we had gone through the trees and picked the perfect tree and tied it to the top of the truck, we had gone to meet friends in Tomball for dinner with the tree attached to the truck parking so we could see it and make sure no one stole our tree, and arrived at home about 9:00 PM. I had insisted that we had to get the tree up that night because we did not have any other time in the next week. So, we worked together getting everything done, the tree decorated and all the lights in place. Christmas trees have always caused my allergies to act up, but I knew this and had started taking extra antihistamines to

prevent any major flare-ups. Well about 2:00 in the morning I woke up coughing and very short of breath and thought to myself, "Oh no, I am catching a cold." So I got up and took some cough medicine and Tylenol and tried to go back to bed but my breathing just got worse. Then I realized I was in a full-blown asthma attack from my allergies. So I found my inhaler and took a couple of puffs still not thinking that it had anything to do with my beautiful tree.

However, the next morning Cristyn, our daughter, was also having difficulty with her asthma. Terry looked at me and said, "Honey, you know it might be the tree. You were fine yesterday until we worked on the tree last night." I did not want to believe it. So, my sweet husband unplugged our tree and carried it outside and positioned it in front of the windows so we could still see the tree from the living room, but it was outside. He cleaned up all the residue left in the house from the tree and sent me to bed. Within about 3 hours I was completely better and Cristyn and I both recovered very quickly, watching Christmas movies and talking about how we need to slow down and appreciate the season.

Although we had a moment of fear and a moment of panic, much like the shepherds when they saw the star – we also experienced the love of Christ and the healing power of His love when we stopped and remembered that this season "brings us good news of great joy . . . for all the people".

Prayer: Most gracious heavenly Father, the bright star in our lives, help us to remember that the chaos is not what makes Christmas. Your presence in our lives and in the lives of our family is what Christmas is all about. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Submitted by Pastor Rebecca Jones



December 17, 2020
Celebrate Jesus and His Gifts – Not Presents

Everything in the world is about to be wrapped up, so take nothing for granted. Stay wide-awake in prayer. Most of all, love each other as if your life depended on it. Love makes up for practically anything. Be quick to give a meal to the hungry, a bed to the homeless—cheerfully. Be generous with the different things God gave you, passing them around so all get in on it: if words, let it be God's words; if help, let it be God's hearty help. That way, God's bright presence will be evident in everything through Jesus, and he'll get all the credit as the One mighty in everything—encores to the end of time. Oh, yes! 1 Peter 4:7-11

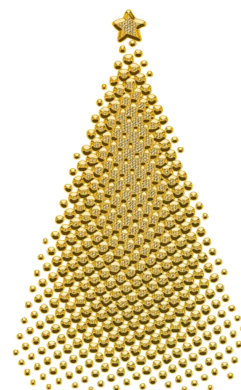
In the past few years I have become uncomfortable with the tradition of gift giving at Christmas. The commercialization and expectations are not Christ like to me. In that vein, I talked to my immediate family, and we decided we would not exchange gifts from here on. We decided instead to celebrate Jesus! We still go to church together on Christmas Eve and have Mexican food afterwards. We still have cinnamon rolls on Christmas morning. We still read the Christmas story in the Bible. We even may surprise each other with something very small and unexpected, or we might play a fun Christmas game. The pressure of trying to find a gift for each person has freed us to enjoy the season along with our family and friends.

Recently I read an article about gift giving at Christmas, and there was a suggestion that we give a personal gift to God – a special gift just from you to Him. One of which no one else is aware; ie., Forgive someone whom you have needed to forgive for a long time; Spend daily time with God; Commit to reading the Bible in a year. As the above scripture tells us.... Feed the hungry; Give a bed to the homeless.....Love like your life depends on it and be generous with the gifts God has given you!

Christmas is a wonderful season of celebration. May each of you bask in the joy of Jesus Christ!

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for the gifts you have given us. As we begin to celebrate Advent, may our hearts be more like yours. Help us to share the gifts you have given us with others, and to celebrate your Son in a way that draws others closer to you. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.

Submitted by Suzanne Reynolds



December 18, 2020
Christmas Communion

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. Acts 2: 42-46

When Cristyn was about 8 years old we were attending Christmas Eve service at our church. The sanctuary was packed. There were probably 500 – 600 people here for Christmas Eve. We had visited with many friends that we had not seen in a while . Our family was sitting right behind the minister's family. As the minister began the communion service, he raised the "bread" as part of the communion liturgy, and my daughter leaned over and not so quietly asked me, "Mom, when did they start using tortillas for communion? Is the juice now margaritas?" I almost died of embarrassment; her questions were in one of those loud whispers that only children can do so well. After I composed myself and told her that it was possibly unleavened bread and that I would explain when we got home; I looked up to the stare (glare) of the minister's wife with pursed lips and a look of total disgrace. Unfortunately, this ensued the most inappropriate response from me and I began to giggle, the more I tried to stop the more I giggled. I finally regained my composure. At first, I felt embarrassed because of the response from the minister's wife and my response to her response, but then I looked down the pew at my beautiful amazing family sitting together, getting ready to take communion together as a family – my mom & dad, my brother and his wife and one of his daughters, my sister, and Terry, Cristyn & I. I began to think about the meaning of family, the meaning of communion, the meaning of fellowship and realized that I was a very blessed individual. I realized that I knew and felt the love of Jesus Christ from those around me and that we were able to celebrate a very special time together as a family. We were celebrating Christmas at my home – the first time we had all been together in many years as we lived all over the United States.

You see communion to me has always been a very special time. It is one of those times that I feel closest to God. It is one of those times in my life where I feel completely and totally accepted by my Lord and Savior and understand His love for me and for those who love Him. Communion has always been a time of real connection for me. Now when I serve communion as a pastor I truly want and pray that each person receiving communion can understand and experience that level of love that I feel. I remember as I walked forward that night to accept communion, I prayed that all who were there could experience Christ's love, even those who found loud questions from children to be inappropriate. The scriptures tell us that we are to come together with glad and sincere hearts. We are to break bread and share in fellowship. We are to break bread and pray.

During this Christmas season, when we share communion together try not to think about the "tortilla" or you too may start to giggle; but please remember that we are sharing one with another in the love of Christ and sharing fellowship with one another as brothers and sisters of Christ.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father who loves me in spite of my flaws, who loves the questions of little ones, who loves those who are concerned about perfection, please be with us and show us ways that we can be accepting and kind to those around us in all that we say and do! In Jesus Name we pray! Amen.

Submitted by Pastor Rebecca Jones



December 19, 2020

Light Conquers

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
John 1:1-5

John recounts the birth story unlike how Matthew and Luke go about it in their Gospels. We see this cosmic approach of the Word, logos, taking on flesh in order to be the Light of all mankind. This Light, Christ, has been sent in order to overcome all darkness for all ages to come.

We are living in a weird world right now overwhelmed with darkness. 2020 has not been the year for many and continues to riddle our world with difficulties and darkness. We started with bushfires raging across Australia, then Iran and the United States almost going to war, watching from a distance as the virus swept through China, locust swarms in East Africa, the basketball legend Kobe Bryant passed in an accident alongside his daughter, murder hornets, COVID hitting home in the states, social unrest with the death of George Floyd, and a massive deadly explosion in Lebanon. This is just some of the darkness we have had to live through in the last twelve months. A darkness that in reality has caused so much more in a ripple effect than can be listed. Many personal struggles have come for the community around us because of the world wide events.



Through all of this, I've seen some humorous comments about this year throughout social media as humor has been the only outlet and coping mechanism for many people. Someone on TikTok made a movie trailer based only on 2020 events as a drama that never seemed to end. It's so crazy, it seems fitting to be in a fiction movie trailer. I also saw a comment on Facebook that someone is trying so hard to save us from something that they continue to time travel back to 2020, but keep making things worse. They successfully saved us from murder hornets at least with a quick disappearance of that threat. However, the reality is that this is actual reality and its getting hard to cope with.

When our world is so filled with darkness, it is hard for us to see the light. In the Gospel of John, we hear of this Light that is bigger than all the darkness our world could ever come with (and our world is really trying this year). You see, the scientific truth is that light will always defeat darkness. You cannot have darkness in the presence of light, it will always overcome it. This is true of Christ and why this comparison between light and Jesus is made. Christ came down to earth to be born as flesh in order to conquer all sin for humanity. We prepare our hearts during this time of Advent to accept this and celebrate our God who would love us so much to do this. We are reminded during Advent of this fact. That our earth may be in complete darkness, but there is God, whom we believe in, that conquers all of it and provides us light to get through these times.

Prayer: *Father, we thank you for sending your Son to be born into flesh in order to conquer all darkness with His Light. We pray that we remember this as we face the darkness in our world today and continue to give you thanks everyday for this. Amen.*

Submitted by Pastor Katlyn Britton

December 20, 2020

Unplug the Christmas Machine

"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."
Luke 2:11-14

One of the most enlightening events I ever attended was a program at a neighboring church called, "How to Unplug the Christmas Machine." It was actually based on a book by the same name and along with the book we made an Advent wreath. I had never had my own Advent wreath and making one was a fun, creative activity.

But the book was the real star of the show. At the time I was a young Mom with two kids, a husband and a busy life. The speaker gave the highlights of the book with some really radical ideas. For instance, if someone in your family really loves it when you send Christmas cards but you really don't, then give them the job of sending the cards. Wow! This was mind blowing stuff. Here's another, if no one in your family likes turkey, then why do you keep putting one on the table every year? These were concepts I had never heard before.

Ok, so I'm being a bit dramatic, but in reality how much of our holiday is spent doing what you think you're "suppose" to do instead of what you enjoy doing for Christmas? The book went on to explain that there are things you really need to eliminate if they don't fit your style and there might be things you add to make new traditions.

For years I wanted to decorate our street by putting a garland on each of the 14 mailboxes, finally I realized it was a great idea but it will remain a good idea inside my own head if I don't ever actually do it. And so I did. My kids thought I was goofy but I loved putting out the garland on each mailbox on Thanksgiving night to have everyone wake up the next day to a decorated street.

Years later one of the Moms on the street told me that her college age daughter always knew she was really home when she turned the curve and saw house after house with a beautiful mailbox.

But then every good idea needs to change, right? So after so many years I got tired of the mailbox decorating and thought about stopping it. I mentioned it to my neighbor and she said, "Well, why don't you let my kids do it?" Let your kids do it?! I would have paid your kids to do it and all along they wanted to help.

Changing and allowing our ideas to expand and contract are great examples of staying open and allowing others to come along side and help us out. Traditions are great but if they stifle or detract from the celebration then maybe they aren't so great after all.

I often think about just how different Jesus was in his surroundings. What a breath of fresh air he must have been for those who felt stifled or unhappy with their lives. And this time of year I love thinking about how he came as a baby, spent 30-ish years growing up and truly understanding what life and family were like here on earth.

Jesus' ministry here was just as different as his entrance to earth, teaching a gospel of love and forgiveness in a world that typically just wants to get even in anyway possible. He loved those who were outcast and different, some that even took advantage of others like the tax collectors.

Our ideas are sometimes so embedded in us that we think they are truth when they are just a habit that has been in our life way too long. Jesus came to give us a different way of thinking and believing and most likely if you're reading this you already know it. But if you don't know it, now's the time to look into how you want to change yourself and your life. Start by reading the Bible, read the New Testament and learn about Jesus life, then dive into the Old Testament and find out why Jesus came. If you don't know this, He came to save us, to forgive us for our sins and to give us eternal life. Jesus really knew how to Unplug the Religious Machine of his day. What do you need to Unplug in your life?

Prayer: God, there are many of us who need changes in our lives to allow us to be the ministers you called us to be. Lead us to be the true light in your world and to your glory. Amen.

Submitted by Susan Bryant



December 21, 2020
Christmas is Coming

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.””

Christmas is coming...is your guest room ready?

You see, the shepherds had to get their guest rooms ready. Oh, I know what you are thinking..."Shepherds don't live in houses, so they don't even have guest rooms!"

But I am not talking about the guest rooms in their houses, or really the ones in our houses, either. I am talking about the guest room we have inside, in our hearts and our souls and our lives. Christmas is coming...do you have yours ready? The angels told the shepherds to get theirs spruced up...

...Because they were going to be the first witnesses of this amazing new thing God was doing. The Messiah came first to those who needed Him most. But that meant that the shepherds had to stop looking at themselves in the old ways and look at themselves with God's eyes – God LOVED them.

...and because something new was about to happen – the Jewish people had been waiting for the Messiah. The prophets of old had told of his coming. But the prophets had been silent now for 400 years. Now the time had come. That meant old things were passing away and they needed to be ready for God to do something NEW in their lives.

... and because there was something the shepherds had to DO. This was not a passive gift coming among them, but a Savior that needed to be prepared for and welcomed and proclaimed. That meant they had to get beyond their old lives and be ready to be led in new DIRECTIONS.

As we approach the celebration of Christmas, let's spruce up the guest rooms of our hearts...making room for Him...His LOVE, a NEW call on our lives...and new mission and ministry to DO as He dwells within us and leads us to serve and love.

Prayer: *God who revealed the glory of the Christ child to the shepherds...Reveal Him to us afresh as we prepare our hearts, souls and lives for the celebration of His birth.*

Amen.

Submitted by Pastor Bill Haygood



December 22, 2020

Christmas Specials

“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’” Luke 2:13-14

Since 1996, there has been a wonderful television tradition that has migrated through various networks, but remained true to the season! It was called “The 25 Days of Christmas” and showed all the greatest Christmas Specials we have come to know and love! I remember the magic of many of those specials when I was a kid. I always loved the “Charlie Brown Christmas” and “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” the most, but also enjoyed “How the Grinch Stole Christmas” and “The Littlest Angel” that starred that little boy who was in “A Family Affair.” You see, those Christmas Specials always seemed to get me in the mood for Christmas! I could watch them and know (in the words of Dr. Seuss) that Christmas was coming!

The greatest of all the Christmas Specials is one we can only read about since we were not around to watch it unfold. It is recorded in the book of Luke and features a star-studded cast (literally!). You see, when the angels arrived to proclaim the news that Jesus was born, the shepherds-watching-their-flocks-by-night were not looking for a great show to watch, but that is what they got! There was no “Holiday

Season" for them because the holy-day was only just unfolding. There was no Christmas Spirit because they had not yet heard about the Christmas event. But there it happened, on a dark and lonely night long, long ago. These shepherds were sitting out in their field, watching their flocks and minding their own business when, BANG, they got the celestial special of a lifetime! The Bible says, "A great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God..."

And the point of the heavenly spectacular was to announce the Messiah's birth and to remind us to bring praise and honor to God. In their message we find the ability to live with peace and love toward one another, and to know just how much God loves us. So... how can that CHANGE your Christmas season as we approach the Holy Day? What will you do differently? As you are watching the Christmas Specials on television this year, getting in the Christmas "mood", remember it is God's heavenly special that reminds us how we should really celebrate.

Prayer: Holy God, we give honor and glory to you. You announce the wonder of the birth of the Messiah in our hearts afresh. Enable us to reflect your glory in our everyday live. Amen.

Submitted by Pastor Bill Haygood



December 23, 2020
Christmas Obedience

“When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’” Luke 2:15

What happens in this short verse of the Christmas Story is nothing short of astonishing. In its own way, it is even more surprising than what comes before it. Remember the story. Shepherds were out in the fields tending their flocks. Now...these shepherds in the fields were among the least of society in that day. They were primarily recruited from among the younger sons of farmers who did not themselves own land. They were hired to care for the sheep, often the flock of an entire community. They lived alone with only the sheep or other shepherds for company and often slept among the sheep in order to protect them through the night. They watched over the sheep in all sorts of weather and battled all sorts of wild animals and thieves so that the community would continue to benefit from the wool, milk and other by-products of the flock. As they lived 24/7 with the sheep, they had no time for leisure, no time for families, and no time for any pursuit that might help them gain a higher place in society. If the shepherds failed at the job, the entire community suffered, so failure was not an option. Then came the angels; the angels that at first frightened them, but then gave them the joyous news of the Messiah’s birth.



Now, think about this for a minute. These shepherds were bedded down with their flock when the angels arrived. The angels told them that this marvelous thing had happened: that the Messiah had been born and they would know the truth of the angel's claim by witnessing for themselves the babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger behind an inn in Bethlehem. What do these shepherds do in the face of such outlandish news?

Get this...they left their flocks unattended and unprotected to go and do what the angels told them to do! They immediately and without question, said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

The shepherds saw that the most important thing they could do was to be obedient to the call of God instead of to the expectations of their culture and society! And we, too, are called to that same radical obedience in our own lives as Christ-followers.

Are you ready to be obedient in your faith this Christmas season? Will you put your connection to Jesus ahead of your connection to culture? Will you make worship and praise a priority in this otherwise busy and distracted season? Our primary obedience should be directed by our faith. So the message to the shepherds is also a message to us...There is a Savior who is waiting for you. Will you go and seek Him?

Prayer: Lord God, we prepare for Your call...to follow You in faith and to remember our connection to You is all-important. As we seek You, bring us your blessing. Amen.

Submitted by: Pastor Bill Haygood

December 24, 2020
Christmas Connections

“So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.”
Luke 2:16-18

This is the time of year when connection to our friends and family is at the top of our lists! We send Christmas cards, sometimes with lengthy letters about what the family has done in the previous year. We send invitations to parties and get-togethers. We call family members with questions about what they might like as a gift for Christmas and we forge special bonds with total strangers with the words, “Merry Christmas” when we usually acknowledge others with only a nod or a smile. Christmas is a time to connect...to reach out...to bond with each other in the spirit of joy and celebration as we remember the birth of Christ.

Now, the shepherds did that, as well, that first Christmas. They left their flocks and went to see the baby Jesus. Then they went on their way connecting with others and sharing what had happened to them. They had been changed and they wanted to tell others about that change. Further, they knew that what had changed them would change others, as well, and they wanted to make sure the message got out! So they made contact...they connected...and they shared!

What about you and me this Christmas season? What kinds of connections are we going to make?

First, I think if we are truly to connect with others about the wonderful message of Jesus Christ we have to witness it for ourselves... the shepherds hurried off and saw for themselves that what the angel had said was true. They saw Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

Only after we have seen for ourselves the incredible gift of Jesus Christ will we be ready to share that with others... When the shepherds had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.

And the people were AMAZED... the shepherds connected with them in a way that changed everything!

How ever we choose to connect with friends and family, let's make sure that in doing so we are reflecting our faith in Christ Jesus and sharing with others what has changed our lives!

Prayer: Eternal God, Your message of hope and eternal life has changed us. As we re-witness the amazing news of the birth of Jesus, help us to share the good news with others, that Christmas will truly be a season of proclamation. Amen.

Submitted by Pastor Bill Haygood



