



AWAKENED TO GRACE

2025 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

*Ordinary Practices that Open Us
to Extraordinary Grace*



FOREWORD

Bishop Tom Berlin



We want to actually live the Christian life, rather than simply talk about it. Our goal is to become disciples of Jesus Christ, people whose lives reflect the love of God in the words we say as well and the things we do. We want to unite faith to action, and live in such a way that we develop loving relationships, help people in our communities, unite rather than divide our country, and honor Jesus as we follow his commandments and use our gifts to share the good news of his love with others. Awakened to Grace devotional materials are based on the assurance of the Apostle Paul, who told the Ephesians,

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:8–9 NRSVUE)

Here you will find devotional resources that will root you in scripture and help you consider the ways God wants to use your life to bless others. Awakened to Grace will enable you to develop weekly spiritual practices that will enable your life of prayer and devotion to God. Our hope is that you will encounter the Holy Spirit as you read the Bible, engage in reflection with the devotional writing, and enjoy times of silent contemplation.

When we create the space to encounter the Holy Spirit, we find that God will offer us hope in times of despair, direction in times of confusion, forgiveness in times of remorse, and reminders of love when we feel distant from the Lord or people important to us. The key to being awakened to God's grace is to take time to participate in practices of prayer, reading the scripture, silence, and other spiritual disciplines so that we continue in the flow of God's grace and direction. Sunday worship is essential to our life in Christ. These resources allow you to continue to enjoy the presence of God in an intentional way throughout the week.

The early Methodist movement was vital. Lives were transformed as they became devoted to the way of Christ. People recovered from addiction to alcohol. They learned to work and save money to care for their families. They shared their faith with such integrity that their friends and neighbors entered the Christian life for the first time. They fed the hungry, visited prisoners, taught the illiterate to read, and organized against the institution of slavery in Britain. That was the fruit of their faith. The roots of their faith were their spiritual practices. They took time daily to be awakened to God's grace, which was new every morning in their lives. God guided them, which is why they gained an authentic faith with observable fruits that they shared with others.

Make a commitment to use these resources to be awakened to grace. Take time to step into the flow of God's love throughout the week and see what God can do in your life.

How to Use This Daily Guide

Each week centers on a theme that ties to the overall seasonal series. They are written by a wide variety of authors in Florida: clergy and laity, pastors of all orders, seminary students, and a diversity of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, ministry contexts, and geographic location. Each author will follow this weekly progression:

Sunday: An introduction to the week's theme, with a preview of the texts and reflections ahead.

Monday: “*Seed.*” A reflection on the theme from the most general, accessible perspective, particularly for “seeking” people who are newer to the faith.

Tuesday: “*Roots.*” Common obstacles that prevent most people from growing in this area of their faith, including encouragement for you to push your roots deeper and trust in God.

Wednesday: “*Breakthrough.*” A pivotal insight, surprise twist, or novel experience that will help you grow in your faith.

Thursday: “*Becoming.*” Guidance for cultivating this aspect of your faith over the long haul of your spiritual journey.

Friday: “*Fruitfulness.*” The impact you can make in the world and the lives of others once this aspect of faith bears full fruitfulness in your life.

Saturday: On this day of Sabbath reflect on the theme and spend time in prayer.

Daily Prayers of Intercession are adapted from the *Irish Book of Common Prayer* (United Kingdom: Canterbury Press, 2018).



Advent & Christmas

Rev. Magrey deVega
Hyde Park UMC, Tampa



It's interesting that in the time of Wesley and 18th century England, Christians did not observe the Advent season the way we do today. This was likely due to the influence of the Puritans, who saw Christmas largely as an appropriation of a pagan holiday. We know from his journals that Wesley acknowledged Christmas, and he even preached sermons on that day. But we don't know that he ever observed Advent, let alone preached an Advent sermon. Nonetheless, Advent has become an important period of preparation for a fresh arrival of Jesus, and the central characters of the birth narrative—John the Baptist, Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph—all point to aspects of self-reflection and renewed commitment to making room for Christ in our hearts. We journey toward Bethlehem with intentional focus on hope, peace, joy, and love as the signposts to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord.

HOPE

Week of November 30, 2025

Rev. Magrey deVega

Senior Pastor at Hyde Park United Methodist Church



Sunday, November 30

We begin this Advent journey with one of the most important aspects of the Christian faith: hope. From Genesis to Revelation, and on throughout thousands of years of history, the people of God have been motivated and comforted by the notion that God is working with us to create a future that is better than the present. On Monday, the reading from Isaiah is from the lectionary for Advent week one, and promises the people that “swords will be beaten to ploughshares.”

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services...*
- *those receiving Holy Communion...*
- *those who will be baptized...*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith...*
- *those living with difficult questions...*
- *those exploring faith...*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself...*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor...*

God in the Future Tense

Rev. Magrey deVega

Monday, December 1

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Lord, thank you for surrounding me with your love and filling me with your peace. Help me to experience the hope that you are offering in every moment, as I face an unknown future. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 2:1-5 (NRSVUE)

¹The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

²In days to come

the mountain of the Lord's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.

³Many peoples shall come and say,

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

⁴He shall judge between the nations

and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation;
neither shall they learn war any more.

⁵O house of Jacob,

come, let us walk
in the light of the Lord!

Reflection: Often the Bible calls people to remember what God has done in the past: the Israelites remembered their deliverance from enslavement under Pharaoh, and the extraordinary relationship God had with them through special covenant agreements with their ancestors. But there are many times, like in this passage from Isaiah, where the verbs associated with God are entirely in the future tense. God's mountain will be established. God will speak words of instruction. God will judge the nations and will turn weapons of violence into means of shared community. This is the essence of biblical hope: God has not only been faithful in the past, and is not only a constant presence in your life; God is already at work in your future, carving out a tomorrow that is better than today. Your responsibility is to awaken your soul to that possibility, and to walk faithfully toward that future, step by step.

How has God been faithful in my past? How will I open my eyes today to believe in what God is doing in my future?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for the world...

- *all the nations...*
- *our own country...*
- *those in authority...*
- *the peace of the world...*
- *racial harmony and justice...*
- *those who maintain order...*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God is teaching me how to live, that I might walk in God's path.

Evening Prayer: *God, as I reflect on this past day, bring to mind evidence of your love and grace at work in my life. Remind me that you are already at work in what will unfold for me tomorrow. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Hand-Sized Hope

Rev. Magrey deVega

Tuesday, December 2

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, grant me a determined spirit, that when my spirit is weak and my soul feels crushed, I would place my trust in your hands, to move one step further in hope, guided by your hand. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 18:41-46 (NRSVUE)

⁴¹Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of rushing rain." ⁴²So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; there he bowed himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees. ⁴³He said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." He went up and looked and said, "There is nothing." Then he said, "Go again seven times." ⁴⁴At the seventh time he said, "Look, a little cloud no bigger than a person's hand is rising out of the sea." Then he said, "Go say to Ahab, 'Harness your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'" ⁴⁵In a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind; there was a heavy rain. Ahab rode off and went to Jezreel. ⁴⁶But the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; he girded up his loins and ran in front of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

Reflection: So many of the miracle stories in the Bible happen instantaneously: the blind receive sight, the hungry crowd is fed, the dead are raised to life. It might lead us to believe that the hope that God promises should always happen with that same immediacy. But we know that is not the case. Often, we need to practice patience and tenacity, two qualities that are hardest to exhibit when the times are toughest. After years of drought, Elijah was sensing that God would soon bring rain to replenish the earth. We can imagine that after the first six times his servant reported no evidence of change in the weather, both Elijah and his servant could have given up. It is easy to lose heart when God's promises don't fit with our timeline or

expectations. But if God always acted according to our inclinations, there would be no need for faith, right? That is the blessed, double-edged sword of biblical hope. It pushes us to trust God before there is supporting evidence. And the more we are able to trust God, the longer we are able to wait. Even for the seventh time, and beyond.

What areas of my life are summoning me to have more patience and fortitude? How will I demonstrate more faithfulness and trust in God, despite lack of evidence?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for the community...

- *those who work...*
- *the unemployed...*
- *those in education...*
- *those in research...*
- *those in communications or journalism...*
- *those who maintain the life of the community...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life*. (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God is working, even though I cannot see it. And God's faithfulness is not contingent on my ability to believe it.

Evening Prayer: *Almighty God, you have worked in known and invisible ways today. Thank you for what you have shown me, and for what I have noticed. In moments of provision that I have yet to discover but in retrospect, I am grateful. May I face tomorrow with renewed trust in you. Amen.*

A Fuller Sense of Hope

Rev. Magrey deVega

Wednesday, December 3

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, just as you raised Jesus from the dead and welcomed him through his heavenly ascension, empower me to live a resurrected life, that I might believe in what I cannot yet see. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:17-23 (NRSVUE)

¹⁷I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit[f] of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²²And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Reflection: Paul exhorts the Ephesians to have a hope that is empowered in the Spirit's wisdom and revelation, and rooted in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Connecting hope to the Ascension offers an insight into hope that we often disregard. Pope Leo I said that in the Ascension—in which Jesus left visible, earthly companionship with the disciples—we remember that “it takes great strength of mind and a faithful and enlightened heart to believe in what escapes the eye. Therefore, what was visible in our Redeemer on earth has been operative in sacramental signs.” Hope is not just a guarantee that things will be better (“better,” after all, is a relative condition, and can even be

temporary). Hope is the force that motivates us to keep going when we feel like quitting, with no guarantee of what will happen. Hope builds our strength and our capacity to endure tough times, enabling us to “believe in what escapes the eye.” When all seems lost, hope stands tallest. And it enables us to keep believing.

How will I hope in God today, less in a way expects a certain outcome, and more in a way that strengthens me to keep going?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for personal relationships...

- *the home, and family life...*
- *children deprived of home...*
- *relationships in daily life and work...*
- *those who are estranged...*
- *those who feel unloved...*
- *all ministries of care...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: My hope is rooted in what God has done through Jesus, and in what God will be faithful to do in me.

Evening Prayer: *Loving God, your Spirit has seen me through another day, made more complex by events beyond my control, yet also simplified by your steady and ongoing presence. Help me to trust you as I process what has been, and face with courage what is still to come. Amen.*

Hope in a Straight Line

Rev. Magrey deVega

Thursday, December 4

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Loving God, you know I have so much to do today, I will wear a bunch of hats and run around from one responsibility to the next. So, help me to at least one thing right—the most important thing: to be as close to you in every moment as I can. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Luke 3:1-6 (NRSVUE)

¹In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—²during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,

‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill made low.

The crooked roads shall become straight,
the rough ways smooth.

⁶ And all people will see God’s salvation.”

Reflection: John the Baptist, a regular companion on every Advent journey, quoted Isaiah’s iconic line: “Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.” John equated the maturity of our spirituality with our ability to walk a straight line. German scientist Jan Souman conducted a fascinating experiment in which he took his subjects to a large, open field, blindfolded them, asked them to walk for an hour

in a straight line. Without exception, people couldn't do it. Everybody thought they were walking in a straight line, until they remove the blindfolds to see their crooked path. Souman said there is only one way to walk a straight line: by focusing on something visible ahead of us and walking toward it. For John the Baptist, there was a clear connection between having hope and staying the course: confession. By repenting of our sins and staying fixed on Jesus, we can walk into the hope that the promised Messiah has in store for us. So, take off your blindfold through confession. Keep your head up and your eyes open. And take things one step at a time, along the straight and narrow.

What blindfolds am I wearing that need to be removed, enabling me to see my blind spots and my wayward steps? And how will I fix my eyes on God and walk into the hope that God promises?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for the Church...

- *the Church universal, and local...*
- *the unity of the Church...*
- *the ministries of the Church...*
- *the mission of the Church...*
- *the renewal of the Church...*
- *all who follow Jesus...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: With every step forward in my life, I not only claim a future that has come, but I claim who I am becoming. May both be what God intends for me.

Evening Prayer: *God, this has been a full day, with both highs and lows, joys and regrets. Reveal to me the serendipities I have missed, and forgive me of the wrongs I have done. Renew my strength for the day ahead. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Joyful in Hope

Rev. Magrey deVega

Friday, December 5

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, strengthen me today through the power of community, that in my relationships with others, I might experience the love and hope revealed in your son Jesus, in whose name I pray, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Romans 12:9-21 (NRSVUE)

⁹Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers. ¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰Instead, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink, for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Reflection: By the time we get to the twelfth chapter of Romans, we see that the tone of Paul's letter has shifted from first-order, high-level theology and doctrine to the practical, interpersonal implications of life in Christ. Because we have been saved by faith alone and by the love of God, we are free to demonstrate that love in our interactions with others. At the center of this exhortation is verse

12: “Rejoice in hope.” Paul reminds us that hope is not something to be cornered and claimed privately and individually. It is to be shared with others and experienced in community. This is done through acts of generosity (verse 13), empathy (verse 15), peace and humility (verse 16), and forgiveness (verses 17–19). The hope that we long to see in the world can be the very hope we can enliven among those of us in community with each other, as together we strive to “not be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good.”

*How will I be a conduit of hope for others today?
What hope will I be open to receiving from others?*

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for the suffering...

- *the hungry...*
- *migrants and refugees...*
- *prisoners...*
- *the persecuted...*
- *all who bring sin and suffering to others...*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice...*

We pray for people in need...

- *those who are tempted...*
- *those in despair...*
- *those who are sick...*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs...*
- *those who are enslaved by addictions...*
- *the elderly and the dying...*
- *those who mourn...*
- *all ministries of care and healing...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life*. (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: The hope I am longing to see can be the hope that I create in community with others.

Evening Prayer: *God, may the words of Paul's letter to the Romans be an inventory for this day. Where I have failed to live up to its calling, I ask for your forgiveness, and I seek forgiveness from others. Where I have fulfilled its demands, I rejoice in the strength you have provided, and the benefits of putting your love into action. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Saturday, December 6

REFLECTION AND PRAYER



**Is there anything that stands out to you from
this week's reflections?**

Spend some time in prayer focused on this week's theme of hope. Are there people in your life or in the world in need of hope? Are you in need of hope yourself? On Christmas, hope was born in our savior, Jesus. Ask God to awaken hope in your heart this season.

LOVE

Week of December 7, 2025

Rev. Amy Greene
Director of Spiritual Care, Metropolitan Ministries



Sunday, December 7

Love is more than a feeling or sentiment. In Advent, we are invited to remember that love took on flesh and moved into the neighborhood. This week, we'll trace the shape of God's love—from the seed of desire to be known, to the deep roots of connection, the breakthrough of compassion, the becoming of beloved community, and the fruit of justice and joy. Through Scripture, prayer, and reflection, may we lean into the transforming power of Love made manifest in Christ.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services...*
- *those receiving Holy Communion...*
- *those who will be baptized...*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith...*
- *those living with difficult questions...*
- *those exploring faith...*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself...*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor...*

Seed

Rev. Amy Greene

Monday, December 8

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God of all longing, plant within us the first stirrings of your love. Let it grow in us and through us, even now. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 1 John 4:7-10 (NRSV)

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Reflection: Before we ever loved God, God loved us. That's where love begins—not with us striving, but with God initiating. Today's scripture reminds us that God's love doesn't wait for us to be ready or worthy. Like a seed breaking open in the dark soil, love finds us right where we are—messy, uncertain, longing. And from that place, love begins to grow. If you've ever felt like you needed to “clean up” before God could love you, hear this clearly: God already does. Completely. Now. Always.

What would it mean to believe that God loves you, as you are, right now?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for the world...

- *all the nations...*
- *our own country...*
- *those in authority...*
- *the peace of the world...*
- *racial harmony and justice...*

- *those who maintain order...*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life*. (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God's love takes root in the soil of our everyday lives—even before we notice it.

Evening Prayer: *Loving God, thank you for loving me first. Let your love take root in my heart as I rest in your presence tonight. Amen.*

Roots

Rev. Amy Greene

Tuesday, December 9

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God of mercy, help us name what holds us back from love—and sink our roots deeper into your grace. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3:16-19 (CEB)

I ask that he will strengthen you in your inner selves from the riches of his glory through the Spirit. I ask that Christ will live in your hearts through faith. As a result of having strong roots in love, I ask that you'll have the power to grasp love's width and length, height and depth, together with all believers. I ask that you'll know the love of Christ that is beyond knowledge so that you will be filled entirely with the fullness of God.

Reflection: Love can feel risky—especially for those who have been let down, betrayed, or ignored. No wonder so many of us struggle to trust it. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is that they would have strong roots in love—a connection that holds firm even when storms come. God doesn't ask us to generate that kind of love from scratch. Instead, we're invited to ground ourselves in Christ's love, which is already deeper and wider than we can comprehend. From that rooted place, we grow strong—not because we never doubt, but because we keep returning to the Source.

What obstacles or fears keep you from trusting God's love more fully?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for the community...

- *those who work...*
- *the unemployed...*
- *those in education...*
- *those in research...*

- *those in communications or journalism...*
- *those who maintain the life of the community...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Deep roots in God's love help us stay grounded when everything else is shifting.

Evening Prayer: *Strengthen me, O God, when I am afraid to love or be loved. Let your Spirit steady my heart. Amen.*

Breakthrough

Rev. Amy Greene

Wednesday, December 10

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God who breaks through walls, surprise us today with love that opens new paths. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Luke 7:36-39, 44-48 (NRSV)

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment...

Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears... Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love."

Reflection: Love is not always neat and tidy. Sometimes it looks like interrupting dinner with an open wound of a heart. The woman with the alabaster jar isn't named, but her love tells her story. She breaks through shame, judgment, and fear—and Jesus meets her there. When love breaks through, it often does so through vulnerability. When we let down our guard, healing happens. The breakthrough isn't just in her forgiveness—it's in the way Jesus sees her, truly and completely. Love sees. Love restores.

Where do you need a breakthrough of love in your life?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for personal relationships...

- *the home, and family life...*
- *children deprived of home...*
- *relationships in daily life and work...*
- *those who are estranged...*
- *those who feel unloved...*
- *all ministries of care...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life*. (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Love breaks through where we are most vulnerable and brings healing.

Evening Prayer: *Jesus, help me believe that I, too, am seen and loved. Let that truth soften and restore me. Amen.*

Becoming

Rev. Amy Greene

Thursday, December 11

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God of transformation, shape me into someone who loves like You. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 15:9-12 (NRSV)

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love... This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Reflection: Abiding in love takes practice. It's not just about feelings or grand gestures—it's about staying. Staying when it's hard. Staying when we're tired. Staying with each other through disagreement, disappointment, and discomfort. Jesus calls us to abide—to make our home—in the kind of love he embodied: generous, sacrificial, faithful. We don't become loving people overnight. But as we remain in Christ's love, it begins to shape our instincts and expand our capacity. Advent reminds us that love is coming... and love is also becoming—in us.

What practices help you stay grounded in love even when it's hard?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for the Church...

- *the Church universal, and local...*
- *the unity of the Church...*
- *the ministries of the Church...*
- *the mission of the Church...*
- *the renewal of the Church...*
- *all who follow Jesus...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life*. (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Love is not a one-time decision, but a daily becoming.

Evening Prayer: *Faithful God, help me to abide in your love—and become a reflection of it in all I do. Amen.*

Fruitfulness

Rev. Amy Greene

Friday, December 12

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God of justice and joy, let your love bear fruit through us for the healing of the world. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Galatians 5:22-25 (CEB)

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control... If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit.

Reflection: Love is not just something we feel—it's something we grow. And when it grows in us, it changes how we show up in the world. Paul names love first among the fruits of the Spirit, because everything else flows from it. In a world that often rewards anger, fear, and division, love is a radical act. But it's also a quiet one—found in kindness offered, dignity protected, joy shared. The fruit of love is not for us alone. It's for the neighbor, the stranger, the world God so deeply loves. What if the world saw our faith not by our arguments—but by our love?

*What kind of fruit is your life bearing right now?
How might love be more visible in your actions?*

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for the suffering...

- *the hungry...*
- *migrants and refugees...*
- *prisoners...*
- *the persecuted...*
- *all who bring sin and suffering to others...*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice...*

We pray for **people in need**...

- *those who are tempted...*
- *those in despair...*
- *those who are sick...*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs...*
- *those who are enslaved by addictions...*
- *the elderly and the dying...*
- *those who mourn...*
- *all ministries of care and healing...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life*. (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: The world will know we are Christ's disciples by the fruit of our love.

Evening Prayer: *Loving Spirit, let my life bear the fruit of your love tomorrow and always. Amen.*

Saturday, December 13

REFLECTION AND PRAYER



**Is there anything that stands out to you from
this week's reflections?**

**Spend some time in prayer focused on this week's
theme of love. Pray that God will help you to love
like he does and share his love with those around
you.**

JOY AS THE FRUIT OF GRACE

Week of December 14, 2025

Rev. Scott Ehler

Associate Pastor of First United Methodist Church of Naples



Sunday, December 14

In the Wesleyan tradition, joy is not merely an emotion, it is the deep, abiding fruit of God's transforming grace. John Wesley taught that the Spirit's work in sanctification fills believers with love, peace, and joy as evidence of God's presence. This joy transcends circumstances because it flows from a heart fully alive in Christ. It is both a gift and a calling: we receive joy through faith, and we cultivate it through gratitude, worship, and service. As we journey through these devotions, may the God of all joy awaken within us a vibrant, contagious gladness that reflects God's Kingdom.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services....*
- *those receiving Holy Communion...*
- *those who will be baptized...*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith...*
- *those living with difficult questions...*
- *those exploring faith...*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself...*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor...*

The Seed: Planted in God's Presence

Rev. Scott Ehler

Monday, December 15

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Lord, plant the seed of Your joy deep in my heart today. Help me rest in Your presence and trust that You are cultivating new life within me. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 16:11 (NRSV)

You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Reflection: Wesleyans deeply connect joy with the presence of God. Psalm 16 reminds us that joy isn't a fleeting emotion; it's rooted in divine companionship. John Wesley taught that Christian perfection includes a heart filled with love and joy through union with Christ. Here, the psalmist describes joy as abundant and lasting, found not in circumstances but in God's presence. When we walk the "path of life" with Him, we receive an unshakeable joy that sustains us amid trials. This joy isn't naive or superficial; rather, it's deep and rooted in the pleasures and promises of God's covenant care. As you step into this week, let the promise of Psalm 16 shape your posture: in every decision and small moment, see and savor the joy that springs from dwelling with the Lord. Even in mundane routines, God's presence is accessible and life-transforming.

*In what ways have you experienced deep,
abiding joy from God's presence this past week?*

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for the world...

- *all the nations...*

- *our own country...*
- *those in authority...*
- *the peace of the world...*
- *racial harmony and justice...*
- *those who maintain order...*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: True joy is not in what we hold, but in whose presence we dwell.

Evening Prayer: *Thank You, God, for sowing Your joy in my soul. As I rest tonight, continue nurturing it with Your love and peace, preparing me for tomorrow's growth. Amen.*

The Shoot: Choosing Joy Daily

Rev. Scott Ehler

Tuesday, December 16

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Holy Spirit, kindle within me the joy of Christ so that others may see Your light shining. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:4 (NRSV)
Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Reflection: This verse is at the heart of Wesleyan life: rejoicing as a spiritual discipline. Our inner witness of the Spirit brings assurance and joy. Paul's exhortation, "again I will say, rejoice." This underscores joy as a continual choice, even when difficulties swirl around us. The Wesleyan stream emphasizes "grace-empowered living," meaning that joy isn't based on our circumstances but on the finished work of Christ and the ongoing presence of the Spirit. Embracing joy in the Lord always means cultivating gratitude in prayer and seeking the Spirit's work in daily life. This joy isn't a temporary high, but a steady fruit of the Spirit, visible in how we treat others and respond to hardship. As you engage in the rhythm of today, let Paul's imperative guide you: make joy your posture, your prayer, and your witness.

*What practice today can help you choose joy
even in hard or routine moments?*

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for the community...

- *those who work...*
- *the unemployed...*
- *those in education...*
- *those in research...*

- *those in communications or journalism...*
- *those who maintain the life of the community...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life*. (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Even when all seems lost, love breaks through like a shoot from a stump.

Evening Prayer: *God of renewal, thank you for the signs of new life you're growing in me. As I sleep, keep tending the soil of my heart with your faithful love. Amen.*

Blossom: Expressing Joy in Worship and Service

Rev. Scott Ehler

Wednesday, December 17

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Gracious Lord, let the joy of serving You renew my heart and uplift my spirit today. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 1 Chronicles 15:28 (NRSV)

So all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouting, to the sound of the horn, trumpets, and cymbals, and made loud music on harps and lyres.

Reflection: In Wesleyan practice, service and worship are intertwined with expressions of joy. David's exuberant celebration while bringing the Ark reminds us that worship is not somber, it's joyful. John Wesley encouraged festival gatherings, sacraments, and songs that uplift the spirit of the community. This scripture shows joy moving outward: shouts, music, whole-hearted engagement. It surfaces when we align our hearts with God's mission and celebrate God's presence among us. Worship isn't just internal, when we serve with joy, we draw others into the celebration of God's grace. Physical expressions, rhythm, voice, dance, are part of faithful living. Reflect today on the joy of serving and praising with your whole being. Let it be a catalyst for praise that changes you and those around you.

*How can you express joy in your worship and service today
through word, deed, or song?*

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for personal relationships...

- *the home, and family life...*

- *children deprived of home...*
- *relationships in daily life and work...*
- *those who are estranged...*
- *those who feel unloved...*
- *all ministries of care...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Joy-filled service transforms routine worship into a feast of grace.

Evening Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for the joy of praising and serving You today. Help it fuel my rest tonight. Amen.*

Fruit: Sustained by Hope and Grace

Rev. Scott Ehler

Thursday, December 18

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Spirit of Truth, plant the seeds of joy in every encounter and thought today. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Romans 15:13 (NRSV)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Reflection: This verse echoes Wesley's emphasis on practical holiness and spiritual vitality. Romans 15:13 celebrates joy and peace as gifts that flow from faith in God's hopefulness. For Wesleyans, sanctification includes not just moral change but flourishing in the Spirit, the fruit of which is joy. God doesn't merely forgive; God fills us with hope that overflows into joy and peace. These aren't passive gifts, they anchor us during uncertainty. As we believe God's promises, faithfulness, presence, and power, our hearts become fertile ground for joy. Romans' "God of hope" points us to a source beyond ourselves. Even in season of doubt, we can trust in the One who guarantees tomorrow. Engage your today by focusing on hope-filled promises and allow joy to rise.

What hope-filled promise of God can you hold onto today to stir your joy?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for the Church...

- *the Church universal, and local...*
- *the unity of the Church...*
- *the ministries of the Church...*
- *the mission of the Church...*

- *the renewal of the Church...*
- *all who follow Jesus...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life*. (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Hope in God is the root; joy and peace are the branches that flourish.

Evening Prayer: *God of hope, thank You for filling me with joy and peace today; make me a channel of that hope tonight. Amen.*

Overflow: Living in the Fullness of Joy

Rev. Scott Ehler

Friday, December 19

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Gracious Lord, may Your joy overflow in my gratitude as I close this week in worship. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 55:12 (NRSV)

For you shall go out in joy and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Reflection: Isaiah paints a powerful picture of a people transformed by God's deliverance. Going out with joy, creation itself joining in song. Wesleyan holiness is transformative, not just moral restraint but suiting heart and life to God's Kingdom. When God liberates, our lives sing. This joy is both internal and visible, affecting our attitudes, our relationships, even the environment we inhabit. As this week draws to a close, be aware of how God's grace has moved you. Are you walking in hope? Serving with gladness? Allow that transformation to shape your going out: into rest, relationships, and mission. Let God's joy lead your weekend.

*Reflect on one area where you've seen God's transforming joy this week.
How will it shape your weekend?*

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for the suffering...

- *the hungry...*
- *migrants and refugees...*
- *prisoners...*
- *the persecuted...*

- *all who bring sin and suffering to others...*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice...*

We pray for **people in need**...

- *those who are tempted...*
- *those in despair...*
- *those who are sick...*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs...*
- *those who are enslaved by addictions...*
- *the elderly and the dying...*
- *those who mourn...*
- *all ministries of care and healing...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life*. (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God sets us free to walk out in joy. Let that joy guide your steps.

Evening Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for carrying me through this week in joy. May I rest in Your peace and wake renewed. Amen.*

Saturday, December 20

REFLECTION AND PRAYER



**Is there anything that stands out to you from
this week's reflections?**

**Say a prayer of thanks. Give thanks to God for
the gift of his son. Make a list of the blessings in
your life, and take time to thank God for them.**

THE ALREADY & THE NOT YET

December 21–24, 2025

Rev. Dr. Susan Gray
Senior Pastor of First United Methodist Church of Jupiter



Sunday, December 21

This week in Advent, we focus on love—God’s enduring, redemptive love revealed through the promises of the Old Testament and fulfilled in Christ. As United Methodists, we live in the tension of the “*already and not yet*”: Christ has come, and yet we await the fullness of His kingdom. Through prophecy, poetry, and promise, these Scriptures invite us to reflect on a love that roots, grows, liberates, and transforms. May this week deepen your faith as you wait in love.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services...*
- *those receiving Holy Communion...*
- *those who will be baptized...*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith...*
- *those living with difficult questions...*
- *those exploring faith...*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself...*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor...*

God With Us

Rev. Dr. Susan Gray

Monday, December 22

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God of love, as we begin this week, remind us that you are already with us—and yet we still await the fullness of your kingdom. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 7:14 (NRSVUE)

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel.

Reflection: The name *Immanuel*, meaning “God with us,” holds profound weight during Advent. In Isaiah’s day, this prophecy offered hope amid political instability and fear. It signaled that God had not abandoned God’s people but was intervening in human history. Christians believe this prophecy finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ, whose birth was both a sign and substance of God’s presence.

As Wesleyans, we live in the assurance of *prevenient grace*—God’s love at work before we are even aware of it. The “already” is that Christ has come and God’s love is among us. The “not yet” is our longing for the day when God’s love is made complete in the world. Even now, we carry this love into a world still waiting to be made whole.

*Where have you seen God’s presence show up
in unexpected places this year?*

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for the world...

- *all the nations...*
- *our own country...*
- *those in authority...*
- *the peace of the world...*
- *racial harmony and justice...*
- *those who maintain order...*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Love entered the world not as a force, but as a child—God already with us, and yet still coming.

Evening Prayer: *Emmanuel, thank you for walking with me today. As I rest tonight, anchor my heart in your presence and give me peace in knowing you are near. Amen.*

A Branch of New Life

Rev. Dr. Susan Gray

Tuesday, December 23

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Lord, help us recognize the new growth you are bringing forth, even when it starts small and hidden. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 11:1 (NRSVUE)

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

Reflection: This verse paints a picture of resurrection from ruin. Jesse, the father of David, represents a royal line that had been cut down—yet hope sprouts from the remnants. In Jesus, this prophecy comes alive as He emerges from David's line to bring justice, peace, and restoration.

For those living in exile or disappointment, the image of a shoot growing from a stump affirms that God's love finds a way, even from what looks dead. Grace is always at work seeking, redeeming, and restoring. Though the Kingdom has begun in Christ, we wait for it to bloom fully. God's love grows even now, and we are invited to participate in its flourishing.

What stumps in your life is God transforming into places of new growth?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for the community...

- *those who work...*
- *the unemployed...*
- *those in education...*
- *those in research...*

- *those in communications or journalism...*
- *those who maintain the life of the community...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life*. (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Joy in the Lord is a choice rooted in grace, not around circumstances.

Evening Prayer: *Thank You for Your Spirit's joy within me, help me rest in that joy tonight. Amen.*

Light to the Nations

Rev. Dr. Susan Gray

Wednesday, December 24

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Open our hearts, O God, to the light of your love that shines beyond borders and barriers. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 42:6–7 (NRSVUE)

I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

Reflection: This Servant Song in Isaiah speaks of a coming one who will be a light not just for Israel, but for all nations. This global vision of redemption highlights God’s expansive love—a love that liberates, heals, and restores. Christians see Jesus as the fulfillment of this promise, whose ministry brought sight to the blind and freedom to the oppressed.

We live in the time between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s return. This “already and not yet” challenges us to be light bearers in a dark world, trusting that love is already victorious, even when darkness lingers. Our call to social holiness echoes this passage—our faith must express itself in acts of justice and compassion, embodying God’s love today.

Where are you being called to bring God’s liberating love to others?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for personal relationships...

- *the home, and family life...*
- *children deprived of home...*
- *relationships in daily life and work...*
- *those who are estranged...*
- *those who feel unloved...*
- *all ministries of care...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life*. (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God's love is a light that frees and heals—and we are called to carry it forward.

Evening Prayer: *Jesus, Light of the world, thank you for shining into every shadow of this day. May your love lead me through the night and into deeper compassion tomorrow. Amen.*

Christmas

Rev. Nicholas Lee, Senior Pastor, Harvest UMC, Bradenton

Thursday, December 25

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *O almighty God, by the birth of your holy child Jesus you gave us a great light to dawn on our darkness. Grant that in his light we may see light. Bestow upon us that most excellent Christmas gift of love to all people, so that the likeness of your Son may be formed in us, and that we may have the ever brightening hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen. (United Methodist Book of Worship #277)*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 9:1-7

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

²The people who walked in darkness

have seen a great light;

those who lived in a land of deep darkness—

on them light has shined.

³You have multiplied the nation,

you have increased its joy;

they rejoice before you

as with joy at the harvest,

as people exult when dividing plunder.

⁴For the yoke of their burden,

and the bar across their shoulders,

the rod of their oppressor,

you have broken as on the day of Midian.

⁵For all the boots of the tramping warriors

and all the garments rolled in blood

shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶For a child has been born for us,

a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, 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 onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Reflection: Merry Christmas! I have always loved this day. When I was a kid, I couldn't sleep the night before, not because I was anticipating Santa Claus, but because I knew my parents had placed presents under the tree, and I couldn't wait to unwrap them. So, I uncharacteristically woke up early, rushed in front of the tree, and anxiously awaited my parents' awakening so the festivities could begin!

I am older now, and I still wake up early on Christmas morning, but for different reasons. I can't wait to see the light in my children's eyes as they unwrap presents that they had no idea were waiting for them. The light from their faces seems to pierce the darkness and chaos that exist all around, even if the moment is fleeting.

Isaiah is addressing people who find themselves surrounded by darkness. They have endured the hardships of oppression in various forms, and it is evident that they are overwhelmed by the presence of evil. However, Isaiah delivers a message of hope, proclaiming that a light will shine forth, illuminating the path for those who have been in the shadows for so long.

Today, we rejoice in the realization of Isaiah's prophecy that "A child is born, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." This manifestation of

God among us signifies a significant change. A radiant light breaks through the darkness, and we need not wait for Christmas morning to celebrate. We hold onto hope because the light has entered our midst, and Christ is with us. Let us give thanks to God for His presence among us.

What gives you hope on this Christmas day?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for the community...

- *those who work...*
- *the unemployed...*
- *those in education...*
- *those in research...*
- *those in communications or journalism...*
- *those who maintain the life of the community...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life*. (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: We hold onto hope because the light has entered our midst, and Christ is with us.

Evening Prayer: *Lord, now let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled: my own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all people, a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel. Amen.* (Nunc Dimittis, United Methodist Hymnal, #225)

Can the Thing You Need be the Thing You Don't Want?

Rev. Nicholas Lee

Friday, December 26

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *O almighty God, by the birth of your holy child Jesus you gave us a great light to dawn on our darkness. Grant that in his light we may see light. Bestow upon us that most excellent Christmas gift of love to all people, so that the likeness of your Son may be formed in us, and that we may have the ever brightening hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen. (United Methodist Book of Worship #277)*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 7:10-14 (NRSV)

¹⁰Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. ¹²But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. ¹³Then Isaiah[a] said: 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman[b] is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

Reflection: Is it possible that the very thing we need might be something that we don't want? I've been pondering what I would say if God gave me the opportunity to ask for whatever I wanted. What would I ask for? Would there be some type of magic genie paradox that could misconstrue my words and cause me more harm than good?

Isaiah's question to King Ahaz arose from the great fear in the Kingdom of Judah. Foreign powers, including the Kingdom of Israel, had risen up against them. God wanted the people to stop worrying and to trust God. Ahaz's response may have been for a plethora of reasons, but what we do know is that Ahaz would align with a

foreign power to fight his battles. Ahaz would make an alliance with the empire of Assyria and Tiglath-Pileser. In essence, he chose the power he could see versus the power of God.

Isaiah's response to Ahaz, the people of Judah, and us was to promise God embodied in the flesh and living amongst us. In the name of Immanuel, Isaiah was literally saying 'God is with us!'

I have been perplexed by the reality that a King in peril would turn down God being with him and the nation, but the more I think about it, the incarnation might be what we need, but it isn't always what we want. It might complicate things and even change our world in ways that we can't predict or control.

Nevertheless, God's promise is still true. He promises to dwell with us and to do the very thing we need: change our reality.

When have you experienced God's care in a way that you did not anticipate, or maybe even want?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for the world...

- *all the nations...*
- *our own country...*
- *those in authority...*
- *the peace of the world...*
- *racial harmony and justice...*
- *those who maintain order...*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice...*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life*. (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: The incarnation might be what we need, but it isn't always what we want.

Evening Prayer: *Lord, now let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled: my own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all people, a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel. Amen. (Nunc Dimittis, United Methodist Hymnal, #225)*

Saturday, December 27

REFLECTION AND PRAYER



**Is there anything that stands out to you from
this week's reflections?**

**What are some things you're waiting for or
expecting this year? What are some things you
want to change? Spend some time in prayer and
ask God to prepare your heart for the coming
year.**



The Florida Conference
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