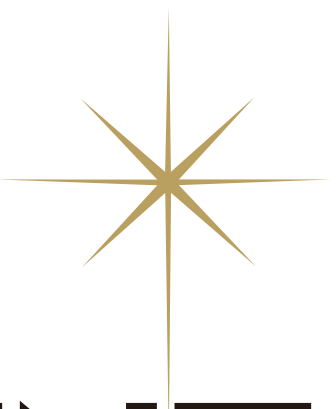




AD ENT

DEVOTIONALS 2025
BROOKWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH



We approach the season of Advent once again, not as individuals, but together in community. The Christmas story is one that simply cannot be retold apart from community. Mary and Joseph were never in this strange predicament alone. They were both visited by angels – a powerful reminder that God’s community isn’t bound to this earth. All through the story, we experience the surprised community. Mary and Joseph wondering in amazement as an angel shares this great news. The Virgin and her husband made the journey on a donkey to Bethlehem, because this was the community of Joseph’s lineage, reaching back to King David. The good news of great joy first comes to the most common of communities...shepherds startled under the stars. Wise men traveled many miles to adore the One testified to by a new star. Sidestepping the corrupt King Herod and his false promises to worship with them, the Magi return to their home communities having delivered their treasure to the treasured One.

Christian community stretches across the globe and across the ages in celebrating the greatest gift of God in the Christ child.

We are so grateful that you would share community with us by following along with our Advent Devotional this year. This endeavor is a gift from the Brookwood community to the Brookwood community. May the Spirit bless the presence of many different voices by giving us a single heart for Jesus this Christmas.

Blake Dempsey

HOPE

Our Sunday rhythm will be a bit different throughout Advent. Rather than read words written by those in our community, Sundays will be a space to read Scripture, reflect, and respond with practicing the Advent theme for the coming week. We begin here with Advent Hope.

READ

Isaiah 9:6-7:

⁶For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore.

Heb 10:23-25:

²³Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

REFLECT

- Where did you see God last week?
- What makes you hopeful this for this Advent season? For your life? For your church? For the world?
- As you read the passages above, was there a word or a phrase that stood out to you? You may want to read/pray the passages several times through.

RESPOND

This week try any or all of the following practices, putting Hope into action (or make up your own!). Then, share how that experience was with someone else.

1. Take some time and be in nature. Take a short walk or a hike or sit somewhere outside. Watch the clouds, listen to the birds, & count the stars. Take a moment and read Psalm 8 outdoors.
2. Call a friend who is hopeful or who makes you laugh.
3. Write a letter or postcard to someone telling them where you notice God in their life.
4. Find someone who is not your peer (either older or younger) and ask them what gives them hope.

The time of Advent... when we reflect and focus on the true meaning of Christmas, the birth of our Savior and the hope of His coming again.

I have always loved the seasons of Thanksgiving and Christmas spending time with family and enjoying special traditions. When I was little, I always loved our traditions of opening one gift on Christmas Eve, having a special breakfast on Christmas morning and the surprise of opening stockings together with my brother.

Now as an adult, I love the traditions of putting out my Grandmother's vintage nativity set each year in my home, going to Christmas Eve candlelight service with family to sing beloved Christmas Carols and constantly listening to holiday music (Anyone else love "The Carpenters" Christmas album? It's one of my favorites!!)

As Tommy & I juggle a "blended" family with 6 adult children who live in 6 different locations, 4 sons-in-law and 2 grandchildren (and one on the way!), our holiday season is always spread out across several days whenever they can be with us, some can come in town and some have to be with other extended family that year. The Christmas season for our family looks different every single year, so enjoying traditions can be challenging. Yet, we always make new family memories and are grateful for the time we have with each other, whatever it looks like for that year.

I have to admit, sometimes I long for the days when the holidays were simple and easy to navigate without all the planning and juggling of time, people and activities. Each year, the holidays seem to fly by as we get pulled into the busyness of the holidays and we easily forget the "real reason for the season" - the birth of Jesus.

That's when I have to slow myself down to reflect and remember - the stable, the manger and Mary and Joseph. It was simple and not at all what they expected. No one had made room for them in the inn, they were outside in a simple, messy stable for animals and their firstborn child was laid in a manger, a feeding trough for animals.

Yet... it is the one beautiful event that gives us hope and peace!

This Advent season will look different for each one of us as we journey along through life. You may be grieving the loss of a loved one this year, or celebrating the birth of a precious new life - you may be rejoicing in the healing from sickness or surgery, or grieving a diagnosis you never expected - you may be joyful in this season of life, or in a season of anxiety and sadness.

Yet...we pause, we reflect, we rejoice in the simple, but messy birth of our Savior who gives us hope!

May we be like Mary today and ponder the events of this year, trust in God's timing and provision, marvel at God's goodness in our lives, and embrace whatever this season of Advent looks like for you and your family. May you treasure all the wonders of His birth and this season!
Emmanuel, God is with us!

Luke 1:37 and Luke 2:19.

- Allison Fuller

When you pray, have you ever paused to consider how God responds? Perhaps the most memorable response is a miracle, an immediate, emphatic “Yes!” How glorious and uplifting is that feeling when we pray diligently and God exalts that prayer by doing something only He can do!

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him. 1 John 5:14-15

But what about the more common situation where it feels like our prayers fall on empty ears? We desire something so incredibly, yet God doesn’t respond with the miracle we might expect. The holiday season, with its promises of joy and fulfillment, can sometimes serve as a reminder of these moments.

So, how do we respond when it feels like God is saying “No”? It’s natural for this to shake our faith or cause us to question the spiritual disciplines we’ve been taught. If we are faithful to an all-powerful God, why don’t we get what we want? Is the issue that God doesn’t always listen? The verse from 1 John would disagree.

So then, is the issue that God can reject our prayer requests?

And I [Jesus] will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the father may be glorified in the son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. John 14:13-14

The above verse tells us that God does not reject prayer requests. So if God hears our faithful prayer, and has promised to act, why does it seem like prayer can go unanswered?

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.
2 Peter 3:8-9

Both John and 2 Peter tell a story of a God who is both powerful and patient. One who responds with the dramatic “Yes!” or the more subtle “Yes... but wait”. The “Yes... but wait” response is God’s perfect timing, often accompanied by a better provision.

To see this in your own life, take a moment of quiet reflection and think about the things you desperately prayed for and thought God had responded with “No.” Now, change your point of view and look at what God has provided instead. It may not be what you asked for, but what impact did God’s alternative response provide?

Maybe you are in a season where you’re still waiting on the dramatic “Yes” response God has promised. This is the hard part, where it feels like God has already said “No” to your prayers. Resist the urge to give up, remaining diligent in your disciplines and ensuring that you are not missing the responses God has and is providing. This may be through new or deepened relationships which is a common manifestation of God’s “Yes... but wait” response.

And when you do notice these “Yes... but wait” responses from God, instead of reluctantly taking them as the secondary reward, treat them as what they are. The “Yes... but wait” responses can be just as amazing. You could argue that the “Yes... but wait” response is even more miraculous because those are moments where God is providing a need that we didn’t know to even ask for.

So as you continue this holiday season, I encourage you to look back on the “Yes... but wait”s in your life and appreciate the miracles God provided when you thought God was saying “No.” And if you’re at a moment in life where it feels like God is saying “No” to your prayers... just wait. Remain faithful and be aware of what God is actively doing in your life to respond to your prayer.

- Ben Parker

The word "Advent" comes from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning "coming." Although in earlier times it referred to the anticipation of Christ's return, by the Middle Ages it referred to the anticipation of Christ's first coming to a modest stable in Bethlehem.

Today I am recalling our anticipation of our son Andrew's birth in Austin, Texas. For my side of the family, he was the first grandchild. For Dan's family, he was merely one in a large flock. Regardless, we were woefully unprepared for his coming arrival. No crib, no wardrobe, no nursery set up yet. Just a stack of diapers and a rickety bassinet to set up in our modest home. I had only one friend with a child. We started from a state of ignorance.

Yet how excited we were to finally be expecting a baby, after years of infertility! How blessed we felt by the Lord! And how much we continued to rely on God's promise in Proverbs 3: *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding."*

In this Advent season, let's reflect on these four elements as reflected in the Advent wreath: hope, peace, joy, and love. We had all these gifts in abundance in 1983! Let's pray for our church family to anticipate once again the enormous grace of the Lord in sending his Son to that humble birth!

- Kathi Stafford

"Finding Peace in the Hurry"

The Advent season often brings joy, lights, and excitement, but also a whirlwind of lists, programs, gatherings, shopping, and emotions. Families rush from one event to another trying to make everything single thing special. In the middle of all the busyness, it's easy to miss the quiet wonder of what Advent really is: waiting. God invites us not to do more, but to pause. The same God who came into the world as a baby in Bethlehem still whispers into our busy hearts today, *Be still and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10)*.

Advent can bring a mix of emotions like joy, sadness, excitement, or even stress. Some families are celebrating new beginnings, while others are missing loved ones or feeling stretched thin. Whatever you're feeling, God meets you there. When Mary heard she would carry the Son of God, she must have felt scared, confused, and amazed all at once. Yet she chose to trust. Her song reminds us, *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior (Luke 1:46-47)*. God welcomes every emotion we bring this season.

Sometimes peace feels hard to find when life feels full. But peace doesn't mean everything around us stops. It means we take a breath and slow down inside. Lighting the Advent candle as a family, reading a short verse together, or saying a quick prayer before bed can be simple ways to make space for peace. These moments remind us that peace is not found in perfect plans but in the presence of Jesus. He is Emmanuel—God with us—right here in the noise and everyday moments.

This Advent, what if we focused less on making things perfect and more on being together? Jesus didn't come to demand perfection but to offer His presence. When we spend time with one another, share laughter, or even talk through a hard day, we honor that same spirit of Emmanuel. Family traditions like baking cookies, singing songs, or serving together become holy when they help us remember the actual heart of Christmas.

God, in this season of so much, help us to find stillness in your presence. Teach our hearts to slow down, our minds to rest, and our families to focus on what really matters, your love. Fill our homes with peace, patience, and joy. As we wait for Christmas, remind us that you are already here. Amen.

- Mason Freeman

Michelangelo's Pieta sits in St. Peter's basilica at the Vatican. The sculpture depicts a youthful Mary holding the crucified body of her adult son after he's been removed from the cross. Mary looks lovingly into Jesus' face, just as she must have on the night of his birth in Bethlehem decades before. This would be an agonizing and terrifying moment for any mother, yet Michelangelo's Mary appears calm and serene. Why is that?

Jesus' birth was announced by angels, with shepherds gathering at the manger proclaiming the arrival of the Messiah – a miraculous and memorable birth. Luke 2:19 says, “...*Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.*” Perhaps the serenity so beautifully expressed in the Pieta comes from all the loving memories Mary treasured and pondered from his birth and throughout the extraordinary life of her child.

The angel Gabriel brought a promise from God to Mary in the months before Jesus was born. In Luke 1:46 – 55 Mary prays a prayer to God often called the Magnificat. It is the prayer she expresses to God once she's come to terms with the knowledge that she will give birth to the savior of the world.

*My soul magnifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name;
Indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.
He has come to the aid of his child Israel,*

*He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.
He has come to the aid of his child Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.*

Mary's proclamation affirms God's continuing covenant with His people through Jesus' ministry of mercy to the poor, the needy and the downcast. Michelangelo's Mary is serene because she knows that her son's sacrifice in this moment is all part of God's plan of salvation. We can find serenity during a hectic Christmas season in the certain knowledge that the baby whose birth we celebrate came ultimately to bring light and hope into our world.

- Doug Rigney

I, like most children, grew up absolutely adoring Christmas—the twinkling lights, the shiny wrapping paper, the family gatherings, the traditions passed down year after year. But here, dear reader, is the almost unbelievable part: I had absolutely NO IDEA Christmas was about a baby named Jesus. Not even a tiny hint.

I read ‘Twas the Night Before Christmas as if it were holy writ and sang “Jingle Bells” (or, because I was in French Immersion at the time, “Vive le Vent!”) with full conviction. To childhood me, Christmas was clearly about Santa, presents, and possibly snow. Actually, who are we kidding—it was definitely about snow. I grew up in Canada; snow was not just a backdrop, it was the entire supporting cast.

So, when I got a little older and discovered that Christmas was actually centered around Christ—a real, theological, eternity-changing Christ—I had a moment of internal crisis. Wait... Christmas is about Jesus? The “Christ” in Christmas isn’t just a silent-letter situation we politely ignore? I felt like someone should’ve handed me a brochure titled:

“So... Some Important Information About December 25 You Seem to Have Missed.”

Slowly and gently the truth began to settle in. Christmas wasn’t just a cozy season of carols and cocoa. It was the celebration of the greatest gift ever given God stepping into humanity, quietly and humbly, as a baby. A Savior, not wrapped in shiny foil paper, but in swaddling cloths. Hope delivered to a world that desperately needed it and still does.

And as I’ve grown, that realization has taken root in deeper ways. Christmas, for me now, is gratitude. Wonder. Awe. A kind of holy pause in a world that rarely slows down. The profound comfort of knowing that long before I ever understood the season, the Savior already understood me. He knew my need, my heart, my story and He came anyway. Not because I was ready, but because I needed Him.

That is the ultimate gift and the one I treasure most. Not just as a Christian, but as a mother raising children to recognize the real reason behind the lights, the music, the excitement, and the joy that keeps drawing us back to Bethlehem, year after year.

- Tasha Davis

PEACE

READ

Isaiah 9:6:

⁶For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Luke 2:12-15:

¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” ¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”

John 14:26-27:

²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

REFLECT

1. Where did you see God last week?
2. Where are you finding peace for this Advent season? For your life? For your church? For the world?
3. As you read the passages above, was there a word or a phrase that stood out to you? You may want to read/pray the passages several times through.

RESPOND

This week try any or all of the following practices, putting Peace into action (or make up your own!). Then, share how that experience was with someone else.

1. Light a candle to remind you of the fire and warmth of the Holy Spirit. Now listen to (or even sing) your favorite Christmas song. Listen again and offer those words to God as a prayer.
2. Plan a movie night or dinner with some friends or your family. Notice the laughter and joy shared over the experience.
3. Give something away this week (clothes, food, your time). You could donate to a homeless shelter or food bank. You could serve for an afternoon in a nursing home, or read a book at the ECC.

*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be
upon his shoulder:
and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The
everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.
Isaiah 9:6*

As a music minister for the last 37 years of my life, Christmas has always meant much planning and preparation for the special worship services that come in December. I can't really remember a time when I was able to relax until the evening of Christmas Eve. When the last candle is blown out after the final strain of Silent Night, my Christmas begins. It is short lived, but never the less profound and peaceful.

Don't get me wrong, I love all the moments leading up to that last chorus of, "Christ the Savior is born." The music of Christmas holds a very dear space in my heart and I love to orchestrate beautiful moments of worship that will be remembered and cherished by my church family. Unfortunately, that desire to make everything perfect is what holds me, and maybe even you, hostage to angst and the fear of disappointing others. Christmas, for all it's talk of peace often times is the last thing we receive. Some of our stress is self-inflicted while some of it is due to the pressure of expectation pressed upon us by others. No matter what the cause, peace is a rare commodity and greatly to be cherished.

It would be easy to go on a tangent and list all the reasons we lack the peace that passes all understanding. It's not just an issue at Christmastime but there's something about the holidays that just seem to magnify what ever feelings we are having at the moment. Obviously, peace is not topping the headlines on the nightly news but Isaiah did prophesy we would have a "Prince of Peace." What does that mean for us?

Whenever I read the words of Jesus: *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33 NIV) I am reminded that our Prince has already carried the weight of the world upon His shoulders. Because He got up, we too will rise. Peace is present any time we choose to step our toes into His Kingdom. He ushered in something so beautifully grand when He revealed Himself in fleshly form.

If I can get my eyes off of me and onto the One who originates peace, I will find it well before the candlelit carols commence. Maybe this year, I will let Christmas be about trying to please One person only and see if peace grows from there. Bet it will...

- Keith McLeod

Tis the season!

Preparation. Meditation. Breath catching anticipation. Mystery.

Years ago at a Christmas Eve mass, our pastor started his sermon by saying a baby changes everything. It has certainly been true for us in the gift of our four children. And now the gift of our four grandchildren. As we begin this season of gratitude and expectation, we await the eminent birth of our fifth and probably our final grandchild, a baby boy.

With each birth, I have felt great anticipation and accepted that I was not only experiencing a miracle, but also accepting that life, birth, death, are the mystery in which we live our lives. I have always kept my head above water because I believe in the promises and the covenant that God has made with us. I believe in the sweetness of Jesus as a baby as a man as a Messiah as a savior, I bank my life on it.

I do my best to carry this gratitude and hope and comfort throughout my days no matter the season.

Trust and hope...

May be our touchstones today, tomorrow, always.

And peace... Always peace.

- Rosanna Tsivourakis

Growing up my favorite Christmas activity was driving around to see Christmas lights. Something about the light attracted me. My mom would play Christmas music and drive us all around town. A really special memory for me is when we were driving around and all of a sudden we hit a dark spot where no houses had lights. As we kept going we started to see a glow but still didn't pass a house with any lights. All of a sudden we ran into this mega house with lights and inflatables, the whole 9 yards. It made the whole neighborhood light up, its light reflecting off of other houses and overwhelming the dark.

As I've grown older, I've learned to love light imagery, especially in the Bible. Jesus talked about light all the time, which caused some controversy. In John 8:12, Jesus claimed to be the light of the world and that his light was contagious. This was one of many claims that Jesus made to enrage the biblical scholars of the time. They knew the power of light and what it meant for the world. Light is necessary for life, it has been since Genesis 1:3 when God commanded "Let there be light." Jesus's claim demands respect. He is claiming to be much more than physical light. He says he overcomes all darkness, that he is the "light of life."

In Matthew 5, Jesus calls us to be the light of the world. He teaches that our light no matter how big or small is of great importance. Even a small candle can light up an entire room. Jesus has lit our candle; however, earthly temptations often cause us to hide our light. The darkness in the world pressures us to become like it for the sake of fitting in.

Jesus calls this out. He tells us to be in the world, bringing light to it, but not to be of it. He points out that it is foolish to hide your light. Why would anyone light a lamp only to cover it up? No rather, it is placed on a stand to give light to all.

Light is a guide to us; we need it to see the road ahead. If God's Word is a lamp, then it is our guide. This is why it is so important to be diligent in reading

Scripture, consuming the living Word of God continuously. Psalm 119:105 says, *"Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."*

So Jesus is the guide of the world, and we are called to guide one another. We are called to walk into the darkness of the world with a lamp—God's word, bearing the light of the world, Jesus Christ our Lord, and then become an overwhelming light that is able to light others' lamps with the Holy Spirit.

Safe to say, then, light is important, but it is advent so I know you want this to connect to Christmas, stay with me for a couple more sentences. Christmas is the celebration of the birth of the light of the world, and it seems more than a crazy coincidence that we celebrate with lights. Lights that are all different shapes, sizes and color. Lights that are grand in number and in intricacy. One light bulb gives off some light, but when you have bulbs and bulbs on strands and strands the light becomes overwhelming. All types of different lights come together to light up the night and depict a picture or a story.

That house I mentioned had a huge light-up Frosty. It was so detailed and super cool to see. Lights are so awesome but, unfortunately, they don't set themselves up. First a master designer has to come up with how to connect each light to a source so it can glow. That seems like such a hard and detailed task. He connects lights in series, so each light relies on the one in front of it. It's no wonder lights don't appear out of no where- complexity requires a creator. Someone with a blue print to bring something from nothing. Then someone has to put that master blueprint into action. The lights, doing what they're are instructed to do, come together to reflect the image of the maker. The lights light each other up, all is done together.

Consider this: God is the mastermind behind creation, He has a plan for the ultimate image of the world. He gives us innate purpose, one that doesn't happen by chance. Jesus of Nazareth came to help put the blueprint into action. He was the model for how all other lights should act. He gave us instructions to glow, interconnecting us, and giving righteous orders for our lives. This advent season may we be like the lights, allowing Jesus to shape us together to ultimately reflect his image.

- Sammy D. Camargo



I spent last week at the beach just down the road from where our youth attend beach retreat each summer.

On Tuesday night as I was reading, my friend saw something on Facebook from James Spann that piqued her interest. She went outside and soon after I heard her shouting, "Sally! Sally! Hurry, hurry!" I ran outside, not having a clue what was going on, and she was standing in the backyard of the house with her phone held up to the sky. I peered over her shoulder and there were the Northern Lights. We actually saw the Northern Lights while in Laguna Beach, Florida! It was unbelievable! I'd never seen such a color.

People who know me well know I am so thankful that God made color for us. He could have made things black and white or sepia, but instead He gifted us with color. And the sky that night was a perfect color. We were all amazed by the beauty.

I thought about that sky as I went to sleep and again soon after I woke up the next morning. I pulled out my phone to look at the picture and that's when I saw two stars right at the top of the Northern Lights. That took me to thoughts of the men who left their homes to follow a star.

The Magi, which means "wise men" in Greek, were men who most likely lived near Persia, possibly astronomers, and probably familiar with the prophecies of the Old Testament, especially from the writings of Daniel. They saw a new star, a bright one, and knew it meant something important.

Were they as excited to see it as we were to see the Northern Lights? Did they call to each other to come look? They chose to leave their homes to follow where the star would lead them.

They most likely gathered together a caravan and headed out, not knowing exactly where they were going or what they would find, but believed it was something important.

They arrived in Jerusalem where they were able to get an audience with King Herod. They asked about the new king who was to be born in Bethlehem. Herod asked the chief priests and the teachers of the law who quoted Micah 5:2. The king was to be born in Bethlehem.

Matthew says the Magi saw the star shining over Bethlehem. When they found the new king, the baby, they offered their gifts, and knelt down and worshipped him. They knew who he was, the king and messiah.

The men were seekers. They were brave men. They made a decision to head out on faith, reaching out for what they didn't quite understand, something they didn't know they needed or desired.

Acts 17:27 says "God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us."

Just as those men were brave and open and searching as they moved toward Bethlehem, as we move toward celebrating the birth of Jesus, may we also be seekers, reaching to find him and realizing he was there all along.

- Sally Sanders

The marvelous vision of the peaceable Kingdom, in which all violence has been overcome and all men, women, and children live in loving unity with nature, calls for its realization in our day-to-day lives.

Instead of being an escapist dream, it challenges us to anticipate what it promises. Every time we forgive our neighbor, every time we make a child smile, every time we show compassion to a suffering person, every time we arrange a bouquet of flowers, offer care to tame or wild animals, prevent pollution, create beauty in our homes and gardens, and work for peace and justice among peoples and nations we are making the vision come true.

We must remind one another constantly of the vision. Whenever it comes alive in us we will find new energy to live it out, right where we are. Instead of making us escape real life, this beautiful vision gets us involved.

- Henri Nouwen
a Dutch Catholic priest, professor, writer and theologian

"Be still and know that I am God." Be still. A command that so drastically diverges from our cultural norms, adopting a posture of Advent Rest seems increasingly more difficult. How often does the most wonderful time of the year approach and pass within the blink of an eye, leaving us again wondering how our busyness has caused us to rush through the season? For many, this season feels not like a chance to get away from the standard hurry of our lives but instead the culmination of months of rush and stress.

In the Advent season, we echo the words of Isaiah and proclaim that a child has been born who is called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace." The Prince of Peace. That is the invitation our Lord is inviting us into in this most hectic of seasons and beyond. He will bring peace to the world but also to our tumultuous hearts. When the season demands our unyielding energy and begins to drain us, what efforts will we make to lean on the only one who can provide this perfect peace?

God calls us to pause, be still, and acknowledge our dependence on Him. When we choose silence over sound and stillness over speed, we are left feeling out of control and forced to trust. And what a joy it is knowing that our God values this trust over our productivity and control! As the oceans roar around us and we're tricked into thinking only our actions can make them stop, may we instead choose the path of the Prince of Peace and take a nap in the boat. Let us make every effort to enter into that rest and choose to "waste" our time with God. Doing so gives us the freedom to focus more on being and less on doing. When the burden of endless responsibility presses down, Jesus offers an alternative.

To steal a line from Dr. B, this stillness "can place us in the eye of the storm. When all around us is chaos and confusion, deep within we know stability and serenity. In the midst of a tense personal struggle, we are still relaxed. While 1,000 frustrations seek to distract us, we remain focused and attentive." So in

this Advent season, may we let our hands down and let the Prince of Peace in. May our stillness of body lead to a stillness of spirit that allows us to embrace the gift this child has brought. To experience this gift to the full, may we embrace that God that calls us not to GO, GO, GO, but to instead slow, slow, slow. *"Be still and know that I am God."*

- Wyatt Williams

JOY

READ

Isaiah 12:6:

⁶Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

Luke 2:8-14:

⁸*In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"*

REFLECT

1. Where did you see God last week?
2. Where are you finding joy for this Advent season? For your life? For your church? For the world?
3. As you read the passages above, was there a word or a phrase that stood out to you? You may want to read/pray the passages several times through.

RESPOND

This week try any or all of the following practices, putting Joy into action (or make up your own!). Then, share how that experience was with someone else.

1. Create something with your friends or family (an ornament, bake something, etc.)
2. Do something this week that you enjoy. Notice why you enjoy it. Offer God a prayer of gratitude for the experience.
3. Find a picture of one of your loved ones. Write down some of your favorite qualities and memories about that person. Where do you see God in the things you wrote down?

"IMMANUEL"

For a number of years now my favorite name for Jesus, especially around Christmas, has been Immanuel, which means "God with us". In the first chapter of Matthew we are told that the birth of Jesus fulfilled "what the Lord had spoken by the prophet (Isaiah): Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel". Then in the last chapter, last verse of Matthew, Jesus tells his disciples that he will be with them always. It seems that Matthew framed his whole gospel with "God with us"!

But how do we know this is true, especially during times when we don't feel like He's near or that He cares? We know it's true because He says so.

If you grew up in the 50's, even 60's, you heard your parents frequently say "because I said so!" That reply to children when they ask "why?" seems to be looked down on today. But when it comes to God telling us something, that's what the writer of Proverbs is referring to when he says, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."*

Trusting what God has said is always more important than understanding Him or how you feel about it. Many times God, in his grace, does reveal His purpose in what he did, but trust must come first.

In many of the Psalms that David wrote, we have great examples of learning to trust that "God is with us." In his lifetime, David found himself in many harrowing situations and cried out to God to hear him and deliver him and avenge him. He began by being honest about his feelings and verbalized until he came to the place where he was willing to trust the outcome to God. His circumstances and feelings didn't change, but his focus did. That's why he could write "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me."

It's interesting to me that David didn't just write one psalm that took care of every situation, but wrote a psalm when he was fleeing from Saul, another when he was fleeing from Absalom and another when he was betrayed by close friends, to name a few. He would start out with "Hear me!" or "Hurry up!" or "Deliver me!" like he hadn't been through something similar before, and God was patient with him each time! What a gracious and longsuffering God we have!

So as I think about Immanuel, I remember this quote by Jessica Wolstenholm. "Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of this theme (God with us), both in His identification with humanity by becoming a man and by His death on the cross for sin. In this sense, the word 'Immanuel' truly does embody the meaning of Christmas. The birth of Jesus, the Holy One of Israel, the Messiah, and Savior of all men, has made a way for God to be WITH us."

Thank you, Lord, that you are with me all the time. May I trust your word and not my feelings or reasonings. I rejoice in your presence with me!

- Carol Giffin

"Losing Jesus"

Luke 2:41-51 relates a story that every parent has probably experienced. We as parents at some time while in a crowd have looked up to find our child missing. We can therefore understand the horror of Mary and Joseph when they realized that they had lost Jesus!

They had set out days before from Nazareth to attend the Passover which included the feast of weeks. They had journeyed with a joyous crowd of friends and family up to Jerusalem most likely singing or reciting Psalms of ascent. They had worshipped and praised God for eight days before heading back home. After walking back a whole day back down from Jerusalem they noticed that Jesus was missing. One would think, "how can anyone lose Jesus?" Of course, no one was closer to Jesus at that time than his earthly parents.

So how did they lose Jesus?

The text tells us that they assumed that he was with the rest of the people traveling back to Nazareth. Jesus was twelve years of age and therefore could have traveled with the women and children in front of the crowd or with the men in the rear. So it is reasonable that his parents thought he was with the other one.

At the end of the day they were careless and distracted as they assumed he was with them. They had not lost their relationship with him but had lost the sense of His Presence. And oh how easy it is to lose the sense of Jesus' presence as we rush around doing good things and even close to the times of worship celebrations. We assume that He is right there with us as we become careless, distracted and neglectful in prayer and Bible reading. We have not lost our relationship that we received at the time we believed the Gospel message, but we have lost the sense of his presence and fellowship. It took Jesus' earthly parents an entire day to realize that he was not with them. How long does it take us?

And to their credit they made the day's journey back up the hill to Jerusalem, the place where they last were with him to search diligently for him. I can only imagine how anxious that walk was. Perhaps most of the time they were in solemn contemplation as they wondered how in the world they could have possibly lost the Messiah who had been entrusted to them by God. One wonders if Joseph received the "look" that wives sometimes give their husbands when the not so good circumstances are surely the husband's fault. At any rate they looked diligently for a day in Jerusalem until they found him. They found him exactly where one would think, in the temple discussing God's Word.

The "boy" Jesus was as astonished as they. It is amazing that the boy Jesus was appropriately but not overly mature for a twelve year old while remaining sinless as he had a sense of "who he was."

During joyous holidays it is so easy to lose the sense of our Savior's presence. We are so caught up in the celebration of Jesus' birth that we forget to maintain fellowship with the crucified, risen and exalted Savior. He has promised to "never leave us or forsake us." We have to remain vigilant to cherish our fellowship with God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Kyle Hudgens

The Place Where Love Grows

Once, in the truest story that you have ever heard, His Story, which is really your very own story, there was this family – Jesse’s family. A family that was like yours, like a tree with branches of these relatives and those brothers and those sisters – a family that loved each other and hurt each other and forgave each other and failed each other. A family that failed God.

Their family tree was a fallen tree.

When their family tree crashed to the ground, it crushed all of their hearts. The stump –and all of their days – felt utterly hopeless. Like their hearts had been cut right out of them. But it happened: the wondrous impossible. It came right out of that chopped down stump --- the miracle no one ever dreamed of. Except for God. God never stopped dreaming of the miracle, the one He’d dreamed right from the very beginning, because love never stops dreaming of a way to draw close again.

If you slowed and looked very close, you could actually see it, coming straight out of that family tree that had been cut right down --- a miraculous shoot was springing up out of the stump! A tender and vulnerable green shoot was growing hope again! Growing love again!

Out of the stump came one tender branch that would grow right into a crown of thorns, right into a rugged cross, right into a ladder --- your ladder back to God. Out of the stump of Jesse’s family tree --- out of the stump of every family tree --- comes the shoot of Jesus’ forever --- love. Jesus would go to impossible lengths to rescue you. Jesus’ love had to get to you in a big world, Jesus’ love had to come to you in a loud world, Jesus had to break into the world and rescue you with a love that would always wrap safe around you. So Jesus slipped into the world as a tiny searching green shoot, as small as a reaching new baby. Jesus comes as your little yet --- big miracle, who whispers to you

in a noisy world: "Right where you are, look for the small glimpses of my love unfurling around you like a slender leaf, like the branches of a tree, like the seeking limbs of a babe."

Look for the little child everyone else forgets. Look for that hunchbacked man no one else remembers. Look for the small, broken cracks in the world, in hearts, that would be easy to walk right by – and right there, slip in a little word that grows great courage. Miracles happen whenever we speak words that make souls stronger. Miracles happen whenever we look for shoots of Jesus' love everywhere --- because this grows deep roots in Jesus' love for everyone. Miracles happen in the drawing close to the little people, the least people, the lonely people, the lost people --- because this is drawing close to Jesus. This is how we all draw love everywhere.

Once, even now, there was this family who slowed down and bent down and could see small, wondrous, impossible things – that no stump is ever just a stump. A stump is always just a place for love to grow, this small unfurling of miracles.

Isaiah 11:1-2, 10

- From Unwrapping the Greatest Gift by Ann Voskam



"THE STAR"

The day of the Christmas presentation finally arrived. My young daughter, Jana, was so excited about her part that I supposed she was to be one of the main characters, though she had not told me what she was to do. The parents were all there, and one by one the children took their places. I could see the shepherds fidgeting in the corner of the stage. Mary and Joseph stood solemnly behind the manger. In the back, three young wise men waited impatiently. But still, Jana sat quietly and confidently.

Then the teacher began... "A long time ago, Mary and Joseph had a baby and they named Him, Jesus. And when Jesus was born, a bright star appeared."

At that cue, Jana got up from her chair, picked up a large tinfoil star, walked behind Mary and Joseph, and held the star up high for everyone to see. When the wise men responded to their cue, she went forward to meet them and jiggled the star up and down excitedly to lead them to the baby Jesus, and her face was as bright as the real star might have been.

The play ended with praises for the children and refreshments for everyone. Then on our way home, Jana said with great satisfaction, "I had the main part." "You did?" I questioned. "Yes," she said, "because I showed everybody how to find Jesus."

How true!! To light the paths of others, so that they can begin to follow Jesus is truly the finest role we can play in life. ~Ruth Rowan

Yes, God has commanded and equipped us to be not penlights or flashlights, but to be glaring spotlights that illuminate others' paths, so that they may discover Jesus' love and God's plan of salvation.

"LET YOUR LIGHT SO SHINE BEFORE MEN, THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS, AND GLORIFY YOUR FATHER WHICH IS IN HEAVEN." Matthew 5:16

We now anticipate our celebration of the holy moment when Jesus put on skin, so that He could teach us and make a way to heaven for those who love Him. Let our "lights shine before men" through unconditional love, joyful sacrifices of time, peaceful attitudes, patient encouragement, kind words, good hearts, loyalty, and selfless actions. Galatians 5:22, the fruits of the Spirit.

"Glory to God in the Highest"

- Sylvia Page

"Memories"

There is tension this season to make memories, to create spaces people want to return to and to make sure we do more than secular festivities. We decorate our homes, pick the perfectly scented candle, prepare the best meals. We have to make the memories! When we say memories, I think we mean feelings. We can look at photos from holidays past and even if the moment looks charming we feel it in our bodies if that moment was indeed warm and full of love or if there was tension and pain in the room.

When God came to earth it was not picturesque but it changed the whole world. From birth John describes Jesus as Light. John 1 refers to Jesus as the true light that gives light to everyone. In this same passage we are called children and then a few verses later we are reminded of the grace in place of grace already given. This shows our human weakness (children) and the lavishness of God's mercy on us (grace upon grace). As we rush to create the perfect holiday I pray we slow down to remember our weakness, our moments of frustration or stress regarding the holiday schedule or the heartbreak of missing seats at the table. Let us turn our hearts toward the one who created us, who in love humbled to human form. Jesus came to earth to meet us, to be the light that gives light to everyone.

John 1:9, "The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world." As John prepared the way let us prepare the way for those around us declaring, "Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given" (John 1:16).

Instead of focusing on creating the memories, let us first sit in the lavish love poured out on us through Jesus, then let us turn our attention to those around us. Instead of the perfect holiday table let us find joy and laughter. Through this grace may we see each other's human weakness and find ways to be gracious with ourselves and others. Maybe through this gentleness with one another we

will experience what Jesus speaks to Nathaneal about at the end of John 1, *"Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." He then added, "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man."*

- Noel Hudgens

"The Mindset of Christ"

Philippians 2:6-11

"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of traveling to Italy with my daughter, Caroline; my sister-in-law, Karen Phillips; and my niece, Carley Phillips. I've visited Italy before, but it was the first trip for the others, which made it all the more special. We began in Rome, doing the classic sightseeing—the Colosseum, the Roman Forum, the Spanish Steps, and the Trevi Fountain. But as I walked through the sacred places - St. Peter's, The Sistine Chapel and others - with the Advent season approaching, I found myself viewing everything through a new lens: one shaped by reflection and reverence.

On my earlier visit to Italy, I was awestruck by the grandeur of Rome's basilicas—the intricate murals, magnificent statues, and gilded decorations. They are breathtaking in their artistry and scale. By comparison, most American churches seem so plain. Yet this time, as I stepped again into these cathedrals with Advent on my heart, the opulence felt heavy—almost overwhelming. I couldn't help but think of how our Lord, the Creator of the universe, chose to come to earth not in a palace, but in a humble stable, with only the sparkle of the stars to mark His arrival.

I know the builders and artists meant to honor and celebrate their Savior, and their devotion is evident. Still, I was reminded that such grandeur contrasts

sharply with the humble nature of Christ. As Philippians 2:6–7 tells us, *“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”*

As we move through Advent, may we model the mindset of Jesus focusing on serving others, showing humility and obedience, treating people with kindness, and living simply. Let us strive to bring glory to God through our attitudes and actions, rather than chasing the fleeting rewards of the world.

During our time in Rome, I also experienced something profoundly moving at the “Scala Sancta,” or “Holy Stairs.” According to tradition, these are the 28 steps Jesus climbed to face trial before Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem. St. Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, is said to have brought them to Rome in the 4th century, and for centuries pilgrims have climbed them on their knees in prayer. The original marble steps were covered with wood in the early 1700s to protect them, and over time, the surface has been worn smooth by countless faithful visitors. The guide warned that the climb could be painful, and of course, I thought I was ready for the challenge. But as I knelt and began my ascent—shoulder to shoulder with strangers—I quickly heard someone weeping behind me. At the top hangs a painting of Jesus stretched out on the cross, and as I looked up at it, I was struck by a deep sense of shame. I had approached this moment as a test of endurance, not of devotion.

A few steps in, my knees began to ache. Panic rose as I realized there was no way out but forward. The pain would have to be endured. Looking up at the image of Christ, I thought of His suffering—so far beyond anything I could comprehend—and tears filled my eyes. Halfway up, trembling and weak, I began pulling myself with my arms, whispering prayers for strength. I remembered how, on the cross, *Jesus cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*—and yet He pressed on in obedience, for love of us all. The Phillipians passage continues in verse 8 with... *“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross.”*

When I finally reached the top, I rose to my feet filled with gratitude and awe. The next day, bruises darkened my knees, but I carried a deeper understanding

of just a fraction of the pain Jesus bore for my sins. I was humbled, grateful, and overwhelmed by His sacrificial love.

Philippians 2:9-11 continues: *"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* Whether your Christmas is lavish like the grandest cathedrals or simple like the stable, remember that Jesus came for us all. You cannot look at the manger without also seeing the cross—one gives meaning to the other. As we journey through this holy season, may our hearts bow before the only One worthy of all praise.

Praise be to God, and Merry Christmas!

- Amy Causey

LOVE

READ

1 John 4:7-21

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In 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. ¹¹Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

¹³By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. ¹⁵God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. ¹⁶So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. ¹⁷Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. ¹⁹We love because he first loved us. ²⁰Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. ²¹The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

REFLECT

1. Where did you see God last week?
2. Where are you seeing love this Advent season? For your life? For your church? For the world?
3. As you read the passages above, was there a word or a phrase that stood out to you? You may want to read/pray the passages several times through.

RESPOND

This week try any or all of the following practices, putting Love into action (or make up your own!). Then, share how that experience was with someone else.

1. Write a Christmas card to someone you know who is sick or to one of our Brookwood homebound members.
2. Give someone your undivided attention for an hour this week.
3. Serve at one of Brookwood's mission partners, or do something for one of your neighbors (bake them cookies, rake their leaves, etc.).
4. Come join us at the Christmas Eve Service!

At its best, the Christmas season truly is “the most wonderful time of the year.” There is a certain magical quality that hallmarks this holiday season, setting it apart from all the others. For me, I experience that magic in the warmth and nostalgia of twinkling lights and colorful decorations. In the enjoyment of laughter and lively conversation while we bake cookies and make reindeer food every year. In the feeling of being transported to an idyllic, festive world while reading stories, watching movies, and listening to music especially made for this season. In the reverent and almost sacred air that fills the room as we lift up our candles and voice our praise together on Christmas Eve.

The same feeling arises when I ponder the Advent story: a story overflowing with mysticism and magic; in the sense that there is obviously something supernatural, incomprehensible at work. It is astounding that God, Lord and Maker of the universe, could take on flesh in the person of Jesus. The incarnation is the most profound mystery and the truest source of such feelings of magic, awe, wonder. While these feelings may arise amidst other aspects of the holiday, nothing compares to what we experience at the manger.

It is there that we see the depth and breadth of God’s love for us and the lengths to which He would go for our redemption. He poured out His love for us by becoming one of us and it is this great mystery that is the crux of our existence. All that we are and all that we do hinges upon the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. So it is at the manger, then, that we find the source of the most stirring, faith-inducing, life-giving sense of magic. May we experience this magic of Christmas this Advent season and let those feelings of awe and wonder guide our wholehearted worship and praise.

- Ryann Brown

Since becoming a parent I find myself often thinking “I have to remember this.” It can be the feeling of holding my sleeping child, the sound of the laughter of my children playing, or a funny thing one of them said – “I have to remember it.”

Since becoming a parent I also find myself getting worse at something... remembering. I am told this will only get worse. I am trying to get better at writing things down, but it’s a discipline that I need to refine.

I admit, if I think about it too long, the inability to remember some treasured memories can make me sad. For some reason, I keep coming back to this verse at the end of Luke 2: *“And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor”* (Luke 2:52). Outside of a story at the temple, that’s all we really know about Jesus’s childhood. He grew in wisdom and stature.

What might seem like a relatively unremarkable verse is deeply comforting to me. I am positive Jesus and his family and friends had a lifetime of treasured memories, incredible experiences, and wonderful encounters with God the Father. It reminds me that a life well lived isn’t marked by giant, splashy moments, but instead by the slow drip of joy, hope, peace, and love shaping us in God’s abundant goodness.

My prayer this Advent season is that we might all sit in that goodness, even when things don’t feel so good. That we would extend love, even when we don’t feel very loving. That we would taste joy even when our circumstances seem bitter. That we would embrace hope even when things seem bleak. That in remembering the coming of Christ, we might remember the good God who holds us dear.

- Larry McCutcheon

Journey to the Manger from Heaven to Earth

Journeys - trips we all love to go somewhere special. Months before the trip we begin to get excited about where we are going, who we will see, what we will do, all the things that make a trip special, especially if we are going somewhere to see those we love! Anticipation builds as the day gets closer and closer.

Often times when we think about the journey to the manger we think about Mary and Joseph or maybe the shepherds or even the Wise Men but have you ever stopped to think about what Heaven must have been like as the days grew closer for the Son's journey to the earth? Where the Angel is whispering it's almost time, is He really going to go there? Is He really leaving all of this for them? Will the Father let Him go? Why does He want to journey there, they don't know him or love him? I can only imagine what Heaven was like as the days grew closer and closer for God the Father to send Jesus the Son to earth.

You see this journey was planned in eternity past, the Father knew we would need a Savior and the only way for it to work was that the Son would have to journey from the glories of heaven to earth. The writer of Galatians puts it this way, *"But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts prompting us to call out, 'Abba, Father.' Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir."* (Gal. 4:4-7)

A journey that made you and me children of God - heirs of the most high! No wonder on that night when the announcement was made to the shepherds the angels broke out in song, so many that the air lit up, singing Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth! So this Christmas season as you journey to friends and family and celebrate this wonderful season remember that the journey actually began in heaven before time ever begun. The journey to make you and me children of God was conceived in the heart of a Father who so

loved us that He sent forth His Son and that the Son gladly accepted this earthly destination. Have a blessed Christmas! Journey in Joy!

Jim Barnette

Beloved Pastor & Friend

March 21, 1961-February 22, 2021

(From Advent 2021)



Thurs., Dec. 25

CHRISTMAS DAY

In late October, Hurricane Melissa, a massive category 5 storm, made its way through the Caribbean. A Weather Channel reporter described the eye of the storm as textbook, calling it, “pure calm surrounded by unimaginable power.” What a description!

When I observe a newborn asleep, I often joke with the bleary-eyed parents that there is nothing more precious than a sleeping baby! A baby places extraordinary demands on parents and they have a uniquely persuasive capability to let us know when they’re unhappy. But when they’re asleep, almost nothing is more peaceful.

On that holy and perhaps not-so-silent night, at some point baby Jesus settled down and took his first nap. Although his surroundings were not entirely ideal, he had what he needed—held in the loving arms of his exhausted young mother. He was pure calm. The famous Christmas hymn Silent Night declares “all is calm!” But not for long. Creation could not ignore its Creator. The sky burst forth with a heavenly host. A new star appeared in the sky and Magi took notice. Shepherds scurried so they could see. Simeon and Anna were now only a week away from beholding the One they had hoped for so long. Pure calm: the eye of the Incarnate hurricane moved over little Bethlehem. What now surrounded them all was unimaginable power. Power to uproot injustice, flood the streets with righteousness, and unleash the gale-force winds of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is both Prince of Peace and Mighty God (Isaiah 9:6). This Advent season, may we rest in the pure calm of Christ and trust in his unimaginable power to make new all things!

- Blake Dempsey

