

ADVENT

DAILY DEVOTIONALS

2026 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.

Hebrews 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.



ADVENT DAY 2
MON., NOV. 30

Immanuel noun
Im·man·u·el or Emmanuel

Etymology: Derived from two Hebrew words—Immanu ("with us") and El ("God").

For Christian philosopher and spiritual formation teacher Dallas Willard, **Immanuel** ("God with us") was not merely a theological doctrine or an abstract metaphysical fact—it was and is the central, practical reality of the "with-God life."

Willard believed, and so do I, that **Immanuel** implies an ongoing, interactive relationship in which His realm of influence or "kingdom" is so close, so near, that we can now have an active, two-way friendship and companionship rather than a distant arrangement. It involves keeping our minds turned toward Christ while expecting Him to impress His presence upon our consciousness.

Our Associate Pastor, Larry McCutcheon, recently reminded us in a sermon on Jesus coming to fulfill "all of the law and prophets" that God comes to us again and again in the ordinary aspects of life. He comes because He desires to have a "with-God life" that includes Himself in every aspect of our existence. He desires a relationship that goes beyond Sundays, Christmas and Easter. We should too! Christ's entry into this world brings great hope, love, peace and joy! Willard taught that walking with **Immanuel** is not reserved for special retreats or mystical escapes; rather, it is practiced by learning to stay attentive to what God is actively doing around us in the middle of our daily, routine tasks.

The incarnation means that Jesus came to make eternal, interactive living a concrete reality here and now. That is why Christmas means so much. Jesus condescends. He literally shows up and shows us how we can reciprocate

God's great move towards us. Jesus announces the Kingdom is near and we can move and breath and have our being in this new reality. "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you" is a well-known promise found in James 4:8. As it turns out, God makes His move in a gigantic gesture when He comes to us in human form. **Immanuel,** "God with us" has come and has not departed. Though Christ has ascended, He gave us His essence, His presence and personality in spiritual form; The Holy Spirit. God keeps coming like a relentless force. He's pursuing like a great hound of heaven.

He does grant us agency though. We can draw near to Him or not. If you feel as though He's far from you this Advent season, please consider, or maybe reconsider who has moved. Immanuel has come very near to the brokenhearted, the downcast, the weak, the poor, the bored and uninspired, the backslidden, the ones who struggle through the frenzy of this holiday season.

There is word for "God with us." It is **Immanuel.**
Is there a word for "us with God?"

This Christmas, as Christ makes His way into the hearts of anyone who would believe, consider what word that might be for you.

- Keith McLeod



ADVENT DAY 3
TUES., DEC. 1

In the first year of World War I, the Great War that would claim 20 million lives, Great Britain and Germany were entrenched in fierce warfare on the Western Front. On December 24, 1914, the Germans pierced the veil of war through singing Silent Night. The British returned not with bullets but with their own hymns. Soon, both sides met one another in the land between the opposing trenches, No Man's Land, a stretch of land that had only been filled with death and destruction. When the two sides met, they did not continue to fight but instead celebrated together, played soccer, and exchanged gifts. This unofficial truce lasted until the 26th, and unfortunately, the fighting resumed. The war continued for four more years, where a truce like this was never seen again.

This story has always been one of my favorites as it highlights the power of Christ and displays one of my favorite Christmas hymns. I've always loved how this truce came into being through the singing of Silent Night. This song has always been special to me as the simplicity of the hymn mixed with the candlelight service evokes a feeling of stillness and calm. I can imagine the soldiers in the trenches being moved by the same lyrics as well.

To be in a situation as horrible as war, it's amazing to see how soldiers found rest in singing and were able to find a moment of peace in a common bond of Christ. The truce shares a stark similarity to Acts 15 when Paul and Silas are in prison. They had been flogged and thrown into a Philippian jail. Despite their suffering, they prayed and sang to the Lord. From their singing, the earth shook, chains broke, the prison doors were opened, and lives were changed. In their hardships, they found tranquility amongst trials, much like those soldiers would almost 1900 years later.

Peace was found in one of the most destructive wars in history, not through a treaty but through the love of Christ. In these days of Advent, it's important to remember the power of Christ, that no matter the circumstances, peace

can always be found. No matter what anxieties or worries that affect us in this season, we may find peace knowing that our Savior has come and died for us.

We may have grievances against others, whether it be people who have wronged us or those with whom we disagree. In this season where the idea of peace is promoted, it's important for us to abandon hate for one another and be united through the Prince of Peace. As No Man's Land separated opposing sides; Jesus acts as a mediator between us and God, bridging the gap of sin that separates man from Him. Through Jesus we may find heavenly peace on this earth and everlasting peace with God in heaven. If opposing sides in a World War can find peace in the midst of violence, if Paul and Silas can sing in chains, we can find our silent night, peace with God and man.

- Luke Christopher



ADVENT DAY 4
WED., DEC. 2

O COME, O COME
Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!

Oh, come, Desire of Nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,
And be Thyself our King of Peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!

Reflect: What's your favorite song to sing during the Advent season? What is it that you love about that song?

ADVENT DAY 5
THURS., DEC. 3

Ponder this, if you will:

He was created of a mother whom He created.
He was carried by hands that He formed.
He cried in the manger in wordless infancy.
He, the Word, without whom all human eloquence is mute.

- Augustine





ADVENT DAY 6
FRI., DEC. 4

Scripture: Matthew 2:1–12

We all carry expectations into the holiday season. Some are spoken aloud: the traditions we want to keep going, the people we want to see, the experiences we want to make happen, and the joy and excitement on the kids' faces as they open their presents. Some may feel a little bit harder to name. Maybe we want a relationship within our family to be easier, hope a disappointment won't hurt as much, or want our experience of Christmas to feel like the way we remember it finally.

If we think about it... the wise men also had expectations. They followed a star in search of the new king. The journey led them to Jerusalem. Most people would expect to look for the future king in a palace. But instead of entering the palace and finding the king, the star led them to Bethlehem, where they found Jesus with his mom. They entered, worshipped Him, and offered Him gifts fit for a king.

The Bible doesn't straight up say if they were surprised by what they found. But if I am honest, if I were walking (or camel-steering), carrying my gift and searching for a king, and then found a child in an ordinary home… it wouldn't be what I imagined. The wise men probably felt the same way… but even still. They recognized it as a moment worthy of their worship.

There are some things I know will not go the way I expect this season. Plans can change last minute; my kids will be tired and have hard days, and even family gatherings can bring little disappointments if things aren't exactly as they have been. Even if our knee-jerk response is frustration or sadness, we can take a closer look, and there may be something underneath that. We may be hoping for connection, rest, or a moment that felt special.

Whatever our emotion may be, it can allow us to ask a deeper question. "What exactly was I hoping for?" This question helps us understand ourselves and also one another with more compassion. It can also help us see where we may have placed expectations on a person or a moment that they were never able to carry.

Advent invites us to search for Jesus just like the wise men. In doing so, we may find that the moments we remember aren't the ones that went exactly as we planned. They might be conversations that happened when dinner ran late, the laughter that interrupted a difficult day, or the quiet kindness someone showed when the celebration felt a little different than it used to.

This Christmas, when emotions start bubbling up, take a moment and ask yourself: What were you hoping would happen? What might someone else be carrying? And where could God be inviting you to notice His presence in the moment?

Prayer:
God, you know every hope and expectation I carry into this season. When I feel disappointed or frustrated, help me to understand what is underneath those feelings. Help me to have compassion for myself and for all the people around me. Open my eyes to your presence, even when Christmas looks different than I have imagined.

- Mason Freeman



Advent Waiting

The art of waiting is a challenge
when patience is not your gift,
Trusting Christ will come again
And heal the world's great rift.

The ancients used obedience
following the law,
As remedy, God sent his son
to reconcile the fall.

A baby, a carpenter, a faithful Jew,
a local hometown man,
The Son of God, crucified
with nails into his hands.

Into the earth, his body placed,
Wrapped in its burial cloth,
Three days in darkness, creation mourned.
It seemed all hope was lost.

But mightily, Jesus rose
Defeating sin and shame,
Forever now, we will praise
The Name Above All Names!

Waiting now for Christ's return
We share the Advent story,

In hope that others will believe
And be with him in Glory.

"So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many;
and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin,
but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." Hebrews 9:28

– Amy Causey



Peace

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 continue with Advent 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.



Allow the Holy Spirit to be your Advocate

Many believe character is something we are born with, unchangeable and unique. In reality, personality traits are largely set around age 5 or 6, while our character is built on the thousands of choices we make every day. So who guides those choices? Is it coworkers, family, friends, or parents?

I encourage you to let the Holy Spirit be your advocate. Allow him to guide those thousands of choices you make daily.

John 14:25–26 says: *"These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."*

When God left us on earth, He gave us a wonderful, perfect, and powerful tool that lives in our hearts. When we choose to follow Him, we are never alone. Sometimes we rely on the world to guide our choices, but focusing on worldly things makes us miss what matters most. I know what it is like to want to control everything when you cannot see the outcome, and to want to know it all right now.

Proverbs 3:5–6 reminds us: *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."*

Obedience can feel impossible, faith can seem hard, and trust can feel overwhelming when we want to do what we think is best. Yet, sometimes the best thing we can do is take a step back so God can take a step in.

As **John 16:13–14** states: *"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth... He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. Allow the Spirit to guide you in what you say, do, and think."*

For my ways are greater than yours declares the Lord. For my thoughts are better than your thoughts declares the lord. He has great plans to give us hope and a great future. When the spirit is in control, everything changes. Base your thousands of choices you make daily solely on him. Allow him to be your advocate.

“Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?”- Corrie ten Boom

- Hazel Serota



ADVENT DAY 10
TUES., DEC. 8

As children of the 1940's, the Christmas season always held a special place in our young lives and hearts with home and family traditions such as hanging stockings, decorating a tree with strings of lights and home made ornaments in anticipation of lots of simple goodies under the tree on Christmas morning.

Our families were involved in all the Christmas celebrations of the birth of Jesus in our local church. Those times were filled with good food, simple gifts, friends and time with family. Now, as senior adults, we have many more traditions and experiences to share with our family of adult children and grandchildren. Getting everyone together for a meal with all the preparations has become a busy, fun time. Sharing movies, pictures, and stories of our children through the years provides exciting fun, laughter and possibly an emotional moment.

Today the advent season will look different to each of us as we go through life and our family traditions change, but one thing never changes and that is the hope that the Christ child brings to us.

This year has held many joys with new births, healings, weddings, to name a few but in this world there is still bad news documented each day on the news reports. Violence, divorce, hate, death, unfaithful behavior and the list goes on. But we have Emmanuel (God with us). We have the Holy Spirit to guide us forward to make good choices of Hope, Patience and Love. Over 2,000 years ago, Our Lord willingly came to earth to experience all human conditions and to teach of God's great love and His plans for His people. This year, many of us have experienced sickness, disappointments, or the passing of a dear loved one. We can move forward knowing who holds us in His hands. Jesus who overcame the world. He provides the faith and power to face our tomorrows. Let us celebrate our Lord Jesus Christ this Advent Season for our Lord JESUS is all powerful, all loving and all faithful. He was willing to give His life for you and

me. May each of you embrace whatever this season of Advent looks like for you and your family. May you enjoy all the joys and hope of Jesus's birth and of this Holy season!

John 16:33 (NIV): *"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 Q and Jan Williams

ADVENT DAY 11
WED., DEC. 9

I'm Tellin'



How it started

On a cold, starry night an angel surrounded by heavenly hosts assured the shepherds "Don't be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy for everyone! The Savior has been born tonight in Bethlehem. . .The shepherds ran to the village … and there was the baby lying in a manger. Then the shepherds ***told everyone what had happened*** and what the angel had said to them about the child" (Luke 2: 10,11,16 NLT). In Jesus' day, the job of a shepherd was a demanding, around the clock vocation that occupied a low socio-economic status. Yet God chose shepherds as the first visitors of the baby Jesus! The shepherds did not hesitate in praising God for the miraculous birth, as they had experienced the majestic and glorious appearance of the heavenly hosts of angels. And now when we share the good news of Jesus, we have the advantage of knowing the miracles and sacrifice of Jesus' life on earth.

How it is going

And Jesus said, *"I am the Good Shepherd, and I know My own and My own know me"* (John10:14, NAS). Sheep love to play follow the leader! Thankfully, as we journey along life's paths as Jesus' sheep, we have Jesus as our shepherd to lead us down the paths that are best for us. When a sheep falls over onto its back, it can't get up without the help from the shepherd and his staff. Our Shepherd is always with us to bring us out of the tough places we experience. Sheep need a daily touch from the shepherd, and we need daily communication with our Shepherd through prayer and Bible study.

Just as a shepherd counts his sheep daily and looks for the lost, Jesus is with us always and desires to bring the lost into the fold. (thoughts from All We Like Sheep, by M.G. Peeples)

How it ends

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace, I have overcome the world!" (John 16:33 NAS)

This Christmas season, **let us tell everyone we know** the good news of Jesus' birth, and His provision for an abundant life and eternity with Him.

- Sylvia Page



ADVENT DAY 12
THURS. DEC. 10

For me, the advent season is accompanied by an overwhelming sense of nostalgia – a bittersweet longing for the Christmas magic I experienced as a child. Unfortunately, it seems time, cynicism, and repetition have all slowly chipped away at that sense of wonder. After hearing it for so many Advent seasons, I know that the true magic of this season lies within the ordinary. The truest source of awe and wonder is found in the unglamorous, mundane, humble scene at the manger. It is an ordinary scene yet overflowing with magic and mysticism – 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. In the incarnation, we see the depth and breadth of God's love for us and the abundance of His grace.

I can see and understand God's presence in such a crucial event, even though it occurred in a plain, lowly setting. It is less easy for me to see where God is showing up in the monotony and plainness of my own life. I find myself in a season of honing this skill – this ability to search and see God in the mundane of my own life and the world around me. Most of the time, my expectation, and honestly my desire, is that I would see or hear from God in some extravagant, overt, or miraculous way. I'm learning, however, that most often God is showing up in ordinary places. Tish Harrison Warren describes this phenomenon well: "The things of God, it turns out, are surprisingly prosaic, ordinary, and unimpressive. If salvation is to meet us at all, it must meet us in the slog." [1]

I feel convicted reading this quote; my tendency is to overlook the ordinary spaces of my life for God's grace, goodness, and presence. But as Warren argues, and more importantly as the manger shows, it is in the ordinary that He works – so it is there that we must choose to look for Him. The incarnation reminds us that our ability to stand in wonder and awe of God does not depend on extravagance or magnitude because He is abundantly present in the mundane of everyday life.

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[1] Tish Harrison Warren, *What Grows in Weary Lands*, 61.

My hope for this Advent season is that my awareness of that presence would be strengthened. That I would see His provision in our family gathering for a lively, meaningful meal. That I would notice His beauty in the warm, twinkling lights and beautiful decorations. That I would feel His holy presence as we lift up our candles and voice our praise together on Christmas Eve. May we all look for God this Advent season with keen eyes, intentional spirits, and eager hearts – finding Him even in the most ordinary places.

- Ryann Brown



ADVENT DAY 13
FRI., DEC. 11

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 arrance 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



ADVENT DAY 14
SAT., DEC. 12

In December of 2020, I wrote an article for the Rooted Parent blog entitled *"A Weary World Rejoices."* Most of us remember only too well how tired and discouraged we felt after many months of lockdowns, social distancing, and fears of sickness and death because of the Covid virus. I must confess that, as I sit here and type this six years later, those unpleasant memories still carry a tremendous weight that makes me want to forget them forever.

But that phrase from the beautiful hymn "O Holy Night" – a weary world rejoices – resonates with me, and though I really tried to think of a different angle for this reflection, I kept coming back to it. I am weary, and I suspect many of you are, too.

Wars are raging in Ukraine, the Middle East, and South Sudan. Our newsfeeds are filled with division, injustice, and hatred. Families fracturing over political differences are becoming all too common. For many, as online interactions with others explode, personal engagement with those people right around us dwindles. Despite our "connectedness" there is an epidemic of loneliness around the world.

Some of us are tired from years of chronic pain, fatigue, and depression, fighting battles that others never see. Many of us this year have dealt and are still dealing with the sting of death, learning to live with grief that never goes away. Some of us feel the burden of personal responsibilities or professional disappointments that threaten to overwhelm us. We all, in our own ways, understand weariness.

Yet God, out of his incomprehensible love and abundant goodness, gives this weary world a reason to rejoice.

Two thousand years ago he gave a couple weary from grueling travel and months of social judgment and disapproval a beautiful baby boy who would literally change the world.

To shepherds accustomed to being ignored or scorned he gave hope for equality and justice.

To heavenly angels he gave a reason to share the good news and sing glorious praises.

He still gives those reasons to rejoice today. While the world still may be "in sin and error pining," we as Jesus's followers know that God fulfills his promises. He sent Jesus as a baby to be the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and he will fulfill his promise to send him again to reign victorious over a majestic new heaven and earth.

As we wait, we hold fast to the words of the prophet Micah concerning Jesus: "… and he will **be** their peace." (Micah 5:5). May we rejoice as we find rest and peace through Jesus in our weary world.

- Tracey Rector



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:

8In 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?



ADVENT DAY 16
MON., DEC. 14

Growing up, one of my favorite parts of Christmas was going to my Paw Paw and Net Net's (grandparents) house. I remember being so eager to get through Christmas morning. Not necessarily because I wanted to open presents, although that certainly didn't hurt, but because I knew what was waiting for me afterward. My cousins would all be at Net Net and Paw Paw's, and all I wanted to do was play. I wanted to get through breakfast, get through presents, and get in the car as quickly as possible. Once we got there I was in a continual state of joy. I never lost a game to my cousins, and was always the best athlete. Looking back, I don't think I was necessarily rushing through Christmas. I was rushing toward the people who made Christmas special.

As I've gotten older, I've started to recognize just how important community is. We were never meant to do life alone. From the very beginning, God created humanity for relationships. But I think there's an even deeper reason community matters. When we look at the very nature of God, we see that He has existed in perfect community for all eternity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three distinct persons, yet one God, eternally existing in perfect unity and love. Before creation, before humanity, before anything existed God was not alone. Relationship wasn't something He needed creation to provide; it was already part of His eternal nature. And because we are created in His image, we were made to reflect that same love and unity in our relationships with one another.

Then this disease we call sin entered the world, and with it came separation. Our relationship with God was fractured, and our relationships with one another followed. We see that separation even still in our 2026 lives. We live in a world that is increasingly divided, isolated, and disconnected.

But that is exactly why this Christmas story becomes so beautiful.

One of the names given to Jesus in Matthew 1:23 is Immanuel, God with us. The God who created the universe, who spoke everything into existence, chose

to enter His creation. He didn't remain distant. He didn't simply send instructions from heaven. He came to be with us. John 1:14 says, *"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."* Jesus stepped into our broken world, taking on humanity so that we could be reconciled to God.

But His coming accomplished more than restoring our relationship with God. It brought us into a family. Ephesians 2:14 tells us that Christ Himself is our peace, breaking down the dividing wall of hostility between us. Then, in verse 19, Paul reminds us that through Christ, we are no longer strangers and aliens, but members of the household of God. Think about the significance of that. The Gospel doesn't just give us a Savior; it gives us a family. People who may have nothing else in common are brought together through the person of Jesus. Our unity isn't built on shared interests, backgrounds, or personalities. It's built on a shared Savior.

And that changes the way we understand community. The church isn't simply a place we go on Sundays, but it's a family we have been brought into. We're called to bear one another's burdens, encourage one another, forgive one another, and love one another. We aren't just meant to receive the love of Christ; we're called to reflect it to the people around us.

So, as we approach Christmas, I keep thinking about that little boy who couldn't wait to get to his grandmother's house. He was excited about the people waiting for him, even if he didn't fully understand why. And maybe there's something worth remembering in that. The Christmas story is ultimately about a God who wanted to be with His people so much that He came down and dwelt among them.

So in this Advent season, may we remember that we were never meant to do this walk alone. May we recognize the family Christ has brought us into, and may we become the kind of community that reflects his love to this world. Let us dwell with one another, making room around the table for all of those around us. Christ didn't remain at a distance but stepped near us, and calls us to do the same.

- Sammy D Camargo



'Tis the time of year for…I'll just say it: JOY! I mean PURE JOY!

I know we hear that word over and over at this season of year, but that's because "truer words have never been spoken!" I always tell my children that "sayings" are around because they are personal and life-applicable and apply to the masses. Jesus had a few of those, you know. He shared "many-a-saying" with his disciples, and many of them were around a table, breaking bread, fellowshipping (is that a word?). He had wise words for most people he met… personal, life-applicable, life-changing.

He shares those words with all of us even now, the many he has never met here on earth but who he knows oh so personally! He takes time to fellowship with US daily…if we let him!

Jesus taught these "words of wisdom" in Mark 10:15: "I promise you that you cannot get into God's kingdom, unless you accept it the way a child does." As we get older in this crazy life we live, sometimes we forget the importance of simply taking stock of this life we have been blessed with. We forget that it's not what we have, but who we are, how we treat others. Do we take time to break bread and listen to fellow journeyers, sharing our lives as well, our faith?

So I propose that this season we stop focusing on what we don't have and, with great gratitude, simply find joy in all that we do. Let's just join the "kids' table" and, with the faith of a child, celebrate the birth of our Christ with all the enthusiasm that comes along with that. For no one is better at experiencing joy than the "kids' table" this time of year!

- Cindy Williams, Beloved Friend and Church Member
1963–2023, (From Advent 2016)



For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior, which is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11

I think it would be safe to say that most members of Brookwood reading this "at our age" would agree that they miss the simpler times at Christmas, the traditions, the less demanding calendars, the awe in our young children's faces etc., etc.

Many years ago when my girls were growing up we had one particular tradition that meant a lot to us on Christmas Eve, after they had gone to bed I would take the crib with baby Jesus out of the $9.99 Sears nativity set and the next morning Shannon and Bethany would place Him back in the manger while we read the Christmas story together, reiterating His wonderful birth to us.

Years later, I sold that little nativity set with much sentimental sadness, in a yard sale, not realizing until later that Baby Jesus had fallen out of it on the ground. I had no name or phone number to follow up with the buyer.

To this day I keep that same Baby Jesus out all year, in our present house, close to Bethany's memorial corner... she honored Him as well as anybody I've ever known.

I'm so thankful that Jesus comes into our lives and homes to stay and never complains about a little dust. Plus you don't have to keep Him in a manger to know His love for you.

Happy Holidays to you and yours... hope you can keep it simple!

- Nancy English



ADVENT DAY 19
THURS., DEC. 17

My birthday is 9 days before Christmas. I often wished I had a summer birthday. Those kids got presents twice a year. Mine all came at once. As a young child, my parents did a great job of separating my birthday from Christmas activities. The tree was never put up until my birthday was over and there were certainly no birthday/Christmas combo gifts from family or close friends. I thought this was great, but as I entered my teenage years I started to have a change of heart and was okay with blurring the lines a bit. I thank Christmas music and Dr. Herman Cobb for that.

I love music and especially, Christmas music. I was very active in the youth group at First Baptist Church in Cullman, AL. We had a very large youth choir and I was in the youth ensemble, The Way. The Way was asked to perform at all types of functions in and around Cullman. We sang at political rallies, 4th of July celebrations, Easter sunrise services at the Ave Maria Grotto and of course we were very busy during the Christmas holidays. Despite the sometimes hectic pace of the holidays, my friends always found a way to celebrate my birthday. One special memory is when they sang happy birthday for me from the top three rows of the living Christmas tree the first year the ensemble participated with the adult choir for this holiday spectacular at First Baptist. I was slowly learning that celebrating Christmas didn't interfere with celebrating my birthday at all. My pastor at the time, Dr. Herman Cobb, had a birthday in December too. He once said to me, "Why wouldn't you want to celebrate your birth alongside the celebration of the greatest gift ever given? We have something unique in common with our Lord and Savior."

Christmas seems to come earlier and earlier every year. Halloween is not even over before Christmas decorations start showing up in stores, Christmas movies can be found on multiple platforms, and my beloved Christmas music starts to be heard. I'm okay with this.

Advent is my favorite time of year. The sights, the smells, the sounds. I love that I often get to share my birthday celebration with a beloved holiday event. I love that our church observes Advent and I cherish the Advent devotionals that are provided for us. The earlier the celebrating starts the more opportunities we have to share why we celebrate Christmas and observe Advent. It's remembering and celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago and anticipating and preparing for Christ promised return.

- Renita Rigney



ADVENT DAY 20
FRI., DEC. 18

The virginity of Mary and her giving birth escaped the notice of the ruler of this age; so too did the death of the Lord—three mysteries of a cry which were accomplished in the silence of God.

How then did he become manifest to the aeons [Or: ages; or: world]? A star in the sky shone brighter than all the stars. Its light was indescribable and its novelty created astonishment. All the other stars, along with the sun and the moon, formed a chorus to that star, and its light surpassed all the others. And there was a disturbance over whence it had come, this novel thing, so different from the others.

Hence all magic was vanquished and every bondage of evil came to nought. Ignorance was destroyed and the ancient realm was brought to ruin, when God became manifest in a human way, for the newness of eternal life. And that which had been prepared by God received its beginning. From that time on, all things were put in commotion because the dissolution of death was taking place.

- Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Ephesians, ch. 19, approx. 110 AD.

ADVENT DAY 21
SAT., DEC. 19

Advent Poem

If as Herod, we fill our lives with things,
And again with things--
If we consider ourselves so unimportant
That we must fill every moment
Of our lives with action,
When will we have time
To make the long, slow journey
Across the desert as did the Magi,
Or sit and watch the stars
As did the Shepherds,
Or brood over the Coming of the Child
As did Mary?
For each one of us
There is a desert to travel,
A star to discover,
And a being within ourselves
To bring to life.





Love

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 continue here with Advent Love.

Read

1 John 4:7–21

7 Beloved, 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.

13 By 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 you neighbors (bake them cookies, rake their leaves, etc.).

4. Come join us at the Christmas Eve Service!



"It was not a silent night."

These opening words to Andrew Peterson's "Labor of Love" have stuck with me ever since I first heard them. The intentional subversiveness is right up my alley, but my smirk slowly faded as the raw beauty of the picture set in. We tend to have an expectation of perfection for Christmas, even when we imagine the first one. We picture a swept floor, fresh hay in the manger, the animals lying calmly as if they knew what Mary knew. However, the reality was far from that: a scandalous pregnancy, an uncomfortable journey, no space in the guest room, and a dirty feed trough for a crib.

But Christ was still there. In the end, that's all that mattered to Mary and Joseph.

The expectation of perfection extends to our Christmas celebrations as well. Rehearsals for worship services begin months in advance. Decorations, presents, and food get planned and prepped. Family schedules are synchronized. Despite all the work, Christmas may not look exactly as we hope: actors forget lines, the food overcooks, kids get sick, the table has fewer people around it.

But Christ is still there, ready for communion all the same. For many of us, this Christmas may not look exactly like we hoped it would, and that's ok. For Mary and Joseph, the first Christmas didn't either.

- Stephen Rhea



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 Voskamp



This past year has been one of tension. Not the angsty kind of tension. Not really even the stressed out version of tension. No, it's been the kind of tension that holds opposing things at the same time. Good and bad. Life giving and loss. Despair and hope.

In the life of our church we've lost some dear friends. Death is gut wrenching, and it should be. It's a reminder that all is not as it should be.

In the midst of it all, I've seen the light of God's goodness penetrate the dark shadows. That goodness has looked like vulnerability. It's looked like speaking the truth, even when it's difficult. It's looked like allowing others to see our honest, raw emotion when words wouldn't come. It's looked like showing up for each other in the simplicity of our presence.

Advent holds this exact tension.

The prophet Isaiah talks about this: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined" (Isaiah 9:2).

Advent reminds us of our longing. Advent also reminds us that our longing was fulfilled, is being fulfilled, and will be fulfilled.

As you sit in the tension this Advent season, remember the one who came into it. The light continues to shine. Choose light.

- Larry McCutcheon



CHRISTMAS EVE

While waiting in a Nazi prison cell in 1943 a few weeks before Advent, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote these words to a friend:

> "A prison cell, in which one waits, hopes, does various unessential things, and is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened from the outside, is not a bad picture of Advent."

Shortly after penning those words, Bonhoeffer was executed by the Nazis. But what a prophetic word about Christmas Day and every day after: The door of freedom for him and for us today is still opened from the outside by the entry of Jesus Christ into our world. Such is the miracle of salvation which has come to us from the outside--from eternity into our fragile and desperate world!

Now, go and receive the miracle with loved ones and—all the more—with the One Who guided you to the manger and Who will carry all of us on our Homeward Journey! Hallelujah! Christ is born!!!!

Jim Barnette
Beloved Pastor & Friend
March 21, 1961-February 22, 2021
(From Advent 2019)



FRI., DEC. 25

CHRISTMAS DAY

Jesus' birth is a bright gift of hope. By the power of God's Spirit, life brims with possibility, even in the valleys of shadow and death. Christ comes into the world to overcome every impossibility and to bring light into every darkness.

As we enter Advent this year, I am particularly drawn to the beautiful tension present in the birth of our Savior and the inevitable experience of death and loss. Cemeteries and columbariums are sacred spaces that have a lot to teach us about living well. Our lives are better when we live in view of our mortality and with eternity in mind.

For me, this connection between life and death deeply affects how I feel about our Columbarium patio, which we recently dedicated. The columbarium offers this unique proximity of absence (or temporary separation from our loves ones) and the presence of life and community.

The birth of Jesus touches every death and holds out the promise of empty tombs.

I love the thought of dozens of ECC boys and girls playing in the patio area. They have spent many hours peering out the windows of their classrooms as the area has been transformed from abandoned playground to a mud pit to a beautiful space. They have been captivated by the machinery, by the workers, by the slow but steady progress. I like the thought of such vitality and curiosity swirling around this hallowed space dedicated to remembrance and gratitude.

Rather than yielding to despair when faced with mortality, the birth of Christ invites us to hope and to dream. To believe that the love of God is never out of reach because we are never out of God's reach. All of Psalm 23 is wonderful, but my favorite image is found in the final verse: "Surely goodness and mercy (chesed) shall follow me all the days of my life…" The word translated "follow" in English usually means to pursue. The extravagant love of God is never stationary or stagnant. It is on the hunt!

I am reminded of Deuteronomy 28:2 – "All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the Lord your God!" God is pursuing us, not to harm us, but to impart the light of his love in our lives.

This Advent season, let us all be reminded that Jesus came into the world, chasing after us to redeem us, always speaking life into the dark caverns of death and despair. Take a moment this Christmas to visit the columbarium patio and be encouraged that the heavenly cloud of witnesses surrounds you!

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." John 11:25-26

- Blake Dempsey

