

# Advent Devotionals

## 2021



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## November 28, 2021 - First Sunday of Advent

by Jason Mikes

*"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*

*He told them this parable:*

*"Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near."*

*"Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."*

*"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."*

### **Luke 21:25-36**

God is holy, holy, holy. To be holy, God must declare all that is good. He must then ensure that the debt for every wrong, for every hurt, for every act of evil that is not good, no matter how slight, must be paid in full. That is what we read about in the passage above and in many like it throughout the Bible. It is terrifying to think of facing the holy, almighty creator of the Universe, and suffer the just wrath we are due.

God, however, is perfectly loving and merciful. The passage says our "redemption is drawing near" and that we "may be able to escape" God's wrath. But how could that be? Can perfect justice and perfect mercy both be served? If God is perfectly merciful, He must overlook every wrong and every act of evil, no matter how hurtful and atrocious. How loving is that? How just is that? How can God be perfectly holy, perfectly just AND perfectly merciful?

The answer, of course, is Jesus. Jesus tells us that justice must be served and the debt for evil must be paid. But He has paid the debt for us. Holiness, goodness, justice and mercy all exist in God...God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The awe and wonder I feel for God is not just His great power and holiness, but the gentleness, forgiveness, mercy and grace He gives me through Jesus Christ my savior.

Advent is associated with Christmas. I discovered my favorite Christmas hymn several years ago at Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church when it was performed by Dr. Jim Cochran and one of the incredibly talented singers he often invites. The hymn is called "Winter Snow," written by Audrey Assad, and it beautifully depicts our God of perfect justice and perfect mercy. The lyrics are as follows:



*You could have come like a mighty storm  
With all the strength of a hurricane  
You could have come like a forest fire  
With the power of heaven in your flame  
  
But you came like a winter snow  
Quiet and soft and slow  
Falling from the sky in the night  
To the earth below*

*You could have swept in like a tidal wave  
Or an ocean to ravish our hearts*

*You could have come through like a roaring flood  
To wipe away the things we've scarred*

*But you came like a winter snow  
You were quiet, you were soft and slow  
Falling from the sky in the night  
To the earth below*

*Your voice wasn't in a bush burning  
No, your voice wasn't in a rushing wind  
It was still, it was small, it was hidden*

*You came like a winter snow  
Quiet and soft and slow  
Falling from the sky in the night  
To the earth below.*



**Additional Readings:**

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Psalm 25:1-10

1 Thessalonians. 3:9-13

Luke 21:25-36

**November 29, 2021**

**by Amber Grider**

**Promises**

*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**

I think of coming home and all of those who won't be able to be there when I arrive...for various reasons. Some because of work or school. Some because they have made other arrangements or obligations with special people in their lives. But others won't be there because they are sick – with various diseases such as cancer or depression. There are other illnesses such as alcoholism and drug abuse that can keep people from their homes, as well. It is my prayer for each of these people that God sees through their mangled hearts to the beautiful person they are meant to be and keeps His promise of not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance!

Say a prayer for those who must be away from family and friends this Advent season for health, school, work or any other reason.

**Additional Readings:**

Psalm 90

Numbers 17:1-11

2 Peter 3:1-18



**November 30, 2021**

by Laura Parsons Swartz,  
VPC Consultant in Christian Education, 1987-1992

**A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God**

*Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations...  
So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom...  
Let your work be shown to your servants and your glorious power to their children...  
Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us,  
yes, establish the work of our hands.*

**Psalm 90**

In the suffering and toil and trouble of Covid, we look to our Lord to “satisfy us in the morning with [His] steadfast love.” In social distancing we have wisely kept away from our families spread around the country and the world, but we have felt the Lord’s presence and given thanks for the gifts of technology to “see” each other virtually. In coming out of our pandemic cocoons we seek to serve the Lord with gladness and to come back into His sanctuary of worship with praise. We ask that the Joy of the Lord will be upon us and establish the work of our hands in whatever new mission we are called to build, re-build, re-invent, re-fashion. We want to recognize and be a part of the NEW THING that God is already doing for the world.

**Prayer:**

*Abba, Father,  
We give you thanks and praise for the gift of guidance in your Word through Moses.  
We ask for your favor to help us wait well and serve well in this Advent season.  
We wait for the grand Celebration of New Life that you provided in the human birth of God the Son, Jesus--Christmas.  
We wait for the day of celebration we will feel when we can truly embrace each other,  
friends, sons and daughters and children and grandchildren—every generation!  
Meanwhile, we stand on tiptoe to catch rays of Hope, ready to be filled with Your Holy Spirit,  
assigned as Your Hands and Feet, for Your Will and Your Way in Your World.  
In Jesus, the Morning Star’s name, we pray. AMEN.*

Offered with Love, Shalom over Chaos.

**Additional Readings:**

Psalm 90  
2 Samuel 7:18–29  
Revelations 22:12–16



**December 1, 2021**

**by Jason Mikes**

*May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us—  
yes, establish the work of our hands.*

**Psalm 90:17**

*Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and he said:*

*“Who am I, Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?  
And as if this were not enough in your sight, Sovereign Lord, you have also spoken about the future of the house of  
your servant—and this decree, Sovereign Lord, is for a mere human!*

*What more can David say to you? For you know your servant, Sovereign Lord. For the sake of your word and  
according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to your servant.”*

**2 Samuel 7:18-21**

*“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I  
am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.*

*Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates  
into the city.”*

**Revelation 22:12-16**

In the first scripture passage, the Psalmist prays to God with a plea...deliver your people from affliction by establishing the work of our hands. In the second scripture passage, King David prays to God with praise...thank you for your provision to me and your people and thank you for a plan and provision for our future! The final scripture passage is Jesus perfecting His ultimate work and promise to us...I have paid the price for the world's sin so that those who believe in me may re-enter Eden and have my presence again for all eternity.

Jesus saves not only in the ever after, but in the here and now. He gives us purpose to expand the Kingdom of God in all that we do (“establish the work of our hands”). Jesus’ provision (“who am I that you have brought me this far”) gives us power to do the good works he planned for us to do even before laying the foundations of the world (Ephesians 2:10). His provision and power lead us to praise Him that He would even be mindful of us and give us even a small part in the Kingdom of God for our joy and His glory. His promise of the ultimate Kingdom of God (“they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city”) gives us hope, which hope gives us joy, which joy allows us to persevere our present struggles and continue running the race He has set before us.

***Prayer:***

*Heavenly Father,*

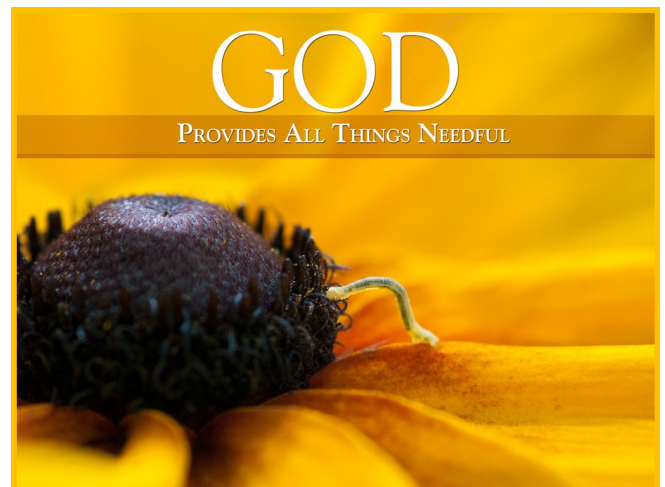
*Thank you for your promise. Thank you for giving me a  
purpose and for giving me provision and power to fulfill that  
purpose. Thank you for your presence, which allows me to  
persevere life's struggles. I praise you for the gift of Jesus and  
that His perfection purchased my redemption. It is in His  
name I pray. Amen.*

**Additional Readings:**

Psalm 90

Isaiah 1:24–31

Luke 11:29–32



**December 2, 2021**

by Jason Mikes

Today's scripture passage for our Advent devotional is **Luke 11:29-32**. In this passage, Jesus just cast out a demon from a man and some in the crowd of onlookers were amazed. Others in the crowd dismissed Jesus and alleged that His power did not come from God but from Satan. Others in the crowd seeking to test and catch Jesus in a lie demanded that He provide a sign from Heaven. Here was Jesus' response:

*"This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom; and now something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now something greater than Jonah is here."*

Jesus, in no uncertain terms, claimed to be God. Therefore, whether in that generation, this generation, or the generations to come, people cannot just accept Him as a good man or wise teacher. He is either a delusional and/or evil liar, or He is exactly who He claims to be...God on Earth to take away the sins of the World. By the grace of God, through the faith He has bestowed, some in the world accept the truth of Jesus and who He claims to be. Others reject His claim. Others still reject His claim, but hedge their bet just a little by suggesting, "I'll believe He is God if He gives me an irrefutable sign from Heaven." Jesus IS the sign so lack of one is no excuse.

The Ninevites were an evil people and were enemies to all the world, including the nation of Israel. Yet when God sent Jonah to preach to them, they recognized the word from God and repented. The Queen of Sheba traveled all the way from Africa just to hear the wisdom of King Solomon, which she recognized to be the word from God. If these non-Israelites, these people not among God's chosen nation, could recognize the word from God and act upon it, then what excuse did the people of Jesus' generation, and the generations after, have for not recognizing the Word of God as He stood and preached before them? The fact of the matter is, which Jesus points out, is that we do not reject Jesus because we lack a sign from God. We know in our souls who He is and where He is from. We reject Him because we want to be our own God, our own sovereign, or we are beholden to something else we would have to give up if Jesus is our Lord.

**Prayer:**

*Dear Heavenly Father, if there is any idol or excuse keeping me from believing in Jesus, or growing in faith and love, bring it to my attention and help me to remove it. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords and I want Him to have sovereignty in my life. I make a poor god and the things that I turn to in order to "save" me have no such power. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

**Additional Readings:**

Luke 1:68-79

Malachi 3:5-12

Philippians 1:12-18a

*Love* the **LORD** your God...  
and **hold fast** to him.



DEUTERONOMY 30:20, NIV

**December 3, 2021**

by Jason Mikes

*"So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me," says the Lord Almighty.*

*"I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty.*

*"But you ask, 'How are we to return?' 'Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.*

*"But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?'*

*"In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe," says the Lord Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the Lord Almighty.*

**Malachi 3:5-12**

Did you catch that? During His 40 days in the wilderness, Jesus rebukes Satan and tells him, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." But in Malachi, God invites us to test Him...and it is the only place in scripture He invites us to do so. Bring your whole tithe into the Lord's storehouse and watch Him open the floodgates of blessing!

Be careful, however, of treating God only as a good investment of money (give 10% for an abundant return). The first part of the blessing you will receive is a reordering of your heart and priorities. Giving is better than receiving (generosity brings the greatest joy). Money is a tool, not a master (all that we have is a gift from God and we are only stewards). Once that reordering happens, and your desires for God and money are properly prioritized, then you can expect the next part of the blessing (greater resources and responsibilities to steward to further the Kingdom of God).

**Additional Readings:**

Luke 1:68-79

Malachi 3:13-18

Philippians 1:18b-26



**December 4, 2021**

by Richard Grunert

**Isaiah 41:10** is a promise from God...

*Don't be afraid, for I am with you.*

*Do not be dismayed, for I am your God.*

*I will strengthen you and help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.*

**Faith...** We have faith in God to do what he has promised, We can be absolutely assured He will.

**Hope...** Who but God has a home for us that is eternal? Who but God forgives our sins? Who but God can give us a life that will last forever? No wonder He is our Hope.

We ask the Holy Spirit that lives within us for guidance, to love our neighbors as ourselves, to be thankful for all God's blessings, to remind us to take care of the needs of others and keep us from sin. As a Christian book author said... life is not about us, it's about who we serve.

**Additional Readings:**

Luke 1:68-79

Malachi 4:1-6

Luke 9:1-6



**December 5, 2021**

**Second Sunday of Advent**

by Amber Grider

**Thanksgiving**

*I thank my God every time I remember you.*

**Philippians 1:3**

As we move through Advent and life gets busier and more hectic, I sit and think about this verse more and more. I thank my God every time I remember you. It could be a person I see every day at school, work or church. It could be someone I hardly ever see, but they "pop up" in my Shutterfly memories. Or it could be a person who has died, recently or not. We miss and remember them all the same.

We thank God for each of these people sharing their gifts and talents every day. Even when they don't think they are doing anything special, there is something in their efforts that beams how extraordinary they are. This phrase reminds me that God's blessings are everywhere, even on our journey home for Christmas.

Say a prayer for a special person whom you hold close to your heart.

**Additional Readings:**

Malachi 3:1-4

Luke 1:68-79

Philippians 1:3-11

Luke 3:1-6



**December 6, 2021**

by Pat Counts

**A Harvest of Joy - A Song of Ascents**

*When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,  
we were like those who dream.  
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,  
and our tongue with shouts of joy;  
then it was said among the nations,  
"The Lord has done great things for them."  
The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.  
Restore our fortunes, O Lord,  
like the watercourses in the Negeb.  
May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.  
Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.*

**Psalm 126**

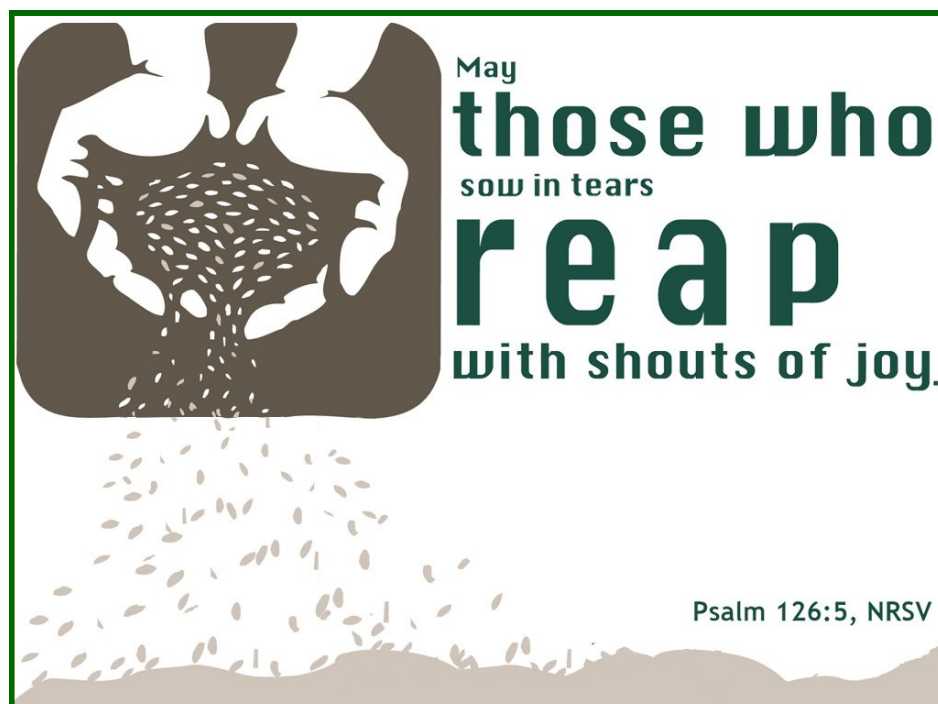
O God, my father, we feel your presence as we approach this Advent Season. How we long for your guidance and divine love. We are struggling in this time of a pandemic and ask for your arms to hold us in love and safety. Teach us to always be kind and loving to our neighbors that we may be worthy to enter your kingdom and sing your praises evermore. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

**Additional Readings:**

Psalm 126

Isaiah 40:1–11

Romans 8:22–25



**December 7, 2021**

by Dixie Bibb

*Make your paths known to me, Lord; teach me your ways.  
Lead me by your faithfulness and teach me, for you are God my savior;  
in you I put my hope all day long.  
Remember, Lord, your tender care and love unfailing, for they are from old.*

**Psalm 25: 4-6**

At the Munford Presbyterian Church US, where I grew up, everyone went to Sunday school, and I mean everyone. If you were 2 years old, you were promoted from Nursery to Sunday school; and yes, Gold Stars tracked attendance, in each class for children and adults. Learning was highly valued, and never stopped, no matter your age. We had very faithful Sunday School teachers such as Mr. James, who for 50 years taught the 5th Graders, and his sister, Mrs. Agnes, taught the high school class (but only for a couple of decades). The young adults class had members in their 40s, because they weren't "old enough" to be promoted to the Adult Men's or Adult Women's Class (ha, ha). How faithful God was to provide role models and educators to teach me. These and the many other Sunday School teachers loved us, and helped us to experience God's love, and learn God's ways through reading our weekly lessons, listening and guiding us to deeper understanding. How faithful God has been to us to provide teachers and preachers to enlighten us to the meaning of the scriptures!

Between Sunday School and Church, we all gathered in the sanctuary to sing a few songs, and anyone who had a birthday would come forward. You dropped in the correct number of coins into a piggy bank that looked like Westminster Abbey (adults and children, we were less than 100), and the congregation recited:

Many Happy Returns on the day of thy birth,  
May sunshine and gladness be given.  
And may the dear Lord prepare thee on earth,  
For a beautiful birthday in heaven!

Today, on our birthdays, one of my brothers or my sister sends a group text with the above. This helps us to remember God's tender care and unfailing love.

***Prayer:***

*Dear God, we are so grateful for your love. Through Christ, you have saved us because you loved Jesus and us. How amazing is that!! Each day you give us opportunities to learn about you. Thank you for our teachers today and in days past. Thank you for providing Your Word and the Holy Spirit. Give me wisdom to seek and learn from you today. Thanks be to GOD, in Christ's name we pray. AMEN.*

**Additional Readings:**

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Psalm 25:1-10

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Luke 21:25-36



**December 8, 2021**

**by John Braun**

*Behold, an angel of the lord appeared and said to her, "The Lord has heard your prayer. You will conceive a child and give birth, and your offspring will be spoken of throughout the entire world."*

**The Gospel of James 4:1**

Today is a special day in the long story of the baby Jesus. It may not be so special to us Presbyterians; in fact most of us have probably never heard of it. But it's very special for millions of Christians all around the world. It is called "The Feast of the Immaculate Conception," and it celebrates a very special mother who conceived a very special child on that day. That child was—are you paying attention?—Jesus' mother Mary.

According to the *Gospel of James*, (one of those early Christian scriptures that was not included in the Bible), an angel came to Mary's mother, Anna, one day and told her she, who had long grieved her barrenness, was about to become the mother of a very special child. The angel then rushed to Joachim, Anna's husband, who was tending sheep far away, telling him to hurry home because his prayers had been answered and his wife was pregnant. As you might imagine, Joachim indeed hurried home, where Anna met him at the door with a big hug and blurted the happy news: "The Lord God has blessed me abundantly."

This is, of course, just the beginning of a much longer and less familiar advent story and it prompts several thoughts. First, the familiar Christmas narratives of Matthew and Luke are beautiful and beloved stories, but they are not the only early stories leading up to Jesus' birth. Second, there's Anna, who reminds us that, like Mary and later Jesus, every baby is in a real way born divine—a sacred trust put in the hands of parents to "train up in the way they should grow," as the old proverb put it. It's an awesome responsibility! And seven months later Anna took it on as she nursed her newborn daughter and quietly proclaimed, "My soul is exalted today." Finally there's Joachim who, exhausted by the hasty trip home and the hubbub in his household, just faded to a quiet place and took a nap. Wouldn't you know—a husband falling asleep while his excited wife talked on. But the next day, rested, he brought a generous thank-you gift to the Temple. While there he looked deeply into his soul, and finding no sin he humbly confessed, "Now I know that the Lord has been gracious to me." Call it 'Joachim's advent prayer'. We could do worse than breathing it as our own this day.



**"The child to be born  
will be holy;  
he will be called  
Son of God."**

**Luke 1:35**

**Additional Readings:**

Psalm 126

Isaiah 19:18–25

2 Peter 1:2–15

***Jesus'  
mother,  
Mary***

**December 9, 2021**

**by Jason Mikes**

*When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed.*

**Psalm 126:1**

*Say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.*

*Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.*

**Isaiah 35:4-7**

*When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'" At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor."*

**Luke 7:20-22**

No more misfortune or fear! No more illness or disabilities! Barren wastelands will become fruitful paradises! But what about us? Yes, the world is broken by sin and will be fixed, but how will our hearts and minds be restored and redeemed from sin?

At the end of Jesus' sermon in the scripture passage from Luke 7, He gives us a hint of how our hearts and minds will be restored and redeemed like the rest of the brokenness.

*"I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John [the Baptizer]; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."*

**Luke 7:28**

John is a great man. The best man ever, according to Jesus. His assigned mission from God was to herald the coming of Jesus and make his path straight! Yet the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than him? Who are the people in the Kingdom of God?

That is us! By God's grace, we have been gifted faith in Jesus. And with that faith in Jesus, God the Son, who takes away the sins of the world, we have also been gifted with God the Holy Spirit who dwells within our hearts and minds. John was but a man made in the image of God. We are men and women with knowledge of and faith in all of Jesus' work, who have God in us!

Jesus secured our salvation and by the power of the Holy Spirit the restoration and redemption of our hearts and minds continues.

**Additional Readings:**

Psalm 126

Isaiah 35:3-7

Luke 7:18-30



**December 10, 2021**

by Linda Burwinkel

"Come unto Him all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

**Matthew 11:28**

This is one of the promises of God that we all enjoy -- peace that passes all understanding. Peace is something we all long for in this hectic world, especially when we look around and see everything falling apart, even in our own lives!

However, the coming of the Christ-child reminds us to bring our focus back to where "peaceful living waters flow," where God's grace is in abundance and just waiting for us to rest in the loving arms of Jesus.

**Prayer:**

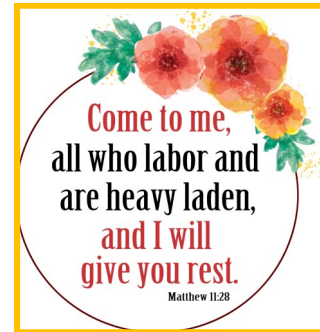
*Lord God, help us to "Come unto Him" - a baby lying in a manger.  
Help us to lift up our hearts in joy, and lay our burdens down! Amen.*

**Additional Readings:**

Isaiah 12:2-6

Amos 6:1-8

2 Corinthians 8:1-15



**December 11, 2021**

by Mary Lynn Myers

*This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people  
but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.  
Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves,  
others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ,  
and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.  
And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you,  
because of the surpassing grace God has given you.*

**2 Corinthians 9: 12-14**

When Steve and I decided to become Floridians and Presbyterians, after a lifetime as South Dakotans and Methodists, we looked for a new church family that made missions a priority. We found that family at Vanderbilt. And, at this special time of year, Advent, our Vanderbilt church family is especially generous in sharing our love with those in need in our community and in the world! Last week, I went shopping for a little girl, age 9, whose Christmas wishes were displayed on the Angel Tree in the Narthex, and yesterday I had the pleasure of helping staff the Heifer Table, where I purchased bees to honor our one year-old great niece (who will receive a stuffed bee and a picture book about the importance of bees). We are so fortunate to have opportunities like these, and so many others, to share the love of Christ with our neighbors—near and far! This Advent season, may you experience the joy of Christmas as you share His love.

**Prayer:**

*Dear God, thank you for the gift of your son, Jesus.  
Keep us always mindful of our many blessings  
and inspire us to share the love of Christ with our neighbors,  
both near and far. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

**Additional Readings:**

Isaiah 12:2-6

Amos 8:4-12

2 Corinthians 9:1-15



**December 12, 2021**  
**Third Sunday of Advent**  
by Susie Hilton

*Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid,  
for the Lord God is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.*

**Isaiah 12: 2**

God wants us to trust in Him. He shares in this verse that He is your strength and song. If you think on this truth and think about the fact that He is your salvation, your emotions will eventually line up with this truth. So today, if fear has been an issue in your life, be encouraged. Focus on the goodness of God and choose to let Him be your strength. As you do this, your emotions will follow too.



Thank You, Lord, for my wonderful salvation. Praise the Lord O my soul, for You are a great and mighty God. As I go into the world today as Your representative, give me increased boldness to speak the name of Jesus. May my life reflect Your grace and goodness, to Your praise and glory. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

**Additional Readings:**

Isaiah 12:2-6  
Amos 9:8-15  
Luke 1:57-66

**December 13, 2021**  
by Amber Grider

**Sharing Justly**

*In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none;  
and whoever has food must do likewise."*

**Luke 3:11**

These words can have no greater meaning than during Advent. It is true that there are always people without enough clothing, food or supplies to get them from one day to the next. And there are always people who have too much money and wealth and who need to learn the proper meaning of being neighborly, as the next verse describes. I believe we need to learn to be kind and gracious to one another. If that means paying for the person behind you in the fast-food line, giving a person in need of some food or clothing, or just listening when a person is sad, we need to do more of these things and less criticizing. No judgement, no rejection, and no discrimination... only LOVE. I am convinced that this verse is asking us to love our neighbors. There is no better way to show that than to give an extra coat if you have one. This lesson is so important when we are coming home for Christmas!

If you have anything extra this holiday season, give a gift to the Angel Tree, Operation Christmas Child, time at a food bank, or volunteer at a shelter. All of these will show how much you love those who don't have as much as we do.

**Additional Readings:**

Zephaniah 3:14-20  
Isaiah 12:2-6  
Philippians 4:4-7  
Luke 3:7-18



**December 14, 2021**

by Kay Beernink

*And in despair I bowed my head  
"There is no peace on earth," I said  
For hate is strong and mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

The news headlines seem to support the verse from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's, "I heard the Bells on Christmas Day." Daily we hear of tragedies in the news and often experience them in the midst of our own lives. "Where is God?" we say.

Isaiah 11:1-9 tells us that it will not always be this way. Because of an infant born over 2000 years ago, we have hope. God's Love entered our existence and the world will never be the same. Praise be to God.

*Then rang the bells more loud and deep  
God is not dead, nor doth he sleep.  
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail  
With peace on earth, good will to men.*

***Prayer:***

*Gracious and Loving God,  
The hope that you have given us in Christ can never be re-paid.  
We can only give ourselves to you in humble gratitude.  
May the love and peace you so freely offer become a reality this Advent.  
In His Name,  
Amen.*

**Additional Readings:**

Isaiah 11:1-9  
Numbers 16:1-19  
Hebrews 13:7-17



**December 15, 2021**

by The Rev. Dr. L. Roger Owens, Associate Professor of Leadership and Ministry,  
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

LORD, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.  
You forgave the iniquity of your people; you pardoned all their sin.  
You withdrew all your wrath; you turned from your hot anger.  
Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us.  
Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations?  
Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you?  
Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation.  
Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people,  
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.  
Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.  
Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.  
Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.  
The LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.  
Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

**Psalm 85**

Old Testament scholar James May points out a striking feature of Psalm 85: The psalm begins by testifying to God's already finished saving work; it sings of a fait accompli—God's salvation is a done deal. Then the situation changes: "Restore us again," the psalmist pleads. "Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you?" God's salvation is a done deal, and yet the people are still awaiting it.

Christians reading this psalm in Advent can relate. We look back to God's accomplished salvation in Christ—it's a done deal. And yet we look around and see a world still broken—sin has not been vanquished, shalom does not yet prevail. In Advent, we look forward to the time when God will make clear and complete what is already finished in Christ, when "faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from on high"—in other words, when God's kingdom of peace will fill all.

**Prayer:**

*Loving God, who through your Son Jesus Christ brought your kingdom to earth,  
in this season of Advent give us patience as we wait for your often-hidden kingdom to burst forth  
from the ground and rain down from the sky, until righteousness and peace fill all things.  
This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Additional Readings:**

Isaiah 11:1–9  
Numbers 16:20–35  
Acts 28:23–31





**December 16, 2021**

by Linda Burwinkler

*"For, unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,  
And the government shall be upon His shoulders,  
And His name shall be called,  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!"*

**Isaiah 9:6**

What happens when you become the Prince of Peace? From the manger to manhood, your life is never your own! For Jesus came to save the world, not to be a part of it. Then He says, "I can take care of that for you if you want." And He reaches down into a basin of grace, scoops up handfuls of mercy, and washes away your sin!"

**Prayer:**

*Dear God,*

*Thank you for the wonderful gift of your son, Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns and walks beside us every day of our lives!*

*Amen.*

**Additional Readings:**

Isaiah 11:1–9

Micah 4:8–13

Luke 7:31–35

**December 17, 2021**

by The Rev. Joseph Hedden Jr.

Pastor, Emmanuel Reformed United Church of Christ, Export, PA  
(Colleague of Pastor Rob Marrow)

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

You turn us back to dust, and say, "Turn back, you mortals."

For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night.

You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning;  
in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.

For we are consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed.

You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance.

For all our days pass away under your wrath; our years come to an end like a sigh.

The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong;  
even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

Who considers the power of your anger? Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you.

So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

Turn, O LORD! How long? Have compassion on your servants!

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us, and as many years as we have seen evil.

Let your work be manifest to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands —

O prosper the work of our hands!

**Psalms 90**

# **God is the source of true joy!**

Is there any time in American culture more thinly sentimental than "the holiday season?" There is an expectation, even in the church, that we must be happy in December surrounding ourselves with plastic and neon trinkets which shout "GLAD TIDINGS!" One almost feels morally inferior for admitting any nuanced emotion beside a shallow cheer.

How refreshing, then, this Advent to turn to Psalm 90! Psalm 90 is a realist's view of the tough moments in life. No tinsel and hot cocoa here. Rather, the Psalmist truthfully reports the alienation of humanity, being bound as we are by mortality and sin. Alongside our human experiences of dead-ends and bramble bushes, fears and anger, we discover the source of true joy: God and God's works. God's revelation pierces human struggle and a deep and authentic joy emerges (verse 14). May we all experience such joy this Advent.

## ***Prayer:***

*O God, you have been our dwelling place throughout the ages.  
As we reflect back on our lives, we can see your hands at work, molding us and shaping us.  
May we encounter you deeply today and may we be joyful in your unending love and grace.  
In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.*

## **Additional Readings:**

Psalm 80:1-7

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Hebrews 10:10-18



**December 18, 2021**

by The Rev. Robert J. Marrow

The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.  
Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.  
When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.  
Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth—  
when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil.  
When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,  
when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep,  
when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command,  
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,  
then I was beside him, like a master worker, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always,  
rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

**Proverbs 8:22-31**

It takes effort in today's world to seek true wisdom, wisdom from God. Worldly wisdom is more readily visible. We would be better served by seeking wisdom, focusing our thoughts and efforts on what God would have us do. In today's world, we can easily lose focus and grow numb to the voice of God's wisdom directing our steps and decisions. Increased technology and connectivity provide us with the ability to make informed decisions more quickly. The advances in technology also enable us to make decisions based whatever criteria we find appropriate. God rejoices as we make decisions based on true wisdom. We choose destruction when making decisions without hearing the voice of God's wisdom.

Whether we are young or old, whether we have a lot of life experience or very little life experience, whether we've been a Christian for decades or we have been following Christ for only a few days, we could all use a little more wisdom in our lives. When seeking wisdom, we would do well to ask ourselves, does what I'm thinking or hearing line up with the wisdom of God revealed through God's Word?

**Prayer:**

*May my thoughts and decisions forever be found in wisdom, Lord.  
May I seek You and your wisdom for my life daily.  
I ask and pray that wisdom leads me away from temptation  
and certain destruction by following worldly ways  
and that I delight in wisdom and love wisdom as I love you. Amen.*

*The LORD  
created me at  
the beginning  
of his work,  
the first of  
his acts of  
long ago.*

Proverbs 8:22, NRSV



**Additional Readings:**

Psalm 80:1-7  
Isaiah 42:10-18  
Hebrews 10:32-39

**December 19, 2021**

by Linda Burwinkel

*Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth, good will toward men.*

**Luke 2:14**

We all rejoice in beautiful decorations, extravagant Christmas gifts, wonderful parades, exuberant productions, and holiday concerts. These are all fabulous God-given abundances, but we must never forget that amid the tinsel and colored lights, Jesus was born in a stable with only animals and shepherds to worship Him. Behold, the son of God, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

**Prayer:**

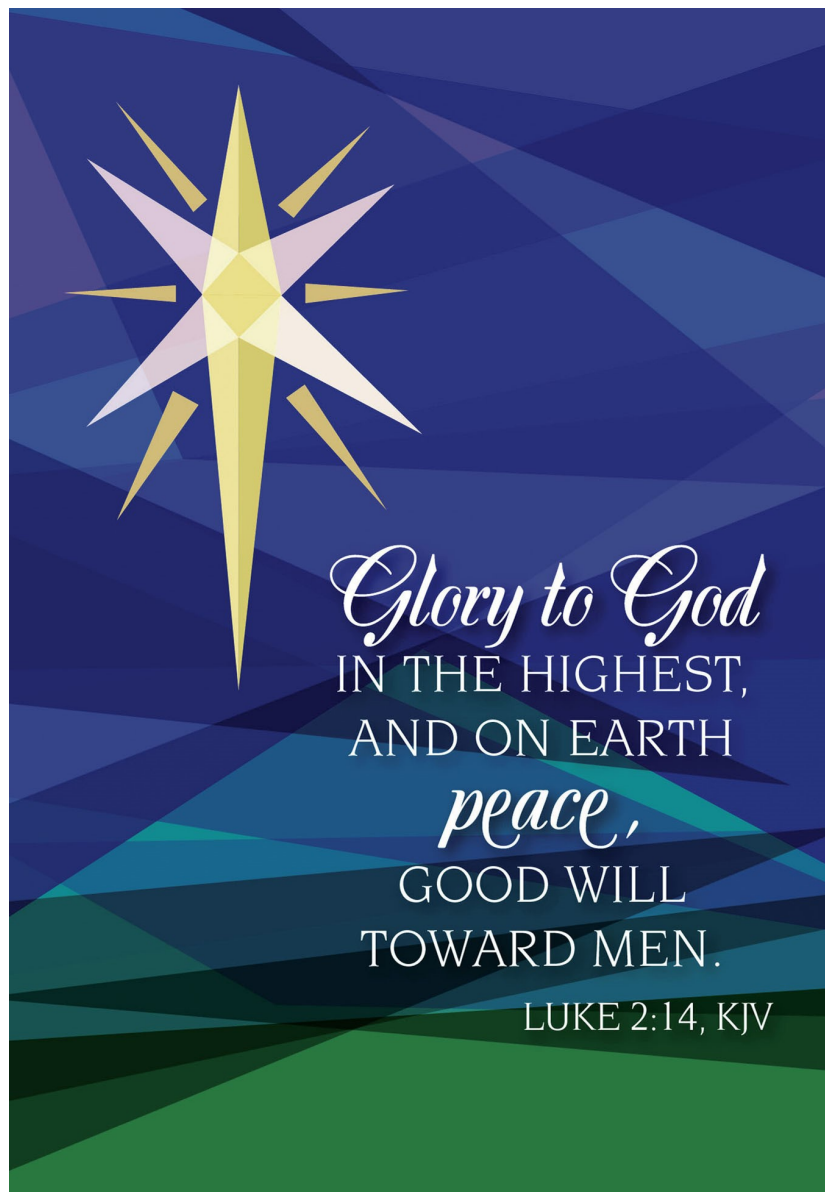
*Father God, don't ever let us forget from whence we come  
and help us be grateful every day of our lives for the blessing we receive.  
Keep us mindful of that baby in the manger who laid down His life for us! Amen.*

**Additional Readings:**

Psalm 80:1-7

Isaiah 66:7-11

Luke 13:31-35



**December 20, 2021**  
by Rev. Dr. Louis S. Thompson

**Psalm 132: 1-12**

***Come, Lord Jesus.***

The national editor of The Presbyterian Outlook, Rev. Teri McDowell Ott, shared with us that she had enough of wrangling of national elections that had the tenor of a raunchy reality show; the endless violence of war, especially in Yemen; the blatant racism in our country; the tsunami of mistrust that swamps us; the vitriolic hate ubiquitous on the web. She said, enough already. She calls for: Come, Lord Jesus. She said she did not know what the Parousia will have for us, but she speculated it had to be better than what we have now. She acknowledges the prayers we say today about the state of affairs are the same prayers we said 10, 20 years ago, even decades ago. Not much has changed. She awaits for reconciliation, for redemption, for the peace that passes understanding, of light and life and end of crying and mourning. She wants it now. She wants the meek to have their turn with the earth. She wants the last to be first, even if it means "I get moved to the back of the line." She will cheer for the underdog and gladly give up her seat if it means we all get to rest and rejoice. So, fervently she prays: Come, Lord Jesus.

I too pray: Come, Lord Jesus.

We too, pray: Come, Lord Jesus.

And we sing, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel", now it is time for Jesus.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Grace and Peace.

***Prayer:***

Come, Lord Jesus. Come.  
I am tired of waiting for you.  
I need you. Our country needs you.  
We have so many needs that it seems  
impossible for you to fulfill.  
But, we have every confidence in your  
wisdom and love for us.  
We know you could satisfy all our wishes.  
Come, Lord Jesus. Come.  
Come as the baby Jesus, if you will.  
But, please come, now. Now is the time.  
I pray it in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.



**Additional Readings:**

Micah 5:2-5a  
Luke 1:46b-55 or  
Psalm 80:1-7  
Hebrews 10:5-10  
Luke 1:39-45 [46-55]

**December 21, 2021**

by Bob Martin

**Psalm 113**

**God the Helper of the Needy**

As we read the Book of Psalms, we are led to understand the greatness of God and offer praise and thanksgiving for His mighty works. David is said to have written 73 of the 150 psalms — not only psalms of praise but also of confessions to God.

However, Psalm 113 is believed not to have been written by David. It begins by giving praise in verses 1 to 5.

*"Praise the name of the Lord,"*

*"Blessed be the name of the Lord,"*

*"The Lord is high above all nations, and His glory above the heavens."*

In verses 6 to 9, the scene shifts to explain how God is the helper to the needy:

*"He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy,"*

*"He gives the barren woman a home making her the joyous mother of children."*

I hope you will join me as we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Holy Child of Bethlehem giving continual praise and thanksgiving for Him and for all the blessings He has bestowed upon us.

**Merry Christmas Everyone!**

**Additional Readings:**

Psalm 113

Genesis 25:19–28

Colossians 1:15–20



**December 22, 2021**

by Amber Grider

**Togetherness in Christ**

*For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.*

**Ephesians 2:14-16**

Christ brings us together always. He never drives us apart. Instead, He finds ways to deliver differing opinions to a common ground. Some are wealthy or poor, Republican or Democrat, tall or short. He finds similarities between the groups and shows us how to get along. Right now, we are struggling with racial injustice, presidency concerns, Covid issues and so much more. There is much that separates us into "two bodies." But, when we learn to love kindness and walk humbly, I feel we might see the conclusion of a long battle. Victory by Jesus who teaches us these wonderful gifts and leads us home for Christmas.



Say a prayer for someone you don't particularly agree with or get along with. I think you will feel better about them, but definitely about yourself!

**Additional Readings:**

Luke 1:46b–55

Micah 4:1–5

Ephesians 2:11–22

**December 23, 2021**

**by Marie Jablonski**

*And Mary said: "My soul doth magnify the Lord."*

**Luke 1:46**

The Angel of the Lord has just told Mary that she would bear Jesus, the son of God. Mary accepts without hesitation or fear what the angel tells her, praising God for this honor.

How often do we find ourselves, like Mary, in situations that we did not expect? And, how do we respond?

Last year, I moved here in the midst of the pandemic. With everything closed, I would not be going home to spend Christmas with family and friends. I resigned myself to a year without Christmas. But, that was not to be. I had been watching the Vanderbilt virtual services and continued to do so during Advent.

Something wonderful happened when each week I heard the Christmas stories and sang the Christmas hymns that we hear and sing each year during Advent.

And, suddenly I knew! While I could not go home for Christmas, Christmas had come home to me!

Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of your son, Jesus Christ, whose birth brought Christmas into the world. Help us to trust, like Mary, that in any situation, we need not feel hopeless or frustrated, because you are always with us.

**Additional Readings:**

Luke 1:46b-55

Micah 4:6-8

2 Peter 1:16-21



**December 24, 2021**

**by Judy Deitch**

*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*

**Luke 2:14**

It was the week before Christmas and my mom was nearing the end of her earthly journey. Mom was on hospice care and was only expected to live a few more days. She was an active, long time and devoted member of church; her special joy was the choir and all the music. Knowing her love of music, the members of the choir asked if they could come to sing for Mom after choir practice, since she had not been able to attend church for quite a few weeks. My brother, sister and I thought that was a wonderful idea. We did not tell Mom, just in case they were unable to come for some reason.

The time was approaching for the choir to arrive. My sister and I were with Mom, when we heard many cars pulling up to the house. The blessing was about to begin. We told Mom there was a surprise about to happen and the choir was coming to sing for her. Her face lit up with surprise and joy. The entire choir entered the house and gathered around Mom's hospital bed which was set up in the dining room. They sang carols, including "O Little Town of Bethlehem," and ending with "Joy to the World." God's presence filled the house! After the choir left, one young man from church who was home for the holidays, and whom my parents had always encouraged with his musical talent, stayed to play a variety of pieces on Mom's piano. Again, God's presence filled the house!

His presence was felt by all who were there that evening! God reached out his arms through the choir and pianist to comfort Mom. She was at peace and ready to join her heavenly Father. It was a perfect evening filled with joy, peace and love. A few days after Christmas, Mom was "home!" Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!

***Prayer:***

Heavenly Father, thank you for the peace that comes only through you. In the name of Jesus, Amen!

**Merry Christmas!**

**Additional Readings:**

Nativity of the Lord I

Isaiah 9:2-7

Psalm 96

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]



**December 25, 2021**  
by Pastor Robert J. Marrow

**Scripture: Titus 3:4-7**

*But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*



**Devotional:**

As a child, I remember the simple joy found in spending Christmas Day with my family. From the moment one would wake in the morning until the moment that the final person awake would turn off the lights and slumber to their bed, every moment of the day was filled to overflowing with the joy found in being with those you deeply love. The sound of laughter would fill our home until that moment when a hush would occur and it became silent. The house became silent because the sounds would be exchanged with the aroma of a delicious Christmas dinner. We would sit as a family and share a meal. As I look back over those times, I am simply reminded of the delight, joy, and love expressed one to the other as we were blessed with the presence of each other. That time together, the meal, the presence of each individual were all gifts that I cherish!

The focus at Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church for 2021 Advent and Christmas season was an invitation for all to "Come Home for Christmas." We made every effort to provide opportunities for the VPC church family to gather and receive the simple blessings that God provides to each of us through the gift of the other. There were gatherings for fellowship. There were gatherings with music. There were gatherings with food. Each event was focused on people and planned with the hope that the VPC family would experience the grace of the Spirit that God poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. I pray that as we continue our journey together in the coming year, we continue to cherish the gift that was freely given to us when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared. May we continue our journey with Jesus as we remember that love never ends!

**Prayer:**

*God of grace, thank you for the goodness and loving kindness that you freely provide to us.  
We are thankful for all of the gifts that you graciously provide for us,  
our family, our friends, and the church.  
Yet we are most grateful for the gift of your son, Jesus Christ.  
We are thankful for his birth and for his saving grace on the cross.  
Teach us how to respond to such love by loving one another.  
Amen.*

**When the kindness and love  
of God our Savior appeared,  
he saved us.**

Titus 3:4-5, NIV

## Happy New Year!

by Molly Godley

*The LORD answer you in the day of trouble! The name of the God of Jacob protect you!*

*May he send you help from the sanctuary, and give you support from Zion.*

*May he remember all your offerings, and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices.*

*May he grant you your heart's desire, and fulfill all your plans.*

*May we shout for joy over your victory, and in the name of our God set up our banners.*

*May the LORD fulfill all your petitions.*

*Now I know that the LORD will help his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven*

*with mighty victories by his right hand.*

*Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses, but our pride is in the name of the LORD our God.*

*They will collapse and fall, but we shall rise and stand upright.*

*Give victory to the king, O LORD, answer us when we call.*

### Psalm 20

As we look forward to a New Year, think on your resolutions. A new year brings lots of questions. Will your health hold? Will our marriage last? Will I be able to hold onto my job? Will the economy improve? What will you want to take on as a challenge, perhaps correcting a fault? Challenges are more attainable with God's help through prayer. We also need to give thanks for all that He has done for us in the past year, and what He will do with and for us in the year to come.

Remember, we don't walk alone through life. God is always with us.

### Prayer:

*Let us pray. Father in heaven, thank you for the gift of a new year and for your promise to stay by our side.*

*We ask for your guidance and wisdom each day helping us to see your hand in every person, smile, tear,  
and let us experience your creation as a reminder of your presence and love.*

*Help us sort out those habits that need your assistance toward a better usage of ourselves.*

*With your guidance, we look forward to a better year ahead. Amen.*





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