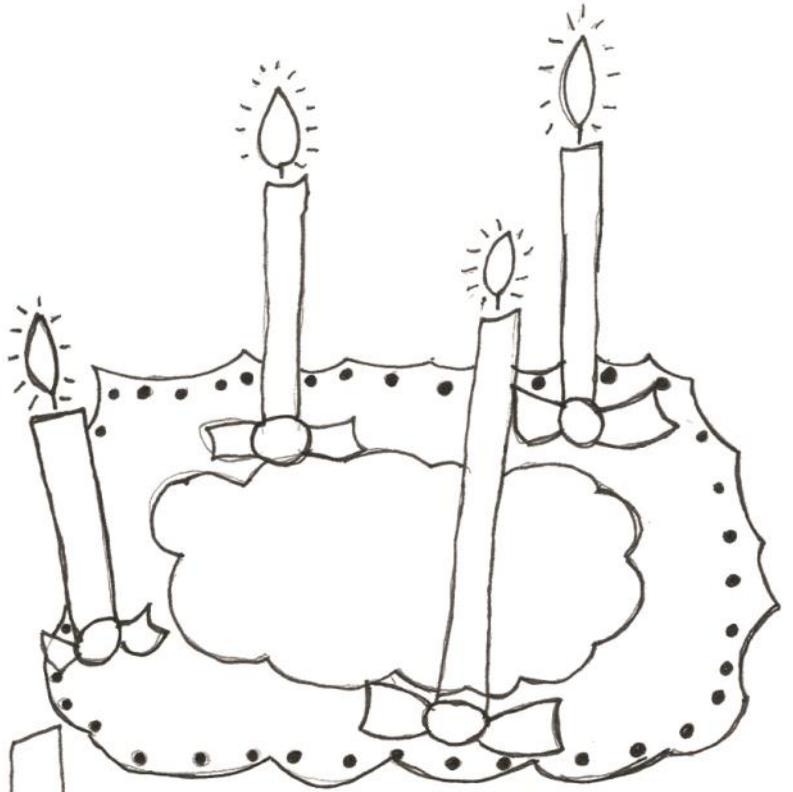




HOPE ★ PEACE ★ JOY ★ LOVE



Advent 2013



Advent

In October, the Worship Arts Team was talking about ways the church can make the worship to home connection better. How can we help people with their prayer lives at home? How can we help people who aren't at church on Sunday to still connect to the worshipping community? How can we help nurture the spiritual lives of our children and families? These were some of the questions we had.

From that discussion comes this Advent Devotion Book. Many people have helped publish this book, and I thank all of them for offering their thoughts and stories with us. We could not have published this without you. Thank you to John and Beth Willock, who painted and drilled the Advent wreaths-over 50 of them! And, thank you to the children who contributed the art work for the booklet. It's our hope and prayer that this book will help you find some peace during this busy and sometimes stressful season.

On Sundays, there is a liturgy for lighting your Advent wreath at home. This liturgy is the same liturgy we are using on Sunday mornings at church. Whether you are a family of one or a family of six, I hope you'll take some time on Sundays to light the candles on your Advent wreath. Taking part in this devotion at home really does reinforce that in this season of darkness, Christ is coming to illuminate our world.

There's a "new" hymn in our new hymnal that reads:

He came down that we may have love.

He came down that we may have love.

He came down that we may have love.

Hallelujah forevermore.

May you experience the love of God we see in Jesus Christ this Advent season and forevermore.

Blessings,

Annie Epling

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2013

Isaiah 2:1-5 * Psalm 122:1-9 * Romans 13:11-14 * Matthew 24:36-44

He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD! ~ Isaiah 2:4-5

Lighting the Advent Wreath

As we enter this sacred season, we gather around this wreath and light the first candle of Advent, the candle of **Hope**. With this candle we remember that Christ is the source of our hope and the light of the world, and calls us to bring light and hope to dark places. (Light one candle.)

PRAYER

Holy God, you come into the dark places and fill them with your light and love! Come into our lives again and fill us with your Hope. In your presence, inspire us to work for that day when your love and light will illuminate the world around us. Today and every day, let us walk in the light of the Lord. Amen.

Anne Epling



(“Angels Bring Hope”)

MONDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2013

Psalms 122; 145 * Amos 2:6-16 * 2 Peter 1:1-11 * Matthew 21:1-11

*And when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up. "Who is this?" they asked. The crowds answered, "It's the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."
~ Matthew 21:10-11 (CEB)*

The month of January is named for the Roman god Janus, who looks both back and forward. For Christians who observe liturgical time, Advent is the time for looking both back and forward. We remember that Jesus came as a human infant over 2000 years ago. The gospel in today's daily lectionary is Matthew's telling of the Palm Sunday story, when Jesus triumphantly entered Jerusalem. Though he was nearing the end of his earthly ministry, people were still asking, "Who is this?" A good question to ponder as we go through Advent.

But Advent is more than looking back. It is also looking forward, looking forward to the triumphal return of Jesus, when the promise of no more warfare or hurting of any part of creation. In the meantime—in the time in which we are living—we look around us and notice that everything has not yet been said and done. There is work Jesus began that we are to continue.

During Advent we remember that Jesus has come, Jesus will come again, and that Jesus is with us to make the kingdom of God a reality in our midst.

PRAYER

Come, Lord Jesus. Transform our remembering into loving actions throughout Advent and into the rest of the year. Amen.

Barbara Willock

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2013

Psalms 33; 146 * Amos 3:1-11 * 2 Peter 1:12-21 * Matthew 21:12-22

In addition we have a most reliable prophetic word, and you would do well to pay attention to it, just as you would to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ~ 2 Peter 1:19 (CEB)

This verse comes as the writer is urging readers to remember the things they know.

Advent rituals, in worship and at home, often include Advent wreaths. Lighting the candles of the wreath is a way to remember that Jesus is the light of the world, come to be the lamp shining in the dark places of our lives. As the preparatory time for Christmas, Advent always falls on the shortest days of the year, the days with the least amount of sunlight and the most darkness, the days when we are increasingly aware of just how much we depend on light. However, in an age of increasing “light pollution” and fully electric homes, we may forget to remember that dependence.

Every year of our marriage, Mike and I have had an Advent wreath in the center of our breakfast table. As a way of reminding ourselves of our need for light—both physical and spiritual—we eat our evening meals by the light of the Advent wreath. That means there’s not much light the first week, but twice as much the second week and by the fourth week, the table is in full light.

PRAYER

Come, Lord Jesus. You are the light of the world. Light our lives that the morning star may rise in our hearts. Amen.

Barbara Willock

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2013

Psalms 50; 147:1-11 * Amos 3:12-4:5 * 2 Peter 3:1-10 * Matthew 21:23-32

The LORD treasures the people who honor God, the people who wait for God's faithful love.
~ Psalm 147:11 CEB

Advent is a time of waiting. We are waiting for the coming of Jesus as a baby. We are waiting for the coming of Jesus at the end of time. We are waiting for the fulfillment of all God's promises.

Waiting can be very hard, but it can also be exciting. Jesus has admonished us to study children to learn how to be responsive to God's coming kingdom. Children can get soooo excited waiting for Christmas, imagining all the wonders it will bring.

What excites us as we wait for Jesus to come? What wonders do we imagine will be brought by his coming?

The psalmist says that God *treasures* the people who honor God by waiting for God's faithful love. I wonder if that might include sharing the love of God they have already experienced with others *while* they wait?

PRAYER

*Come, Lord Jesus. Transform
our waiting into expressions
of your love for those around
the world who wait with us.
Amen.*

Barbara Willock



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2013

Psalms 18:1-20; 147:12-20 * Amos 4:6-13 * 2 Peter 3:11-18 * Matthew 21:33-46

*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. ~ Psalm 126:1-3*

Twenty-one years ago today, Jim and I were married at the Old Des Peres Church on Geyer Road. Our union not only brought our lives together but also the lives of our four children. Blending our families meant blending celebrations, traditions and expectations and never more so than at Christmas, less than three weeks away! Whose tree topper did we use—my angel or Jim’s star? What music did we listen to while we decorated the tree? Luckily, we all loved the Muppet’s Christmas music. We anticipated difficulties in juggling schedules with the other parents but were blessed with cooperation and congeniality from all. That first Christmas found that, as the Psalm says, “...our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy...” Christmas continues to bring anticipation of our growing family’s joy and laughter just as we anticipate the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

Gracious God, we are blessed to be your people who grow anxious with the anticipation of the arrival of Christmas. We long for the time of joy and celebration with our families and indeed, your whole creation for we know you have done great things for us, the greatest being the gift of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Joanna Gerst



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2013

Psalms 102; 148 * Amos 5:1-17 * Jude 1-16 * Matthew 22:1-14

Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry come to you. Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress. Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call. For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace. My heart is stricken and withered like grass; I am too wasted to eat my bread. ~ Psalm 102:1-4

Project Hope

On Sunday we lit the candle of **Hope** on our Advent wreaths. Are you ready to bring light and hope to the dark places in the world?

As you go through your month, consider how you can bring hope to other people. What follows are two ideas for you to consider, but you may have one that suits you better.

Change for Hope

Consider putting some of your loose change into a Salvation Army kettle every time you walk by one. I did this one year; every time I walked by one of the kettles, I put in my spare change. Think of the impact it would have if everyone did this.

Giving Tree

It's not too late to contribute to the Christmas Giving Tree at the church. The Mission and Ministry Committee is always looking for people who are willing to contribute \$25 gift cards to Target or Schnucks. Gift cards may not be as fun to shop for as toys for kids, but we all need food and the basics that we buy at the grocery store and/or Target.

PRAYER

Redeemer, come, with us abide. Our hearts to you we open wide. Let us your inner presence feel; your grace and love in us reveal. Amen.

(Adapted from George Weissel, "Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Might Gates")

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2013

Psalms 90; 149 * Amos 5:18-27 * Jude 17-25 * Matthew 22:15-22

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. ~ 2 Timothy 3:16 (KJV)

I remember with joy the numerous family times I shared with my family growing up. My father, my mother, my older sister, my younger brother and I, without the traditional kitchen or dinner table which serves as the meeting point for family talk, would sit around in our living room right after the evening prayers to share stories. Reading 2 Timothy 3: 16, Dad usually would tell his favorite Bible stories and try to relate them to life experiences. By the way, half his book shelves were filled with assortments of Bible translations, dictionaries and commentaries. He was a lifetime student of the Bible. The best Bible lesson we learned from his nightly Bible stories was his favorite refrain, "The Bible is the story about you, and you and you..." pointing to each one of us, his children. Dad was convinced that there is not one Bible story that doesn't speak to us directly. So his singular charge to us was to find ourselves in each of these Bible stories. His refrain did not make much sense to me back then until I began to navigate on my own the deep waters of life experiences. Slowly, I began to understand that the story of the Israelites' escape from Egypt (bondage), their Red Sea experience, their wilderness experience and other Old and New Testament stories, as Dad labored to explain, actually are stories about me. It is both shocking and fascinating for me to learn that even the stories of the healing of the blind man or the woman with infirmity eighteen years or the many parables as told by our Lord Jesus Christ are actually stories about me as I grope through life, seeking the divine light and strength that leads to God's infinite possibilities and opportunities for me.

I am the Good Samaritan. I have also identified with the guy who was beaten and left for dead in the parable. I have also played the Levite (which I am every time I hear the cries for help from across the planet and refused to pray) who walked by and refused to help. For a truth, the Bible is truly alive in my daily experience. It is a book about me, about "you, and you and you...." It "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." ~ 2 Timothy 3:16 (KJV)

PRAYER

Dear Lord, help me to see my story in your story. Amen.

Tola Olayefun

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2013

Isaiah 11:1-10 * Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19 * Romans 15:4-13 * Matthew 3:1-12

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ~ Isaiah 11:1-2

Lighting the Advent Wreath

On this second Sunday of Advent we light the candle of **Peace**. The prophet Isaiah declares that the day will come when the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. (Light two candles.)

PRAYER

*Light of the world, shine on us.
In this world of pain and darkness:
Light of the world, shine through us.
In this world that is in need of Your peace:
Light of the world, shine in us.*

*Help us to be your peacemakers
so that your peace will illuminate
the world around us.*

*Today and everyday:
Let us walk in the light of the Lord.
Amen.*

Anne Epling

JOY
PEACE

MONDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2013

Psalms 122; 145 * Amos 7:1-9 * Revelation 1:1-8 * Matthew 22:23-33

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near. ~ Revelation 1:3

Project Peace

On Sunday we lit the candle of **Peace** on our Advent wreaths. Are you ready to be a peacemaker so that Christ's peace will illuminate the world around us?

As you go through your week, consider how you can be an agent of peace to other people. What follows are two ideas for you to consider, but you may have one that suits you better.

Prayer Walk

Take a walk through your neighborhood and pray for the people who live and work there. Pray that Christ's peace may shine on and for them.

Prayer for our Troops

Pray for our military servicemen and women who are away from home this Advent. Pray for peace in our world, and pray for their safe return home.

PRAYER

Dear God, we pray for peace today. May your peace be known to everyone and throughout the world. We pray in the name of the Prince of Peace. Amen.

Anne Epling



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2013

Psalms 33; 146 * Amos 7:10-17 * Revelation 1:9-16 * Matthew 22:34-46

Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and shield. Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you. ~ Psalm 33:20-22

As in many families we all have our “jobs,” especially when it comes to Christmas. Christmas Eve and Christmas dinner is at my sister’s house. Christmas morning or brunch includes a strata, cinnamon pull-a-part rolls and mimosas (we eat about 1 pm). My second sister is responsible for “entertainment”—don’t ask anymore—it is one of those family traditions. My job can be called “memories.” My grandmother knitted Christmas stockings for my two sisters and me. My brother had a tiny felt stocking for years. When he was about 12, I knitted one for him—rather amateurish, but he was completely surprised and still uses it. As our family expanded, I knitted stockings for each one. We now have 12 hand-knitted stockings that grace my Mom’s fireplace each Christmas.

Making gingerbread houses is another tradition. When my niece was two (she is now 27), we had our first “party”. Back then you couldn’t get gingerbread houses or even pieces of houses. We used cardboard and milk cartons from school. We added the rest of my nieces and nephews as they came along. We did do other “projects,” but gingerbread houses were the highlight! Imagine—five kids, ages 5-12, quietly working for 2½-3 hours—peace!

What are your family traditions?

PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank you for traditions that bring us joy, and help us to let go of the ones that do not. Amen.

Leslie Barnes

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2013

Psalms 50; 147:1-11 * Amos 8:1-14 * Revelation 1:17-2:7 * Matthew 23:1-12

And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father — the one in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted. ~ Matthew 23:9-12

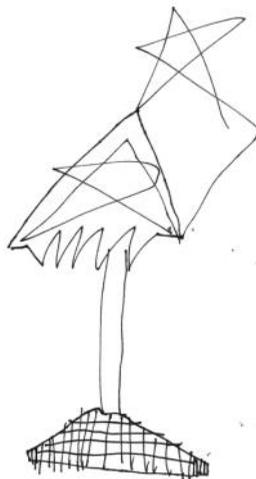
When our sons were very young, we bought a calendar with 24 paper-hinged rectangles: one for each day of December through Christmas Eve. The plan was for them to take turns opening a “window” each morning while we made a big deal over how many more days until Christmas. All went as expected for about a week. Then, our five-year old wanted to change our routine. He wanted to open the calendar windows before bedtime. His reason? He didn’t want to count the *days* until Christmas; he wanted to count the *nights*. When asked why it made any difference he said, “If we keep counting the days we might miss something.”

It took a new look at an old Advent calendar to see that we’d been counting wrong. We still try to relish the time before Christmas instead of hastening the days or heightening emotions. We won’t even force the amaryllis into bloom for this holiday season: we’ll just let it happen.

PRAYER

God, help me to consciously live one moment at a time. Allow me to feel the fullness of an hour, a day, a week and a year, and learn to trust your plan for me in this life. Amen.

Diane Asyre



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2013

Psalms 18:1-20; 147:12-20 * Amos 9:1-10 * Revelation 2:8-17 * Matthew 23:13-26

I love you, O LORD, my strength. ~ Psalm 18:1

Paul Gerhardt was a 17th century Lutheran pastor and poet. He is considered one of the finest German hymn writers. One of his hymns starts this way:

*O Lord, how shall I meet you, how welcome you aright?
Your people long to greet you, my hope, my heart's delight!*

When family and friends come to visit there is always a flurry of activity getting ready for them. We want them to feel welcome. We anxiously await their arrival. There's a lot to prepare! Yet I, like many others, often feel overwhelmed and stressed at this time of year. What if we truly "welcomed" and "longed to greet" Jesus in this season? Can we honestly say Jesus is our "heart's delight?" Do we really think about the significance of his coming?

Verse 2 of the hymn explains why he came:

*Love caused your incarnation; love brought you down to me;
Your thirst for my salvation procured my liberty.
O love beyond all telling, that led you to embrace
In love, all loves excelling, our lost and fallen race.*

This love transcends all other loves we can possibly imagine! The Apostle Paul says it this way: "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2: 4-9, NRSV)

Gerhardt responds to God's abundant love in the remainder of Verse 1 of the hymn:

*O kindle, Lord most holy, a lamp within my breast,
To do in spirit lowly all that may please you best.*

PRAYER

Lord, I am thankful for your blessings including the gift of salvation. May I live my life in a way that brings honor to you. Amen.

Gay Spears

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2013

Psalms 102; 148 * Haggai 1:1-15 * Revelation 2:18-29 * Matthew 23:27-39

So do not worry, saying 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you. ~ Matthew 6:31 & 33

The Christmas season is busy and stressful. The advertising media continues to push Christmas into October and does its best to whip us into shopping frenzies. Nightly television commercials bombard us with scenes of elaborate holiday parties and of picture-perfect Christmas mornings with an abundance of beautifully wrapped presents nestled under a glittering tree.

Take a deep breath. Trust in the Lord. Remember Christmas as the celebration of the birth of Jesus, and have a blessed and worry-free holiday.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, help us to slow down and to trust in you. Lessen our anxiety so we can celebrate the wonder this season brings. Amen.

Terry Baker



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2013

Psalms 90; 149 * Haggai 2:1-9 * Revelation 3:1-6 * Matthew 24:1-14

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. ~ Psalm 90:1-2

Growing up 13 hours away from our relatives, the holiday season was very difficult. Being only two years old at the time, my parents were open to meeting new people in our neighborhood to help celebrate the season. Our first Christmas in Missouri consisted of a few families who did not have relatives nearby. One family made the turkey, while another made the sides, and another the desserts.

Over the years, we have kept this tradition going. These families became more than just friends to us. They became parent figures, brothers, and sisters. They are our Chosen Family.

Every holiday season, we are always excited to see our Chosen Family. It is wonderful to have such a great network of support that is always there for us in the states, when our family is up north.

Through opening up our hearts and homes we formed a Chosen Family that will last a lifetime. Just like how we are a part of Jesus' Chosen Family, we must all open our hearts and homes to those around us.

PRAYER

Lord, be with us this holiday season. Allow us to remember that we will receive your gift of Family, for you have chosen us before we were born. As long as we believe in you we will never be alone, no matter how far away our family may be. Amen.

Daniel Mortimer

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2013

Isaiah 35:1-10 * Psalm 146:5-10 * James 5:7-10 * Matthew 11:2-11

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed. ~ Luke 1:46-48

Lighting the Advent Wreath

On this third Sunday of Advent we light the candle of **Joy**. Our excitement increases: Christ is coming! Those desert places in our lives, like wilting flowers, will bloom again. We will be made strong. We will not be fearful. God remembers us. Sorrow and sighs will end. Joy and gladness blossom. (Light three candles.)

PRAYER

Holy God, may this candle we light remind us that our journey toward the promise continues: Come, Lord Jesus! Help us to bring your Good News to others so that your joy will illuminate the world around us. Today and everyday, let us walk in the light of the Lord. Amen.

Anne Epling



MONDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2013

Psalms 122; 145 * Zechariah 1:7-17 * Revelation 3:7-13 * Matthew 24:15-31

One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.

~ Psalm 145:4-5

*“Glory be to God for dappled things...” **

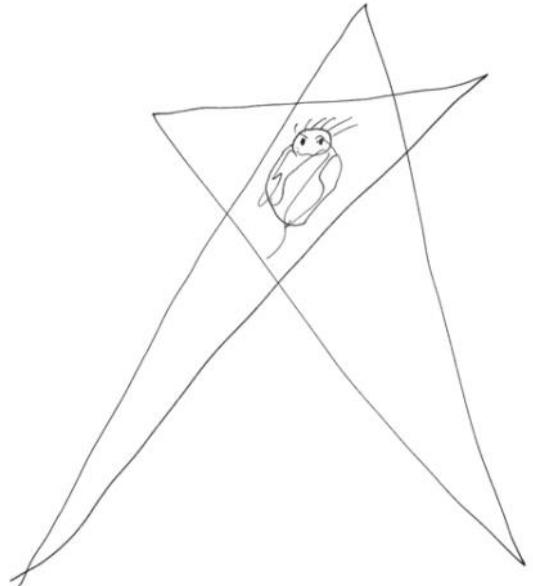
The Wildflower Lady described the geology that formed the plateaus and ridges around Trout Lodge. It was an upheaval, an underground push from the South that was responsible for the high ground and the strips of land that spread out from them. The result is one of the richest and most diverse habitats for plants in the U.S. We proceeded to wander, tucked under umbrellas, through the woodlands near the Lodge and became reacquainted with the wildflowers we had met last year and the year before during previous walks. The wildflowers resembled previous years except that the shapes, the colors and the growth stages were slightly, but noticeably, different. You see, the weather patterns, including the sunshine, rain and temperatures, are never exactly the same each year. Isn't nature wonderfully complex?

PRAYER

Gracious God, You have blessed us in so many ways. During this Advent season, help us to be mindful of your creation and work to sustain its beauty and complexity for the next generation and beyond. Amen.

Will Ridley

* from *Pied Beauty*, by Gerard Manley Hopkins



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2013

Psalms 33; 146 * Zechariah 2:1-13 * Revelation 3:14-22 * Matthew 24:32-44

Sing and rejoice, O daughter Zion! For lo, I will come and dwell in your midst, says the LORD. Many nations shall join themselves to the LORD on that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in your midst. And you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. ~ Zechariah 2:10-11

Project Joy

On Sunday we lit the candle of **Joy** on our Advent wreaths. Are you ready to proclaim the Good News to others so that Christ's joy will illuminate the world around us?

As you go through your week, consider how you can be an agent of joy to other people. What follows are two ideas for you to consider, but you may have one that suits you better.

Joy Box

This year, celebrate the twelve days of Christmas (December 25—January 5). Take one of the boxes you unwrap on Christmas, leave it out with scraps of paper and pencils, and invite the people in your house to write something that gives them joy this Christmas season.

Project Cookie

Everyone loves cookies! Be a secret elf to your neighbor and leave them some cookies. (They don't need to be homemade!) Leave a note with them that says, "I hope these bring you some joy!"

PRAYER

Dear Lord, as we get closer to Christmas our joy grows. Help us to slow down and enjoy this season so that it brings us joy even when we are weary and stressed. Amen.

Anne Epling

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2013

Psalms 50; 147:1-11 * Genesis 3:8-15 * Revelation 12:1-10 * John 3:16-21

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming, "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God."

~ Revelation 12:10

As a child I so looked forward to Christmas morning. Presents! Shiny packages, comic-wrapped boxes, ribbons, tape. I loved all the mystery and wonder surrounding those packages. Christmas morning was a flurry of bits of paper as Santa liked to wrap everything individually. Sometimes, even batteries were wrapped separately. The excitement would always pass by so quickly, the last present coming way too soon. I thought that was the pinnacle of the year, being showered by gifts from my parents and Santa.

Watching my own two boys open gifts each Christmas morning, messy and loud, I have such a different perspective. Taking in much-needed coffee and often wearing my robe, I only half-heartedly try to fend off the chaos. I laugh, remembering my own mom trying to reach the coffee pot each Christmas morning. She was so patient, passing presents out one at a time, with a smile so bright. Sometimes she had succeeded, coffee was in hand. Other years, I'm guessing, she remained in a half-awake daze, having been so abruptly awakened by my screeches of "Santa came!" I understand her smile now and it wasn't because of coffee (though that might have helped). As parents we get to reflect the joy and energy that emanates from our children. A blessing from God!

PRAYER

Father in Heaven, thank you for family. Lift up those who are unable to be with their loved ones this holiday season due to conflict, illness or other circumstance. Let all feel your love and the love of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Beth Willock

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2013

Psalms 18:1-20; 147:12-20 * Zephaniah 3:14-20 * Titus 1:1-16 * Luke 1:1-25

But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord.

~ Luke 1:13-15

When I was younger, I used to spend a lot of time at my Aunt and Grandmother's houses on the weekends. My Aunt and Grandmother became very active in the Presbyterian Church of Sullivan, MO. They decided that the new rule was, "If you come to spend the night on the weekends, you will be coming to church with us on Sunday." This kind of came as a surprise to me. As a middle-schooler, this change was not a very welcoming one. I just wanted to enjoy my time with my family and not have to go anywhere else, especially a place that was very foreign to me. Eventually, this new community became my home. Church became a place that I wanted to go to—as much as I could. It was a safe haven. A place where I belonged.

As an adult, I look back and realize what a blessing the persistence of my Aunt and Grandmother taking me to church was—they gave me a gift. They nurtured me spiritually, emotionally, and musically. I have a photo frame with a picture of my family in it. Around the photo is a quote from Maya Angelou. "When I think of the gifts I already have, I stop and I thank God." As I hold the hymnals that are dedicated to their lives, I stop and I thank God. My Aunt and my Grandmother are my saints. They blessed my life more than I can explain.

Today, pray this prayer and remember your saints of present and past and know they are with you always.

PRAYER

Dear God, thank you for the many blessings in my life—those unseen and those noticed. Thank you for the mysterious ways people come and go in my life—those living and those already in your heavenly kingdom. Thank you for the joy and light you bring to me every day. Amen.

Samantha Stout

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2013

Psalms 102; 148 * 1 Samuel 2:1b-10 * Titus 2:1-10 * Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ~ Luke 1:26-28

I keep a file that contains news clippings, essays, bits of poetry, a line from a movie or song — any combination of words that touches me for one reason or another. I was browsing through the file a few weeks ago when I came across this meditation by Debra Klingsporn.

“If God only made his presence known in the momentous, how barren our lives would be of grace-filled windows to the sacred.

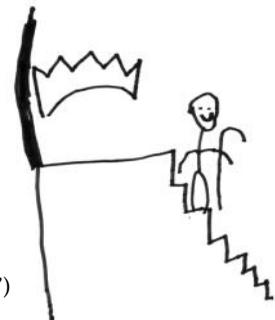
“Instead, there are snowfalls and rain showers, waking and sleeping, as we live a succession of ordinary days. Into our ordinary world we are given this hidden God, one who comes to us as a baby born amid hay and barnyard smells to a nondescript couple on an ordinary night. Into the ordinary, came the extraordinary. The birth of a Savior. And our lives will never be the same.”

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, in this journey we call life, help us be inspired by the extraordinary, appreciate the ordinary and celebrate the giftedness of all those who travel with us. Amen.

Jean Neunreiter

Jesus is King



("Jesus is King")

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2013

Psalms 90; 149 * 2 Samuel 7:1-17 * Titus 2:11-3:8a * Luke 1:39-48a (48b-56)

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. ~ Psalm 90:1-2

I like vintage autograph books. They are surefire imagination triggers. Circa 1914, a school pal signed my great aunt's autograph book with this sentiment: *May you be happy and live at your ease and get a kind husband and do as you please.* Another writer urges: *Good, Better, Best! Never ever rest! Until your good is better and your better is best!* I didn't like that one. Most likely it annoyed me to be reminded of something I fear in myself. Inspired by that autograph, I wrote the following prayer. I use it to ask for help with two things: focusing on the process of achievement instead of the outcome and embracing authenticity over images of perfection. It's an all-season prayer with particular appeal during the holidays.

PRAYER

God, help me to save energy so I can enjoy the road stops along my way to success. Keep me alert and grateful for unexpected detours that show me things beyond my belief or imagination. Remind me to apply the brakes when pursuing perfection. When others reach out a hand to me, give me the wisdom to know if I am being stopped, supported or pulled forward and give me strength to act appropriately. Let me know when I have thought it through enough, talked it over enough and when it is time to move on. Protect me from attempts at success that are not in my best interest and lead me to take actions that make the world a better place. Amen.

Diane Asyre

ON CRISMI¹ We.
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(“On Christmas, we go to Church.”)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2013

Isaiah 7:10-16 * Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 * Romans 1:1-7 * Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ~ Matthew 1:18-19

Lighting the Advent Wreath

On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we light the candle of **Love**.

How may God's Love take shape in our world?

In dreams which move us to risk compassion,

In a vision of a community whole and peace-filled,

God's Love takes shape in our world.

We look for an extraordinary sign of hope for our world, but God's sign is most ordinary of all:

A young woman is with child.

We look to power for strength in our world but God points to the most vulnerable:

She gives birth.

We look far and wide for a key to God's mystery, but God points us home:

She calls this child Immanuel: God with us!

(Light four candles.)

PRAYER

Come, Lord Jesus! Open our hearts to the Love which you embody. Let that Love flow through us so that it will illuminate the world around us. Today and everyday, let us walk in the light of the Lord. Amen.

Anne Epling

MONDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2013

Psalms 122; 145 * Jeremiah 31:10-14 * Galatians 3:15-22 * Luke 1:67-80

*Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away;
say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock."
For the LORD has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.
~ Jeremiah 31:10-11*

Project Love

On Sunday we lit the candle of **Love** on our Advent wreaths. Are you ready to embody Christ's love so that it will illuminate the world around us?

As you go through your week, consider how you can be an agent of love to other people. What follows are two ideas for you to consider, but you may have one that suits you better.

Spread the Warmth

Take some time this week to go through your closets and give away the clothes you no longer wear, especially those winter coats. They aren't doing any good in your closet, unused. But they could do a world of good to someone who needs them to stay warm.

Love Notes

Who doesn't love a love note? Write a love note to someone special, telling them how much he or she means to you.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank you for your love that allows us to love others. Thank you for sharing your love with us through your Son, Immanuel, God with us. Amen.

Anne Epling

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2013

Isaiah 9:2-7 * Psalm 96:1-13 * Titus 2:11-14 * Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ~ Luke 2:8-11

I love that Luke begins his story of Christ's birth in such an earthy, real way because then we can relate to it. Granted, none of us have ever had to travel by donkey and given birth in a stable, but most of us have done enough traveling and gotten stuck in enough airports that we can relate to Mary and Joseph's long, tiring journey. I can imagine the scene: Mary is prying her shoes off her swollen, pregnant feet to accommodate the metal detector, and Joseph is behind her discarding all the liquids over 3 ounces. Their slowness is holding up the line, which causes the people behind them to complain. When they finally arrive at their gate they learn that all the flights have been cancelled due to bad weather, and when they try to find a hotel room they learn that they're all sold out, so they'll have to spend the night on the airport floor.

We all know what happens next, of course; Mary gives birth in less than ideal conditions. This is not how God is supposed to enter the world.

Some people may ask, "Why in the world (then) would God do such a thing? Why would God come into human history in this way?" Well, God had already tried floods, manna, prophets, and famines (just to name a few), but no one paid attention to those things. So God decided to come in a way that would grab peoples' attentions, and not much grabs peoples' attentions more than a newborn baby. When God wanted to tell the world, and you, how dearly and unconditionally you are loved, God did it in a way that would get your attention-through the birth of a vulnerable baby.

In this beautiful story, God shows us that out of an impossible situation, something wonderful can happen. That no matter how dire a situation may be, God will come for you because God loves you.

PRAYER

Living God, thank you for this day when you call people to gather in your loving embrace, by many names and traditions, in lands far and near. Thank you for the rejoicing in my life, and for your promise of steadfast love when my days are hard with sorrows. Surround me now with the love that will not let me go, and give me rest, in Christ's name. Amen.

Anne Epling

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2013

Isaiah 52:7-10 * Psalm 98 * Hebrews 1:1-4 (5-12) * John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ~ John 1:1-5

Lighting the Christ Candle

After counting the weeks of Advent, we have come to Christmas Day. 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)

[All five candles are lit and the reading continues.]

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. (John 1:9)

And the Word became flesh and lived among us,
and we have seen his glory,
the glory as of a father's only son,
full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

PRAYER

Gracious and Holy God, I thank you for the darkness and the light, for sleeping and waking, for the privilege of safety and shelter, of warmth and health, and I ask your help for all who do not have these comforts. Guide me on this holy day to pray for your world with a whole heart and to see in myself, and in family, friends, neighbors, and strangers, what you see: each one a beloved child. Today and every day, let me walk in the light of the Lord. Amen.

Anne Epling



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("On Christmas, Jesus was born.")

Illuminate: Shedding Light on the Holy in the Holiday

You know the routine: the Friday after Thanksgiving, the secular Christmas season officially begins. It's *buy, buy, buy* and *go, go, go*. The things we do to prepare for Christmas can be endless and exhausting!

But it doesn't have to be this way. It is possible to find the Holy in the holiday.

Be sure to join us this Advent season as we prepare for the birth of the **Light of the World**. Join us as we find the balance between the sacred and the secular, between the culture and Christ, and between Advent and Christmas.

✦ 1st Sunday of Advent (12/1):

Isaiah 2:1-5: *"Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!"*

What does it mean to walk in the light of the Lord?

Where are we going?

How can we bring the Light to others?

Musical Offering: Faith Des Peres Choir will sing.

✦ 2nd Sunday of Advent (12/8):

Isaiah 11:1-10: *"The wolf shall live with the lamb . . ."*

In what places do the wolf and lamb lie together in peace?

Where do we see that peace in our relationships, neighborhoods, or world?

How do we live this peace in our lives and our world?

Musical Offering: Bel Canto, a women's choral ensemble, will present special selections.

✦ 3rd Sunday of Advent (12/15):

Isaiah 35:1-10: *"The desert shall rejoice and blossom"*

How do we sing the Good News in our day and age?

Musical Offering: Christmas Cantata, "A Celebration of Carols," by Joseph M. Martin, will be presented by the Faith Des Peres Choir.

✦ 4th Sunday of Advent (12/22):

Isaiah 7:10-16, Matthew 1:18-25: *"The Lord himself will give you a sign..."*

What are the signs and promises of the Incarnation today?

How do we resist God's presence breaking into our world as Joseph tried to do?

How do we know that Jesus is with us?

Musical Offering: A Fifth Above, a woodwind quintet, will play familiar Christmas carols.



Join us for Christmas Eve worship at 5:30pm Tuesday, December 24!

We'll have a Traditional Candlelight Service with trumpeter, carols, and choir. Sing the carols, hear the stories, and find hope here!

Christmas Giving Tree

Help us make Christmas a reality for those who otherwise may think it impossible. By taking an ornament from the Christmas Tree, you will be supporting a family at Lydia's House or South Side Day Nursery. Email Elizabeth Pribor at efpribor@gmail.com with questions.

Annual Gingerbread House Party—Register by December 1st

Come decorate a gingerbread house on **Saturday, December 7th** from 10am-noon! This event is geared toward kids but all ages are welcome to decorate a house (or to help). Invite friends to join us in Fellowship Hall for a fun morning together. Please sign up in the Gathering Space by December 1st so we know how many houses to prepare. The cost is \$13 per house.

Movie Night!

December 15th is Movie Night at the church. All ages are invited to watch "A Christmas Story" from 5:30-8:00 in the Gathering Space. Bring a munchie to share. Join us for a commercial-free viewing of this quintessential Christmas movie.

Cookie Exchange

December 16 at 10:30am is the annual Presbyterian Women brunch and cookie exchange. Leila Davis will be hosting. Bring 2-3 dozen cookies to exchange. Please RSVP to Leila at 314-994-0039 or Marie in the church office at adminasst@faithdesperes.org or 314-432-8029.



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Rev. Dr. Anne B. Epling, Pastor

Dr. Gay Holmes Spears, Director of Music & Organist

Hav A OSUM
CRISMIS



("Have an Awesome Christmas!")