

2022

# ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

St. John's Christian Church





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### *What Child Is This?*

An angel announced to a girl named Mary that she would bear the Son of the Most High and name him Jesus, and she became pregnant with this child. The mere presence of this child in Mary's womb made John leap for joy in the womb of his aged mother, Elizabeth. And when this child was finally born, a multitude of angels announced His birth to shepherds watching their flock by night.

This was no ordinary child.

*What Child Is This?* The angel answers the question this way in the presence of the shepherds: "a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). The hymn writer answers it this way: "This, this is Christ the king!" Both Scripture and hymn want to leave us with no doubt regarding the identity of this child. Day by day, these Advent devotions reflect on the Scriptures and on beloved hymns, preparing us for that joyful Christmas morn!

Thank you to all the members of the SJCC family who helped put together this beautiful book of thoughts, prayers, and reflections. Now, may the Holy Spirit work through these words for the kingdom and glory of God!

Pastor Ryan

## 1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT - HOPE

*See amid the winter's snow,  
Born for us on earth below,  
See, the gentle Lamb appears,  
Promised from eternal years.*

*Lo, within a stable lies  
He who built the starry skies,  
He who, throned in height sublime,  
Sits amid the cherubim.*

*Hail, O ever blessed morn! Hail, redemption's happy dawn!  
Sing through all Jerusalem: "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"  
-See Amid the Winter's Snow (Edward Caswall, 1858)*

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"  
– John 1:29 (NIV)



## MONDAY, NOVEMBER 28

*“I say to myself, “The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.”*

*The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.”*

*Lamentations 3:24-26*

Jeremiah reflects on the total destruction that has happened to Jerusalem and the temple. There had been generations of rejection and rebellion and in this book the prophet recognizes that the destruction is the judgment of a righteous God. The misery of God’s people was a result of their failure to seek and remain faithful to God. Knowing that God is merciful, Jeremiah prays for mercy and writes that seeking God again would bring renewal and goodness.

Jeremiah offers the key to living a satisfying life: finding one’s portion in the Lord. Jeremiah has learned to be satisfied in what the Lord has provided, recognizing that the Lord is the All-Sufficient One, the source of all a person can ever need. The prophet seeks the Lord rather than seeking satisfaction through the world’s goods and pleasures.

I sought these verses from Jeremiah for a specific reason, my humbug response to the ever earlier approach to the celebrations of Christmas. Now, I’ve read how Christmas lights and decorations foster peace and joy, contentment and well-being within people’s mindsets as they enjoy these seasonal sights in the longer nights of the winter months. I can recognize the goodness that can result as stores display Christmas décor prior to Halloween and homes and yards are decorated soon thereafter.

I hope that the lights and decorations of the season point people to such times of waiting and quietness Jeremiah writes in these verses. My hope is that Christians seek their portion from the Lord. That there is time taken to wait in expectation of God’s provision, the hope, peace, joy and love realized through Jesus Christ. May our prayer be that our hope remains in the Lord as we seek him throughout our preparations for and celebrations of Christ’s birthday.

Jeremiah shares the key to satisfaction, to being blessed with a satisfied soul – “The Lord is my portion.” With hope in the Lord, reflect on the chorus of “Wise Men Still Seek Him”:

*“And wise men still seek him, their King and Messiah  
with gifts from their hearts they do sing  
With tears they rejoice  
as their hearts fill with love  
for Jesus, their Savior and King”*

May the goodness of hope in the Lord bless you.

## TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29

The soon-ended season of Thanksgiving was filled with the usual decorations of gourds, pumpkins, leaves, and cornstalks. While observing these many and varied displays, I looked carefully at the pumpkins there. I remember as a younger person all the pumpkins used to be smooth-skinned. Some of today's displays, however, have pumpkins that are not smooth-skinned, but do show what I call "warts."

Thinking of my own life, I also have "warts." These could be something I have done, or left undone. They could be a word or words either said carelessly – or even kind words that were left unsaid.

This brings me to the season of Christmas and the birth of the baby Jesus. Jesus was sent by our God in Heaven to show us the way we should and need to live. This is the same Jesus who also died on the cross for us to atone for all our "warts."

Thank you God and Jesus!

Submitted by Jim Grieser

## WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30

When I was a kid, my mom wouldn't let a single Christmas decoration be strung until the Nativity was put up. I remember being so eager to put up the tree as soon as the boxes would start to come up from the basement storage room. That beautiful tree meant Christmas season was starting! That tree meant Santa was coming and would soon have presents underneath it! That tree meant we'd have new toys to play with in just a few short weeks!

“Not until we put up the Nativity first,” my mom would say.

*Ugh. C'mon, Mom.*

Mom, in her wisdom, intentionally halted all of my greedy thoughts with her one Christmas decorating rule. That simple rule reeled in my brothers and me by forcing us to talk about and reflect on the true meaning of Christmas.

As I got older, and to my surprise, I looked forward to finding that box with the Nativity first. And now I find myself with the same rule for my daughters: “Not until we put up the Nativity first.”

Submitted by Jocelyn Walker

## THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1

*“O, come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.”*

How many Christmases have we sung those familiar words? We are very used to hearing phrases such as ‘our Lord Jesus Christ’, ‘Jesus Christ the Lord’, or ‘Christ Jesus our Lord.’ But this would have been a new concept for the Jews of Jesus’ day. For them, ‘Christ’ or ‘Messiah’ would translate to ‘Anointed One.’ He was to be descended from King David and would usher in a time of prosperity for the nation. Nobody said that he would be God incarnate.

Imagine how the shepherds would have responded to the message shared with them by the angel. “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.” The Christ is being given the title of Lord as well. They might ask, “Did we hear right? What does this mean? I don’t understand.” It would make sense for the Christ to be born in Bethlehem. That could be accepted easily. But ‘Christ the Lord’? How could that be?

Maybe we are going through a similar time of challenge. We understand who Jesus is and the plan of salvation. But maybe there is a new aspect about God that we are just discovering. Or some part of our relationship with the Father is moving from knowledge to experience. Let us keep our minds and our hearts open for what the Lord has for us to learn.

*Heavenly Father, there will always be more about You and your ways than we can ever understand. Show us just a little bit more and help us to accept what You have in store for us.*

Submitted by Crissi Stuckey



## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2

As I have shared in previous devotions, my mom was a fan of Helen Steiner Rice poems. So once again, I would like to share one with you.

Luke 2:16 And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger.

Long, long ago in a land far away,  
There came the dawn of the first Christmas day,  
And each year we see the promise reborn  
That God gave the word on that first Christmas morn.  
For the silent star in the timeless skies  
And the wonderment in a small child's eyes,  
The Christmas song the carolers sing,  
The tidings of joy that the Christmas bells ring  
Remind us again of that still, silent night  
When the heavens shone with a wondrous light,  
And the angels sang of peace on earth  
And told men of the Christ Child's birth  
For Christmas is more than a beautiful story,  
It's the promise of life and eternal glory.

*Prayer: Savior, light my path so that I can see in my search to find you.  
Amen*

Submitted by Linda Heer

## SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV)*

As I lay in a hospital bed waiting for the lengthy night to pass, I anxiously wait, wonder, and worry about my procedure in the morning. I have so many questions and fears. My blood pressure is through the roof and they've said they will have to cancel the procedure if it continues to remain high. But how do I calm my over-anxious heart in the middle of this crazy night??

Sound familiar? I think many of us can relate.

I know it's a bit of a leap, but I can imagine Mary had some of the same feelings on the night she awaited the birth of the Messiah. Anxiety, fear of the unknown...

Now, this part is not something Mary would have been able to do: I grab my phone and I attempt to concentrate on something - anything - maybe a game, maybe Facebook. And then I remember the Bible app I have downloaded on my phone! I struggled to concentrate. I scrolled with shaking hands. I tried to focus. I began to read through devotions and Bible verses. For endless hours that evening, I read the verses over and over again. I let them sink in. I read and chatted with God. I thanked him for the many blessings he had bestowed on me. I read and plead with God. Dear Lord, I was really hoping to get a few more years to enjoy my blessings. I prayed and I asked Him to calm my soul.

That dreadful night I read and re-read those verses over and over again. I re-read Philippians 4. Slowly, Peace began to guard my heart.

The next morning, as they rolled me wide awake into the procedure room, you would have thought that my anxiety would have been at its highest level. But no; I had an overwhelming sense of peace. I was singing old children's Bible songs in my head and my heart was calm. Even the gentleman prepping me in the procedure room (who happened to be an old co-worker of my brother' - a God moment) commented on my atypical calmness. The Peace of God had indeed transcended all understanding and guarded my heart when I needed it most!

So, as we enter into this Season of Advent with a sense of expectation and need for preparation, when we feel an overwhelming sense of unease and apprehension; take a moment. Spend time in prayer, in conversation with God, and reading your Bible (even your Bible app). Allow Him, who can calm your heart in the midst of a firestorm, bring you PEACE.

## 2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT - PEACE

*Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King;  
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"  
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,  
Join the triumph of the skies;  
With the angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"  
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"*

*Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all He brings, Risen with healing in His wings.  
Mild He lays His glory by,  
Born that man no more may die,  
Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth.  
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"*

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith,  
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Romans 5:1

And whoever lives by believing in me will never die.  
Do you believe this?  
John 11:26



## MONDAY, DECEMBER 5

Easter of 2022 brought us news...news of rejoicing. We discovered we were once again to be grandparents! We have three adorable grands already, but have never experienced living within a few miles of one of our grandbabies. As we approach the Christmas season, I am more aware of the sacrifices of parents and of the humbleness of Mary, mother of our Beloved Savior.

Although Mary was told she would be highly favored birthing the Christ child, Mary's submission to God's plan would cost her dearly, yet she was willing to be God's servant. God knew that Mary was a woman of rare strength.

She was young, poor, and female. These qualities made her unsuitable in the eyes of her people to be used mightily by God. But God saw Mary's trust and obedience. He knew she would willingly serve God in one of the most important callings ever given to a human being. Mary was willing to submit her life to God's plan no matter what it would cost her. Obedience to the Lord's will meant Mary would be disgraced as an unwed mother. Surely she expected Joseph to divorce her, or worse yet, he might even have her put to death by stoning, as the law permitted.

In today's world, most babies are greeted with everything but the kitchen sink. They must have a crib, bassinet, night light, rocking chair, mobiles, a swing, portable play yard, etc. What exactly welcomed baby Jesus into the world? Mary had none of these things.

His crib was a bed of straw. There was no bassinet waiting for the diaper change; in fact, there were no diapers! Jesus's nightlight was the bright shining star that led the way to his manger bed. Mary's arms provided the rocking chair and the swing. My guess is that rather than being entertained by a mobile, the animals in the barn were his entertainment. He felt the warmth of their bodies and was soothed by their calls.

Mary's life was not an easy one. Yet, she was willing to accept God's plan no matter the cost. Are you like Mary? Are you willing to give total commitment to God? Do you have a willingness to sacrifice everything out of love and devotion to your Savior? Can you firmly state, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." Luke 1:38

Submitted by Nancy Rupp

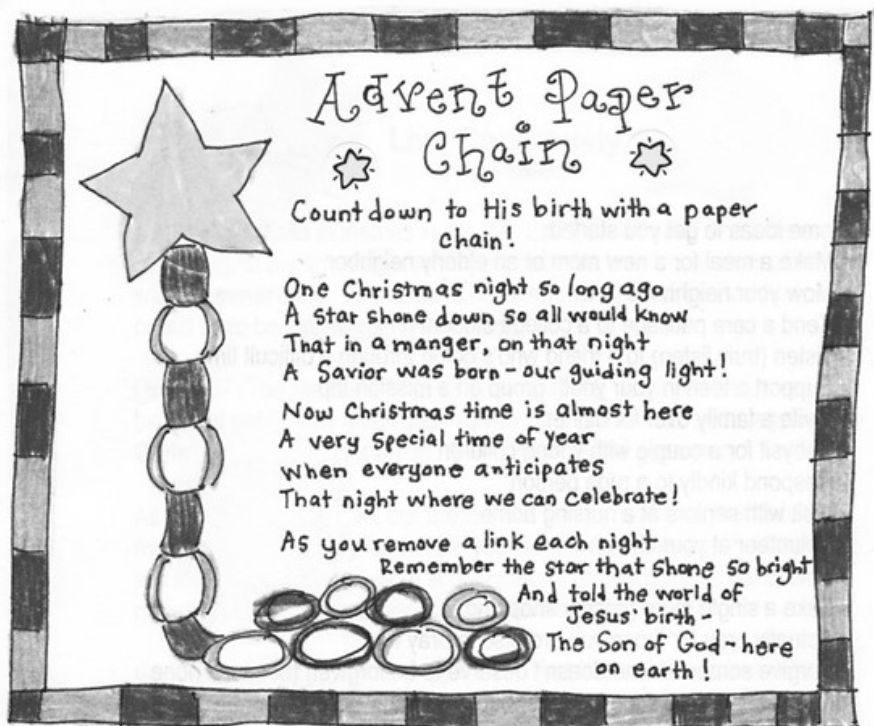
## TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6

I have always been touched by the O'Henry short story, "The Gift of the Magi." You may recall this is the story of the poor young couple longing to give each other a Christmas gift. The young lady sells her hair to buy a watch fob for her husband only to discover that he in turn sold his watch to buy combs for her long, now short hair. Both giving gifts of the heart, now unusable. I find it a poignant story of love and devotion. At minimum, it confirms the twists of fate in life whereby things don't turn out as expected, even with the best of planning and intentions. It is also a heartfelt statement on the custom of Christmas giving started by the Wisemen/Magi. The value of love and sacrifice are truly to be pondered in this story during the Christmas season.

The story of the Wisemen can be found in Matthew 2 verses 1-12. The Magi are referred to as wisemen and kings in the biblical writings but apparently scholars find nothing that identifies them as rulers, prompting the suggestion that Old Testament prophecies may have influenced this implication. Our Western Christianity celebrates the visit of the Magi to the baby Jesus on Epiphany, January 6.

*Dear Heavenly Father,  
As we enter the Christmas season, its history and traditions, grant us the counsel of wisemen as we make choices in our daily lives. May our actions reflect decisions of love and devotion that are pleasing to you. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.*

Submitted by Betsy Redd



I found this poem and it reminded me of when our kids were younger. Every year I would make a paper chain for Advent. On each link I would write an activity for the family to do together. It may be anything as simple as making milkshakes for supper or reading the Christmas story by candlelight. The kids would get up in the morning and couldn't wait to see what our Advent activity was for the day. The important thing was that we were spending time together as a family.

During this advent season I would like to remind you spend time with those that you care about because that is what Jesus would want you to do. He cared so much for each and everyone of us that he lowered himself to come to earth as a helpless infant and then was raised on a cross to die for our sins. Wow, are we blessed!

Submitted by Karen Walker

## THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8

Whenever we recite the Apostle's Creed, we include some events from the Advent season. "Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary..." At a different church that I once attended, there was a dear lady, a grandmotherly type, who could not say that. She was a wholehearted believer in Jesus' miracles, that he healed the sick, fed the 5000, walked on water, raised Lazarus, and certainly that he rose from the dead after dying for our sins. But a virgin birth was a bridge too far for her. That just was beyond comprehension.

She held on to this problem as a secret for many years as a member of the congregation. As a mentor to younger ladies of the church, she was gracious and loving, ready to share in any need. But her secret always nagged her, something she could not ignore. I do not know what caused the change, but somehow, my friend came to accept this portion of the Scriptures as well. One Sunday evening, she stood before the congregation and shared what her struggle had been for so long.

Perhaps there is something in the Bible that we do not understand. It could be something clearly stated, but just does not make any sense. This Christmas, maybe we could ask for belief in the unbelievable.

*Father, as the possessed boy's father exclaimed to Jesus, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

Submitted by David Stuckey

## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9

Psalm 34:5 – “Those who look to him are radiant, their faces are never covered with shame.”

If you heard the 10:30 a.m. version of my sermon on November 13th, you might recall what I’m writing about in this devotional. I say my 10:30 a.m. version because I added something in that I was blessed with after the 8:00 a.m. service.

Following Sunday school that morning, three-year old Allie Walker (now four as of 11/19) handed me a folded up, somewhat crinkled paper. After thanking her for her gift, I went into my office to unload my arms of the confirmation materials I was carrying and I quickly opened up the paper bundle Allie handed me. She had plenty of strips of tape on the paper! After peeling them off, I opened the tri-folded paper which was an envelope for another folded up piece of paper. That second paper was a coloring page of Mickey & Minnie Mouse with the caption “Looking Good!” The coloring and stickers Allie placed on that page were cute, but what really caught my eye was the red-lettered sticker she had placed on the inside of her “envelope.” I was blessed to read RADIANT HEART stuck right in the middle of the page.

I immediately thought of the verse of Psalm 34:5 that I was quoting in my sermon, and I carried Allie’s gift to the pulpit in case the Spirit moved me to share this as an illustration once I read the verse during my sermon. And the Spirit moved me to share it, and I was momentarily overcome with emotion as I shared the spiritual gift Allie gave to me that morning – how did she know I would be talking about the radiance of Christ that morning! O’ the blessed work of the Spirit of God!

In Matthew 19:14, Jesus says, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” Knowing that the greatest joy of Christmas is the birth of the Christ-child, Jesus, maybe my second greatest joy of Christmas is watching children experience the many wonders of the season. I enjoy a child’s sense of awe and wonder, their expressions of love and joy, and the very real gifts of faith and emotion they share within the blessings of the Christmas season.

What joy a child can offer, and the greatest joy of all has been realized in Jesus, the child born in a humble stable, who was to be the Savior of the World! This Christmas, may you see Christ’s love in the sparkle of a child’s eye and joyful exuberance they share at Christmastime.

Submitted by Pastor Erich



## SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10

When thinking and praying on what I wanted to write about for this devotional, one word kept coming to my mind... Joy!

What is the biblical definition of joy? The biblical definition of joy says that joy is a feeling of good pleasure and happiness that is dependent on who Jesus is rather than on who we are or what is happening around us. Joy comes from the Holy Spirit, abiding in God's presence and from hope in His word.

Joy is that deep settled confidence that God is in control of every area of your life.

The third candle we light on the advent wreath symbolizes "joy." We welcome the joy that comes through Jesus' arrival, and through the salvation he has gifted us.

We sing about joy in the song "Joy To The World." Joy to the world, the Lord is come, Let Earth receive her King.....

The word joy is found 218 times in the NIV translation. Two scriptures include:

Luke 2:10 " I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people" and Matthew 2:10 "When they saw the star, they were filled with joy!"

So, I look forward to all the events surrounding advent that bring me joy....decorating the Christmas tree, making cookies with my kids, seeing family I haven't seen in awhile, and buying presents for loved ones. Even better than that, I know that God has given me a joy that no one can ever take away. No matter what happens in this sometimes dark world, I can experience light. So can we all. No earthly thing can give us complete joy. Our joy comes from You!

Submitted by Stacy Rutledge

### 3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT - JOY

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let every heart prepare Him room  
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing,  
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.*

*Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!  
Let men their songs employ,  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains  
Repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.*

Sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous things;  
His right hand and His holy arm have worked salvation for Him.

The Lord has made His salvation known  
and revealed His righteousness to the nations.

He has remembered His love and His faithfulness to Israel;  
all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth,  
burst into jubilant song with music!

Psalm 98:1-4



## MONDAY, DECEMBER 12

### What Do Family and Christmas Have In Common?

Your family is a support group that raises you from infant to adulthood, they teach you right from wrong. They are always there to lean on, they are there for guidance and words of wisdom. They love you, care for you, they want to be there for you during happy and celebration times and be there during troubling and trying times to comfort you.

We celebrate the birth of Christ and listen to the story of his life. Through his lessons and teachings, he teaches us how to treat people with respect and love one another. He teaches us patience and how to live a life according to his words. So, there are a lot of parallels to how we are raised and how Jesus wants us to live our life. Love one another, treat people how you would want to be treated. Be willing to be there for people during good times and bad times, be a role model for other people and live a life that Jesus would be happy with.

Luke 6:31

Treat others as you want them to treat you.

*Prayer:*

*Dear heavenly father, thank you for the birth of your son Jesus. Thank you for the holiday that brings family together. We celebrate the joy of the season with family and friends and giving to others that are less fortunate. As Jesus said in Acts 20:35, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." So, with that in mind let's keep the spirit of Christmas and the birth of Jesus in our hearts and mind every day.*

*In Christ's name, Amen.*

Submitted by Norm Fether

## TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13

Common statements I hear from my preschooler (most of the time in ordinary conversation, but *sometimes* behind screams and tears):

*“Mommy, no; I don’t want to play with that toy.”*

*“Mommy, no; I don’t want that for my snack.”*

*“Mommy, no; I don’t want that flavor of toothpaste.”*

*“Mommy, no; not that hairbrush.”*

At only four-years-old, she’s learned the concept of having a choice. She can choose from a room full of toys to play with; a pantry of snack options; different toothpaste flavors because she suddenly doesn’t like the one she was using last week; a specific hairbrush in the drawer that doesn’t tug at her tangles as bad as the others. Yet, at only four-years-old, she doesn’t realize just how much of a simple blessing having those choices are.

On a recent afternoon in the middle of a typical tired four-year-old meltdown, I heard my mother’s voice come out of my own mouth as I finally said to her, “there are some children who would be so grateful to have that snack in their hands right now.” My curious little girl immediately stopped her fussing and looked at me with confused eyes. “What do you mean, Mommy?”

She is so used to having the luxury of choice.

In placing the order for Operation Christmas Child this year, I spent a lot of time reflecting on the children who will be receiving the items in their boxes. I watched some videos that would show up on my Facebook feed posted by Samaritan’s Purse – the children receiving their boxes and the pure moment of joy on their faces as they opened them. It didn’t matter what was in the box. They were simply grateful for the objects. They didn’t have meltdowns if their box contained a toy they didn’t want. They were sharing. They were playing. They were exuding happiness.

This Christmas season and beyond, I’m making an effort to pray with my daughters for the children who aren’t as fortunate to have the choices they have. We’re actively praying for children to have food in their bellies, to have a toy to play with or cuddle with at bedtime, to have a hairbrush to help their hair feel better, for clean water to brush their teeth, to know Jesus Christ in their hearts... for simple moments of joy.

It’s time to be grateful for the choices we get to make.

Submitted by Jocelyn Walker

## WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14

As the year ends, I find myself more and more reflecting on everything that has happened over the last twelve months. This year has been a year of many changes some in which were good, and some were experiences to learn from. I was blessed to marry my best friend this year. I am so grateful for all the love and support that surrounded us during the entire process from the beginning. I could not have asked for a better husband, family, friends, and church.

Then, there were the moments to learn from this year. I recently had gallbladder surgery and it was hard to be that vulnerable. I was so used to being able to do things on my own and not having to depend on other people for the simplest things like getting up off the couch. I also had to work through difficult work situations that really had me questioning my abilities and myself. These different trials helped me to see the things that God has blessed me with and how to find my worth in God.

As you look back on this year, remember that God always has our best interests at heart, even if we can't see it at the moment.

*"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" Romans 8:18*

May we have faith that God is always with us and will help guide us to where we need to be. Amen.

Submitted by Keira Christman

## THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15

Every year at the beginning of December, our family displays a Nativity set. We enjoy this task. We take great care to place each figurine in exactly the right position, making sure each can be easily observed by anyone visiting our home. When they were younger, our children, Adam and Emily, loved to help in the “setup” process. We talked about each figure as it was unwrapped and placed in the stable.

One year, several days after we had arranged the Nativity set, my wife and I walked into the room and noticed that all of the figurines had been moved into a straight line as if they were participating in a parade. When questioning the kids about who had moved the pieces, Emily, then 3-years-old, explained, “Everyone was marching to see Baby Jesus.” We smiled and reminded her to be very careful when handling the pieces. We, then, rearranged them according to our standards.

The next day, each of the figurines were moved again. This time, they were all facing the back of the stable, crowded around Baby Jesus. They were pressed together so tightly that the faces were barely visible. We once again called Emily to explain. She just giggled and said, “Everyone is excited to see Baby Jesus. They are pushing closer to look at him!” Now it was our turn to smile.

For the remainder of the Christmas season, the figurines stayed in that position, because they were, “excited to see Jesus.” Emily understood what was important! Jesus offers us hope and joy. Sometimes it takes a young child’s faith to remind us that Jesus wants to be the central figure in our lives. We need to “push” closer to Him every day.

Isaiah 9:6-7

“<sup>6</sup> For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”

*Prayer:*

*Dear Lord, you sent your eternal Word to take on human nature in the womb of the virgin Mary. Grant that your chosen people put off earthly desires, to prepare their hearts and minds for the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with us in the unity of the Holy Spirit, forever. Amen.*

Submitted by Steve Walker

## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16

*“Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. <sup>14</sup> May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”*

*2 Corinthians 13:11, 14*

It all began in 2014 when Mackenzie Nofziger moved to Bangkok, Thailand. She had just graduated from college and was moving to Bangkok to teach at a Christian school. She sent home a parent letter that mentioned she graduated from Bowling Green State University. Another teacher at the Christian school, whose son was in Mackenzie’s class, knew that her friend Nicha Pimthong (originally from Bangkok) was studying piano at Bowling Green. She put Mackenzie and Nicha in touch with each other so they could share stories about their cross-cultural experiences.

Fast forward several years. Lynne Christman attended a conference at B.G.S.U. She sat at a table during lunch where Nicha just so happened to be sitting. As they began talking, they realized that they both knew Mackenzie. Lynne, having watched Mackenzie grow up at St. John’s, and Nicha, through her contact at the Christian school in Thailand.

Lynne and Nicha connected quickly due to their love for the Lord and their love for piano. Lynne invited Nicha to visit St. John’s and Archbold, Ohio, and introduced Nicha to me. I was able to get to know her and learn more about Bangkok and Thai culture.

On Christmas Eve 2015, Nicha and I sat next to each other at the church service here at St. John’s while Mackenzie’s dad and sister attended the Christmas Eve service with Mackenzie at her church in Bangkok. Nicha and I were both missing our families at the holidays, yet found comfort in being together and celebrating the unexpected way in which God had choreographed our Christmas Eve together.

God orchestrates the crossing of people’s paths in the unlikeliest of circumstances.

Submitted by Tammy Nofziger

## SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17

Come into my home during the Christmas season and you'll see the word "Noel" everywhere.

Like, everywhere.

In every corner of every room. Noel ornaments, Noel candles, Noel pillows, wooden letters spelling out Noel... Yeah, I know what you're thinking: "*Why is she so obsessed with that particular Christmas song?*"

My family lost my only sister on December 18th, 1997 when my mom was 19 weeks pregnant. One week before Christmas. I was six. My parents named her Noel.

In my simple six-year-old brain, I conjured up the best way of coping with the loss that I could. She became real to me in a spiritual way. I knew she was in Heaven, but I was convinced she could still hear me. If Jesus could hear me pray, so could Noel, I was sure of it. I'd talk with her on my way to and from school and even at night when I couldn't sleep, telling her about my day, my fears, and simple secrets I'd imagine only ever sharing with my sister.

Every Christmas after that year, my parents began receiving gifts and decorations with Noel printed on them. Noel candles, ornaments, pillows... Then, my mom began purchasing a new Noel ornament each year for our Christmas tree. It became a tradition. We'd search until we found just the right one and we'd place it on the tree alongside the others. As I got older and moved out on my own, I continued the tradition in my home, decorating with Noel items and finding a new one each year. Sure, it brought up those old feelings of grief, but this became the best way to have some sort of connection to the little girl I longed to meet in Heaven someday.

Fast forward to 2018. I gave birth to my first daughter. We named her Alexandra Noel. Then, in 2021, I gave birth to my second daughter. Two sweet little sisters.

In a strange way, I feel my sister is alive in my little girls. While I know the Bible tells me her soul is in Heaven, and therefore very much *not* alive in my daughters, I also realize that part of who she is – who she would have been, what our own sisterhood would have looked like – is a very real part of their DNA. And as they get older at Christmastime, when they begin to question why Noel is everywhere in our home, I hope



I can adequately explain to them the love in our family that extends to those in Heaven we'll meet again someday.

Noel and Jesus Christ. Two people I think about every single Christmas. And two people I plan on hugging tightly the second I arrive in Heaven in His time. As we head into the final week ahead of Christmas Day, I know there are many reading this booklet who have lost loved ones, and that loss can make this joyous season feel heartbreaking at times. However, I hope and pray that each of you longing to see a loved one in Heaven feels the comfort of Jesus this Christmas season. Because it is His birth that gives us life in Heaven to see those loved ones again.

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I wasn't going to share the story above because of how personal it is. But on the day after I submitted two other devotionals for this year's booklet, my daughter, Allie, asked if we could call her Great Nana on the way home. My Nana answered our call in a weepy voice. "You're not going to believe this," she said after composing herself. "I was just having a conversation with your sister Noel – you know, sometimes I still like to talk to her – and the most beautiful cloud in the shape of an angel appeared above me. Then, you, her big sister called. You two are so connected. This family love is so crazy strong." We shared a moment of adoration over the Lord's way of giving us messages of comfort, then went about our conversation.

Later that evening, she texted me and said she had shared the phenomenon with my parents. How she was talking to Noel and looking at the cloud as I called. My dad responded to her with the words, "She's alive in those two little ladies." He was referring to my daughters in the same way I wrote my words for this devotional insert just days earlier. DNA, love, and the moments of comfort only Jesus Christ can provide.

*<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. – 2 Corinthians 1:3-4*

Submitted by Jocelyn Walker

## 4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT - LOVE

*Of the Father's love begotten  
Ere the worlds began to be,  
He is Alpha and Omega,  
He the source, the ending He,  
Of the things that are, that have been,  
And that future years shall see  
Evermore and evermore.*

*Oh, that birth forever blessed,  
When the virgin full of grace,  
By the Holy Ghost conceiving,  
Bore the Savior of our race,  
And the babe, the world's Redeemer,  
First revealed His sacred face  
Evermore and evermore.*

We love because he first loved us.  
- 1 John 4:19



## MONDAY, DECEMBER 19

O Come, Thou Wisdom

**Reading:** Proverbs 8:30-31

Did the most beautiful building just spring up from the earth? Did it just drop down from the sky? Even if we waited billions of years, buildings would not just appear. An architect spends many hours drawing detailed plans. Builders carefully follow the plans and spend many weeks constructing such buildings. This world began not as an accident, nor was it formed as a result of the collision of random cosmic chance. It came to be by God's command and wisdom.

Scripture often gives Jesus the title "Wisdom." Christ was there when the Father created all things – in fact, nothing was made without Christ. And so this cosmos was designed in perfect wisdom.

He who delights in mankind wants to share His Wisdom with us. So He came and taught us. He comes in His Word today and still teaches! We need this Wisdom. We need Christ. He teaches us how to trust Him and thus join in His death and resurrection life. He teaches us how to order our life according to His commands: to fear and love God and to love our neighbor.

*O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,  
Who ord'rest all things mightily;  
To us the path of knowledge show,  
And teach us in her ways to go.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

## TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20

O Come, Thou Lord of Might

**Reading:** Exodus 20:18-19

Might can be terrible or great. It depends on who has it. It depends on whose side you are on. To sinners, God's might is terrifying. On Mount Sinai, it was terrifying: gloom and darkness, thunder and lightning, smoke and earthquakes, and fire falling from the sky. The sound of the trumpet grew louder. Moses talked to God, and the voice of God spoke. The children of Israel at the base of that awful mountain could not bear to hear God. They pleaded that God would speak to them no more! For those who always do what God commands, like the holy angels, the full might of God is not a terrible thing. They rejoice in it.  
But sinners cannot bear it.

Do we see God's might at Bethlehem in a little baby? Do we see God's might at Calvary in a dying man? Maybe not. But it is there! For there Christ, the Lord of might, the God of all power, was crushing the devil. He overcame death. He rose.

Now, to us His rescued children, His might is of great comfort. His holy, powerful outstretched arm of rescue is exactly what we need. We look forward to His return when He will fully show His might again.

*O come, o come, Thou Lord of might,  
who to Thy tribes on Sinai's height  
In ancient times didst give the Law  
in cloud and majesty and awe.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

## WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21

O Come, Thou Branch

**Reading:** Isaiah 11:1, 10

Ever see a tree so big that you cannot wrap your arms around the trunk? That big tree did not start big. It was once a tiny little shoot. The lord promised Isaiah that the Savior would come as a little shoot from the stump of Jesse. This means that the Messiah would come from King David's family, for Jesse was David's father. So Jesus was of the house and lineage of David. This promise meant that the Savior would come in a small way: as a little shoot from the stump of a formerly powerful family. Jesus began as one cell in the womb of Mary. He was the tiniest of shoots.

The Lord promised that this shoot would grow up to "stand as a signal for the peoples." It would grow to be the largest of trees. At the cross this happened. For there the Branch of Jesse was nailed to another tree. In that lifting up of Jesus, He became the savior of all nations. He died for all our sins. He made shade from the burning heat of God's wrath for our sin. As a large tree provides homes for many birds, so Christ, the Branch of Jesse, is the largest tree – the place to gather for life, now and forever.

*O come, Thou Branch of Jesse's tree,  
Free them from Satan's tyranny  
That trust Thy mighty power to save,  
And give them victory over the grave.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

## THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22

O Come, Thou Key of David

**Reading:** Revelation 3:7

In some schools and hospitals, when a fire alarm sounds, many doors immediately shut automatically. They close to keep the fire and smoke contained. This is not a new idea.

At the Garden of Eden, when the first sparks of sin lit the fires of suffering and death and hell, what did God do? He shut the door. He closed off the garden to keep Adam and Eve from eating from the tree of life and living forever here on earth. Imagine how terrible that would be, to be stuck here in sin and suffering forever! Of course, death isn't a good thing. It was not God's plan for humanity. But without death we would be in pain and sickness with no hope of being set free.

Thankfully, our coming Savior is the Key of David, "who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens." He has opened the door to heaven. Wherever the Good News of His coming, death, and resurrection is proclaimed, there the gates of hell are slammed shut.

Sadly, there are those who, like the evil one, always reject Christ. At the end, the doors of the prison will enclose them. But today and every day, Christ unlocks His people from their sins and opens the door to heaven as they repent and He forgives. Every day He brings the full benefit of his coming: the prisons of sin, death, and hell cannot hold you who trust in Him.

*O come, Thou Key of David, come,  
And open wide our heavenly home;  
Make safe the way that leads on high,  
And close the path to misery.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23

O Come, Thou Dayspring

**Reading:** Luke 1:76-79

A couple of days back was the darkest day of the year. It was the shortest day. It was the longest night. This is quite fitting. For without Christ's coming, this world is a dark and cold place – frozen and gloomy. It is during the winter that many animals die because the cold weakens them so. It is in the darkness that many people feel depressed.

But Jesus' birth is celebrated just as the days begin to lengthen. In Christ, the Light of the World, comes warmth and thaw. In Christ, the Light of the World, comes joy and thanksgiving and life.

Jesus' uncle, Zechariah, said of His coming: "the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death." In the babe of Bethlehem, the light shines out. His holiness dispels sin. His life overcomes the shadow of death.

On the last day, when Jesus comes in all His glory, He will shine forth. Not just for a little while, but forever. For there will be no more night. There will only be the light and warmth, joy and peace of being united with God and His holy people forever. This is the light we need! This is the light He is and brings!

*O come, Thou Dayspring from on high,  
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
And death's dark shadows put to flight.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

# SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24

## Christmas Eve

*It came upon the midnight clear that glorious song of old,  
From angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold:  
"Peace on the earth, goodwill to all, from heaven's all-gracious king."  
The world in solemn stillness lay to hear the angels sing.*

*All you, beneath your heavy load, by care and guilt bent low,  
Who toil along a dreary way with painful steps and slow:  
Look up, for golden is the hour, come swiftly on the wing,  
The Prince was born to bring you peace; Of Him the angels sing.*

*For lo, the days have come to pass by prophets seen of old,  
When down into the circling years came Christ as was foretold.  
His Word of peace shall to the earth God's ancient promise bring,  
And all who take this gift will hear the song the angels sing.*

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." – Luke 2:13-14





## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25

### Christmas Day

*On Christmas night all Christians sing to hear the news the angels bring,  
On Christmas night all Christians sing to hear the news the angels bring,  
    News of great joy, news of great mirth,  
    News of our merciful King's birth.*

*Then why should men on earth be sad, since our Redeemer made us glad,  
Then why should men on earth be sad, since our Redeemer made us glad,  
    When from our sin He set us free,  
    All for to gain our liberty?*

*When sin departs before His grace, then life and health come in its place,  
When sin departs before His grace, then life and health come in its place;  
    Angels and men with joy may sing,  
    All for to see the newborn King.*

*All out of darkness we have light, which made the angels sing this night,  
All out of darkness we have light, which made the angels sing this night:  
    "Glory to God and peace to men  
    Now and forevermore. Amen."*

So, the shepherds hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. – Luke 2:16-20

May the  
*Hope, Peace,  
Joy, & Love*



of Christ's birth be with you  
and yours this Christmas.

Love, St. John's Christian Church



