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*With all that 2020 has wrought,  
our hope remains in Jesus as the light of the world.*

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(Biblical passages are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV))

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To the Readers:

We hope this Advent devotional carries you through this season as a beacon of Christ's light amidst the darkness. You will notice different things about this devotional from years past: first and foremost that each reflection is composed by members of our church community. This year we need to be connected, and so reading through each day connects you to someone in our family in Christ (don't be afraid to reach out and tell folks you enjoyed or felt something meaningful in their devotion!). Second, many of our daily reflections include songs, videos, or other online components. Worry not, however, if you are reading this in print there is still plenty for you to enjoy.

Remember, Advent is a season of waiting and preparing for Christ. But those four eternal Advent themes of hope, peace, joy, and love bring extra depth this year. How can we incorporate hope into our practice of waiting? What about peace? Joy? And love? We need these more than ever, and for stretches of this year they have felt elusive. We pray that this devotional is one small piece of the season that helps put hope, peace, joy, and love within your grasp... and that you feel the light of the coming Christ shining in your life.

In hope,

The Discipleship Commission

Yorkfield Presbyterian Church

Elmhurst, IL



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If you have questions about our church community or would like to be in touch with one of the pastors, we encourage you to reach out, and lean in to that nudge from God. You can find our contact information on our website: [www.eypc.org](http://www.eypc.org).

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

*By Christopher Menconi*

As I finished my shopping and left the store, I heard a familiar ringing, a bell in the otherwise silent cold of an early December Sunday. Ah, the Salvation Army ringer, the same man with the friendly face, weathered by many years of service, was here every year.

Two years ago I was not in a good spot. If it wasn't for support from friends and family, I would not have been able to pay my bills. I appreciated how much the bell ringer's service would help others. Then I remembered—what were those words? I heard them every Christmas while I was going to church: "On those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned." The words speak so clearly to me now that I know what the light refers to. It's the Light that comes from Christ that we give to others through our actions. I guess I did learn something in Sunday School after all. Maybe I'll go back to church for the Christmas Eve service; it'll make mom happier than any gift.

The ringer looked at me with his friendly eyes, no doubt wearing a smile beneath his medical mask, and I think he could tell my smile as well. Taking my change and leftover bills -admittedly not much- in hand, I placed them gently in the plastic bucket with the other donations. "God bless you, Sir," the ringer said. His name tag read 'Maurice'. While I had seen him year after year, I had never spoken to him until now. "Thank you for what you do, Maurice," I replied simply, and walked to my car.

We have to come together, so that everyone can see that light, no matter how dark things get. I have the feeling it says something like that in the Bible, though a bit fancier than how I put it. We need to come together so we can all enjoy this time of year, in safety and security.

I called my mother from my car. "Hey Mom, I have a surprise for you! What time is church on Christmas Eve?"

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**Prayer for today:** Thank you, God, for the times you nudge us out of our routines and open our eyes to those around us. Let us hear the bells this season and share the light of Christ with others through our actions. Walk with us, Lord, and prepare our hearts. In Jesus' name, Amen.

*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.*

*By Deb Webb and Mark Harada*

New starts are always hard. In this passage, God “offers a unique personal relationship with God himself, with his laws written on individuals’ hearts instead of on stone.” (NIV footnotes)

We are moving. We are leaving Elmhurst and YPC for a new home and will look for a new church home. We only just made YPC our church home a few years ago and love it so much. Now we must leave again. This should be easier than it sounds because God has written his laws on our hearts. Wherever we go, we know the Lord because God has given us that ability without having to depend on others to tell us about him. But it’s Christmas time. Church is so much a part of our lives, especially during Advent. We love Christmas at YPC. What will we do without it? We will carry God in our hearts and he will be with us because we know HIM, no matter where we are.

Whether together or apart, in Elmhurst or anywhere in the world, we share a future with God and with each other that only our God could create. The new covenant in Jeremiah offers a HOPE for the whole world, and it’s a hope that’s underway-embodied by Jesus and freely offered. It’s a hope certain to arrive fully in God's perfect time: "the days are surely coming, says the LORD" in Jeremiah 31:31. The days are surely coming.

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**Prayer for today:** God of New Beginnings, how grateful we are that you go ahead of us wherever we go. In this year of change and uncertainty, Thank you, Lord, for the certain knowledge of Jesus who’s promise does not change. Bless our friends with new joys and a church family that will embrace them as YPC embraces each of us. Let us always make room for those You bring to us. Amen.

*And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.*

*By Angie Udelhofen*

What struck me about this verse is how we can find ourselves in the “deed of darkness” when preparing for Christmas. We can allow the busyness to take away the light and joy. We need to “wake up from our slumber” and truly appreciate this present time. But how? One of the things I started years ago was making and freezing Christmas cut out sugar cookies in early December. These are our family’s favorite but they take so much time to make and decorate. What had been stressful turned into a special time for my mom, my kids and me to ice and decorate the cookies together just days before Christmas. It became a joyful tradition in our family as we could celebrate God’s gift of salvation, and be filled with the true Spirit of Christmas. Included among our Christmas cookie cutters is a cross to help tie together Jesus as Savior.

The Advent season might look different in 2020. Which of your traditions will you adapt? What is something new you can add to bring light to this season? May you and your family be filled with light and joy as you prepare for and celebrate this Christmas!

### Cookie Walk Sugar Cookies

(Preheat oven at 350 degrees)

1 c butter	2 tsp baking powder
1 c sugar	1 tsp vanilla
1 egg	2 3/4 c flour

Cream together butter and sugar. Beat in egg and vanilla. Add baking powder and flour a cup at a time, mixing after each addition. Roll out on floured surface, use cut-outs and bake for 8 minutes. Remove cookies from trays, cool on racks and place in freezer bags. Freeze up to 1 mo.

For digital readers: A celebration of God's light in the world, Angels from the Realms of Glory <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELjgFKACcdQ>

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**Prayer for today:** In this season, Lord, speak light and life over your creation yet again, awaken us from busyness, and let our hearts be glad. Amen.

*A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."*

*By Dr. Caroline Wolfe*

In the early days of the pandemic in March, I was at work on a Saturday morning and one of my appointments was a phone visit for an ER follow up for an older lady whom I had never met before. I reviewed her ER record and it was clear that her symptoms were all anxiety related. She had declined any medication and was sent home with instructions to follow up. When I spoke with her, I felt like I had little to offer her in the way of help, but I listened and we discussed her symptoms.

At the end of our conversation she asked me where she could get a mask. I asked her why she needed one and she told me she was the caregiver for her ill husband and so she was the one who had to go out to get groceries or whatever they needed and she was very frightened to go out but felt intense stress knowing she had to. At the time I had no idea where she could obtain a mask. Masks weren't readily available and we had been instructed not to give out our supply of masks since the shortage of PPE was a big concern at the time. So I told her I didn't know, and we ended our visit.

About 20 minutes later I received a text from another patient of mine who is a Circuit Court judge and who had been off work because the courts were closed. She had been making masks and wondered if I would like her to drop some off. Oh Yes! I said, and thought right away of the frightened elderly lady I had spoken with on the phone. I called her back and told her I would have a mask for her if she could come into the office to pick it up, which she delightedly agreed to.

When she came in, I could see the hope and gratitude on her face as she accepted the mask from us. In the end I believe that the kindness I was able to show her thanks to the generosity of my other patient was exactly the medicine she needed, to feel cared for in a tangible way. The timing of the communication from my other patient was surely from the Holy Spirit and I felt so grateful for the way we as a community cared for one of the least of these. Indeed, her rough place was made a plain in a small way that day.

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**A Prayer for Today:** Lord of Kindness and Generosity, You for provide according to your perfect timing. Show me the ways in this season that I can be part of your healing care for others. Amen.

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears;*

*By Avy & Cy Cochran*

A conversation with Avy (almost 10) and Cy (4.5)

Mom: If you look at this this drawing, do see God in the big stump or the little plant?

Cy: The big stump.

Mom: Why?

Cy: Because I've never seen God and God is big.

Avy: I see God in the little plant because God brings new life.

Mom: Why would the Bible use plants to talk about Jesus do you think?

Avy: Because plants are peaceful.

Mom: Would you rather be like the stump, or the little plant?

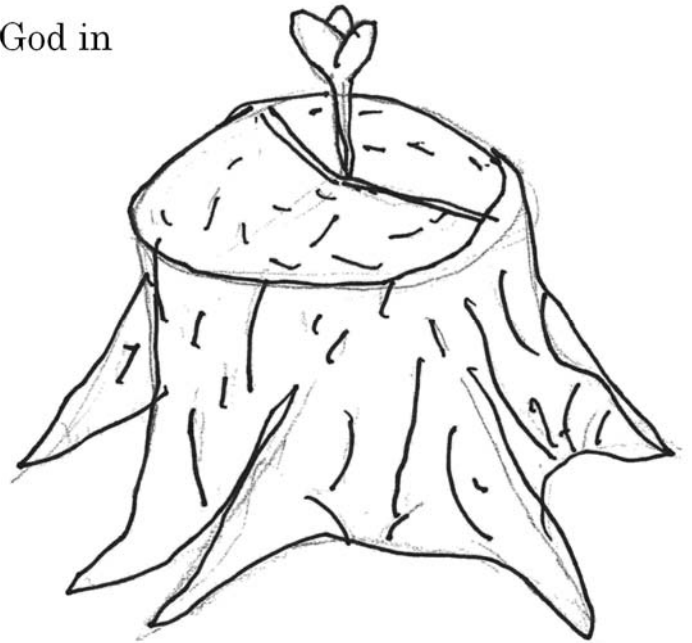
Cy: I want to be the little plant because God makes it grow.

Avy: I want to be the stump because when the little tree grows, the stump will become its food and help it grow, and I like to help people.

Mom: One more question: we talked about how this scripture was talking about waiting for the Messiah, Jesus. Which words in the scripture sound like Jesus to you?

Avy: Wisdom!!

Cy: Lord.



Drawn by Avy Cochran, age 9

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**Prayer for today:** Jesus Christ, bless us with a child's eyes to read your word.

Help up to grow as you make us grow, and to help others grow as well. Lead us to see where new things are growing, even from big stumps. Amen.



## Day 6

## Peaceable Kingdom

Isaiah 11:6-10

*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. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.*

*By Garrett & Neil Schwan*

Consider the possibility of God's Peaceable Kingdom as you find the elements of the scripture in this painting. Which element most speaks to you?



*Edward Hicks (1780-1849), Peaceable Kingdom, Painted circa 1833*

**Prayer for Today:** God, help me to see creation as you see it. Let me be a part of bringing peace on earth in this season and always. Amen.

*Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. 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. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*

*By Anne Callen*

Zechariah and Elizabeth were still without children beyond the age where others were building families. They never stopped praying to God for rescue from their heartache. When an angel unexpectedly appeared with the assurance: "Don't be afraid, your prayer has been heard," everything changed! God heard their prayers. They would have a son, John, who would serve the Lord and become a central figure in the faith. It was more than they knew to hope for.

The assurance that God hears our prayers, makes me think about the many children across the world who are suffering from abuse and exploitation and live in fear. So many of these children hope God will hear their prayers to be rescued and freed from their situations. I know of a young woman named Brittany who, at 16, was left at a party by someone she thought was her friend. That night, she tragically fell into the hands of traffickers. Her abusers threatened to harm her family if she tried to escape. When she was finally rescued she was brought to Reclaim13 (a YPC mission partner in Lombard.)

Brittany's story is heartbreaking, but it is also a story of hope. She was rescued and thankful that God heard her prayer. God provided safe adults who showed her love and compassion and gave her the therapy she needed. She went on to finish her high school diploma and get a Nursing Assistant certificate. She is grateful to God and wants her story told. She was able to testify against her traffickers and they went to jail. God's promise to turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous must include those who took advantage of her.

When we support missions, prayers get answered and we become part of the healing work God is doing in the world. God continues to work within each of us to prepare our hearts.

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**Prayer for Today:** Healer of Hearts who hears all prayers, open my eyes to vulnerable children and prepare my heart to respond. Thank you, Lord, for your healing love of all of your children. Amen.

*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. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.*

*By Rev. Jennifer Parker Wrzeszcz*

Mary's story lodges deep in my heart during these Advent days of anticipating the Christ, God's Divine Mystery, bursting into our world with love.

In an unexpected and surprising encounter with the Holy, Mary discovers God is asking her to carry Love itself – Jesus – into this world. She is soon to become pregnant with possibility. Yet before she consents to participating in this unconventional undertaking so many things rush through her mind. She is perplexed and afraid. She wants to know exactly how this can happen and ponders what it all means.

Are these not some of our own reactions whenever we begin to suspect God is inviting us to deliver Love more fully into the world? Aren't they similar to the feelings that arrive when we are asked to step out of our comfort zones and nurture new possibilities of birthing God's love in unusual and imaginative ways?

The questions are natural, but if given free rein can lead to so many excuses for not agreeing to participate. So, let's not get stuck there. Mary didn't. Ultimately, she chose to trust God's promise that the Holy Spirit would overshadow and embrace her on the journey into uncharted territory as she made room for the Child. May we do the same.

Here is a lovely poem, *After Annunciation* (Madeleine L'Engle and Luck Shaw, Winter Song, pg.69) to inspire you as you ponder God's curious requests.

This is the irrational season/ When love blooms bright and wild.

Had Mary been filled with reason/ There'd have been no room for the child.

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**Prayer for today:** Lord, Let it be with me according to your word. Amen

*When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

*By Tom Ebsen*

I never read this passage without thinking how miraculous it was for the Wise Men to find the stable – a star can only offer up so much earthly guidance after all. But with God all things are possible. It was no less miraculous that I was led to Christ from my previous life with a worldly, selfish, and sinful lifestyle.

As a new believer at 34 years of age I was able to hear singer/songwriter Rich Mullins twice at Wheaton College concerts. Rich was a consummate musician, especially on the hammered dulcimer, and his artistry helped reinforce my new Christian perspective on all things. A favorite song was “If I Stand”, the refrain included:

*If I stand let me stand on the promise that You will pull me through,  
And if I can't, let me fall on the grace that first brought me to you.*

God's grace brought me to Jesus just as he led the Wise Men to a manger on that winter journey long ago.

For electronic users you can hear the entire song here: <https://youtu.be/-TgyCds3jDM>

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**Prayer for Today:** Gracious God, you lead us into the unknown where the miracles lie. Fill me again and again with wonder and awe and a driving desire to continue to follow where you would lead me. Amen.

*Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.*

*By Sue Shepard*

When I was 8 years old my family lived in a tight-knit neighborhood at the end of a cul-de-sac in Edmonds, Washington. My dad had been gone most of the year with only occasional visits home, as he was the campaign manager for a man running for the Senate. The candidate lost, and my dad was out of a job, and we were broke – a fact that I didn’t really comprehend. As Christmas drew near my 4 siblings and I were in that Christmas Frenzy of pouring through the Sears Catalogue and making long lists for Santa. Finally, on Christmas Eve my dad sat us down and explained the reality of our situation. “I see you’ve made your lists,” he said, “and I just want you to know that you will all get something for Christmas, but it just won’t be all you want it to be.”

We left for the Christmas Eve service that night, and I’m sure my mom and dad’s hearts were a bit heavy.

When we returned home, there were presents EVERYWHERE! We laughed and chided my dad for joking with us, but mom and dad’s eyes were filled with tears. Our neighbors had bought and wrapped gifts for each of us and put them under the tree while we were at church.

Such loving, caring neighbors we had in our lives! They really showed Hope and Love in a very tangible and unforgettable way.

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**Prayer for today:** Lord, Help me sew seeds of joy today and use me to be an answer to someone’s prayer. Amen.



*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. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.*

*By Ann Raley*

Prior to becoming a high school counselor, I taught high school German and English for many years. For both subjects, words are vital to learning and communication, whether spoken or written. Words are tremendously powerful in making and conveying meaning. As a result, this passage automatically captivates me in thinking about the original Word coming from God and being part and parcel of God. My fascination continues in reading that this mysterious, original Word of God couldn't be contained. God's expression of love was demonstrated through the gift of life and light, namely Jesus, the eternal light of the world. God spoke God's love to the world through Jesus.

As Jesus' followers, these verses tell us that, similar to John the Baptist, we are called on to share Jesus with the world, not to try to keep him all to ourselves (which quite frankly won't work anyway). How do we do that? When we invest our time and energy in others, listening to them and praying for them, we are sharing the light of Jesus. Even when we may feel inadequate, these verses remind and encourage us that his light is an unstoppable force.

May this amazing Word, whom we know as Jesus, bring life and light to your day in this Advent season.

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**Prayer for Today:** In this season where much feels uncertain, thank you, Lord, for the certainty of your Word and for the Light of Christ that shines in the world and in me. Amen.

*he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

*By Angie Udelhofen*

After you read this scripture passage, watch and listen to these two songs (linked below) that exult and glorify Jesus as the name above all names. May these words resonate with you and fill you with the loving gift Jesus Christ is to us. Praise God!

**Jesus Name Above All Names**

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-X1EoecpeE>)

Jesus name above all names  
Beautiful Savior glorious Lord  
Emmanuel God is with us  
Blessed Redeemer living Word

**You Are Holy (Prince of Peace)**

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsYyuK1w3q0>)

You are holy, You are mighty, You are worthy, Worthy of praise  
I will follow, I will listen, I will love you, All of my days  
I will sing to and worship (You are Lord of Lords, You are King of Kings)  
The King who is worthy (You are mighty God, Lord of everything)  
I will love and adore Him (You're Emmanuel, You're the great I AM)  
And I will bow down before Him (You're the Prince of Peace, Who is the Lamb)  
I will sing to and worship, (You're the living God, You're my saving grace)  
The King who is worthy, (You will reign forever, You are Ancient of Days.)  
I will love and adore Him, (You are Alpha, Omega, Beginning and End)  
And I will bow down before Him, (You're my savior, Messiah, Redeemer and Friend)  
You're my prince of peace, And I will live my life for You

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**Prayer for Today:** Jesus, name above all names, in you lies the hope of the world.  
You are my savior, Messiah, Redeemer, and Friend. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

*In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

*By Maddie, Abby and Michelle Saltiel*

We like to read together as a family from our favorite Advent book each Christmas. This is the version of the scripture found in the book. Abby, after reading this passage, wrote her own reflection in the form of this poem. May you and your family also spend time reflecting on this passage and discover what it means to you.

### **The Advent Book**

“At that time, a decree said everyone had to go to his family’s town to register. Joseph was from the family of David, so he and Mary went to Bethlehem, which was David’s home. While Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, the time came for the baby to be born, and Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in strips of cloth and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” (Stockman, J & Stockman K. (1999) The Advent Book. Oak Park, IL. Open Doors.)

A few days pass,  
but unlike before God has been reborn  
and Jesus with him  
I will always find love, hope and faith  
through familiar words  
deep down inside.

-A poem by Abby Saltiel

May we find comfort and hope in this well known story. Our world is constantly changing but we know that God’s love for us is constant. He sent his son to be a light in the darkness.

For digital readers: enjoy reading The Advent Book along with the Saltiel family:  
[https://youtu.be/hj\\_lGZwvOLE](https://youtu.be/hj_lGZwvOLE)

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**Prayer for Today:** Jesus, you are the comfort and the hope. Let me make room for you and experience the familiar in new ways 'deep down inside'. Amen

*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. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"*

"Fear Not!" said the Angel to the startled shepherds, "I bring you good news of great joy!" After the angel spoke, the sky was suddenly filled with angels singing "Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace and goodwill to all." What a scene! Do you recall when you first heard the Good News of Jesus? Who shared it with you? Anna Van Meir says this passage made her think about Christmas and how the angel appeared to the shepherds. This is how the angel appears to Anna.

The appearance of the Angel and the hearing of the Good News, changes everything after that. In our lives, the Good News creates new priorities and a new foundation of hope.

When Gordon Burrows reflected on where our HOPE comes from, these words from the song "In Christ Alone" came to mind: *"In Christ alone my hope is found/ He is my light, my strength, my song/ / What heights of love, what depths of peace/ When fears are stilled, when strivings cease/ My Comforter, my All in All/ Here in the love of Christ I stand."*

Digital readers can listen to Gordon's recording of "In Christ Alone", (written by Stuart Townsend c2001). : <https://youtu.be/UiZg7KZD7iA>

May these reflections bring Hope and Peace to your day.



The Angel Appears

Anna, age 10

**Prayer for today:** Thank you, Lord, for artists and musicians who let us encounter the Living Word in new ways. Help me to live my life seeking Your presence so I can rejoice daily in the good news of your birth. Amen.

*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

*By Kate Cross*

I've been blessed to be a part of the Yorkfield Christmas pageant for many years as my own children have had big and not-so-big parts. What I've learned to appreciate is not only how each character in the story, but each precious child in the pageant, as well as those gathered to watch, play an important role in spreading the hopeful message of Christ's birth. In reading Luke Chapter 2, I am particularly struck by Mary's response upon encountering the shepherds.

Mary was the first to accept her role in bringing hope into the world by trusting God and risking everything to give birth to the Savior. Earlier in the Christmas story we learn how God reassured and assisted Mary along the way by sending angels, getting Joseph on board, and providing a companion in Elizabeth, who was also tasked with a special role. But perhaps His ultimate reassurance to Mary came through the lowly shepherds.

The shepherds, who had been informed by angels of the birth of her son, paid a visit to adore him, and then left quickly to do the most important work of sharing the news with others. This is a pivotal moment in God's plan when suddenly knowledge of the Savior's birth was no longer just between heavenly hosts and Mary's family members; the good news was unveiled to the world! Luke explains that people, upon hearing this good news, were 'astonished'. But, Mary, she took this all in, 'treasured' it and 'pondered it in her heart'. I like to think she paused to absorb the magnitude of what was happening as God's messianic plan was unfolding right before her eyes - all because she accepted her role.

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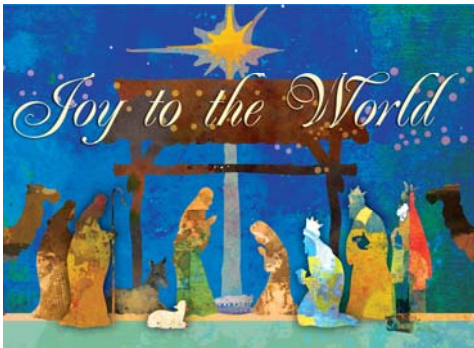
**Prayer for today:** Heavenly Father, thank you for Mary saying yes and for the shepherds who spread the Good News that the Savior was born for us! Guide us to follow your plan and to play the role you lovingly designed for each of us. Amen!



*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

*By The Griffin Family*

These two songs spoke to us as we reflected on this well-known scripture. We thank God for the gift of His son, Jesus. We also praise God for the gift of music and cherish our time playing our brass instruments together. We hope the lyrics of these two hymns bring you a little joy and love today



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.

**Love Divine All Loves Excelling** (by Roland Hugh)

Love Divine, all love excelling,/ Joy of heav'n, to earth come down;/  
Fix in us Thy humble dwelling,/ All Thy faithful mercies crown./ Jesus,  
Thou art all compassion;/ Pure, unbounded love Thou art;/ Visit us with  
Thy salvation,/ Enter every trembling heart.



Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit/ Into every troubled breast;/ Let us all in Thee  
inherit,/ Let us find the promised rest./ Take away the love of sinning;/ Alpha and Omega  
be;/ End of faith, as its beginning,/ Set our hearts at liberty.

Come, Almighty, to deliver,/ Let us all Thy life receive;/ May Thy presence e'er be with us,/  
Never more Thy temples leave./ Thee we would be always blessing,/ Serve Thee as Thou  
wouldst approve,/ Pray, and praise Thee without ceasing,/ Glory in Thy perfect love.

Finish, then, Thy new creation;/ Pure and spotless let us be;/ Let us see Thy great  
salvation/ Perfectly restored in Thee;/ Changed from glory into glory/ Till with Thee we  
take our place,/ Till we cast our crowns before Thee,/ Lost in wonder, love and praise.

For digital readers: enjoy this video of us playing this song and hymn at <https://youtu.be/I7q3ZYZVUZ2U>

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**Prayer for today:** Father God, we thank You and praise You today for the miracle of Your Son's birth. Thank You for bringing great JOY to the whole world!  
Amen.

*The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully. They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation. Such is the company of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah*

*Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah*

*By Colin and Sarah Lestina*

The passage of Psalm 24 begins with the simple phrase “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.” We are reassured that everything on this earth, everything that we know, love, hate, and overlook is in the control of God. As human beings, we might fear the future because it is unknown. Yet, in a world created by God, the future is good and is under his power. The passage asks “Who can ascend the Lord’s mountain?” and it responds with those who have not made “false promises” or “sworn dishonestly,” and those who have “clean hands” and “pure hearts.” All of these characteristics are impossible to follow, as we all sin. Yet, through seeking to know God and believing in Jesus, who had clean hands and a pure heart, we are freed. It is in Jesus that we have hope for a future with God which is eternal. So while we may have troubles on earth, we have the hope that is only found in the King of glory, who is strong and mighty to save.

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**Prayer for Today:** Jesus, you are my hope and salvation. Help me be still when the world begins to spin and remember You are God. Amen.

*Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, “Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.” Then Isaiah said: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. “Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.”*

*By Pat Burrows*

I LOVE S'mores! This perfect combo of melty/goosey/crumblly comes with memories of simple, peaceful times around a fire with family and friends. Everything about them feels like love to me. The best S'mores I've ever had were in a field in Kenya at the end of an intense week of missions. It was an unexpected, joyful surprise, and so out of place it still hardly seems real. But there they were: in Kenya! After all the ways God showed up that week, He brought me S'mores and my heart was overwhelmed.

In today's passage, the last verse is so familiar, it's easy to skip past the lesson before it. This was not the first chat with Ahaz - a self-serving evil king. Instead of trusting God, Ahaz put faith in political alliances to protect himself at the perilous expense of God's people. In one last effort to get through, God tells Ahaz to ask for a SIGN that would make him believe God is God. Anything at all-ask God for it! God offers him the experience of confirmed belief. Ahaz wiggles around and says no. Undeterred, God skips past Ahaz and declares his own sign that would ring throughout history: “Behold, the virgin will conceive and bear a son, and will call his name Immanuel.” Ahaz missed the gift of a lifetime and went the way of all evil kings. Centuries later, we recognize Jesus as Immanuel: “God With Us,” the embodiment of God's promise and presence.

To “behold” is to observe/recognize/pay attention. We have chances everyday to behold God's presence because everyday He is indeed present. He shows up in the normal and in the unexpected, in large and small ways, and sometimes with S'mores in Kenya. Recognizing and receiving God's presence with gratitude, brings HOPE to hard days and elevates even the best ones. May it be so.

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**Prayer for today:** Thanks, God, for all the ways you show up. Open my eyes and my heart to see you as you make your presence known this day and in this season. Amen.

*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.*

*By Pastor Matt*

Humans are extremely vulnerable creatures. We get hurt. We get sick. We ache. Sometimes our feelings get crushed. Sometimes we feel all alone. If you have ever walked down the halls of the hospital, you know what a huge place it is. Rooms are filled with people from all different places and situations. Each person is admitted for a particular ailment (or perhaps a series of different things). The not quite comfy enough chairs in the halls are filled with family members and friends who come to be present in the moment. Some are praying, others are crying; Some take a quick nap and others check their phones. Some laugh with joy because great news was recently delivered. There is a myriad of situations all playing out within a few feet of one another and, in each, God is present.

God created us human, with all our various emotions, aches, ups and downs. God knows us inside and out (even better than we know ourselves). Understanding each of our struggles and joys, Jesus became one of us (great news indeed)! The One who created us cares enough to send the very best (I think I heard that somewhere before). Whatever struggles and joys we experience in life, Jesus is present and knows exactly what we are going through. This is good news of great joy – the Word became flesh. Allow that news to dwell in your heart today.

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**Prayer for today:** God who knows me better than I know myself, be present to me today. Remind me that you love me enough to know me, fully. Amen.

*In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

*By Gordon and Pat Burrows*

**A Conversation between the Psalmist (who could be writing in 2020) and Jesus:**

Overheard in the back corner of a mind where often unspoken thoughts stir

Psalmist: How long, Lord? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.

**Jesus: Blessed are you who are weeping. In due time, you will be laughing. Hear my word with an honest heart, hold on to it tightly, and it will produce fruit as you patiently endure.**

Psalmist: Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief. My life is consumed by anguish and my bones grow weak. I have become like broken pottery. For I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side!"

**Jesus: Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid. Come to me, you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**

Psalmist: As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My tears have been my food day and night...When I look beside me, I see that there is no one to help me, no one is to protect me. No one cares for me...I am worn out calling for help, my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God. Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink; for I am in trouble.

**Jesus: Are not sparrows sold for very little? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. The very hairs on your head have been counted. Fear not. You are worth more than sparrows. I tell you, do not worry about your life...But seek his kingdom, and all you need will be given to you as well...for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.**

Psalmist: These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng.

**Jesus: Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit who will help you and always be with you.**

Psalmist: Yet, I am always with You, Lord; you hold me by my right hand. And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and heart may fail, but God is my strength and my portion forever.

**Jesus: I came that you may have life and have it abundantly. Surely, I am with you always, in pandemics and strife, in peace and in plenty, even to the very end of the age.**

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**Prayer for Today:** Lord, in life, tears and joy live side-by-side, and you meet us in both. Thank you for the Psalmist who gives voice to our darkness and for Jesus who is the Light the darkness can never overcome. The Psalmist says, you draw near to the brokenhearted. May it be so. Amen.



*O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth. Say among the nations, “The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity.” Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.*

*By Leslie Menconi*

Much like the beloved sounds of Christmas carols that fill our homes at this time of year, the author of Psalm 96 extols the name of the LORD in song saying that even the “trees of the forest sing for joy!” (v.12) As we are awaiting in hope for the coming of the Christ child and preparing our hearts and homes for the season, let us harken back to the simplicity of the first Christmas and focus on the basics.

We complicate the season by thinking that we need to do so many things! In truth, on the first Christmas, God did all of the work!

- ★ God hung a glorious star as a beautiful decoration.
- ★ God’s angels provided the heavenly music.
- ★ God provided a place for this to happen that was unexpected and given freely.
- ★ God took care of the invitations for all - from the lowliest of shepherds to the most regal of worldly kings--an offer still extended to us today .
- ★ But most importantly God gave the Gift--the baby in the manger--a Gift for each one of us-- the gift of salvation and life everlasting made possible through this Gift of Love.

Mary and Joseph huddled close to each other and to the baby Jesus and shared in the celebration of this miracle child’s birth. May we be with those we have devoted our lives to and proclaim the Good News of Love Incarnate.

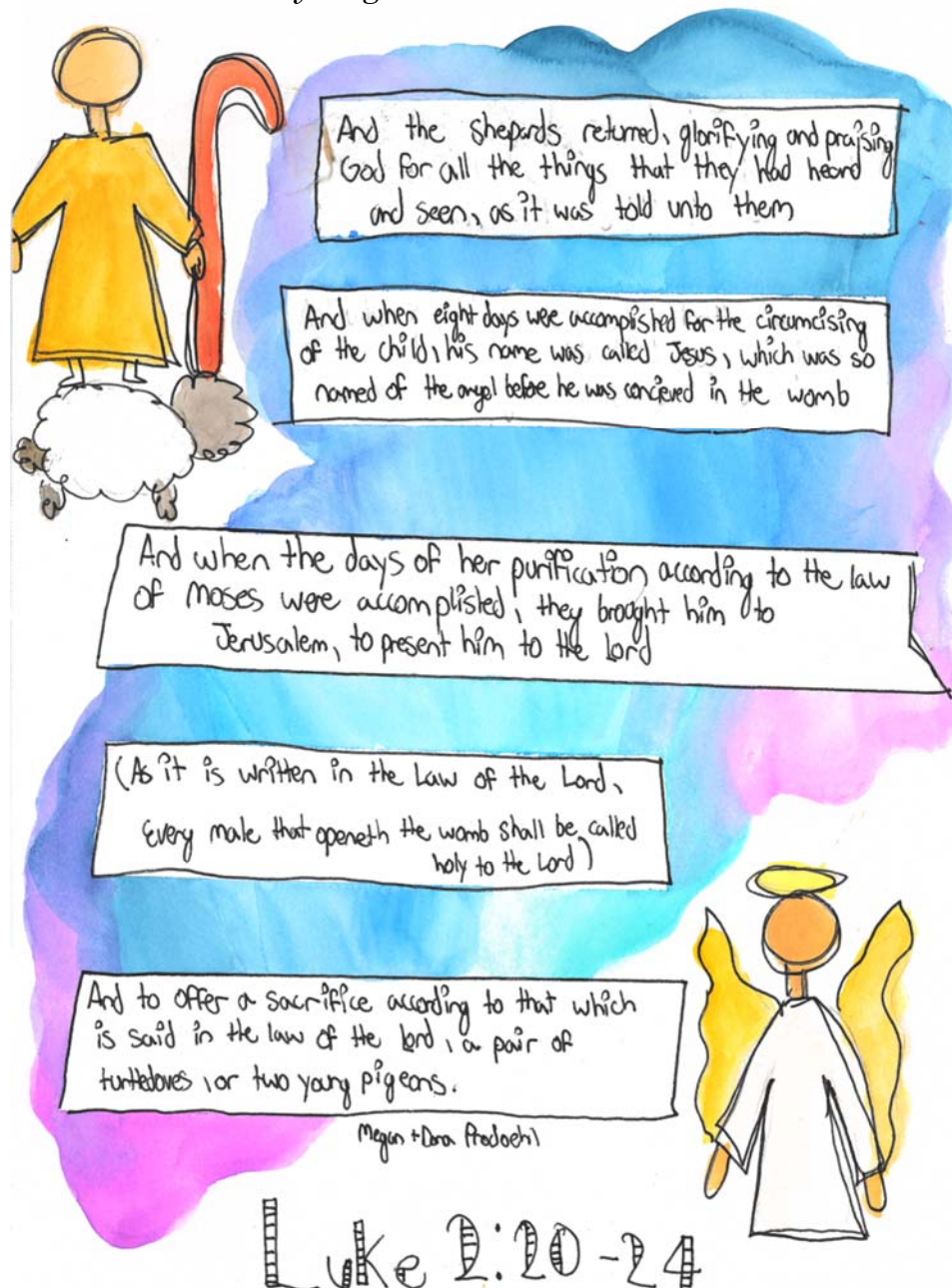
May you allow God to do all of the work this Christmas season to prepare you and yours for a simple holiday season filled with bounteous peace, joy and HOPE.

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**Prayer for Today:** Lord, for all the ways you prepare ahead of my needs, let my heart sing with joy. Amen.

*The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."*

*By Megan and Dana Prodoehl*



**Prayer for Today:** Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Give me courage to ask for forgiveness, change my ways, and live a life worthy of the Gift of Jesus. Amen.

*O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come. Your power and your righteousness, O God, reach the high heavens. You who have done great things, O God, who is like you? You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depths of the earth you will bring me up again. You will increase my honour, and comfort me once again. I will also praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing praises to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel. My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to you; my soul also, which you have rescued.*

*By Lisa Miller*

Dan and I are founding members of Canterbury Carollers. As carollers in traditional dress, our songs are all written before 1870, so almost all are about the birth and life of Jesus.

We love to tell the story of Jesus in song, some everyone knows and some people have never heard. We never know who will be in the audience and we treasure the opportunity to connect with people from all walks with our music. One memorable moment of connection came one year when we were singing at an event at the Art Institute. People had dinner in the Trading Room at the Art Institute and then they would go to the Goodman Theater to see “A Christmas Carol”. We sang from table to table. As we started to sing “Adeste Fideles,” a man joyfully sang along with us:

*“Adeste fideles laeti triumphantes / Venite, venite in Bethlehem / Natum videte regem angelorum / Venite, adoremus, Venite, adoremus / Venite, adoremus, Dominum!...”*

He sang every word and verse. He caught up with us afterward and told us how much that song meant to him. He was Jewish, but he went to a Catholic school and the nuns taught them the Christmas carols in Latin. It touched all of us that this song could bring him back to a happy place in his childhood and that we could touch his life with the birth of Jesus.

Advent is a season of music that can transport us and transform us- adding depth to our experience and bringing light and life to our days. What are the songs that feel like Christmas to you? Without concerts and church singing this year, how will you add music to this season?

For digital readers, you’ll find a track of “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” on the CD page of the Canterbury Carollers website. <https://www.canterburycarollers.net/cd>

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**Prayer for Today:** Fill my spirit with music today and let it glorify you. Amen.

*There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.*

I want to be an Anna: an elder who still worships, fasts, and prays, who speaks life over babies and children and encourages young parents. Someone who is present and steady, who speaks her mind with love in her heart and points everything back to God. The Annas in our midst give me hope.

My first Anna was my grandmother. I was too young when she passed to have known much of life and faith or how important this would all be to me. But she knew. Some of her certain hope comes to me in songs she would have sung, like these words from ***It is Well With My Soul***:

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll  
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say  
It is well, it is well, with my soul...*

There are life circumstances- the one's that hurt hearts and bodies- that can leave us diminished at any age. And there are attitudes and perspectives that make us resilient, allowing us to rise above the chaos in the world, to choose HOPE again and again, and to keep our eyes on Jesus. 2020 has certainly brought cause for anxiety and despair amidst so much uncertainty. It seems a good time to learn from these elders who have lived long and still hold on to hope.

Who are your Annas? Where is their hope?

Digital readers can enjoy this a cappella rendition of ***It is Well With My Soul***-  
<https://youtu.be/ZYrL9ea1XUg>

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**Prayer for today:** Thank you God for the Anna's among us, for their faith and their example. God, move in the hearts of all our elders today, cover them with peace and joy, remind them of your love. Give us all the courage to be an Anna at any age, speaking life and pointing others to you. Amen.

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.*

*By Amy Wiesenmayer*

“Looking for the blessed hope” are the words that most struck me when reading today’s scripture. Looking for hope was the most needed and often difficult thing to find in the past year. Hope is what we all strive for each day. Hope that our families remain healthy. Hope for the safety of our first responders. Hope that the hungry are fed. Hope that every person feels equal and is treated equal. Hope that the world can heal. As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, we are reminded of the hope that God gives us every day; Jesus our savior who gave himself for us.

As we look to the new year with all its uncertainties, we need to remember that Jesus is the blessed hope we desperately need in our lives. There is no way to predict what this new year will bring us, but if we can lean on our love of God, we can remember to see the world through his hopeful lens. Every day there are examples of God’s love, compassion and forgiveness in the chaotic world we live in. Let us actively look for God’s blessed hope each day and approach the new year with optimism, for we know that God has already blessed us beyond any daily challenge with the birth of his son Jesus Christ.

Digital readers: The Cause of Christ <https://youtu.be/ifu6aJTOEVA>

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**Prayer for Today:** God of Hope: Open my eyes and my heart to witness the wonders of your love in the midst of what swirls around me and fill me with peace that overflows to others. Amen.



*Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*

*By Debbie Suits and Danielle Schell*

Our daughter, Danielle, grew up at YPC. Each Sunday during Advent, children would gather for the lesson and excitement would build as the Nativity statues moved closer to the Communion table. As Danielle remembers it:

At the Christmas Eve service every year, our Christian educator, Loretta, would bring a present wrapped in gold wrapping paper. Each year after the children's lesson, she asked for who ever had the birthday closest to Dec. 24th to open the present. I was born on December 25th, and to my amazement every year I got to open the box. I would wait, look around and make sure no one else had a birthday closer then throw my hand in the air. Un-wrapping that box every Christmas I would find a little baby Jesus figurine that would complete the set of eager people in the manger. Contrary to popular belief, babies do not come from the stork or from Mommy's stomach, they come from little gold boxes.

That box contained the same thing every year, but my excitement never died. Now that I am older I sit in the congregation and watch kids gather for the same lessons all advent long, and the story never seems over-done or worn out.

Why did God choose to enter the world so humbly? Christmas time is an eye opening and tendering time of year for me. Often I forget why we go through all the gift buying and rushing around. Material wealth and riches pass quickly. How many toys do I remember from my childhood? What Christmas dinner details do I recall? I can't think of any Christmas memory that is as vivid and alive as the gold box that possessed our baby Jesus.

Thinking back on that time, I realize how grateful I am for the gift of Jesus, for a church that comforts and surprises me, and for children who remind us, even as adults, about the truest meaning of God's love.

Digital readers can enjoy this version of Away in a Manger: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CJFt7BZKUU>

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**Prayer for Christmas Eve:** God, Once again we come joyfully and humbly to the manger, ever in awe of this Gift. In you, our HOPE is renewed. Remind us of our collective stories of your presence and grace so we can share with others the Good News of this precious gift. With all creation, we say, Hallelujah! Amen.

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

*By Pastor Lauren*

Did you get any coal this morning as a gift? I hope not... I've always found the 'you better be good or you will get coal for Christmas' to be a theological farce—that somehow, Christmas morning and the joy it brings relies on our good behavior. As much as I *\*want\** to use this idea in my household (You better shape up! You better clean up! You better stop acting like animals... or else!), it just never seems right.

God grants us the ultimate gifts: love, joy, peace, hope, forgiveness, and grace, all wrapped in the tidy (albeit sometimes surprising) package of Jesus Christ our Messiah, with absolutely no strings attached. Not because of how well we decorated our house or how quiet we were when mom was on a conference call. Not because of the college debt we paid off or the good grades or the deals bartered or the lack of sick days we took. Not because we gave to the church or worked our side hustles or because we did everything to our best effort. As unusual as it is for us to hear, the gift of Jesus Christ this morning comes whether we've been naughty or nice.

The gift of Jesus is not a reward for our good behavior, but the impetus that begins our lives where we do our best. It is because we have received the very best most glorious present (read: not coal), that we can't help but shower all the other people in our lives with the same grace, love, mercy, peace, and hope.

Let the renewal of these promises present itself to you today, and open that gift with the care and awe of someone receiving the best gift ever given.

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**Prayer for today:** Jesus Christ our Messiah, you are the greatest gift we've ever received. May your love renew us this morning so that we may always be extravagant in our work for you, giving love to others we meet along our journey. Amen.



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