

Second Presbyterian Church

making room

advent devotional 2021



## Making Room: An Advent Devotional

### *Editor's Note*

Advent is the start of a New Year, liturgically speaking. Why we don't celebrate the first Sunday of Advent with midnight parties and food is still a persistent question in the back of my mind. Perhaps the answer is that Advent finds itself squished in the middle of a "celebration sandwich" between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Celebration and questions aside, the first Sunday of Advent is the beginning of the liturgical year, the beginning of the church's calendar of scripture and holy days that recount the ministry of Christ, the relationship of God with God's people, and the over-arching story of love and faith. The liturgical year begins with Advent, not Christmas. Though Christmas has its fair share of importance to be sure, it is the season of Advent that is the forerunner of our church calendar. It is a time for turning back, a time to re-focus, a time set apart for our preparation as we anticipate Christmas as well as Christ's coming again. During the season of Advent, we are called to have hope, to share love, to be open to joy, and to work toward peace. Though this may come across as another to-do list in our already crammed holiday scheduling, these are all actually calls for us to make room, to make time, to make space in our lives for the holy.

The stories of Advent and Christmas, though they are greatly celebrated and divine, each hold a human element to them. Just like the divine and human aspects of Jesus, the story of Jesus' birth is foretold by heavenly angels to lowly shepherds at work. The incarnation is a work of the Holy Spirit, and the Son of God is carried in the womb of a peasant teenage girl. The King of Kings is born a Jew under Roman rule and in a feeding place for animals no less.

After our series on the Acts of the Apostles, we have seen how we are all called to be supporting players in the redemption of the world. The Holy Spirit is present in our midst and in our lives. We need only to follow God's leading. This season of Advent is a gift to us all. A gift of time, intentional reflection, and change of pace. K.C. Ireton, in her book *The Circle of Seasons*, explains this perfectly:

"In a culture that is too often hurried and distracted, the church year helps us pay attention because it draws our focus continually back to Christ. It hallows time, reminding us that time, too, belongs to our sovereign God, who is present in it, and calls us to slow down long enough to notice. In a culture where people often feel isolated, lonely and fragmented, the church year calls us to community and wholeness." The season of Advent "focuses our attention...on the one thing that is needful, enabling us to enter together into the very life of God as God enters into life with us."

It has been a joy to read and compile your lovely devotions this year. I am grateful for this opportunity and for the ways this collection will encourage us all to make room for the holy in our everyday lives.

Peace and Light,

Jessica Lewis

## Advent Devotional Bookmarks

On November 21<sup>st</sup>, the youth and children of Second Presbyterian created beautiful “Painted Prayers.” They were prompted to use colors to pray for our church family as we experience the season of Advent together. They were given a palette of 8 watercolors to use during this activity. Each color represented who or what they were praying for as they created their painting. Their prayer-filled creations have now been transformed into bookmarks for the physical copies of this devotional. Each bookmark has the name of the young person who created it (or who the artwork was created in honor of). During the season of Advent, may you find time each day to pray for this special person who has shared their prayers with you in an artistic way!

To better understand the colors used on your bookmark, the colors and meanings listed below were given as a guide for the youth and children to compose their prayers. The meanings could reflect: what they hope someone will feel, the current feelings of those they hope will feel loved during this season, what they wish for our church family to enjoy or feel this season, etc.

Black → Sorrow/Sadness

Red → Love/Loved

Orange → Happiness

Yellow → Joy

Green → Creation/Earth

Blue → Peace

Purple → Hope

Brown → Pain/Anger

Bookmarks are included in the printed copy of this devotional and on the tables in the Atrium and Narthex for those who are using the digital copy of this devotional.

If painting prayers or using art to pray is something you find interesting, why not give it a try during Advent? Perhaps making room for a new way of praying may just make more room for you to experience the loving presence of our magnificent Creator.

*Note:* This technique of painting prayers was adapted by Jessica Lewis from the book, *Praying in Color*, by Sybil MacBeth.





## Making Room for Mission & Outreach

During the season of Advent, one way you can “make room” for others in our community is by creating a Reverse Advent Calendar. Instead of a box of chocolates (or other fine things) that is *taken from* throughout the season, a Reverse Advent Calendar is a box or container that is *added to* during Advent.

### Reverse Advent Calendar Directions:

1. **Make Room in Your Home:** Find a space in your home to place a box or container that you can fill with items needed in our community (food, hygiene products, etc.). Maybe near a doorway or family gathering area, so that the presence of the Reverse Advent Calendar will remind you to pray for and minister to those in our community who are hungry, homeless, sick, and in need.
2. **Make Room in Your Day:** Put a new item in the box each day, perhaps as a daily ritual before dinner. You could have a theme: food items, warm winter wear, or pick a specific charity and ask what their greatest needs are. A list of item suggestions can be found below, as well as a plan for a FISH Pantry Reverse Advent Calendar.
3. **Make Room in Your Holiday Plans:** Remember to deliver your items to a nearby shelter, community organization, or to the FISH Pantry after you have filled your box during Advent.
4. **Make Room in Your Year:** Let this activity spark other ideas of how you can reach out and make room for those who need to feel the love of Christ at all times of the year.

Suggested Items to Add to your Reverse Advent Calendar:

- |                            |                   |
|----------------------------|-------------------|
| -Non-perishable food items | -Hygiene Products |
| -Blankets                  | -Scarves          |
| -Gloves and hats           | -Socks            |

If you would like to make your Reverse Advent Calendar for the Fish Pantry mission, it is in need of the following household and personal items:

- |            |             |
|------------|-------------|
| -Dish Soap | -Bath Soap  |
| -Shampoo   | -Toothpaste |
| -Deodorant | -Pet Food   |

## FISH Pantry Reverse Advent Calendar

November 28 <sup>th</sup> – Bar of Bath Soap	December 12 <sup>th</sup> – Bottle of Dish Soap
November 29 <sup>th</sup> – Small Bottle of Dish Soap	December 13 <sup>th</sup> – Shampoo
November 30 <sup>th</sup> – Shampoo	December 14 <sup>th</sup> – Hair Conditioner
December 1 <sup>st</sup> – Toilet Paper	December 15 <sup>th</sup> – Bottle of Body Wash
December 2 <sup>nd</sup> – Bottle of Body Wash	December 16 <sup>th</sup> – Women’s Deodorant
December 3 <sup>rd</sup> – Women’s Deodorant	December 17 <sup>th</sup> – Toothpaste
December 4 <sup>th</sup> – Toothpaste	December 18 <sup>th</sup> – Men’s Deodorant
December 5 <sup>th</sup> – Men’s Deodorant	December 19 <sup>th</sup> – Toothbrushes
December 6 <sup>th</sup> – Toothbrush	December 20 <sup>th</sup> – Cat Food
December 7 <sup>th</sup> – Cat Food (can/small bag)	December 21 <sup>st</sup> – Bottle of Hand Soap
December 8 <sup>th</sup> – Bottle of Hand Soap	December 22 <sup>nd</sup> – Dog Food
December 9 <sup>th</sup> – Dog Food (can/small bag)	December 23 <sup>rd</sup> – Toilet Paper
December 10 <sup>th</sup> – Bar of Bath Soap	December 24 <sup>th</sup> – Toothpaste
December 11 <sup>th</sup> – Toilet Paper	December 12 <sup>th</sup> – Bottle of Dish Soap

**You can drop these items in the FISH Pantry Collection Box in the Coat Closet near the Atrium.**

**You can also volunteer to help them with packing and delivering on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month, which will be December 28<sup>th</sup> for this month.**

week 1

making room for...

what is to come

**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent: Making Room for What is to Come*****Luke 1:26-38 & Matthew 1:18-21***

Mary makes room for the baby announced to her by the angel Gabriel with the astounding proclamation, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me just as you have said." Yet as amazing as that is, as a father I can't help but think about how Joseph made room in his life for the child that wasn't his. Matthew doesn't tell us what Joseph felt, but I think I know.

When we were told by the adoption agency that we had been chosen by a birth mother to raise the child she had brought into the world, we had 2 weeks' notice to prepare for our daughter's arrival in our family. We had been preparing to welcome a child for some time, but now it was different. What had been a possibility had become a reality. We had been chosen. The baby was here. She was really here in the world. She was real. And she was going to be our daughter.

I was overcome with fear and doubt but there was one fear that stood out above all the others. What if I couldn't love her the same way I loved my son? I have since discovered from talking with people that almost every parent has the same fear with the second child. *What if I don't love this one as much as I already do that one?* The complicating factor for me, though, had to do with biology. Could I make as much room in my heart for the child that wasn't *biologically* mine as I had for the one that was?

What I can tell you is this. When the social worker placed Lily Grace into my arms at the adoption agency, it was the *exact same* feeling for me as when the nurse placed Seth into my arms in the delivery room. The exact. Same. Feeling. Instant love, immense and huge and real.

My error was in thinking that *I* was the one who had to make room in my heart for my adopted daughter. I didn't. The *Lord* took care of that. He opened my heart to love that child as if she were biologically mine. *God* did that.

Just as I am sure he did with Joseph.

-Rev. Tim Reynolds

**Prayer:**

*Holy One, you have promised us that the day of our salvation is near. Keep us faithful in love and watchful in prayer, so that we may stand with confidence and joy at the coming of Christ, our redeemer and Lord. Amen.*

**1<sup>st</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room for What is to Come**

**Luke 1:38**

In one day, life changes: good news, bad news, a loss, a happy event. All of us have experienced these days and emotions.

For me, in one week I went from modest independence and walking to most likely never walking again and needing assistance in the morning and at night.

I had to have room and time to process the emotions and what this means for my life going forward. No walking or driving, but now using a wheelchair and needing quite a lot of help every day from here on out. But I also had to make room for the Lord and his will in this new life.

In Luke's story when the angel first shows up, Mary is greatly troubled and trying to understand what is going on. By the end of the angel's visit, Mary must be filled with great faith and courage because she simply says, "Let it be with me according to your word."

Sometimes even dealing with or facing new challenges we need to have the faith to say, "Let it be with me." In my life I have always struggled, but I have known the Lord is there. I've seen his hand at work, and I've seen how he has provided.

We need to remember Mary's words and have enough faith in our Lord to say, "let it be with me."

-Frances Lee Johnson

Prayer:

*Loving God, even in the midst of trouble and turmoil, you allow us glimpses of the kingdom to come. May these signs of promise bolster our hope and faith in a new heaven and a new earth. Amen.*

Spiritual Discipline for the First Week of Advent: Future Thinking

*How much do you like to plan out the future?*

*How do you envision God's presence in your future?*

*Take this benediction with you as you go throughout your week:*

*The Lord bless you and keep you  
in your going out and in your coming in  
from this time on and forevermore. Amen.*

## 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room for What is to Come

### *Zechariah 2:1-13*

As a culture, we are consumed with the idea of success. How can we be more successful? How do we measure success? Am I a success? And inevitably, these questions begin to bleed over into every part of our lives. We overwhelm ourselves with the questions of am I a successful parent? Am I successful at my job? Is my family a success? We run ourselves ragged just trying to keep up and in this pandemic world these questions of success are even harder to answer.

Zechariah is a book that is filled with prophesies and visions. The community of that time were deep in the midst of rebuilding. They were returning from exile and trying to figure out how to re-imagine their society, their faith, and their community after upheaval. They were trying to re-define success. This feels deeply familiar as we seek to understand and reframe what community looks like after the upheaval of the past year of pandemic. We are having to re-define what success looks like, what church looks like. And I am going to step out on a limb and say it was a gift. So often the church equates success by the amount of people we can gather. We count people in pews, at Sunday school, on the rolls of membership. But the pandemic has given us the opportunity to shift from quantity to quality. We have been given the chance to redefine success.

In campus ministry with UKirk, we understood this upheaval and re-defining of success deeply. With most of our students navigating online classes and adjustments in every part of their lives, we have found that our encounters with students had to look different. Like the church, we often view success of campus ministry my numbers, trying to gauge our effectiveness by people in seats. But what the pandemic has taught us is that we need more room for grace, for people to bring their authentic messy selves. And we could all use more grace. So we let grace lead the way. We extended this in in our welcome, in our meals, in our coffee, in our fellowship and worship, redefining success and taking the intentional time with each one as they walk through our open doors this semester.

With this in mind, as the church that is re-building and re-imaging, maybe it's time for us, as individuals, and as a community, to stop the pressure of what is successful. Because God never intended us to measure the kingdom in terms of success, but in terms of loving our neighbor, acting justly, and intentionally. That is where we will see the kingdom thrive, when we are a people of grace, of welcome, and imagination.

-Rev. Rachel Penmore

### Prayer:

*God of righteousness, thank you for your loving grace. In faith and hope, we offer our gifts to be used in new ways, that we may be part of what you are doing in the world even now, as we watch for Christ's coming in glory. Amen.*

**1<sup>st</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room for What is to Come**

***Isaiah 49:5 and Philippians 4:4-7***

Advent two years ago was like many others before: we went to church each week, made an advent wreath, decorated Christmas for the 2nd Pres tree, and attended holiday parties. I was a bit more tired than usual, so maybe work was wearing me out or I might have caught the stomach bug going around. Soon after New Year's, the growing presence of a baby was confirmed, and everything began changing. I felt sick all the time for months. I was becoming more and more uncomfortable, and I didn't sleep well. At times, everything hurt. The physical challenges and changes my body went through, week by week, were astonishing. My body was making room for our baby. When I didn't think I could stretch further, my human body amazed me as I continued to make room.

Then the whole world shut down. The global pandemic began. Everything was uncertain. My job changed dramatically as I worked from home. Geoffrey still went to work every day, so I was alone a lot of the time. I went to my doctor's appointments alone. We weren't even certain Geoffrey would be allowed in the delivery room. It was a time of joy and excitement but also fear and isolation.

I had been pregnant before but lost those babies in miscarriage. Ultrasound appointments were triggering memories of the worst moment, when excitement turned to stomach dropping grief. Because of the pandemic, I was facing these appointments alone, holding my breath until the sound of Finley's heartbeat was clear. I was praying for a healthy baby and for the strength to make it through if this pregnancy turned out like the last. I felt so much anxiety, and I prayed for peace.

So much about pregnancy and creating new life is totally out of our control. Mothers are stretched, pushed, pulled, and kicked literally from the inside. We have to make room for a whole human inside our own bodies. I may have had a false sense of control since it was happening inside my body, but really, it was all in God's hands. I was stretched spiritually, too: Trust God no matter what happens, Hand over my fear and anxiety, Recognize my lack of control, Have faith in God, Remember God will help me through it all, and Trust God instead of myself.

God is steadfast and trustworthy, even when I feel so uncertain. God is strong, even when I am weak. God is my comfort, even when everything is uncomfortable. God designed my body to make room for Finley, and God helped open my heart and eased my fears to make room emotionally, too. Just as I labored to bring Finley into the world, God labors over us.

-Patricia Kennedy

Prayer:

*Dear Heavenly Mother, thank you for being steadfast and strong throughout our times of worry and weakness. You never forget us even when we forget to turn to you. Mother God, forgive us when we are too focused on our own fears and control. Help us to trust in you as Mary did. Bring us peace this season as we continue to make room in our lives and hearts for Jesus. Amen.*

**1<sup>st</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room for What is to Come**

***Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. - Matthew 5:4***

**“Making Room for Grief”**

In 2010, my parents passed away a week apart on each side of Thanksgiving. There was a funeral the Sunday before and the Sunday after the holiday, so we entered into the season of Advent in a state of grief.

In her later years, Mom was fond of quoting, “When I am old, I shall wear purple,” from a poem by Jenny Joseph, so we asked that folks attending the service wear purple – and they did. The following week we asked folks to wear blue in honor of Dad’s beautiful blue eyes – and they did. During our time of grief, this was a wonderful show of support from family, friends, and this congregation.

As the holidays progressed toward Christmas, we three siblings and our families all handled our grief in different ways, but we stayed connected and committed to holding each other up. We also felt much love and support from those outside our family. One friend took over cooking our Thanksgiving dinner while we sat bedside at the hospital and then we gave ourselves a two-hour window to share this special meal and find solace in each other’s company.

Each year Thanksgiving holds an extra special place in our hearts and the journey to Christmas becomes about Hope and Family and trusting in the Love and Guidance of the Christ Child that is found in each of us.

***May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. -Romans 15:13***

-Jan Barber

May the Christ in me always acknowledge the Christ in you.

Prayer:

*Holy Creator and Most Gracious God, May we find the courage to share our grief and allow others to bless us with a listening ear, broad shoulders or simply their presence and may we be used as an instrument of blessing to others who mourn. May our trust always be in you for knowing the best way to move forward and may our steps be confident and secure in your Love. Amen.*

**1<sup>st</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room for What is to Come*****Philippians 1:3-5***

It has not been a real good Fall for the McLean family. We've been forced to pull Ally from the house we placed her in due to a toxic environment. We cancelled our twice-postponed trip to Paris when our oldest daughter was diagnosed with a reoccurrence of breast cancer. About that same time, Fran fell and hit her head on a concrete driveway. When she continued to have problems with her neck, her doctor scheduled a CT scan. The scan revealed a spot on her lung which was diagnosed as cancerous. The upper lobe of her right lung was removed on Nov 2. She is still recovering.

So what do these woes have to do with "Making Room"? So often, we get caught up with all the preparations for Christmas. In our rush to get Christmas cards out, the house decorated, presents purchased and the tree put up, so often the joy and meaning of the season gets lost. This year, "Making Room" defines what we are doing. It might better be described as "Making Accommodations". Since we have three immune compromised individuals, Fran, Kristina, and Ally our Christmas dinner may be outside or inside depending on Kristina's white blood cell count. We all have been vaccinated, including boosters, and our five-year-old granddaughter will have received her second covid vaccine by Christmas. We will buy very few Christmas presents since that burden most often falls on Fran and she is simply not physically capable this year. A lot of our Christmas traditions simply will not happen.

So, what are we left with? First of all, we will have family together. If possible, we will attend the Christmas Eve service. We will tell tales about one another, most of which will be true. Christmas morning, we will put baby Jesus in the manger. Traditionally, that honor belongs to the youngest, so Madeline, our granddaughter, will do that. Then we will talk about how Jesus was born as a helpless baby destined to redeem the world. Will our Christmas be different as we abandon some family traditions? Yes, but will it be less meaningful? I think not. All the really important elements will be there.

At church, I hear people speak of how things used to be. I like to apply the same logic here. Are we different than we used to be? Yes. Is it less meaningful? No. All the essential elements are still there. Throughout Fran's recovery, our church family has been there. We have had calls, visits, meals and, most importantly, a feeling of being cared for. It is the essence of Church that is so often missing. Everyone is busy getting ready for the holidays, but you have made room for us.

-Marty McLean

**Prayer:**

*Caring God, thank you for the people you have placed in my life. Thank you for family, friends, and for those who show me a glimpse of your love in their actions and words. May I be a reflection of your light to another who needs a reminder of your mercy and grace. Amen.*

**1<sup>st</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room for What is to Come**

***Psalm 32:8 and Proverbs 3:5-6***

*“I will instruct you and teach you about the direction you should go.  
I’ll advise you and keep my eye on you.” Psalm 32:8*

After retiring a year ago, I was looking for a new activity to get involved in. Pastor Sarah Morgan had a suggestion that involved cooking for our shut-ins and other members in need. Those of us used to cooking for the Wednesday night dinners were excited about this new project. In order to proceed, however, someone needed to volunteer to be the coordinator. It was time for me to “make room” in my daily life for this new job.

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5-6*

Along with Jan Barber, Visitation Minister, we delivered our first home-cooked meal in November 2020. It has been my joy this past year to “make room” for Compassionate Cuisine, serving along with Jan, Sarah, fellow chefs, and delivery folks.

We have fun spending time with each other on Wednesdays; we get to try new recipes and take leftovers home. But best of all are the visits with those who receive the meals.

-Leslie Matthews

**Prayer:**

*Sovereign God, through your Holy Spirit instruct us by the light of your prophets. Illumine our hearts, that we may hear your call to become your path into the world. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.*

**Reflection for the First Week of Advent:**

*How do you feel when you think of “What is to Come”?*

*Is it easier to have faith in God’s presence in the present and past than it is to have faith in God’s presence in the future?*

*What might God be calling you to do or be in the coming week? month? year?*



week 2  
making room to...  
welcome others

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent: Making Room to Welcome Others****Mark 9:37**

When I was in kindergarten, my maternal grandmother, Nana, married Mr. Ed Crane, who soon became Papa Ed to all of us grandkids. I remember those early years when he drove a snack delivery truck to gas stations and small dollar stores. When we would visit them in Nashville, he would get home in the evening and let us pick out a prize from his inventory. This solidified him as “Papa Ed the Cookie Man” to all his grands, and I still smile at that memory whenever I eat Famous Amos cookies. I have plenty of glorious memories with Papa Ed, but my favorite is our special, secret pact that involved eating multiple breakfasts.

Whenever they would visit our house, Papa Ed and I would be the first ones awake. Nana would always make her homemade biscuits and chocolate gravy for us while they were there, but she didn’t wake up as early as the two of us. Somehow, out of our hunger and intelligence, we came up with the perfect plan: Papa Ed and I went to Waffle House for breakfast. The only problem was that we didn’t want Nana (or anyone else) to know that we hadn’t waited for her biscuits, which we ate with plenty of gusto despite our previous meal. On the drive home from our first breakfast, Papa Ed and I would come up with the most outlandish excuses for our absence: we needed to get buttermilk but the register at the grocery store was broken, the road was blocked by a herd of cows on our return trip from showing Papa around town, etc. No matter what stories we came up with, apparently, I just couldn’t go through with it. We would walk in the door, and I would bust out with “We went to Waffle House!” This is a story that Papa Ed still loves to tell, and so do I.

For someone who entered our family after I did, Papa Ed welcomed me into a tradition that has stood the test of time. He still addresses my birthday cards to his “Waffle House Queen,” and he took me out for my first breakfast on my wedding day as well (before Nana made biscuits and chocolate gravy for my bridesmaids and me a bit later). He is the epitome of welcome and love, and he is still that example today as he is the patriarch of the family, leading us all with his kind smile and caring nature...and a love for breakfast food and his grandkids.

Whenever I think of what it means to be an example of Christ’s love, I picture Papa Ed across the table at Waffle House eating a waffle and smiling at his granddaughter as she comes up with some outrageous scheme to fool the world, knowing full well she won’t go through with it. I wonder how many times God has looked at me with that loving smile during my plan-making schemes, knowing full well what will happen next...and loving me all the same.

-Jessica Lewis

**Prayer:**

*Welcoming God, guide us as we seek to be a place of warmth and comfort for others. May we share your love in ways that are honest, caring, and kind. Amen.*

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room to Welcome Others

### 2 Samuel 9:6-8

Losing one's mother at age 12 was the stimulus my father needed to become the man he was (this happening over 100 years ago). Raised in Indiana's rural heartland, an aunt and uncle "made room" for him in their tightly knit household of three (providing Dad a "sister", too)! Although he was not with them physically at all times, their influence encouraged him to go on to college after graduation from high school.

Fast forward: after WW II, my Dad returned to his job with GM with a family that included three children. The first 40-mile trip we took was to re-unite with the aunt and uncle who left their indelible mark on his heart. Nearly every major holiday during my formative years were spent at the farm with those "closer than grandparents".

I will always remember the Christmas dinners: the prayer offered by Uncle Jess as we welcomed Jesus into our midst; the "made from scratch" yeast rolls Aunt Ethel lovingly crafted; Jess's unending balance to make jam/butter equal rolls on his plate ... with the roll basket much too close signaling "MAKE ROOM FOR ONE MORE"!

May we all make room in our hearts for ONE MORE ... to see with the eyes of Christ the needs of others.

-Sandra K. Butler

### Prayer:

*Mighty God, who scatters the proud and fills the hungry, by your Holy Spirit let your word leap in us and bring to our yearning the joy that comes with new beginnings and renewed lives. Amen.*

### Spiritual Discipline for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Advent: Welcoming Others

*Find a time each day to welcome the needs and cares of others into your prayers.*

*Find one way this week to "make room" for another person: invite a friend to coffee, send a note to a family member, or volunteer at a local charity or school.*

*Ponder this question: How can you "make room" for others in high times, low times, and those times in between?*

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room to Welcome Others

### **Matthew 25:36**

Making room in our lives for someone or something first depends on our taking action. It is up to us to decide to “make room.” For me, once I’ve made that decision to take action, I generally expect everything to go smoothly and just fall into place. The hard part is deciding to act, isn’t it?

Back in 2008, I felt an unmistakable call to prison ministry. The story is too long to tell here, but suffice it to say, that after struggling with God over a call for which I felt completely unprepared, I surrendered. It really didn’t make any sense at all. I had a busy life with a family, a full-time job, and volunteer commitments, but I felt compelled to join a new prison ministry. I would be trained and then paired as a mentor with a woman who was scheduled to be released from prison in the next few months. It seemed straightforward, and I decided to trust God to provide whatever I needed to succeed.

Of course, God did provide, but not in the straightforward way I expected. There were many opportunities for me to conclude that it just wasn’t meant to be. Bureaucratic red tape stalled my progress for months, the training was superficial at best, and self-doubt was ever-present.

Could I really do this or was I just being naïve? Whether it was the Holy Spirit or just plain stubbornness, I persisted and was finally paired with Becky. It turned out that I was being very naïve, and if I’d known all that would transpire in the months and years to follow, I might have run in the other direction. But God helped me make room, not just in my life, but in my heart, and provided me with whatever I needed for each step along the way.

It’s been twelve years since Becky and I first met. There have been many ups and downs, triumphs and challenges along the way. She still introduces me to people as her “mentor,” but I have never felt worthy of that title. I have learned much more from her than she has ever learned from me. I feel blessed to call her my friend and thank God for enabling me to “make room.”

-Dana Hendrix

### Prayer:

*Blessed are you, Lord God: By your tender mercy the dawn breaks upon us. Guide our feet this day in paths of peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room to Welcome Others**

***Matthew 10:40 & Matthew 25:40***

Several weeks ago, Susan Martin, Community Partner Coordinator, for West View Elementary contacted members of the Service and Outreach Ministry Unit looking for housing for a Honduran gentleman and his second-grade son. They had been living with others, but the father determined that that living environment was not conducive to raising a young boy. Teachers at West View raised enough money among themselves to pay for two weeks at a local motel for the father and son while efforts were underway to find a more permanent solution.

In addition to the housing challenge, there was a transportation challenge. The father, who does not speak English, works construction and could not pick up his son after school without jeopardizing his job. Unfortunately, West View has no after-school program to help working parents who cannot pick up their children at the end of school.

Time after time, Pastor Tim has encouraged us to serve the least, the last, and the lost. Easy to say; more difficult to fulfill. But not difficult for the Reynolds family!

Tim, Tuesday, and Lily (Seth is living in an apartment) opened their home to this gentleman and his son, allowing them to live in their downstairs apartment. Tim picked up Junior after school, bringing him to the church to play until he and Tim would go home together. The staff at West View had been unable to get Junior admitted to an after-school program, until Pastor Tim convinced his contact at the Emerald Youth Foundation to admit Junior to their after-school program at the Laurel Avenue Church of Christ. In addition to living in the downstairs of the Reynolds home, the father and son occasionally have dinner with the Reynolds, sometimes together and sometimes individually. Perhaps you have seen Junior participating in our Children's Sermon on Sundays when he comes forward with the Lewis boys.

At the risk of embarrassing the Reynolds because they absolutely do not want their kindness and generosity to ever be publicized, I choose to do so because I think it's inspiring to have a pastor who practices what he preaches. So as we contemplate "Making Room" this Advent season, may we be inspired by our pastor and his family who made room for a family in need, and in doing so, lived out the words of our LORD and SAVIOR who said to his apostles "...truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

-Tim Wright

Prayer:

*Redeeming God, guide us in your ways and strengthen our hearts, so that we may live out the faith we profess. Surround us with help in troubling times and empower us to help others in their need. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

**2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room to Welcome Others*****Matthew 25:35***

It was a dark Christmas Eve, 1962, and snowflakes began to fall as my husband and I left a long line of out-of-state cars backed up on U.S.25W north and headed down a back road outside LaFollette, Tennessee. We were headed to my mom's house for a couple of days of rest and Christmas holiday time with family and friends. I thought briefly of those many car travelers we left behind in heavy traffic as they inched along toward the 24 mountainous miles immediately ahead on a narrow, winding road between LaFollette and Jellico. I thought about them—but not much. I was already anticipating my mom's delayed supper waiting for our arrival and a time for rest, a warm fire, and exchange of Christmas gifts.

Arvilee turned our car into a dark driveway with no festive Christmas lights, no cars, and no lights inside the house! Where could my folks be? There was no answer at our knock or a note on the door. Maybe my Mom had gone back to her downtown cafe for something?? Mac's Cafe was located on Tennessee Avenue (it was also the U.S.25W route leading out-of-town and straight toward the Big Stone Gap upward to Jellico). Deciding to try Mac's next, we found the main road downtown completely blocked with motionless cars. We parked in a nearby alley to walk the two blocks toward the cafe. Several people stood outside their cars, too restless to wait inside them. One frustrated fellow told us that the Highway Patrol had closed the road ahead because of dangerous ice patches in the higher elevations—they didn't know when the road would be open! One driver suggested that there was warm food and hot coffee down the street at a cafe still open. Could that be my mom? Indeed, it was!

We walked in the front door of Mac's and were met with a mingling crowd of adults and children—all booths and seats and counter stools were occupied. People standing everywhere. My mother yelled, "Hello", to us and said, "Grab aprons" while assigning Arvilee to be a server and me to the kitchen—but "first help those mothers trying to warm bottles for the babies"! About two hours later, a state trooper came in and announced that they had cleared the ice so traffic could now start moving over the mountain. With many shouts of appreciation and "Merry Christmas", the travelers revved up their cars and slowly moved out. We were left alone with silence and an emptiness—just grills to clean and lots of dishes to wash. Later. Turn out the lights. Go home for a tired but Merry Christmas!!

- Helen Grant

**Evening Prayer:**

*Heavenly Father, thank you for your saving love. Bless all those whom I met today and strengthen their hope in your power and grace. Now as I close my eyes, I relinquish all anxieties and fears, trusting in your providence and mercy. Amen.*

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room to Welcome Others

### *“Making Room for Family”*

#### **Luke 2:41-52**

The annual Thanksgiving dinner gathering of the extended Dodson family has been going on for decades now, almost always here in Knoxville and for a long time at Elsie and Bill’s house. About 10 years ago or so, that gathering moved from their house to ours, partly for “more room,” as the number of attendees grew.

Tables and chairs are rented to set up suitable seating on our screened porch, our largest open space. Even so, it’s still a cozy fit. Prior to sitting down, the kitchen and dining room are crowded with the frantic activity of serious meal prep.

The house, which is normally inhabited by just two people (and only me most days when Lauren is working), is suddenly abuzz with the chatter, laughter, and the human energy of family members who, because of geographical distance, don’t see each other in person all that often. So it’s quite a metamorphosis from the normal daily routine.

When making room for others, particularly as the Advent season approaches, the gospel of Luke reminds us of Jesus’s young life (Luke is the only gospel that reveals anything about his childhood), and how his family’s visit to Jerusalem when he was 12 years old (Luke 2:41-52) set in motion his path of learning, even as he suddenly disappeared out of the sight of his parents into “his Father’s house.” The boy Jesus knew he had to begin the process of making the ultimate room for his heavenly Father.

As we make room for family and friends, as well as trying to fill the holes of those we have lost, Advent presents us with a glorious opportunity to open full our hearts and our homes to all who help make us “whole,” the most significant of which is the Holy Spirit.

-Dick Dodson

#### Prayer:

*Triune God, we thank you for your example of relationship in the way you are one God, yet three Persons. Help us live in relationship with you and with one another. May we be open to seeing your presence in our lives and the lives of others. Amen.*

**2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room to Welcome Others**

**Luke 2:7**

***And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.***

Wow! Can you imagine how that inn-keeper felt after realizing that he did not make room at the inn for the birth of our Savior? Talk about an epic fail! But how was he to know? Mary and Joseph didn't demand that room be made by boasting about what was about to happen. They gratefully took what little room was made for them in the stables. The good news for us is that, as children of God, there will always be room for us in His kingdom. There will never be an innkeeper turning us away. Let us take the same approach with others...always make room, never turning anyone away. You never know when the room you made for someone is exactly what they needed.

-Lisa Henley

Prayer:

*Gracious God, help us make room for others as you so mercifully make room for us. Lead us in ways of welcome and teach us to love others with our time and space, our thoughts and actions, our words and wants. Amen.*

Reflection for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Advent:

*What does "welcome" mean to you?*

*What do you think "welcome" means to someone who is hungry, thirsty, homeless, sick, or lonely?*

*How can you be a source of welcome to others that are different than you?*



week 3  
making room for...  
worship

### 3rd Sunday of Advent: Making Room for Worship

#### *Luke 1:46-56*

Have you ever had an experience where, like Mary's, your reflexive response is, "Thank you, God!" When you just had to stop and acknowledge the rejoicing of your very spirit? Maybe the time you narrowly escaped that speeding ticket, when the stars (and stop lights) aligned and you made it to that appointment on time, when you passed the test that you didn't feel totally prepared for. Or maybe it was something like receiving a good report from the doctor, the birth of a child, or having a loved one arrive home safely.

In these moments, it's easy to throw our hands up in praise and say, "Thank you, God!" But have you ever just thrown your hands up in praise when your toast pops out of the toaster in the morning or when you're brushing your teeth or driving to work? Have you ever just stopped what you were doing in the middle of the day to say thank you to God? Maybe you have, but I would venture to guess it's not a regular practice for most of us. We mostly just go about our days, doing the things that we always do and forgetting to give thanks in these ordinary moments, but God is present in both. God is present in the exciting moments of relief and gratitude, and God is present as we go about our day. Why not make room for praise and thanksgiving in both kinds of circumstances?

This Advent, may we take the time to stop and say, "Thank you, God!" In the highs and the lows, in the chaos and the calm, in the waiting and the wonder, may we remember to make room for praise and gratitude and worship of the One who is present with us in and through it all.

-Rev. Sarah Morgan

#### Prayer:

*Ever-Present God, you are with me in my waking moments, my anxious moments, my boring moments, my sleeping moments, and all the moments in between. Help me to be more open to seeing your presence in my life and showing gratitude to you in all things. Amen.*

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room for Worship**

#### **1 John 4:7-12**

When Jessica contacted me to ask if I would contribute to our Advent booklet, I thought if I procrastinated long enough she would find someone else to do it. I had had two meetings at Second Pres and had two more scheduled the next day, so I felt I was out of “church” time. I was feeling a bit guilty, but not enough to say yes to her.

Thursday, I had a doctor’s appointment and knew this 62-year-old gentleman had lost his wife very unexpectedly a year ago and now planned to retire at the end of the year. We discussed this briefly but his message about “making room,” aka “making/taking time,” to do the most meaningful things in life hit home with me. He plans to spend more time with his adult children and “precious” grandchildren. He is very active in his church and hopes to be involved in reaching out to others who are grieving, but the bottom line to his message was “make room” in your life to connect with the important things in this life: to know and accept the greatest gift ever—eternal life if only you are willing to accept God’s Grace through faith.

Let’s “prepare Him room” by waiting in Hope, Peace, Joy and Love this 2021 Advent season as we anticipate God’s greatest gift, Jesus Christ, His Son and our Savior.

-Margaret Sullivan

#### Prayer:

*Living God, you are my Rock and my Redeemer. May I live my days worshiping you for your powerful love. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.*

#### Spiritual Discipline for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Advent: Worship in the Ordinary

*How can you praise God in your daily activities?*

*What is one routine you do every day? How could you incorporate gratitude into this activity?*

*Do you love to sing, write, draw, exercise, or cook? How can you use your gifts or hobbies to praise God?*

**3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room for Worship**

***Matthew 4:18-20***

I've been watching the series "The Chosen" and during this time of watching, there has not been a single episode that I didn't cry my eyes out. I know, I know! These are stories most of us have heard since childhood. Shoot, we've probably written some devotional or other about them, or at least researched them. But there's something about this series. The quality of the film, sets, etc. seems to me to be glorious. This is not a cheap B movie type of production. It's top notch. There're some wonderful songs, too, that are not only catchy, but meaningful.

The actors present the well-known characters to us in ways that are just so very personal and engaging. Every single time Jesus looks into the eyes of His followers with "that" all knowing look, I cry. I can't help it. It's as if He's looking at me and speaking to me in new ways and concepts already familiar, are striking a more personal chord. I've come away with new compassion for Nicodemus and can see the pain he felt at not going. He just couldn't.

Matthew, the tax collector, the attention-to-detail man, the slightly odd one of the group, no more or less important than the others, but when Jesus said, "Follow me," he just closed up shop and did! He'd witnessed miracles. He'd seen conversions. He'd lived learning about this man Jesus.

Mary Magdalene, in this series, basically has a flare up of PTSD and wanders off to familiar ways and haunts, but Simon and Matthew go find her to bring her back. The charge ahead, the nit-picky record keeper and the bawdy fisherman and the combination of force and tenderness toward the situation is magnificent. She comes back, ashamed, regretful, and so sad, feeling so very unworthy. But she goes to His tent and comes away knowing, without hesitation, that she is forgiven and loved, and His.

When I think of these things in light of His coming, I think making way for Him isn't even possible! There's no way to "clean up" for Him, He knows all our stuff. There's no way to spiff up who we are and where we live. There's no way to prepare adequately for all that He was, is and will be. He is beyond it. Maybe that's part of why He had to be born lowly in the manger, because the reality of all He is just too big to come to any sort of terms with unless we've seen the lowly.

As we approach the season, may we be open enough to realize that He is the Waymaker, not we. He is the one who will track us down. He will knock. He will say, "Follow me." And we will, because to look into those eyes gives us no choice but to do so. May we be grateful for the gift that He truly is and overwhelmed again by His astounding love.

-Kim Elrod

**Prayer:**

*Leading Lord, give me strength and courage to follow you in all of life's journeys. May I live my life in a way that worships you and reflects your love to others. Amen.*

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room for Worship

#### *Isaiah 11:1-2*

In common parlance, to love and to like are linked—the same impulse, modified by degree and intensity. To love something, in other words, is to really, really like it. I don't think that's quite right.

For a while now, I've been experiencing that particularly young adult phenomenon of ambivalence toward where I'm from. Coming home would fill me with shame. Something about witnessing with grown eyes what I used to look upon with wonder: that the Little League fields I used to play on are now a paper mill's parking lot, or that the mall I'd spend hours in is a dump, or that the best restaurant in town serves crummy food. A shame in its mundanity and a fear that its mundanity flakes off onto everyone who comes from there, coupled with a guilt for feeling that way in the first place. Each trip home felt harder than the last.

Earlier this year, I mentioned this to a poetry mentor of mine. In return, she talked about tomatoes. How, even among the same strain, no two tomatoes are alike. The size, the skin, the flavor—these depend upon the unique conditions under which it was grown. The temperature, the soil, the season, all the way down to whether it was planted in the shady or sunny side of the garden. To like tomatoes is to put them on your burger. To love tomatoes is to understand that each bite contains the microcosmic miracle of uniqueness.

Going home has been easier since then. I realized I don't need to like my hometown to love it, to accept its terrible food and confusing streets as inseparable from who I am. Loving God works in a similar way. It's not easy to look upon your life through God's eyes, knowing shame and guilt lurk around life's corners. We won't often like what we see. But shaped as we are in God's image, grown as fruit in God's creation, there also lies the miraculous truth—if we make room for it—of our beloved uniqueness.

-Andrew Butler

#### Prayer:

*Merciful God, you know me and love me. You forgive my faults and see purpose in my plainness. Guide me to live a life of worship, grateful for your care and your creation. Amen.*

**3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room for Worship**

***Luke 1:26-38***

***Matthew 1:18-25***

***John 1: 1-18***

When the angel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary and told her she was the favored one to give birth to the son of God, she was initially shocked and questioned, “How can this be....” (Luke 1:34). Then, even though she clearly understood the public scorn and negative ramifications of a young unmarried girl being pregnant, as well as questioning how her betrothed Joseph would respond, she accepted and trusted the word from God and said to Gabriel: “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be done to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38). Thereafter, Joseph in a dream had a visit from an angel who told him to marry Mary as the child she conceived was of the Holy Spirit and he would save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:20-24). When Joseph woke up, he did everything the angel instructed him to do and he honored the purity of what God was accomplishing through Mary. “The Word was made flesh and dwelled among us” (John 1:14).

Both Mary and Joseph made room in their lives for God’s plan. Both Mary and Joseph went out on a limb pursuant to God’s plan. Just as Jesus lived within Mary until he was born and thereafter with Mary and Joseph, so too does he wish to live in us. If we “make room” for Jesus to dwell in our hearts through faith, he will move into our lives just as he did with Mary and Joseph. “May it be done to me according to your word!” (Luke 1:38).

-Mary Farmer

**Prayer:**

*Dear God: It is impossible for us to understand that you would leave the glory of heaven and come to earth as a helpless baby. You were and are today the God of the impossible. Help us make room for you! Give us the courage to go out on the limb you are calling us to do just as Mary and Joseph and all the saints who preceded us did. As Jesus is alive in us, may our lives be transformed by your love and grace and may we freely share your love and your light and your hope for the world with others. In Jesus’s name we pray. Amen.*

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room for Worship

***“So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” - Colossians 3:1-2***

For the last several months, the Bible department in the Christian school where I teach has been admonishing students to write devotionals and share them at the start of any class where a teacher will let them. I've had several students complain about this and say that writing devotionals is *soooo haaard*, but I've been quick to tell them that writing devotionals is not actually that hard. They should want to think critically about God's Word and share it with others. I'm the English teacher, after all, so I encourage writing and reflection at all points intime.

Now that I'm making room to write my own devotional, I'm becoming a bit more empathetic toward them. Hmm. I've got the whole Bible at my fingertips, and nothing is really coming to mind. My day is busy and I have a growing stack of essays to grade, and taking time to think about a piece of scripture is not first on my agenda. Rationally, I know that setting aside the time to sit with God and reflect on His word is always worth it. But stepping over that hump and simply opening the Bible or the page or the document can be the biggest roadblock. There are always more practical things to do than open the Bible. But we all know that the Bible never returns void. We are the image-bearers of Christ, and as we set our minds on things above, we clear our focus from worldly minutia.

In his widely anthologized commencement speech for Kenyon College, late writer David Foster Wallace spends several minutes describing the everyday rigmarole required for being human. The drive to work, the drive back home, the line at the grocery store, etc. He details how it can be easy to stay in our own heads and get annoyed at the guy who cuts you off in traffic or the lady who is holding up the line. He reminds us, though, that everyone is dealing with something. Our world holds a network of stressors and anxieties happening to everyone simultaneously. He argues for us all to have empathy for others, of course, but the Bible argues for more—for us to seek Christ in those situations and to work through him. To set our minds on things above. To not let these earthly stressors dwell on us, and to instead think about Him as we let his light shine through us.

It's easy to get stuck in our chaotic world, but when we turn our eyes to the Lord—when we stop to rest in His love and grace, to thank him and to commune with him—it is always worth it.

-Kirsty Bleyl

#### Prayer:

*Gracious God, help me see your image in those around me. Guide me to be grateful for all the reminders of your love that I see in my everyday life and lead me to paths of empathy for all of your children. Amen.*

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room for Worship**

When I was growing up in Nashville, my church was the base for Christmas Eve neighborhood caroling. We met at the church, were divided into groups of adults and young people. Each group was assigned a specific route.

We walked door to door, knocked on the door or rang the bell. When the residents appeared, we sang a carol or two. We also gave them an opportunity to donate to the Florence Crittenton Home for unwed pregnant girls.

When the route was completed, we returned to the church, turned in the donations, and warmed ourselves with donuts and hot cocoa.

I made room in the Christmas celebrations for a pleasant activity that also benefitted others who very much needed kindness at that time in their lives.

Looking back, I think that was my favorite event of each Christmas season.

-Clara Hardin

#### Prayer:

*Almighty God, you are present with me in all my activities and in all my thoughts. Grant me peace of mind to know that you love me and grant me courage to follow your call for me to grow in ways of grace and gratitude. Amen.*

#### Reflection for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Advent:

*What do you consider "worship"?*

*Is there a certain place besides the sanctuary where you feel more apt to worship God than other places?*

*Are there certain actions besides singing and praying that you feel to be worshipful in your life?*



week 4  
making room for...  
wonder

**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent: Making Room for Wonder*****Luke 2:8-15, 20***

I feel like the older I get, the more I lose my sense of wonder. Or maybe it's not my age, but my profession. Or perhaps some combination of both. In my 20's I was a professional creative artist spending a lot of time with other creative artists. Surrounded by these people all the time, cultivating a healthy sense of wonder was essential to the creative process. We fed off each other, noticing together the wonder of the world around us and figuring out how to share that sense of wonder with audiences, whether through instrumental music, song, dance, art, improvisation, or some other creative expression.

At this point I have been in ministry for 20 years. The vast majority of my time is spent on bulletins, budgets, meeting agendas, newsletters, programs, committee meetings, caring for people in crisis, theological education, training and equipping elders, preparing Bible studies and sermons, and answering questions like, *Whose responsibility is it to clean the kitchen?* or *Why aren't more people coming to church?* Don't get me wrong – these are all important things in the life of a congregation. It's just that sometimes the mundanity of it all keeps me from being able to see the big picture. I feel like at the end of each day I return home feeling fatigued and overwhelmed, rather than glorifying and praising God for all I have heard and seen.

I guess the ironic thing is that I answered the call to ministry *precisely because* of my sense of wonder at what God is up to in the world. I thought, perhaps naively, that being in ministry full time would lead to an increase in that sense of wonder, not a decrease. That has not proven to be the case, however. I find that I can still access that sense of wonder, but I have to be very intentional about it. I have to intentionally set aside time – which I will admit I haven't been very good at doing – to go for a hike or be in a play or spend time with a child or just go sit outside and contemplate the majesty of God in order to make room for wonder in my life.

The Session has granted me a sabbatical for the summer of 2022. More will be communicated about that after the first of the year, but I just want to let you know that making room for wonder in my life, reconnecting with that constant sense of wonder at what God is up to in the world, will be a primary focus of my sabbatical time.

But why wait until then? The annual celebration of the coming of the Christ child into our world happens in just a few days. It seems like Christmas is the perfect time to begin.

-Rev. Tim Reynolds

**Prayer:**

*Surprising God, you are a marvelous mystery. Help me seek your presence with wonder, even in the mundane days of life. Amen.*

**4<sup>th</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room for Wonder**

***The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,  
the world and those who dwell therein,  
Psalm 24:1***

The book, *The Forest Unseen*, describes observations on year-round visits to one small plot of land. On reading it, I decided to try this as a way to reflect on the wonders of God's creation.

I recently walked to "my plot" in our back woods and marveled at what I found: brilliant red maple leaves still clinging to trees, a decaying fallen tree limb being turned into soil by a multitude of tiny creatures, groups of Christmas ferns standing green and vibrant in the midst of brown leaf litter. What a joy it was to just sit, observe, and reflect on God's handiwork.

But my visits have been only sporadic. Somehow the "busyness" of life has overshadowed my intentions.

As we approach the season of Jesus' birth, I want to make room for reflection. I want to sweep away the "busyness" that stands in the way. I want to make room to focus on the coming of the One who offers us life, and life more abundantly.

-Mary Kay Sullivan

**Prayer:**

*Caring Creator, you were not in a rush when you made your masterpiece. You took such loving care when you created the world, the heavens, and us. Guide me to live a life worthy of your image, a life of wonder and worship surrounded by your glorious creation. Amen.*

**Spiritual Discipline for the 4<sup>th</sup> Week of Advent: Walking in a Winter "Wonder"land**

*Spend time outdoors marveling at God's creation. Walk, hike, sit in a rocking chair, or lie in a hammock.*

*Use your senses to experience the wonders of nature: listen for birdsong, smell the rain, taste the snow cream, watch the sunset/sunrise, feel the chill of the wind.*

*You can wonder at God's creation from indoors too. Spend time admiring the image of God in another, water your indoor plants, cuddle up with your pet, display greenery on your mantle or door.*

**4<sup>th</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room for Wonder**

*“I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people”*

*Luke 2:8-15, 20*

When winter brings the first frosted nights, then you sit viewing bright stars away from the city lights with an intense presence of darkness, yielding something more than at a causal glance.

Finding an appearance with the Lord’s glory very possible, we feel a sense of opening to His wonder and to the Light bringing His Good News and great JOY for all people.

-Dean Farmer

Prayer:

*Heavenly Father, your creation astounds me day and night. Empower me to find joy in the small, hope in the forgotten, peace in the unpleasant, and love in the unexpected. Amen.*

A “Wonder” Filled Exercise:

*Find time to enjoy Christmas lights. May they remind you of Christ’s Light coming into the world.*

*Find time to enjoy the stars and moon. May they fill you with wonder at the works of our Creator.*

**4<sup>th</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room for Wonder**

***John 10:10 and Hebrews 13:5***

***The Church at Christmas***

Seasons of life are always changing and these changes undeniably affect our expectations at Christmas. The sweet memories of Christmas past recall our youth and the loving memories of those long gone. We may recall watching our own children enjoy the season with anticipation of special surprises and events on Christmas morning. Life is full for many at this point but, for others, busy years often lead to empty years and the past two have produced much loss.

With change, many ponder about the expectations of the church at Christmas. In John 10:10, Jesus says, "I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly." Thankfully, the church at Christmas is more than pretty wreaths, poinsettias, and a tree with white ornaments. While the sanctuary lights elude the warmth of hospitality, the caring smiles, familiar songs, and scripture remind us that we are never alone. The church at Christmas offers the affirmation of care and belonging as we unite with the fellowship of believers surrounded by Christ's love for us. Change is constant but so is God's love. Christmas is a time to remember that in Hebrews 13:5 God has promised, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." May we carry this promise in our hearts throughout the coming year!

-Tracy Horton

**Prayer:**

*Holy God, thank you for the family of believers you have given me. Help me to remember that I am never alone because you are with me and so are they. Amen.*

*As we approach the end of Advent, may you take this blessing with you through your day:*

*May the God of hope  
fill you with all joy and peace in believing,  
so that you may abound in hope  
by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

**4<sup>th</sup> Week of Advent: Making Room for Wonder**

***Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.***

***-Hebrews 11:1***

When we lived in Laurel, Mississippi, our home on Bay Circle had a lovely sunroom. During the year, that room functioned as a playroom, reading room, and our dog's favorite squirrel-watching room. But in December, that room was magical for us and our boys. It turned into a twinkling Christmas tree display case and became the center of our Christmas traditions. It was where each of our boys experienced their first Christmas morning. When we moved to Maryville in the summer of 2020, Christmas morning was somehow still on my mind. As we moved furniture and boxes into our new home, I kept trying to find room for our Christmas traditions, a place for the tree, a window to display the twinkling lights to brighten spirits as we pulled into the drive. There was also another person in our home who was thinking about Christmas.

When we decided to move to Maryville in the spring of 2020, Noah had declared to everyone that we would have snow at Christmas "because we are moving to the mountains." Even when we arrived in the heat of the summer, his notion of a pending "White Christmas" could not be swayed. We spent over 6 months trying to prepare him for a letdown, trying to soften the blow of disappointment. We wanted him to make room in his mind for the possibility that we wouldn't have a snowy Christmas, because statistically, the odds weren't very good.

Well, on Christmas Eve of 2020, Noah stood out in the yard as the snow came down and he smiled from ear to ear. He had gotten his Christmas wish; he was twirling in the middle of his longed-for white Christmas. I watched him from the dining room window and realized my error. I was so focused on having Noah make room for the possibility of disappointment that I forgot to make room for hope and wonder in my own mind and heart. Our Christmas morning was different than those of our past (snow included!), and I was grateful for the ways Christ met us that morning in a different place and in different ways.

Noah's faith in a snow-covered Christmas morning is a story I hope to always share at Christmastime because it is a story of childlike faith, enduring hope, and twirling joy. What better way to remember to make room for these tenants of the season of Advent than a six-year-old basking in the cold and catching snowflakes on his tongue?

-Jessica Lewis

**Prayer:**

*Loving Parent, you call us children, and yet we forget how much of a blessing that title is. Help us to live into the name you so graciously bestow upon us. Guide us in ways of wonder and lead us to make room for joy in our lives. May we all live with a child-like faith, marveling at your creation and love, and twirling in your presence. Amen.*

## Christmas Eve: Making Room for Christ

### ***Galatians 4:4-6***

For me, there are two Christmases. There's the commercialized Santa-infused gift-giving holly-trimmed mistletoe holiday filled with family traditions. And then there is the mystery-filled, miracle of God giving humankind the gift of eternal redemption through his Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. For some I know, there are symbols in the first that tie it to the second. In my mind they are totally separate... And I celebrate them separately.

I find nothing off-putting in the frivolity of the joy of family traditions. I love Christmas carols. I love the twinkling lights and ornaments on the tree. I love the smiles I get from strangers at West Town Mall. Each and every one of these things bring me joy. They gladden my heart. They do not, however, nourish my soul. Nourishment for my soul comes from the second Christmas. Jehovah, sent to earth for me, my Savior. He knew and loved me before I was born. He knew I would sin. He loved me still. He still loves me... And he always will.

Galatians 4:4-7 tells us that:

*God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption into sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, the spirit who calls out, Abba father. So you are no longer a slave but God's child and since you are his child, God has made you an heir.*

For unto us a child is born. Unto us a son is given. And we shall call his name Emmanuel. Counselor. God with us.

This is the Christmas gift that nourishes my soul.

-Charles White

### Prayer:

*Thank you, Jehovah, for sending your Son, Jesus, into the world. Amen.*

**Christmas Day: Christ Makes Room for Us**

***...Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself....***

***- Philippians 2:6-8***

Nobody made room for Jesus.

The extortionist empire decreed that all Jews should be herded into their homelands for counting. The head of the house made a very pregnant girl and her not-quite-official husband sleep with the animals in sub-human, slave-level filth.

Nobody made room for Jesus.

After 2000 years of faith in Christ Jesus, who set aside his godliness, even now, we assign Jesus's room. We decide where Jesus should be put, in which corner of the house he should stay, how much time we will allow him. We pick the length of his season. We decide the terms of his confinement, the reach of his freedom. We're in command of making him room. So we think.

But nobody makes room for Jesus. Jesus makes room for us.

The one who set aside his power and authority, who took the form of a slave, has always lifted us above our basest nature and shown us that God makes room for us. Even we who "did not accept him" have a place in his heart, receive his full and merciful inclusion, not as a reward for our generosity or as the outcome of our obedience, but because Jesus makes room for US.

Don't worry if you're making enough room for Jesus. Don't worry if you're giving him enough space. Don't worry if you're sincere enough, or example enough, or winning souls enough for Jesus. Nobody ever has. Nobody makes room for Jesus.

Jesus makes room for us.

He made room for the poor and the enslaved in the world of his birth. He made room for the guilty and the accomplices in the world of his death. Jesus is making room for us, for all of us -- ALL of us -- even now, even here, in this world where nobody has enough room.

This Christmas and this day, Jesus is making room -- for us. Room for all of us in the limitless breadth of God's love. May we all make room in our hearts to rejoice.

-Rev. James McTyre

Prayer:

*All glory to you, great God, for the gift of your Son, whom you sent to save us. With singing angels, let us praise your name, and tell the earth his story, that all may believe, rejoice, and bow down, acknowledging your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

## **Under the Tree Holiday Drive**

The Volunteer Ministry Center Holiday Store was canceled in 2020 due to the pandemic and VMC is excited to announce a significant change with VMC's Holiday Store in 2021! The Holiday Store will reopen this year as the Under the Tree Holiday Drive. In past years the Holiday Store focused on children and families in our community, Under the Tree has a different focus in 2021 and moving forward in upcoming years. Since VMC's mission is to end and prevent homelessness in Knoxville, Under the Tree will focus on serving those that are either working to achieve housing through VMC's low barrier housing focused emergency overnight shelter, The Foyer or have achieved their goal of housing at VMC's Permanent Supporting Housing development, Minvilla Manor.

Please join us in collecting the following NEW items for both men and women as we strive to brighten the holiday season for those that we directly serve to either achieve or sustain their housing. Items may be dropped off by December 17<sup>th</sup> at VMC's main office on Broadway:

*Sweatpants and shirts*

*Pullovers with hoods*

*Socks*

*Underwear*

*Sports Bras*

*Hats*

*Gloves*

*Assorted Hygiene Products*

*Shampoo for different types of hair*

*Bodywash*

*Body lotion*

*Adult Coloring Books*

*Coloring Pencils*



## **Worship & Fellowship Opportunities**

**Dec. 19<sup>th</sup> following worship – Farewell reception for Jan Barber**

**Dec. 19<sup>th</sup> from 3:00-5:00 p.m. – Drive-Thru Caroling**

**Dec. 24<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 p.m. – Carol & Candlelight Service**

We open the door to celebrate  
“God is with us!”

The Christmas Joy Offering  
will be received on  
Sunday, December 19<sup>th</sup>  
and Friday, December 24<sup>th</sup>.



CHRISTMAS JOY  
SPECIAL OFFERINGS

LEADERSHIP: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

NOVEMBER 28 - DECEMBER 19