

Angels

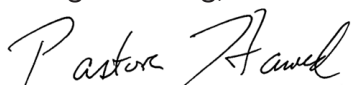
Watching Over Me



2024 Advent Devotional

New Covenant United Methodist is pleased to share with you your first Christmas gift, this Advent devotional! Each day leading up to Christmas you have the opportunity to reflect on a devotion that points you to the light of Christ who is the "Light of the World." It is our hope that these devotionals will help you grow closer to Christ, as you ponder and pray over them. The questions at the end of the devotions are meant to be a guide for deeper reflection and spiritual renewal. Thank you for receiving the Advent devotion booklet gift, but most importantly thank you for receiving the gift of a Savior who continues to transform lives all around the world. There are both hope and light in the words of St. John who said, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

Let's get reading, Pastor Harold

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pastor Harold".

Church Family, It has been a joy to put together this second edition of an Advent Devotional book. Taking our sermon series and the referencing scripture on the topic of angels has been challenging and at times, overwhelming. I am confident that we will learn more about God and will be changed in significant ways through this Advent season.

Thank you especially to those who volunteered to write for this year's book; I know it was a tough assignment but all of you have shared something deeply personal. It is my prayer that we will all reflect on the personalness of our great and wonderful God this Advent season, as we await the coming of the Christ child.

Peace and joy to you! Rev. Ellen Pollock

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ellen".

Sunday, December 1, 2024

Writer: Randy Cooke

Writer's Ministry: Teaching Pastor

Scripture: Genesis 16:6^b-11, 13

Word: Water

The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert. The Hebrew for angel means messenger. This messenger found Hagar at a time when she was at a low point in her life — pregnant, alone, and on the run. The Lord finds her near the water of a spring and guides her steps to where she needs to be.

This is the first appearance of the Angel of the Lord in the Bible. He didn't first appear to Noah or Enoch or Abram. The Angel of the Lord first appeared to a single mother-to-be who had a pride problem and was mistreated by the woman who put her into the whole mess. All this makes us amazed at God's love for the unlikely, and we should never forget that He often delights in doing this.

This Angel asks Hagar two key questions: "where have you come from, and where are you going?" These are two of the three key questions about our life we should consider. The third key question is "Why are you here?" (1 Kings 19:9).

As we enter the Advent season and prepare to welcome the great gift of Jesus into this world, let us take a moment to consider:

- where we have come from — and what talents and skills we have acquired from that journey
- where we are going — our dreams and hopes for our community by sharing His love
- and understanding why we are here — to make disciples of Jesus Christ to transform the world.

The answers to those questions will guide our paths and bring purpose to all our actions. Our lives are meant to be abundant and fruitful. May we encounter God's messenger in any form near the spring in our desert so that He may guide our steps.

Prayer: Lord, the God who sees me, thank You for coming to me in the midst of the challenges that surround me. Make me open to Your guidance as I choose a path each day hoping to follow You. Help me to understand the skills we have to be Your hands, feet, and voice in our community so that we may bring others to Your loving embrace.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. Where have you come from and how has your journey prepared you to be part of God's plan?
2. Where are we going — what dreams should our community pursue?
3. Why are we here? What will we do this Advent season to help others accept the gift of Jesus?

Monday, December 2, 2024

Writer: Judy Stuart

Writer's Ministry: REC

Scripture: Genesis 16:6^b-11; 13

Word: Wilderness

Hagar was used, scared, abused, and forgotten by those she had been designed to serve. She was obedient to Abram and Sarai, yet they had ceased to see her as a person. And she ran. Finding herself in the wilderness, she was still scared and alone. Till God came to her.

Like Hagar in the ancient world, I, too, ran from loneliness and fear only to find myself in the same wilderness. I began running at an early age laughing and demonstrating that I was okay. I stood up to the adversities of the world and circumstances — until I couldn't.

I was so deep into the wilderness that the only place left to look was up out of the pit I was in. At first, there was nothing to see except the clouds rolling across the sky — out of reach.

What God allowed me to see then was that He had been 'seeing me' all along. What God wanted me to see was not the fear and loneliness that I shared with Hagar, but a future that He had designed just for me. A universe where I belonged and would fulfill the plan He had for me.

He promised that if I believed with all my heart, all my soul, and all my mind that Jesus was the "Son of the Living God" and that He was sent to earth to "save a wretch like me." He would give me a future where I and my descendants would feel the love forever. I finally told Him that I did.

Then God sent me back into the world's mix to fulfill His plan; to serve His people — only this time I knew that He had His eyes on me and that I was not alone anymore.

Prayer: Living God, help me to leave the wilderness behind and to live fully into your plan for me. Amen.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. Was there a time in your life where you felt unseen and alone? How did it impact your emotions?
2. Did you try to run away to handle things yourself? How did that work for you?
3. Once you recognized God's grace, what promise of His were you able to see when you accepted His gift?

Tuesday, December 3, 2024

Writer: Bonnie Thompson

Writer's Ministry: Hospitality

Scripture: Genesis 16:6^b-11, 13

Word: Multiply

At the gym one day, I had pain in my back. My trainer told me to see a doctor. A week later, at age 59, I was being prepped for open heart surgery.

The surgeon I'd met two days before came into my room. He looked from me to my family. "Before I go to the operating room, I'd like to pray together. I'm not operating alone. I believe God is with us."

As he softly prayed for guidance, I felt wrapped in God's love. I had no fear.

Jeremiah 17:14 says, "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for you are my praise."

Philippians 4:19 says, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

I kissed my husband and daughter. "I love you," I said, "see you soon."

After stopping my heart, there was no need to shock it to restart. It started on its own.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for always being by my side. Amen.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. What do you think is the message?
2. Have you ever felt the presence of God?

Wednesday, December 4, 2024

Writer: Mary Beth Aguilar

Writer's Ministry: Strumming Sisters

Scripture: Genesis 16:6^b-11, 13

Word: Son

I am a daughter of nine divorces between both parents, so needless to say, that is a book in itself. I thought, to avoid some of the horrific situations I encountered as a child, I would make a plan. Work hard, buy a house, pay it off, have money in savings, all my ducks in a row by the age of 37, then begin a family. Well, that was definitely my plan, not God's. Everything went as I had planned except my having children. Health issues led to multiple surgeries, and I was no longer able to bear children. At that point I had to humble myself and ask, "Lord, please lead me to Your plan for what I am to do." From that moment on, an angel of God has directed me every day, leading me to a wonderful career in education, mothering numerous foster children, sponsoring multiple international high school students, and sponsoring an after-school bicycle club for middle and high school students. I learned to let go, turn it over, and to daily ask for guidance and direction, not for what I want, rather, how I can be used for our heavenly Father, and Jesus, son of God.

Prayer: May the angels of God be there to help protect us in all situations and know that God will always forgive us, if we humble ourselves and ask. Believe with all of your heart, mind, and soul and we ALL have God's promise of protection. Amen

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. Am I turning all things over to You and trusting You with all of my heart, mind, and soul?
2. Lord, how can I be used as your hands, feet, and ears here on earth?

Thursday, December 5, 2024

Writer: Jeff Vermilya

Writer's Ministry: Fresh Expressions

Scripture: Genesis 16:6-11, 13

Word: Slave

What a helpless situation in which Hagar found herself. She had done nothing wrong to get her into this predicament, and now she was being punished. And with little recall, her situation reminds us of someone else: Mary, pregnant, facing shame, and her espoused ready to put her away quietly.

Have you ever had a time where you felt trapped? Afraid and alone? In a messy circumstance, through no fault of your own, and dealing with punishment, retribution, bondage?

It is possible that we can find ourselves enslaved by our circumstances. I have, more than once. Perhaps it was a work situation in which you are being treated unfairly or threatened. Or a family drama in which you didn't even want to be part of, but now people are lashing out or blaming you. Been there/done that?

The opportunity Advent provides is that if we wait, good news will come. We find that despite our impossibility is God's opportunity. Hagar found that God was with her, that He had a plan in which she was a part, that He would provide grace so as she watched and waited to experience a much better outcome than running away. Mary found the same. She would marry Joseph, and she would bear the Messiah to the world.

When I have felt enslaved by my circumstances, each time what has delivered me and set me free is that after all my worrying or getting mad, that after my confusion or despair, God has made it clear in my heart, soul, and mind that He is with me, that He has a plan, and that He would give me grace as I waited for a better outcome than I could ever imagine.

I pray these words could soak into your soul. And I pray that you and I could be ready to share this, to do as Peter says in 1 Peter 3:15 "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you."

Our words can be like the words of the angels that came to Hagar, and to Mary. Your circumstances do not enslave you. Wait for His plan, Wait for His grace, Wait for His outcome.

Prayer: Faithful God, help me to know that your plan is always perfect, and to lean into your will for me. Amen.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. Have you felt enslaved to a circumstance? If so, what did you do to break free?
2. Do you tend to worry and/or get mad at an existing circumstance?

Friday, December 6, 2024

Writer: Cindy Kane

Writer's Ministry: Community Bible Study, Hospitality

Scripture: Genesis 16:6^b-11, 13

Daily Word: Affliction

There are times in life when all is good. Family, careers, health, and retirement. You say to yourself as a believer, "God is so good to me." Then your world is rocked; in my case it was a cancer diagnosis this spring. Afflictions — we all have them, and they can look like cancer, loss of a loved one, financial hardships, broken relationships, and countless others.

Just like Hagar, there are angels in my life who watch over me. My angels look like family, friends, my medical team, the receptionist when I check in for treatments, and my church family. They remind me to be patient, trust in God's plan and purpose for my life.

I don't consider my cancer affliction as a curse, it is helping me grow my faith, pray more, study the Bible and hopefully help and encourage others to grow in their walk with the Lord.

Prayer: Lord, guide us in trusting You and Your faithfulness in our afflictions. Amen

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. Are you ready to "Let Go and Let God" be in control?
2. Will you set aside time to be still and listen to God's message?
3. Do you trust that God is faithful in our afflictions?

Saturday December 7, 2024

Name: Lorraine Harris

Ministry: Missions and Outreach

Scripture: Genesis 16:6^b-11, 13

Word: Return

When Lamont and I looked for wedding bands before getting married, we couldn't find ones we liked. Tired and frustrated, we made one last stop at a small jewelry store located in the District of Columbia. Disappointed, we didn't see anything we liked and were about to leave when the owner said, "I have two bands our jeweler designed for a couple, but they changed their minds about getting married." She showed them to us, and not only did we like the rings, but they fit perfectly.

Over the years, Lamont's wedding band had broken in different places and repaired several times. In hopes of having it remade, we looked for the original jewelry store but unfortunately, the store had closed. Heartbroken, we had no other choice but to buy Lamont a new ring.

One Saturday, while driving around Springfield, Virginia, doing errands, Lamont made an unexpected turn into a small strip mall. To our surprise, there was the jewelry store where we had bought our rings. We walked inside the store and learned that the owners had died, and their children were now the owners. We told them our story and they couldn't believe it. To our delight, they remade Lamont's ring.

After the ring was made and picked up, I sent a thank you card to the jewelry store. Several weeks later, the card was returned. The store had closed.

Prayer: Father God, thank you for the big and little miracles you make possible every day. Amen.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. In what ways have you seen God show up in your life unexpectedly?
2. When God has shown up in your life unexpectedly, how have you explained it?
3. God is always in our lives; how can we recognize and be grateful for his presence?

Sunday, December 8, 2024

Writer: Mat Napp

Writer's Ministry: Digital Director

Scripture: Revelation 12:7-9

Word: War

I remember walking through a peaceful meadow with my grandfather when I was a child. The sun was setting, casting a golden hue over the tall grass. Suddenly, he stopped and pointed to two butterflies seemingly locked in a dance. "They're fighting," he said softly. Confused, I asked why they would fight when the world around them was so beautiful.

He explained that sometimes, even in the most serene places, conflict arises. "But," he added, "it's how we choose to resolve that conflict that matters." He told me that within each of us, there's a battle between our better selves and the temptations that lead us astray. The real war isn't fought with weapons but within our hearts and minds.

Years later, reflecting on Revelation 12:7-9, I understand that the war in heaven mirrors our internal struggles. The passage describes a cosmic battle, but it also symbolizes the conflicts we face daily. We're constantly challenged by forces that seek to pull us away from peace, compassion, and understanding.

In this season of Advent, we're reminded of the hope and peace that the birth of Christ brings. It's a time to embrace the angelic messages of goodwill and to let go of the battles that hinder our spiritual growth. By choosing love over hate and peace over conflict, we participate in a divine resolution that transcends any earthly war.

As we prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ, let's focus on overcoming the internal battles that prevent us from fully experiencing His love. Let's be peace-makers in a world that desperately needs healing.

Prayer: Gracious God, be the peace the world needs today, and show us how to be bearers of peace. Amen.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. What internal conflicts are you currently facing, and how can you seek peace in those areas?
2. How does the concept of a spiritual battle resonate with your personal faith journey?

3. In what ways can you promote peace and understanding in your community during this Advent season?
4. How does embracing non-violence align with the teachings of Christ in your life?

Monday, December 9, 2024

Writer: Anne Foote Hill

Writer's Ministry: Director, Church Administration and Mentor Program

Scripture: Revelation 12:7-9

Word: Heaven

I love hearing stories shared by people who have had encounters with angels. Surrounded by bright lights, the rustle of their wings flapping, and their beautiful features offer a glimpse of solace and peace. While I long to see these heavenly beings, I know that I've been blessed to witness angels in human form who were used by God to bless me and my children. When I first became a single mom with a newborn, and two young girls, I began receiving anonymous notes of encouragement in the mail each week. Sometimes it was a scripture, sometimes a sweet card, but always with no signature — this was the act of an angel. When I first moved back to Sumter County with my family, I had to adjust to having a whole new career and "life." I struggled during a period financially and prayed about how to provide groceries for my family. Miraculously, that weekend at church, our pastor gave me an envelope from a congregant — in it was enough money to purchase groceries for that week. No one knew of my need — this was an angel. Recently, as we grieved the devastating loss of my brother-in-law, we had people who surrounded my sister and family with food, supplies, and love. Each person offered themselves during one of the most difficult times of our lives — these were angels. While I enjoy reading stories about our heavenly angel encounters, I am even more appreciative of hearing about the encounters that happen on our earthly home, by earthly angels, who are called by God to bless others.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help us be on the lookout for the angels you send to us each day. Please help us be angels to your people. Amen.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. Have I had an encounter with a heavenly angel?
2. How have I been blessed by an earthly angel?
3. How can I be an angel to one of God's people?

Tuesday, December 10, 2024

Writer: Cindy LaDow

Writer's Ministry: Grief Ministries

Scripture: Revelation 12:7-9

Word: Defeat

As a child I loved the early morning. I believe that it was my favorite time of day as every weekend I spent with my granny and grandpa. Many stories were shared. It was our time where I learned so much about faith in our God. I learned also about kindness, caring, and serving the Lord as both were very active in the church.

Our family was not without our struggles and granny was always there to help us get through. Through it all I learned the power of prayer. On weekends at night granny and I would kneel on the side of the bed and say our prayers. It is there that I learned the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed. Every Sunday when we say the Apostles' Creed I take a moment and thank my granny for being my angel. It is always my time of being thankful for the gift God gave me when he gave me my granny. I felt beyond loved, secure, and safe.

I have grown in my faith over the past 75 years. I truly believe my grandparents were instrumental in the person I am today. As part of my research I learned so much about what the Bible believes in angels. Angels are mentioned 133 times in the Bible. One source stated only two angels are specifically named in Scripture. The archangels Michael and Gabriel. Another source states God created all the angels by the sixth day and on the seventh day God rested. My heart chooses to hold onto some of my childhood innocence as in my heart my granny was an angel for me.

Prayer: Dear Lord, as we journey through this most sacred Advent Season help us to take time to thank you for the gift of the birth of Jesus. Remembering that each birth is truly a gift from you. May we continue to be the hands, feet, and voice to bring others to know You, Lord. We ask all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. As we face the world today how do you prepare to defeat Satan, as he continues to tempt us here on earth. The Book of Revelation provides insight into this.
2. How do and your family plan to spend this most sacred time of year?
3. When asked by family every year what I want for Christmas, it is the same answer — I would love my family to be in church with me or their family and truly hold Jesus as their Lord and Savior. This is the gift that lasts an eternity. Just a hint to share.

Wednesday, December 11, 2024

Writer: Bradley Collins

Writer's Ministry: Creative Director

Scripture: Revelation 12:7-9

Word: Ancient

Grandma was my biggest fan.

She encouraged me constantly about making my studies at school a priority. She taught me to count to ten before acting if I was angry. She passed down to me a love for music by playing me albums like Gershwin's "An American in Paris" on her record player. She showed me how the Palmer Method of penmanship worked. Oh, and she was kind enough to buy me Pokémon cards despite not knowing what a "Pokémon" was. I learned a lot from her.

Earlier in life, Grandma had raised three boys and worked as a bookkeeper. After she retired, she moved from Michigan to Florida to leave behind the cold weather. And she loved to volunteer with her friends on Friday mornings to help get the church ready for Sunday.

Whenever I would call my parents "old," Grandma loved to respond with one of her favorite jokes: "If your parents are old, what does that make me? Ancient?" And then we would proceed to erupt into bursts of laughter as I grabbed a full-size Butterfinger bar from the Sam's Club-sized stash that she kept for me in the pantry.

But maybe there was something to that word. Ancient.

This year, the journey through Advent makes me wonder if Grandma's fortitude, wisdom, and venerability might not be dissimilar to the formidable angels that

we encounter in the Bible. From what we read in today's devotional Scripture passage, the angels are majestic beings.

And yet, for all the magnificence of the angels, the greatness of God far surpasses them all. It's a powerful thought to realize that God, who is called "the Ancient of Days" in the Hebrew Bible, loves us and cares for us, even more than the greatest grandparent in the world.

May we consider how to live into this good news during the holiday season.

To close, perhaps I can offer the words of the hymn-writer as one way for us to respond to the good news:

"O come, let us adore him."

Discussion/Reflection questions:

1. Have you experienced someone in your life that provided wisdom, guidance, and unconditional love?
2. In this devotion, it was a grandmother who provided the encouragement and support needed, but have you had a different circumstance that might remind you of an angel unaware?

Thursday, December 12, 2024

Writer: Stu Yowell

Writer's Ministry: Congregational Care Minister

Scripture: Revelation 12:7-9

Word: Deceiver

I have been a morning runner for nearly 50 years. Within the past 10 years of my runs, I began talking to God more. It really starts my days off in the right direction. Being human though, my prayers during these runs are sometimes quickly forgotten. I tend to make daily problems on my own and rationalize or ignore the outcomes of such behavior.

Thinking back on my life, I realized that I went through the motions of going to church because my mom dragged me there. I also did the regular Sunday church activities that didn't do much for me, and I wasn't getting any closer to God and becoming a better person.

Fast forward a few decades, I discovered God was with me when I needed something, but never realized the devil, the great deceiver, was also there. For most of my life, I became a 'CEO' Christian that went to church on Christmas, Easter, and Other church dates that fit my calendar.

The devil was, and still is, always present in my life creating havoc as an imposter, hypocrite, pretender, liar, phony, and fraud. In taking hold of our lives at times this deceiver brings envy, desire for more, selfishness, greed, and many more distractions that are not good for anyone. He is both relentless and impressive.

It is what Paul struggled with in Romans 7:15, where he states "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate to do." This is similar to my own experiences. I certainly could have been a better follower and made better choices during my journey. I have missed too many opportunities at being the person God wanted and planned for me to be. Thank God for forgiveness.

We are all created for good. By getting closer to God, I have a chance at being what I was created for. Read the Bible, small group attendance, prayer, going to church and listening, and being an active, positive role model for others will help with setting up a barrier against the devil's distractions. I must persevere with this endeavor to move closer to my Creator.

I have come to conclude that God has this all planned out, especially when our Scripture above tells us how this devil will finally be done away with. Thank God for this ending and planning for believers to enter heaven. This end is both a comfort and a challenge for me today — one that should be taken seriously as I continue to live my life and knowing God's unconditional love is always there to help.

Prayer: Father in heaven, may we always realize you are with us, that your love for us is never-ending, that our sins are forgiven, and that you are in control to handle our needs. Amen.

Discussion/Reflection questions:

1. When you truly believe in Christ, how does that change the way you live your life?
2. Are you aware that the devil is a constant threat and how do you deal with this truth?
3. In looking back, what were some of the distractions in your life that you became aware of after they happened?

Friday, December 13, 2024

Writer: Bonnie Fisher

Writer's Ministry: Choir & Worship Accompanist, Small Group Leader

Scripture: Revelation 12:7-9

Word: Earth

"War broke out in Heaven. Michael and his Angels fought the Dragon. The Dragon and his Angels fought back but were no match for Michael. They were cleared out of Heaven, not a sign of them left. The great Dragon — ancient Serpent, the one called Devil and Satan, the one who led the whole earth astray — thrown out, and all his Angels thrown out with him, thrown down to earth." Revelation 12:7-9

I found this particular passage of Scripture to be very difficult. I even questioned if it was a mistake. What does a war in Heaven and Satan being thrown out have to do with the Christmas story? I'll admit, I read just a bit further where verse 12 states, "He's (Satan) wild and raging with anger; he hasn't much time and he knows it."

Our earth seems to be in such an uproar — wars, floods, poverty, hunger, racism, politics, and the list goes on. There are times when I wonder why I pray at all. It seems nothing is going to change. But it was into this world of unrest that God sent His perfect Son, Jesus, to live among us. He set a perfect example of love and acceptance.

While Satan may "rule" this world, he is no match for our newborn Savior and King. Jesus was born. Jesus lived and died and arose victorious. Jesus WILL come again — and Satan is no match for our Lord! I live in that hope.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we admit there are times when our prayers seem useless. Our world continues to go astray. We show cruelty to one another. We have failed to love those different than ourselves. This Christmas season, our prayer is to look to the greatest gift ever received — Jesus. His sacrificial life and love give us reason to have HOPE. Allow me to be a peacemaker in my own world. Amen.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. Do you believe there is ever going to be hope for peace on earth?
2. What can I do to help overcome Satan's stronghold on this earth?
3. Who in my life/family is going through a difficult time right now? What can I do to remind them of Jesus' love and hope?

Saturday, December 14, 2024

Writer: Jerry Byers

Writer's Ministry: Choir

Scripture: Revelation 12:7-9

Word: Darkness

The Book of Revelation seems like an odd scripture source for the season of Advent, but if you read the first six verses of chapter 12, you will see how verses 7-9 relate to the birth of Christ. In this vision, a being described as “the great dragon, that ancient serpent, the Devil, Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” stands waiting to devour the male child being born to Mary. These verses seem to describe very well King Herod's attempt to kill the baby Jesus after his birth, causing the Holy Family to flee to Egypt.

Revelation 12:7-9 tells us that the Archangel Michael threw Satan out of Heaven and down to Earth. (Thank you very much!) I believe in angels because they are referenced in the Bible, and people I know and respect have spoken of being saved in various situations by an “angel” who helped them, and then was never seen again.

So, I believe in angels. Likewise, I believe in the Devil or Satan — an evil force, and his demons — all of whom seem to be very active in our world today! The results are obvious.

We are told that the prophet Muhammad met a spirit in the darkness of a cave. He initially thought it was a demon, but his wife convinced him that it was the Angel Gabriel. How could anyone tell the difference? The Bible advises us in 1 John 4:1-4 to test every spirit: “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus, is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist...”

I am so thankful to have been raised by godly parents and grandparents. My paternal grandmother taught children's Sunday School for about 40 years. I have a long strip of brown paper that she cut from a paper bag. On it, she wrote in pencil the words to a song that she taught to children (me amongst them).

All the verses make it a rather long song, but it goes like this:

“Oh, be careful little eyes what you see; Oh, be careful little eyes what you see;
For the Father up above is looking down with Heavenly Love. Oh, be careful little eyes what you see.”

And it continues with “little ears what you hear,” “little feet where you go,” “little hands what you do,” “little heart what you love,” etc.

I have remembered this song throughout my life, and it has served me well. With all the electronic media constantly demanding our attention, it is still excellent advice for avoiding evil and the influence of Satan.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I pray that you would surround my loved ones with angels to help direct their path and protect them from the Evil One. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. Do you believe in angels and demons?
2. Have you ever experienced an angel visitation?
3. How have you resisted evil in your life?

Sunday, December 15, 2024

Writer: Donna Hendren

Writer's Ministry: Visitation Pastor & Pastor, Lake Panasoffkee UMC

Scripture: Galatians 4:14, Hebrews 13:1-2

Word: Trial

Sometimes we have order and sometimes we have chaos in our lives. Sometimes we do smart things and sometimes we do dumb things, sometimes life seems simple and quickly life gets very complex.

Our faith journey is about figuring it all out through the mountains and valleys of life. John Wesley called it "Sanctification." It's about growing. It's about the process. It's about struggle and crisis and sacrifice and pain, but it's also about life's victories and joy. Each day I think we are trying to figure out how God fits into our life and how we fit into his desire for our life.

Jesus was able to endure the trial of the cross because he understood the good that would come of it. He realized the good of a redeemed, rescued people honoring God for all eternity.

A life of faith is not the absence of pain or doubt. A life of faith is born in the midst of doubt and pain and struggle. A life of faith requires us to look to God through the mountains and valleys of our journey.

When you encounter seasons where God's goodness seems far away, will you stand strong in your faith? If you have questions that is not a lack of faith. Faith is not the absence of doubt. Faith is the place where we stay in the conversation over time. Faith is a journey. It is learned in the trenches and the stretches and the questions.

Recently, Harold and I, along with our family have been through many trials. In my despair I asked God to give me a sign that everything will be okay. A day after I prayed this prayer my son Cameron gave me this poem that he wrote.

"Living under the forgiveness God offers us is the pinnacle of humility. Hope builds expectation while faith acts as an anchor to accepting uncertainty in the trials of our lives."

Prayer: Dear Lord, through the trials of our lives let us stand strong in our faith. Let us walk "Faith Forward." Amen

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. Will you keep believing God is Good?
2. Will you keep the conversation going?
3. During the trials of your life, will you always know God is near?

Monday, December 16, 2024

Writer: Kathy Herrick

Writer's Ministry: Women's Ministry Core Team Member, MOAMI Coordinator, Music (Handbell Choir member and Strummin' Sisters Ukulele Group member)

Scripture: Galatians 4:14, Hebrews 13:1-2

Word: Illness

Her request came via email, a year after her MOAMI (Moving On Always Master Inspired) class. She shared the challenges she faced and that she felt deeply she needed a small group of women for Bible study, fun, service, and support. God sends us to make connections sometimes and I knew He was telling me to connect. Susan joined a small group I am a part of, and those special bonds formed.

Four years later, the diagnosis came for Susan, stage four ovarian cancer. The gamut of emotions roiled through her, her family a thousand miles away, and through our small group. What to do?

She fought it and stayed in Florida. There were surgeries, radiation, and chemotherapy, and our small group and others became her angels, stepping in to support her, taking days in rotation to help with whatever her needs were. She was surrounded by a cloud of angels.

But the story is just beginning, for Susan went into remission. Her hair grew back, her body strengthened, her mind was determined to give back, to become an angel herself. She listened carefully to needs and concerns and supported, by physical acts, prayer, and a shower of love.

But there's more. Another MOAMI staff member was fighting cancer last winter and a team of us became "Kathleen's Team," providing meals, prayers, visits, and love. Susan joined that team.

On her first meal delivery to Kathleen and her husband, Susan shared her own diagnosis from the year before, and how she was there. She shared hope, and in that hope, she was reaching out, giving back, and in my words, becoming an angel herself. She gave Kathleen the hope to fight and get better and Kathleen did.

Soon after Susan's visit, I visited with Kathleen and her husband. Kathleen took my hand and leaning in said, "I want to get better so I can minister to others like Susan is." My words here, be an angel to others as Susan was.

And there are miracles, for Kathleen got much better, for seven months, and she became an angel for others. On another visit, we spoke about a third MOAMI sister fighting cancer and Kathleen drew me into the kitchen and had me write down our friend's information so that she could pray for her, let her know she was there for her, that there was hope. Kathleen was the angel.

We never know when God is going to send an angel into our lives, just when we need one, or when He is going to ask us to be the angel in another's life, just when they need one. He asks us to be open, watching, available, to be ready with heart and hands.

In closing, Susan and Kathleen were angels in my life, authentic, sweet, loving, courageous, supportive friends I will treasure forever. I will see them again. They didn't let their illnesses define them. Even in those times, each let God teach and use her to make a difference for others.

Kathleen passed away last summer, and Susan passed away in early November. They are truly angels now. I can picture them whispering with God, pointing us out, watching over us, cheering us on. Their hands may be quieted, but ours are not. Let us take up the challenge of making a difference for others, as these two beautiful women did, of being an angel for others, no matter our circumstances.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we praise you in all things, even in times of illness. We thank you for sending “angels” to us in our times of need, to minister, care for, and love us, those who let you work through them to minister to us. We ask that you open our hearts and minds, so that we will see others in our lives, who need us to be the “angel” for them. Thank you for walking with us through all. In Jesus name, Amen

Discussion/Reflection questions

1. Who is someone in my life now, who could use a loving angel to support and love them?
2. What can I specifically do that will show God’s love to another
3. Looking back, who has been an “angel” for me, during a time of need?

Tuesday, December 17, 2024

Writer: Lyn McElwee

Writer’s Ministry: SALT Representative

Scripture: Hebrews 13:1-2

Word: Preach (Teach)

Hebrews reminds us to “Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.”

My teaching career brought me countless loving and joyful moments, working alongside kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade students. Even now, reflecting on their radiant smiles and the bright-eyed excitement they brought to class fills my heart with warmth. Each year was special in its own way, but one memory shines brighter than the rest.

During my second year as a teacher, there was an extraordinary student who would leave a lasting impression on me. Her name was Susan Elliott, and she was remarkable — not only for her gentle spirit and determination but because she was blind.

At first, I was filled with worry and a bit of panic. How would I teach a child who couldn’t see the things I pointed to so often in my lessons? I wondered if words like “Do you see this?” or “Let’s look at this” might make her feel isolated or different. My heart ached at the thought of her feeling excluded.

But Susan, with her quiet wisdom, taught me something beautiful and unexpected. She assured me that she understood those phrases and didn’t feel left

out by them. In her own way, she “saw” things — not with her eyes, but with her heart, her senses, and her imagination. I recall a time when I asked about her favorite color. Susan said yellow because it reminded her of the warmth of the sun — a feeling she could “see” in her heart.

Thinking back on Susan, I am reminded of the teachings in Hebrews on acceptance, patience, and love. I realized that each child deserves that same kind of welcome, free from judgment or hesitation. Embracing every student’s unique needs with open arms, as if we were welcoming Christ himself, creates an environment where everyone is valued.

This memory serves as a beautiful reminder — to greet each person we meet with love, to listen deeply, and to honor the unique light they carry within. May we all bring the brotherly love shown by God to those in our own lives, welcoming others with open hearts and the warmth of Christ’s love.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to see others through Your eyes, honoring each person as Your beloved creation. May we show Your kindness and grace in all our interactions, lifting others with compassion. Guide us to treat everyone with love, patience, and humility, as you have shown us. Amen.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. How does Susan’s perspective on color challenge our understanding of “seeing” and experiencing the world? What does this teach us about embracing diverse ways of understanding?
2. In what ways can we, in our daily lives, create an environment that welcomes and includes others, especially those who may face unique challenges? How can we apply the message of Hebrews 13:1 in our interactions?
3. Reflect on a time when someone’s unique perspective taught you something valuable. How did it change the way you see others or approach your own life?

Wednesday, December 18, 2024

Writer: Jim Head

Writer's Ministry: Stephen Ministry

Scripture: Galatians 4:14, Hebrews 13:1-2

Word: Entertain

Words that can stop your world.

Cancer — Alzheimer's — dementia — stroke — heart attack!

These are words that can scare us, worry us, and bring us to our knees.

What if one hears mental illness, or more specifically, bipolar disorder? Do we react with the same level of fear, concern, or even panic? Often, hearing these words associated with mental illness causes us to think; oh, that's sad but it's someone else.

For years we watched our daughter live with and ultimately die from the incredible highs and the horrific lows brought about by a severe mental disease known as bipolar disorder.

We observed her incredible highs of earning three college degrees, recognition in the workplace, and amazing artistic talent. Through indescribable horror and disbelief, we watched her helplessly go through extreme lows of personal destruction, drug and alcohol abuse, incarceration, and ultimately the death of a beautiful person. Bipolar took our daughter's life. Both while she lived and finally in her death.

How did we survive? The tragedy of Amy's death left us with the blessing of her 14-year-old son, who we adopted. Max is now a fine young man who teaches music in a Tampa Special Needs School. We survived because he needed us! In a very unique and mysterious way, Max became our angel. When two grandparents became the adoptive parents of a 14-year-old boy, a lot of things could have gone a lot of different ways.

I prayed to God, if you will just help us do this, pave the way, I'll do the best I can with this young man.

God sent us an angel. Max was a total delight, and we often drew strength from his character, his faith, and his commitment to kindness for all.

As I look back on all our lives during that time, it's clear to me, that in our darkest hours, our most challenging years, the angel God sent us, was the force that pulled us all together and through that storm.

But it was our unyielding faith in God that ultimately pulled us through. There were days when we just said God, we can't do this on our own. Show us how. Somehow, he always did.

"Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14:27)

During the years of emotional pain, I learned to *rest in God's presence*. By resting in God's presence, I experienced a peace like none I had ever known before. A peace, in the presence of God that pulled me through the most difficult days of my life.

Prayer: Dear Lord, as these storm clouds gather, help me rest in your presence and find comfort in a peace that only comes through you. AMEN

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. What comes to mind when you hear the term mental illness?
2. Do you view severe depression as a potentially life-threatening disease?
3. When life challenges you, do you rest in God's presence and seek his peace?
4. As you think back on times in your life, has God ever put a unique or unsuspected angel in your presence?

Thursday, December 19, 2024

Writers: Don & Elaine Buckey

Writer's Ministry: Men's Ministry, SALT, Mentor

Scriptures: Hebrews 13:1-2. Galatians 4:14

Word: Siblings

We can't imagine our lives without the gift of our siblings. We both have brothers, and Don has a sister. Though we are all seniors now, ranging from 63 to 87, we have fortunately only lost one of nine so far.

Siblings have a difficult-to-explain bond. They are our playmates when we are young, our allies as teens and young adults, and our rocks when we don't think we have the strength to face another day as seniors.

People often ask Elaine if she misses not having a sister, but how could she miss something she never had? She never had to wear "hand-me-downs," share a room, or split "mom time."

And Don has an identical twin. The first day they didn't get to room together was in 1976 when we married. Talk about a wonderful, tight bond; they look and sound alike, think the same thoughts, finish each other's sentences, and sometimes even buy each other the same gifts.

We lean on our siblings around our parents' hospital beds — and eventually around their coffins. Our siblings teach us lessons in life like sharing and playing nicely, riding a bike, and driving a car. They're the first people we call to share good and bad news. They know our secrets and love us anyway. They're our shelter in a storm, light at the end of the tunnel, and hands to hold when our hearts are broken.

It's difficult to put into words everything siblings truly mean, but when the going gets tough, they are often angels watching over each other. We thank God for these gifts that we never asked for — but, oh, how we love them!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the gift of siblings and the multitude of blessings you continue to shower upon me. I am so undeserving, but so grateful. Please help me to never take these things for granted — and to be the best sibling and friend possible to those around me. If I have contributed to creating a strained sibling relationship, please reveal it to me and give me the wisdom and discernment to take steps to begin the healing process. Lord, I know you want what is best for me, so please help me to yield to your will in my life. I pray for these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. If you have a strained relationship with a sibling, what steps can you take to mend it before it's too late?
2. Take time to share with your living siblings how much they mean to you, while you still have time.
3. If you are an only child, do you have pseudo-siblings who have filled that sibling role in your life? If so, please take a moment to let them know how much they mean to you.

Friday, December 20, 2024

Writer: Joan M. Sampson

Scriptures: Galatians 4:14; Hebrews 13:1-2

Word: Knowing

As I look back on my childhood, I remember my parents excitedly discussing the plans for our new home. The house was being built a few streets over from the duplex we were living in at the time. There was such joy, and so many prayers as they began making preparations for the big move.

After months and months of waiting, we finally moved into the new house. I had my own bedroom, painted pink of course. Besides all the teddy bears, dolls, and all the other things associated with being a little girl, there was a picture above my bed. It wasn't very big, but it was large enough for me to see every night as I said my prayers.

The picture depicted two little scared barefooted children crossing a rickety bridge on a dark frightening night. There was a beautiful lady in long flowing robes standing behind them. She had wings and a bright light over her head. The lady seemed to be guarding or guiding the children as they crossed over the perilous bridge.

My mother explained to me that the lady in the picture was a guardian angel to the children. She said that angels were created by God to protect us. Whenever I was frightened, sick, sad, or upset, I would look at that picture and feel better knowing that God had sent an angel to watch over me as well. That picture stayed near my bed until I went to college.

My fascination with the topic of angels increased throughout my life. I attended Catholic School for the first eight years of my formal education. We were taught that each person is surrounded by a guardian angel from conception until death. Some say that Jesus had a guardian angel, and that Michael the Archangel may have filled that role.

Some may question the existence of angels, but I believe as it says in the Bible, God created angels to do His will, carry out His work, and protect, guide, encourage, and strengthen us humans. While some may not believe in their existence, I know that I have been protected and ministered to by angels.

According to Scripture, there are thousands and thousands of angels. Therefore, it behooves us to treat one another kindly, with love and understanding because you never know when you may be in the presence of angels.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your angels to watch over us. Knowing that you care enough to place angels among us gives us hope for tomorrow. Amen

1. Describe a time when you felt that you were in the presence of angels.
2. How did you feel when you realized that you were being visited by an angel?

Saturday, December 21, 2024

Writer: Ashley Hill

Writer's Ministry: First Impressions Manager

Scripture: Galatians 4:14, Hebrews 13:1-2

Word: Love

The reflection on loving one's enemies is incredibly powerful. It's true that love becomes challenging when we are confronted with real people who have hurt or oppose us. Jesus' command to love our enemies often feels countercultural and impossible, especially in a world where political and social divides can make hostility feel justified. Yet, Jesus wasn't bound by political sides or human disagreements — he calls us to a higher, more challenging standard of love.

Loving our enemies transforms us as much as it helps them; it can be an act of healing and growth that moves us past bitterness and resentment. Offering loving kindness and hospitality, even to those who think differently, allows us to stay connected to God's grace and reflect His unconditional love. It's a radical approach, especially today, when polarization has reached new heights.

When we welcome others — even those we might consider enemies — into our hearts with genuine love and open arms, we may indeed encounter unexpected blessings or even “angels unaware.” In doing so, we become instruments of God's love, creating connections that may have seemed unimaginable before. Showing grace and kindness to everyone we meet can truly be a form of ministry, one that aligns us with Christ's example. This is a beautiful and profound challenge, one that invites us to see the image of God in every person.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the courage to love as You love, even when it's hard. Help me to see Your image in everyone I meet and to respond with grace, kindness, and understanding. Soften my heart toward those I disagree with and fill me with the humility to let go of my need to be right. May my words and actions reflect Your love, drawing others — and myself — closer to You.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. How can I approach someone with opposing beliefs or opinions in a way that reflects Christ's love, even if it feels difficult or uncomfortable?
2. What might I need to let go of — such as bitterness, resentment, or the desire to be “right” — to create space for genuine love and hospitality toward those I consider my “enemies”?
3. In what ways can I practice daily acts of kindness and hospitality towards strangers or those with whom I disagree, and how might this change my perspective on love and unity?

Sunday, December 22, 2024

Writer: Rev. Marilyn Anell, retired

Writer's Ministry: JOY Singers; Women's Ministry

Scripture: Luke 2:1-14

Word: Census

Angels are God's special messengers. They deliver messages in a variety of ways, and we have Earth angels that do the same.

Now, at Advent, I especially love the recounting of Gabriel sharing with Mary what will happen in her future, “You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him, Jesus.” We happily know the rest of the story.

In Acts 12, Peter is in prison and carefully guarded by 16 men and chained while he sleeps. While he is sleeping, an angel appears and commands him to: “Get up! Get dressed; put on your sandals and coat and follow me!” He does and is led past guard posts and through a gate, and is freed.” He says, “The Lord has sent his angel and saved me from Herod and what he planned to do to me.”

When I was in grade school my mother was ill with leukemia. She often shared with us her experience in the hospital when an angel visited her roommate. My mother said an angel was beautifully standing at the foot of her roommate's bed, clearly there to heal the lady. Thankfully, my mother was also healed by the presence of that angel and then lived to be 91.

Earth angels are such a blessing, just as God's real angels are. I have had many people in my life whom I would say were “angels” to me, but I was greatly surprised recently when I returned home to Illinois and saw a gentleman who called me his “angel.” Wow, a reverse angel experience! I had not seen this man

in probably 15 years, and at first, I didn't even recognize him. He kept blinking to keep back the tears and said, "You were my angel. You came to be with me when my dad was on his death bed, but I really think that you were there for me." He and his wife gave me big hugs, and the man continued to try and hold back the tears. Next, we had a discussion of how God does place us where he wants us at the time we are needed, and obviously, he did that with me. Now, I feel terrible, but I cannot remember exactly what the problem was, but I do remember sharing compassion and calling him a couple of times to check on him and pray with him each time.

It is a beautiful experience to read of Biblical angels, to be helped by angels, and to be an "angel." We must listen and follow God's guidance, so we don't miss these angelic opportunities.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to follow you daily so we may be an angel to someone. Amen

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. When have I experienced an angel?
2. When have I been an angel?

Monday, December 23, 2024

Writer: Dan Southworth

Writer's Ministry: SPRT, Choir

Scripture: Luke 2:1-14

Word: Decree

I grew up as a "Christmas and Easter" Christian. My family were not members of a church, but my dad did insist on attending church on Christmas and Easter. So, we would dress up in our Sunday best and make our way the First United Methodist Church on Silver Springs Boulevard in what was then a much smaller Ocala.

Being shy, it felt awkward, but I remember the congregation always being open and welcoming to the considerable number of C&E Christians who showed up two Sundays each year. The feeling of awkwardness did not last long, my sister Sandy and I would soon find schoolmates who were regular members of the church to play around with when no grown-ups were looking.

Not attending church for those weeks of Advent leading up to Christmas meant I missed the reading of the various stories of the birth of Jesus from the Gospels. So, my most vivid recollection of hearing this passage during Advent is from Charlie Brown Christmas special which we watched every year during Christmas season.

As a young fan of Peanuts watching a Charlie Brown Christmas, I heard Linus, responding to Charlie Brown's frustration on the meaning of Christmas, walk out into stage and recite the story of the birth of Jesus Christ from verses 8-14 of Luke Chapter 2 with the Angel telling the frightened Shepherds to "fear not" that a Savior was coming.

Only later when my faith and church became a much more important part of my life did I hear and read this passage from Luke and heard the rest of the story beginning with the decree from Caesar Augustus which forced Joseph and Mary to make the arduous journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

The Roman Imperium ruled by fear and a decree from Caesar Augustus had to be obeyed. Fear of severe punishment was what drove Joseph to take a pregnant Mary and make the 70-mile journey by foot to Bethlehem. But the message brought to the Shepherds started with "fear not." Luke emphasized this to show the difference between the ruling by fear and decree by Caesar Augustus and the message of Love and Hope that will be delivered by Jesus Christ.

As I enjoy this Christmas season, I will once again watch Charlie Brown Christmas and will look forward hearing Linus recite part of the Christmas story. But I look forward with much more anticipation of being in church during the Advent season and hearing all the Gospel stories of the birth of Jesus. They are all to me messages of Love and Hope.

The shepherds were seen by many people as dirty and of a lower class. But it was to them that an angel announced the birth of Jesus.

Prayer: Grace-filled God, please help me to be more than a holiday follower of Jesus. Fill my days with your thoughts, your words, and your actions. Amen.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. Do you judge people too quickly by their outward appearance or vocation?
2. It is easy to become overwhelmed, frustrated, and even depressed by all the frenetic activity of the Christmas season. Are you letting fear of not getting everything done during the season overshadow the joy of celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ?
3. How does Luke speak to you in this passage?

Christmas Eve — Tuesday, December 24, 2024

Writer: Rev. Ellen Pollock

Writer's Ministry: Associate Pastor — Care and Discipleship

Scripture: Luke 2:1-14

Word: Room

This part of the story about Jesus' birth that tells us there was no room at the inn, so they went to the lesser place where the animals stayed. I would like to think of this differently in terms of room.

When Mary and Joseph went to the inn looking for respite, I'm sure they felt overwhelmed, exhausted, and somewhat rejected by lack of availability of lodging. Let's face it, this was a young woman, very pregnant with her first child, and a man who has trusted God's instruction to stay with her, despite the questions Joseph had to have in his heart.

Scholars tell us that most likely Jesus was born in the basement of a peasant home. The basement would be where animals were kept. Thus, we often refer to it as a stable. However, a reference to Jesus being born in a stable, could in fact mean that Jesus came for all people, not just the wealthy.

When we learn of Jesus being placed in a manger, it often makes us feel sad for the newborn to have such a humble beginning, but what if it meant more than that. What if the manger, or feeding trough, was a foretelling of the open table of God, showing to the world that Jesus invited all people to dine with him.

Lastly, what if there were animals around during His birth and early days; wouldn't that send a message of the welcoming nature of animals? Animals don't judge people based on what we are wearing or how much money they have, but rather animals are accepting and unprejudiced.

Maybe this area that the hosts provided for Mary and Joseph would have given the most privacy during a very delicate time in their young lives. The animals would not complain. Maybe it was important to Mary that the animals would not mind having their space invaded by a young couple and a newborn.

Maybe the lessons to learn from Jesus' birth are as simple as love and acceptance.

Prayer: Holy God, in our lives, show us how to be loving, accepting, and without judgment. You sent Jesus to teach us; help us to live into his teachings. Amen.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. Have you ever thought that there was more to Jesus' birth story than meets the eye?
2. What would be your response if your reservation at an inn or lodging turned to be different than what you thought you were getting?
3. Have you experienced a time in the peace of God's creation that surprised you?

Christmas Day — Wednesday, December 25, 2024

Writer: Rev. Harold Hendren

Scripture: Luke 2:1-14

Word: "Getting up"

During Advent we have been focusing on Angels and their role throughout the Bible and the Christmas story. As we have learned, angels are messengers. These celestial beings share a divine message that God wants the world to behold. In other words, "Listen up I have something important to say." The words from God are always important. Sometimes they are a word of caution, while other times they are a word of inspiration, hope, joy, and deliverance.

The angel Gabriel's message did just this. Gabriel shares with Elizabeth, Joseph, and Mary that help and hope are on the way. The message of help, hope, and healing come bundled in a Christ child that was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. A humble place to begin such a humble life and ministry. This child came to embody his name, "Emmanuel" God is with us. The incarnate message was delivered to peasants from a town that wasn't even on the map, inhabited by insignificant people. Isn't it amazing what God can do with so little to work with. It just goes to show the power of God working through the story and the people.

The words from Angel Gabriel found early in the story line are the most memorable. They are often quoted from the lips of some youngster in a Christmas pageant and featured from longwinded preachers from the pulpit, "Do not be afraid, (Mary); for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11) Yet I discovered a key message that rarely ever gets mentioned. "Get up!"

In the great escape (Matthew's version) Christmas narrative, the angel evidently wakes up Joseph and says, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee..." (Matthew 2:13) Typically calls that come in the middle of the night get our attention. This one was no exception. Joseph got up and did exactly what the angel had told him to do.

Which presents a wonderful Christmas question: What are you "getting up" to do this Christmas? For most, getting up on Christmas isn't a problem. If you ever had kids, you know there isn't any sleeping in on Christmas morning. Millions of very excited children are "getting up" to unwrap Christmas gifts. Those who are blessed with the gift of cooking are "getting up" to prepare a fine meal, while those sports enthusiasts are "getting up" to watch lots and lots of football. Getting up for Christmas means different things to different people and leads in various directions. For Joseph the angel's "get up" message meant to protect the Savior of the world which took them the direction of safety. Aren't we all grateful that Joseph "got up." Why? Because he realized that Jesus, the Christ child, was the most important person in the world. Perhaps we should follow the angel's words, and Joseph's direction this Christmas morning. "Get up" and realize that Jesus is most important, and He is ultimately the reason why we get up not only on Christmas day but every other day in the year. "Joy to the world, the Lord is come, let earth receive her king." Merry Christmas!

Pastor Harold

Christmas Worship Services

Christmas Eve Candlelight

Tuesday, December 24

4:30 PM and 7 PM

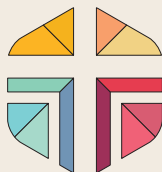
Holy Communion

Tuesday, December 24

5:30 PM – 6:30 PM

A guided meditation and reflection will be available in the Chapel for those wishing to partake in Communion.

Our Worship Services are live streamed and recorded each week. If you are unable to attend in person, please visit our website (ncumcfl.com) or YouTube Channel (New Covenant UMC–Florida) to watch anytime.



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