

*Hope  
Peace  
Joy Love*

*Advent 2021  
daily reflections*



Hope. Peace. Joy. Love.

These four gifts illuminate our Advent season. We need hope when we fall into despair. We need peace when turmoil has overtaken us. We need joy when we find ourselves in sorrow. And we need love when hate surrounds us.

We have all needed these gifts from God in the past year, and now we receive them in a special way during the season of Advent – because God promises us that Christ will come to brighten our world through hope, peace, joy, and love. And his birth as Emmanuel, God with us, will bring with it a promise of salvation for all the world.

These daily reflections are the fruit of three congregations working together to share our common faith in Christ. You will read reflections based on Advent scripture readings that not only remind us that we eagerly anticipate the birth of Christ, but that we also anticipate his second coming, when our creation is made anew. In the meantime, we notice and celebrate Christ's presence with us in the here and now.

I hope these reflections give you comfort that God extends his boundless love to you. I hope these reflections will challenge you to spread God's love to others. But I also sincerely hope that these reflections will give you hope, peace, joy, and love in accord with this Advent season.

Advent Blessings,

**Fr. Mike Cruickshank, CSP**, Associate Pastor  
Cathedral of Saint Andrew

## Sunday, November 28

***To you, O LORD, I lift my soul.... Your ways, O LORD, make known to me; teach me your paths, guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior, and for you I wait all the day.***

***– Psalm 25:1,4-5 (Full text, Psalm 25:1,4-5,8-10,14)***

Welcome to the beginning of this year's Advent. Advent has been with us since sometime in the fourth century as a way to prepare for the birth of Christ. It was originally called "St. Martin's Lent." Advent is also the beginning of our next Liturgical Year. It has four Sundays and each represents a different focus. The first Sunday is Hope, the second is Faith, the third is Joy, and the fourth is Peace.

Advent, like Lent, is a season of quietness and reflection. It is not Christmas, but it is the time for us to prepare for the birth of Christ.

This portion of Psalm 25 talks about asking God to show us His ways, to teach us and guide us along the pathways He wants us to follow. For us to hear what God is instructing us to do, we must wait patiently and quietly listening for the "still small voice of God."

During this season of Advent let us read daily devotionals and books that call to us, light our Advent wreaths to bring the Light into this darkest season of the year, and wait for the coming of Jesus into our world.

O God,

*Thank you for sending your only Son into our world. Teach us and guide us along your paths during this season of Advent, that we may continue on them for the rest of our lives. In your name we pray. Amen.*

**Doug Karsen, St. Mark's Episcopal Church**

**Monday, November 29**

***A centurion approached (Jesus)..., saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully.” He said to him, “I will come and cure him.” The centurion said in reply, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man subject to authority.”***

***– Matthew 8:5a-9a (Full text, Matthew 8:5-11)***

Remember the days of long-distance phone calls? As a kid, we’d only talk to my grandmothers in Wisconsin on holidays because my parents avoided long-distance fees. I remember the frustration of living with roommates who wouldn’t claim their long-distance calls on my monthly bill. As a young professional, I worked for a company that asked vendors to place any long-distance calls. Long-distance doesn’t carry a lot of positive associations for me.

In this verse, we marvel at the wonder of long-distance healing. Not long after the Sermon on the Mount and three in-person healing miracles, Jesus is approached by a Roman centurion and asked to heal his paralyzed servant. Again, it’s a Gentile looking for help from a Jew. The soldier’s humility is pure; his faith is strong, and he makes clear that he understands and respects Christ’s authority.

In the full text, Jesus shares how unusual the centurion’s faith is before healing the servant from afar. My takeaways are that we can take our problems to Jesus, and that he is more than willing and able to help. Whether we’re on our knees in prayer or traveling halfway across the world, just like today’s smart telephones, there is no such thing as long-distance with Jesus as long as we’re willing to talk.

*Jesus in Heaven,*

*As we prepare to celebrate your birth, let us remember to keep the lines of communication open and to faithfully trust all the blessings that you bring to our lives wherever we are. Amen.*

**Bryan Bickford, Bethlehem Lutheran Church**

**Tuesday, November 30**

***“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news!” – Romans 10:13-15 (Full text, Romans 10:9-18)***

It is easier than ever to share news – phone calls, texts, emails, social media, etc. But how do we share the greatest news given to us? “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Amen!

But to call on Jesus, one must believe in Him and all that He has done and all that He is. So, one must have heard of Him and the Word of God to be saved. Imagine if the disciples never shared what they witnessed and knew? What if they kept the Good News to themselves out of fear?

We are all called to act on our faith and to share the Word of God. “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the Good News.” Would God call yours or my feet beautiful? Not in physical appearance but in where they have taken us? Do our footsteps show a path for God’s will? Have they taken us places to serve him? Do we set an example of our faith by our actions? Do we share our faith and belief with others?

We can all have beautiful feet in His sight if we put them to work to get His word to others.

*Dear Lord,*

*Thank you for your everlasting love. Help show us the path and give us the strength to share the Good News with all! Amen! Praise God!*

**Debbie Meyer, Cathedral of Saint Andrew**

**Wednesday, December 1**

***And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For in this mountain shall the hand of the LORD rest. -- Isaiah 25:9-10a (Full text, Isaiah 25:6-10a)***

Our God is with us. He is the Lord we have all been waiting for. In these verses he is reassuring each of us that he has destroyed any "mountain" of fear or anxiety – that he is truly the Lord of ALL.

That knowledge of reassurance is a major part of the faith of each of us as we deal with daily stresses (sometimes almost minute by minute or hour by hour). He will take our fears as HIS. He has promised that. We must take a deep breath and believe that God is there, and believe in what he has promised for ALL people – that death truly means everlasting life with God. He has promised.

*Oh, God,*

*Please help us to believe, to be confident in thy love, to help reassure others of your love, and your willingness to bear our fears, to free us from worries. Help us to always understand and know that you have promised to always be with us. You have promised, and we need to believe. Amen.*

**Jacqueline D. Taylor, Ph.D., St. Mark's Episcopal Church**

**Thursday, December 2**

***Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes. – Psalm 118:1,8-9 (Full text, Psalm 118:1,8-9,19-27a)***

We all need reminders at times, and I am living proof of it! Too often time “gets away from me” and I need to “catch up.” These verses from Psalm 118 are reminders to me, and possibly to you also, that the LORD is good and merciful, perfectly trustworthy, and our sure refuge. I wish I woke up every morning and went to bed each night praising the LORD for his goodness and mercy. I wish my first instinct was to seek refuge and place my trust in the LORD. But that’s usually not the case. Too often I forget to thank God until Sunday morning. And even worse, I trust my limited knowledge and the advice of friends and experts as I make daily decisions.

Is it just me? Or do others fall into the same routines? Sadly, I think the answers are yes and yes. Perhaps King David wrote these verses as reminders to himself and the Israelites that he, although their king, was not their ultimate guide or source of mercy and refuge. And today, centuries later, his words are as needed as ever to point us to the LORD, the source of all we need.

*Dear God,*

*You know how forgetful we all can be, giving us your written word to ponder, and Jesus Christ to be our teacher and guide. May each of our days begin and end praising and thanking you for your providence. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**Donna Engstrom, Bethlehem Lutheran Church**



**Friday, December 3**

***Those who err in spirit shall acquire understanding, and those who find fault shall receive instruction. – Isaiah 29:24 (Full text, Isaiah 29:17-24)***

Isaiah chapter 29 presents a sequence from judgment to deliverance of God's people. First, Isaiah warns of God's judgment, where the nations will "make war against Mount Zion" (v. 8). Judah's arrogance continues as the people plot a military strategy without consulting God (v. 15). Then, after God's judgment (vs. 1-8) and Judah's pride (vs. 9-16), comes a major turn of events starting in verse 17: The people of God will turn away from their sins and return to God!

On the day when God redeems Israel, "the deaf shall hear" and "the blind shall see" (v. 18); "the tyrant shall be no more" and "the scoffer shall cease to be" (v. 20); and, the verse atop this devotion: "Those who err in spirit shall acquire understanding, those who find fault shall receive instruction." The passage presents a vision of the kingdom of God.

Isaiah 29:24 is full of hope for us! To "err in spirit" is to get off track or turn away from God. We do this when we act foolishly and impulsively. But if we seek God's counsel, God promises to grant us wisdom and understanding. It is very easy to find fault in others. We are much more interested in pointing out everyone else's sins than in taking a personal inventory of our own.

*Dear God,*

*Please help us stay on the path that leads to life! And may we reflect deeply on our own sins and praise you for your forgiveness! Amen.*

**Scott Pichard**, Cathedral of Saint Andrew

**Saturday, December 4**

***On the day the LORD binds up the wounds of his people, he will heal the bruises left by his blows. – Isaiah 30:26b (Full text, Isaiah 30:19-21,23-26)***

This hope-filled and merciful message comes to the people of Judah in a time of great suffering and affliction. A few verses earlier the people are instructed: “And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’” (Isaiah 30:21)

This Advent 2021 season, be ready for the message of Divine Mercy. Later in the message from the Prophet Isaiah, Christians read verse 53:4 with Messianic allusions of the coming Incarnation of Divine Mercy. The suffering servant was wounded, crushed, and bruised.

What does it mean for you this Advent season to turn to the right and to the left and to hear this message of Divine Mercy – that your wounds will be bound and your bruises healed?

*Merciful Lord,  
We pray that we hear your instruction  
this Advent season as we await  
the celebration of the coming  
of Divine Mercy. Amen.*

**Amy Richards-Duncan, St. Mark's Episcopal Church**

## Sunday, December 5

***I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.***

**– Philippians 1:6 (Full text, Philippians 1:4-6,8-11)**

Bigotry. Hatred. Oppression. Racism. Terrorism. Gentrification. These are current truths of our society. It can be hard to see good works around us. Paul writes to the believers in Philippi of being certain that God will do good works in and through them until Christ returns. What an amazing certainty.

During confirmation, we pray for good works to happen in believers. From the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer: “Renew in these your servants the covenant you made with them at their Baptism. Send them forth in the power of the Spirit to perform the service you set before them.” That’s wonderful, but how do we keep the covenant? Are we not called as believers to do God’s good works?

Opportunities to do good works present themselves nearly constantly. Out shopping, pick up the toy that you saw fall from a stroller and give it back. Give change or a couple dollars to someone in need. Hold the door for people. Crochet hats for preemies. Volunteer. Donate. Protest. After writing this, I’ll be decorating bags for Kids Food Basket. Maybe, just maybe, in focusing on doing good works and sharing God’s love ourselves, we’ll be able to be as certain as Paul.

*Thank you, Lord, for your faith in us to carry out the good work you have begun in us. Help us to show your loving kindness in all we do. Amen.*

**Katie Baxter**, friend of Bethlehem Lutheran Church

**Monday, December 6**

***Then the scribes and Pharisees began to ask themselves, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who but God alone can forgive sins?” Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them in reply, “What are you thinking in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk?’” – Luke 5:21-23 (Full text, Luke 5:17-26)***

When Jesus was living among us, he performed many miracles to cure the body, spirit, and soul. This is the first time that Jesus revealed to the people that he has the authority to forgive sins. Jesus reminded the Pharisees of his power and authority, and he does have the right to use it.

Jesus died for us, and then returned to us to bring more good news. We all have the opportunity to share in Jesus' inheritance if we take up our own cross and follow him. During his first visit to his disciples, he shared his authority to forgive sins with his disciples: “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ... He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven, and whose sins you retain are retained.” (John 20:21b-23)

Today's disciples have the authority to forgive sins just like Jesus but what power do lay people have? It is in the *Our Father* prayer: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and **forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us**; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.”

*O Lord Jesus Christ,*

*Advent is a time of repentance and forgiveness, preparing for our meeting with you.*

*May our meeting be a glorious one. Amen.*

**Cynthia Smith**, Cathedral of Saint Andrew

**Tuesday, December 7**

***Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care.***

***– Isaiah 40:11 (Full text, Isaiah 40:1-11)***

In the previous verses of Chapter 40 of Isaiah, the prophet proclaims both the mightiness and mercy of the Lord God, Jehovah, for the people of Jerusalem. He says that their sins are forgiven twice over by the gift of his Son, Jesus. The prophet foretells of John the Baptist's preparation for the coming of Jesus, just as we are preparing for our Lord's birth in this Advent season.

The prophet also reminds us that Jesus does not come in grandeur as a king or conqueror, but as a humble shepherd who gently cares for his flock with tenderness and love. From Matthew Henry's commentary: "Christ is the good Shepherd; he shows tender care for young converts, weak believers, and those of a sorrowful spirit."

This is an example to us as Christians. This Advent we should spend more time caring for our fellow human beings just as Jesus cares for us. It's still early. Make a plan to volunteer at a food pantry, Kids Food Basket, visiting the elderly, or even making cookies with your grandchildren! Remember, it is more blessed to give than receive.

*Good and gracious Lord,*

*Help us to be like the Good Shepherd and care for those who are suffering from sickness, hunger, grief, or other tribulations. Give us the grace to do your will in all that we pursue. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

**Aleta Wells, St. Mark's Episcopal Church**

**Wednesday, December 8**

***And coming to her, (the angel Gabriel) said, “Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.” But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus.” – Luke 1:28-31 (Full text, Luke 1:26-38)***

Yikes! And Mary said yes. She asked only how; the response was equally confusing and puzzling. “Greatly troubled” indeed.

When our son announced, “You are going to be grandparents,” I cried for three days. I was afraid—for them and for me. I wasn’t old enough to be a grandmother. I grieved for what I imagined they were giving up and taking on. I was angry at what I imagined would be the imposition on my life. But clearly, I was called to be a grandparent and to support these college students without jobs or plans. It was a common event—not a call to be a grandparent of the Son of God—but I wasn’t ready to share our son with a wife and grandchild. Not ready to take on more family obligations.

The call to say yes—to a child, a neighbor, a community need—may be inconvenient, hard, and frightening as we walk into unknown territory. How to respond? Will we follow Mary’s example? “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38) Our grandson became the brightest star in our galaxy, but the gift was not apparent at the announcement of his birth. Mary’s ability to trust God was far greater than my own.

*Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,*

*We pray for the grace to put ourselves in your love and trust. We pray that when called, we will join Mary in yes. Amen.*

**Deirdre Toeller, Bethlehem Lutheran Church**

**Thursday, December 9**

***Let all your works give you thanks, O LORD, and let your faithful ones bless you. Let them discourse of the glory of your Kingdom and speak of your might. – Psalm 145:10-11 (Full text, Psalm 145:1,9-13)***

The response in the psalm for today is “The LORD is gracious and merciful; slow to anger, and of great kindness.” What other appropriate response is there to this than one of gratitude?

As we continue to hope and remember God’s incarnation in the person of Jesus Christ, the quintessential example of how to live a life of gratitude and praise to our Creator, let us imitate Jesus by word and deed by totally giving ourselves over to the good of our neighbors and to all of creation, even if it costs us.

Let us commit to support each other, advocate for the poor, the marginalized, and the outcasts of society, and be in relationship and community with them. Let us care for our world, our common home, so that all people have access to nutritious food, clean air, and clean water. Let us remember that we are all one in Christ so that when one suffers, we all suffer.

And let us rejoice with all of creation and never stop telling the story of what God has done for us through his radical and all-inclusive grace and mercy. Let us be mindful that all things belong to God and that our very existence is evidence of his love for us.

*“Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Praise him all creatures here below! Praise him above ye heavenly hosts! Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost! Amen.”*

**Kurtis Hoffman, Cathedral of Saint Andrew**

**Friday, December 10**

***“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’”***

***– Matthew 11:16-17 (Full text, Matthew 11:16-19)***

How hard it can be to resonate with the thoughts and behaviors of others! First century hearers drew blanks both at Jesus’ good news (“flute-playing”) and the Baptist’s “wailing.” They remained so self-absorbed that they could not connect with either message.

Some years ago, a friend back East, hearing that I’d lost my first spouse, offered me his heartfelt condolences. By that time, however, I had worked through my grief and had even remarried. So, I tossed off his words with, “Oh that’s alright. We old codgers don’t stay single long!” By the look on his face, I could tell my retort had caused him only confusion. Thinking back, I wish I’d accepted with grace his well-meaning consolation: that I’d perceived and identified with his kind intentions.

When you and I do manage to place ourselves into the feelings of others, to read their intentions and respond accordingly, we truly hear the Christ’s flute-playing—and if need be, the Baptist’s wailing. We become good news to all persons we encounter.

*Lord Jesus Christ,*

*You once “played the flute” of good news to people around you. Empower us to read others’ intentions and step into their hearts for a moment, that, united with them, we may journey toward the kingdom. Amen.*

**The Rev. Hugh Dickinson, St. Mark’s Episcopal Church**



**Saturday, December 11**

***Turn again, O God of hosts; look down from heaven and see; have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted. – Psalm 80:14-15 (Full text, Psalm 80:2-3, 14-19)***

When I first read this passage, it seemed as though the psalmist was thanking God for the bountiful vegetation that God had provided. But wait a minute! In verse 16, he rebuked the people for burning and destroying the vegetation. Wow! Isn't that exactly what we are facing today? Disastrous fires, floods, and toxic waste accumulations, brought about in part by global warming, are threatening our very survival.

Is history repeating itself? Is there a lesson here for the present time? I believe so. In verse 3 the psalmist calls out "...let your face shine, that we may be saved." And in verse 17, he writes, "Let our hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself." Is this a reference to Jesus, who eventually came to save humankind?

Whatever your interpretation, I believe that God strongly admonishes us to preserve our beautiful world.

*Lord,  
Let us listen to the psalmist,  
and take action to improve  
life for all humankind. Amen.*

**Bob Swanborg, Bethlehem Lutheran Church**

## Sunday, December 12

***Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:6-7 (Full text, Philippians 4:4-7)***

Have no anxiety at all. How true. It's called "turning it over," "giving it to God."

There is a saying: "If you pray, why worry, and if you worry, why pray." When stress or anxiety hits, I often think of the Serenity Prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

Are there things you can change? If not, then give it to God through prayer. He gave us His peace; don't let anything take it away from you.

*Dear Lord,  
I turn all my worries and anxieties over to You.  
Show me what I need to do  
to regain the peace that  
You have so generously  
given me. Amen.*

**Mary Close**, Cathedral of Saint Andrew

**Monday, December 13**

***How goodly are your tents, O Jacob; your encampments, O Israel! They are like gardens beside a stream, like the cedars planted by the LORD. – Numbers 24:5-6 (Full text, Numbers 24:2-7,15-17a)***

Advent reminds us that we are on a journey – not just to Bethlehem, but in our life. The journey is long; it wears us out. And then there are roadblocks.

That's the case with Israel. The long journey to the Promised Land is coming to a close, but Moab stands in the way. The king of Moab has summoned Balaam, a seer ("one whose eyes are clear"), to put a curse on Israel and stop their journey. Balaam instead blesses. And look at this blessing. While Balaam sees tents, the stuff of the journey, he also sees a glimpse of a garden with aloes and cedars and flowing water; it's a hint of a return to Eden. There is a blessing in their future.

There's more: Balaam peers further into Israel's journey, "a star shall come out of Jacob." That promise first attaches to David, but then is seen by rabbis and the Christian church as pointing to the Messiah. This is the star that will guide the magi and be proclaimed gloriously as the Bright and Morning Star (Rev. 22:16).

This Advent, we again remember that we too are on a journey. Roadblocks are not the end; there is a blessing in our future. God is bringing us out of the wilderness, giving us a Messiah, Jesus, who will lead us to streams of flowing water.

*O Bright and Morning Star, our companion on the way, you who have overcome our roadblocks, we thank you for the promise of life with you. Amen.*

**Bill Harris, St. Mark's Episcopal Church**

**Tuesday, December 14**

***Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the Kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.” – Matthew 21:31b-32. (Full text, Matthew 21:28-32)***

When I was in elementary school, we received gold stars whenever we followed our teachers' directions. If we behaved ourselves and studied our assignments in high school, we were rewarded by making the honor roll and graduating *cum laude*. Throughout life we are rewarded for exercising and eating a healthy diet, working hard, providing for our families, saving for our retirement.

The kingdom of God is not like this. It is not a meritocracy based on each individual's achievements or personal virtues. On the contrary, it is a commonwealth for the common good. It isn't a dualistic kingdom.

In this passage Jesus has just entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and has cleansed the temple. The chief priests and elders came to confront him before they would bring him to trial. They wanted to justify themselves in contrast to others, especially tax collectors and prostitutes. The tax collectors and sinners, those who misbehaved in school and were outcasts, those who wouldn't work and didn't save money in IRAs, had believed John the Baptist, but we self-sufficient folks still don't change and believe him. We still don't follow Christ instead of our own selfish and self-serving ways.

*Loving God,*

*In the prayer that Jesus taught us we pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.” May we know that outcasts and sinners are going into heaven ahead of the self-righteous. And may we like that. Amen.*

**The Rev. Charles Homeyer, Bethlehem Lutheran Church**

**Wednesday, December 15**

***At that time, John summoned two of his disciples and sent them to the Lord to ask, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” – Luke 7:18b-19 (Full text, Luke 7:18b-23)***

Right now, aren't all of us a bit like John? In John's time and in ours, there are many who seek worldly things: comfort, wealth, and power. In John's time and in ours, there is cruelty and injustice, a lack of mercy. However, we are like John. We are looking forward to the Messiah, the salvation of all humankind. We are filled with anticipation for the coming of the Lord. We too are hopeful and excited. But like John, we want to be sure.

In our heads, we know that Christ is “the one who is to come,” but as the miracle of Christ's birth draws ever nearer, we also need to prepare our hearts, to make room.

As we journey together through the season of Advent we are like John, moving from uncertainty to conviction – until we can proclaim with confidence and joy, “Behold, the Lamb of God.”

*Lead us, Lord, from the darkness of doubt and indifference to the light of compassion and mercy. Let us be a light to the world, guiding seekers to the warmth of your love. Amen.*

**Stephan Hokanson, Cathedral of Saint Andrew**

**Thursday, December 16**

***Though the mountains fall away and the hills be shaken, my love shall never fall away from you nor my covenant of peace be shaken, says the LORD, who has mercy on you. – Isaiah 54:10 (Full text, Isaiah 54:1-10)***

Isaiah is known as the prophet of salvation. He spoke of the hopeful future and the saving grace of the Messiah to come, the one whose birth and manifestation we await during this season of Advent – Jesus.

We are not to be discouraged or to lose hope, because the gift of our Savior has brought light into the darkness, lighting the path for all and showing us a new way of living in Him. He will model Love and forgiveness, justice, and healing for all.

The gift of Jesus, the Son, is a sign of God's everlasting care for us, and we rejoice in that Love.

*Gracious God,  
You are as near as our next breath.  
Guide me through each day,  
and may I feel your calming presence.  
You are my strength  
and my balm. Amen.*

**The Rev. Susan York, St. Mark's Episcopal Church**

**Friday, December 17**

***The mountains shall yield peace for the people, and the hills justice. He shall defend the afflicted among the people, save the children of the poor. – Psalm 72:3-4 (Full text, Psalm 72:1-8, 17)***

The psalmist is describing the world as it could be when ruled by Solomon in his wisdom. Even the wonders of creation bring peace and justice to the chosen people of God! Full of poetic beauty, this psalm praises the king as caring for all his people: “For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence, he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight.” (Psalm 72:12-14)

In 2021, such leaders are few. The world of the psalmist seems like an impossible fantasy! With the news full of corruption, lies, and misdeeds of our national leaders, what can I do to bring peace and justice in the world?

Jesus made it clear that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. There are so many ways to show love! Write letters to leaders in support of programs to provide food, housing, medical care, and jobs; donate time/money to food banks, shelters, organizations that serve the poor; speak up when we hear misinformation or lies. The list of ways to spread love is endless.

Go forth in love!

*Holy God,*

*Help me to remember that it does not take the wisdom of Solomon to bring your message of love into a hurting world. Thank you for sending Jesus to show me the way. In Jesus' Holy Name, Amen.*

**Pat Baxter**, Bethlehem Lutheran Church

**Saturday, December 18**

***All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means “God is with us.”  
– Matthew 1:22-23 (Full text, Matthew 1:18-25)***

“God is with us.” These words give much solace to me – simply because we are not alone.

No one should live a life of loneliness. Yet, sadly, some do. Loneliness does not preclude the human condition; rather at times loneliness and isolation plague us especially as we age or undergo transitions in life. However, knowing that “God is with us” validates not only the purpose of community but the importance of our covenant with God.

Like Emmanuel, our Christian faith is tied to and expressed through the words “God is with us,” which has symbolic significance of the shape of things to come! Our future hinges on and awaits God. Advent is a time of rejoicing but also renewal: Try and reach out to those in need or, moreover, within your life, for God works in unexpected, miraculous ways.

*Dear Lord,*

*Advent is hardly seen as a time of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit is alive and at work – as evident in the annunciation to Joseph, and to Mary earlier. In a mysterious, miraculous way, the Spirit's action brings the gift to the world, Jesus Christ. Please help us to bring that spirit into our daily lives and to practice being closer to you.  
Amen.*

**Kelli Donigan, Cathedral of Saint Andrew**



**Sunday, December 19**

***And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. – Hebrews 10:10 (Full text, Hebrews 10:5-10)***

During this Advent season, we come humbly before God. For some of us, that literally means on bended knee(s). Some are reading these daily devotions as a way of more deeply connecting with God. Advent is an opportunity to connect with God by reflecting on the sacrifice of Jesus for us and for our salvation. As God made a man in the Incarnation, Jesus would have known the will of God the Father, and that *will* included offering himself as a sacrifice.

I don't really think I can know the will of God, other than keeping the Commandments, including keeping holy the "Lord's Day." I do believe that I can know what God *desires*. Jeremiah 29:11 reminds us, "For I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." God desires good things for us. God desires that we grow in faith, love, and charity. God desires that we are just, merciful, and humble before God, as Micah tells us.

As we prepare for the Incarnation, let us embrace God's desires for us, desires made present in the life of Jesus. Jesus came into the world to show us the way, the truth, and the life. May we embrace that "way" and prepare our hearts and minds for the "Word made flesh" at Christmas.

*O God, through the power of your love for us in Jesus, we humbly come before you with good intentions to embrace your desires for us. Give us that grace in abundance, that we might journey with Christians around the world and experience the true joys and delight of Christmas. Amen.*

**The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector, St. Mark's Episcopal Church**

**Monday, December 20**

***He shall receive a blessing from the LORD, a reward from God his savior. Such is the race that seeks for him, that seeks the face of the God of Jacob. – Psalm 24:5-6 (Full text, Psalm 24:1-6)***

I love a book series called *The Dresden Files*. In it, there is a recurring character who has faith that I find myself envying at times. As I write, I am listening to a book where he is being whispered to by a fallen angel, and his steadfast reply is that his faith is in God and God alone. I am aware that this person is fictional, but I often find myself inspired nonetheless. While I may never encounter a fallen angel, I sure hope my response would be the same. But how often have I placed my knowledge or the things that the world values above God without even realizing it?

Today's psalm states that those who have steadfast faith in God will receive God's blessing; that the pure of heart and clean of hands can stand on God's mountain. Advent is a time of hope, among other things, and what better to hope for than the blessing of our God? While I stumble and fall, I know God is there to help me back up; and as long as I seek God's face, I know that I will find it. This Advent, I hope that you are able to seek and find the face of God in the hope that is brought by the birth of our Savior.

God,

*Thank You for Your steadfast love and faithfulness to me. Your hope does not disappoint us, and I pray that, as we navigate Advent, we are able to share that hope and love with those with whom we interact. Amen.*

**Elizabeth McNicholas, Bethlehem Lutheran Church**

**Tuesday, December 21**

***My lover speaks; he says to me, “Arise, my beloved, my dove, my beautiful one, and come! For see, the winter is past, the rains are over and gone.” — Song of Songs 2:10-11 (Full text, Song of Songs 2:8-14)***

The pandemic, sin, and natural disasters have separated so many of us from God and each other. We might even feel we are in a winter of absence of life, love, and abundance. Deep down, though, we can never lose our deep longing for God and His love manifested through others. And God never stops trying to reconnect with us.

In these verses, God calls us as His beloved tugging at our hearts to leave our winter of desolation to embrace the joy of new life, of new hope, His Son’s coming.

The closeness of God resembles the dove, flowers, and fig tree. Like the first sign of spring, God invigorates us, awakens us, and draws us near. The beauty of God is unimaginable. It’s powerful and bold and unlike anything else.

*Let us pray that in any time of darkness, we might seek closeness with You so that we may experience Your incredible love and compassion. Help us radiate and reflect that love to ourselves and everyone we encounter. Amen.*

**Joe and Jenna Jonaitis, Cathedral of Saint Andrew**

**Wednesday, December 22**

***And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed.”***

**– Luke 1:46-48 (Full text, Luke 1:46-56)**

I used to beg my parents for a coin to drop in mounted telescopes or binoculars along Lake Michigan or other scenic spots. Then for a minute I would view a nearer horizon or a larger boat, even though the magnified images were often hazy in the sun.

In today’s reading Mary does not need a telescope or coin to magnify the Lord. She is carrying the Savior in her womb, and her rush of exuberant praise reflects an image of the Lord that is so large and so clear in her young life.

Some versions of the Bible use “proclaims” or “glorifies the Lord” instead of “magnifies the Lord.” Whatever translation is used in Mary’s Song, commonly called The Magnificat, she feels the Lord’s presence in her very soul.

We cannot make God greater, but we can strive to make the Lord greater in our lives. One of the ways I try to grow closer to my Savior is by reflecting on the devotions in this Advent book. It shows me how God has made a difference in the lives of my brothers and sisters in Christ, and reminds me to give thanks for the Lord’s power to transform me – and that I don’t have to view God for just a coin-operated-telescope minute.

How can you magnify the Lord today?

*Lord God,  
Help me to see you more clearly,  
and help me to magnify you to others. Amen.*

**Mike McCarty**, friend of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, and the Cathedral of Saint Andrew

**Thursday, December 23**

***Good and upright is the LORD; thus he shows sinners the way. He guides the humble to justice, he teaches the humble his way.  
— Psalm 25:8-9 (Full text, Psalm 25:4-5,8-14)***

It would seem that to follow the LORD's way out of sin, we must be humble. What does humility look like in the real world? I like poet Wendell Berry's take on humility:

"If there are a 'chosen few'  
then I am not one of them,  
if an 'elect,' well then  
I have not been elected.  
I am one who is knocking  
at the door. I am one whose foot  
is on the bottom rung.  
But I know that Heaven's  
bottom rung is Heaven  
though the ladder is standing  
on the earth where I work  
by day and at night sleep  
with my head upon a stone."

*Dear Lord,  
Help me to recognize that the bottom rung of the ladder is more than enough. Help  
me to keep knocking at the door as long as I live, because I will need to knock that  
long. Amen.*

**Judith Simonson, Bethlehem Lutheran Church**

**Friday, December 24**

***(Zechariah prophesied:) “In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.” – Luke 1:78-79 (Full text, Luke 1:67-79)***

“To guide our feet into the way of peace.” We certainly need peace these days. We are surrounded by the world’s business, violence, terror...not much that resembles peace.

My hope for your Christmas is that you find many peaceful moments in the next eight days, the Octave of Christmas. Maybe you have time off work and can spend some quiet moments with the Lord in the morning or evening. Maybe you have grandchildren or little ones to cuddle and see the wonder of the Nativity through their eyes. Maybe the Christmas services tonight or tomorrow will reinforce that God sent Jesus for you. How amazing! He came for you and for me!

May we shut out the world’s way of Christmas and enter into the life of a tiny child who knows our every need. A man, Christ, who heals our every wound. A Messiah for the greatest and the least.

Merry Christmas! Jesus comes with blessings of peace.

Lord,  
*Help me to open my heart to new ways  
of finding you during these days  
of infinite light, love, and receiving  
your eternal love. Amen.*

**Margo Dean, SFO, Cathedral of Saint Andrew**

**Saturday, December 25**

**Christmas Day**

*When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. — Luke 2:15-16*



***An Ecumenical Offering from***

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**Cathedral of Saint Andrew  
215 Sheldon Blvd. SE**

**St. Mark's Episcopal Church  
134 N. Division Ave.**

***Grand Rapids, Michigan***