



Advent 2020

Crescent Hill Baptist Church



## ADVENT 2020

The 2020 Advent devotional booklet contains messages of hope, of struggle, of joy, of wonder. There are expressions of many of the emotions that we all are experiencing in this most unusual time. There are stories of love, of loss, of discovery, of anticipation. Of God's grace.

May you feel that grace as you ponder these stories and make your own way through this time of waiting.

Thanks to the folks who shared so generously their thoughts and dreams.

At the back of the booklet you will find a prayer calendar submitted by our Prayer Team, PrayerNeeded2020. Each day there is a person or group of people for which to pray as well as a way to act on that prayer.



# First Week of Advent



## Advent Hope

“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!” – *Isaiah 64:1-9*

Hardly the verse we expect to begin the Advent season! Instead of softly lit candles in a green wreath, the prophet wants a real light show from God, not only with fireworks, but for the Almighty, God's Self, to rip a big hole in the heavens and come down to scare the bejeebies out of, or at least make tremble, God's/our adversaries.

Picking a fight with God is not usually an Advent recommendation. But here is the prophet, pulling no punches with God, demanding, “You better get down here NOW because things sure are a mess. All of our best efforts have failed, and we are at the end of our rope. It's time you did something, because after all, we are your people!”

Anger and despair. Situations gone awry. Powerlessness. Rampant evil. Abandonment. The prophet's lament in its raw and demanding expression points us to the true substance of Advent hope: desperation, life out of control, on the one hand, reaching out in boldness and vulnerability, on the other hand, to a God who is not stuck in the heavens, but intimate and ever present in transforming ways.

*God of Hope, You are our potter, we are all the work of your hands. Hear us when we are angry, desperate and in pain, and whisper words of hope that your love abides now and forevermore. Amen*

Susan Lockwood

## The Elusive Hope

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. – *Romans 12:12 (NIV)*

At the end of October, in my daily newspaper reading, I came across an article in *The Wall Street Journal* entitled “Finding Hope When Everything Feels Hopeless” by Elizabeth Bernstein. She began by saying that hope is the perfect four-letter word for the moment. She continued by summarizing why psychologists agree with the premise—“It’s crucial to our physical and mental health...it protects us from stress...hope is PPE—a Personal Protective Emotion...hope takes motivation and strategy...hope is malleable, can be boosted, and is a choice.” There was even a reference to an Adult Trait Hope Scale, created by psychologist C. R. Snyder in the early 1990s. Using twelve questions, the tool tests whether a person has the motivation and pathway necessary for hope. I decided to take the test.

On a personal note, Ms. Bernstein said by reading historical books on the Black Death, the Civil War and others, it actually cheered her up and reminded her that “bad times do end” and it “gave me an intimate peek at how people have held on to hope in the darkest times.” Further, she suggested that we should imagine ourselves happy when life returns to normal, set one goal for the week and steps to realize it, use positive language like “I can or we will,” and model hope for others because hope begets hope. While I know it sounds simple, we all must start somewhere.

For me, my score on Snyder’s hope scale showed that I do acquire a fair amount of hope, but I, like probably most of us, still need to follow some of the expert’s advice to get through this pandemic.

Bernstein, Elizabeth. “Finding Hope When Everything Feels Hopeless.” *Wall Street Journal* 28 Oct. 2020: A12.

Snyder, C.R., Irving, L., & Anderson, J.R. (1991). Hope and Health: Measuring the will and the ways. In C.R. Snyder & D.R. Forsyth (Eds.) *Handbook of social and clinical psychology: The health perspective* (pp.285-305). Elmsford, New York: Pergamon Press. Cited in Snyder, C.R. (2000). Hypothesis: There is Hope. In C.R. Snyder (Eds.), *Handbook of Hope Theory, Measures and Applications* (pp. 3-21). San Diego: Academic Press.

*God, you, above all, are our key to personal hope. Amen*

Valorie Horn

## 2020 – The Year of Waiting!

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. – *Psalms 130:5 (NIV)*

Most historians believe that the celebration of Advent began in western Europe in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. That celebration never reached the Southern Baptist Church in Louisville where I was raised! In fact, that news apparently didn't travel too quickly at all since I was an adult before I had ever even *heard* the word. While I certainly was excited as a child waiting for Christmas, my own children marked their waiting with Advent calendars.

If the season of Advent is our reminder to slow down and wait, maybe I have been celebrating "Advent" for most of 2020. At least, I sure have observed the slowing down and waiting part! Although I haven't been waiting for the celebration of the birth of Christ, there were many things to anticipate.

I have waited to return to the YMCA, I have waited to go on trips, I have waited to return to church, I have waited to see my family, I have waited to do volunteer work, I have waited to go out with my friends for coffee or a meal, and I have waited to learn election results. The list for all of us goes on and on. Of course, most of my "waits" have been for "first-world issues" since I have had money, food and a place to live.

I suspect many of you reading this aren't good waiters. We don't like waiting for doctor appointments, waiting in line at a store, etc. We like immediate gratification. But really this year has taken our waiting to a whole new level. I don't like waiting when I have no idea when that difficult period will end!

While we are waiting for the pandemic to be over and for an effective vaccine, apparently, quick results aren't coming. I am not sure what I am learning about myself through all this and how I will be changed. I'm recording activities, observations and experiences in the hope that I will hold on to some of the insights and disciplines I have gained when all this is finally over. But for now, waiting is necessary and difficult. My hope is that "on the other side" of this, the experiences that brought me quality of life will return and life will feel even richer.

*Lord, as we celebrate Advent this year, let us wait with patience and hope. Amen.*

Gail Tucker



**“There is a crack in everything. That is how the light gets in.”**

-Leonard Cohen

More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. – *Romans 5:3-5*

Jake was playing a video game this morning using the keypad and the mouse. “What is it called when you aren’t good at something but really want to be good at it?” he asked me. I answered “Life.” He laughed, but is convinced there is a specific word. “It may be novice?” Nope, not it. I have no idea. Enhance, remedy, improve upon, enrich, revitalize, elevate, level up? I am an English major without a word. I turned to Google. “Ameliorate?” Let’s be honest, I need to do all of those things, but none of the words were the right words. Is there a right word for this year? I have read A LOT of books recently and have yet to find any word to sum up 2020. Thank God. Thank God we don’t have the word.

I’ve messed up a lot this year. This year has messed up a lot of people. I personally hate Physical Therapy. Hate it. But, I go, and have met some incredible people while we are all feeling pain. It made me realize there are incredible people everywhere. It is just that right now we are broken. Broken in spirit, emotionally broken, financially broken. I can’t find words. We are cracked and are trying to let the light in. We are trying to get better. As people, as a Country. It is almost as if this pandemic has decided to enhance mental illness and make those of us with OCD more OCD (hence, I spent so much time looking for the right word for Jake). It took this year to make me see that is a bad choice for me, like online shopping or trying to get better at geometry.

We are all trying to get better, and that is okay. It is okay to not be perfect. I’ve learned the hard way that “perfection” does not exist. Perfection is terrible and I am glad because I am not good at it. There are a lot of things I am not good at, but there are things I can do well. I am cracked, and I am glad because now the light can come in. And guess what? I have HOPE. I may not have the right word for getting better at a video game, but I am hopeful.

*My words for 2021 are Love, Hope, Heal and Reveal. Let that light shine in.*

Jennifer Johnson Armstrong

## Advent in Exile

“Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” – *Isaiah 40:30-31*

We have learned to relate in new and personal ways to the people of the Exile this year. These words from Isaiah were given to Judeans who had the opportunity to return from exile. The prophet tries to remind them of God’s faithfulness, goodness, and strength – in spite of everything they have been through. It’s a tough sell.

I imagine it’s a bit of a tough sell for us too. As we attempt to put the year 2020 behind us and welcome 2021 with hope, we have our doubts. What are the chances, realistically, that 2021 will be the time when we soar on wings like eagles, where we run without growing weary?

Although the return from exile is often imagined as joyous, there was not a big rush of people competing to live in the destroyed city of Jerusalem when the exiles were allowed to return. As hard as exile was, coming back to a demolished home was in some ways even harder. So what are we hoping for in 2021? Perhaps we hope for what the exiles hoped for – wings.

The poetry of Isaiah goes beyond the images in Exodus (where God bears the people on eagle’s wings), implying that God will bestow upon the people wings of their own. Wings are described in the Bible as a supernatural attribute, a special gift of divine power. That is what we need at this critical time in history. We need God to act, as God has done before. We need to ready ourselves to be the vessels through whom God can act in redemptive ways.

What will do you with your wings in 2021? How do you plan to tirelessly work in service to God, who is endlessly creating new life in the midst of all of this despair? These words from the prophet Isaiah remind us that God’s people have endured great hardship before. Time and time again, we rise up from the ashes and rebuild. In the year ahead, let us renew our strength, use what we have learned in 2020, and grow more fully into the people God created us to be.

*Creator God, grant us hope. Lend us strength. Give us wings. Amen.*

Brittani Massey Bair

## Where do we find Hope today?

A king does not win because of his powerful army; a soldier does not triumph because of his strength. War horses are useless for victory; their great strength cannot save. The Lord watches over those who obey him, those who trust in his constant love. He saves them from death; he keeps them alive in times of famine. We put our hope in the Lord; he is our protector and our help. We are glad because of him; we trust in his holy name. May your constant love be with us, Lord, as we put our hope in you. – *Psalm 33:16-22 GNB*.

Misguided helpfulness has been on my mind lately. When the people of our world are faced with multiple sources of danger, where does one turn? In the face of pandemics, climate change and crashing economies we turn to those who are “experts.” Yet we find that even their knowledge is limited and sometimes the advice they give may be colored by political or financial interests.

We are a people shaped by wars whose heroes and many national leaders have “earned their spurs” by serving in the military and fighting in war. We thank veterans for their service defending our freedom (as we should). Yet the Psalmist reminds us that powerful armies, strong men and terrible weapons do not always produce peace and victory. Sometimes the “little guys” with few resources prevail. Look at the story of David and Goliath for instance. One also wonders if we shouldn’t give teachers, social workers, medical workers, Peace Corps volunteers and ministers higher ratings!

The Psalmist suggests that our hope is better placed in God whose love and mercy never ends. God watches over us in times of difficulty, even keeping us alive in times of famine. God is our hope, our protector and our help and we are glad because of God’s work in our lives. God’s love and protection covers us in times of war (even political divides), protests (left and right), famine (probably in pandemics too) and when we walk through the shadow of death and depression—God gives us joy! **Sit still a bit and meditate on that.** We are reminded that those who wait/hope upon the Lord shall renew their strength (Isa 40:31).

*Lord, I am not very good at waiting and my hope sometimes erodes into hopelessness. Help us to place our hope in the right things. Please renew our strength and our joy for the living of these days.*

Dale Tucker

## Building a Table

You set a table for me, right in front of my enemies. You bathe my head in oil; my cup is so full it spills over! –  
*Psalm 23:5*

I built a table this year....my first ever, a 12' outdoor table. I knew nothing about tables, but with the internet, someone will show you how to do just about anything you would like to do...at least I found plans for an 8' table and I had to make up the rest. It took me about ten days to build it, working on it during vacation as if it were my full-time job.

I know this raises many questions..."how do you build a 12' table?", "what do you do with a 12' table?", "why would you build a 12' table?" All good questions, particularly in a time of pandemic.

My 12' table will seat 14-16 people if tightly packed. Tight packing, however, is not the mood for these COVID times. Instead, the table has become our socially-distanced venue...a place where we can see individual family members without being too close or indoors.

Our hope, however, is for the day when our table might be full and have everyone gathered around it. Hope is like that, built in the dark for the time when the light will shine.

*Creator God, in the words of Job 36:16, draw us up from the brink of trouble to a wide place, without distress, where our table is set with rich food.*

Barry Creech

# Second Week of Advent



## Let There Be Peace

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. – *Mathew 5:9*

Advent is about newness, that which is approaching. Advent is about hope.

My favorite Bible verses are those which deal with peacemaking and conflict resolution. War, injustice, and chaos are regular features of our history. Into that confusion, we Christians believe God presented Himself in the person of Jesus as a remedy for such harshness and evil.

Christian scripture and tradition provide that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Such is quite fitting as Bethlehem often has experienced the world's confusion. It often has been invaded and occupied by others, and much like the larger world, Bethlehem must confront the current issues of pandemic, militarism, authoritarianism, and inequality. Thus, it is appropriate to consider the voice of Bethlehem pastor and educator Dr. Mitri Raheb:

"At times when we feel as if the world must be coming to an end tomorrow, our call is not to wait, not to cry, nor to surrender. Rather our only hopeful vision is to go out today into our garden, into our society, and plant olive trees. If we don't plant any trees today, there will be nothing tomorrow. But if we plant a tree today, there will be shade for the children to play in, there will be oil to heal the wounds, and there will be olive branches to wave when peace arrives."

*My prayer is from the words of the famous song: "Holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray. Your love rain down on David's town, drive fear and hate away. Awake the ire of nations, let justice be restored. Rebuild the peace in silent streets where once your love was born." Amen.*

Charles Boteler

## Losing Mom

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me. – *Psalms 23:4*

It's been a year. I haven't been sick, and I'm glad for that. Even better, my mom hasn't been sick, and they've had residents on her floor twice now with Covid-19. Her Senior Living home has been closed to visitors since April 1. In the summer they began doing calls by Skype, which meant we got to see her and talk to her. It's not conversation, because even though every once in a while she'll answer a question, she hasn't said anything meaningful in a year.

This year has been about Mom. She's under Hospice care because of her weight loss, which is what happens when one doesn't eat. It's been quite difficult to know that she is failing and I'm not with her. Ruthie and I were able to visit with her in person 3 times outside before they had to lock it down again. Right now they're not doing any Skype calls because the staff is taking care of Covid-19 patients, and working to ensure the safety and stability of Mom and the others.

Ruthie talked to her last week, and said Mom was barely awake, but that she looked up and clearly said, "I want to go home." I wrote this last week and had to stop, because we don't know what she means. Home with her parents, home in Liberia, home on Marquette Drive, home with Dad? It's difficult to write about death in a time of birth, but I hope for next year that Mom gets to go home. I believe she will go straight to the heart of God, and there find her parents and brother, Chris and Rob, and the others who have peopled her life almost 92 years.

No, I don't want Mom to die, but we lost her through the past 4 years. Every day I want to pick up the phone and call her, but that hasn't been possible for a long time. I do want her free from pain and confusion. She's been in a wheelchair since she broke her femur earlier this year, and I want her to walk again, and climb trees, play kickball with her kids, whatever one does after death. I want her to be whole again.

*Loving God, hold fast to those we love who have gone before until that glad reunion. Help us remember how the birth of a little boy made possible life beyond life for us all.*

Ann Hammon

## The Light of the World

You are light for all the world. A town that stands on a hill cannot be hidden. When a lamp is lit, it is not put under a meal-tub, but on the lamp stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. Like the lamp, you must shed light among your fellows.... – *Matthew 5:14-16a*

“Well, it is 2020 after all!” or “I just wish 2020 would just be over!” Those phrases have become so familiar during this year. Yet besides all the hard challenges 2020 has thrown at us, there is a flip side. For me, I have had to slow down, pay attention to and consider those people and qualities that I hold valuable and precious.

So what can I take away from this crazy year and desire to be different in 2020? I have been deeply saddened by the rise of negativity and division creating chasms between family, friends, and co-workers. So, I yearn for kindness, equity, inclusion, and acceptance to become the norm in 2021.

Yet on the flip side, I have been delighted by the tenacious and creative human spirit. I have taken more time to truly see and enjoy nature, have been inspired by the stories of those who have paid attention to the lonely and the sick and have been forced to take a closer look at the realities of life surrounding me in the communities in which I participate and abide. As I have had more time to reflect, I have remembered things forgotten, learned things I should have known for ages, and have discovered new mentors and heroes. One of those, the late Representative John Lewis, has spoken the words of challenge and vision that lift up my hopes and prayers for myself and all of us in 2021.

“You are a light. You are the light. Never let anyone – any person or any force – dampen, dim or diminish your light. Study the path of others to make your way easier and more abundant. Lean toward the whispers of your own heart, discover the universal truth, and follow its dictates. [...] Release the need to hate, to harbor division, and the enticement of revenge. Release all bitterness. Hold only love, only peace in your heart, knowing that the battle of good to overcome evil is already won. Choose confrontation wisely, but when it is your time don’t be afraid to stand up, speak up, and speak out against injustice. And if you follow your truth down the road to peace and the affirmation of love, if you shine like a beacon for all to see, then the poetry of all the great dreamers and philosophers is yours to manifest in a nation, a world community, and a Beloved Community that is finally at peace with itself.”

*Heavenly God, please hear the words of John Lewis as our prayer. May it be so. Amen.*

Alice Adams



## Peace

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth, give I unto you. – *John 14:27*

My closest lifelong friend, passed away last week. Carol Ann and I were babies together, roller skated down the sidewalks, told ghost stories in the dark beside the woods, lost teeth together, told secrets, walked to school each day, and played together daily. Our parents were good friends from OBU, and we lived in old army barracks where most of the OBU faculty lived back then. After she moved away sometime in grade school, we took turns spending weeks with each other in the summer. We have always exchanged long, newsy letters and photographs, and I cherish these. We both went to OBU and majored in English while we took organ lessons on the magnificent chapel organ. She became a French teacher while I taught first grade, but we both were church organists for many years. And – we both love to read.

When her mother became mentally ill during our college years, Carol Ann turned to my mother to be her adopted mother. As her mother aged, Carol Ann cared for her in her own home. We married the same summer. She married a pharmacist who worked among the needy in Utah and then on a Native American reservation in Montana. In both places, Carol Ann felt like a fish out of water. We spent years struggling with religious and social and political issues. In her later years, she developed a debilitating disease. Her family was so supportive and the two of us wrote even more letters. Last week she passed into that peace that passes understanding. She so needed that peace.

I feel so fortunate to have known Carol Ann for my entire life. Memories have flooded in this week. Rest in peace, dear friend.

*Thank you for your gift of peace that passes understanding.*

Bobbie Thomason

## The Light

This is in essence is the message we have heard from Christ and are passing on to you: God is light pure light; there's not a trace of darkness in him. – *First John 5*

This has been a challenging year for me and I suspect many of you also. A year mostly depressing, as we all deal with the pandemic resulting in separation and fear that comes from seeing people dying in our state, country and the world in record numbers. A year seeing the mood of our country continuing to be one of division and hopelessness.

I hope and pray that as events unfold in 2021 that peace and a feeling of calm will engulf (sweep over) us and surround us and give us hope about the future of our country and the world. I choose to think that my and our need for peace in a world that needs understanding can be accomplished by practicing our faith by providing compassion and understanding to each other.

Let us all lean toward the light that is the supreme being, our GOD.

*O God, in troubling times, help me to feel the peace and calm of your light.*

Rae Taylor

## Lean Into the Light

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. – *1 John 1:5-7*

Our women's retreat this fall focused on "leaning into the light", and we talked about imagining a picture of two or three women, leaning on each other as they walk toward the horizon with the sun hanging low in the sky. The images of our fellow women of faith arm-in-arm, marching ever forward, is a powerful reminder of God's promise of light and of fellowship.

The Bible speaks often of light, its connection to God and our desire to be near it. Here on earth, exposure to light isn't just a seasonal preference – it is a life-giving drive. The sun nudges the sleeping seeds underground. It darkens our freckles but bleaches the laundry on the line. **Prolonged exposure to light is catalytic.** It fundamentally changes the objects it touches. A sprout can't slip back into its seed; it is no longer the thing it once was.

When we are "in the light as He is in the light," we choose a path in which we know we will change. God's promise in 1 John 5:7 reminds us that we will have fellowship with one another. Thank God for this gift, because when change comes, it's often painful. In our retreat, we remembered the times we leaned on each other until we were strong enough to walk on our own. We pause and link arms again, placing one foot in front of the other, moving together toward the sun.

*Dear God, thank you for your light and your promise of fellowship with our family of faith. Amen.*

Kerri Richardson Cheng

## Steering Our Course

But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles: they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. – *Isaiah 40:31*

Not our choice the wind's direction, unforeseen the calm or gale....from the CHBC hymn

My dreams have often been very revelatory to me.

One Saturday morning during the COVID19 crisis, I awoke from a dream that helped me to realize what my mind was processing during this time of isolation. In my dream, I was in my car, and was having trouble directing it on the path I was following. It just would not go where I wanted it to go. While I was attempting to drive smoothly, I suddenly recognized that there was no steering wheel. In my mind, I could picture where the steering wheel was left on the side of the road. It was on 10<sup>th</sup> Street and I knew that I had to get there in order to get my steering wheel. So, I headed off to 10<sup>th</sup> Street, and would get so far but couldn't make it all the way. I attempted several times to make it there, but just never could make it that far. I knew I would make it, but just couldn't make it yet.

When I awakened, I realized that this was my life right now. Not being able to steer my life on the chosen path, but at the same time, picturing a solution to the problem from afar and attempting to make it to the finish line of this pandemic that we are all facing. As I am writing this meditation, it is now week 4 of our isolation, and things are different. We are using zoom, telephones, notes, and cards to communicate. No human contact, hugs, or face to face contact. I miss it all but know that this too shall pass. I pray for our world, and the wonderful people who will not make it through the crisis. I thank God for friends, local and state leaders who are supporting us, and the wisdom of some of our medical leaders who are leading our world back to health. May we all be better when we reach the end of this pandemic. Let it be so.

*Oh God, help us through the hard times that occur in life. Make us stronger and better willing to follow your paths for our lives. Teach us to bring peace for our world, so that we may work together for the good of all.  
Amen*

Debbie Brashear

# Third Week of Advent



## A Perfect Summer Evening

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe. – *Hebrews 12:28*

It's a day in late July, 2021 and it's hot and humid. Kate spends most of her day in her law office writing a tedious brief, consulting with clients, and managing her office. I officiate a funeral and iron out the order of service for the upcoming Sunday's worship. The kids spend the day at an art camp that ends at 4PM. I almost forget that the camp ends when it does, so I hurriedly get in my car and drive across town to retrieve them. By the time we all get home around 5:30 we are weary...in addition to being hot and sweaty. None of us are ready for dinner, but we all are ready for relief from the heat.

Fortunately, neither Kate nor I have meetings that evening. The kids' schedules are free too. We each pack a small bag and hop on our respective bikes. I'm less than 10 minutes, we walk through the gates at Lakeside Swim Club. The place is crowded, but not overly so. We spot a couple lawn chairs in our favorite spot near the pavilion. Along the way, we spot and chat with a few friends. The kids excitedly report that they see this friend and that friend. Before going in different directions with friends, Brooks and Millie Lou want to swim around "the lake" with Kate and me. Due to the heat and because the parents are increasingly aware such opportunities are fleeting, Kate and I quickly and gladly oblige. We all dive right in. Kate and Millie Lou stick near the water's surface giggling and chatting as they glide through the water. Brooks and I prefer to navigate below the surface. Like dolphins, we come up for air when needed and go back under again. My goggles are on allowing me to keep an eye on the scene around me. I find the way the light works under the water in the early evening that time of year to be enchanting.

After we feel sufficiently refreshed and delightfully fatigued, we dry off. The kids meet up with some friends. They jump of the diving boards to see who can make the biggest splash.

The sun gets low and the shadows get long. We sit next to the pool and eat cheese pizza and chocolate and vanilla swirl ice cream in cone.

When dusk arrives, we say our good byes. We slowly meander our way home on our bikes. We are in no hurry.

*God of grace, thank you for bestowing upon us simple pleasures. May more moments of deep joy come our way in 2021. May we cherish them and give thanks to you when they do. Amen*

Jason Crosby

## On Squinting

When I was a child, I talked like a child. I thought like a child. I reasoned like a child.

*1 Corinthians 13:11*

Our family tradition was to put the tree up about seven days before Christmas and to take it down by December 27. A cut spruce was favored, but they dried rapidly. I was somewhat the self-appointed guardian of tradition. I would not brook the idea of an artificial tree!

Though I was not disinterested in the presents, it was the week of nights prior to “the day” that groomed my romantic imagination. With the family off in the den after dinner, I would go into the dark living room, close the door, plug in the tree lights, and stare. If I narrowed my eyes to a squint, the blues and reds and greens and yellows and whites would blur; the tinsel strands would make stars. With such altered perception, my mind could find a different and magical state. I could get lost.

As for the Christmas message, however, I have learned that I must not squint. The different infancy accounts are not just different color-palette choices to be harmonized. They clash. Magi and shepherds do not converge. Nor do genealogies. Scripture proof-texts overwhelm historical proof. We have no evidence that real babies died by Herold’s murderous act to protect his power.

But we are certain that real babies are forced from parents’ arms today by real tyrants; cruel men desperate to cling to office. The real tree is a dark cross; somehow it becomes the lever to topple tyrants. The fables of stables and empty tombs are just starry-eyed squints.

In that bleak tree, I get found.

*“Open my eyes, that I may see.”*

Quinn Chipley

## Blessing

(God said to Abraham)...and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. — *Genesis 12:2b-3*

The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. — *Numbers 6:22-25*

God requires in the Torah a blessing for entering a house, and for almost every activity of the day. The Sabbath is made holy by a blessing of the lighting of the candles which is done by the woman of the house, then there is the blessing for the daughters, for the sons, for the bread, for the fruit of the vine, and for the father. On an episode of Great Performances on PBS, about Fiddler on the Roof, it was noted that after hearing the blessing for the Sabbath song, more Jewish households started practicing that tradition again. It connected them to their ancestors and to their heritage. Jews and Gentiles responded about how moving and powerful that scene had been for them. It is also one of my personal favorites.

Since this has been such a difficult year, I think we could all use the power of Blessing in our lives right now. I want to give this blessing to each of you for Advent and for the New Year.

*May God bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; may God open your hearts and your minds, to see the wonder and the beauty of the grace of God that surrounds you. Amen*

Eugina Robertson



## When We Can Gather Together

And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching. –

*Hebrews 10:24-25*

What I'm looking forward to in 2021 is the day when we can all get back together. I am looking forward to being in one area together without hesitation or thinking that someone will get sick with Covid-19. I am looking forward to the day we can gather without masks, when we can get back to the sanctuary and fellowship hall without tables separated 6 feet apart.

*Dear God, be with us while we are apart. Help us to know your faithfulness during this time. Bring us all back together safely. Amen.*

Nate Creech

## It is All in the Preparation

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.” – *Luke 2: 1-2*

Who were these guys? Actually, we only know that there were three gifts so we assume there were three “kings” or Magi. Tradition names Melchior from Persia, Gaspar from India and Balthazar from Arabia. Magi (from the Latin Magus) were priests in Zoroastrianism and earlier religions of the western Iranians. The earliest use of the word magi is seen in an inscription written by Darius the Great, known as the Behistun Inscription. It is thought by some that a number of this group were influenced by Daniel of the Old Testament.

Daniel Esparza relates in Aleteia, a Catholic website, that a 14<sup>th</sup> century historical text outlines how these three came from their respective homelands to meet up in Jerusalem. They then traveled on to Bethlehem. After they worshipped Christ, they made their way together to India where they started a Christian church and when they died, they were buried on that site. Two hundred years later, St. Helena, the mother of Constantine, traveled to India to recover their bodies and put them in a beautifully ornamented casket in the great church of St. Sophia in Constantinople. Later they were moved to Milan and finally to Cologne and placed in a cathedral built to house these relics.

So much for the history lesson. What intrigues me is that they were the scientists of their day and they spent their lives looking for meaningful signs in the stars. They didn’t one day decide to hop on a camel and set out for Bethlehem. They obviously knew something about Jewish prophecy as well. They made preparations for this long trip and then set out to discover truth and wonder. They came prepared with gifts to worship the King of the Jews, no doubt alarming Herod when they told him of their quest.

In this season of anticipation celebrated by Christians through the centuries and around the world, how have we prepared ourselves for the arrival of this King? What type of journey have we made and what further travel do we anticipate? Has the trip this season been tougher than usual? Have bandits tried to steal your happiness and purpose? What gifts do we bring? What are we hoping our encounter with this baby king will mean in the coming year?

*Oh, Son of God, open our hearts and minds so that we prepare for your coming again into our lives. I want to be ready, I want to be ready! Give us renewed hope and direction so we may return from our encounter with you to do the things you would have us do.*

Dale Tucker

## Sharing Your Oil

But they [the prepared attendants] replied, 'There may not be enough oil for us and for you; you had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves.' – *Matthew 25:9*

After listening to Jason's sermon this morning about the ten wedding attendants (five sensible and prepared, and five foolish and unprepared), Carolyn had the thought that each of the five sensible attendants could have taken the arm of one of the foolish ones and invited each to walk together and thus "be present." Of course the intent of the parable was to warn the listeners to be prepared for the coming of the kingdom, but, as Jason noted, the thought of exclusion from the wedding runs counter to the gospel we like to hear.

What if Jesus told another unrecorded version of the parable where one of the foolish attendants, instead of rushing off to buy more oil, stayed with the sensible attendants in order to remain present. She would have submitted herself to the mercy of the other prepared persons in the hope that each of them could share part of their oil and thus all six would have enough. And, to her great relief, that's what happened.

Each of us has vulnerabilities and aspects of our life which are not orderly, and we often find ourselves unprepared for what life throws at us. This alternative parable of Jesus reminds us that we depend on the mercy of others and can ourselves show mercy so that the kingdom of love can come.

During this season of Christmas as we see the many lights shine, may we look for ways to share the oil of our faith and love with others.

*God, forgive us for being unprepared, but thank you for your mercy, and help us to show mercy to others who are struggling with the complexities and misfortunes of their lives especially in this current pandemic.*

Carolyn and John Arnett

## A Year Like No Other

Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. – 1 Peter 5:7

2020 has certainly been a year like no other:

- ❖ Crazy weather – When have we ever remembered hurricanes blowing through the English alphabet and going into the Greek alphabet? Iota??? And there have been so many that brought death and devastation over a wide area.
- ❖ Crazy politics – I hesitate even to start thinking or talking about this one. As I write this, there are still those who contend that the presidential election is still undecided. And this after one of the most rancorous and hate-filled campaign seasons in memory.
- ❖ And the kicker – the coronavirus pandemic. We have had to learn about healthy at home, social distancing, wearing masks, sanitizing, sheltering in place, curbside pickup, business closings, travel restrictions, remote learning and worship, and, most of all, illness and loss of friends and loved ones. Today the US marked 250,000 deaths from COVID-19. And still there are deniers.

And now it's Advent – usually a joyful, yet hectic, time of anticipation, of preparation, of celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. In this year like no other it will be difficult for many of us to experience the hope, peace, joy, and love of the season. It will require faith and hope that better days are ahead.

My hope is that 2021 will bring a time of renewal: that the promised vaccine will be effective, that we will be able to be in community with each other without fear, that we can see our children back in school and flourishing, that the focus of every newscast will be more on what is good and hopeful in our city, country, and world. May it be so.

*May these words of members of our church family help you to rest in the comfort of God's promises to us, and may our prayer be: "Plunge us on with hope and courage 'til Thy Harbor is our home!"*

Janet Cole

# Fourth Week of Advent



## Light and Life

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. – *John 1:1-5 (NIV)*

I don't like winter. I don't like the cold wind, the cold rain, or the cold gray skies that seem to be the everyday reality of winter in our area. I don't like *being* cold. But most of all, I don't like the way it gets dark well before dinnertime. Every year as summer moves into fall and fall into winter, I lament the going of the light, and I long for the return of the lighter, longer days of spring and summer.

The season of Advent, anticipating the coming of the Christ-child, coincides almost exactly with the last days of autumn and the beginning of winter. The days get progressively colder, shorter, darker, until finally, the darkness begins, ever so slowly, to abate. In many ways, this year feels even darker than most. Yet, just as we reach the darkest part of the year, just when we begin to feel overcome by the darkness, hope returns – the Child is born, the Child who is the Light of the world!

Thanks be to God!

*Remind us, God, that as followers of Jesus, who is the Light of the World, we are called to carry the Light out into the world so that the darkness will not overcome.*

Eileen Bartlett

## Namaste

Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? – Corinthians 3:16.

I am very blessed to have genuine affection in my life. The endearments and kindnesses of good friends, some of them long time compadres and commadres and some still relatively recent companions on this spiritual walkabout disguised as a life. We are all united in the way our hearts comingle when we talk; or see each other across the now ubiquitous screens that shield us; or, if we are lucky, the few masked face-to-face encounters that engender connection.

The grace to feel what is the most important, prescient, and enlightening in this temporal space is such a gift. CONNECTION. I remind myself of this every time I open my phone to an update or alert or tune into some version of broadcast news. I must remember the connection to the higher me with the higher whomever else is around me. The NAMASTE blessing that draws us to our better angels.

Lately, I've ended more conversations with "I love you" or "feel my strong hugs" or simply "thank you" – Thank you for being part of my sphere, my world, my family in spirit. Thank you for being.

I know there are some who might say this attitude is unrealistic, "nice," overly optimistic, possibly even Pollyannaish. But if ever there was a time to have faith, to trust in the potential of the human spirit and the altruistic evolution of our collective souls to connect with our better angels – now is good!

I heard a news story of a seven-year-old from my home state of Maryland who recently raised enough money to put together care packages not only for elderly neighbors but extended the philanthropy to the residents of the Pine Ridge reservation. Through ongoing requests for donations Cavanaugh Bell traveled with a semi-truck filled with supplies to fight this "coronapocalypse" to one of the poorest and hardest-hit areas of the United States. Seven!

You can read the report about these remarkable good works, but it is not just about the action. Though important, honorable and God knows, gratefully uplifting, it is grace blossoming out of grieving that captures hope for a brighter, kinder, and faithful future.

<https://www.newsbreak.com/news/2072938422353/7-year-old-boy-donates-massive-shipment-of-covid-19-essential-supplies-to-people-in-need>

Again. SEVEN! What can we do to connect even in our sequestering, quarantining, sheltering, and staying-apart to connect and allow those better angels to take flight?

Even the smallest nod to another can make the whole world smile. NAMASTE.

*We are always in the grace of God's loving presence. May we always remember – LOVE always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.... And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is LOVE. May we always embody Love, as God loves us.*

Asaera Coté

## What Time Is It?

The time we live in is fraught. No question about it. Suffering abounds. Uncertainty pervades our daily lives and our nation as a whole. It's natural to want these troubled times to abate, if not end. To look forward to better days. But I think a better plan is to seek strength for our nowadays-time. Hoping for a better tomorrow may assuage our present struggles, but provide no anchor for how to face the demands of today. Wishing for a better tomorrow has little value today.

I don't mean to preach. What do I know? I was taught that we can pray for God to provide strength through our loss and uncertainty. The author of Ecclesiastes wrote, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven. (3:1) ... a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend." (vv. 5b-7a) The challenge is to decide what to do when – and then do it. Taking action, or refraining from action, is an act of courage, however small.

In this passage, we are reminded of the centrality of God:

What does the worker gain from his toil? I have seen the burden that God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in his time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ...That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil – this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it, and nothing can be taken from it. (vv. 9-14)

Finding satisfaction in all our toil is a heavy lift. Millions of people on Earth have died from the monstrous virus. It seems timely, today, to pray for patience, and gratitude, which help provide strength, "for the living of these days." Patience reinforces resilience – stamina. Gratitude helps assuage our severe stresses, while helping to broaden our perspective. Patience and gratitude, calm the spirit.

Hymn – "God of Grace, and God of Glory"

*Oh God, help us to remember that you are here for us, now, in our present struggles. Help us know that we can call on you for strength to face what is before us, even as we hope that in time, our sufferings and those of others will abate. Amen*

David Huey Cook



## Giving and Receiving

It is more blessed to give than to receive. – Acts 20:35

In our culture the Church celebrates Advent, the coming of Jesus, during the end of year holidays. We celebrate by feasting and gifting loved ones and being charitable to the “unfortunate”. Paul is quoting Jesus in the Acts passage though we don’t have this saying of Jesus in the written Gospels. This quote also comes after Paul has poured out the difficulties they have been through as well as the difficulties ahead.

I work for MedWater in Ecuador. We learned quickly that the people wanted to learn how to do the work of improving the health of their communities, not just have MedWater do the work for them. We focus on teaching while struggling to understand the culture and language of people who live as we never have. Their desire and commitment to learn makes our work easy. In the village of Mishak Allpa a woman told me, “I never believed it was possible for us to have safe water. I never imagined that I could make water safe. Now we have safe water and I am making it safe.”

I live with a teacher. Alice taught children who saw and heard and thought differently. I found it difficult to understand how she could help them learn, but I’m always amazed at the stories she receives from former students and their parents. Recently she received a poem about overcoming difficulties from a girl who had struggled so hard, yet today loves learning. These lines moved me deeply.

All these sparks  
Yet you have not caught fire  
Even though your thoughts are dire.  
If you’re waiting for permission then look no further.  
You have vocal chords?  
That’s your permission.

Is “more blessed” the life-changing gift of a relationship we would never have known were it not for the struggle that created it?

*Sweet little Jesus boy, in the year ahead help us imagine how we can give to relationships that just might create the lives we need for the time ahead.*

Darrell Adams

## Love

And now abideth faith, hope, and love, these three: but the greatest of these is love.  
13:13

*I Corinthians*

As I think about love this Advent of 2020, my thoughts turn to all of the teachers that are struggling to follow their calling during this challenging time.

I think of my very young, talented neighbor, Shannon, who leaves home early each day and comes home late, only to spend her evening and weekends preparing for her English classes. Despite her youth and energy level, she is exhausted. Shannon is doing the best she can although she needs a good rest.

This is love.

I think of my friend, Sarah, a teacher of low-income children in Atlanta, who has found that she has a talent for virtual instruction that she didn't know she had. She has become the person that the other teachers turn to for help, and she willingly spends the time to help them. She misses hugging those little ones and giving each one more personal attention.

This is love.

I think of my counselor friend, Julie, whose school is meeting in person. She spends each day going into classrooms to help the teachers and students who are struggling. Not only does she do her counseling job all day, in the evenings, on her own time, she visits the students at home that are the most troubled. She knows she is taking risks, but does it anyway.

This is love.

Finally, I think of my amazing niece, Emily, who started her own small school in Alabama for autistic children. She is gifted in working with these children. These children need to be with a teacher physically to thrive. She is giving that support to them and their families.

This is love.

*Love is so difficult to put into action. You always showed us how. Help us, we pray, to do likewise.*

Bobbie Thomason

## **“Either...or” vs “Both...and”**

I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever  
I will thank you forever, because of what you have done.

*Psalm 52:8-9*

In his eleven volume epic *The Story of Civilization*, Will Durant tells the story of the revered twelfth century Cistercian monk St. Bernard who “covered his eyes lest they take too sensual delight from the lakes of Switzerland.”

Such is the misfortune of those who relate to God with an “either...or” dualistic perspective: Either choose the “physical” world or choose God and the “spirit” world. But God – the life affirming force of the universe – has given us this world, and we need to thank him/her/or whatever for what has been done or evolved. One of Jane Crecelius’ favorite hymns was “This Is My Father’s World.”

The message of Christmas is that the God-force chose to appear in the flesh of Jesus to demonstrate God’s steadfast life affirming love. This demonstration took the form of acts of kindness and mercy and, though Jesus never wrote anything down except in the sand, he also left us with some memorable words and parables which have been passed down to us through hundreds of generations. Most of all his coming affirmed the goodness of this world and the gifts of life for which we give thanks. (And, oh yes, in a mystery none of us can fully understand, God did some redemptive work though Jesus’ death and resurrection.)

This is a season when we often are called upon to give to the poor through such agencies as UCHM or the Salvation Army. The poor, of course, are with us always, not just at Christmas time but throughout the year. But here again we need not feel guilty with “either...or” thinking. Though another monk, St. Francis, set the bar high, I believe God would have most of us take the “both...and” position – to “consider the poor” (Psalm 41:1) but also find happiness in the good “things” of God’s created order.

*God of all, Thank you for your world and for Jesus who demonstrated your love. May we consider the poor and to be good stewards of this world you have created.*

John Arnett

## Little Children

But Jesus said “Let the little children come to me and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” – *Matthew 19:14 (NRSV)*

For several decades I have had the privilege of working with toddlers in our church, sometimes with Sharleen, my wife, sometimes with John Arnett, my friend. I say “privilege” and that it often has been. Oh there is the occasional screamer or crier, but all-in-all at times the work is joyful. The one who opens a book and backs up to you, expecting you to pick them up and read to them. I remember trying to peer around up to three little heads to keep the story going. I remember a little girl, now grown and lovely, tumbling down a sliding board, and looking at me and giving me, in all my innocence, a scowl of disapproval. And from that day any tumble or trip led her to look for me and give me that scowl again. Innocent I tell you! And the game “knock ‘em down” when several of us would stack the large cardboard blocks as high or higher than the tallest child, then someone would whisper “knock ‘em down?” and down they would come, to little yelps of glee. Finally, the Christmas Eve Sharleen and I wanted to help the children sing, but the only song we all knew was Old McDonald, so peals of “E-I-E-I-O” rang joyfully from the nursery. Good times! Thank you, children.

*Lord, continue to bless the little children and help them learn and grow, but also protect that core of childish trust and love in them.*

John Birkimer



# 2020 Advent Prayer Calendar



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
29 Pray for your grandparent or another favorite relative. Write a note to him or her.	30 Pray for our world that this may be a year of healing and peace for all. Learn how to say "Hello Friend" in another language.	1 Pray for someone special in a church group that you enjoy. Give them a call.	2 Pray for Jason Crosby.	3 Pray for healthcare workers. Do a random act of kindness for one.	4 Pray for your own health and well-being. Take a nap or a walk or read a book.	5 Pray for our adopted Congolese family. Send gloves or scarves to Ky. Refugee Ministries.
6 Pray for Brittani Bair and Louie Bailey.	7 Pray for teachers and educators as they prepare future leaders. Leave a book at a Little Library.	8 Pray for COVID sufferers and those with mental or physical health issues. Wear a mask.	9 Pray for the safety of police officers as they respectfully serve. Call your police precinct and give an encouraging word.	10 Pray for those who are hungry or homeless. Donate to United Crescent Hill Ministries.	11 Pray for Andrea Woolley.	12 Pray for our earth and its health. Hug a tree. Give to Medwater.
13 Pray for Joe Biden and other elected leaders to work together for the common good. Send a virtual hug.	14 Pray for people of color to be treated fairly in all ways. Donate to Simmons College.	15 Pray for Bobbe Crouch and Janet Cole.	16 Pray for your neighbors. Leave a small gift at a neighbor's door.	17 Pray for all religions that we may be on the path to find God. Learn about Interfaith Paths to Peace.	18 Pray for Bill Johnson, Ken Nay Moo, Kenny Allen. And Charlie Wagner.	19 Pray for all students. Give to the Samuel Clayton Williams scholarship fund.
20 Pray for justice and equity for all. Join the Fairness Campaign.	21 Pray for veterans and those in active duty service. Donate to the Wounded Warrior Project.	22 Pray for those who suffer violence by family or others. Show kindness to someone with whom you disagree.	23 Pray for our city leaders. Talk with a metro council member or watch a video by state Senator Gerald Neal.	24 Pray for refugees and immigrants. Contact a Karen friend. Give to La Casita.	25 <b>Merry Christmas! Zoom with someone special.</b>	



Hope you have a wonderful advent season. The church Prayer Team, PrayerNeeded2020, compiled this calendar giving you suggestions of whom you could pray for each day in addition to your own prayer list. The actions listed on some days are again just suggestions, but here is a list of websites and addresses of the organizations listed.

Ky. Refugee Ministries – [kyrm.org](http://kyrm.org) – 969 Cherokee Rd. 40204

United Crescent Hill Ministries – [uchmlouky.org](http://uchmlouky.org) – 150 S. State St. 40206

MedWater – [medwater.org](http://medwater.org) – 1355 Bardstown Rd. #107 40204

Simmons College – [simmonscollegeky.edu](http://simmonscollegeky.edu) – 1018 S. 7<sup>th</sup> St. 40203

Interfaith Paths to Peace – [paths2peace.org](http://paths2peace.org) – 2500 Montgomery St. 40212

Samuel Clayton Williams scholarship fund – [chbcky.org](http://chbcky.org) – 2800 Frankfort Ave. 40206

Fairness Campaign – [fairness.org](http://fairness.org) – 2263 Frankfort Ave. 40206

Metro Council – [louisvilleky.gov/government/metro-council](http://louisvilleky.gov/government/metro-council)

Wounded Warrior Project – [woundedwarriorproject.org](http://woundedwarriorproject.org) – PO Box 758516 Topeka, Kansas 66675-8516

Senator Gerald Neal video Straight Talk on FaceBook Live each Saturday at noon video – <https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=straight%20talk%20with%20senator%20gerald%20neal>

La Casita- [lacasitacenter.org](http://lacasitacenter.org) – 223 E Magnolia Ave. 40208

Please pray for and send encouragement to the church staff:

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Every member a minister

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JANET M. COLE, Administrative Assistant

BOBBE A. CROUCH, Financial Secretary

WILLIAM M. JOHNSON, Facilities Manager

JASON W. CROSBY, Minister of Preaching, Pastoral Care and Administration

ANDREA V. WOOLLEY, Minister of Spiritual Formation, Families and Community

