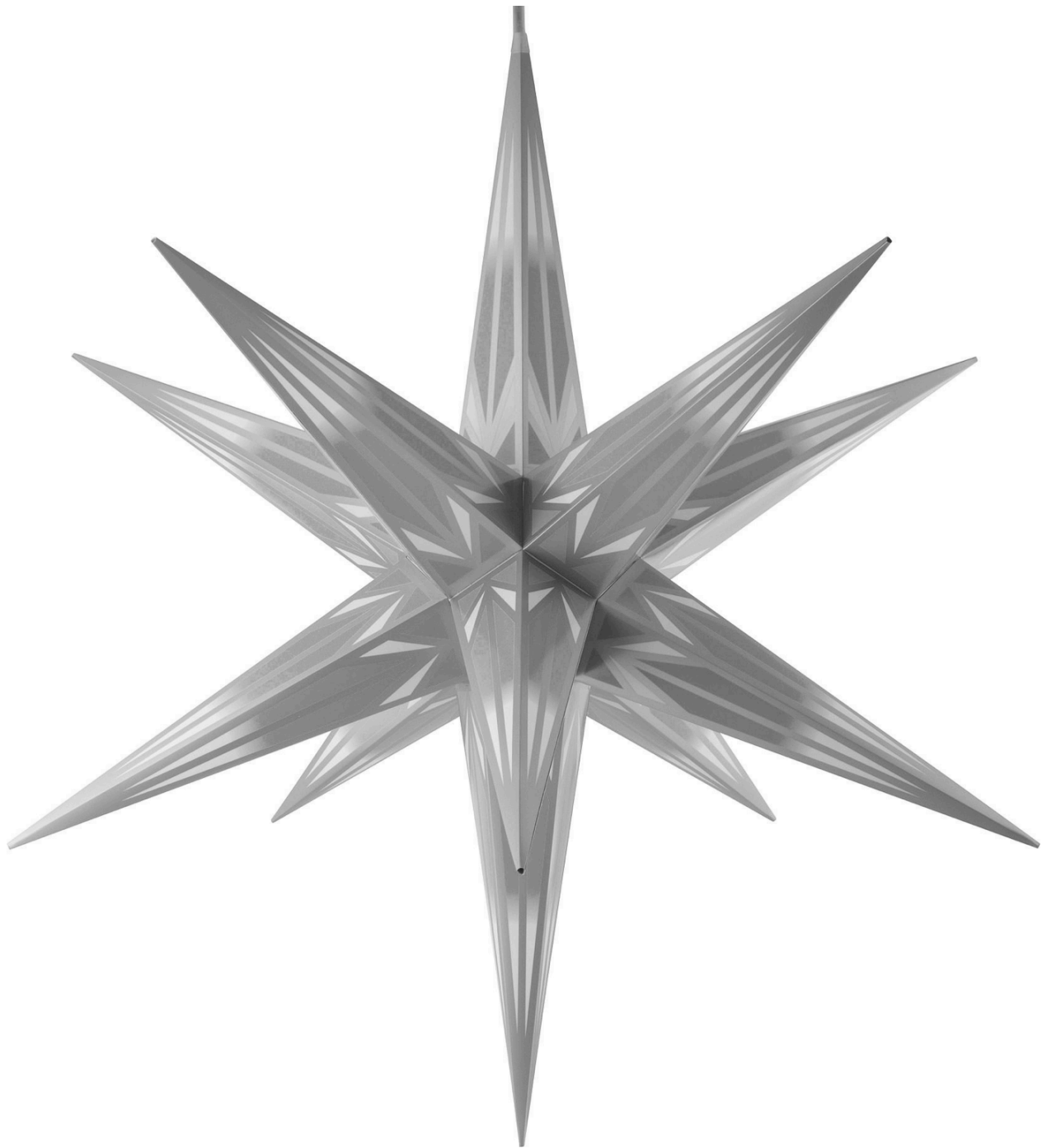


Wait and Listen



Advent 2019

Crescent Hill Baptist Church



Hope

Let us
go
rejoicing
to the
house
of the
Lord.

“Pay Attention”

*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. Psalm 23:4*

“Pay attention. Listen.” I even remember that as the first thing my French professor taught me. Pay Attention. Listen. In French it is *“Faites attention. Écoute.”* I was always too busy to pay attention. Simon LeVay said that the only way we can love people is if we know how to pay attention. The most generous thing we can give to somebody who is suffering is to pay attention to them. He said it is very rare in our culture and difficult to pay attention to a suffering person because we are so bad at it. We’d rather drop a dollar in the hat and move on.

I have long been drawn to the fact that in a hospital, the main doctor on a team is called “The Attending Physician.” She or he pays attention. I’ve seen so many doctors this year; I watched as they entered the room. They begin attending immediately. They begin asking, “How long has this been swollen?” “When did your eye develop that twitch?” The questions go to what they’ve seen.

In my work as a counselor, I feel the same need to attend. As LeVay says, “The only way we can love people is if we know how to pay attention.” As we approach the Advent season, it is time to pay attention. Christ is coming in the form of the Holy Spirit. Pay attention. Listen. *“Faites attention. Écoute.”* The only way Christ can know that we care for him is if we know how to pay attention to Christ. By doing Christ’s will. The Holy Spirit is coming. Listen. *“Écoute.”*

*Dear Father, open our ears and our eyes. Help us to see Your coming into our lives again.
You will know we are Christ Lovers by the way we pay attention to your coming this
Advent Season. Help us to see you. Help us to hear you. Amen.*

L. Lee Whitlock

What do you Hope For

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. Jeremiah 29:11

Many people are able to look forward to what is around the bend..."Who might I encounter?" "What new experience awaits me?" They live in wonder, in expectancy of something good crossing their path – but it rarely is a "thing" they are hoping for but rather the experience, the interaction with others, or the incredible scene unfolding in the park or even at church.

On the other hand, some live their lives in anticipation of the next "best thing." Oh, if I only had this new outfit, this new iPhone, this new car, this new "whatchamacallit!" Unfortunately, they often miss out enjoying what they already have. Perhaps that is part of the dis-ease of being part of a consumer society.

Then there are those who live their lives in fearful anticipation – when will the next shoe drop? Perhaps Lil' Orphan Annie, believing that the "sun will come up tomorrow!" was not living realistically, yet there are those whose hope keeps them afloat. Kentucky's own Barbara Kingsolver said, "The very least you can do in life is determine what you hope for."

*Thank you, Father. for giving us both anticipation and hope.
May we have eyes to see the hope alive around us.*

Dale Tucker

Waiting, Balloon in Hand

*The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for what they had heard and seen;
it had all happened as they had been told. Luke 2:20*

Observing Advent is not a tradition I followed growing up as a Southern Baptist in Oklahoma. My first experience of this part of the Christian calendar was right here at CHBC. As I tap into my memories, I am flooded with images associated with Advent through the years. I have long associated the word, its meaning and its practice, with the idea and concept of “waiting” – waiting for the birth of the baby Jesus. This year that meaning grew and deepened as I read that “Advent is derived from the Latin word ‘adventus’, which means arrival”! Well, of course! Waiting implies that there will be an arrival!

An image for me that fully embodies that enriched meaning is one of Aanika, my granddaughter, on her 3rd birthday. A party was planned. The house was decorated. The food was ready. All that was missing were the guests. I looked around and there was Aani in her party dress, ribbon in hand holding a helium balloon, standing so still on the porch in front of the screen door looking toward the street – waiting, anticipating the arrival of her friends. They did arrive and the celebration began. The waiting was complete.

Life is chocked full of things for which we wait. Some are ordinary, some are life-changing. Some arrive and are complete. Some keep us standing, eyes focused ahead, balloon in hand, watching and waiting.

*With glory and praise, we thank you Holy Child for arriving to show us the way to relationship
with God so that we may know hope, joy, love and peace. May it be as we have been told.
Amen.*

Alice Adams

Waiting, Listening, and Doing

Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him. Isaiah 30:18

In recent decades, managerial experts and self-help gurus have flooded the media with the virtues of being “proactive.” You may remember Stephen Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and its first exhortation, “Begin with the end in mind.” We are to face the future with purpose rather than simply being reactive to circumstances.

Proactive and other managerial buzzwords typically are related to productivity. We have heard about synergizing, leveraging, and incentivizing, but I do not know of a single buzzword related to waiting. Waiting does not make our resumes shine nor does it enhance our organizations’ profitability. We usually wait because we are powerless to avoid it. No amount of proactivity can totally eliminate waiting from our lives.

Waiting is often associated with anxiety, but waiting can also be accompanied by expectancy. During Advent, we wait with a sense of expectancy, and the themes of Advent, hope, peace, joy, and love, wait with us. As we embrace these wonderful gifts of God, we anticipate the coming of the One who best personifies them. We listen for God’s voice, and we are challenged to work for God’s hope, peace, joy, and love. We come to see that God uses both waiting and doing to accomplish God’s purposes.

Grant us, O God, the grace to wait patiently on you. May our waiting tune our ears to hear your voice and stir our hearts to do your will. Amen.

Pat Cole

“I’m Waiting”

Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. Isaiah 40:31

I’m waiting. I don’t know exactly what I’m waiting for, but I know I’m waiting; but then so are hundreds of other people. They are building shelters with military-grade food rations, water purifiers, and supplies to start over in the new world that is to come. Some groups have found reason in the Scriptures to wait for God to return in the form of the risen Christ. Some are waiting for Armageddon to finally be the war to end all wars.

And I’m waiting too. I’m not sure exactly what I’m waiting for, but I know I’m waiting. I know that I’m waiting for a possible breakthrough medication to do something with this Multiple Myeloma. I don’t know what they will come through with, but I hope it’s something significant. Each year I’ve waited and each year some new chemical prolongs my life a little further.

Yet, I still wait. So why stand around looking up? What am I waiting for? I know what God desires: mercy, justice, love, compassion, and all the rest. You know that God says he will be with us always and that God says he gives us the power to do this work. So there's no need to wait around for the end! We cannot know when any of our ends will come. But we do know what we can do in the meantime, so let us get to work, flooding the world with the good news of Christ in word, action, and prayer.

Let us not just wait, let us seek to do mercy, deliver justice, seek to love one another, and feel compassion for those in pain. Praise be to God that we have been given such a gift and calling. Amen.

L. Lee Whitlock

Keeping Hope Alive

John sent word to Jesus...are you the one or are we to expect another? Matthew 11:2-6

"Are you the one or should we expect another?" John the Baptist's question to Jesus was very important to him and others who had long waited for the fulfillment of a prophecy about a messiah who would bring back David's kingdom. The people of Israel lived with the belief that someone with close connections to God would intervene in history.

Moses was very upset with the slavery his people endured and God asked him to be the one to lead his people to freedom. "How can I do this, God?" "What do you have in your hand? Use it."

Theologians developed a term called realized eschatology, meaning that all the prophecy about a coming messiah was realized in the life and work of Jesus and the subsequent work of his church. What does that mean for us today? It seems each age has hoped for a savior and feared some evil force like an anti-Christ would try to thwart the work of God. It is often pretty apparent who the age's anti-Christ might be; however, it is not always clear who might be the savior or "point person" for change for the better.

"Is it you, Lord, or should we look for another?" We may get the answer God gave to Isaiah when God asked, "Who will go for me?" Isaiah replied, "Here I am, send me." "Go and tell my people...." Maybe we are part of this age's realized eschatology? Gandhi suggested: "Be the change that you want to see in the world." If not me, who will it be?

Lord, what role should we play in today's world to help keep hope alive?

Dale Tucker

God With Us

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning. Psalm 130:5-6

December 10, 1975, I gave birth to a premature boy. The nurses set him aside, thinking he would die. Two hours later, he was still breathing. So they put him on 100% oxygen and put him on a helicopter headed to St. Louis Barnes Children's Hospital. I signed the papers, but I didn't see him.

This was when the waiting began in earnest. We had the phone number of the neonatal nursery and called at least every other day. Because of toxemia, my kidneys were at risk; and the doctor wouldn't let me travel for 2 weeks. We fudged it and went to St. Louis to meet our tiny boy.

When I saw him, I was horrified. He looked like no baby I had seen. But we kept going back, and watched him grow a little. And we waited.

Chris was in school, and I had dropped out. We were trying to find our way as a couple and settle in to our small apartment. He was gone a lot, and on Saturdays he'd go ride for 7 hours. So I was alone, waiting. People all over the world were praying for Rob, and we assumed he was coming home. At 5 months, he weighed 6 pounds 7 ounces, and began to lose weight.

We were so ignorant. The oxygen fried his lungs, and he never had a chance. We had no idea. The phone rang at 6 PM on May 6, 1976, and Chris answered it. He got off the phone crying. Rob was dying. The phone rang again at 6:30 PM, and he had died. The waiting had ended.

Were we foolish to wait and hope? Even though it ended badly, the people we were then could do nothing else. We had 5 months of being parents and we held him, sang to him, and told him stories. With all the uncertainty, we waited hopefully. I would do it again. To wait without hope is unthinkable.

God with us, help us wait through this Advent with hope. Even when I knew it not, you were with us, and Rob. I am grateful. Amen

Annie Hammon



Peace

Justice
shall
flourish
in His
time,
and
fullness
of
peace
for ever.

When Will They Learn?

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. Philippians 2:1-7 (NRSV)

Sometimes we wonder when others will finally recognize our value. When they will be grateful for what we have done. When they will see who we truly are. When they will reward us with the love and admiration we deserve. Will God ever open their eyes?

Then comes the gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit that Jesus embraced humility. God's child, who merited exaltation, came to serve and offered obedience even to the point of suffering and death.

The eyes that needed to be opened were our own.

Dear God, remind us that our purpose is to serve. Help us to shift our focus from ourselves to the needs of others around us. Thank you, God, for your constant love for us, and your patience as we learn to listen to you. Amen.

Dixon Martin

I Want It NOW!

I hope, Lord. My whole being hopes, and I wait for God's promise. Psalm 130:5 CEB

"I want a CD! And I want it NOW!!" We heard these words one Sunday at lunch from a ten-year old boy and laughed – to ourselves, of course. We have laughed about it many times in the years since that day.

But as I think about that comment/request/demand, it seems so indicative of today's culture. We want what we want, or think we need, and we don't want to wait for it! Instant gratification. We order something online and are discouraged when it doesn't arrive within a day or two. We send an email or text to a friend and grow angry when it isn't answered immediately. We see gaily wrapped gifts under the Christmas tree and want so badly to open them – NOW!

In God's wisdom, we are shown to wait. The Israelites waited years to be freed from Pharaoh's oppression. They waited for the promised Messiah to come. The apostles, still uncertain, waited in hopes that Jesus' promise that he would be with them again would be fulfilled.

We wait for crops and flowers to break through the earth, to ripen and bloom. The nine months of waiting for the birth of a child seems more like nine years. We wait anxiously for that envelope containing our acceptance at college – or the offer of a job.

The celebration of the season of Advent give us exercises in waiting, knowing that God's end result is sure to come – in the fullness of time. Jesus Christ is born!

God, help us to take a deep breath and trust in your promises. Amen.

Janet Cole

Listen to the Sound of Hope

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities -his eternal power and divine nature- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. Romans 1:20, NIV

Jesus would often say, "He who has ears, let him hear." after parables and to John in the book of Revelation.

When thinking about the Advent book theme waiting and listening, I immediately thought of the song, *Listen to the Sound* by the Christian band Building 429. The beginning of the chorus is, "Oh, listen to the Sound of Hope that's rising up... Listen to the Sound of a new beginning."

Then my mind was flooded with other songs like, the song, *How Sweet the Sound* by Citizens Way and of course the hymns, *Amazing Grace* and *This is My Father's World*. Simon and Garfunkel's, *The Sound of Silence* especially the section, "People talking without speaking. People hearing without listening. People writing songs that voices never shared..." and *Vincent* about Van Gogh by Don McLean, "Now I understand what you tried to say to me. How you tried to set them free. They would not listen, they did not know how, perhaps they'll listen now."

Then I thought of a Doctor Who (a time traveler) episode, "Vincent and the Doctor". Van Gogh declares, "It seems to me there's so much more to the world than the average eye's allowed to see." Then he shouts, "It's color! Color that holds the key! I can hear the colors...every time I go outside they shout at me...capture my mystery!"

The Christian band Building 429, takes its name from Ephesians 4:29: "Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouth but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." This is my prayer that all those who read this will be blessed in the listening.

Eugina Robertson

Hark!

The Word became flesh and lived among us.... John 1:14

The old word "Hark!" calls us to listen. If we do listen carefully, and if we wait patiently to listen to what words we have heard, we may be disturbed. In a paradox of the season, we must become aware of the facile heresy in *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*. This lyric deceives so subtly with the line, "Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see."

The meat and squall within the stall reveal it all; they do not veil.

This skin is no scrim. This birth strips the truth naked that no child,
neither before nor since, has ever been accident or mere appearance.

Each is the thing in itself. All are opportunities to find all matter of matter
absorbed by God; that all life and death has been redeemed.

Charmed quarks infused with Trinity ever quiver in every beggar's bones
as much as in rulers on their thrones; make of them what we will.

This is Incarnation.

God, let us hear eternity in every heartbeat; find Your face in all we meet.

Quinn Chipley

Wait and See

...Consider the farmer who waits patiently for the coming of rain in the fall and spring, looking forward to the precious fruit of the earth. James 5:7

Twenty-two years ago, our family received a pre-natal diagnosis that upsets the anticipated course for most pregnancies. After being told that the diagnosis “was not incompatible with life,” we were immediately referred to a high-risk ob-gyn specialist and also to a neurosurgeon to learn more. The mind of expectant parents can wrestle quite a bit with the nuances of that double-negative phrase.

A few days later, the first visit was with the neurosurgeon. He explained the diagnosis details. His demeanor was one of confident arrogance in service to his patients. His answers were ones in which patients regularly put their trust and hope, as life and death decisions frequently hung in the balance. It was no different for us. We wanted to know what to expect. We needed this information to make an assessment on whether our family could handle it. It was a simple, honest request: “Just tell us what is going to happen.”

The answer took us by surprise: “Your life story has not yet been written. I can’t read you from the script, it doesn’t exist, you will just have to wait and see.” As harsh as it sounds, those words were liberating for us. It was our story, and we had the chance to participate in its writing. Our privilege gave us resources that many families didn’t have; but for us, the idea that our story was not yet written gave us the hope to live step-by-step, day-by-day, adventures, where our story could unfold.

God, help me to see clearly enough to take the next step in the adventure.

Barry Creech

Waiting for the Match

Get up and make your way down to the potter's house, and there I shall tell you what I have to say. Jeremiah 18:2

People hate to wait, and Admiral Jacoby, who was Chief of Medicine at Bethesda Naval Hospital where I trained, often quoted one of his three favorite sayings which was, "Do It Now." [The other two were, "All Blow, No Go," and "A Man's Desk Is Like His Mind."]

In trying to tie in "waiting" to some spiritual awakening result, I'm reminded of the waiting process that Millie Horn is soon to go through. Millie is a senior medical student at UK and will graduate this next May, forty nine years after I walked across that same stage. In the spring, she'll designate several hospitals where she'd like to do her internship, and then wait for the matching process to take place. When I was going through the same process in 1971, my first choice was Mary Hitchcock Hospital connected with Dartmouth in NH. My second choice was the Bethesda Naval Hospital (now called the National Naval Medical Center). I had been in the Navy reserves since 1964 and spent two weeks one summer as a corpsman at Bethesda. On a Saturday night at that time I visited the Potter's House operated by the Church of the Saviour. I'd learned about the Potter's House when reading Elton Trueblood's *The Company of the Committed* (1961), which many of us who attended the Training Union at CHBC in the 60's read, and Elizabeth O'Connor's *Call to Commitment* (1963) at OBU.

Following entanglement with a religious "cult" in the summer of 1963 and resulting disillusionment with organized religion there followed about seven years of agnosticism fueled by the "Death of God" movement. Miraculously I made it through college and medical school (and it didn't hurt knowing that if I dropped out of school I'd end up as a corpsman with a Marine patrol in Vietnam).

After a period of waiting, the day of the "Match" came and instead of heading to New Hampshire, I was matched with my second choice, Bethesda. When we arrived in the D.C. area Carolyn and I first attended a Unitarian Church, but soon we found ourselves at the Church of the Saviour participating with Mary Cosby in the operation of the Potter's House on Sunday night. There was a small book store at the PH, and I found faith again through the people there and several of the books I read.

*May the Force of Life and Love continue to guide us
and help us seize the opportunities that follow our waiting.*

John Arnett

In the Fullness of Time

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, from under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. Galatians 4:4-5 ESV

My mother was much better at waiting than I am. She had always wanted to be a mother and wanted to have lots and lots of kids. She married late in life, at the age of 30. She prayed daily, like Hannah, asking God to bless her with children. She prayed continuously for ten years. Then, when she thought she was going through menopause, and went to see her doctor with what she thought was the flu, she was told she was five months pregnant.

After I was born, she did go through menopause. I was born one month premature on December 27, 1965 and was very sick, unable to hold down food. In frustration with her doctor, who kept saying I would get better in time, she took me to the hospital emergency room. The doctor she met there admitted me immediately to intensive care. Relatives were not allowed to stay in the hospital back then and he told my mother I probably would not live through the night. She prayed for God to save the child she had waited ten years to be born.

When she got to the hospital, the doctor said he was an atheist but he didn't know what else to call it but a miracle, because science couldn't explain it. As my mother talked to the doctor, he explained I had a recently discovered genetic condition for which a treatment had only been developed a year before.

In my ancient history class, I point out to my students that because Alexander the Great caused the whole world to learn Greek and spread Hellenism, it allows the message of the Gospel to be spread all over the world without a language barrier. Then a few hundred years later the Roman Empire builds roads to connect the ancient world and make it easier for missionaries to spread the Gospel throughout the world.

Thank you, most loving God for the fullness of time! Thank you for redeeming us. Amen

Eugina Robertson



Lord,
come
and
save us.

I Have Been Waiting All My Life

Be still, and know that I am God. Psalms 46:10

I have been told all my life to be still and be quiet and you will know and hear God. I have been trying to be still and quiet waiting all my life to more deeply experience the presence of God.

The problem with experiencing God's presence in the silences more deeply is that there is just too much noise around life. The world in which I live seems not to allow enough time to be still, to even begin to enter into a moment of scared quiet.

I just want to learn how to slow my mind. How to stop the thoughts of this responsibility, or that worry, or the thoughts of how am I going to get something I need or want from someone, or my belief that I need this or that material things, etc.

Is it actually possible to know the presence of God and hear God say, "I am here, I am love, the love that breathed the spirit of life into you when you cried that first time out of your mother's womb?"

*Dear God, may I this Advent learn how to better still my soul, be quiet, and listen so I may hear You, find new direction, a new way to love others, and a new way to live.
Amen.*

Brian Williams

The Day I Sang *In the Garden* with The Pianist At Von Maur

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Luke 12:32

I was waiting, seated in a plush wing chair listening to the pianist play old 1940’s standards. Roz, my daughter-in-law, had flown in from Chicago to spend the Saturday before Mother’s Day with me. She had announced, “We’ll have a fancy lunch, and then shop for a frivolous present for you, something you wouldn’t buy yourself.” One thought sprang to mind: a new Spring hat!

Before we went to the hat department Roz had asked if I would like to go upstairs to the Petites. When I said no, she asked if I would mind waiting while she checked it out. Not at all, “You know I never mind waiting.” I added, “Take your time, don’t hurry.” (I meant it. I know liking to wait is counter-cultural; today we highly value intentional action, and we tend to consider waiting lost or empty time. On the contrary, life has taught me that waiting may allow time and space for the Spirit to break through and act). I had looked forward to just sitting and listening to a medley of my retro music, but there was much more to come. When Roz returned I thanked the pianist for playing so many songs I knew. He asked if I was a musician. I replied, “No, but I used to sing in a church choir when I was young.”

I saw my hat first from afar; we were still in Handbags when I spotted it on a rack ahead of us. It was a retro pillbox, bright pink, trimmed in black. I didn’t need to try on any others; I had found THE HAT. Once I put it on I kept on wearing it even when the sales associate was lining a hat box with tissue, and Roz tactfully reminded me to hand her the hat. I said, “No, we’ll take the hat box with us, but I want to wear the hat to show the pianist, and then wear it out of the store, and on home.”

When we rejoined the pianist he said, “I’ve been thinking about you. Do you know *In the Garden*? I said yes as he began playing that beloved, familiar tune. He said, “Sing it with me.”

Both of us knew the words “by heart”. Roz whipped out her iPhone and took our picture as we sang the first stanza. Then he said, “Let’s sing the second stanza because that’s my favorite.” *“He speaks and the sound of his voice is so sweet the birds hush their singing. . . .”*

As our song filled the store I looked out at the people shopping and thought, we are singing about a believer’s mystical experience with the Living Christ here, in a completely commercial setting. I could hardly believe it, I had done nothing to make it happen. I remembered later that Bill Johnson calls such experiences, “Holy Moments.”

Heavenly Father, Thank you for times when you transform our days by giving us “Holy Moments,” and for the knowledge that, “...it is (our) Father’s good pleasure to give (us) the kingdom.” Amen.

Dorothy Spurr

Waiting...Waiting...

As God's chosen one's, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Colossians 3:12 NRSV

When will that light ever turn green? When will this traffic jam break up? Where is the waitress for our table? Why isn't our food here yet? When will the receptionist finally call my name? Oh when will they call with the results of my scan?

When will I finally fall to sleep this Christmas Eve of my childhood? Santa won't come if I am still awake! (Another day.) My Captain Midnight secret decoder might have come in the mail today. I'll run home and hope it's there. Noooo! Still not. Well, maybe tomorrow. Hey, it's tomorrow. Maybe it came today? Finally here it is. Now working the code and deciphering the message...It does not say "Be sure to drink your Ovaltine."

I have long forgotten what message the Captain had for me that day, little more important than the one Ralpie received from Little Orphan Annie I am sure. But I believe there was a lesson for me in all that.

The light turned. The traffic jam broke. The waitress arrived as did the food. My name was called and my scan was fine. The childhood me finally slept on Christmas Eve. And, of course. the decoder arrived. The lesson in all this for me? Trust! Things will work out! As Paul urged, have patience!

Lord, help us control our frustrations and trust and clothe ourselves with patience.

John C Birkimer

with thanks to John Arnett

Running to Listen

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Hebrews 12:1

In fourth grade gym class my physical education instructor, Ms. Butcher, made each student run a mile around the perimeter of the gym. I ran my mile and I ran it quickly. I ran it so quickly that Ms. Butcher did not believe that I had gone the full distance. I protested. I told her I would run another mile after all the other students finished so that she and everyone else could count the laps. I ran the second mile faster than the first. I have been running, roughly six days per week, for the last three decades. In high school and college I ran competitively with teammates each day. These days, most days, I run alone. My solitary morning runs have become the more significant spiritual discipline in my life. In addition to the physical benefits, my runs enable me to clear my mind, be quiet, and listen. You all know all too well that I do a lot of talking. Sometimes I wonder if I enjoy running because it forces me to stop talking. Most days I do not listen to music or a podcast when running. Most days, I pay attention to my surroundings. In just the past few months while running through Cherokee Park I have crossed paths with a six-point buck, snakes, nearly every variety of bird including hawks and owls, a possum, beavers, coyotes, and turtles. When running on the sidewalks of Bardstown Road or Frankfort Avenue I always encountered friends and I am able to more tangibly get a feel for what is really happening on the streets of our community. Waiting and listening are values that stand in marked contrast to what the world around us seemingly values. Therefore, it can be difficult to create space and time for waiting and listening. I am grateful that by God's grace, my love of running has forced me to engage in waiting and listening on a daily basis.

During this Advent season and throughout the course of this year, may we all find regular spiritual exercises that enable us to wait and listen.

Jason Crosby

Long Awaited Dreams

I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. Psalm 130:5-7

The past 18 months have marked one of the longest periods of sustained waiting I have experienced in my relatively short life. I waited in grief as I closed one chapter by saying goodbye to a job in a congregation that I loved. Shortly afterward, Scott and I waited in anticipation for the birth of our precious child (a dream for which neither one of us dared to hope).

During my pregnancy, we also waited as I sent out resume after resume, perfecting cover letters and interview questions along the way. Before we got married we dreamed together of the day that I would become a senior pastor. Scott even made a bit of a pivot in his career trajectory so that we could one day see this aspiration come to fruition and not be constrained by location.

In 12 months, I worked four different jobs while I prayed for God to lead me and my family to the congregation where their greatest need met my gifts and joys. As the burgeoning life inside me grew, I wrote (near) daily letters to my Franklin. One day, I sat and wrote to him about my calling and my deep hope that he would grow up watching his mommy live into the fullness of who she felt God leading her to be.

This Advent, Scott, Franklin, and I wait expectantly to join with the wonderful people of Village Baptist Church in Bowie, Maryland, where I will be their senior pastor. The waiting felt so long and painful at times, but I stand today amazed once again at God's faithfulness.

Gracious and Loving God, Thank you for staying with me even in my longest hours, and providing a steadfast love to cling to even when the road ahead seems bleak. -Amen.

Emily Holladay

Waiting and Listening for the Train to Take Me to Granny's for Christmas

Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall be the families of the earth be blessed. Genesis 28:14

Waiting for Christmas for any child is really hard and, for me, the season didn't really start until I got to my Granny's house in Paris, TN. In fact, we never even had a tree at our home in Louisville, because everything about Christmas happened at Granny's. We usually maximized the season by heading to her house the day after our school break started. To this day I really don't know why we just said "Granny's house," because Granddaddy was there too!

To get there was another adventure because we went on the L & N train. My dad was a welder with the railroad, so we had passes that let us go many places free; but the main place we went was to Granny's house. My dad would take my mom, two brothers and me to board the train down at the station on Broadway. Then he would drive down when he got his break from work so by Christmas, we would all be together again and with our five cousins, aunts, uncles, great uncles, etc. We wouldn't return until right before school was to resume in January.

Once we got to Granny's, we would go out on the farm and cut a cedar tree and decorate it. We would fix popcorn to string over the wood-burning fireplace, string fresh cranberries, make construction paper chains and hang icicles. I don't recall that we got a lot of gifts but we always had a lot of fruit, nuts and candy. The big meals, with at least 20 people in attendance, were such a highlight. There were vegetables from Granny's garden, ham smoked in her smokehouse and cornbread for certain. We usually had fireworks on the big front lawn as well.

*Thank you for wonderful memories of family,
where we first experienced love and learned to cooperate.*

Gail Tucker

Praying the Rows

I hope, Lord. My whole being hopes, and I wait for God's promise. Psalm 130:5

David and I were so happy when our son James and his wife Cara announced to us that they were expecting their first child. Waiting can be hard. I wait best when I am doing some kind of handwork. In anticipation of the big event I started knitting a baby blanket. Looking back I can truly say that the baby blanket became a prayer blanket for me. A prayer blanket is a way for the person who makes the blanket to pray for the person who will receive it.

In choosing the yarn I couldn't go with the traditional blue or pink since at that time we did not know the baby's gender. I chose a variegated washable yarn and a ripple pattern. I knitted whenever I had a chance. The bright green ripple band of stitches changed to a band of watermelon pink, followed by marine blue rows, a band of bright lemon yellow rows, and then a band of violet rows. The bands then were repeated, some wider and some narrower, depending totally on how the ball of yarn had been dyed. The brightness of the colors and the variety of band sizes hid the fact that my beginner's stitches were at times uneven and imperfect. With each row of 84 stitches there were prayers and thoughts for this baby who we would love so much.

The blanket never seemed to get finished despite my knitting and knitting. We traveled to be with James and Cara in anticipation of the birth. The baby was two weeks later than we had anticipated. The night they went to the Birthing Center in Middlebury I could not sleep. We heard that Cara was having a very long and hard labor. It was that night when I was working on the blanket that the 5 skeins of yarn were finally used up and I finished the last row of knitting. Rye Toshi was born healthy and beautiful (in this grandmother's eyes) at 4:10 am. I had finished the last lemon yellow row at 4 am. The question from James was, "why did I not knit faster?"

We do not control the timing of things but can find ways to prepare for the coming of new births. In this season of advent we anticipate the coming of the Christ child. How do we best prepare for this holiest of events?

God, thank you for the hope that comes with new birth.
Help us prepare for the coming. Amen

Margaret Graves



Let the
Lord
enter;
He is
king of
glory.

Love

Pearl

I have a woman in Richmond, VA that I love to call my family. Her name is Pearl. I first met Pearl when I was 19 years old. I volunteered with an organization that partnered college kids like me with underprivileged kids like Pearl's grandson, Robbie. I would go to Pearl's house after classes and tutor Robbie when he was in 3rd and 4th grade. We would go for bike rides, etc. Robbie didn't know how to ride a bike, so I'd take a bike and force him to learn. Over time, Robbie lost interest in me, but Pearl never did. Pearl and I remained friends. Thanksgiving came, and I'd rally folks to bring her a meal. She needed it. And was so appreciative.

When I was pregnant with Morgan, Pearl told me, "You are going to have a Christmas baby." And I did. Do you want to know who the very first person I called that day from that hospital bed was? Yes, it was Pearl. Later, Logan was born. Again, Pearl was the first one I called. She's just THAT special.

I developed a relationship with her, and eventually, I moved away from Richmond, to come home to Louisville to be near my parents. Sadly, a few years ago, Robbie overdosed on drugs. But Pearl and I remained friends.

Over the years, our friendship has never died. Every year, I pay Pearl's utilities. It's a small thing for me, but a big thing for her. It's an important thing for me to know that Pearl will be warm in the winter, and cool in the summer. There have been brutal summers in Richmond, where we hear that folks pass away because they suffer from heat. I'm always thankful that I've contracted with Dominion Energy to make sure Pearl is not one of those individuals.

I don't share this to benefit myself. I share this to let you know how amazing it is that we can build these relationships. Recently I called Pearl to touch base. It was the funniest conversation. "Anne! I've been following the news! What a wild story about your governor election!" It was election day; she had been following our politics, and had many opinions (that aligned with mine).

I find it so interesting that a very poor woman in Richmond, VA is following our politics. Maybe all because Morgan was born on Christmas Day, and she was the first person I called?

We never realize the impact we make. Just because we decide to take a poor kid from the projects on a bike ride. Make a difference! You'll benefit more than you even think is possible.

As I consider a verse of the Bible to tie to this meditation, I'm repeatedly drawn to the Beatitudes. Probably every time I talk to Pearl, the STRONGEST Christian I know, I think of Matthew 5, verse 3. Pearl exemplifies this: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."* As you can imagine, Pearl is perpetually poor in spirit. She has lived a hard life. But she KNOWS she will inherit the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. She will be more blessed than the rest of us. And Matthew 19:24 tells us, *"it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."* Pearl will be there; I hope that I can visit her there, when she sits on the amazing pedestal she has earned by being a faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

With Gratitude

One of them, finding himself cured, turned back with shouts of praise to God. He threw himself down at Jesus's feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Luke 17:15-16

I love Thanksgiving! It is my favorite season of the year! Giving thanks and being grateful are necessary all year but we give it special attention during the Thanksgiving season.

Gratitude has saved me. After the most tragic event in my life, just living was a daily challenge. Then I found this quote, "Of all the qualities of life that help us cope, gratitude is the most potent". It made me stop and consider that even in the face of tragedy, that there are many things to still be grateful for each day. My change in focus from the tragedy to looking for at least one thing for which to be grateful every day (even if just that I had shoes) did not diminish the grief and pain, but it did open me to looking beyond it to the good that still exists around me.

On the heels of Thanksgiving and the season of gratitude, comes the season of Advent, waiting and arrival. Perhaps an attitude of gratitude prepares us for waiting. Waiting is hard. In today's world we are no longer very good at waiting. So much is "instant" - information from Google or Siri or a text. We even have "Instagram" and "instant pots!" I've often wondered what it was like in the days of early travelers, missionaries, explorers when families might wait months to learn of an illness, a wedding, a birth and so on. It is hard for me to imagine!

Today we do still wait on so much that doesn't happen or appear in an instant – for hatred to end, for peace, for safety, for a world where people care for each other and treat them fairly and with kindness and respect.

Waiting is hard. Anxiety, discouragement, impatience, even anger can set in. Yet in waiting there is time, time to prepare for the arrival for which we wait. We prepare with a grateful heart for the arrival of the Christ child who came to bring hatred to an end, to teach us to turn the other cheek and go the extra mile, to care for others and the least of these, to bring hope, joy, love and peace into a waiting world.

*Heavenly parent, with shouts of praise we are grateful for your sustaining grace no matter our circumstance. Teach us to wait and to work while fully expecting the arrival of the justice, peace and mercy that abounds when we walk humbly with you, our God.
Amen.*

Alice Adams

A Greeting Like That

Upon entering, Gabriel greeted her: "Good morning! You're beautiful with God's beauty, beautiful inside and out! God be with you." She was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that. But the angel assured her, "Mary, you have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you." Luke 1:28-29 (The Message)

We pulled into a large gravel parking lot, almost an hour before the Sunday morning worship service was to begin at First Baptist Church of Morehead, KY. Allen Bartlett carefully parked the church bus along the wooden railings that marked the lot. Just as we made our final adjustments within our chosen parking space, we were greeted by a distinguished gentleman in a gray suit. When I stepped out of the bus, he was already very close to me. I had missed his approach, being focused on providing alignment feedback to Allen. So when I noticed the greeter it was as if he had appeared out of nowhere.

His face was very kind and he smiled. Then he spoke, with reverent awe, looking at the bus and then at me, "Are you really from Crescent Hill Baptist Church?" He asked the question with such wonder and excitement about the possibility – as if the giant blue lettering on the side of the bus was too good to be true. "Why yes, we really are," I replied.

His reverence toward our origin made it seem as if he had been waiting there at the corner of that gravel church parking lot, perhaps for many long years, in hopes that one day, we would arrive at that very parking space. We hadn't told anyone we were coming. But our greeter seemed to have been anticipating us, waiting for us at the exact spot, at the exact moment of our arrival.

Perhaps it is more likely that Mr. David Gregory saw us from inside the church, recognized the name of our church on the side of the bus and came out to welcome us, sharing fond memories from his own time with our congregation years ago.

But the welcome did not end with Mr. Gregory. We were greeted and welcomed so genuinely as we made our way inside, it is hard to put the feeling into words. To be so openly received, like fellow-heirs of a holy legacy...all because of some letters on the side of a bus. The whole visit had a sense of preordained completion...as if we were always meant to be there on that day.

It was only the first Sunday in October, but the expectant hospitality of Advent was already potent in the congregation at Morehead. Soon 24 strangers from across the globe, youth and a few adults, traveling under the banner of Crescent Hill Baptist Church, were sharing World Communion and singing hand in hand with a group of strangers we met in the Kentucky mountains. It was like realizing you had a whole batch of first cousins out there you never knew about. But they knew about you and had been wondering if you were ever going to show up to the weekly family reunion.

What is Advent, if not the realization that we are fellow-heirs of a holy legacy? What is Christmas, if not the arrival of Someone special at Somewhere ordinary? What is Church, if not a reunion of the Family of God wherever we happen to journey today?

God of Welcome, may we find ourselves strangely at home in places we have never been this Advent Season. Make us ready for our long-awaited visit from the Holy. Amen.

The Year our Family Came to Understand “Advent”

When the angels had left them, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go and see this thing that has happened... So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby...” Luke 2:15a, 16a

Our family was invited to spend Christmas in Richmond. We all traveled East, happily talking as the snow began to fall. We enjoyed our trip and the anticipation of Christmas, but unlike the shepherds, we knew of the advent, and we also knew of the baby whose birth we were anxiously awaiting.

When Christmas Eve came, we attended a memorable late Christmas Eve service and then went back to wait some more. We watched the stars outside, but were all actively waiting for Christmas and trying to pass the time waiting for the coming birth.

Finally, we settled down for a long winter’s nap, when suddenly the alarm was sounded, letting us know that our long awaited baby, due in a few days, was coming now, sooner than expected. She arrived before noon on a crisp, sunny Christmas Day. There were phone calls, pictures and laughter, as she was such a special baby, and the very best Christmas present ever. She brought such joy and happiness and has done so for 20 years. Morgan Flecke brings joy and happiness to so many.

We thank you God for the Christmas gift of a baby girl who brings such joy to many now, even as we remember the humble circumstances of the birth of the Christ Child, and give thanks for that birth and the birth of all children everywhere. We pray that all children can be so much anticipated and so desired. Happy Birthday remembrances for the Christ Child and for Morgan Flecke, as well as all children everywhere.

Carolyn Arnett

On behalf of all of Morgan Flecke’s family

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