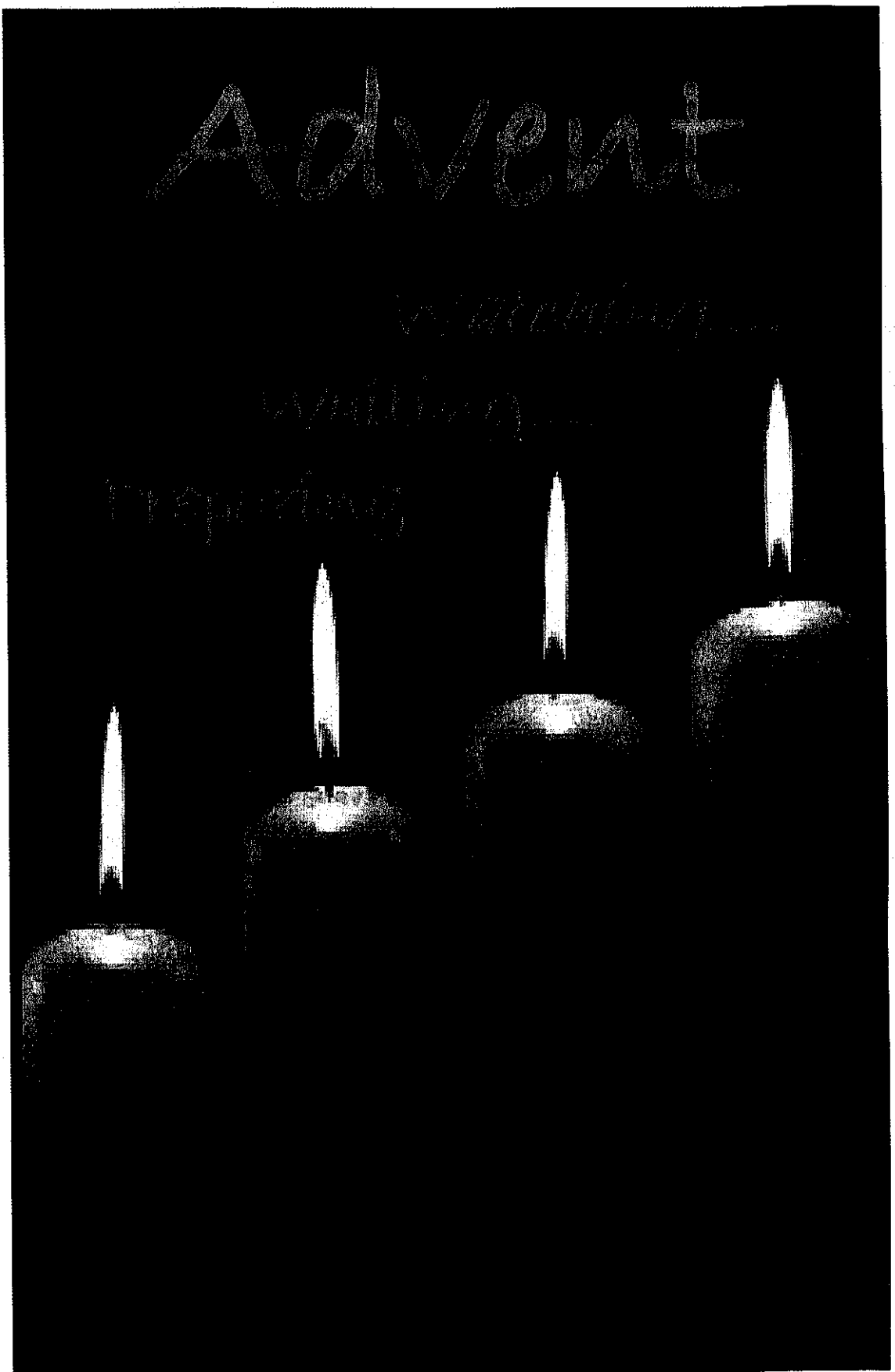


# Advent

waiting...

wishing...

preparing...



## **Activities to Complement Devotional Times**

The Theme of our Advent Devotions is Watching and Waiting. We are including some ideas of activities for families/singles of all ages. We hope that you will enjoy incorporating one or more of them each week or as an on-going activity throughout the season.

### **Seasonal Activities:**

**Advent Wreath** – Your wreath may be as simple or elaborate as you desire. The basic design is 4 candles placed around a circular metal, styrofoam, etc. wreath. Decorate your wreath with greenery using pipe cleaners to anchor the branches. The four candles are placed on the wreath and can be anchored with a bit of glue. They may be 3 purple and 1 pink or 4 blue. Trindle Spring uses 4 blue in our service. A large white candle is placed in the center. The outer candles symbolize the royalty of Christ as King, the white symbolizes Jesus as pure, without sin and the surrounding greens symbolize God's everlasting love without beginning or end.

**Nativity Set** – Nativity sets may be large or small, elaborate or hand made. Each week add one more element until the baby Jesus is put into His crib on Christmas Eve.

**Week 1** – set out the stable, animals, and any greenery, etc., place the empty manger;

**Week 2** – add the shepherds and sheep out in the fields;

**Week 3** – add the wise men and camels quite a bit away from the stable (they have a long way to travel and will not arrive until Epiphany);

**Week 4** – add Mary, Joseph, donkey and angel; Christmas Eve – add baby Jesus.

## **Weekly Activities:**

**Week One** – The first advent candle symbolizes Hope. It is also called the Promise candle. Focus on promises as things we wait for and look forward to. Make a promise that can be kept later in the week like baking cookies, putting up decorations, etc. Discuss why promises are so important. What is the most important promise God made to us?

**Week Two** – The second advent candle symbolizes Love. It is also called the Angel candle. Make the visits of the angel to Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds the focus of this week's activities – how does this fit with our theme of watching and waiting? God's angels were created to serve Him. Serving activities could include helping someone, taking food or other items to church for New Hope, going Christmas Caroling.

**Week Three** – The third advent candle symbolizes Joy. It is also called the Bethlehem candle. It stands for rejoicing in our Savior's birth. God's gift of His son in a stable in Bethlehem was the greatest gift we could ever hope to receive. Focus this week on this gift and the joy and anticipation of giving and receiving gifts. Give a gift to a shelter or homeless person, bake cookies for the firehouse or police station, explore the gifts God has given you and how you can use those.

**Week Four** – The fourth advent candle symbolizes Peace. It is also called the Shepherd candle. Recall how the angels sang of Peace on Earth when they visited the shepherds. Shepherds spent most of their time watching their sheep, waiting to see if they would be safe or danger would come their way. Get a candy cane and discuss how it is like a Shepherd's crook. The white reminds us that Jesus was pure and without sin; the red reminds us that Jesus shed his blood for our sin; the hardness of the candy reminds us that Jesus is the rock of our faith; and if you hold the candy cane upside down, it will look like the letter "J" which stands for Jesus, our Good Shepherd. Consider giving away candy canes this week with the story of its significance.

**Christmas Eve** – The large white candle is the Christ candle. It stands for Jesus' first coming into the world and symbolizes His holiness and purity.

## **Hymns by Martin Luther**

Martin Luther was born into a musical family. As a boy, he joined a boys' choir and became proficient with the flute. Luther became known in particular for three things: the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, the belief that Scripture should be translated into the people's language, and the birth of congregational singing. He felt that music was of God, not of man. He was determined to restore congregational singing in the German language to the Church.

So strong were his beliefs about music and worship that he wrote these fiery words: "Next to the word of God, the role of music is the greatest treasure in the world. It controls our hearts, minds and spirits. A person who does not regard music as a marvelous creation of God does not deserve to be called a human being..."

His passionate beliefs led Luther to write both words and music for several hymns. Luther's first hymnal was published in 1524. It contained eight hymns, four written by himself. Later hymnals were also published for congregational use. He urged people to use the hymns at home and encouraged parochial schools to teach them to their students. In his lifetime, he wrote thirty-six hymns, each written to convey a message.

We will focus on one of these hymns each Sunday in our worship service. May their message add yet another dimension to your Advent devotions.

## **Savior of the Nations, Come**

Savior of the nations, come,  
Virgin's Son, make here Thy home!  
Marvel now, O heaven and earth  
That the Lord chose such a birth.

Not by human flesh and blood,  
By the Spirit of our God,  
Was the Word of God made flesh –  
Woman's Offspring, pure and fresh

Wondrous birth! O wondrous Child  
Of the Virgin undefiled!  
Though by all the world disowned,  
Still to be in heaven enthroned.

From the Father forth He came  
And returneth to the same.  
Captive leading death and hell –  
High the song of triumph swell!

Thou, the Father's only Son  
Hast o'er sin the victory won.  
Boundless shall Thy kingdom be;  
When shall we its glories see?

Rightly doth Thy manger shine,  
Glorious is its light divine.  
Let not sin o'ercloud this light;  
Ever be our faith thus bright.

Praise to God the Father sing,  
Praise to God the Son, our King,  
Praise to God the Spirit be  
Ever and eternally.

*This hymn was based on John 1:14 and was written in 1524. The original version of it was composed in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century by Ambrose. Over a millennium later, Martin Luther translated the text into German. Songs Luther wrote or adapted helped fuel the Protestant Reformation as it opened the door to influencing the head, heart and imagination.*

**Read Romans 15: 12-13**

Today we begin the season of Advent. For many, Advent means, “coming”. We are to anticipate, prepare and get ready to celebrate the occurrence of a miraculous event. Each Sunday we shall focus our attention on one of the candles in our Advent wreath. The first one is called the candle of Hope.

We long for a source of hope everyday as we face a world that is blundering along in spiritual darkness. Wars, violence, divisions, devastations fill us with a sense of Hopelessness. Where are we to turn?

The apostle Paul, in writing our verse for today, was quoting the Prophet Isaiah when he says: “The root of Jesse shall come...and in him the Gentiles shall hope.” Paul was reminding his followers in Rome to continue showing the Gentiles that their only source of Salvation was to place their hope in the promises of God. The Roman Christians were to share the truth that the babe born in Bethlehem’s humble stable is the promised Messiah. He was and is the birth of hope for all the world.

If we, like so many today, place our hope in the accumulation of fame, money or material possessions, we shall be sorely disappointed. If we believe we can handle everything ourselves and need no one, we shall find ourselves truly alone. We need to rid ourselves of the spiritual darkness engulfing our lives by listening to God’s Word and “preparing” to celebrate the coming of his Son. That is our only hope.

**Prayer** – God of all grace and mercy, as we begin this Advent Season, we pray that you will lead us in our anticipation and preparation to celebrate the miraculous event that is to come. May our hearts be filled with the joy and hope which only you can provide. Amen.

**Read Isaiah 40:31**

Waiting. Waiting. Waiting.

Waiting is hard because we're trained not to wait. Everything is instantaneous now – information, mental stimulation, recreation, and relationships. We all wait at some time in our lives. Sometimes we wait for traffic. Maybe you spend time waiting for a package to be delivered, a doctor appointment or for that pair of sneakers to go on sale. These are short term waits. They are irritating but in reality, you know the wait will end relatively quickly.

There are other kinds of waiting that happen to all of us at one time or another. These are long term waits. We wait as we watch a loved one struggle with cancer, illness, old age, etc. We wallow in grief that no one else understands. We are faced with making life changing decisions for ourselves our parents or our spouses. These kinds of waiting are draining. They seem to pull us under, wanting to drown us. This kind of waiting makes us feel hopeless and helpless. They can make us weary.

Advent is a season of waiting. A time of remembering Jesus' first coming and a time of looking forward to Jesus' return. It can be a season filled with joy and hope or a season of stress and being overwhelmed. Whatever your present season of life is, know that you are not alone. God is faithful and we can trust him to give us strength and to see us through our life's journey.

What better time than Advent to refresh our awareness of Christ's coming to us, for opening our minds and hearts to welcome this treasure and toward a renewed appreciation of Jesus' enriching, presence. We wait because there is something worth waiting for.

**Prayer** - Dear God , as we enter this Advent Season, may we refrain from rushing toward December 25<sup>th</sup>. Help us to spend time with our church, family and friends to experience the peace that comes with waiting on the Lord and focus on the journey as much as the destination. Amen

**Tuesday, December 5**

**Lynda Farner**

**Read Joshua 1:9**

Some people are always watching and waiting as a way of their lives, watching for the next business opportunity or waiting for the next exam in school. When we were just newlyweds, my husband, Ken, was a member of the USAF and was deployed to Vietnam for a one year tour of duty. Personally, waiting for him from my parent's home while he was half a world away was extremely stressful. However, waiting for him to disembark from the plane that brought him back home, I was both anxious and happy.

We watch and wait in the season of Advent. We know the story and still we watch and wait. We want to experience the anxiousness and excitement of hearing and seeing it again. And so we watch and wait. Do you know why? It is because while a tiny baby is born of a virgin in a manger in Bethlehem who will become the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, we also know of the sacrifice He made as He died on a cross for our sins. While we earnestly wait and watch for His birth, we are really waiting and watching for His life to unfold, His teachings and His ultimate death and resurrection.

**Prayer** - Dearest Lord and Savior, help us to be mindful of the miracle of Your birth and life. Let us have strength and courage to continue to do what is right in life, according to Your word. Be with us during this Advent season and help us to daily reflect on the preparations for Your coming as we watch and wait. Amen.



**Read 2 Peter 3:3-10** In our family, the aunts, uncles, and grandmothers always asked each child in our family to write a Christmas wish list and bring it to share after our Thanksgiving Day meal. As a result, my belly-turning Christmas excitement kicked-off sometime between the arrival of Santa during Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade and saying grace before our meal. I'd ponder my list throughout dinner and compare lists with my cousins while we waited for the adults to finish their dinner conversations, wash the first round of dishes, brew coffee and prepare the desserts, and then finally, they would request the wish lists. For the kids, waiting for the grown-ups to be ready definitely felt like a thousand years, yet for the adults it was mere moments.

On the drive home or even the next day, I'd realize how long I'd have to wait to see if anyone granted my Christmas wishes and so the agonizing impatience of Advent would set in. Thankfully, knowing that waiting and being patient are skills that elude most children and for that matter, many adults, our family had activities, Christmas/Advent milestones of sorts that helped break the time into more manageable pieces. Things like short intentional shopping trips, punching out days on an advent calendar, baking cookies, preparing for my grandmother to arrive, decorating the tree, and finally Christmas Eve services.

Writer Henri Nouwen shares, "Active waiting means to be present fully to the moment, in the conviction that something is happening where you are and that you want to be present to it. A waiting person is someone who is present to the moment, who believes that this moment is the moment." It may not have been intentional, but incorporating these activities honored our family traditions but also provided a way for my sister and me to wait actively and keep our minds in the present rather than fixating on what was yet to come.

As an adult, with a much better understanding of the promise of Christmas, I've learned to embrace active waiting and that it's okay to slow down

and observe all that is going on around me, to worry less about perfection, be mindful and present during seasonal activities, and follow the lines of one of my favorite Advent hymns, People Look East (ELW #248), to “Make your house fair as you are able, Trim the hearth and set the table... People, look east and sing today, Love, the Lord, is on the way”.

**Prayer:** Father, you fill our lives with many signs of your presence and reminders of your promise. Help me to set aside the chaos of the season and become mindful and present so that I may enjoy these blessings and find peace in preparing for the return of the light, your son Jesus. Amen.

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**Thursday, December 7**

**Ian Corey**

**Read Genesis 8:6-19**

Noah had to wait for a long time for the water to dry up and the plants to grow. I think that he was excited to finally get off of the ark, but he might also be scared. They knew it would be okay because they trusted God. Mary and Joseph were probably excited because they were going to be the parents of Jesus, but they were also scared because they might not have enough money to feed him. But they also knew it would be okay because they trusted God.

Like Noah, Mary and Joseph I got excited waiting for my first water polo game. I was scared, nervous, and excited. I had practiced hard so I wasn't really scared and I knew my mom and dad would be proud of me.

**Prayer** – Dear God, please help us wait for Christmas and help us not forget what Christmas is all about – Jesus' birth. Amen.

**Friday, December 8**

**Bonnie Distad**

**Read Mathew 25:13**

I heard the helicopter fly over our house as I was working outside in the flower beds on that sunny Sunday afternoon. That was not unusual, as our house was at the base of South Mountain and in the direct path to the hospital. Later, I went inside to answer the phone call from the Emergency room. The ER nurse was asking permission to treat my son. A shiver went through me as I imagined all kinds of things. Then I heard my son yell in the background, "Mom, tell them to take this catheter out of me." An immediate calmness came over me and I said "Yes, do whatever needs to be done and I will be right there." I knew he was conscious and alert.

The headline in the local paper the next day would read, "City boy falls 20 feet from Annapolis Rock." As he explained it, they had been repelling and he had a "head rush", passed out and fell, landing with the left side of his head hitting a rock. His eye socket had been shattered and there could be hemorrhaging into the brain. He was scheduled for surgery the next morning. That is when the waiting began. Prayers, family and friends came. I decided to stay overnight with him.

The next morning when they wheeled him out in his bed and the room was empty, it hit me. I prayed for a good outcome and thought to call a dear friend, MaryAnn. She came over to the hospital to wait with me in the room just off of surgery. She would go back to the information area and report back when he would be out of surgery. I prayed for the best and hoped that I would be prepared for the worst. Such a long day of waiting, but a cherished gift of time spent together.

Like the 10 bridesmaids waiting for the bridegroom, who did not know the hour the bridegroom would come, we waited. Five came prepared with oil for their lamps. Was I prepared?

Our prayers were answered. The surgeons were able to repair the orbit of his left eye with a metal plate and mesh and found no further bleeding into

into his brain. In the end, isn't it our prayers and those special people who reflect the healing comforting love of Christ that help us "wait" through those difficult times.

**Prayer** - Lord, I humbly pray that you will help me reflect your patience and love as I wait for this Advent Season to celebrate the birth of Your son, Jesus. Amen.

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**Saturday, December 9**

**Ryan Talton**

**Read Psalm 33:20-22**

The meaning of this is that the Lord will help and protect you in all situations. Sometimes you don't think that God has a plan for you, but he does. Sometimes when your prayer isn't answered immediately, you wonder, "Is He actually listening?" but by waiting, He will show you that you are being listened to. Even if your prayer isn't answered, there is a reason for it. Just like when Jesus helped David to beat Goliath, He will show up in some of the strangest places. I don't know this for sure, but I bet that when Jesus was born, no one had any thoughts that he would be the Son of God and would have a huge role in the world. In the four weeks of Advent, everything seems so special as we wait for one day: Christmas. In the four weeks, so much is going on inside and outside of the church. As we wait, many people light a candle each week awaiting the birth of Christ on December 25. In those four weeks, I feel so excited as everything is going on like getting a Christmas tree and hearing the hymns in church each Sunday.

**Prayer** - Dear Lord, please lead us as we await your birth in the weeks to come. Let us remember the true meaning of Christmas and why we celebrate it. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

## From Heaven Above to Earth I Come

From Heaven above to earth I come,  
To bear good news to every home;  
Glad tidings of great joy I bring  
Whereof I now will say and sing.

To you, this night, is born a Child  
Of Mary, chosen mother mild;  
This tender Child of lowly birth,  
Shall be the joy of all your earth.

'Tis Christ our God, who far on high  
Had heard your sad and bitter cry;  
Himself will your Salvation be,  
Himself from sin will make you free.

He brings those blessings long ago  
Prepared by God for all below;  
That in His heavenly kingdom blest  
You may with us forever rest.

These are the tokens ye shall mark,  
The swaddling clothes and manger dark;  
There shall ye find the young Child laid,  
By whom the heav'ns and earth were made.

Now let us all, with gladsome cheer,  
Follow the shepherds, and draw near  
To see this wondrous Gift of God,  
Who hath His own dear Son bestowed

Give heed, my heart, lift up thine eyes!  
What is it in yon manger lies?  
Who is this Child, so young and fair?  
The blessed Christ Child lieth there!

Welcome to earth, Thou noble Guest,  
Through Whom e'en wicked men are blest!  
Thou com'st to share our misery,  
What can we render, Lord, to Thee?

Ah, Lord, Who hast created all,  
How hast Thou made Thee weak & small,  
To lie upon the coarse dry grass,  
The food of humble ox and ass.

Were earth a thousand times as fair,  
Beset with gold and jewels rare,  
She yet were far too poor to be  
A narrow cradle, Lord, for Thee.

For velvets soft and silken stuff  
Thou hast but hay and straw so rough,  
Whereon Thou King, so rich and great,,  
As 'twere Thy heaven, art throned in state.

Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child,  
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled,  
Here in my poor heart's inmost shrine,  
That I may evermore be Thine.

My heart for very joy doth leap,  
My lips no more can silence keep,  
I too must sing, with joyful tongue  
That sweetest ancient cradle song.

Glory to God in highest Heaven,  
Who unto man His son hath given,  
While angels sing, with pious mirth,  
A glad New Year to all the earth.

*One year as Martin Luther was thinking about his Christmas sermon and rocking the cradle of his youngest at the same time, the words and music of this Christmas hymn came to him. He picked up his lute and sang these words. This hymn was penned in 1534 for his children and family. It is written that the Luther family celebrated in their home by having the first seven verses of the hymn sung by a man dressed as an angel. The children completed singing the rest of the verses.*

**Read Psalm 130**

A soldier has the night watch, staying up all night in order to keep those who are sleeping safe. But, I can only imagine that as they keep watch through the dark hours they can't wait until dawn, until their shift is over, and they can rest. That's the image the psalmist paints in Psalm 130; waiting with anticipation. It's like waiting up all night for a child's fever to break, for the birth of a baby, for company to arrive at your house, or for a storm to be over. We wait for many things in our lives, but when we wait for morning to come, we wait knowing that it will happen. God is just as sure, just as dependable. The Psalmist in verse 7 reminds us to have hope in the Lord, that God is dependable because with God there is steadfast love.

In our world, waiting tends to produce anxiety and impatience, but as God's people, we are reminded to wait with hope. God's steadfast love for us gives us hope in the face of uncertainty. One of the things I wait and watch for is to see my grandparents again. Because of God's love sent to us in Jesus Christ, and God's love for all of creation I don't need to worry about when or if it will happen. I can wait in anticipation and hope for God's promise. In this season of waiting, know God's love and I hope God's love brings you hope.

**Prayer** - God of love, you come to us in many ways; in the love of family, in the beauty of your creation, in the life and death of Jesus, your Son. Fill us with hope and help us to share the story of your steadfast love with the world. Amen.

**Read John 14:27**

Peace was the furthest thing from my mind in the fall of 1998 following my Dad's diagnosis of colon cancer that had already spread to his liver. A simple internet search confirmed my worst fears, that the long-term survival rates of liver cancer were slim to none.

How quickly the excitement of an upcoming marching band trip to Arizona to see our son Christopher march in the Fiesta Bowl Parade turned to panic. The travel agents arranging the trip offered a discounted "tag-along" rate for friends and family and since my parents had never had the opportunity to travel out West, we decided to honor over 40 years of marriage by including them in our reservations. A trip to the Grand Canyon was part of the week's festivities and we were so excited to see this amazing part of our country and to cheer on my son and his fellow marching band members on this grand adventure.

Dad's diagnosis stopped us in our tracks. He was starting chemo, would he be allowed to travel? Were our efforts to honor my parents for all of the love, hard work, faith and support going to be thwarted? My sorrow and disappointment at that prospect were paralyzing. I felt like I was moving through molasses, struggling to deal with everyday matters. How could God stop us from providing this one act of pure joy from the lives of our family?

Several weeks later, I walked out of the front door of our house and saw something odd in our yard, just a few feet from our front porch. As I walked toward it, I could see it was a deflated balloon, with ribbon and a card attached. I picked it up and read the card. It read that it was from a church in Hagerstown Maryland who had launched hundreds of balloons to honor an important milestone in the life of their congregation. Amazingly, this one balloon made it all the way to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, over 60 miles, to land only a few feet from our front door.

I stood there, in amazement. We have a number of trees on our property that we planted when we built the house. This balloon somehow made it over the trees and then dropped, just a short distance past them. How did it avoid getting caught in the branches?

How indeed. But the how wasn't important at that point. I understood that God was using that simple balloon to reach my troubled heart. That simple balloon from a church celebration snapped me out of my worried state of panic and gave me an amazing sense of calm and peace. God meets us where we are every day, through joys, sorrows and the unknown. He calms our worries, brings peace to our souls, carries us through the darkest of valleys. "Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

My parents did accompany us on that amazing trip, with the doctor's blessing. We had to give my dad ample opportunities to rest, but we made some truly special family memories on that trip that helped sustain us as we said goodbye to Dad two years later when God called him home.

**Prayer** - Dear Lord help me to understand the struggles in my life that are leaving me less than peaceful. Calm my troubled heart so that I may watch and listen for signs of your presence to bring me that calm that only you can give. Amen.



**Tuesday, December 12**

**Lorna Weber**

**Read Psalm 33:22**

How many times in one day do we hear or say the word “wait”? Wait for the traffic light to change to our favorite color green, so we can go, and quickly. To the child, unwilling or unable, to wait for the adult who just said “wait, I’ll just be a minute.” The list is long. Our patience is short or non-existent. Our everyday lives are just too busy.

But there is hope. Someone else has asked us to wait, to prepare to receive a gift. That’s good news! The gift is from God. We are assured the gift will arrive because God fulfills His promises. Celebrate each day as a sacred gift from God. Make time in your schedule to receive and enjoy God’s loving gift – a Savior! Each day is an adventure for a new beginning. Life may not always be as we planned, but it will be as God has planned. We will wait with faith and trust to receive the most precious gift ever given, the Christ child of the manger.

**Prayer** - All praise to you, loving God, the giver of every good and perfect gift. Slow us down, quiet our worries, make your way our way and give us patience in our waiting. In the name of our Lord. Amen.

**Read Proverbs 3: 5-6.**

A part of the human condition is that we believe we should be able to “fix” the things that go wrong in our lives. We forget that praying to God and asking for his help can often free our minds and let Him speak to us.

Two days before Christmas, 1818, in the small village of Oberndorf, a young pastor named Joseph Mohr was feeling frustrated. The church organ was out of order and could not be fixed in time for the Christmas Eve service. Father Mohr knew this would disappoint the congregation, so he tried to think of something special to do to make up for the mishap.

A new baby had been born to a family in his parish, so that afternoon he set out for their home to administer the traditional blessing. The joy of the family refreshed the Father for a short time, but on the journey home, his mind returned to his pressing problem. Suddenly, he stopped, awed by the beauty of his surroundings—the blanket of pure, white snow, the brilliant stars in the night sky—the complete solitude. “Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht”.....Silent Night, Holy Night. The words for a beautiful poem began to form in his mind and when he arrived at home, he quickly wrote them down.

The next day he showed the words to the church organist, Frank Gruber. Within a few hours, Gruber completed a melody set for two solo voices and a chorus, accompanied by a guitar. That evening at midnight mass, the most widely loved Christmas carol in the world was heard for the first time.

**Prayer** - Lord, help us face our disappointments and despair with the quiet calm of your voice. Lead us to solutions that help others as well as ourselves, and help us to honor you always. Amen.

**Thursday, December 14**

**Nancy Luley**

**Read Luke 2:4-7**

It has been almost 35 years since our first child, a son, was born on Christmas Eve. Benjamin's birth that day certainly gave me a new perspective of Mary's journey. I had not walked and ridden on a donkey for hours ahead of our baby's birth. I was not in a stable. I was not a teenager. I did not have to wrap our baby in whatever cloths I could find. I did not have to lay him in a manger so that I could rest. Yet these were the humble beginnings of our Lord and Savior. We so often take for granted how easy and comfortable our lives are. Every Christmas I reflect on how overwhelmed Mary and Joseph must have felt that night in the stable. They were not only first time parents; they were the worldly parents of the Son of God, a role they readily and willingly embraced.

God gave the world its greatest gift that first Christmas, His Son, who would someday suffer death on a cross to save humankind from its sins. John 3:16 reminds us that God's perfect gift came from His heart. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

The true meaning of Christmas is not wrapped in colorful paper and shiny ribbon. Rather, God's perfect gift was wrapped in cloths and laid in a manger among the animals in the stable.

**Prayer** - Dear God, help us to step away from the greed that drives our world and reach out to those who are not as fortunate as we are. Let us remember the selfless gift that you gave the world that first Christmas, and give us the strength to go out into the world and do your will. Amen.

**Friday, December 15**

**Lois Witmer**

**Read Colossians 3: 12-14.**

As we enter Advent we are waiting for the birth of Jesus. The world had been reading about the coming Messiah in the scriptures before the birth of Jesus. And now He has come, the word has become flesh and lives among us! We now know that Gods gift to us -- Jesus Christ -- exceeds all gifts.

Because of His gift of life to us we serve Him and others by showing compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. We should love all others for it binds everything, everyone, together in perfect harmony.

**Prayer** - We pray for guidance each day as we go out into the world to show love for each person we meet in our daily journeys. We are ever thankful for the gift of Jesus. Amen.

**Saturday, December 16**

**Diane Boone**

**Read Isaiah 30:18**

In these times of instant access and gratification, it is hard for people to wait.

Being tied up in traffic, standing in a long line at a checkout counter, wading through all the electronic prompts on a phone call before reaching a human to speak with.....these are just a few examples of the relatively unimportant situations that can test my patience.

But pondering on the patience God has to wait for me; to read scripture every day, to pray every day, to put others at the top of my "to-do" list instead of myself, to be more forgiving of others than I am of myself, to judge others less and the list goes on, helps me gain perspective. Why should I have expectations that waiting for answers or direction from God would entail any less patience from me? Why can't I be content to wait?

Maybe in my wait for God, God is refining my character or finding the right circumstances in which bigger and better things can be accomplished than if God had interceded at the moment I asked. Maybe God can be more gracious and more merciful with a response that happens later than earlier. And maybe, just maybe while I wait, I can become less self-centered, less prideful, more patient and more focused daily on God.

**Prayer** - Dear Heavenly and Gracious Father, help me be more patient in my waiting. Help me build the constant daily discipline of conversation with you and devotion to reading your Word. Strengthen me to persevere today and to delight in the wait for what lies ahead. Amen.

## **All Praise to Thee, Eternal God**

All praise to Thee, eternal God,  
Who, clothed in garb of flesh and blood,  
Dost take a manger for Thy throne,  
While worlds on worlds are Thine alone.  
Hallelujah!

Once did the skies before Thee bow;  
A virgin's arms contain Thee now,  
While angels, who in Thee rejoice,  
Now listen for Theine infant voice.  
Hallelujah!

A little Child, Thou art our Guest  
That weary ones in Thee may rest;  
Forlorn and lowly is Thy birth  
That we may rise to heaven from earth.  
Hallelujah!

Thou comest in the darksome night  
To make us children of the light,  
To make us in the realms divine,  
Like Thine own angels, round Thee shine.  
Hallelujah

All this for us Thy love hath done;  
By this to Thee our love is won;  
For this our joyful songs we raise  
And shout our tanks in ceaseless praise  
Hallelujah!

*This melody came from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The verse was translated from Latin into German and first appeared in 1370. Martin Luther is credited in writing verses 2-5 in 1523. It was published for the Christmas service that year, making it the first Christmas hymn of the Reformation. This hymn and its tune were used by Bach in his Choralkantate for Christmas Day.*

**Sunday, December 17**

**Seminarian Andrew Berdahl**

**Read Psalm 95:1**

During my senior year of college, my grandfather's cancer grew very aggressive. He would pass away three days after my graduation. The ensuing grief coupled with the logistical chaos of handling his affairs was difficult for my family. Simultaneously, I had been waiting for several months to get a straight answer from the National Guard as to what my training timeline would look like. It might have caused me to miss the fall semester of seminary and brought about a number of other uncertainties. There was an overwhelming sea of change coming my way. All of it at once felt like a punch right in the gut. I was certainly not the happiest guy in the world.

While I may not have been happy, I was joyful. This might sound contradictory but happiness is but a temporal feeling while joyfulness is a mindset. While there are going to be difficult times ahead, I rejoiced in knowing I had my faith to anchor me. I was so joyful because I had Jesus Christ to embrace and protect me. If Christ could calm a storm, certainly He could prevent me from feeling overburdened. Sorrows and heartbreak cannot and will not simply go away overnight but when I feel Christ's outstretched hand asking me to follow him, everything else seems so small in comparison. Christ's desire to lovingly lead us has helped me to keep everything in perspective but more importantly, it causes my heart to be utterly overwhelmed with sheer joy.

**Prayer** - God, we rejoice in your presence and it brings us comfort. May you continue to reveal yourself to us, in ways known and unknown, so that this wondrous joy remains forever in our hearts. Amen.

**Monday, December 18**

**Jill Lenig**

**Read Isaiah 11:6**

“And a child shall lead them” is a phrase I remember as I reflect on the past. So much of my life revolved around children. I watched my daughter grow into a strong independent woman and mother to my granddaughter. I pray she will also find the courage to resist temptations we all face in this crazy world today.

As a middle school teacher, I watched 12-13 year olds struggle to understand themselves and their place in society. I encouraged a group of girls to accompany me on weekly visits to a nursing home all school year. They loved talking and learning from the residents and visa versa. They formed very strong friendships which lasted for years after our year ended.

I don't know who benefitted more from this experience, but the hand of the Lord certainly was evident as the two generations played games, read books, took walks, acted out skits – together! I hope the visits translated into something positive later in their lives and they “paid it forward” in some way.

**Prayer** - Let us always remember that we all have something to offer, regardless of age. We need to listen and learn from each other. Help us to guide children to become responsible adults who are the role models for the next generation. In this chaotic world help us, also, to feel the kindness of strangers as well as friends along the way. Most of all, help us recognize the needs of others and give the gift of ourselves to help them find peace. Amen.



**Tuesday, December 19**

**Bruce Seagrist**

**Read Micah 7:7**

I enjoy the fast and furious rides at amusement parks. The faster the speed, the higher the drop, the bigger the loops, the better the ride. With that said, the biggest negative is waiting in line. And the older I get the more my patience is tested.

But waiting in line with family and friends makes it much easier. Waiting gives us time to talk, share experiences and stories as we stand in line for the next thrilling ride. Sharing the wait and sharing the anticipation makes the experience that much better.

As we prepare for the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus, waiting gives us the opportunity to pray, reflect on the true meaning of the season, and wait with joy for the coming of Jesus. May each of us share this wonderful gift with family and friends. And maybe, like the waiting in line for "the ride", sharing the wait and sharing the anticipation will make this Advent Season much more special.

So the next time you find yourself waiting in line for a roller coaster, look around. Take notice of all of God's children experiencing the same wait. And know that God is present as we all make our way down the road of life.

**Prayer** – May the Christmas morning make us happy to be thy children, and Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake. Amen. (Written by Robert Louis Stevenson)

**Read Psalm 33:20**

Wait! It seems throughout our lives we are told to wait. I remember waiting for dinner, for a family picnic and the end of a school year. Waiting for Christmas and Easter were hard as a child. My mother often said I was always in a hurry to get somewhere fast. I should stop wishing for time to fly by. There is something to be said about waiting and the journey to get where we are headed.

Growing up in a family that attended Church every week, I remember hearing that God had a plan for everyone of us. I wondered what God's plan was for me. I prayed to ask Him and waited and waited for his answer. I wished He would hurry up and tell me. I got a job, got married and had children whom I brought to church. I was still waiting for God to tell me his plan. There had to be something more that I was to do. One Sunday on the way into worship, a church member approached me with a comment that she was enjoying watching my faith journey evolve. WHAT! Here I was waiting for GOD to reveal his plan for me and he was already guiding my steps.

God had given me gifts to use and share with others. As I knit or crochet for shawl ministry and lead a Sunday school class, I realize that this is part of God's plan for me. I wonder what else God has planned for me. It can be difficult to wait as we often want to hurry up, to get to where we are going and find out what else God has in mind. I know he is not finished with me, so I wait and ask that we continue the journey together.

**Prayer** - Help us to wait when we should and let joy fill our hearts as we walk in Your ways along the journey for a deeper understanding of Your gracious will. Amen.

**Thursday, December 21**

**Mary Clay**

**Read Micah 7:7**

What this means to me is God will always know what is going on in our lives. When we pray to Him or need Him , He will hear us and will always be there for us no matter what is going on in our lives.

**Prayer** - We pray that everyone realizes that God pays attention to us and that He will always be there for us. Amen.

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**Friday, December 22**

**Joy Grant**

**Read Psalm 121:1**

I am not very good at waiting. However, I was an excellent waitress at a restaurant and customer service representative at JC Penney's as I worked my way through college. People are basically nice and my time working with them was rewarding. I was good at understanding how to deal with impatient folks. Not so good with my own impatience.

Growing up in a family of six with one bathroom, 3 other sisters, and shared bedrooms created "waiting" situations. Being number two in the line of succession with two younger siblings (one 11 months younger, the other two years younger) allowed me the freedom to fly under the radar so to say. Loving the outdoors, I was out in the woods playing with friends, fishing at the creek, riding my bike all over the neighborhood – life was good.

How the waiting game has changed in this world. Instant everything. We are down to a nanosecond. Our patience is nonexistent. We do not have to wait – just watch TV for one evening and you will know how quickly you can look, feel, and have everything you want. Instagram, instant hot chocolate, instant photos, instant meals. Is God instant? Well, yes, He is. God is just a prayer away.

I always had a feeling that God was with me, watching over me and that is a good feeling. Through Sunday School and confirmation that feeling was reinforced. Still, I needed a sign, a voice, a call, something concrete to assure me that God is here. Wait, wait, wait. I can't stand it. Right now, show me something, now. What is it that I am to do? How can I best use my talents to be helpful, to do Your will?

Not yet Joy, not yet. Reading all those Bible stories of God's people being patient, waiting for signs, help, anything. I understood their impatient, questioning attitude, and longing for God to be with them. God has a plan for us all. Have faith, and patience for His plan to be revealed. Now, God, now?? When I am ready Joy, when I am ready.

**Prayer** - God grant me patience in your time, not mine. Amen.

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**Saturday, December 23**

**Jean Brackbill**

**Read Psalm 46:10-11**

Christmas is a joyous time of year, and may spark cherished memories of past Christmases. Christmas catches us in various life seasons. We may deal with happy times or not so happy times. Experiences with health issues, the loss of a loved one, loneliness, or stressful/hectic schedules can be difficult.

I remember Christmases of my youth. Time was spent at church learning the Christmas story, decorating the church during the Hanging of the Greens, and participating in choir rehearsals for special worship services. The Service of the Tree of Carols involved the Primary, Junior, Senior, and Chancel Choirs comprised of individuals ranging from age 6 to 60 plus. Styrofoam ball ornaments were wrapped with a colorful ribbon on which was written the name of a Christmas carol or anthem. One by one, an ornament was held high as a member of the choir told a brief story of the origin or meaning of the carol or anthem. The ornament was placed on a Christmas tree before the choir sang the words of the carol or anthem. At the close of the service, the tree was fully decorated with the ornaments bearing the names all of the pieces of music sung during the service.

An Austrian Christmas carol and lullaby, "Still, Still, Still," was included in the service one year and part of the carol was sung in German. Various English translations of the carol exist and include phrases: Watch for the star and wait in the stillness, the angels are making beautiful music - celebrating the little child, and [God's] love is enormous. This Austrian carol can remind us to let this Christmas catch us in the stillness. Be still. Watch for the star. Hear the beautiful music. Wait for the coming of the Christ child. Know God's enormous love exists for all of his people.

**Prayer** - Heavenly Father, let me hear your words to be still and to know that you are God. Fill my heart with your presence and strength. As the world waits to hear the wondrous story and beautiful music of the miraculous birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, may I be reminded of your great love given to all people. I thank you that there is no human experience where your love cannot reach. I pray that you will open my heart to share that love with others. Amen.

## **To Shepherds as They Watched by Night**

To shepherds as they watched by night  
Appeared a host of angels bright;  
"Behold the tender Babe," they said,  
In yonder lowly manger laid.

"At Bethlehem, in David's town,  
As Micah did of old make known;  
Tis Jesus Christ, your Lord and King,  
Who doth to all salvation bring."

Oh, then rejoice that through His Son  
God is with sinners now at one;  
Made like yourselves of flesh and blood,  
Your brother is th'eternal God.

What harm can sin and death then do?  
The true God now abides with you.  
Let hell and Satan rage and chafe,  
Christ is your Brother – ye are safe.

Not one He will or can forsake  
Who Him his confidence doth make.  
Let all his wiles the Tempter try,  
You may his utmost pow'rs defy

Ye shall and must at last prevail;  
God's own ye are, ye cannot fail.  
To God forever sing your praise  
With joy and patience all your days.

*Luther wrote this hymn in 1543, based on Luke 2:10-11. This is a beautifully written Christmas hymn that clearly announces the purpose, means, and result of the birth of Jesus.*

**Sunday, December 24**

**Pastor Sigrid**

**Read Isaiah 9:6-7**

“Round yon virgin, mother and child, holy infant so tender and mild. Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.” If you close your eyes, can you picture the moment when we sing these words, quietly, in a darkened, candle-lit sanctuary? That moment of singing “Silent Night” is among the most treasured for many people each year. In a season of running and doing and hurrying, the singing of that carol is a time when we bask in peace and beauty. If only we could carry it with us all year!

Scripture promises that Jesus comes to us as the Prince of Peace. But even as Christians, our lives often feel so far from peaceful. I think we long for the peace we hear about in “Silent Night,” the peace of a newborn sleeping in his mother’s arms, all trusting and safe and calm. We can’t remove ourselves from the hustle and bustle of our life, where we have been called to serve God and our neighbor. But we can remember, even in the midst of the noise and clutter, that we are in fact children of our heavenly father, cradled in God’s loving arms. “Sleep in heavenly peace,” God sings to us, “for you are mine.”

**Prayer** - O Prince of Peace, this world longs for the peace you bring. Break us out of our busyness and anxiety to know deeply the peace that comes from being forgiven and treasured by you. Amen.

## **Come Worship With Us...**

### **Worship with Holy Communion**

8:00 & 10:30 AM Sundays

7:00 PM Wednesdays

### **Adult and Children's Sunday School**

9:15 AM Sundays

### **Christmas Eve**

9:00 AM - 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent Service with communion

6:00 PM – Family Service with communion

8:30 PM – Candlelight Service with communion

### **December 31**

9:15 AM - Service of Lessons and Carols

**Trindle Spring Lutheran Church**

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