

Christian Church in Ohio Advent Devotional Booklet 2021



IMAGINE
God's Love
REVEALED



Sunday, November 28th ~ First Day of Advent

Hope in the Midst of Despair

Please read Jeremiah 33:14-16

When we look at the state of our world today, what comes to the forefront is the immense chaos, division, restlessness, injustices, war and a world that seems to bring out the worse of humankind on a daily basis. It appears to be a world living in a state of despair, lacking all hope for a better future.

In the past 20 months, we have lived the reality of a world turned upside down. We have witnessed and experienced extreme economic and racial disparities, disparities that have existed in our country for decades alongside a pandemic coming to fruition. How does one feel safe and hopeful at a time when the level of our anxieties, fear and brokenness is at an all-time high?

As we look for answers and solutions, comes the realization that we need to be more consciously aware of how our lives and livelihood are and can be tremendously impacted by the actions of others and the conditions under which we live as community. How we exist together as community in a sense of safety requires giving attention to the hazards and conditions leading to physical, psychological or material harm within the environment in which we live. It provides all with a sense of hope for the future and focuses our attention on the health and well-being of all of God's creation. It is essential to be responsive to the needs in everyday life by individuals and communities and to assist in the realization of their aspirations. ¹⁶ *In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."* Jeremiah's words remind us of God at work in the world, even when we lose sight.

The text in Jeremiah 33 is part of what many identify as "The Book of Consolation", with chapter 33 focusing on the hope that God brings in the midst of troubled times and unfaithfulness of the people. In the text, Jeremiah speaks not only of hope but also to the day there will be deliverance for Judah and safety for Jerusalem. And how will this come about? It will be brought about by the hand of God through a descendant of David who will execute the 'justice and righteousness' that had been expected of the kings all along. This is the hope fulfilled through God's love for God's people.

"The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." (Jer. 33:14-15)

So, if we can just hold on a little longer our safety net will come. Hold on and imagine God's love revealed. Love that we imagined when we chose to follow him. Love that we imagine when we fellowship and retreat with one another. Love revealed when the early church found ways to break down racial, political and economic barriers to form a true community. Love revealed when Mary gave birth to one who embodied God the father and brought neighbors, strangers, and those afar together.

Advent is not just about something *in the future*. It is as much about the reform of our present ways: the ways we govern ourselves, share wealth and responsibility, organize our communal life, and prepare ourselves for the future.

This season I pray you continue to imagine God's love revealed in the everyday things of life enabling each of us to play an active role in transforming the world as a witness of God's love.

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Monday, November 29th

This devotion is the written accompaniment to a video Advent message that can be viewed on our YouTube Channel by clicking [HERE](#).

90 1-2 God, it seems you've been our home forever; long before the mountains were born, Long before you brought earth itself to birth, from "once upon a time" to "kingdom come"—you are God. 3-11 So don't return us to mud, saying, "Back to where you came from!" Patience! You've got all the time in the world—whether a thousand years or a day, it's all the same to you. Are we no more to you than a wispy dream, no more than a blade of grass That springs up gloriously with the rising sun and is cut down without a second thought? Your anger is far and away too much for us; we're at the end of our rope. You keep track of all our sins; every misdeed since we were children is entered in your books. All we can remember is that frown on your face. Is that all we're ever going to get? We live for seventy years or so (with luck we might make it to eighty), And what do we have to show for it? Trouble. Toil and trouble and a marker in the graveyard. Who can make sense of such rage, such anger against the very ones who fear you?



12-17 Oh! Teach us to live well! Teach us to live wisely and well! Come back, God—how long do we have to wait?— and treat your servants with kindness for a change. Surprise us with love at daybreak; then we'll skip and dance all the day long. Make up for the bad times with some good times; we've seen enough evil to last a lifetime. Let your servants see what you're best at— the ways you rule and bless your children. And let the loveliness of our Lord, our God, rest on us, confirming the work that we do. Oh, yes. Affirm the work that we do!

This Psalm is said to have been a song written by Moses. There probably has never been anyone who understood the power of God and the patience of God better than did Moses. He watched as he grew weary and often frustrated with his fellow people for not following God and being faithful to him. While at times God would punish, he often was patient and longsuffering with them. God is patient because he loves us but also because he does not count time the way we do. He is never rushed or in a hurry as we seem to be so often.

When we grasp the concept that God is beyond our limitations, it helps us have the reverence we should have for him. He is not bound by what we call impossible or by time constraints as we know them. Our lives are measured by minutes, days or years. When God created all things, he announced that the morning and the evening were the first day and then the second and so on. He gave us the measures of time but as part of the creation he is not bound by them.

What a blessing this is! God is patient toward us. While we may want to give up on ourselves or others, God is willing to give us time to get things right in our lives so we can be in fellowship with him. As with so many things, we are not to take undue advantage of his patience but O how we need it as we seek to be like him.

Use this advent season to take time to reflect, and see the Love of God revealed to you. This is such a crazy time in our culture, sometimes we may completely miss the love of God revealed to us. Take your time today, to reflect on how God's love has been revealed to you. If we can find God's love in our lives we can strive to be better stewards of the gift God has given us. If we see God's love, and share God's love in our lives, we will surely be furthering the kingdom of God.

Rev. Connor L. Thompson
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Tuesday, November 30th

Can You Imagine a King?

During this Advent season, it allows me an opportunity to reflect and meditate on the hymns of the church. As a minister of the gospel, we represent Christ, to a dying world. But what does that look like in this season of a pandemic? What does it look like in time as this when some may not think that we need a Savior.

The scripture God has encouraged me is Luke 2:34; *"This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel."*

My song of encouragement for today is: **"What Child is This?"**

Song lyrics state:

What child is this, who, laid to rest

On Mary's lap is sleeping?

Whom angels greet with anthems sweet

While shepherds watch are keeping

This, this is Christ the King

Whom shepherds guard and angels sing

Haste, haste to bring him laud, The Babe, the Son of Mary

When I listen to the music it makes me imagine and ponder what a King looks like. Can you imagine the royalty and the expectation of the arrival of a King? Some people might not have been looking for him in a high plush palace with many rooms and servants to take care of him.

But as the narrative reminds us in the gospels is that Jesus was born in a lowly manger and was taken care of by the animals and was tended to by the shepherds in the field. He had the best choir or praise team with the angels rejoicing. As a baby he was found wrapped in swaddling clothing with his parents, Mary and Joseph, and he was lying in a manger. During the Advent season, I am reminded that Jesus was born to die for our salvation, and for that I still stand in awe.

Here we are in 2021, can we imagine, "What Child is This? This child was born to heal the broken hearted and save the world. As believers we are encouraged to share his love with those that need to know His love.

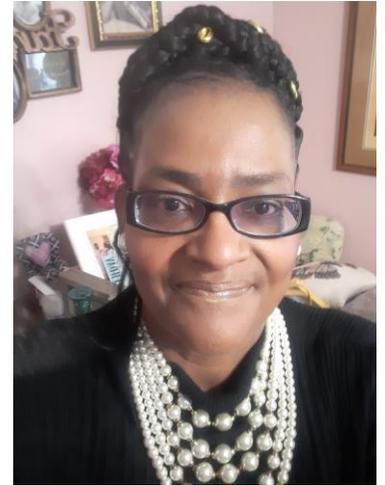
Let us continue to share the true meaning of hope, peace, joy and love during this Advent season. Waiting for the arrival of these attributes are shown in humility in sharing God's love. As believers, we have to activate our faith to show love to God's people. In my personal life, I am a bi-vocational pastor. I work full-time with homeless people and also minister the gospel. I have the unique joy to share the everyday concerns of people who sometimes can be challenged because of the issues of life due to poverty, drug addiction and mental health issues. God continues to reveal to me how to share the love of God. I am motivated by the song lyrics that state: Haste, haste (which means excessive speed or urgency of movement of action, hurry), which excites me to do it now. During this Advent, right now focus on how can show the humility of Christ with more hope, peace, joy and love? God will reveal to you during this Advent season areas of our life that we can practice hospitality to show God's love.

Throughout this pandemic, we have been blessed by God's protection and love. Let us continue to honor the Baby Jesus, as a King of King, and a Lord of Lords. Let us continue to meditate on His goodness and prepare to celebrate this Christmas morning that This! This is Christ the King, Whom shepherds guard and angels sing, Haste, haste to bring Him laud, The Babe, The Son of Mary."

Rev. Denise Cunningham-Doggett

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Wednesday, December 1st

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

~ II Corinthians 5:17 (NRSV)

It's getting to be an old person thing, like liniment, or doilies on the back of the upholstered chair, or a four legged cane.

It's having an unbent paper clip somewhere in a desk drawer, or around your personal work station. They used to call it a "hard reboot," and you would only do it as a last resort, when the computer was locked up and unresponsive. Poke that paper clip end into a small hole, narrow for your protection, but with a switch at the bottom you could press with your high tech paper clip prong and the whole computer or laptop went "zzzzthunk."

Now we have "press on/off for 30 seconds" or "press power and home buttons at the same time" or other means to do a hard reboot, a shutoff that usually means nothing since you last intentionally saved anything gets saved. Sometimes on a hard reboot you lose something that is a real loss (like the last Advent devotional section you wrote), and other times it's the best way forward.

If we have a workplace IT issue, or have to call the company ("please hold, your call is very important to us") the least favorite thing we always hear first is "have you shut everything down and restarted?" along with the ever popular "is the power cord connected and the device turned on?"

Yet who among us has not been in that spot, irritated at being asked the obvious, and then found . . . oh. It wasn't plugged in. The switch was in the off position as we tried to start at the keyboard. We had not, in fact, done the hard reboot sometimes an update or refresh will require.

Advent is an opportunity to run a system diagnostic, to take care of the obvious, to clear the fields and finish the updates, and yes, for a fresh start. We talk this way about the start of a calendar year, but honestly, between post-Christmas events and New Year festivities (festive or not!), it can be a rough time to reassess, restart, relaunch, renew.

In preparing for the coming of the Christ, the birth of the infant Jesus and the arrival in glory of a returning Messiah, in following the steps of Advent as prescribed in the Christian calendar, we all are given a chance to reboot. Forget resolutions or January rituals, but let Advent start a new year in us, with Christmas yet to come our day to begin afresh. Just make sure you're plugged in.

Prayer: Waiting and watching with you, O God, as time makes its way around us and eternity finds a place within us, may we anticipate our new life in Christ Jesus, promised and yet also already at work in us. Amen!

Thursday, December 2nd

The Gift of Presence

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” - Matthew 1:23

This year our family is going to travel to Indiana/Illinois the day after Christmas to spend a week with my parents and my sister's family. It will be the first time since before the pandemic that we will all be together and the first time the cousins have been together in over 2 years. Hands down it is the Christmas present we are looking forward to more than any other! All of us, parents and children. Perhaps it is because our children are getting older, or perhaps it is because after two years of separation and hardship we have a deeper appreciation for the importance of simply **being together**. The texts and phone calls and video chats have been a lifeline to be sure; but nothing can replace the comfort of a hug, the joy of sharing a meal around the same table, and talks and laughs late into the night.

God knows well our deep longing for connection and togetherness. So much so that God chose to leave heaven and to take on human flesh. In Jesus Christ God entered into our existence so that we might come to understand the extent of God's love for us. A love not only willing to die for us, but a love eager to **live with** us. To walk beside us along dusty roads, to sit in the boat with us when the waves crash around us, to touch our wounds, to look in our eyes, to speak our name. Jesus is fully present with us as we drive to work, change diapers, lay awake worrying at night, work on the car, sit in the hospital, kiss our spouse or prepare our morning coffee. There is no part of life too mundane or too messy for Jesus. After all, you can't get much messier or more mundane than a cattle stall and a manger.

This Advent and Christmas let us marvel at the gift of Jesus Christ.

The gift of God's presence.

Emmanuel

“God is **with us**”

Rev. Sarah West, Sr. Pastor
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Friday, December 3rd

“What marvelous love [God] has extended to us! Just look at it – we’re called children of God! That’s who we really are.”

1 John 3:1 (The Message translation)

“Imagine God’s Love Revealed” – The theme for this year’s advent devotional book from the Ohio Region of the Christian Church. I toss that four-word phrase around in my mind, chew on each word, savor the flavor of the four-word combo. I feel the sweet taste of it and smell its pleasant aroma. Imagine-God’s-Love-Revealed is cooking in my kitchen right now. I am cooking up a big batch of it as I imagine God’s love made known. Even an extra big batch so that I can share it with a hungry world.

The recipe card I use contains the simple heading, “God’s Love Revealed”, and the ingredients that follow, although sometimes difficult to find, are not all that rare when one knows where to look. Needed is a teaspoon of each of these essential ingredients: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness. Mix all ingredients together and stir gently for one imagining minute with your best Holy Spirit Spoon.

To those who would say “God’s love is limited and imagining it revealed is an exercise in futility”, they obviously haven’t tasted this recipe, haven’t savored its flavor, or sipped its sweetness. That is why it is so important for all the God-squad imaginative cooks to heed the call, report for duty, and head to the kitchen right now. Start stirring up abundant batches of “God’s Love Revealed” and share those batches with all who hunger for just such a meal! May it be so this Advent season and in all seasons of all the years yet to come.

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Saturday, December 4th and Sunday, December 5th

This devotion is the written accompaniment to a video Advent message that can be viewed on our YouTube Channel by clicking [HERE](#).

Shine The Light!

John may be taking us back to the beginning of creation. Genesis 1:1-2 tells us: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. John develops the theme throughout his gospel of light and darkness. Light brings us comfort. Knowing that those who hear about him and believe in him don't have to walk in darkness any longer. LOOK AT THE SECOND PART OF THE VERSE: the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. This is an awesome truth! God brings great peace to you for no matter where you are, no matter what circumstance faces you, God's Spirit is present hovering over the waters.

We need go no further than Genesis 1:3-4 to see this truth. God said (the action of Christ in creation) let there be light and there was light. And God saw the light that it was good. Light was the thing Christ brought forth and good was the attribute to that light.

Have you ever pondered how powerful light is? When one is in the dark, we are desperately seeking any light for guidance to safety. Children sometimes need a night light for comfort, or direction to the bathroom at night. I can tell you, being at Camp Christian at dark when there is very little lighting is a little scary. Darkness makes us uncomfortable, we connect darkness to bad things. Darkness also lacks the ability to physically overcome light. Remember this the next time a storm hits and the lights go and you turn on a flashlight. Light overcomes darkness. Darkness cannot conquer light. Light will always prevail over darkness. No matter how dark your situation, the light of Christ will overcome it and allow peace and love to reign in your heart.

God sent his son Jesus, He was born of flesh and blood, and was flesh and blood just like you and me. We as Christians confess that he is the Light of the world. His love for us no matter who we are, he wants to shine in our life. He wants to provide us with an everlasting hope, peace, joy and love. But in the church we also have a light too. God has provided us resources to do so. Jesus as our guide on earth shines his light every day. We have been created to be His light now. You must know the old song, "This little of mine, I'm gonna let it shine!" It might be one little light but when we put all our lights together, it's pretty bright. Imagine what we can do together that you and I can shine into our world of darkness. The difference we can make. Are you willing? Wherever you go, take that light of Christ, and we let it Shine because when we do we bring hope to a dark world. Amen Church.

Bruce Bowerman-Jett
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Monday, December 6th

...When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

~ Matthew 6:3-4 (NRSV)

Myra was a Greek city on the southern coast of what's now Turkey, in which it's a small town called Demre. But as part of Lycian Greece, it was an outpost of Grecian culture, a seaport with cosmopolitan connections, and in the early Fourth Century the Christian community of Myra had its own bishop, a fellow named Nicholas.

There's a long journey from Nicholas of Myra to Santa Claus, and some might even argue there's no real connection anymore between the two. This is where the wider Christian tradition of acknowledging saints has been less accepted in more austere branches of our faith community, because the historic person and the legends that can entwine their image can in truth end up at some distance from each other.

Saint Nicholas is honored in the ancient Christian calendar on December 6, traditionally the date of his passing in the year 343. The week between St. Nicholas's Day and St. Lucy's on the 13th is where many northern European traditions of trees and candles and wreaths and gifts have their actual roots, grafted onto the celebration of the birth of Jesus a little later in the month.

December 6 as a time for gift giving has the longest heritage, although it might be worth recalling that for many centuries while there were gifts in the Advent season, they were no more than could be stuffed into a stocking or stuck in a shoe left at a child's bedroom door. This would seem to leave out ponies and bicycles and game consoles, let alone automobiles with giant red bows.

But the idea of a secretly given gift, without the giver seeking credit for having left it, has a very long and honorable heritage going back at least to Nicholas himself. The legends go back nearly to his era, that the bishop of Myra was, as a good Christian pastor would be, attentive to the hurts and needs of the congregation. Nicholas knew of certain challenges faced by various families in his parish, and found a way to make the practical side of a solution (gold coins, or a ransom in a pouch, or some other tangible way to pay off a debt) show up in their house. He never climbed down a chimney in those first stories out of Myra, but sometimes stockings or shoes by a fireplace were the receptacle of the needed gold bags.

The semi-ironic point of them all was that the receivers didn't know who their benefactor was, though if that really was the case, why do we know it was Bishop Nick here some seventeen centuries later? Ah, saints stories. Like a modern superhero movie, you may not want to pick at the details too closely, let alone the physics. The through-line of the story is that there was a family in need, a church ready to respond, and a gift given not to receive thanks in return, but to honor Jesus's call to love one another.

And isn't the clear origin of the impulse of Saint Nicholas that caution from Christ in the Sermon on the Mount: that in giving gifts to aid and uplift others, don't tell people. Don't put your name on a plaque. Don't make a big deal about it to others. In fact, don't even let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. A warning I read this way: when you give a gift? Give, and let it go. If you give something to someone, and you find yourself worrying about their reaction, their response, how thankful they are or whether it's getting used the way you think it should? You need to forget about it. That's the left side of your brain knowing too much about what the right half got going on. Drop it.

Leaving aside the puzzle of how we know, but letting it be one of those artistic license moments, Bishop Nicholas in helping his community members was truly a Secret Santa. That was clearly his intention, and that seems to be a scriptural intention, too. May all our giving and sharing and helping this Advent be done in that same spirit.

Prayer: God of grace, giver of every good and perfect gift, help us to give freely, to receive thankfully, and to share in the joys of this season as people of grace, a family of faith, with a witness to the world. Amen!

[Jeff Gill is a writer, storyteller, and preacher living in Granville, Ohio; his email is knapsack77@gmail.com but he's fairly slow about replying, so please be patient.]

Tuesday, December 7th

Today's Advent Devotional is a musical meditation from the Rev. David Long-Higgins. The video can be viewed by clicking [HERE](#).

The song is the carol "In the Bleak Midwinter" from the poem of the same name written by Christina Rossetti. The musical arrangement was written by Gustav Holst.

Please reflect on the words:

In the bleak mid-winter
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter
Long ago.

Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him
Nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign:
In the bleak mid-winter
A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty,
Jesus Christ.

Enough for Him, whom cherubim
Worship night and day,
A breastful of milk
And a mangerful of hay;
Enough for Him, whom angels
Fall down before,
The ox and ass and camel
Which adore.

Angels and archangels
May have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim
Thronged the air,
But only His mother
In her maiden bliss,
Worshipped the Beloved
With a kiss.

What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb,
If I were a wise man
I would do my part,
Yet what I can I give Him,
Give my heart.

Video from
David Long-Higgins
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Wednesday, December 8th

Please read Isaiah 6:1-13

Will we be among the lucky ones who actually see the Christchild this Christmas?

Isaiah was like us—a man of unclean lips living among others just like us—and yet he saw the King, the Lord of Hosts.

That gives us hope as we approach another Christmas season. Even the most blind among us can hope to somehow come into the presence of the most high as we eagerly await the Christ event. Just as Isaiah received a miracle of forgiveness and commission, so can we be touched by god's grace and mercy through our faithful anticipation. It will be only through our intentional expectation that our eyes will be opened and our hearts attuned to the divine intervention of God into History.

We're blinded by what we already know will happen. The excitement is gone. Our annual trip to the manger doesn't fill us with the awe as it once did.

But Isaiah has a new word for us. He doesn't say "Come to the manger and see", he says "I have heard a call from the Lord and I answered".

Will we hear that call amidst all the trappings of cattle stalls, swaddling clothes, and bowing shepherds?

Yes, we wait, but we wait already in the presence of our Lord who has come and who is to come.

Prayer

Lord of Hosts, may we hear your call to us today in the midst of the angel songs as well as in the commercial noises of the season. In the name of He who comes,
Amen.

*In memory of Rev. Dixie French, who wrote this devotion in 2008.
1935~2021*

Thursday, December 9th

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage.
~ Matthew 2:11 (NRSV)

Advent and the magi have an uneasy relationship, especially for liturgical purists who might even ask that they and their camels stay out of the manger scene until Epiphany.

Yet in the melange of nativity tales that makes up most of our Advent observances, they tend to sneak in as pageant members wearing cardboard crowns, cut-out figures in plywood and paint on the church lawn, or figurines in our crèche sets.

A friend of mine likes to celebrate the day after Thanksgiving as Nativity Day, hauling out of storage a vast collection of manger scenes from around the world. (I'm happy to just enjoy the pictures online — I don't have to dust those.) They are an art form, and an act of worship: but I repeat myself.

To look at a wide variety of forms and cultures and means presenting the nativity story in three dimensions can be revelatory in a New Testament, gospel oriented sense. You see how the mystery of "God-with-us," Emmanu-el, is re-presented by different societies and artistic media. I'll admit to having an olive wood manger scene carved simply and quickly by Palestinians in Bethlehem, who were delighted I wanted to visit their workshop and not just buy and run. Looking at that set when I get it out, I remember the sheen of the steel tools and drills on the bench, the scent of the milled wood, the crunch of sawdust everywhere, and the smiles and kind words shared that day, along with the baby Jesus who brought us together.

There's wrapped carefully a nativity in a box at home which was a set of Italian rubber figures, ethnically diverse kings and Renaissance shepherds, bought by my mother at Western Auto in a small town as a child. They are special, but so also is the stable wood. It was made by my grandfather out of wood from the old family home after it had been demolished. The sheep and I know that the donkey and ox have to go just so, or they won't stand up, on either side of Mary and the baby.

Then a larger mantelpiece set of ceramic, a commercially molded collection but painted and fired by my great-aunts, a team effort and one of their last, as eyesight and coordination were growing weaker. They were proud of their gift, though it took the last of their energies that winter long ago. I see the odd squiggles and misplaced facial features as I get it out, and they make me love it all the more. Love overcame perfectionism in that last craft project, and there's a lesson Joseph nods his head at, stiffly.

In every manger scene, each crèche display, all our plastic or blown glass stables, we pay homage to love and hope and promise and fulfillment. May your image of Christmas to come illustrate the Advent you intend to experience.

Prayer: God of shepherds, angels, camels and oxen, mothers and fathers and shirttail relations, may we see ourselves standing somewhere in any manger scene we view, and know we have someone worthy of homage opening the way ahead for us. Amen!

Friday, December 10th

This devotion is the written accompaniment to a video Advent message that can be viewed on our YouTube Channel by clicking [HERE](#).

Today with a message for December 10th. We are coming near the halfway point of Advent with a thought and a message from the scripture today or something for our minds to be thoughtful of. I'm reading from 2nd Corinthians chapter 9, so I invite you to hear these words from The New International Version.

“There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the Lord’s people. For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action. But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to say anything about you—would be ashamed of having been so confident. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: “They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.”

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”

I only get four minutes or so and already two and a half minutes in just reading the scripture today. The brief version is that Paul was writing to the church in Corinth to remind them of an offering that was needed for the church. The church had already promised to give that offering but he was sending some people in advance to remind them of that offering that they have the opportunity to give graciously. That's probably one of the most challenging things at times it is giving graciously not with the sense of obligation but as has Paul would say a God loves a cheerful giver. Sometimes we disguise that cheerfulness to hide things like pride or arrogance, “look at how much I'm giving” and sometimes we use it to get down on other people, “you should you should be giving with a cheerful heart!” But there's so much more than that and I think one of the key passages in this is actually verse 11: “You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”

Continued on the next page

Friday, December 10th continued

As we think about that and our spiritual life and our walk with Jesus Christ, God's grace and God's love in us was meant to be a gift beyond measure. The kind of gift in this generosity reflects and God's incredible and infinite love for each and every one of us. And in the world that we live in today. I am a firm believer that the world is desperate for a church, for Christians who believe in a God of infinite love and are our generous with that love with the world.

Now Paul's writing about this church in Corinth, this body of Christ, he's writing to people to care for other people to the gift of money, but I think in our world today is so much more than money it's the love that moves us to do things like share with generosity; to have compassion on others. In a world that is broken and divided seemingly on every edge, the world is desperate for people of faith who are willing to hear God's call on their life based in the invitation of Jesus Christ. It is an invitation so deeply sourced in love; an invitation which we're about to celebrate in just a few short weeks in Christmas. Its an invitation of a God who loves us so much that his own Son took on the vulnerable form of a child that he might live into our world and love into our world.

As Disciples of Christ we claim an identity statement that states: "we are movement for wholeness in a fragmented world." I believe that that movement starts in us, it starts with love and it starts with the God of infinite love pouring into us so that we may be generous and compassionate on every front. Its time to answer the call. The world needs us.

Allow me to offer a quick prayer blessing:

Gracious and Almighty God send us to be your people, but do not send us ill equipped. Send us filled to overflowing with love that we may truly be your children sharing the infinite bounties of your generosity and Grace with the world, in your Holy name we pray, Amen.

Submitted in grace,

Rev. Timothy McCollum

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Saturday, December 11th and Sunday, December 12th

Is the Boy Safe: Re-imagining the Advent Season

Matthew 2:13

Hello, Christian Church in Ohio and New Regional Minister and President, Rev. Allan Harris.

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him."

As a Pastor, Advent invites reflection on the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into the Roman Empire, where Joseph and Mary lived under Roman colonial rule.

From early childhood memories of Sunday School, Sermons, and Bible Studies about the arrival of a child named Jesus, in a manger in Bethlehem, is the tension between Herod's mighty power to seek and destroy the baby Jesus and the birth of God's love revealed through the Christ child, Jesus, Immanuel, God with Us!

The question that emerged was, Is the Boy Safe?

Similar to Counter Intelligence Measures to never see a Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr grow up to counter the racism of the U.S. Empire, the U.S. Government searched for Black children to destroy.

The Safe Streets Act of June 1968, just two months after the assassination of our beloved leader Dr. King, President Lyndon Bain Johnson, signed legislation into law to criminalize Black Neighborhoods.

Since 1968, the Safe Streets Act has provided approximately \$4 billion to state and local Law Enforcement agencies. The Fiscal Year 1976 funding level is nearly \$810.7 million. Yet, these monies account for about 5 percent of total direct state and local expenditures for criminal justice purposes.¹

These dollars created Law Enforcement programs operating under the innocuous title "*safer streets*" in every major city in the country. Including Atlanta, GA, where Dr. King came into the world as a little boy.

Remember the little boy, Tamir Rice, 12 years old, killed by Cleveland police in less than 5 seconds of engaging him in 2014. Perhaps the language *Safer Streets* is foreign, but Donald Trump's *Operation Legend* resulted in over 120 felony arrests in Cleveland, OH, during the George Floyd uprising in the summer of 2020.²

The question agitates us this Advent season, is the boy safe? When Black children are born, are they safe? Is there a resounding Yes? If not, beloved, something is wrong. We need an Advent where the experience of God's Love is for everyone, and we can celebrate not only in the Church but in the community.

¹ John L. Carney, "The National Criminal Justice Reference Service," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 1, no. 4 (December 1976): 353–57, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0047-2352\(73\)90038-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/0047-2352(73)90038-x).

² Julia Bingel, "122 People Charged with Federal Crimes in Cleveland since Operation Legend Started in July," <https://www.cleveland19.com>, December 28, 2020, <https://www.cleveland19.com/2020/12/28/people-charged-with-federal-crimes-cleveland-since-operation-legend-started-july/>.

Saturday, December 11th and Sunday, December 12th continued

The wider non-black population that calls out violent crime in the Black community as a counter-message to folks saying Black Lives Matter emerges from 1968 because it reinforces the racist intentions of the Safer Streets Act. At the same time, it ignores the racism and harms coming from white neighborhoods, as in Law enforcement institutions. The emergence of racist law enforcement policies long ago or as early as 1994, Bill Clinton's Crime Bill,³ are carried out by present-day folks with no understanding of what they are enforcing.

Jesus was not supposed to be here. Jesus was not supposed to make it. Jesus was never safe, hence Calvary. However, can we imagine an advent of safety? Ideally, there should be no opposition to the birth of God's love, especially law enforcement policies, period. Or labels such as thug and violent neighborhoods. Those narratives are the foundation of the penal system that locks up little Black children. Can we imagine the coming of Christ where God's Love does not filter through state violence? Or dangerous treks of immigration to Egypt (you know, the place of Hebrew enslavement)? Or counterintelligence measures where law enforcement programs mislead through innocuous titles? Or, cover up the true nature of state-sanctioned violence like the war on drugs that produced mass incarceration of Black and Brown folks into prisons and solitary confinement in the United States?

Beloved people of God, is the boy safe? Can we re-imagine safety? Yes, people of God, Yes, We Can!

When we re-imagine safety for children to be born without the threat of state violence, we can look at Issue 24 in Cleveland, OH, where families of those who lost their loved ones to Police involved-Murder can hold law enforcement accountable through a permanent civilian review board with subpoena power and community centered leadership.⁴

When we re-imagine safety, we do not wait for the birth of God's Love; we experience it by building out the system God wants for all of us! Love! Care! Treatment! Needs-based!

God's Word for the People of God!

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³ Congress.gov. "Text - H.R.3355 - 103rd Congress (1993-1994): Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994." September 13, 1994. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/103rd-congress/house-bill/3355/text>.

⁴ Marisa Saenz Hope Sloop, "Issue 24, Controversial Cleveland Police Reform Ballot Initiative, Passes," wkyc.com, 2021, <https://www.wkyc.com/article/news/local/cleveland/issue-24-cleveland-police-reform-initiative-passes/95-dee2f979-06a1-4b14-b1b0-8185545e18ba>.

Monday, December 13th

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

~ James 1:17 (NRSV)

Before the reforms of the Western calendar, December 13 was effectively the winter solstice date, the shortest day and longest night of the year.

It was also the feast of Sancta Lucia, St. Lucy's Day, and the connections of "lux" or light with Lucia meant that from Sicily to Sweden, in early Europe the celebration of this date meant folk traditions to ask for vision, light, and the rebirth of the daytime hours which would become visibly longer about December 25th, at Christmas.

We have other ways to mark the month and the days, and light switches to banish the gloom of evening coming shortly after lunchtime, but for all our modern innovations, we still seek vision. To see, and see clearly.

James speaks in his letter about light from above; Alexander Campbell cited this verse to explain his windowless study with a six-sided cupola allowing only "light from above." The message of James is that every self-giving act, every perfect gift, brings us something of God, of the divine intention, into our everyday life.

St. Lucy in her martyr's tale from the third century tells us about a young woman who chooses to see God's love as the most important love in her life; there are many myths about her, all of them eloquent (and some creepy), but I most like the stories that talk about how she could not be moved, even by a team of oxen. She was barely more than a little girl in the midst of the Roman Empire at its height, but they could not move her. God and the love of charity and chastity and compassion came first, and not wild horses or well trained draft animals could move her. She could not be moved.

In Advent, we look for the light of God to grow on us and around us, and we pray that when God's anointed comes to lead us, that we will follow, that we will not be moved from that faithfulness. Advent is about the promise God has given, again and again, to offer guidance when we need it, to lead us for a season, to transform us for eternity. Lucy heard and saw and believed that promise, which gave her enough light to follow step by step. On St. Lucy's Day, we can remember that witness, her martyrdom, as a light for us which "comes from above."

As saint's tales do, from St. Nicholas to Sancta Lucia, her image and story becomes in the north of Europe a procession of young women walking slowly, deliberately, with a crowning wreath studded with lit candles, avatars of a coming dawn made real on the "longest night" as Dec. 13 once was in Sweden. Those illuminated acolytes cast flickering shadows on the snow, a tribute to a young woman who likely never saw snow in her life.

The Christian journey, the story within the story of Advent, is one where we find ourselves made one family, siblings of the Christ, children of the Most High, alongside of Sicilian princesses and Scandinavian children. We are ancient modern people, brought together from the east to the west, the arctic to the antarctic, from Romans to Americans, empires lost and rising and falling again, but all made one in a redeemed and resurrected hope.

May we all find light from above that illumines our inmost thoughts, our late night reflections, well before the reassurance of the dawn a light that comes from above but shines out within. Sancta Lucia, shine your light upon us!

And may we remember that all light comes from above, from God.

Prayer: Illumine Thou our hearts, O God, and shine not only on us, but through us, that we might show a light which helps others find a path that leads towards your love. Amen!

[Jeff Gill is a writer, storyteller, and preacher living in Granville, Ohio; his email is knapsack77@gmail.com but he's fairly slow about replying, so please be patient.]

Tuesday, December 14th

This devotion is the written accompaniment to a video Advent message that can be viewed on our YouTube Channel by clicking [HERE](#).

Isaiah 11:6-9

*The wolf shall live with the lamb,
The leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.*

*The cow and the bear shall graze,
Their young shall lie down together;
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
And the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
They will not hurt or destroy
On all my holy mountain;
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
As the waters cover the sea.*



It's December 14 -- our son and daughter-in-law's 9th wedding anniversary. Through the gifts of technology and a November deadline for this devotional, we're with them in Seattle in their home that is a blaring cacophony of the sounds of a baby and a 3 year old – sounds that bring such joy to their grandparents' ears!

December 14 brings another memory to mind, for it's also the 9th anniversary of the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary. What began as an ordinary Friday morning changed the lives of the entire town of Newtown, CT, most especially the families of the 20 first-graders who were killed that day. It could have been a day that changed the trajectory of gun violence in our country. *Sadly, it did not.* But I changed. I literally tore up the sermon I was going to preach that Sunday, deciding that no longer was it enough to offer *thoughts and prayers* for the victims. It was time for those thoughts and prayers to lead to action.

It was then that the organization, God Before Guns, was birthed. We said: *Enough. Not One More.* Sadly, it wasn't enough and so today, God Before Guns is still hard at the work of ending gun violence deaths— 109 people die every single day in our country and double that number are injured. The numbers have only increased during the Pandemic.

The numbers are so staggering that many people believe that there's nothing that can be done. That it's too late. There are just too many guns. Our country's leaders are unwilling to offer anything other than their thoughts and prayers. So many times, those words said without any resulting change. So many times, that those three words have become a sick joke. The Urban Dictionary *says thoughts and prayers are an expression of indifference to tragedy intended to be seen as empathetic. Stop praying. Do something!*

I, too, have responded in anger to those 3 words. But my more reasoned response is this. It's not an *Either-or/Pray or Do Something*. No follower of Jesus can accept that the time for prayer has ended.

Continued on the next page

Tuesday, December 14th continued

Recently, I recorded an interview with a young woman who is a survivor of gun violence and still dealing with daily limitations from her injuries from a shooting at her workplace 8 years ago. Taylor Schumann is a lifelong Christian who grew up in gun culture in the south and now has written a book titled, When Thoughts and Prayers Aren't Enough. Schumann says *I have a complicated relationship with thoughts and prayers* and writes:

*I believe in the power of prayer. I believe in praying for others and I am thankful every day for the people who have and continue to pray for me. Every time I see a shooting on the news, I pause to pray, every time. ... It's not the thoughts and prayers I'm tired of. It's pretending the thoughts and prayers are all we have to do and all we have to offer. ... I ask all of us to imagine a world where we lay down the weapons of this world and try out the ways of Jesus for a change. The worst that would happen? We end up more like him and less like this world.*⁵

I asked Taylor what sort of world she wanted for her 3-year-old son, Henry. She answered without hesitation, a world where *...kids go to school and they all come home*. She says this with her distracting, adorable, precious child climbing on the back of her shoulders.⁶

Today is Dec 14 and the devotional is from Isaiah 11 who describes a world in which: *The wolf shall live with the lamb, ...and a little child shall lead them*.

A world in which God's love is revealed. May our thoughts and prayers lead us to what we can do to help build such a world. Amen.

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⁵ Schumann, Taylor. *When Thoughts and Prayers Aren't Enough: A Shooting Survivor's Journey into the Realities of Gun Violence*, 2021. Intervarsity Press. Pg. 202.

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OABtDRUIZ6o>. The portion I reference comes in the final 2 minutes of the interview.

Wednesday, December 15th

GOD'S GRACE IS MORE THAN ENOUGH

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.



This Scripture begins with My Grace is **sufficient** for you. **Sufficient** is defined as something that is adequate, enough, and the second line states and My **Strength** is made perfect in weakness. Strength is defined as the state of being physically strong, being able to withstand great pressure. It is good to know that God's grace is more than enough to handle any problem or issue that we face.

God's grace is sufficient to cover our debt, sufficient to transform us, and sufficient to sustain us as we are being transformed.

When we are in the midst of infirmities such as, illness, lack of resources, problems, God's Word is telling us to rejoice! With Jesus, we can overcome the world! We can boast about our issues/problems because we know that when we are weak, He is strong. God's grace covers us through the shedding of Jesus' blood. With God on our side there is nothing we cannot conquer. We are victors in and with Christ.

My father would sing his favorite song with us, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so, little ones to him who belong, they are weak, but He is strong. Yes Jesus loves me, Yes Jesus loves me, Yes Jesus loves me, for the Bible tells me so!

I ask that you focus on the word GRACE and remember G=God's Goodness, R=Righteous Living, A=Able, C=Compassion, and E=Evangelism.

As we move deeper into the Advent season, we are eager for the next move of God. Advent is defined as "coming". In this era of COVID and all we have suffered through this year, we know a change is coming. God's love has been revealed by sending his son into the world to save us from our sins.

Christmas is a season of giving. Please remember to make a donation to the Christmas offering.

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Thursday, December 16th

December 16th Lectionary readings: Psalm 80:1-7; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 10:10-18

"People with little or no patience for communing with stones, flowers, pets, or human beings will probably not have much more patience communing directly with God." ~ Father Richard Rohr from *What the Mystics Know*

I love the Psalm for today as it captures honestly the human struggle of being in relationship with God. The Psalmist says, "You have made us an object of derision to our neighbors, and our enemies mock us" (Psalm 80:6). Then later writes, "Restore us, God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved" (80:3). So often we stand before God with our struggles, unsure how we ended up in this place of pain and suffering. If we are honest with ourselves, we wonder how God could love us and yet let us suffer. We call out, "Save us from broken relationships, addiction, sickness, death, and not having enough! Make your face shine on us that we may be saved!"

If you are like me, you know in your mind that God is not punishing us when bad things happen. As Rabbi Harold Kushner says, "Bad things do happen to good people in this world, but it is not God who wills it" (*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*). The world is complex and at times unpredictable. Surely God did not cause that accident or force that earthquake or make that person shoot another. And yet... I know the honest cry of the soul. I know the cry of the mother who has lost a son. Why, God? I have witnessed the suffering of the husband who loses a wife. I know the pain of watching a loved one go down a path that only leads to destruction and they cannot be stopped. Where are you God?

Advent is a season in which we are invited into those dark places in the world, in our churches, and in our souls as we join the Psalmist asking for God's face to shine on us. So how do we do this? It can be so difficult to face the pain! There is a story in Richard Rohr's book, *What the Mystics Know*, in which a boy asks a Rabbi how to love God. The Rabbi teaches the boy that loving God begins by loving a stone until its "goodness and beauty come into you". Next work on loving flowers, your dog, and then other people. When we can be present to what is, God will arrive showing us God's goodness and beauty. After all, God is written on our hearts and minds (Jeremiah 31:33).

All of us are chosen by God yesterday, today, and tomorrow. By being present in the brokenness and the beauty in our world, God will show up. It is the season of waiting. But the Good News is that God's arrival has nothing to do with our ability to meditate properly, understand the scriptures sufficiently, or to be "righteous". The promise of this season is that God shows up despite our foibles, our confusion, and our doubts - not because of our merit. God shows up because God's love for us and this world trumps everything else. May this Advent season for you be a time of healing as we wait together for God's hope, peace, joy, and love. Amen

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Friday, December 17th

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in God, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

Disappearing Hope OR God's Love Revealed?

At last I was ready to begin. The project had been on my mind for a few days, but I had been unable to locate the needed supplies. I was certain I had a small paint brush with narrow bristles somewhere in the house. Where in the house was the question. I tried the laundry room. Then looked in the plastic bin on the shelf that holds miscellany. Then checked out the junk drawer in the kitchen that seems junkier at each opening. Then descended the basement stairs and searched the small work bench there. I had no success in my search until I finally slid open the top drawer in the upstairs desk in the back bedroom. And there it was. Not the single unused new paint brush I desired, but I saw and reached for an item that would work equally well for my project. The narrow blue plastic case with the clear plastic lid held one paint brush and eight small ovals of color. The cheap children's paint set didn't respect the ROYGBIV spectrum, but colors were well-represented by the line-up of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, brown, and black. I only desired the paint set's brush for my project, but had second thoughts when the narrow strip of colors presented themselves to me.

I had already selected the four rocks for my project. Flat stones. Palm size. Worn smooth by Lake Erie waters. I had gathered the stones over the course of the summer from the lake's shore. And now I had four simple stones on my kitchen counter waiting patiently for my artwork to begin.

The color palette before me. The water dish prepared. The brush at the ready. All set to start my work. I am an artist in words, not by brush. I knew the challenge before me was large indeed. Four Great Lakes' smooth stones, one narrow bristle brush, eight color choices, four words in mind. I knew the basics – dip the brush's bristles in water, take brush to the color oval, move brush with paint toward the rock surface, connect bristles and paint with stone's surface. Easy enough it would seem. Yet the proverb "things are not always as they seem" is a wise saying for a reason.

I start with the shortest word and the smoothest stone. J-O-Y in purple. My hand steady, and the stone's paint holding firm. Success. I am indeed joy-filled. L-O-V-E comes easily too as my brush dips in orange and moves confidently across the next stone. I tackle H-O-P-E next. Not quite right. The color too light. Too much water on the letter O. Water widening and bleeding into other letters' lines. I move onto the longest word and the biggest stone. P-E-A-C-E. Looks better than I thought it might. Good thing I practiced on shorter words and smaller stones. As my art project nears completion, I notice something happening. My H-O-P-E is disappearing, the letter O already gone. The disappearing act has begun and continues its disappointing magic. The stone becomes more barren as the water continues to dry, the paint continues to lighten, and my hope, literally and figuratively, is going away. What to do?

Several more times I dip the brush in water. Some more times I choose different colors. Maybe a darker color will help for my disappearing H-O-P-E and its quickly vanishing O. After each brush dip and stroke I summon up the nervous patience of a child and impatiently let the paint dry for a bit to see if my H-O-P-E will remain. I really desire this H-O-P-E to stay. I don't want to lose my H-O-P-E on the rock's surface just as I don't want to lose any hope that has been painted on my heart.

It is when I am watching that O, caring for that O, rooting for both my stone's H-O-P-E and my heart's hope to stay, that the thought comes to me: God holds equal vigilance over God's hope for humanity. God's paintbrush is busy every moment of every day painting hope for the people, bringing hope to creation, offering hope to the created. Like me and my amateur art project, God's painting is not finished until each brush stroke is just right, until each element of H-O-P-E stands out from even the dullest surface, until H-O-P-E in capital letters remains painted on each heart. Steady and steadfast does our great artistic Yahweh God paint, create. And I give thanks that even in this world of disappearing H-O-P-E the constancy of God's persevering spirit and painting creativity continues to bring hope to all.

Rev. Cynthia Klingemier

Regional Elder OH District 4 and Commission on Ministry Team 1 Leader Revckdoc91@gmail.com

Saturday, December 18th and Sunday, December 19th

"A Visit from the Lord"

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be^[e] a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." Luke 1:9-45 NRSV

The narrative found in Luke 1:39-45, particularly in verse 41, is remarkable in several ways. It presents the actions of several persons who will be significant in the earthly ministry of Jesus, as they prepare for his birth and that of John the Baptist. In a very real sense, it can be said that those who we observe in this text are observing Advent for perhaps the first time.

Another remarkable thing about this account is that both Jesus and John are in secondary roles. Neither of them is named in the narrative. We are told that Mary is traveling to visit with Elizabeth, her cousin. The house is described as the house of Zechariah, the husband of Elizabeth. John is named as "the child" in verse 41. Elizabeth describes Jesus as "the fruit of your womb" in verse 42. Finally, in verse 43 she describes Jesus as "my Lord". I am not speaking in protest of the location of any of the characters in the telling of the story. It is a story about Mary and Elizabeth. John and Jesus will become central and featured characters later. At this point, neither has even been born.

I want to look at all five characters: born or unborn, named or unnamed, in light of our Advent theme. That theme is *"Imagine God's Love Revealed"*. Each of the characters is both a recipient and a messenger of this revelation.

Zechariah was someone who required assurance before buying into anything that was at odds with his previous understanding. He was initially skeptical about the news that he and Elizabeth were going to become parents. He thought that they were both too old for this. Later, when directed to name the child John, he balked. Nobody in his family had ever been named John. After God's love was revealed by way of a bout with "Heavenly laryngitis", Zechariah embraced the revelation and celebrated the love.

Elizabeth could have missed the realization of the revealing of God's love. She was initially caught up in the usual kind of joy. We are not told if she knew that Mary was coming. The visit was a source of delight for Elizabeth, who clearly cherished her cousin. Usual left the scene when Elizabeth spoke with prophetic insight. Nobody told her that Mary would bear the Savior of the world; that is no mortal person. The Spirit of God let Elizabeth in on the secret and God's love was revealed.

Mary was not experiencing a revelation when she went to visit. Although it is unclear if she was already expecting, she had been informed by an angel that she would carry the Messiah. Her Magnificat (song of praise) appears later in this chapter. In it, she revels in the love of God. For her, revelation of the profound significance of God's gift would unfold throughout the earthly life of Jesus and for the rest of her life.

John would go on doing flips for Jesus. He preached the Gospel with a commitment to being in line with the ministry of Jesus rather than in the way of the ministry of Jesus. He asserted that he was unworthy to untie the sandals of Jesus. John spent his life proclaiming the revelation of God's love. He never needed to imagine it.

Jesus was unable to avoid stealing the show. Although he enters this passage as the unnamed "fruit" of Mary's womb, he emerges as everybody's reason for their role in this narrative. Like John, we have no need to imagine. God's love is displayed in clear view, and forever so. God's love is revealed. Don't imagine it. Deal with it.

Dr. Irvin W. Green
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Monday, December 20th

The Love of God Revealed

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 1John 4:9 (NKJV)

The heart of God is revealed to us in a Spirit of Love. He has shown His love for humanity in numerous ways, however the incarnation of His Dearly Beloved Son in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, is the most brilliant and significant demonstration of God's love for humanity. The love of God is not only seen through the ultimate sacrifice that Christ made upon the cross, but is also shown to us in the Father, Who sent The Son of His Love as a Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world.



God manifests with grandeur of love, His gift to a cursed and condemned world, at the appointed time, when He sent his only Begotten Son into the world to be a substitute for our sin, his death paying the price for sin, so that all who believe on Him will never perish but live eternally through Him.

The gift of God's Savior-Son expresses the depths of God's love, and we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. We are made a new creation in Christ through His Spirit living in us. Like a mosaic, we have become members of His mystical body simply by having faith in Him and the Spirit of God that indwells us and we are granted abundant grace to live in the newness of life.

It is only through the bestowal of Christ's life in us, given to us at salvation, that we can experience the abundant and eternal life. It is the newly-born-again-life of Christ's that empowers us to say, "it is not I that lives but Christ that lives in me." It is only through the death of this perfect man that the power of death has forever been broken, and eternal life is given to all those who believe in the Only Begotten and Dearly Beloved Son of God.

It is because of the grandeur of the love of God that we have been purchased back from the slavery of sin, declared judicially righteous in the eyes of God, rescued from condemnation, condemnation that we justly deserve, but are made the children of God and share the inheritance of Jesus Christ. This is not because of any good deed we have done, but because of the remarkable goodness of God.

And this is how God's love was confirmed to us, God sent His Unique Son into the world that we will live through Him, not only in this world but in the endless future. May we never esteem lightly the love that God has for us.

Rev. Dr. CJ Koen Th.D
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Tuesday, December 21st

Reflect on the Hymn O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here,
until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thine advent here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight.

Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, thou Wisdom from on high,
and order all things, far and nigh;
to us the path of knowledge of show,
and cause us in her ways to go.

Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Desire of nations, bind
all peoples in one heart and mind;
bid envy, strife and quarrels cease;
fill the whole world with heaven's peace.

Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

Chalice Hymnal 119
CCLI #225547

Reflection Questions:

How do these words feel as you reflect on Advent 2021?

What phrase stands out to you when you look over these lyrics?

If you read/sing these words aloud, what word stands out to you today? Why?

Do these familiar words seem different for you this year? If so - why? If not - why not?

Wednesday, December 22nd

Please read Isaiah 40:1-11

“Hope in the Wilderness”

We all have times in our lives when we feel like we're in a wilderness; whether it is physical, emotional, or spiritual, or even a bit of all three. There are times when we find it hard to trust in God. We struggle to see the bigger picture. We search for our escape but it is if we are in a maze and we keep hitting dead ends. We are lost in a world that is constantly changing.

The prophet Isaiah brought good news to the people who believed God had forgotten them. God made a promise that there is Hope. God's faithfulness is at work in our lives.

There is no better place to get comfort from God's word. God has the power to act in our lives now. In our hardship we are comforted, we are forgiven, we have the power to overcome our challenges. Through all this the glory of God is revealed.

This Advent as we prepare ourselves to celebrate God's coming let's give thanks for the comfort of God, the loving embrace that he so graciously extends to us. The Light cannot be extinguished by darkness. The candle may flicker but it will never go out.

As we consider the question “What shall I bring?” I hope you will experience with joy the GLORY of God that shines from the star above the Manger, that shines from the empty tomb on Easter Sunday and shines through our lives so all mankind together will see the wonder of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Prayer:

Come Lord Jesus; give us that comfort only you can give. Stir our hearts, O Lord as you reveal to us a new future. Help us to be willing to repent, grow and change.

Amen

**In memory of Mary Beth Cascio who wrote this devotion in 2014
1941-2021**

Thursday, December 23rd

This devotion is the written accompaniment to a video Advent message that can be viewed on our YouTube Channel by clicking [HERE](#).

“Every good gift, every perfect gift, comes from above. These gifts come down from the creator of the heavenly lights, in whose character there is no change at all.” James 1:17

Imagine this with me. It’s like a package. It arrives on your porch. Do you leave it on the porch? Do you call the carrier and request a pickup? Do you carry the package inside? It’s entirely up to you. As for me, I want to see what’s inside.

Oh, look! It’s a beautifully wrapped package! A Christmas present! When I open the gift, God’s love pours out. Imagine that!

When you claim the gift, accept the gift, open the gift – God’s love is revealed, and your life is changed forever. The lives of those you touch with God’s love are changed forever too. All because you took the risk, accepted the gift, opened the gift, carried it into your home and into your heart.

Accept God’s gift of love and then pass it on. Don’t leave such a precious gift unattended and unopened on your porch or neglected and alone outside of your heart.

Prayer

God of all good gifts, Creator of the best Christmas gift ever, Gift us with your love so that our hearts are changed and your love for all is revealed through us. This we pray. Amen.

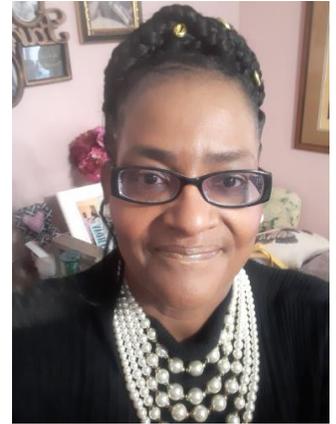
Rev. Cynthia Klingemier,
Regional Elder OH District 4 and Commission on Ministry Team 1 Leader
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Friday, December 24th ~ Christmas Eve

This devotion is the written accompaniment to a video Advent message that can be viewed on our YouTube Channel by clicking [HERE](#).

“Imagine God’s Love Revealed in a Name”

Each year I fall in love with a hymn that shares in the narrative of the Birth of Christ. My joy is this is that as a minister and a musician I can meditate and reflect over what the true essence of the Advent season is for me. One of my favorite songs of the Advent season is “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” It is a Christian hymn for Advent and Christmas. It is a translation of a Latin hymn, “Veni, Veni, Emmanuel.” The 1861 translation, by John Mason Neale, from *Hymns Ancient and Modern* is the most notable in the English-speaking realm, but other English translations also endure. Adaptations into other modern languages (particularly German) are also in broad use.



In Scripture, the name "Emmanuel" first appears in [Isaiah 7:14](#), which says, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign; The virgin will conceive, and give birth to a Son, and will call Him Emmanuel” (NIV). The original meaning of the name is: “with us is God,” or “God with us.”

Although it says in [Isaiah 7:14](#) “thou shalt call his name Immanuel,” Mary and Joseph didn’t give their son that name. Instead, they followed the directions given specifically to them in [Matthew 1:21](#) (Joseph in a dream) and [Luke 1:31](#) (Mary by the angel Gabriel) to name Him Jesus.

As seen in [Matthew 1:23](#) above, the meaning of Emmanuel is “God with us.” The promised child was given the name of Jesus but was also Emmanuel, God in the flesh.

During this Advent season, let us take the time to imagine God’s love revealed throughout this Advent season and to know that “God is with us” in our home, work, school, church and in our community. I am reminded that God’s love might not appear like a mark down at shopping mall or on line shopping. Can you imagine on today what God will reveal to you in the middle of a pandemic about how to share the love of Jesus.

I believe that God is with us and He waits for us to share His love to a dying world. Can you imagine sharing God’s love with your family more during the time of this pandemic? It also might mean spending or sharing time with the youth in our family or encouraging some sick senior family members. I believe even in our employment if we shared God’s love by making cookies in our department and just setting them on the table for staff that really need the encouragement of memories of the holiday season. Since I am worshiper, can you imagine singing carols or songs or encouragement outside in this season and to encourage people in the community to sing along with you. It certainly would meet the guidelines of social distancing and listen to the songs of praise that could touch the hearts of God’s people.

When I sing this hymn of old, I focus on the 4th stanza that reads:

“O Come, thou Day Spring come, come and cheer
Our Spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night

And death’s dark shadows put to flight
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Isreal!

I believe throughout this Advent season, we can continue to reflect and prepare for the arrival of Christ renewed in our hearts. It also allows us to creatively know how God has revealed his son Jesus to creatively share and reflect about His love. It gives us as believers a time to prepare for Christmas and “Rejoice! Rejoice!” to know that “God is truly With Us!”

Rev. Denise Cunningham-Doggett

Bethany Christian Church in Cleveland, OH where, Rev. Dr. Robin Hedgeman is Senior Pastor

Email: Niecy63@sbcbglobal.net

(Video: Rev. Denise Cunningham-Doggett, flautist, Cerena Mangum, keyboard)

Saturday, December 25th ~ Christmas Day

This devotion is the written accompaniment to a video Advent message that can be viewed on our YouTube Channel by clicking [HERE](#).

Please read Luke 2:1-20

Verse 17 reads, "When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child."

While Matthew and John both have something to contribute to the Christmas narrative, whether it is in further details about the famous and not-so famous people around the blessed birth, the lineage of the Christ Child, or a theological poem of epic proportions, In Luke's Gospel we have the most complete and detailed description of what we now call "The Christmas Story." I'm taken by these 20 verses, especially since almost two thirds of them are devoted not to Mary or Joseph or, most pointedly, the baby Jesus, but to the shepherds who were out in the fields, "keeping watch over their flock by night."



Doesn't it seem a little odd to you that in the limited space the gospel writers had, with the difficulty of securing writing implements and paper, that they chose to use it sharing that the good news first when to the laborers of their world, the not-so-glamorous everyday inhabitants of the land, the sheep herders. Well, it isn't so odd if one remembers that the God who the Christ Child embodied was the same God who chose the small and insignificant Hebrew peoples through which to bless the world and not the empires of Egypt, Babylonia, or Rome. It makes perfect sense when one remembers this infant savior was related to both kings and commoners, to brick makers, musicians, and sex workers, to both wise sages and rascally change agents.

The challenge humanity has always had is to keep both the momentous and epic nature of the Birth of Jesus Christ in check with the incessant focus on the simple, the everyday, and the weak. This is hardest during the holiday season, let's be honest. That is why the Church has edifices dedicated to the infant born this day that range from gold-adorned cathedrals to storefront churches. It is also why God calls lay people as well as clergy of all types, even Regional Ministers.

On this day my prayer for you is that at the very same moment you are able to both comprehend and celebrate this paradox, and may the enormity of this day overwhelm you with gratitude and joy, like the shepherds when they were terrified by the angels, as well as reassure you with comfort and hope, like the shepherds when they made known to others the good news they had been told.

And this will be the salvation of our faith: when the wonder and the reality of Christmas Day meet, and we feel compelled to tell others about it.

Merry Christmas, my dear friends.

Rev. Allen Harris
Regional Pastor and President
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*We hope and pray that this year's
Advent Devotionals have been a blessing to you.*

We extend a heartfelt thanks to all who contributed.

*A full playlist of the video devotions can be viewed at
<https://www.youtube.com/c/ChristianChurchInOhio/playlists>*

Please prayerfully consider a gift to the [Christmas Offering](#)

Your gifts support the work of regional ministries this Christmas. Your Ohio Region works to:

- Connect congregations to each other
- Foster faith development
- Gather Disciples in camps, conferences, and assemblies
- Nurture the development of a new generation of pastors
- Assist churches in calling new ministers
- Interpret the global mission of the church
- Represent the church in ecumenical gatherings
- Counsel and pray with those who are troubled of spirit
- Walk with those in conflict
- Lead the church to address racism
- Inspire leaders to experiment and create
- Witness to the power of God to make things new

The [Christmas Special Day offering](#) supports all of these and many other ministries here in Ohio.

IMAGINE
God's Love

REVEALED

REFLECTED

A special day offering of Disciples Mission Fund supporting the ministries of our Region

