









ADVENT DEVOTIONS

Highland Presbyterian Church

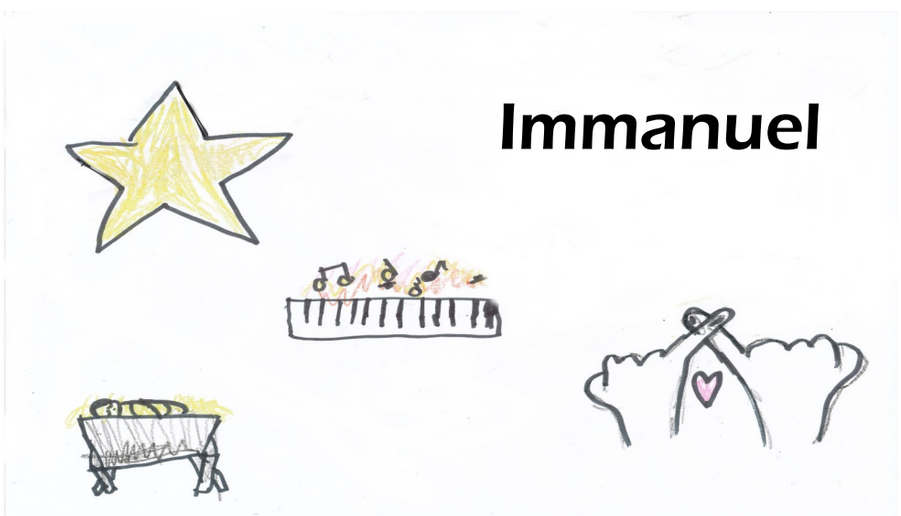
2021

2021 Advent Sunday texts and Lectionary Readings

First Week of Advent	
"The Wonder of a Star"	**Matt 2: 1-6**
	Jer 33:14-16
	Psalm 25:1-10
	1 Thess 3:9-13
	Luke 21:25-36
Second Week of Advent	
"The Wonder of a Name"	**Matt 1:18-25**
	Mal 3:1-4
	Luke 1:68-79
	Phil 1:3-11
	Luke 3:1-6
Third Week of Advent	
"The Wonder of Music"	**Luke 2:11-14**
	Isaiah 12:2-6
	Amos 9:8-15
	Luke 1:57-66

Fourth Week of Advent	
"The Wonder of a Manger"	**Luke 2:1-7**
	Ps 80:1-7
	Isaiah 66:7-11
	Luke 13:31-35
Christmas Eve	
"The Wonder of a Promise"	**Isa 7:14; Luke 2:8-20**
	Isaiah 9: 2-7
Nativity of the Lord	Psalm 96
	Titus 2: 11-14
	Luke 2: 1-14 (15-20)
Christmas Day	Isaiah 62:6-12
	Psalm 97
Nativity of the Lord	Hebrews 1: 1-4 (5-12)
	John 1: 1-14

Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings (Year C)
Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)



Christmas Day
Saturday, December 25,1921

A Christmas Journey

Welcome Boys and Girls and all who care to journey with us. Get your walking shoes and sleeping bags. We are going to journey to Bethlehem to see the baby who is "Christ, the Lord". The shepherds are in the field with their sheep and have invited us to spend the night with them. The stars will be easily seen tonight, and we can look for the "Great Star" – "The Star of Bethlehem" – The one that shines light over the stable where the baby lies. They say it's a "great light" and is very bright. We will easily be able to see it from our sleeping bags. Come – the shepherds are waiting for us. I think they have "snacks", too! Oh, boy! We'll be ready for that!

Almost there. Take a water break, and we will head up the hillside. Well, we're off. Be careful, it is very slippery. Just a little further now. GREAT JOB. You are wonderful!!! Find a grassy spot and roll out your sleeping bag and get comfortable. The shepherds are planning to come by with their sheep soon. That will be a real treat. There they come! They may have word about the 'Christ Child.' "Sir, can you tell us about the child in the stable under the Great Star?" "Well, lady, we have not seen Him ourselves, but some say that He has come to save the world. You will know when you see Him. Have a great rest now. See you in the morning." Well, kids, sleep well and don't forget your prayers!

Arise and shine! Ready yourselves for travel!!! It will be fun going down the hill to Bethlehem. We are almost there. Are you excited to see this special little baby? Well, gang, there is the bottom of the hill. What do you think that this little baby will be like?? I wonder if He will look just like we did?? Little hands and fingers?? Tiny toes?? Let's go and see! We will be quiet and respectful now; I'm sure Mary and Joseph are very tired.

Hello, there, Mary and Joseph. We have come a long way, and we would like very much to visit a few minutes and see your baby. What is His name, Joseph? "Jesus," said Joseph. That is a lovely name, Joseph. He's what??? "The Light of the World", "The Savior", "God's Son" and God's special gift to you.

Thank you for allowing us to visit and to see the Baby. Well, children, it's time to go, but know that you have been blessed with the greatest Christmas gift of all. Better than a doll, a bike, a video game, a cell phone, a dog, cat, or anything else. You are blessed with a Savior, God's love, and eternal life with Jesus. Merry Christmas!

Sue Esch, Deacon

Christmas Eve
Friday, December 24, 2021 **Isaiah 9:8**

Promise

Reflection: There is nothing more sustaining than the promise of hope. We live in and for hope. Just as our Hebrew fathers lived with the promise "For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm to give you future with hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). Apostle Paul confirms the promise reassuring us, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Today the promise of hope is hard to grasp and is even illusive. Our world seems to cry of hopelessness. Our personal situation may cause us to wonder "why" and cry with our Savior from our own cross, "My God, my God, why have your forsaken me?' (Psalm 22:1)

Jesus was not forsaken, and neither are we! The prophet calls out the promise, "Therefore the Lord will give you a sign, look a young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel". (Isaiah 7:14)

Even when it is hard to believe that "God is with us", the birth of our savior should cause us to shout with the shepherds, "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:14) On this day, His Son was born and the promise of hope is fulfilled.

Prayer: Our God...On this most holy night may we wonder at the hope you promise, and rest assured the promise has been kept. May that assurance be with us through the coming year and forever. Peace.

Calvin A. (Cal) Kent, Trustee





Greetings Highland Family, November 2021

This 2021 Advent Devotional is being mailed, via first-class postage, the week before Thanksgiving. It is our fervent hope that you receive it prior to the beginning of Advent.

Our writers were presented with the sermon texts for the Advent Sundays as well as the Sunday Lectionary texts. They were asked to focus on the "Wonder" of each week. Thank you everyone, for sharing your personal reflections, especially our ten first-time authors; your thoughts are a blessing to us all.

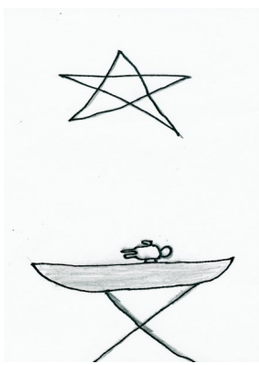
Many thanks to Deacon Nancy Mudloff for the inspirational original watercolor that graces our cover. Thanks also to our guest illustrators: Thomas 13, Maggie 10, Maisie 10, Caroline 10, Wyatt 14, Henry 14, Smith 10, Cynthianna 7, Aléthea 5, Ariella 3, Sean 9, Nolan 7, Miss Parker, Mr. Will and Miss Jenn.

This Devotional happened only with the smiling assistance of editorial team members Averril Good and John Hershey, and the extraordinary efforts of Donna Stettler. Thank you so much.

May you each enjoy the many Wonders of Christmas well into the new year!

Highland Presbyterian Church
Worship and Music Council 2021

Donna Benson, Barb Denlinger, Anita Ewing, Larry Ewing, Annabelle Hargreaves, Lee Heisey, John Holtzapple, Ginny Miller, Roger Rabey, Linda Shugarts, Leigh Shuman, Paul Thorlakson, Josh Witmer, Johnny Wood



First Sunday in Advent **November 28, 2021**

Advent

Reflection: Today begins my favorite season of the year: Advent! It's a beautiful, wonderful, meaningful time of year, as we spiritually prepare for the celebration of Christ's birth on Christmas Day. But it is also very confusing and misunderstood in historical church interpretation. What began in the 4th century in Spain and France as a time of preparation for the baptism of new believers at the January feast of Epiphany is today celebrated in most churches as a four-week preparation for Christmas Day. In the non-church, secular world, Advent is not known by that name, but by the inauguration of enticing, consumerist sales, to commemorate yet another end-of-the-year season of shopping, gifts and presents.

Literally, the name comes from Latin, *adventus*, which means "coming or arrival." In Greek, it's *parousia* – a term used today for the Second Coming of Christ. This is why the scripture texts for today are eschatological, dealing with the end times. Advent texts combine the two elements of remembrance and anticipation. The first two Sundays in Advent look forward to Christ's second coming, and the last two Sundays look backward to remember Christ's first coming, in Bethlehem.

Yes, Advent reminds us to focus our thoughts on the "coming Christ" – but in three perspectives:

- First, and most obvious is Christ coming physically, to the nativity in Bethlehem as a human baby born from Mary;
- Second, is the future hope that Christ will come again soon, as he has promised, to return in glory to consummate his eternal kingdom;
- And finally, Advent personalizes the message reminding each of us to celebrate the reception of Christ coming into our hearts as Lord & Savior.

One of my favorite quotes about Advent is from the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

> "The celebration of Advent is possible only to those who are troubled in soul, who know themselves to be poor and imperfect, and who look forward to something greater to come."

Prayer: In these challenging times in which we live, may this season provide for all of us a time of spiritual hope, peace, joy and love in these days we know as Advent. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Roger Rabey, Senior Pastor

Thursday, December 23, 2021 **Luke 2: 1-7**

Anticipation

Reflection: As we read the manger scripture, think about the anticipation that Mary and Joseph must have been feeling. First, they had to embark on their mandatory trek to Bethlehem. Second, they had the pending birth of a very special child. All that anticipation, only for them to have to settle on a less-than-perfect birthing location.

While the manger may have provided an unusual location for such a significant event, it certainly set the stage for a humble beginning. That manger scene, whether anticipated or not, provided a novel and beautiful frame for Jesus' birthplace. Dare we suggest it was predestined?

While contemplating the concept of anticipation, a distant childhood memory surfaced. I am one of five siblings. We were on a family vacation that included only my parents, my younger sister and me. We were somewhere in New England, most likely Cape Cod which was a favorite spot for my parents.

One of our day trips included a visit to a state park that claimed to be the location of a spring where the pilgrims tasted their first fresh water. We hiked a path to the spring that seemed long at the time for my sister and me. Along the path were frequent signs that announced how far we were from reaching the spring and little bits of information about its history. It felt like there was a sign every few yards, which only heightened our anticipation about seeing this natural wonder.

When we finally reached the spring, my sister and I were very unimpressed to see literally a tiny puddle. My parents even agreed that there was a lot of buildup to a very anticlimactic end.

To this day, we still laugh about it. The story had such an impact on my father that he incorporated it into one of his sermons. While I don't remember the sermon topic, it no doubt included the concept of anticipation.

As we quickly approach Christmas, may we all wonder on the beautiful simplicity of a quiet manger (and a tiny puddle)."

Prayer: Heavenly Father, as we approach this holiday season, may we pause to reflect on the wonder of the manger. Help us to be reminded of the true meaning of Christmas.

Ginny Miller

Wednesday, December 22, 2021 **Psalms 80:7**

Radiance

Reflection: Back in May of 2019, my daughter Dana and I took a girls only trip to Spain. Any trip to Europe means visiting lots of churches. I love church architecture – I find churches beautiful. When Dana was in elementary school she did a project on cathedrals – guess who suggested that idea to her? Standing outside looking up at a cathedral, the sculpture is amazing: Biblical scenes in such detail, pictures of what an artist believes heaven and hell look like, always accompanied by either happy faces or miserable faces. When I step into a cathedral, I always feel God's presence – the greatness of God. Gorgeous arches and domed windows direct your eyes up to God. Stain glass windows bring stories alive with color and light.

Towards the end of our trip, we visited Granada. After spending the morning at the Alhambra, we had an afternoon free to explore the city. We decided to walk to the Monastery of Carthusian, a hidden gem across town from our hotel. It was a very hot day and a long walk. I can't say I was as tired as Mary was when she arrived at Bethlehem, and had to wait for a place to lie down. But I can say that at first there was "no room" at the Monastery – there was a wedding in process and we were not allowed inside. So, we waited in the hot sun for longer than we wanted to.

Once inside, we were overcome with the beauty of the Monastery. The courtyard was full of flowers and the rooms facing the courtyard where the monks used to live were filled with paintings. One painting caught my eye – a picture of Joseph and Mary holding the baby Jesus in the manger with shepherds looking on. It seemed Mary's face was aglow as she looked at her new baby's shinning face.

Our passage from the Old Testament Psalms asks for God to let his face shine on us so that we may be saved. God, in his infinite wisdom, did just that by sending his only son Jesus. May we be captured in the beauty of the season as one is captured in the beauty of cathedrals. May our faces shine, reflecting Jesus as Mary's did in the manger. Who will see God through your shining face today?

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus and shining your face upon us. Nudge us today to see that person who needs to see your shining face filled with love today. May we boldly proclaim your love through righteous actions each and every day. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Barb Droz, Clerk of Session

Monday, November 29, 2021 **Numbers 24:17 (NIV)**

God with us

Reflection: On December 24, 1973 I awoke in a quickly progressing labor around 2:30 AM. We needed to find someone to care for our elder daughter and thankfully there was a church member nearby. Then we discovered our car would not start and we had to get to a hospital in NE Philly. The Clerk of Session graciously loaned us her car even though she was headed for Bethlehem PA later that day.

So, what does this have to do with "THE WONDER OF THE STAR?" As I lay dealing with the pain and my fears of making a mess in the car, I focused on the beauty of the nighttime sky and began looking for the brightest star. I wondered what it was like for Mary to give birth in a stable. I wondered what it was like when the wise men first saw the star. What were they thinking? Some scholars say that they knew of this ancient prophecy, and God used it to inspire their long journey to see the Christ child.

God was fulfilling the promise: The nation started with Abraham and Sarah would one day be a blessing to all nations. This star announced "God with us," not just for the Hebrew people, but for all peoples who recognize Jesus as God's only Son, our Redeemer.



I ponder, do we always grasp what it means to have God with us, God's amazing love? Do we recognize God with us in other people? May we think of Jesus, "The bright and morning star" and wonder in awe at all that God has done and is doing.

And thinking of "God with us," we got to the hospital just in time for our second precious daughter to be born.

Prayer: Heavenly Father – We thank You for loving us so much that You came to us in human form. We thank You for baby Jesus who grew to be our Savior. Amen

Marion Drain, Deacon

Tuesday, November 30, 2010 **Psalm 25:9-10**

Risk

Reflection: When I was in middle school, my family lived by a pond. One day in late winter, a friend from the neighborhood knocked on our door to announce that his brother was stuck out on the icy pond. His excursion was very risky, and once he made it out a few yards, fear struck him and he refused to come back. The rescue effort involved a sturdy rope and, for some reason, my father doing a snake-like crawl along the surface of the ice to retrieve him. A memorable image!

As individuals and as a church it is all too easy to wander far from the path to which God calls us. When we look back to the shore and gain some perspective, we may realize that we are putting ourselves and perhaps others at risk of harm. But what then? When we are on thin ice—even when we fearfully acknowledge that we need to turn back—can we find the way back on our own?

Perhaps you can see where this is going, but we need help. Don't you think? We count on God to show us the right star to follow when we go astray. But God loved us so much that he sent Jesus out on the ice to retrieve us. For God, being born into a fallen world was like venturing out on thin ice: risky. If King Herod had his way, God's Son may not have lasted long. And we know how the story ends: Jesus' opponents succeeded in killing him, for just a couple days. But because of His steadfast love and faithfulness, God chose risk and vulnerability. Praise God, because how else could we find our way to solid ground?

Prayer: Merciful God, thank you for taking such an incredible risk, and for accepting suffering in order to rescue us. Guide us back to your paths. Amen

Will Massey, Director of Youth & Mission



Tuesday, December 21, 2021 **Isaiah 66:10; Luke 13:33b-34**

Deliverance

Reflection: The verses cited above are grouped in the lectionary with the familiar words of Luke 2:7 about the Christ Child who is laid in a manger. They show that there is more involved here than what we were probably taught as children.

Isaiah tells us to rejoice with Jerusalem when its people are delivered from captivity in Babylon; the prophet has already told us, in the terrifying verse that is Isaiah 13:6, of the forthcoming destruction of Babylon, "Howl ye, for the day of the Lord is at hand..." And in Luke's gospel, having been told by some Pharisees that Herod wants to kill him, Jesus foretells his own death in Jerusalem.

What are we to make of this? For me, it is that there were many painful and ugly events connected with the ultimate deliverance of Jerusalem by the Messiah and the redemption of the world by the Resurrection, all of which began when a Christ Child was laid in a manger. Our lives have painful and ugly events as well, yet we should "not lose heart . . . because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:16a, 18 (RSV)).

Prayer: Loving God, in Your mercy help me to turn my eyes and mind toward the eternal, unseen things promised by the Savior who began for us as a child laid in a manger.

Bob Hoelscher, Trustee



Monday, December 20, 2021 **Luke 2:7**

Awe

Reflection: The birth of Jesus is an amazing story. Only two verses in Luke 2 suffice to tell all that happened when Jesus was born. I discovered again that because there was no room in Bethlehem for Joseph and Mary, they had to lay Jesus, when he was born in a "manger," a feeding trough for animals. And Jesus' Mother was probably unattended and had to wrap Jesus in clean strips of clothing as required by Jewish law. This was a birth like millions of other babies, and yet, hardly noticed. But it is God's amazing revelation of Himself to the world. Would it have been told this way, if it was not true?

There have been times when I could hardly believe this unusual birth was true! We get so caught up with our Christmas requirements, we forget the reality of this wonderful event! Yet, we are told this is when God personally enters human history. There is an old hymn that says, "Oh the wonder of it all." Hebrews 2:4 says, "God added his testimony by signs and wonders, and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit."

The word for "wonder" in the Bible describes an act of God that goes beyond description. Someone said, "It is a spectacle that boggles the mind." It is an act of God that simply fills us with awe for what God is doing in the world. No scientific information or details are given to help explain the facts.

In our celebration this Advent season we need to simply come to God in awe and appreciation for all that God has done for us in Christ our Lord. At times there is nothing left for us to do but experience feelings of "wonder" for the amazing things God does for us. Let me suggest during this Christmas season, to relax, sit quietly, and remember the wonderful ways God is at work in our lives for good. It is our story with God. Merry Christmas.

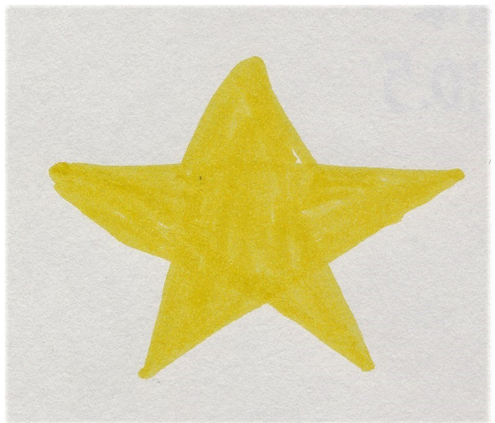
Prayer: Lord God of the universe, we come to you today seeking your guidance in the midst of doubts, confusion, and even at times feelings of hopelessness. At this moment, fill us with joy and peace knowing that you have revealed yourself to us in Jesus Christ our Lord. May this day be filled with wonder and appreciation for all you have done for us in Jesus' name. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Robert S. Burns, Parish Associate

Wednesday, December 1, 2021 **Revelation 22:16**

Morning Star

Reflection: Although this passage from Revelation is not one of the lectionary texts for the week, reading the story of the Magi in Matthew 2:1-6 led me to explore a bit about the use of the star image in the Bible. In the story of Abraham for example, God tells him that his descendants will be as many as the stars in heaven. But the image of the single star over Bethlehem marking the place where the baby Jesus lay is so familiar to all of us, seen in visual images of the Advent season and celebrated in song.



In the life of my family, Moravian stars have always held a special place. Although I'm not sure we ever had one of our own, we used to drive around the county looking at Christmas lights and having a contest as to who could spot the most Moravian stars that night. We often found more than 20 even on a short drive. Although these stars actually began life as a geometry exercise in Germany, for me, their spiky arms and soft glow say "Christmas" like few other things.

Likewise, one of my favorite Christmas carols is "We Three Kings". It was written just up the road in Williamsport, PA in the 1850's, and sings of the "Star of Wonder, Star of Light" and celebrates the birth of the Christ Child and the visitors from the East who came to see him and worship him.

Prayer: Jesus, bright morning star, be with us this Christmas, and "guide us to thy perfect Light". Amen.

Leigh S. Shuman, Elder

Thursday, December 2, 2021 **Luke 21:31**

Comfort

Reflection: 2020 was a challenging year for us all. The fear of contracting Covid overwhelmed our lives creating a general feeling of anxiety for most of us. I found myself looking to history for reassurance that challenges have been defeated before and would be again. My look into the past included not just remembering past "fear producing" events, but insights about how these events impacted me as a child and hold potential to impact me today.

My walk down memory lane reminded me of some "fear highlights" experienced during my formative years. There were bomb drills in school where we hunched down under our desks. Nightly news reported combat in Viet Nam with caskets lined up on airport runways. Race riots with shooting in the streets and on college campuses. Leaders killed; Kennedy and Martin Luther King shot. It felt like the world was a very dangerous place, much like we are feeling now.

As with many children I started to show signs of the stress of handling all the bad things that made life feel out of control. I was afraid of the dark, my stomach was constantly upset, anxiety had set in. My Mother worked to exorcise my fears, but they were too big for her alone. She turned to God and began to really teach me about his love and protection. Most importantly she taught me about the big picture of God's plan for his Kingdom. Remembering that ultimately, he is in control, he walks through hard, fearful times with us and that in the end the hurt of this world will be defeated. This is the only way to find peace amid the chaos of humanity. *"*Even when you see these [bad] things happening, know that the Kingdom of God is near*."*

God uses many methods to comfort and remind us that he is always nearby. The star of Bethlehem, sent on the night of Jesus birth, is one way he reminds us of his divine guidance and protection. His wondrous, nightly stars are every night a reminder of his presence with us now, through Christ, and his Kingdom plan for our future.

Prayer: Lord help us to look at the stars and each time we see them to remember that you are in control and "Thy Kingdom Come". Give us the peace that exceeds all understanding in these times when fear enters our minds. Amen.

Robin LeCrone

Fourth Sunday in Advent
December 19, 2021 **Luke 2:7**

Joy

Reflection: From earliest childhood, singing was an enjoyable pastime and I couldn't wait to join the choirs at church: first in Primary blue, moving-on to Junior red, Youth purple, and finally, Chancel black. The highlight, through the purple years, was processing to "Oh Come All Ye Faithful" at the annual Candlelight Service the Sunday before Christmas. Such excitement! Such anticipation! What a celebration of our Lord's birth!



In our later teenage years, we caroled on Christmas Eve at nursing homes and hospitals, bringing our joy of the season to those unable to attend services. "Away in a Manger" was often requested and those who could, sang along with us. Of all the many Christmas carols, that one seems to be remembered best; no one ever loses the wonder that Jesus was born in a stable surrounded by cattle. I think that it's a carol that makes people realize that fancy trappings aren't the be-all to end-all.

Think of it: a stable, a hay-filled trough, odorous animals. This was the birthplace of our Lord, He whom we've celebrated and worshipped for over 2000 years. And compare its simplicity to all of today's hoopla: shopping for gifts to gaily wrap; decorating; cookie baking; glitter and bling. (I'm not immune, I love to bake.)

I feel so privileged to have been born and raised in a Christian home with abundant love given unstintingly. I was also fortunate to have had a crib for my bed, and I'm still able to buy gifts and bake cookies to give to loved ones and strangers. But the joy of being a Christian comes from the joy of Christmas, the celebration of the birth of our Lord, who gives us *His* abundant love unstintingly. Jesus is the Wonder of the Manger and I will continue to joyfully sing about him at Christmas and always.

Prayer: Dear God, we continue to appreciate all that you have given us, especially your Son, and that we and Jesus are always connected by love. Amen.

Lee Heisey, Deacon

Saturday, December 18, 2021 **Luke 2:13-14 (The Message)**

Praise

Reflection: Music has been loved for centuries. It can make you feel happy and calm or joyous and energized. Music is heart healthy, lowers blood pressure and reduces stress levels. It engages your brain and can improve your memory. Music truly is amazing.

As I reflect on the scripture from Luke 2, I think about what a fabulous experience it must have been for the shepherds watching their flocks that night. To see and hear an angelic choir sing God's praises and peace on earth – WOW!

Many Christmas carols use parts of this scripture in their lyrics – "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing", "Angels, from the Realms of Glory", "The First Noel" and "Angels We Have Heard on High" to name a few.

I have always loved "Angels We Have Heard on High" and have fond memories singing it in my church as a child and when Christmas caroling in college. The hymn tune, "Gloria" is from a traditional French song of unknown origin often thought to be written by a monk in France. It was first published as a hymn in 1855. Today there are many variations of it. There is a simple, soothing version by pianist Jim Brickman, a gorgeous duet by Josh Groban and Brian McKnight, a rhythmic rendition by Pentatonix and an inspiring version by Celtic Woman. But perhaps the most meaningful is singing the carol at a Christmas Eve service and imagining the heavenly choir of angels singing their praises on the night of Jesus's birth.



Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the wonder of music. As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, may we join with the angels in singing your praises. May we do all we can to bring about peace on earth. Amen.

Barb Denlinger, Elder

Friday, December 3, 2021 **1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 (The Message)**

Hope

Reflection: Christians believe that Jesus is coming back. Believing this, charges each moment of the present with hope. Paul prods the Thessalonian Church and us on this sixth day of Advent to continue to live forward in taut and joyful expectancy for what God will do next in our life stories with Jesus. Stars have long been used to navigate unknown territory.

I remember my own Father envisioning what living eternally with God might look like. In his view, every individual who enters eternal life is given a new star or planet to care for, having stewardship of its vital resources. Paul gives us a hope filled message of joy and encouragement:

May the Master pour on the love so it fills your lives and splashes over on everyone around, just as it does from the lasting relationships we have with others in the community of faith. Paul's Advent wish for us today is that we be infused with strength and purity, filled with confidence in the presence of God and continue to look for our Master Jesus to arrive with all of his followers.



Prayer: God of Grace and Love, enable me to relate to the uniqueness and gifts of the joy and hope you have for me this day. Let me practice fruitful Christian relationship and hospitality with each person you bring to connect with me, so that they may feel your love and presence. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Ann Osborne, Associate Pastor

Saturday, December 4, 2021 **Luke 21:29-31,34**

Seasons

Reflection: I didn't realize it until I lived in San Diego for a few years, but the four seasons of the year are a real treasure (even winter!). Not unlike the Christmas Star showing the way, seasons really foreshadow what is coming. Each year I'm in awe at how our location on planet Earth in our galaxy has the same four seasons repeat themselves.

When Laura and I lived on the west coast, the lack of seasons kind of threw us off our rhythm and routines. We had Thanksgiving at the beach one year. Christmastime only felt like Christmastime because Starbucks had peppermint lattes and people in commercials wore scarves. And the summer was, well, normal because we didn't have kids yet to remind us that school was out.

Sometimes this caused me to feel a little lost or bored. I'd lose my bearings a bit within the year and I'd even get upset at the beautiful weather as I drove an hour each way to work, unable to enjoy it. The sameness of each day actually did kind of weigh me down more than I would've thought and caused some anxiety.

Like each of our seasons foreshadowing the next, take some time this Advent to appreciate that Christmas is coming and know that the kingdom of God is near.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the seasons you put into our environment and lives. One prepares us for the next and we can even find joy in the cycles. Be with us, please. Protect us from anxieties and prepare us for your kingdom. Amen.



Pete Rothacker

Friday, December 17, 2021 **Luke 2:11-14**

Announcement

Reflection: How magnificent it must have been to experience this moment. The announcement of the birth of Jesus Christ, the son of God, our Messiah. It must have been joyous, exhilarating, and inspiring. I call this a pinch yourself moment. Part of me is sure a symphony of sound from instruments and voices accompanied this announcement. There was no written composition for this, the sound was divinely inspired. I can imagine strains of *The Hallelujah Chorus* accompanying this extraordinary announcement.

Music has the unique ability to dramatically enhance and transform any experience. I think of all the great movie soundtracks that pulled out feelings intensifying the experience. Music can reach into our very souls and bring out deep emotions and feelings and transform any experience to be truly extraordinary.

The wonder of music has played an important part in my life. To enhance it through personal expressions such as membership in Lancaster Symphony Chorus, Highland's choir or just strumming and singing with family and friends. One moment that will always be particularly moving to me is singing "Silent Night" by candlelight in a darkened and peaceful sanctuary on Christmas eve. The wonder and beauty of the season comes together in that moment for me.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank You for the gift of music as we are uplifted by the wonders and joys of Christmas. Amen.

Jeff Doane, Elder



Thursday, December 16, 2021 **Amos 9:13**

Inspiration

Reflection: My Facebook friends know that I post a lot of Bach cantatas. I can't help myself, because I find my faith reflected in each one of these pieces. Soloists, choir, and instrumentalists blend together without losing their individual voice. In one moment, they're full of joy and brilliant praise, and in another, they're gently despairing. God's love shines through despite the worry and sadness the world delivers.

The Bible passages for this week underscore the limitations of our earthly lives, but also tell of God's ability to surprise, inspire, and replace what we've lost. A Savior is born, a mute speaks, and prophets exalt God's name. This chapter of Amos announces the restoration of David's kingdom after the destruction of the sinful. The new kingdom is so bountiful, that barren lands produce sweet wine, and the people of Israel can't keep up with the harvest.

The wonder of music is that it gives us hope for another fruitful season and takes us places where words can't go. It speaks to our fears and weaknesses while celebrating the beauty of what God works in us. This Advent season, my prayer for all of you is that you revisit the music that reminds you of the love of God. It's not hard to find.

Prayer: God of triumph and tragedy, help us to hear Your voice in the words and sounds of artists who inspire us. Open our hearts and minds to their love for You. Challenge us to turn that inspiration into a commitment to make our world a better place. Amen.

Kip Van Blarcom



Second Sunday in Advent

December 5, 2021 **Matthew 1:21,23**

Yeshua

Reflection: Picking out baby names for our daughters was no easy task. As we scoured books and websites for girl names, the first thing Richie and I considered was the meaning. We believed (and still do) that these names would give shape and influence upon each of our daughters' lives. We kept their names hidden until the day of their birth because we wanted to introduce these beauties to the world with a bold proclamation of the meaning behind their names.

The same is true in the Jewish tradition. The meaning behind one's name is an identity marker of the newborn. Historically, many tended to wait eight days until revealing the name of the baby due to the high mortality rates of infants. More recently, however, Jewish families have kept the tradition to avoid family drama and allow more time for a name to be chosen.

Mary and Joseph weren't given the traditional choice of choosing a name for their son: An angel did that for them! I wonder how Mary and Joseph felt about this name – trepidation, anxiety, excitement, joy? I imagine they felt a little bit of everything a new parent feels when a baby is on the way. I also imagine they were willing to do everything within their power as parents to help their child live into the fullness of his name: Yeshua, God is my Salvation.

Prayer: Name above all Names, you knew each of our names before they were chosen. Show us how we might live into the meaning of our own names this Advent season. In the name of the Christ-child, Amen.

Jennifer Weitzel, Interim Director of Christian Education

Write the meaning of your name here:

_____.

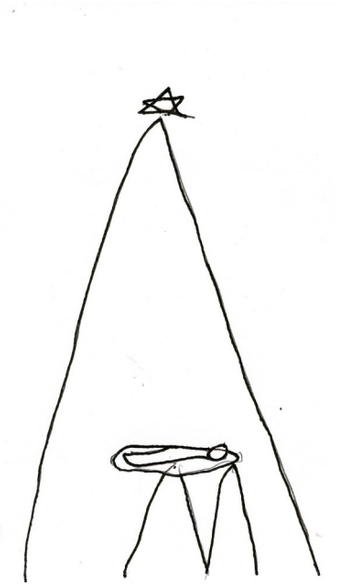
How are you living into the meaning of your name this Advent season?

Monday, December 6, 2021 **Matthew 1: 21, 23**

Promise fulfilled

Reflection: Our Savior was given names to portray what he would mean to us, and he then fulfilled the promise of those names.

Names are assigned for varying reasons – a special meaning that the name has; a hoped-for quality or characteristic that the newborn will possess; in honor of a parent, other relative or someone admired; or simply for its nice sound.



The names Jesus and Emmanuel were given for what our savior would mean to us. He would be "God with us" and would save us from our sins. Later, he would be called by other names. When Thomas had thrust his hand into the side of Jesus, he proclaimed "My Lord and my God". Paul very often used the name Jesus Christ, which referred to Jesus as "The Anointed One".

Names sometimes were changed within the Bible – Jacob became Israel, Abram became Abraham, Sarai became Sarah, Simon became Peter, Saul became Paul.

What is interesting to consider are names that are ascribed during or after a person's lifetime, based upon the image that they have portrayed. Some examples in recent times, are The Iron Horse (Lou Gehrig), Honest Abe (Abraham Lincoln), and Chairman of the Board (Frank Sinatra).

My thought at this time is what name each of us would want to be given based upon how others have perceived us. By what name would you want to be remembered? Are you living such a life that this might be possible? Otherwise, what might be the name you would be given based upon how you are actually being seen by others?

Prayer: May we all live our lives according to a purpose and, foremost, may we all live worthy of the name of Christian that we share with each other. Amen.

Larry Ewing

Wednesday, December 15, 2021 **Luke 2:11-14**

Glory Be!



Reflection: As we celebrate Advent and Christmas, music has always been a central part of that celebration. When we praise God, or remember all that God has done for us, we naturally turn to music. When the heavenly host praised God that first Christmas day, we first think of them singing "Glory to God, Glory to God in the Highest", or at least that's my vision as orchestrated by Handel.

It seems that music is a way we express that awe, wonder, and praise. A little before this passage in Luke, the pregnant Mary greets her cousin Elizabeth, we read Elizabeth's response and then Mary's Song (*The Magnificat* - my soul magnifies the Lord). It's only natural that many composers have set those words to music, and that music magnifies the scripture passage. A little later in Luke, when Simeon was presented with the Christ child in the temple, we hear the Song of Simeon (in Latin, *the Nunc Dimittis*), now borrowed in many liturgies as parting words, but for me it is part of the Christmas story, another recognition of God with us.

We recognize that putting words to music adds much to our understanding, the emotional content of those words, and even our ability to remember those words. So, as we tell the story of Advent, or Christmas through music, it is ingrained in our memories, and I trust our souls. Let it be so this year.

What will be your song this year?

Prayer: Lord as we anticipate and finally celebrate the birth of Jesus, let the wonder, the emotion and the power of music bring us closer to you and remind us of Emmanuel, God with us.

Dick Entz, Trustee

Tuesday, December 14, 2021 **Isaiah 12:6**

Blending

Reflection: Have you ever been a stranger in a strange land? In my adult life, we have relocated seven times. Each new place—all within the United States—lead me to strange scenery, customs, and ways of thinking. When I sought out a Presbyterian church to visit, the leader might be a man instead of the woman pastor I had before. Or the order of worship might omit something I thought important. The sermon might be delivered with an accent I had to work to understand. So instead of feeling "at home" in church, with a spirit of peace, I felt anxious and distracted. But that anxiety would fall away when the congregation began to sing. Voices, mostly untrained, raised in carols, hymns, or responses, some familiar, some new to me, were like a collective shout: "Welcome, my sister in Christ!"



It didn't matter what the music was. Some hymns took me back to my childhood church. A Christmas carol I might have heard on the radio only the day before. A few dated back to the early days of the Reformation, or even to our Jewish roots. Being able to join with strangers—merely friends I hadn't met yet—let me understand more deeply that the Lord is with me, binding me in fellowship with a great cloud of believers, no matter where I have been led. So, sing! If you can only hit a single note, the Lord will blend your voice in with all the others into a blessing for others. I know it did for me.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for your miracle of music. Guide me to forget myself in worship. Help me to focus on the message of the songs, and let the melody bind that message into my inmost being. And bless my brothers and sisters in Christ as we sing. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen

Nita Sue Kent, Elder

Tuesday, December 7, 2021 **Malachi 3:1-3**

Purifier

Reflection: The first words of this passage reflect the prophecy of the appearing of John the Baptist, a harbinger of the coming of Christ. John shall prepare the way before Christ, by calling people to repentance. The Messiah has long been expected and now shortly he will come. He is the messenger of the covenant. Those who seek Jesus shall find pleasure in him. The verse continues "he will be like a refiner's fire… He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." Christ by his gospel shall purify and reform his church by his spirit working in us, he shall regenerate and cleanse souls.

This is the heart of the Advent message. Not an easy task, to repent, to allow for refining, and purifying. As a youth I didn't think of Advent that way, I was more focused on the gifts expected and celebrations with family and friends. But this idea of repentance is the core of Advent, preparing our hearts and souls for Christ. We are called to reflect on areas God wants us to work on, spend time in quiet reflection in anticipation of Christ. This is a more difficult view, but more meaningful, so we can enjoy the gifts of Christ and the celebrations of his presence in our lives.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please be with us as we reflect on the true meaning of Advent, allow our hearts and minds to be open to repentance, to be refined and purified this Advent season, in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Jack Snyder, Deacon



Wednesday, December 8, 2021 **Luke 1:63**

John

Reflection: As children, we have little control over what our name will be. Our parents choose based on a variety of reasons. For example, my real name is "Dolores Marie". I



was told that this was a very special name my father chose especially for me. It was the combined names of a mother and daughter with whose family he lived during his final years of high school. They opened their home to him and treated him like a family member with the love of Christ. I cherished the thought that I was blessed with the name because of what it meant to my dad. It wasn't until later in life that I learned the actual meaning of the name: It is derived from the word 'dolores' meaning *pain*. The name refers to one of the many Spanish titles for the Virgin Mary, Maria de los Dolores, which means 'Mary of the Sorrows'." I am still not sure how I feel about that!

Most of us have probably looked up the meaning of our name. In the passage for today, Zechariah prophesies with a song, the first time he has spoken in nine months. His mouth was opened to praise God in this way when he pronounced that the name of his son would be "John". This was in support of Elizabeth, Zechariah's wife, who had already declared the name to her neighbors and relatives when they came to circumcise John on the eighth day.

Curious as to the meaning of the name John, I looked it up to find it "is derived from the Hebrew Yohanan, meaning *graced by God*." It is a solid, traditional name that exudes strength, smarts, and kindness." It also means that God is gracious, or that God is merciful. How perfect a name for the one who came to announce the coming of the Messiah. We are truly graced by God with Jesus, and we are shown His everlasting mercy through Jesus' death and resurrection. John definitely lived up to his NAME!!!

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for the message of John, honoring the name so perfectly chosen for him. Amen.

DeeDee Rabey

Monday, December 13, 2021 **Luke 2:14**

Emotion

Reflection: Music plays a great role in my life and from early in my childhood I sang hymns, played piano and sang in choirs. Singing "Glory to God" was just what we did. Music has the power to shift our feelings from joy to sorrow. It can bring us back to memories we forgot or spark emotions in us, taking us to sensational heights. When I hear "Amazing Grace," I remember my mother singing this to my son as a lullaby. He always jokes that when he hears that hymn, he gets sleepy. Songs elicit memories and connections to events, i.e. "Eternal Father Strong to Save" makes me visualize scenes from JFK's funeral. Think about other examples of songs we danced to as teenagers, love songs with shared special meaning, or theme music that evokes the name of a TV show or movie.

Native and indigenous people have used the drumbeat for centuries to stir emotions. Our brain can interpret vibrations as annoying booming rhythm sounds from a passing car or entertaining zinging vibrations of the Blue Man Group. We are often moved to tears listening to orchestras, voices, children or bird songs. Whether the song is from our great classical composers, pop music, country, jazz or just a child nursery song, God has given us music to enrich our lives.

Prayer: Dear Lord, you have given us the gift of music to reach the depths of our souls. Help us to remember that when we hear music that moves us that we should glory in the greatness and presence of the Lord. Thank you for our Highland music program and for all those who help glorify Your Name in song.

> "Surely, the presence of the Lord is in this place, I can hear the brush of angel's wings, I see glory on each face. Surely, the presence of the Lord is in this place." Amen.

Donna Benson, Elder



Third Sunday in Advent

December 12, 2021 **Luke 2:11-14**

Angels

Reflection: Christmas music and angels seem to be inextricably tied together. We have all seen artist drawings or crafted models of angels singing and even holding music. We may even have singing angels hanging on our Christmas tree or on our mantle. But do angels really sing? Most of us would assume that yes, they must. Have you ever heard the compliment, "She sings like an angel!"?

The Bible, however, is not exactly clear or conclusive on this subject, and would rather seem to point to the idea that singing was especially reserved for us, the blessed human race, as an emotional outlet, a priceless tool to use to praise and worship a living God, our Savior Jesus Christ who came to us as a helpless baby on that first Christmas.

But isn't one of our favorite Christmas carols, "Hark the Herald Angels Sing"? And didn't the angels sing "Glory to God in the highest" to the sleepy shepherds on the hillside that wondrous night? The apostle Luke tells us that the "great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and *saying,* "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."" Luke 2: 13, 14 (NIV) According to Luke, it wasn't a song, but it certainly was an awe inspiring and knee shaking joyful announcement of praise by the radiant heavenly host!

I am sure that the angels must look on in awe at all that God has done for us, His children. Although we have let God down, we have all fallen short, yet His limitless love for us involved the highest sacrifice of His own dear son. Jesus came to this earth to show us how to live, and then died in our place. What must the angels have thought as they saw these almost inconceivable events unfold before their eyes? They do not have the extraordinary gift and opportunity that we have to call Jesus their Savior.

In closing, we all must echo that music is a wonder. Music is a very special gift that all human beings enjoy on some level. Music lifts us to another realm of feeling and exquisite emotion. When we praise God in music, we feel transported in our spirit to a higher place of worship and praise to our creator. At Christmas, many of our happiest memories are relived when we sing carols together. We are praising our Lord for the most precious gift we could ever receive. This undeserved gift of a Savior who brings everlasting life to us, the family of God. May this Christmas find your heart stirred and renewed by the wonder of music.

Merry Christmas and sing on!

Prayer: Lord, my heart is filled with gratitude for the wonder of music and every musical opportunity this Advent season affords to offer praise and adoration to you.

Sharon Thorlakson, Deacon Dr. Paul Thorlakson, Director of Music

Thursday, December 9, 2021 **Philippians 1:6**

Christian

Reflection: I thank God for family and loved ones, I pray with joy because of how they have helped me learn about God. In good times and in life's struggles, I know the Lord gives me strength. I will give glory and praise to God even for the small things.

I was born into a Christian farm family where the Sabbath was held in reverence. The Macy family of seven never worked in the fields on Sunday. Never! We attended worship service together and always shared lunch together afterwards. The example of my parents, grandparents and many aunts and uncles helped pave the way I would shape my daily walk with Jesus. Some principles I continually try to emulate:

Be a doer for good.
Be a role model daily
Be caring of others
Be a family leader
Be an encourager
Be a good example
Be a don't tell me…. show me kind of person.
Be a living example of the Golden Rule

Recalling the Sunday benediction from Pastor Rabey:

> Remember, you are a child of God, and that you bear the name of Jesus Christ. Bear His name gratefully, for you are not your own. Bear His name thankfully, you were bought with a price on the cross. Bear His name joyfully for He enlists each of us to live as blessed people. In the name of God, Father and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, in the quiet of the night, I pray that I will recognize what *your* will is for my life. And finally, I pray your presence and promise will fill my life with acts of good qualities which only Jesus Christ can produce for the glory and praise of God. Amen.

Jean Harris, Deacon

Friday, December 10, 2021 **Philippians 1:3-6**

Discernment

Reflection: Prayer is so important in our walk with God, to share what is on our heart and to listen to what God wants us to know. I practice this connection daily and numerous times throughout the day so that I know I am staying close to God and performing the work he has for me to accomplish.

Love, for God and for people around me. Each day during my prayer I ask the Holy Spirit to fill my heart with God's love. I want to see people the way God sees them and to share my love with them in ways that he directs me. We can be so judgmental in our daily life and I pray this prayer so that I don't judge but love those people I meet each day.

Each day I read the Bible before I start my day so I may grow in **knowledge** and **insight**. I also practice **discernment** as I face different situations throughout the day and I have to decide an appropriate response or action. Jesus taught us through the Bible the expectations of God and how we may learn to live **pure** and **blameless** or at least try!

The **fruit of righteousness** includes all the character traits flowing from a right relationship with God. When we join our lives to God the fruit of righteousness grows in us, the Holy Spirit produces these character traits that are found in the nature of Christ.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for your love, and for your son Jesus. Jesus taught us how to pray, how to show love, how to grow in knowledge, insight and discernment. He lived a pure and blameless life. Thank you for caring so much for us and rescuing us through JESUS.

Leslie Aikens, Deacon



Saturday, December 11, 2021 **Matthew 1:23**

Love

Reflection: Emmanuel, another name for Jesus, or is it? The prophets certainly said He would be named Emmanuel, but elsewhere in this scripture text Joseph was instructed by an angel to name Mary's child "Jesus" and he (or they) did so. This phrase in Matthew is taken from Isaiah 7:14 and 8:8, but the name "Emmanuel" does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament. So, it's fair to suggest that the prophets were really prophesying who Jesus would be, not specifying a name.

In fact, many of the names, such as Master, Teacher, and Lord that were used in the early church and then appeared in the New Testament, had been selected to underscore the message, mission, and teachings of Jesus. In that context, I would choose LOVE, which admittedly doesn't work very well as a name. But to me it most accurately and completely embodies Christ's message.

A picture in my office I cherish the most is one I took when 10 years old. It's a photo of my parents, aunts, and uncles on our porch. Why "cherish"? Because it radiates the love that was in our family. Despite differences in personalities and abilities we all cared deeply for each other which was never more evident than at this time of year.

We were a large, extended family numbering about 40. My uncle would sponsor Thanksgiving dinner each year at the General Sutter in Lititz. This is when we'd "exchange names" and buy a small gift for the individual whose name we'd chosen. Then on Christmas Eve, after church, we'd gather at another uncle's house to celebrate. On Christmas Day, my mother and aunt would alternate preparing Christmas dinner for everyone. When I was old enough it was a treat to sit at the "adult" table rather than the one for the "kids." How fortunate I was to grow up in family taught to LOVE by my Mennonite grandfather.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to love all others, no exceptions.

John Hershey

