

Advent Devotionals

2013



A gift to you from
Members and friends of
Trinity Presbyterian Church

TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET 2013

1 Corinthians 13:7 Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

Over the years many of our contributors have shared the process they go through in writing their devotional. Most find a quiet time, read the scriptures listed and spend some time asking for God's inspiration as they focus on their message. Suggestion: in reading the devotionals this year, why not do the same to receive the messages meant to be shared. It is our HOPE you will be inspired with the message they share in preparation for the celebration of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our theme this year is HOPE. Each devotional is original. Most focus on hope, though some have chosen to share an inspirational message reflecting the spirit of the season. We suggest you read the scriptures listed and then the devotional on a daily basis. Many folks say they read all the way through and then return to a daily reading. Share with your family and others.

This year we have also, contributions from the youth of our church. They are the future of the church. We wish to thank them for their shared thoughts.

Thanks to all the contributors for sharing their message of hope, once again, their gift of words for the congregation's inspiration.

Lois Settles for the Christian Education Committee

Nov. 28 Psalm 122, James 4: 1-10

HOPE IN THE LORD RESTORES STRENGTH

As a child growing up in rural Iowa, I am sure I hoped for gifts that I did not receive. I don't remember being disappointed. There was probably a time or two that I was; and now, I hope I had the grace (I'm quite sure I didn't) to not give voice or attitude to that disappointment.

I also don't remember hoping for a horse, but we got one, Senator Scott. The quarter horse was named in honor of my grandfather, Iowa State Senator George L. Scott. I think the horse was technically my brother's, but I got to ride him. Senator Scott (the horse) loved to race and jump. It was always my hope that he did neither of those things while I was riding. He was especially vulnerable to such behavior when I rode with my friend, Nancy, along Highway 18. At those moments, my hope was lost.

Sometimes, hope leads to disappointment (in my case it was fear), but "those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." Isaiah 40: 31 Our Scripture today says, "Peace be within you". . within you. Peace is not something that seems to be within me ~ especially atop Senator Scott. More often than not, I can be seen running up and down the halls of Trinity. I am pretty sure I do not invoke an aura of peace even though yoga is an important part of my life. But I do hope and pray for peace in my life, in the life of this church, and in a world that seems to want something else.

Prayer: Dearest Lord Jesus, You are our hope, our only hope. May our lives reflect Your love for us and the peace You offer us. Amen

Karen Thomas

29 November _Genesis 6: 1-10; Hebrews 11: 1-7

A DEFINITION OF HOPE

It finally happened. Yes, like many of us, I've thought about it before – signing up for Trinity's Advent Devotional. In the past, I found what other church members wrote enlightening and I wasn't sure I could do the same. Yet, this year, I felt "moved" (or maybe God's little push) to put my name on a date. To start, I turned to the two scriptures assigned for this day. It was what Paul wrote in the first two verses in Hebrews 11 that hit home for me: *What is faith? It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot see.* So faith is what we hope for. Then, what is the definition of hope? The dictionary says: a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen; a feeling of trust; wanting something to happen or be the case.

Okay, that's the dictionary's definition but what does hope mean in the Bible? Turning to the internet, I Googled 'hope in the scriptures'. In Wikipedia, I found: *that according to the Hebrew and Greek words translated by the word "hope" and according to the biblical usage, hope is an indication of certainty. "Hope" in Scripture means "a strong and confident expectation." Though archaic today in modern terms, hope is akin to trust and a confident expectation. Hope may refer to the activity of hoping, or to the object hoped for—the content of one's hope. By its very nature, hope stresses two things: (a) futurity, and (b) invisibility. It deals with things we can't see or haven't received or both.*

My hopes are many. Working with the Congregational Life Committee, I always hope that our memorial receptions give comfort to the families that are mourning a loved one. When Rich and I were moving to Palm Coast from the Atlanta area, we hoped to find a church home. When I sing in the Community Chorus, I hope I'm singing in tune. Of course, there are too many to list here. So as I close, I pray and hope (the confident expectation) that this Advent Season is a blessed one for you and your families.

Prayer: Our Father, please give us hope – your strong and confident expectation -- that what we hope for may happen even though we cannot see it.

Jane Gaulding

In 2003, Karen and I attended an Eagles' (one of my favorite musical groups) concert in Philadelphia. For the conclusion of the concert, the Eagles introduced their new song, "There's a Hole in the World Tonight" which was based on the terrible events that took place at the World Trade Center in 2001. One of the lines of that song has stuck with me for ten years and I always wanted to write a sermon based on that line. It said, "Unless we learn to love one another, we will never see the promised land."

At this time of the year, that line reminded me of a famous Christmas song that reminds us how much God loves us and wants us to share His love with the world. The song, of course, is "Love Came Down At Christmas" which was written in 1885 by Christina Rossetti containing the words:

*"Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love Divine,
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and Angels gave the sign."*

That line also reminded me of the powerful words of John 3:16; "For God loved the world so much that He gave us His only son...."

God's love surrounds all of us during this Christmas season but it also fills our hearts every day of the year. God did not mean for us to hold this love for ourselves. He meant for us to share it with others so that the world would come to know Him through His love. And, we often do such a terrible job of sharing that love with everyone in the world.

And, finally, the words of I John ring clearly: "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love....Because God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another....Those who say, "I love God" and hate their brothers and sisters are liars"

The world is so full of hatred in 2013. As we enter this Christmas season, let us remember that the message of Christmas is LOVE and we are to share that love with everyone so that they may come to know God. Make this Christmas a time of love for everyone.

Prayer: Father, we thank you for loving us so much. Help us to share that love with all of those around us. In Jesus name, Amen.

Don Scott

1 December Isaiah 2:1-5; Matthew 24:36-44

HOPE, TRADITIONS & GIVING OF OUR SELVES

Memories from Middle School Youth

"Let them turn away from evil and do good; Let them seek peace and pursue it." 1Peter 11-12

"I hope people care."

"I liked to share with my family ...eating pumpkin pie, opening presents, putting ornaments on the tree...and helping cousins and family put something together and sharing games with others."Matthew P.W.

"I have hope for peace."

I liked our family tradition of staying up late, listening to my Momma, aunt, Grandpa, Grandma, uncles, cousins, share stories, share food, and help the younger cousins with presents. I like helping others."Danielle E. Hartley

"I have hope for the world."

"I like to go out on the roof and hang Christmas lights and then stay up late and drink hot coco. I like to give my time to those who may not have much."David Joseph Wheeler

"I hope for people getting along."

"My older brother and I would make noises that would sound like they were coming from the roof. The kind of noises Santa may make and my little brother would go wake up my Mom and Dad. I like share and help others when they may not understand things in school or in general"Logan Xavier Greenstreet

Prayer: Ever-present God, thank you for your guiding spirit. Help us to look beyond ourselves and see the needs of others. Help us to remember this Christmas season is not about us, but about lessons You have brought to us to live a Christ-like life.

Middle School Youth

2 Dec. Genesis 8: 1-19, Romans 6: 1-11

Hope, Renewed Hope, A New Beginning

These passages offer pictures of life's most fundamental spiritual challenges. Noah's leaving the ark (Genesis) is a new beginning with hope that mankind will improve the religious culture of life on earth. The passage in Romans is another renewal for individuals, through Baptism, that each day may be a new beginning, a new starting point, a new direction, and a renewed life along a different path. This is the hope.

These two pictures, *re-orienting life on earth* and *each individual's new life through Baptism* are the ends of two quite different perspectives. The arrival of Jesus 2000 years ago provided both form and substance to the practice of religion now known as Christianity. The greatest renewal of Christianity may be received through personally visiting Israel and walking along the paths that were taken during His short mission on earth.

Lois and I only recently returned from our short visit to the Holy Land. Over parts of four days we relived many of Christ's travels and the lands that became the seat of Christianity, which is now spread widely across the face of the earth. Walking through Jerusalem and Bethlehem, visiting the Wailing Wall, the Garden of Gethsemane, the River Jordan, and driving around the Sea of Galilee were highlights of this short journey.

Experiencing the Holy Land through our eyes must be vastly different from Christ's 2000 years ago. The country of Israel is about the size of most counties in the United States, and the wilderness described in much of the Old Testament is in the neighboring county to the East. We visited the Jordan River and drove around the Sea of Galilee easily before lunch on one day.

Prayer: May we always appreciate the magnificent gifts we receive through Christ's bounty. Amen.

Bob Settles

Fun with Interrogatives

What work has God done since the creation of the universe? The Bible tells us. How did God perform that amazing work? Science attempts to tell us. The question that seems to fascinate and sometimes frustrate us is why things happen the way they do. For most of the important questions in life, only God can answer why. Once I made the mistake of asking my physics professor, “Why can I see so clearly though a window made of millions of relatively large silicon atoms floating freely around in the glass?” He responded, “I would have to turn my collar around to answer that.” I regretted not beginning my question with the word ‘how’.

How often do we hear the question? Why do bad things happen to good people? And we overlook the abundance of blessings those people may have also received. Life is like a window we pass through filled with obstacles of pain and suffering that we slam into head on or temporarily avoid. I have never met anyone who has passed through life enjoying only God’s blessings without also experiencing significant hardships along the way.

The advent season reminds us of God’s love and our need for redemption. It helps us to understand why God would humble himself to take on human form and to have shared this voyage of life with us.

Prayer: Father, we thank you for showing us the way to accept life’s challenges and to appreciate life’s victories through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus in whose name we pray. Amen

Sinclair W Stickle

JOY TO THE WORLD

When we moved to Halifax Plantation, there was this beautiful evergreen tree across the road we would sit on the porch and enjoy. It was tall, straight with perfect symmetry. Then gradually other things began to grow and soon our view was obstructed. I was sad for our picture perfect view was gone.

This can happen to us with our faith and our view of God, the manger, and the cross. Our perfect picture of the world and life is distorted. We see and read of violence, war, greed and reluctance to help others and hear remarks of doom and gloom.

Isaiah speaks of the survivors who will produce and be proud again. Everyone will be classified as holy. They will be alive and precious. God will build a canopy to protect them.

In John 15, Jesus says "I have loved you the way my father loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. My joy will be your joy. This is my command, love one another the way I love you. I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy complete."

When we read about the troubles, lack of the value of life, greed, corruption and the love of wealth in Jesus' day, we realize we are not unique. Jesus didn't give up. He saw the world clearly, but he knew what was possible.

The view of our evergreen was gone, but it was still there, strong, stately and beautiful. I just needed to remember and trust. We may feel at times that God is gone from our view. We can't see or feel Him. He is still here! God is still in control!

In Henri Nouman's THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL he says to keep moving toward the light when the darkness is so real.

As we journey and prepare for Christmas, we remember we are given a gift, a gift of a child who lived among us and then died on a cross. We celebrate the birth. We celebrate the cross. Jesus' life and birth give us an example of how to live. Death on the cross showed us how to die and forgive. We celebrate not because all the problems have been solved, human pain and suffering obliterated. We celebrate the birth which brought us the ability to live and have joy. In our Joy we see the obstructions, remembering and seeing the beauty of the manger and the cross.

As for me, I am going to wish everyone a Merry Christmas, feel great joy upon seeing the manger, singing and listening to the carols, , and I will continue to pray everywhere. Joy to the world!

Prayer: Our gracious God, Help us to feel and see the love and joy. Help us to love everyone and give joy. Thank you for loving us and sharing joy in the simple and small. Amen

June Carlson

A PRECIOUS TIME

Christmas is a time of celebration, reflection and preparation of the heart and soul! I remember my first Christmas in the United States after living in Nairobi as a little girl. It was amazing to watch the snow filled city of Chicago bustle with holiday shoppers. Not a day went by without seeing people get out of cabs and busses heavily laden with holiday packages for their loved ones. Bells were rung on street corners by an array of Santa's. Christmas carols were played in all the department stores and the "Nutcracker" was the ballet of the season. All of this for Jesus' birthday, I thought, how exciting! My next thought was, what shall I give to anyone in honor of Jesus' birthday? After all the adults had jobs and money and I had neither. So I began to take inventory of my things and remembered I had a precious set of china horses tucked away in the corner of my drawer. On rainy or snowy days I would take them out and put them on the windowsill so that the daylight could touch them and I could take in the beauty and delicacy in which they were made.

So that Christmas I decided that I would give my most precious china horses away as presents. After all, baby Jesus was a precious gift to the world.... and if Jesus was my little brother he might like them too. Taking care to look for just the right boxes and combination of cotton balls and toilet paper; I wrapped them up and placed them under the tree on Christmas Eve.

Many years later, as my mother and I were cleaning out some of my Grandmother's things after she died, I found a small box in the corner of her drawer. Inside was a china horse wrapped in cotton balls and toilet paper. To my surprise my Grandmother had kept my treasure all these years, just as I had given it to her. She must have known how special that china horse was to me, and on that day I realized how precious I was to her. Tears flowed down my face as I gently unwrapped the china horse and thought about her fingers peeling back the layers of cotton balls and toilet paper in the same manner many-years ago.

**May he live while the sun endures. And as long as the moon
throughout all generations. Psalm 72:5**

*Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, thank you for the precious time in life and for the
gift of our Lord, Jesus.*

Reverend Sheryl Sumlin-Barclay

December 6 Isaiah 30: 18 -23

HOPE THROUGH THE SAFE HOUSE

The people in Isaiah's time were hoping for a Messiah to lead them and protect them from all danger.

When I think about hope in my life I think about the years I spent as a volunteer at Safe House. Our former minister Dr. George Mehaffey, with the other ministers of Flagler County had the vision to form an agency that would speak to the needs of the victims of domestic abuse in Flagler County. The Safe House was established in 1987 through the faith, hope and determination of the church leaders. The leadership of these churches continually changes and they have faced some enormous problems in 26 years. Each year new leaders have accepted the challenge of serving on the board .Their time and expertise has been a blessing for all who are victims of abuse. This service has given "hope" to many desperate women in Flagler County.

Prayer: We thank you Lord for the Safe House. You have continued to be the strength and hope for the future. Continue to guide and protect us in Jesus name. Amen.

Joan Morris

December 7

Isaiah 40, 1-11; John 1: 19-28

COMFORT MY PEOPLE

In the passage from Isaiah, God asks the prophet to comfort those who were exiled in Babylon.

Verse 11:

He will feed his flock like a shepherd;

He will gather the lambs in his arms,

and carry them in his bosom,

and gently lead the mother sheep.

When I was very young, I saw a picture of Jesus holding a lamb in his arms. I was greatly impressed by that picture; I found it comforting. The pastor of the Presbyterian Church which my family attended was a tall, unsmiling man who always seemed to be dressed in black. I think I was afraid of him. So the picture of Jesus as a loving shepherd seemed to put me at ease somehow.

We are living in stressful times! Sometimes our world seems to be coming apart. We have wars, political crises, illness, environmental concerns, unbelievable poverty, and the list goes on and on. We need to remind ourselves from time to time that God is in control and he holds us in his arms much like the good shepherd.

During this Christmas Season we need to remember the great gift that God gave us in Jesus Christ who brought salvation to all people.

What a joy this is! Remember and be comforted!

Prayer: Gracious God, help us to remember that you are in charge and that you love us even more than a shepherd loves his lambs.

Ross Royce

MY HOPE

Many years ago, when I was a young lad, I was fortunate enough to get involved in sandlot baseball. This was a type of baseball only played on certain fields in the area of Brooklyn, New York, where I was born and grew up. I used to travel by train to get to these fields. I fell in love with the game, and had a mindset that I would be good at the game. Like most boys at this age, I had great hope I would be one of the great players. Also, at this time in my life, I gave my heart and soul to our Lord Jesus Christ, the basis of all Hope.

I continued to play ball a couple of times a week, including Saturdays and I got picked for a special team at that time. As time passed, progressing into a good shortstop, I was asked to represent our team and league on a television program called "Happy Felton's Knot Hole Gang". A few shortstops from different leagues were picked to be on the program, vying against each other at Ebbets Field, home of the Brooklyn Dodgers. The winner of the shortstops taking part would be picked by none other than "Pee Wee Reese". To make a long story short, Pee Wee Reese picked me as the winner, and presented me with my first decent baseball glove. I was elated, and sat in the dugout with all the now Hall of Famers, such as Jackie Robinson, Duke Snyder, Carl Furillo, Billy Cox, Roy Campanella, Gil Hodges, and many others. Wow, this was a dream come true!

I always had HOPE to become a big league player, but that did not come to pass. I did get picked by our local newspaper at that time named "The Journal American" team where I had the opportunity to play at Ebbets Field, the Polo Grounds, and Yankee Stadium. Those were the days, when HOPE for me was a great blessing and continues to be. I have kept that hope. I have been blessed ever since, with a wonderful wife and family.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for all the Hope and blessings bestowed on me.

Howard R. Parker

December 9 Psalm 21, Isaiah 24: 1-16a

SINGING PRAISES

When you spend four to five hours each week with the same people for close to 10 years, you tend to become family, and as family you celebrate the good times and deal with the bad together. For years we seemed to move through the church as a group ~ almost always singing ~ but also helping each other. When Events held a concert, all four of us could be there to help with the concessions or usher or clean-up. Thursday nights after dinner and before choir we would all help change the paraments and the hymn numbers and change the oil in the candles on the Communion table. Poinsettias and Easter Lilies did not stand a chance ~they were placed on the chancel almost as soon as they arrived in the sanctuary. The biggest concern seemed to be “bows or no bows?”

And all because of singing, we were brought together. We lived and breathed the music. We rehearsed a lot because we have been told “Practice does not make perfect; perfect practice makes perfect.” And we tried to be perfect: lifting our voices to praise the Lord, using the talents that we as a group possessed.

Now, sadly, one of us is gone. When one is taken it makes all of us realize how precious life can be. We celebrate our time together as a family and are grateful to the Trinity family for supporting us with their love and prayers. The Psalmist says: “From the ends of the earth we hear singing: Glory to the Righteous One.” We would amend that to say: From the ends of the earth and heaven we hear singing. . .

Prayer: We thank you, God, for allowing our small family to lift You up in song.

Gioioso

CELEBRATE WITH HOPE AND JOY

I still remember as a young child making a wish list for Santa for gifts and going with my Mom to the post office to mail it to the North Pole. The hope, excitement and anticipation were enough to make me never sit still until Christmas morning. It was and is a magical time of year. The little Lord Jesus was born. When the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds and said, “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”

What a wonderful day when Christmas dawned. My sister and I opened gifts “ooing” and” aahhing” over as we tore open our gifts. Even if we didn't get everything that we wanted, in the excitement of the day, it was forgotten. Next, we went to church to celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus and sing the hymns that are so familiar and that filled us with joy and hope for our lives celebrating our Savior's birth.

We got to repeat the same experience when we had children. It was so full of our memories from childhood that it was easy to do it again and see the wonder and hope written on their faces. It brings a smile to my face every time I think back on our past Christmases. Sometimes in our lives, things go wrong for a million reasons. You are feeling desperate and far from the Lord. The love and support offered by our Lord can turn that despair into quiet hope and finally put a smile on your face. Prayer and bible study help to clear out the cobwebs and show us the face of God. So that in this advent season of year, we can all celebrate with hope and joy the birth of our dear Lord.

Dear Lord, Thank you for sending your only begotten Son to us so that we can celebrate His birth each year and realize the joy and love He brings to our lives.

Carol Graff

December 11 Matthew 12: 33-37, Psalm 21

HOPES OF THE 3 AND 4 YEAR OLDS

Sometimes, the Advent and Christmas season can be a difficult time. You feel pulled in a million different directions. If you have lost a loved one, you can feel overwhelmed with sadness and grief.

Advent is the time when, as a Christian, we should be filled with hope. The individuals with the most hope this time of year are children. Advent and Christmas is a time of excitement and hope for what the future will bring.

Here is what our 3 and 4 year old Sunday school class hopes for this Christmas:

A car when I grow up (hopefully it will be green or purple)

A police car

A power ranger

A dinosaur

Reflect for a moment about what your 4- year- old self would have hoped for you to have in your life now. Chances are, God has blessed you with more than you could have ever dreamed of.

Dear God, Thank you for all the blessings in our lives. Thank you for giving us what we need, when we need it and thank you for hope for future blessings. Amen

Brooke Tucker's Three and Four Year Old Sunday School Class

December 12 Scripture: 2 Peter 3: 1-10, Psalm 146: 5-10

THE CHRISTMAS THAT ALMOST WASN'T

The Advent season of 1968 wasn't looking very festive at our house. Things were a bit hectic. I had just completed the dissertation defense for my Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin, and was to start my job at the State University of New York in January. Just before Christmas, we were packed for the moving van. I have a mental picture of Jeannette sitting on one box, with the typewriter (remember those?) on another, desperately typing a paper for me that needed to be out before we left Madison. We would be celebrating Christmas Day with parents, but nothing looked like Christmas in our little apartment; our three boys would just have to put up with a small celebration this year, and hope for better next year.

But our boys weren't quite willing to accept such a grim setting for Christmas. They found a rather bedraggled Christmas tree in a dumpster, obviously cast off by some graduate student family that had already celebrated and were on their way. The boys set up this somewhat-the-worse-for-wear tree in our nearly bare living room, sat down with paper, scissors, and crayons and made their own ornaments for the tree.

Somehow this bit of color in our now almost emptied home represented the hope in our hearts for the future. The previous weeks had been filled with stress and worry, but we could now see a new future for the whole family, and this improvised tree stood for that hope.

Advent is surely a season of hope; a time of looking forward, of course, to Christmas Day and the first coming of Christ, and also looking forward to the return of our Lord. But my years on the Missions Committee have made me aware that hope is not part of the view for many people; for some, their future looks just as grim as their present. Those of us who have hope can share this hope with those who have none - the hope that comes of our faith, and of our blessings. Hope shared is not diminished, but is enhanced by being shared.

Let us pray with St. Francis of Assisi:

Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Del Smith

13 December Ruth 4:13-17; 2 Peter 3:11-18

*“LET US WALK IN THE LIGHT WHICH THE LORD
GIVES US!”*

Isaiah 2:5

"As a Christian, I learned to not take things for granted. After my mom got sick, I appreciated her more. Going on the Mission trips, I learned to give back to the community and it helped me realize that there are people who are starving and homeless. That made me realize that I should be thankful for what I have. I give back to the community, I appreciate what I have, and I am thankful for what God has given me in this life."

McKayla MaeDavendonis

"I give back to the community and less fortunate. I also think and pray about others."

Jarrold Michael Connors

"I give of myself for service to others."

Joseph Thomas Digby

"I am thankful for the little things in life. I am also thankful for the good and the bad things in life because without the bad, you would never experience the good."

Tyler Bennett Gynizio

Prayer: Father God, as we grow in our Christian lives, guide and direct us, help us to always remember the needs of others. Give us the insight to recognize what service you would have us do. Amen

Senior High Youth Group

December 14, Matthew 6:7-13

STUDYING THE LORD'S PRAYER AND LOOKING FOR HOPE

This year our Trinity Troopers are learning the Lord's Prayer and the meaning as it applies to them. Each week we are taking a line and discussing it. The part of the verse 'Give us this day, our daily bread' was our discussion. We talked how this not only applies to the essentials of food, water and air, but other things are needed from our Lord; HOPE and the power of our Lord to help us when we need it. When I asked the children what is their hope - these were the responses that were given to me by our youth family ages 5 – 11.

Hope to me is my pets and my friends; Hope is winning the lottery because you are lucky; Hope to me is my cat; Hope is like a song when you feel sad, a rainbow to show smiles; Hope is like a billion dollars!!!; Something that gives me hope is my sister Lauren that is in the Marines; Hope is a million dollars; Hope is something you can't wait for or something I like to be. Hope is something you can't see or hear, but something you can feel; I hope for my family; I hope for money and to see snow this winter.

What is your hope for this season?

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for the gifts of these, your children. Bless them and their families. Thank you for letting me share time with them and see them grow into the beautiful individuals that you have placed into our church family.

Libbie Butler, Troopers

GUIDANCE, PROTECTION AND LOVE

And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

When asked if I could write for this year's Advent Devotional Booklet I said yes and proceeded to select a date. When I got home from church that morning to check the passage I had randomly signed up for I was startled to see it was the *same passage from Luke that I selected last year... Coincidence?*

I recently celebrated my 80th Birthday at the home of my sister Louise and Tom in Ormond Beach and with my brother Michael and Norma from Flemington, N.J., sister Joyce and Kelly from Satellite Beach, FL and daughter Leslie and Bill from Mifflinburg, PA and many friends. We enjoyed lots of food, laughs and were entertained by a Frank Sinatra performance, arranged by our daughter Kymberlee and her husband Rob (who because of Kim's foot operation couldn't fly in from Bishop, California, but was able to enjoy the performance thanks to new technology "the camera/phone"). Our son Christopher was unable to attend because of a conflicting program he instituted for teachers and "would be" teachers at the University of Western Georgia where he serves as Department Chair.

After loving my husband, family and friends, I love my garden. When we moved to Palm Coast I had a big challenge. Our back yard is adjacent to golf course property which over the years has metamorphosed into flower beds from weeds. The statue of St. Francis enjoys the yard along with the flowers and birds. For many years I have wanted a statue of the "angel of good and evil" you may remember from a book and movie which took place in Savannah, GA, but there was always another reason for not spending the money. As a surprise to me Bob ordered the statue and placed it in the garden under a trellis where she and I are very happy.

Driving to the Orlando Airport early one morning and just before reaching I-4 intersection my dashboard light came on saying I had low tire pressure. Quickly I turned around and went back toward International Drive to a gas station and pulled up to the air pump where a young Spanish speaking girl was on the phone and trying to put air in her flat tire. She motioned to me "I don't think it's working", so I continued to the next gas station and asked if someone could help me, but he was alone and couldn't leave the store so on to the next gas station I went and pulled up alongside someone who was bent over the tire filling it with air. When she stood up I recognized her UPS uniform. She asked me which tire needed air and I couldn't tell her because I didn't know. She quickly put air in my tire as she still had time on her 75 cents airtime and we both were on our way, she to work and me to pick up my daughter at the Orlando Airport coming from Mifflinburg, PA, for my birthday!

Prayer: Thank you Lord for your constant guidance, protection and love.

Edwina Tabit

December 16 Isaiah 29: 17-24, Acts 5: 12-16

HOPE: THE EXPECTATION OF GOOD

The theme of this year's Advent devotional is "HOPE". According to my Cruden's Concordance, there are approximately 125 passages in the Bible containing variations of the word "hope". According to my Unger's Dictionary, "Hope is in the New Testament sense the expectation of good".

We have several books in our church library with the word "hope" in the title. One of them is "The Audacity of Hope", (then Sen.) Obama's story of pursuing "the American dream". Another is "Hope Within History" by Walter Brueggemann. In it he shows the development of the concept of hope as the very structured Jewish system grew and the people became a nation. Having hope allows us to accept God's will for our lives. Although we may not receive the Christmas gift of our dreams, we are assured that Santa cares enough about us to see that we are not forgotten. Having a "hope" week in the Advent season reinforces these thoughts as we watch the "Hope" candle being lit. I am reminded of a line from a song from not too many years ago, "hope of deliverance from the darkness that surrounds me".

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for Jesus' coming and for His Light that permeates us all.

Maudie Parker

December 17 Ezekiel 47, Psalm 42

HOPE THROUGH BELIEF IN GOD

My experience has been that no matter how devastating life can become, there is always hope through our belief in God. When we pray, God puts situations and people into our lives and it is there where we find our hope.

My Hope has appeared after the most painful day of my life. That evening we saw a magnificent sunset which was so breathtaking, we knew it could only be a sign from God - our precious child was with him. Hope appeared when our TPC family came to us with food, help, listening ears, hugs and love to help share and ease our pain. Hope is having friends and family who continue to support us and to remember Tiffany even after many years have passed. Hope appeared in a season which once was too painful to enjoy, then finding people who wanted to help and work hard to make our little girls' dream become a reality. Hope is realizing that God will provide you with opportunities, experiences and people, while you are on this earth, to help bring you the peace of God which surpasses all understanding. Hope is knowing and totally believing that one day we will be together with our loved ones in eternity. My hope this advent season is that we can all feel God's peace and love through our prayers to him and through one another.

Prayer: Dear God, you know the troubles we experience in our lives. Help us always turn to you in our time of need. Amen.

Libbie Butler

December 18 Zachariah 8: 1-17, Matt 8: 14-17, 28-34

Worship by young Children

In the worship center we have all the time we need so we walk more slowly and we talk more quietly because someone might be talking with God and we don't want to disturb them. We talk with God by praying and singing. We listen to the stories about God. We have heard about the Light (a liturgical story using the Christ candle based on Jesus saying , "I am the light"). It is meaningful to the children because it is a link to Bible stories such as: The creation, the story of Noah and the animals, the rainbow and the parable of the lost sheep. After we hear the story we draw pictures and make play dough figures which remind us of the story and its meaning. When we light the Christ candle we are reminded that God is with us as we read from the Bible and then we have our feast. We hope that God will always be with us and with our moms and dads and with our dogs and cats. We hope our grandpas, Grandmas, Nanas, Papas and Uncles will stay well. We hope to learn more about God's creation and to sing His praises.

Prayer: Dear God help us to listen to you and to talk to you every day.

THE CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY

The entry door to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem traces the history of the place. Originally, there was a straight and wide Byzantine doorway. When the Crusaders came, they filled it in below to make a narrow, pointed doorway. Later when the Turks captured the church, they filled in the doorway for easy defense so anyone entering would have to stoop very low to enter. Emperor Constantine built a large church over the birthplace of Christ. The large prayer hall has four rows of twelve stone pillars. An octagonal altar overlooks the sacred grotto where Jesus was born. Constantine had a hole cut in the ceiling of the cave so worshipers could view the holy place while at prayer.

Our tour group descended steep steps down into the cave. A small nook near the base of the stairs marked the birthplace of Christ with a silver star on the floor. The space was cramped and filled with pilgrims from many different countries. A young woman from Eritrea got down on her knees and kissed the star. Tears of joy streamed down her face. Her husband and small son waited patiently for her as she worshiped. Pilgrims gathered in alcoves nearby praying or singing. Our group sang several Christmas carols. Emotions at that time and in that place were intense. Various languages mingled in praise and thanksgiving. Each of us truly realized that “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus...” (Galatians 3:28).

The church building we saw in Bethlehem is not the original building. Through the centuries, three churches have been built over Jesus’ birth site. Excavations have discovered the original mosaic floor from the first temple built by Emperor Hadrian in 135. Fires have destroyed two of the buildings. Muslims, when they captured this area did not destroy this holy place as it is the birthplace of Asa (Jesus), one of their prophets. The present building is managed by three denominations who celebrate Christmas on different dates: Catholics who celebrate December 25; Greek Orthodox who celebrate January 7; and Armenians who celebrate on January 19. As told in 2nd Samuel, David was concerned that he had not built a proper temple to hold the Ark of the Covenant. A revelation to the prophet Nathan reminded David of the many promises God had already made to the Israelites and that He had kept them. The revelation also revealed that it would not be David’s job to build the temple, but the task would be the responsibility of his descendants (2 Samuel 7:4-13). God is not worried about the edifices we build to honor Him; he truly is more concerned with what lies within our hearts. God has made many promises to us and fulfilled them. Like David, we need to remember this. As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, we need to celebrate God’s faithfulness with grateful hearts, both in prayer and in song. We need to exclaim as David did, “How great you are, O Sovereign Lord!” (2 Samuel 7:22).

Prayer: Dear Lord, Help us to come to Christmas with a feeling of joy and thankfulness for the many blessings you have given us. Help us celebrate your gift of Jesus with sincere humility and gratitude. Amen.

Carol Corson

HOPE, FAITH AND TRUST: THE RIGHT TIMING

When I was young in college my high school boy friend and I parted our ways. I hoped and prayed we would make up. Instead God brought me Bob Settles, a much better choice for a life time. When we had been married about three years I hoped and prayed we would be blessed with a "little Settles". Two years later when Bob, who was now out of the Navy, and settled in a job he liked we had our first child; much better timing for our future. When Bob accepted a new job in Iowa away from our roots in Kansas I hoped and prayed we would stay put, buy a house and be there many years. It was not to be. Bob was offered an assistantship at the University of Missouri, which led to an advanced degree and a much better job teaching at the University of Georgia. By now I was beginning to pray "help me to follow the path You would have me go, Lord", recognizing God has better plans for me than I can devise.

Sometimes our hopes may not be what's best for us. Or perhaps these "hopes" are daydreaming. If we spend more time with prayer and scripture we may find our hope for the future is based on the hope given us for forgiveness and grace delivered through Jesus' act of great love. The scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promise to be fulfilled.

So much in our lives happens in God's time, not ours. My LIFE APPLICATION STUDY BIBLE says: " 'When the right time came' (Gal. 4:4) God sent Jesus to earth to die for our sins. For centuries the Jews had been wondering when their Messiah would come ---but God's timing was perfect. We may sometimes wonder if God will ever respond to our prayers. But we must never doubt him or give up hope. At the right time he will respond." (p 1990)

PRAYER: I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

Lois Settles

21 Dec. Psalm 80:1-7 and 17-19, 2 Samuel 7:23-29

HOPE

Has anyone ever made you a promise? Oh how we hope that they keep that promise. In 2 Samuel we read that God is reminded by the writer to do as you promised: To keep the covenant with Israel! Further on it states that the words of the Lord are trustworthy. When we think of the word trustworthy, we know that the promise will be kept, the promise will not be broken. We think of Israel today, a tiny country surrounded by many enemies. Its hope is in the Lord and His promise for protection, His word that good things have been promised and it "will be blessed forever". How comforting this must be for those who read this word and believe this promise from the Almighty God.

In the verses in Psalms, we discover that Israel has suffered an invasion. She has been ravaged by a foreign power and her people are praying for restoration. How many times this has happened and how many times the people have "humbled themselves and prayed" and God has time and time again answered!

We all, like sheep, have wandered and strayed, but thank God, He is just and faithful and willing to forgive and restore us again and again.

During this Christmas season we can all take comfort in the promise of our God and the Hope of His undying love for us in His most perfect gift: JESUS!!

Prayer: Father God, help us to keep our eyes on you through all our trials and hardships. Help us to remember the HOPE Jesus has given us and the blessings of your grace. Amen.

Jane Lippian

MY HOPE

Hope: to look forward to with confidence of fulfillment.

I don't know about anyone else but I hope for many things; a good day to weed in the garden, a safe journey on I 95, that medical issues will be resolved or stay stable. We all hope for many things small and large. I have a new granddaughter who is about 11 months old and since her arrival, with each visit to see her, she grows and is on target as for growth and development milestones. She now babbles and loves her musical toys. Will she be a singer like I was, or a good flutist/singer like her aunt who is my other daughter, or will she take after others on both sides of our family who love expressing themselves within the sphere of music with accordion or guitar or voice? This last year has been full of wonder, and I marvel at how much I missed while doing "mom things", hoping that our daughters would grow and prosper. What is she thinking and what will she grow up to be? I hope many things for her and her parents.

But this word of HOPE resonates with the birth of our LORD and what is meant by the celebration of his birth at this time of year. Grand music by the "heavenly hosts" proclaimed his birth. I and others delight and shiver at the music of Handel, listening to the Messiah's Christmas section when a choir sings.

So, I turn to a favorite hymn which expresses hope and my belief and is not a seasonal song. It was composed in the mid 1800's and still is in hymnbooks today and entitled,

MY HOPE IS BUILT ON NOTHING LESS

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand. 2. When darkness veils His lovely face, I rest on His unchanging grace; in every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand. 3. His oath, His covenant, His blood, support me in the whelming flood; when all around my soul gives way. He then is all my hope and stay. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand. 4. When He shall come with trumpet sound, Oh, may I then in Him be found; dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne. On Christ, the solid Rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.

Here is my hope. Merry Christmas dear friends

Prayer: Thank you Lord Jesus for the hope you brought us. Loretta Johnson

December 23 Gal.3: 6-14, Luke 1: 46b-55

HOPE AND PROMISE THROUGH CLASS

Miss Patsy's Third, Fourth, and Fifth Grade Class begins each class by reviewing last week's lesson. The lessons build on each other so this is a good way to reconnect and bring children who were absent the week before up to date. While I'm doing this, Mikie Davendonis is taking attendance and collecting our offering. We take turns reading or lesson from our new books. At the end of our lesson and discussion, we get ready for our "movie time". Lights out! We have a few treats during our movie: popcorn, gluten-free snacks, or Goldfish. Our favorite drink is ICE, a sugar free, vitamin water. If we have time we show the previous week's DVD. We take turns reading the scripture from our Connect Bible. The lesson is reaching each child visually as well as through reading and discussion. So ~ we tell it ~ show it ~ read it! And we may do a craft to reinforce it all.

The last ten minutes of our time is set aside for our continuing Korean lesson. We are very blessed to have Mrs. Jin Young Burch and her husband, Mike, helping this year. We write our names in Korean and practice our words. We are still trying to learn "Jesus Loves Me" in Korean.

Our class hopes for peace, to learn more about the Bible, to go to heaven.(and when we go to heaven) we hope to see angels, God, and Jesus. One little girl also added, "I hope to see my parents because they will be dead then, won't they?"

What a very "hopeful" class. They hope for peace in the present. They hope to learn more about the Bible with the hope of heaven. And they look forward to the reward of heaven and meeting God.

I am very pleased to have such wonderful children, eager to learn. We try to make this class full of Christian Education and FUN! I want to make the children to look forward to our class each week, as I do. I am so fortunate to have such wonderful help!

Prayer: Thank you, God, for our hope in the present and the promise of the world to come. Amen.

Patsy Moden

FINDING HOPE

Jerusalem surrounded us. We were all seated on a low stone wall contemplating the circumstances. The lovely olive trees surrounded us. The sky was bright blue and clear. Only the background noise of other tourists was all we could hear. The Garden of Gethsemane, our guide explained, is much as it was in Jesus' time. Some of the trees have even been proven to be offspring of the trees of many years ago. As we sat and took it all in, imagining Jesus there with us, the guide asked a volunteer to read Matthew 26:36-46 to us. Jesus asked, as you will remember, for Peter and James and John to accompany him to the garden and sit there with him as he went to pray. He was very sad for he knew soon they would all abandon him and he would face the horrible scene of torture and death. He asked God to take this cup from him, but as you know, said, "Thy will not mine be done". The disciples fell asleep. He asked Peter if they could not watch with him for just one hour. He must have truly felt so very alone with no support facing a dastardly act and had to be terribly distressed. He once again went a little ways away and prayed the same prayer. He returned a second time to find them asleep again. And his repeated effort was once again thwarted with sleeping disciples. The third time, of course, was when he told them the time had arrived. As our reader continued we truly felt the sadness of the time. There was hardly a dry eye in our group of twenty-five.

And then I thought, as I sat there how this was the beginning of Hope for so many. Jesus gave his all for those of us who are sinners and brought Grace and the Holy Spirit to us. We can find where the hope is. Because of the life, ministry, and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, millions of Christians throughout the world bring hope to people in need. Every kind word is a seed of hope. Every act of mercy sows hope. Every moment of teaching and learning is a path toward hope.

We can find hope through worship, reading scripture and prayer, gaining the vision and strength to help others find where there is hope.

Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), help us to open our eyes to opportunities to be agents of your grace. Help to us help others find Your Hope.

Lois Settles

December 25 Luke 2:8-11

FEAR NOT

Luke 2:8-11 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

Fear can cripple us both emotionally and physically. It can lead us down paths that we'd rather not travel. It can make us misinterpret the world around us. Worst of all, fear can remove us from the joy that God is bringing to us every day. At this most special time, when we remember that God our Father sent his son as an infant child, let us let go of all fear. Let us fear not that Christmas is either overdone or undone. Christmas is just right. It always has been. Christmas is about the moment when God intervened and entered human history to change that history forever. In God, at Christmas, we have the gift that takes away all fear. Today let us hear the calming words of the angel, "Do not be afraid..."

Prayer: Loving God, giver of Christmas everlasting, help us to let go of all fear this day and embrace the joy which is Emmanuel. Amen.

Pastor Ron Watson



Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

II Corinthians 9:15

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