



*Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*

*II Corinthians 9:15*

### Trinity Presbyterian Church

156 Florida Park Drive

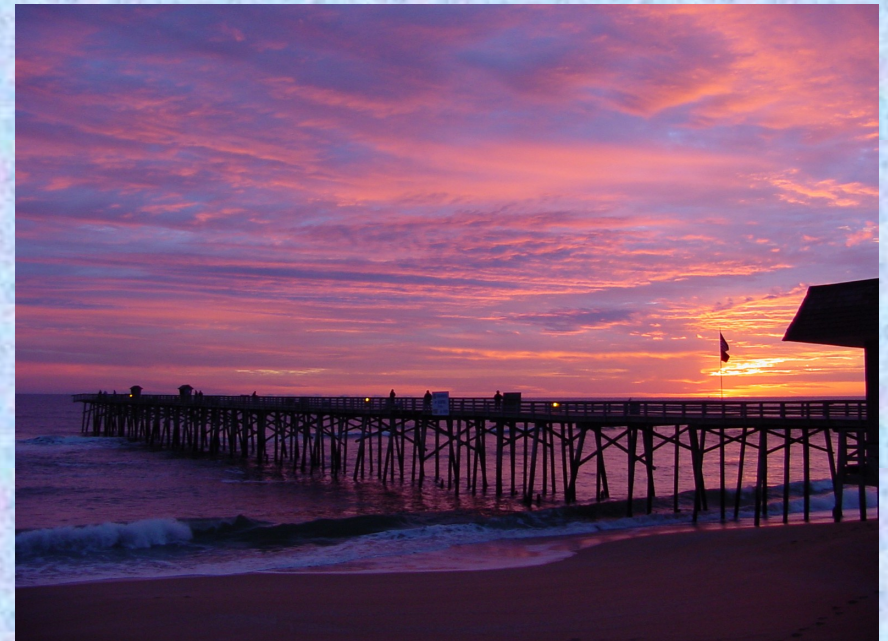
Palm Coast, Florida 32137

386.445.4757

[www.trinitypresbyterianchurchpalmcoast.us](http://www.trinitypresbyterianchurchpalmcoast.us)

## Trinity Presbyterian Church

### 2014 Advent Devotionals



The joy of advent as  
expressed and experienced  
by members of  
Trinity Presbyterian Church

TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
ADVENT DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET 2014

**I John 1:4 We are writing these things so that you may fully share in our joy. Psalm 92:4 You thrill me, Lord, with all you have done.**

Since 2005 the Christian Education Committee has been providing the congregation with devotionals for the advent season. Over the years our writers have shared some truly inspirational stories from their own experiences. Our theme this year is JOY. Contributors this year share with you original stories of times of joy in their lives. Focusing on JOY has brought forth some great stories of the joyful times families share at the holiday times, as well as through-out the year. References are made to songs that bring joy: “Joy to the World the Lord has come” and “Joyful, joyful we adore thee, God of Glory, God of Love” come to mind. Writers have shared joy felt with their animals that have brought them great joy; as well as joy in birth, joy in His Grace, joy gained from their books, etc. All personal stories or observations have a unique flavor of our own congregation. Nowhere else will you read these same devotionals.

Each day’s devotional is preceded with suggested scripture readings. These may or may not reflect the shared message. We suggest you read the scripture passage listed and then enjoy each contribution on a daily basis. Each year many folks tell us they read it all the way through, then go back each day to reread that particular day’s offering. Morning or night, shared out loud with the family or read silently, we hope it brings you inspiration and an insight to the loving congregation here at Trinity Presbyterian Church.

Thanks to all the contributors who have shared their inspirational thoughts for this season as we prepare to welcome, once again, God’s gift of Love and JOY, His Son, Jesus Christ.

Lois Settles for the Christian Education Committee

*more  
notes*

# notes

Advent devotional November 30, Psalm  
146, 147, 111-113: Luke 21: 5-19

## **FEEL THE JOY**

In Psalm 146 we read these words – “he always keeps his promises”. Therefore, we assume that God does answer our prayers – all of them! I can hear a few dissenting voices – I didn’t get what I prayed so long and hard for, God wasn’t listening. Wrong!! God always listens, but we don’t always “hear” his reply. Perhaps it isn’t the answer we want, but God’s answer is always there if we only listen.

We are an impatient people and many times we only hear what we want to hear. So, open your ears as well as your heart, feel the joy – you’ll be surprised how smart God is!

Prayer: Father God, we are ever so grateful for the joy we experience when we listen to you and know you are there always and forever. Amen.

Pat Dixon

Advent devotional Dec 1: Psalm 1-4, 7:  
Matthew 21: 1-11

## **CHRISTMAS IS JOY**

The definition of Christmas to me is joy. . . the joy of the Savior's birth. We feel that joy all around us in children's laughter. Our scripture today says: "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise." Children knew then and they know today of the special presence of Jesus.

I do not like shopping. If I have something in particular that I need to get and have a list (I love lists!), shopping is tolerable. And, if I find what I deem to be the "perfect" gift, I am filled with joy! I want the recipient to have that same reaction when she/he receives the gift. That is not always the case.

God has given us so many incredible gifts, but what is our response? Is it joy? As the Giver of those gifts, does God feel disappointment in our lack of joy? He certainly could. He could have given up on us eons ago. But He didn't. God continues to love and bless us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to feel the joy of this season and to spread that joy with all your children.  
Amen

Karen Thomas

## **Index of Contributors**

Many thanks to Trinity's volunteers who offered their personal experiences of JOY in this season of advent.

Jef Amsbaugh

Anonymous

Sheryl Barclay

June Carlson

Carol Corson

Dave Corson

Pat Dixon

Carol Graff

Queenester Jones

Joan Morris

Maudie Parker

Sue Pope

Helene Read

Hawley Rogers

Lois Settles

Betty Lou Singalewitch

Del Smith

Sinclair Stickle

Karen Thomas

Ron Watson

Advent devotional December 25: Psalm 72, 111, 113,  
Luke 1: 39-56

### **Hollow Chocolate**

Each Christmas, once Santa's toys were played with, my sister and I moved on to the stockings, knowing that inside would be a giant chocolate Santa, or Snowman, or Reindeer, or something. But both of us, under our breath, would mutter the words, "Please don't be hollow chocolate! Please don't be hollow chocolate." The hollow chocolate was a big Christmas let down. It looked right. It was wrapped right, usually in brightly colored foil. And, for a moment, it even tasted right, until our teeth came quickly together, finding a giant pocket of lifeless candy factory air. Childhood memories can do much to steer our expectations this time of year. When we hit that hollow chocolate moment, old familiar disappointments appear.

But I have good news from the prophet Isaiah 9:6:  
"For unto us a child is born, a son is given; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

"Unto us a child is born" means that we do not have to create or expect the defining moment of Christmas, nor dread a hollow feeling. The moment is given to us by God. It may be fleeting, but it is God's gift that brings it, not our own expectations. It is reliable. It happens every year. It is solid, not hollow. And when you really think about it, it is surely enough. Merry Christmas!

Prayer: Loving God, only you give this season its meaning. Find us in our hollow places and fill us with your solid Spirit. Amen."

Rev. Ron Watson

Advent devotional December 2: Psalms 5, 6, 10, 11; Matt. 21: 12-22

### **GIFTS: TIME, ENERGY, MONEY**

Matthew 21 is the passage where Jesus flips out, overturning tables and shouting at the people in the temple. It is probably fitting that this passage should be included in a devotional celebrating His birthday. I always feel challenged at this time of year. There is always a lesson to be learned in the giving and receiving of gifts. Am I overspending? Am I being too tight-fisted? Am I being a good money manager? Would Jesus flip out if he saw the ways we celebrate His special day?

When I was growing up, each Christmas was different. A few times I received what I requested, but more times than not, I did not. One year when I was a teenager, I asked for ice skates. My grandfather was kind enough to buy them for me. The next year we were living in Hawaii...little use for skates there. I don't remember what gifts I received that year, but I do remember our gifts were wrapped in newspaper, due to a shortage of wrapping paper... and I remember standing with my family as we watched a boat loaded down with Christmas trees pull into the harbor. We chose our tree and spent the afternoon bending and wiring it into a shape resembling our memories of the Colorado blue spruce. The following year we were in Alabama and I was able to find a part-time job to help with the cost of my Christmas purchases. Each year something new has been added to my understanding of the Christmas experience.

Always there is great joy with each new Christmas experience.

Prayer : Dear Lord, thank you for the many, many different opportunities to experience You anew, and thank You for the many people you give us with whom to share our joy. In Jesus' name we pray...

Maudie Parker

Advent devotional Dec 3: Psalm 12, 13, 14: Matthew 21: 23-32

### BE JOYFUL FOR WHAT YOU GOT

According to the Ngram Book Analysis, during the last 100 years the use of the word “joy,” defined as a feeling of great pleasure and happiness, has decreased in aggregate by over 20%, in all printed English material. One might consider this a reflection of the conditions which mankind finds itself in today, but another answer might be that our perspective has become clouded and changed.

Consider embroidery when viewed from below, it appears a tangled random mess of colored threads. However, when viewed from above, it can become a beautiful work of art. Joy or sorrow is often a reflection of our point of view. God in his infinite wisdom grants us life experiences that are ultimately in our best interest. Even if we don’t immediately understand events which occur in our life, we would do well to consider them in light of Isaiah 55:9, **“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”** (KJV). Isaiah points out, here, that, like children, we may not know what is in our best interest. When viewed from God’s Heavenly perspective with His ability to foresee the future, these experiences become positive opportunities—deserving of joyful responses not those of worry and fear.

Henry J. van Dyke in his 1907 hymn, **“Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee,”** lists many of God’s everyday works for which we should also express joy:

“All Thy works with joy surround Thee,  
Earth and heav’n reflect Thy rays,  
Stars and angels sing around Thee,  
Center of unbroken praise.  
Field and forest, vale and mountain,  
Flow’ry meadow, flashing sea,  
Singing bird and flowing fountain  
Call us to rejoice in Thee.” (Verse 2)

More contemporaneously in 1972 DeV Vaughn composed **“Be Thankful for What You Got”** a then popular song about being thankful even if you don’t own a Cadillac or any car at all. Both song writers were giving us the same good advice concerning our contentment. Because our Father, the Giver of all good and perfect gifts, always has our best interests at heart we should be thankful for whatever God has provided. Trust in God’s infinite wisdom to guide your life and provide blessings that are good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, for this you can be truly joyful.

Prayer: Our Father, during this Advent Season, please help us be joyful for the gifts and talents that you have already provided to us. As Christians let us project joy to others so that when your Son returns He will say to us “Well done good and faithful servant.” We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and our Redeemer for it is only through Him that we can be truly joyful--Amen.

Jef Amsbaugh

Advent devotional December 24 Psalm- 66,67,116,117; Luke 1:26-38

### JOY TO THE WORLD

The Lord has come. Imagine the joy of the father and mother as their first born child is born. Visualize how the shepherds must have felt, first with fright and then with excitement and joy as they learned from the angels about the new born baby, Christ the King. Think about the three wise men who came from far away to see the new King and what joy they felt as they viewed the newborn baby in the manger. All this was long ago.

What joy has been found from this one birth since that night in Bethlehem! The love of Christ has brought with it hospitals for the ill, orphanages for children with no place to live, soup kitchens for the hungry, and benevolent organizations to help all walks of life in numerous ways. His word has brought comfort and joy to a huge unknown number of people over the centuries and many have died for him.

Much joy has come to humanity through music written from inspirations of Jesus’ coming. The Messiah and numerous etudes, hymns, symphonies, and even modern musicals have filled the air. Great works of art and sculpture have filled our world with joy for centuries. Magnificent churches bring joy to people all over the world. Impressive crosses commemorating Christ’s sacrifice for all of us are a sign of the Joy he brought us.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father thank you for the great joy You have given the entire world through the gift of your Son. Sing praises in His name. Amen

Lois Settles



Advent devotional Dec 23: Psalm 45,46,89:1-29: Luke 1: 26-80

**JOY! JOY! JOY!**  
**For nothing can be impossible with God.**

Our first Christmas in Africa began with the thought "surely Santa would not be able to find us here." Besides it was too warm and Santa might even have gotten stuck in the chimney trying to shimmy down it if he attempted to make a visit. That Christmas my mother thought it would be a good idea if we spent the early part of Christmas Day visiting the orphans who were housed in a community outside of Nairobi. I had second thoughts about that but jumped in the land rover, begrudgingly. To my surprise the day was filled with the excitement of presents, food, candy and music. I had not seen so many smiling children in one place ever! The day was so full I did not have a moment to think of the logistics of Santa coming for us. As I was crouched preparing to play a game of marbles, I felt my mother take my hand and lead us into a side room. This room didn't have as many children, but there was a huge Christmas tree in the middle of the room with a "kinta clothe" angel on the top. Some other children were playing on the floor, so I joined in, but soon realized the air was a bit different. The caregivers told us that this was their "special day". A day of JOY! Couples would come in one door and meet quietly with a child, share smiles, hugs, and whispers, and then they would take the child out of another door. Each child in this room was meeting their parents for the first time. Each child in this room had a home to go to. You could see that some parents were crying; they were so happy. You could see that Christmas meant LOVE, JOY, and HOPE. The children looked so happy! The last boy who was adopted that day got up and danced saying; "They picked me to be their special son and I won't let them down!" "MERRY CHRISTMAS" he said at the top of his lungs! "Merry Christmas" said the little girl who began her day "begrudgingly" that Christmas. I found that jubilation and joy comes when you least expect it!

Prayer: Thank you, God, for the love, joy, and hope given and received in Your name. Amen

Rev. Sheryl Sumlin-Barclay

Advent devotional Dec. 4: Psalm 18: 1-20, Matthew 21: 33-46

**SEIZE THE JOY!**

We all go through changes in our lives; these changes may be just a natural part of life, planned or unexpected. Life's seasons may last for long periods of time, come in spurts or occur in rapid succession. Similar to most people, the stages in my life thus far have happened in different ways such as through paths I choose, happenstance, changes from friends and family, and divine intervention. Reactions to change run the gamut from sad and angry to excited and joyful. We may not be able to control change; but we can control our reaction to it.

About three years ago I was dreading a major life change on the home front. The last of my children was preparing to leave home. Now there are those who may have jumped for joy at this prospect; however, I was at a loss. For many years my identity as well as most of my time was tied to my children. What would I do without parent meetings, piano lessons, band practice, dance lessons, recitals, school events, etc. Juggling my family's schedule was as challenging as when I had a career managing advertising agendas at a media agency in New York City. After all the activity of a three-ring circus, the quiet of my house would be deafening and the stillness unsettling.

God answered unexpectedly. A grandbaby was on the way! I was blessed to be a part of the coaching team in the delivery room. When that nine and a half pound red-headed screaming bundle of joy made an entrance into the world, I knew my house would not be quiet anymore. I laughed to myself as clichés such as "Be careful what you wish for" and "God works in mysterious ways" filled my mind. Due to my daughter's job as a teacher, I am now a full time caregiver for my granddaughter. Each day is a new adventure as the joy of this little girl runs through the door of our house shouting "Pa Pa" and "Maw Maw"! Even though I wouldn't have it any other way, I also have come to appreciate the quiet times.

PRAYER: Dear God, help us to take the blinders off and see the blessed opportunities you place before us. When doors close, thank you Lord for opening windows and letting the light in. Help us all to SEIZE THE JOY! Amen!

Helene Read

Advent devotional December 5: Psalm, 16, 17, Matthew 22:1-14!

### JOY IN THE MORNING!

A gray, heavily overcast Christmas morning - quite typical for western New York in December - our two little grandsons (both now grown up) were anxiously awaiting gift-opening time. They and I were up early, while it was still dark. They had strict instructions from their parents to not awaken them before the sun rose. On such a cloudy morning it was difficult to know if the sun had indeed risen or if the feeble light we saw just meant that the sun had decided that fully rising simply wasn't worth the effort. Finally, when I thought that if I didn't act soon these two little boys might burst, I said, "By the authority invested in me as a grandfather, I declare that the sun has risen." They were off like a shot. Soon they were dragging their bleary-eyed parents down the stairs for the long anticipated gift-opening.

At the moment the boys were dashing up the stairs they were experiencing the peak of happiness, which I take to be an intense, but fleeting, emotional feeling like, I suppose, winning the lottery. In contrast, their joy is deeper and longer, like the experience of having a family. Happiness is like bubbles rising in champagne - joy is like the air we breathe. Happiness vanishes when sadness comes; joy is with us in good times and bad.

I spoke recently with both grandsons about this event. Neither is sure whether he remembers it directly or as a result of having been told the story so often, but both agree on the joy that comes with these family times. As one of them recently wrote to me, "Looking back on many warm, butter horn-smelling, winter memories in that Brockport house makes me smile, and that is undoubtedly the joy you are writing about." Indeed it is.!

For the daylight will dawn  
When the darkness is gone  
There'll be joy in the morning  
On that day.  
-Natalie Sleeth!

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

Advent Devotional December 22, 2014: Luke 1: 1-25

### TWO BIRTH THRILLERS

Luke's opening chapter is a joyful thriller by any standard. He tells the story of Zachariah and his wife, Elizabeth. For years they remained childless until they were both old. While Zachariah was performing his priestly duties, Gabriel, the Angel of God, appears. Zachariah was paralyzed with fear! The Angel reports that his prayers have been answered, and that he and Elizabeth will bear a son, who they are to name John. The Angel said that John would prepare the people for the arrival of the Messiah.

After Zachariah's fears subsided he responded to Gabriel that both he and his wife were old, and that such an event would surely not be happening. For his disbelief, the Angel promised to render Zachariah speechless until after his son was born. And so it came to pass.

Shortly thereafter Elizabeth discovered she was pregnant. For five months she went off by herself relishing her pregnancy. "So this is how God acts to remedy my unfortunate condition!" she said. By contrast, Zachariah, who was now unable to speak, worked on perfecting his sign language, and undoubtedly came to appreciate the power of the Holy Spirit. He remained speechless until after John's birth. This amazing story predicted the birth of John the Baptist. Within six months a second miracle of birth was predicted to the virgin, Mary, whose son would change the world. What joy these babies brought!

Prayer: Lord, help us appreciate how the miracle of birth changes families, and how one birth changed the world.  
May we always show our gratitude. Amen

Anonymous



Advent devotional Dec 21: Psalm 8, 24, 29, 84: John 3: 16-21

### JOYFUL PRESBYTERIANS

Psalm 84:4 Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise.

When Philip and I moved to Palm Coast in June of 1979 we were astonished to learn that there were no Presbyterian Churches in all of Flagler County. We had come from New Jersey where there were lots of Presbyterian Churches. I was a cradle Presbyterian and Philip was Presbyterian by marriage. We needed to find a church home.

Thankfully, the Reverend James Tinsley came to our door one day and asked if we would be willing to help start a new church. In short order twelve couples met with Jim and Martha at their home. We learned that ITT would donate the land and Presbytery would supply the funds. All we had to do was supply the people. We met several times and went over the plans and I'm happy to say that our first service was held at the Community Center on Nov. 11, 1979 with over one hundred people in attendance. We knew we had a long way to go, but at least we had started and now there would be a Presbyterian presence in Flagler County.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, we are so very grateful for the presence of Trinity Presbyterian Church where so many people have found so much joy. Amen.

Betty Lou Singalewitch

Advent devotional Dec 6: Psalm 20, 21, 22: Matt 22: 15-22

### JOY

“Joy to the World” is one of the most popular songs during the holiday season.

We are, as Christians, all supposed to be concerned about the problems of people of other nations and wish them more Joy.

However, we do not look for the simple joys in our everyday lives. I am so joyful to have lived to see my children and God-children live to be grown up and doing well in their lives. I am joyful to have a great long marriage with few problems and illnesses.

I get great joy from missionary work that our church and other churches do. I am always amazed and joyful for the organizations like "Doctors-without-Borders" and those who do what they can where they are.

Our goal should be to bring Joy to those we know and those we do not know.

Prayer: Heavenly Father help us to remember to be the “joy bringers” to others’ lives and to show gratitude for the joy you have given us in our lives. Amen

Queenester Jones

Advent devotional Dec 7, 2014 Psalm 14, 15, 48-50: Luke 1:57-68

### **The Joy of Advent**

Today's text discusses the birth of John the Baptist. Earlier in verse 44, Elizabeth's unborn baby leaped with joy when Mary visited her. The unborn John knew that he was in the presence of the Christ and later in Chapter 3:21 at Jesus' baptism, it is obvious that John surely knew who Jesus was when a voice from heaven announced, this is my Son in whom I am well pleased. John certainly witnessed that.

It has always bothered me that John seemed to have lost faith in whom Jesus really was as recorded in Luke 7:18. I can imagine John thinking, "You are the Christ, the Son of God. Why haven't you rescued me from this prison? I was sure that the person I baptized, and that I have known all of these years, would come and set me free."

I, too, grew up with Jesus and yet questioned my faith when I saw bad things happening to good people. "Where is God in all of this?" I asked.

Years later, I realized that God has set us free, free to do His will or to oppose God's will. We are destined to live in a world surrounded by both of these outcomes.

We are reminded during Advent that we have a Savior to rescue us by grace through the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

*Prayer: Lord, we thank you for the joy that comes from the anticipation and celebration of the birth of Jesus each year and the reminder that nothing can separate us from the love of God.*

*Sinclair W. Stickle*

Advent devotional: December 20, Matthew 25: 31-46

### **COUNTING SHEEP**

After an angel of the lord announced to shepherds that the Savior had been born in the town of David, shepherds departed to Bethlehem to see the Christ-child. Imagine their great joy! We must assume that some shepherds stayed to guard the sheep because sheep were vitally important supplying meat and wool. The Bible passage talks about shepherds separating the sheep from the goats. I don't know much about goats but I'm very knowledgeable about sheep.

As a 13 year old farm boy involved with 4-H, I decided that I wanted to raise purebred Hampshire sheep. My folks and I traveled to Iowa and Southern Illinois to acquire stock. While Definitely not a shepherd, I fed them, made sure they had a clean shed and sound fences. I had them sheared by a professional. It gave me great joy to see lambs born and then raised to adults. Another source of joy was to show my sheep at a county fair in the 4-H classes.

But I wanted more, which was to show my sheep at more fairs in the open classes against the "big breeders". Initially, my dad hauled me and the sheep to fairs. When I was 16 and 17 I drove to three or four county fairs each summer. I usually had a ram, a couple of ewes and a pen of lambs under one year old. I had my show trunk with grooming shears and equipment, my "Corson's Hampshires" sign and my shirt with the same script and an embroidered sheep on the back.

Imagine my joy to be with my sheep friends and totally independent for several days. Judging, of course, depends on the judge and what sheep show up. I did OK with some champion ribbons, many blue and red and (sometimes lesser) place ribbons. Occasionally I would beat a "big breeder". The pinnacle was when a ewe I raised from birth was judged Grand Champion of the Show at the Dekalb County Fair. Imagine my joy!

*Prayer: We are so blessed to be your sheep Lord, as you shepherd us through life. Amen.*

Dave Corson

## MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE UNTO THE LORD

Psalms ninety-eight says: *Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise.*

So many of the hymns we sing were not written for others to sing as hymns, but at a time of joy or a time of stress to express feelings for needing God, either to praise Him at a great time of joy, or to come to him at a time of need in turmoil or distress. John Greenleaf Whittier (“Dear Lord and Father of Man-kind”) was a Quaker. Their services did not include singing hymns, but he was stirred to express himself in music, saying, “I do not claim that I have succeeded in composing a hymn”.

John Wesley, who wrote many hymns, wrote his first hymn after surviving a vicious storm at sea in a crippled ship. He wrote “Jesus, Lover of My Soul” which has been translated into all the languages of the missionary world. Sarah Flower Adams wrote “Nearer, My God, to Thee” for her pastor to use following a sermon he preached about Jacob’s dream of a ladder where he saw a vision of God. That hymn was played over and over by the band as the Titanic was sinking and the passengers responded by singing it as they were facing death.

When “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name”, written by an English pastor, Edward Perronet was sung, it is said that Queen Victoria had her jeweled crown removed in deference to the hymn’s message that Jesus should be Lord of all. “In the Garden” recorded some years ago as second most popular hymn next to number one, “The Old Rugged Cross”, was actually written by a pharmacist, C. Austin Miles in 1912. He told the story of an experience he had in his dark room where he developed pictures. He had a vision in a “blue light” seeing Mary Magdalene coming to the empty tomb feeling despair and then her joy when she recognized the gardener as her Lord, Jesus Christ. The words came to him immediately and he recorded them, giving us such a greatly loved hymn.

These hymns and so many more have brought joy to the hearts of Christians everywhere for many, many years. When Trinity choir, musical instruments, and reader introduced our new hymnal it renewed much joy in many hearts and was a joyful celebration. Thanks be to God.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we are ever so grateful for the joy of Your Son coming to redeem us. And we are so grateful for the joy Your music has given us to help us praise You. Amen.

Lois Settles

## GOD IS LOOKING AFTER YOU

I am a beach girl. My family moved to Florida when I was five years old to run a small motel on the beach in Daytona. I spent the next five years learning, and loving, the beach. When we finally moved to the mainland I still spent a lot of time on the beach. Some of my favorite memories are of my father loading up the car after church on Sunday so that we could spend the day on the beach. Even as an adult, as my job took me from city to city, I always found myself close to the beach: Daytona, Sarasota, Palm Beach, and finally Jacksonville.

Several years ago, while living in Jacksonville, my husband and I decided to look for possible investment/vacation properties (condo or townhouse) in the Ormond/Flagler area. After a week or two our realtor called and said she had a house we had to see in Palm Coast. I laughed and told her, “No way!” I didn’t want another house and I didn’t want to live in Palm Coast! Week after week we looked and at every meeting she said, “You really have to see this property.” We kept refusing. Finally she forced the issue. She insisted we meet her in Palm Coast before she would take us anywhere else. Long story short – we fell in love with it, stopped looking for investment property, sold our home in Jacksonville, and moved here! It is my dream home on the beach!

The day that we signed the papers on the house I had a dream about living here. When I woke up I wrote the following:

*You may not know you have a dream until it comes true.  
That is how you know that God is looking out for you.*

Every day I wake up to the sound of the ocean and I am filled with Joy. God knows what is in our hearts and he takes care of us. All we have to do is listen and follow where he leads us.

Prayer: Dear Father in Heaven, You are willing to lead. Please give us the insight to know where you are leading us and to know to follow. Amen

Sue Pope

Advent Devotional December 9: Matthew 22:34-46; Psalm 39: 7

### **Live a Life Based on Joy**

When we first moved to Florida, we lived in Clearwater. At our new church home, I joined a newly-formed circle composed mostly of young women with school age children like myself. We named ourselves JOY. In our first year we decided we would sponsor a needy family at Christmas. We carefully selected the gifts for the children. Then we decided the mother should have gifts also. After the holidays, we received a beautiful thank you note from the mother. Her gratitude was genuine, especially that we had sent a gift for her. It seemed so natural for us to provide a gift for the mother; we did not realize the impact it would have on her. We continued that tradition year after year as we sponsored a new family each Christmas.

The name of our circle was selected with care. To the members, JOY meant Jesus, Others, and You. In our circle, we practiced the true meaning of JOY:

Jesus – Study His teachings  
Others—Help and serve others  
You—Pattern your life after Jesus’ teachings

The years have passed. Unfortunately, I have lost contact with my Joy circle sisters, but I have kept this lesson learned from them foremost in my mind: a life based on JOY: Jesus, Others, and You, is a life well lived.

Prayer: Dear Lord, At this time of Advent, help us keep JOY in our hearts. Help us focus on Jesus and his example for our lives. Help us find ways to reach out to others in love and care. Help us in our words, actions, and deeds to live as Jesus taught. Amen

Carol Corson

Advent devotional Dec 18: Psalm 32:11, Psalm 33:1-5, Matt 25: 1-13  
**GIVING WITH JOY**

Our theme this year is Joy! Joy is one of the words we use when describing Christmas. We all want to be happy, warm and fuzzy when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. The world is a mess. We have wars; children being killed, homeless and hungry; fraud, greed, distrust, hatred and many elderly sick, lonely and afraid. So where is joy? Is it in the gifts, holiday music, parties and cheer? Or do we look at Jesus for guidance and an example for how we celebrate?

I actually felt joy when I read an article on the front page of the News Journal entitled “Miracle on Charles Street”. In October a lady with her husband and daughter took possession of a house. She and her family had been homeless living in their car for months. Her husband has health problems and she works. Between rent and medications she fell behind in her rent, thus they lost their apartment. Several things began to happen. She went to her church to hear a bank representative speak on getting out of debt. The church found them a place to stay, a house that had been condemned. It was appraised at \$21,000 plus \$25,000 for code violations. A deed was secured from the owner who gave it up for forgiveness of the code fines. The city agreed to help with the fines. The electric box had been stolen, as well as the plumbing for copper. Windows were gone or broken; a complete mess. And so the work began. With help from the church, the men’s ministry, a retired electrician, and a fraternity (who cleaned and restored the floor with paint from Southern Paint) the transformation was accomplished. A ripple effect began. Inspired others in the neighborhood started improving and fixing up their property. The church formed a non-profit development corporation that refurbishes other distressed properties keeping them from being a blight on the city as well as providing affordable housing. The city has the house back on the tax roll; the family is off the street with dignity and has felt the goodness of people.

All have a sense of giving with joy. I felt joy just reading the story. This story illustrates, my fellow Christians, what Christmas is all about. Community giving and joy while helping others. God has given us love unconditionally. Everyone involved in this project gave love unconditionally.

In Jesus we have a clear example of how we, his followers, should respond to those who suffer or are in need. Phillip Yancey said faith is not something to be believed but something that is to be lived. There is our joy. Merry Christmas.

Prayer: Our gracious God help us to be in touch with your presence within us...to find joy in our giving.

June Carlson

## THE JOY OF BOOKS

I recently decided to move a cabinet from my entry hall to the living room. In order for me to move it I had to remove all the books inside. I kept procrastinating because it was a big job for me. Finally I began to make piles on the floor of the different categories and then realized that these books represent my past. There was the special copy of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's love poems, given to me in 1947 by my best friend and confident in High School. Then I pulled out the King James Bible that Granny Price gave me when I was eight. It was well used in high school as I uncovered what God's word meant to me. Then there were those nature books I would surely need when the grandchildren came to visit. There are histories of my home town in Ohio and an Atlas of the World. There were devotionals and books by Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II. Funny how the novels have been given away but the inspirational books were still there. I hung on to them thinking that they will once again have deep meaning for me. At Christmas time I will bring out the beautiful editions of books depicting the birth of Jesus Christ. Books influence our lives and bring us great joy. And so books will continue to influence my thinking as the needs of my life continually change.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I thank you for the written word. It has brought us ways of growing in the spirit and in knowing you and your direction for our lives. Amen

Joan Morris

## SING A JOYFUL SONG

When I was a teenager in high school, I dated a young man who was Baptist. I went to their youth group with him on Wednesday nights and church on Sunday. The famous preacher, Billy Graham, was coming to Manhattan to preach at Madison Square Garden and my boyfriend's church decided to send in a bus load of church members to see him and included me. The place was packed. I don't remember the sermon that night but I will never forget when George Beverly Shea stood up to sing, "How Great Thou Art". I had never heard the song before but I was surely impressed by the words and the reverence and glory it gave to God. The congregation was all singing and they sounded like a heavenly choir. It was magnificent.

I think I like certain hymns because they give me joy and comfort. We can all remember "Jesus Loves Me" that we sang as children. As an adult, some of my favorites are "Here I Am Lord", "Blessed Assurance" and "Amazing Grace". Whenever we sing them in church, I always have a smile on my face and in my soul. They strike a chord in my heart and give me peace.

Of course, I cannot forget that this year again our church is presenting the Messiah. The music is joy to my heart. It is during the Advent Season and it is a glorious hymn to the Lord. From there, we go into the old and familiar Christmas Carols to celebrate the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Some that come to mind immediately are "Away in the Manger", "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" and "Joy to the World". The words are so familiar because we sing them every year but they ring true and help us sing our hearts out for the glory of God in the Highest and on earth, peace and goodwill to men.

It is interesting that I would decide to write about this topic which brings me joy, when I cannot sing a note. I am a dead flat monotone. I try not to annoy people sitting ----near me in church but it is one of the few places I sing. I do not think the Lord minds. The words and the music are held in my heart and when I am home, I find myself humming and singing those words. They give me peace and comfort and make me feel closer to my Lord.

Prayer: Dear Lord, as we go through the days of Advent, we are looking forward to the celebration of the birth of your Son. We sing hymns and praises to his Name. We feel the joy of his coming. Amen

Carol Graff

**Clap your hands, all you nations;  
shout to God with cries of joy.**

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord....Luke 2:10

This is, indeed, the season of great Joy for all of us who love Jesus Christ, but too often we don't experience the same joy throughout the year. How, to paraphrase Charles Dickens, do we honor Christmas all year long and keep it in our hearts?

Several years ago some senior high youth and I discussed this issue in Sunday School. I had read one suggestion which resonated with me and has helped me on a daily basis to pay attention to God and the joy he gives to us all. The suggestion was that we find something that we encounter on an everyday basis that gives us joy and to condition ourselves when we see this thing to think of God and his blessings in our life.

All my life I have been a dog lover and whenever I see one I find myself smiling at least inwardly. Thus I attempt at each encounter with a dog to remember to think about God who has given us this creature to bring such joy to us all.

A few years ago Allison Yeh brought to church her dog, a service dog in training, whom she had named Joy. How apt was the name! Its presence in church certainly brought joy to many of us.

Prayer: Oh Lord, help me each day to find joy in the morning by thinking of you and counting all the ways in which you bless my life. Help me to be a blessing in someone else's life each day. Amen.                      Hawley Rogers

**The Joy of Preparation**

This selection of Matthew describes the second coming of Christ. "*No one will miss it. . . . he'll dispatch his angels with a trumpet blast summons, pulling in God's chosen from the four winds, from pole to pole.*" Matthew 13-14 may be the key for most of us: "*Staying with it – that's what God requires. Stay with it to the end. You won't be sorry, and you'll be saved. All during this time, the good news – the Message of the Kingdom – will be preached all over the world, a witness staked out in every country. And then the end will come.*" This translation comes from the Peterson Bible: The Message.

*"If these days of trouble were left to run their course nobody would make it. But on account of God's chosen people the trouble will be cut short."* (Matt 24: 21-22)

*"Following those hard times,  
The sun will fade out,  
moon cloud over,  
stars fall out of the sky,  
cosmic powers tremble."* (Matt 24:29)

Prayer: Our gracious Father, help us hang in to the bitter end, and witness the joy of preparation for the coming of the Son of Man.

Anonymous



WHAT JOY YOU HAVE BROUGHT TO THE WORLD

Psalm 41:4 I said, “O Lord, have mercy on me; heal me for I have sinned against you”.

This Psalm was David’s prayer for mercy after he became seriously ill. He believed that his illness was related to his sins. I’m participating in Paul Eckstein’s class studying the Book of Job. Job suffered a series of life-shattering blows. While David accepted that his illness was caused by his sins, Job didn’t believe his sins were of such a magnitude as to cause the devastating punishment that he was enduring. Both men believed that sins against God would result in punishment. However, both continued to be strong in their faith in God.

One of the questions that comes up in any study of Job is, “Why do bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people?” The author of the resource used in this study of Job suggests that the limits of human wisdom will prevent us from finding an answer to that question. She says that “faith is not having all the answers, but it is an act of utter trust and breathtaking courage”.

During this season of Advent, we remember that God came to us through the birth of His Son so that in spite of our sins, we might experience joy and hope in our lives through the presence of His grace.

*Prayer: Gracious God, we thank you for the precious gift of your Son. What joy you have brought the world. We pray that with the help of the Holy Spirit, our faith will continue to grow.*

Ross Royce

WHAT BRINGS JOY TO YOU?

We could never have guessed as we drove the 270 miles to my grandparents’ house for Christmas in 1941, we would not be returning for four years. Every Christmas had been pure joy with all the cousins, aunts and uncles under one roof of a huge six bedroom farm house. Lots of good food and fun and always Our Lord’s birthday remembered as His. That was when there were few presents, but much love. We would all go to Grandmother’s little country church, so warm (an old pot belly stove kept it toasty) and comfortable and sing Christmas carols, and always received a candy cane. I was eight that year.

The next four years were all spent in Eastern Kansas at Christmas. World War II was in full swing with rationing, as well. Gas rationing kept us from traveling, and all the tires went for military use, as did all the new vehicles. Only farmers could get new tractors in order to produce the food and then only with government approval. We got two pairs of leather shoes a year and limits on sugar, coffee, and canned goods. Additional ration stamps could be gotten for canning and when we baked to send to the troops overseas. And we did bake cookies and fruit cakes, and knitted wool scarves to send, as well. My sister (six years older than I) had friends in the service and we had cousins who were serving. And so, our joy now came from doing for others and celebrating at home with a tree and the five of us singing around the piano the Christmas carols we had sung at my grandparents. We went to Christmas Eve services in our own church, which was much larger with lovely stained glass windows and a magnificent organ with a choir to bring joy. Many friends were lost and three cousins, all pilots, lost their lives. Some came home with wounds that would never heal, but there was still joy over Jesus’ birth and celebration that we were all together. Christmas began to bring so much more joy to me as I began to understand the significance of God sending His Son to be sacrificed that we might live an everlasting life.

Christmas of 1945, with the war behind us, we were back at the farm together for the most joyous Christmas of all. Peace brought so much joy to all of us and the feeling that God is in his heaven loving and caring. As the song says, “I’ve got joy like a fountain in my soul”. Jesus said, “If you obey my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

Prayer: Our Father in Heaven we are ever so grateful for the joy you have brought to us. Joyful, joyful we adore thee. Amen

Lois Settles

## THANKS, GUIDANCE AND JOY

About fifty years ago The Rev. Charles Webster from Red Bank, New Jersey Presbyterian Church where we attended incorporated in his sermon the following poem that I share with you.

### *The World Is Mine*

Today, upon a bus, I saw a very beautiful woman and wished I were as beautiful. When suddenly she rose to leave, I saw her hobble down the aisle. She had one leg and used a crutch. But as she passed, she passed a smile. Please forgive me when I whine. I have two legs; the world is mine. I stopped to buy some candy. The lad who sold it had such charm. I talked with him, he seemed so glad. If I were late, it'd do no harm. It's nice to talk with folks like you. You see, he said, "I'm blind." Please forgive me when I whine. I have two eyes; the world is mine. Later while walking down the street, I saw a child I knew. He stood and watched the others play, but he did not know what to do. I stopped a moment and then I said, "Why don't you join them, Dear?" He looked ahead without a word. I forgot, he couldn't hear. Please forgive me when I whine. I have two ears; the world is mine. With feet to take me where I'd go. With eyes to see the sunset's glow. With ears to hear what I'd know. Oh, God, forgive me when I whine. I've been blessed indeed, the world is mine.

I hope that this little poem touches your heart and you find joy in it as I did.

To the end that my glory may sing praises to thee, and not be silent O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee forever.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for opening my eyes to see the needs and to care for those around me.

Edwina Tabit

## THIRSTY

Psalms 63: O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you, my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

My mother passed away on Sept 11, 2014. In June she aspirated during her evening meal and consequently, after testing, was given a permanent feeding tube. I was with her at the hospital the morning the feeding tube was placed in her stomach. She had to have a light IV sedation and a scope went down her throat to guide the placement of the tube. While waiting for the procedure to begin, she was nervous. "Pray, Jane," she said. I took her hand and we prayed; soon after the procedure was done she was resting comfortably in the recovery room.

As I read the verse from Psalms 63 about thirst, my thoughts were about her and the weeks following June when she could no longer take anything by mouth. She was thirsty! She never complained of hunger, (the tube feeding was there to satisfy that), however her mouth and throat were DRY!! We tried moistened swabs, mouth spray, cool cloths and occasionally a small chip of ice, but as we all know, when you want a drink of water, nothing else fills that need.

Many places in the Bible, it speaks of thirst.... the woman at the well from John 4, Psalm 42:1 as the deer pants for streams of water, my soul pants for you, O God ; In John 5:42, we read that some do not have the love of God in their hearts, but thankfully we have the assurance of that love. We drew on that love from God over the next few months, many, many times. My sisters and I would pray with Mom, read the Word and just "be there" with her. My sisters and I have always been close, but during this time when we were ministering to Mom, we were in fact ministering to each other. Sometimes just a sounding board, sometimes a chuckle about something funny Mom would say, but thru it all, God was with us. We felt His Peace and His Presence. Mom passed away peacefully and though we will miss her, we know she is with her Lord and at last is no longer thirsty.

Prayer: I thank God for His Word, His perfect Gift in the birth of our Messiah, His Peace that passes all understanding and finally from Revelations 7:17--For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to the springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Amen.

Jane Lippian