

# TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## 2016 ADVENT DEVOTIONALS



*"The bricks have fallen, but we will build with dressed stones; the sycamores  
have been cut down, but we will put cedars in their place."*

*Isaiah 9:10*

**27**  
**DAYS OF ADVENT**

**AS EXPERIENCED BY MEMBERS OF TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

# TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## ADVENT DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET 2016

### **Romans 1:7 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

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 wonderfully reflective stories from their own experiences or thoughts. Our theme this year is PEACE.

Contributors this year share with you original stories of times of peace in their lives. Focus this year is on describing peace as seen by the contributor, one of finding peace, or peaceful experiences, and in some instances are about people of peace. 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 are fitting for the Christmas season. 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 Peace this holiday season.

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 peace, His Son, Jesus Christ.

Thanks to Shelley and Jason Wheeler for helping with our editing and publishing this year. God bless.

Lois Settles for the Christian Education Committee

November 27 Romans 13:11-14; John 14:27

## **FINDING AND SHARING PEACE**

Peace: it is such a deceptively simple concept but so very hard to attain. I pray for peace every day ~peace in my life, in our country, in our world. And yet conflict, discord, disruption, uproar, and war are a part of the world in which we live. Living honorably and with the love of Jesus Christ would lead to a peaceful life, but falling short is what I seem to do ~ on a daily basis.

Prayer and yoga help me find peace. Centering my thoughts is elusive, yet I continue to practice. I do not understand how it is possible to have a multitude of thoughts at the same time when walking and chewing gum can be such a struggle. The peace of meditation should be a “peace” of cake. Not! Teaching the Young Children and Worship class has given me a measure of serenity. Each story begins with the instruction to embrace the silence and feel the story within you. As one tells the story, one wants to convey the mystery and wonder of the Bible narrative. It amazes me that sometimes it really does happen! And three and four year olds are mesmerized by the presentation. And peace is present ~ if only for a few moments.

May this season of peace help all of us to share the love of Christ wherever we may be.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us remember that You have given us Your peace, the peace that we gratefully share with our families, our church, our communities, and our world.  
Amen

Karen Thomas

November 28 Corinthians 1:3-9

## **HE WILL KEEP YOU STRONG THROUGH THE END**

In I Corinthians 1:3-9, the apostle Paul is writing to the church in Corinth. He is expressing his thankfulness to God for them and sharing that they should be thankful for Jesus has enriched them. He reminds them to be confident in their spiritual gifts as we wait for our Lord to return. You were called into his fellowship and he will be with you until the end.

If you continue reading in I Corinthians, you will understand the nature of the letter Paul is writing. There is division in the church! As I write this, we are 13 days before an election and the division amongst us is polarizing. I have long since stopped worrying about who will be in any political office because I know that our God is bigger than any election, any politician, any country, any world leader, and any crisis. This world is not our home. It is just a temporary dwelling and while we are here we have been called upon to use the spiritual gifts God has given us. There is Joy in doing God's work, not in debating the future of America. We as Christians know our future! It is not up for a vote nor can it be amended!

Find God's peace in knowing; "God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord is faithful." – I Corinthians 1:9.

Prayer: Help us, Dear God, to be aware of our gift of fellowship with you through Jesus, Your Son. Amen

Sherry Lewis Settles

November 29 Mark 13: 33-37

## ABIDE

*"...My spirit abides among you; do not fear."* Haggai 2:5 (NRSV)

This Old English word is uncommon in today's vocabulary. Yet when Jesus appeals to his disciples (and to us) in his farewell discourse, he uses "abide" to describe his desire for us to always remain with him. In John 15:4 we read *"Abide in me, and I in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."* To abide in him is to dwell, to reside, in that life-giving branch.

God doesn't promise that there will not be storms in life. We pray for protection from a hurricane, from cancer, from war, from death, for our loved ones, for peace. Regardless of the perceived outcome, through our prayers we are abiding with God—dwelling in him—connected to that vine of which Jesus spoke. The peace that comes only from him is ours to claim if we choose to abide in him. *"I have said these things to you, so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."* (John 15:11)

**Abide With Me** (words by Henry F. Lyte)

Abide with me: fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;  
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, O abide with me!

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;  
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies:  
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee:  
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!

Father of all, author of peace, draw us near to you this day and in the days to come, that we may enjoy the peace only you can give. Amen!

Linda McClelland

November 30 John 1; 1-15

## LIFE'S LIGHT

This has been a different year for many of us. We have had personal darkness and darkness in our country & world. It's hard not to feel stress.

We must keep in mind these verses. The Life Light blazed out of the darkness. The darkness couldn't put it out. John 1: 1-15

I was flipping through the channels one evening and happened upon a true story being related by the participants, a woman, her little boy and another diner. I don't think this was by accident. God takes many ways to speak to us.

All at once according to the story the little boy ran out into the street. The mother starts yelling and running after the boy, as did the diner. After much talk and tears the man taking the car said I'm only doing my job, you have missed two payments. She had lost her job and was looking for another one.

At this time the diner reached into his pocket for his phone to call his wife. He said, "I need to write a check for \$1000. I will explain later, so trust me." She started to object then said okay. What trust and peace in that relationship.

The host asked the man why did you respond like that to a stranger? He said simply, "She needed help."

Tears were coming into my eyes. I was inspired by the goodness of that man. He had a goodness about him like Jesus. He didn't ask questions or think if she was worthy. He must have gone home and felt a great sense of peace for he brought Life Light to someone in darkness.

We all have the ability to bring light, the light of God to those in need. The Life Light will also be with us in our need and darkness. God spoke to me through this story for I realized many times I walk by or over analyze when someone when a stranger is asking for help. I make excuses telling myself I can't stop in traffic. I often think about that man and his wife and how blessed they are for they GET IT!

You will find it hard to believe what happened to me the day after writing the devotion. Too long for here, but ask me about it.

Our Gracious God, Thank you for the opportunities to bring your light and be in your light. Illuminate us, help us to see and feel when you present these moments to us. Amen

June Carlson

December 1<sup>st</sup> John 1: 6-9

## **BREATHE, JUST BREATHE**

Right now, I want you to take a deep breath in through your nose and slowly let it out through your mouth. Take another deep breath in through your nose and slowly let it out through your mouth. Breathe in God's love and breathe out God's love to others. Breathe in God's mercy and breathe out God's mercy to others.

Be still and know that I am God

Be still

Be.

I don't know about you, but for me, being still and letting God work is hard! I am a fixer! I want to make everyone happy, I want everyone to get along and love each other.

This summer at Montreat Youth Conference, we had the pleasure of meeting Rodger Nishioka. Rodger was our keynote speaker for the week. I had heard wonderful things about him and his speaking ability. I was expecting greatness! After his first talk I was a little disappointed. He took time in his keynote to read from the bible and then led the entire auditorium in a large group bible study. Where were the fireworks, the excitement? As the week progressed, Rodger won over my heart as well as the hearts of 1,000 teenagers. For one keynote, he went through Jesus' entire family tree and had the whole auditorium on the edge of their seats. Rodger didn't have exciting past or theatrical special effects to tell us how great Jesus is. Rodger had himself, his bible, and his love for his Savior. No one in that auditorium would have any doubt that Jesus is real and alive and well when listening to Rodger. Rodger lets the spirit move through him and that is where his power comes from.

Many days I spend pouring over curriculum and lesson plans trying to come up with the best possible way to share God's message with our kids. Wishing that I could do more, be more. Day after day, God reminds me that, while the bible and curriculum are important, it is letting God's light shine through us that is the most important thing. Will our kids remember the bible lesson that we taught them on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2016? No, but they will remember who was there for them week after week excited to share God's love with them. Be still and know that I am God.

This advent season, let the spirit move within you. Stop trying so hard to fix everything and to be everything for everyone, God has got it covered. Be still and know.

Holy Spirit, fill me today with your passion, your strength and your love. Use me today to do your work in this world. Remind me that because of you I am enough. Amen

**Brooke Tucker**

December 2 Jeremiah 13:6-7

## **PEACE, AS WE KNOW IT**

This year's Advent theme is "Peace", and what a challenge it has been! The most peaceful time I have had recently was the time spent waiting for Hurricane Matthew.

Half of our neighbors were away and the remaining half kept a close eye on the weather reports, sharing their info. I had free time to spend around the house and I spent part of that time addressing my first box of Christmas cards. Thinking about these people put a smile on my face and a peace in my heart.

When I went to my Unger's Bible Dictionary for a definition of "peace", I found: "Shalom" and "familiar" from the Hebrew, and "unity" and "concord" from the Greek. Quote : "The word is used frequently with outward conditions of tranquility and thus of individuals, of communities, of churches and nations". "In its deepest application, it is spiritual peace through restored relations of harmony with God."

While researching "peace", I also consulted my Cruden's Concordance. I discovered over four hundred listings of the word in the Bible plus another 20 or so other variations of the word. There were 17 songs related to peace in our 1990 Presbyterian Hymnal and it will be interesting to see if there are more or less in the current hymnal. Songs from the 60's containing the word "peace" are running through my mind these days. "Peace like a river" and "peaceful, easy feeling" are constant companions. When I turn on the TV, everyone seems to be looking for a peaceful place to live and animal owners are praying for peace around their houses.

When I canvassed my family for their reactions to the word "peace", it was interesting to note that they all mentioned inner peace. Fifty years ago was a different time and place and my personal answer would have leaned much more toward world peace.

Prayer : As we welcome the holidays, Lord, please help us to keep the word "peace" first and foremost in our thoughts and prayers. Amen!

Maudie N. Parker



December 3 Isaiah 6

## **WORLD PEACE**

When I was young, I was the eldest child in my family. As is typical with first-borns, I always felt it was my responsibility to keep peace, possibly because I was held accountable for those times when the 3 of us weren't all that peaceful. As we matured, (resentments aside) I found myself still feeling responsible for the peaceful climate we desired. Compromise can backfire, but that doesn't mean we don't keep trying. As adults I discovered that we are all very different personalities, different lifestyles, etc. It is a rare moment when we can all agree on anything. My siblings will probably never be able to see my point of view, but that's OK. That awareness has stood me well my entire adult life...both within my family and without.

The first time I remember praying (and wishing on a star) for peace was when I was about 9 years old. I stood alone outside after dark and spoke to a far away God. My dad had returned from duty in Korea, we were living in North Carolina, and Billy Graham was just starting his world crusade tour. My baby brother was born, grew up, and studied Russian in college. I felt a great sense of satisfaction when the Berlin wall came down and the Cold war was a thing of the past. I knew for certain that God had heard my prayers, regardless of how long it had taken. It is still that way with prayer and inner peace.

My unceasing prayer, when needed...

Thank you, Lord, for the power of prayer. Thank you for your peace (first!), your love, your caring, and your forgiveness. Thank you for the ways you enable us to become your people. In Jesus, your loving Son's name we pray. Amen!

Maudie N. Parker

December 4 Romans 15: 4-13

## THE PEACE IN PRAYER

One day as we were praying together in church, I realized that I always clasp my two hands together before the prayer starts. It never varies when I pray. I thought about for a while and looked around the church to see where other people were put their hands while praying. Then I knew that it didn't matter what others do, but what I do when I pray to our Lord and Savior. Upon looking back and trying to discover when I started praying this way and I am sure it began when I was a child in Sunday school.

I also realized that clasping my hands centered me and gave me peace to converse with our Lord. It is not what I do only when I am in church. I do it everywhere I pray, in church, at night before I go to bed, other bible studies, and every meeting that I attend where praying is done.

Not only do I feel peace when I pray but also when I enter the sanctuary for a service. I relax and sit in a pew and talk to God. It is the same when we celebrate communion. No matter how crazy the week may have been, just sitting quietly in church smooths out the wrinkles.

So peace is a state of mind and soul brought on by worshipping the Lord.

Anywhere I am, if I am troubled, I take a deep breath and fold my hands together and pray by talking to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

As stated in Romans 15:13, may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him.

Prayer: Heavenly Father , we rejoice in your love for us. Grant us peace in knowing that you will always be there with us. Fill us with your love and surround us with your presence. We are your faithful servants.  
Amen

Carol Graff

## December 5 Psalms 43:3-6

### THE PEACE AROUND US

This summer my mom at age 93 passed away. I had always dreaded the thought of this happening. How could I ever be happy when the person who had been there for me my entire life was out of my sight? The last few months of her life had become quite stressful and we both knew it was probably time for her to be with our Lord. Still, where would I ever find the peace of not having her - she was the best!

It happened so fast, and like all major stresses in my life, God had the plan under his loving control. He was calling us both to do what would bring us the peace that he promises to all who believe in him.

The morning she passed, I was camping in the foothills of NC. There was peace from the surroundings and also peace of being with Bill and our grandchildren; but I also really needed to be with Brooke. It so happened that she was only 1 hour away at Montreat. The drive was so beautiful with mountain views the whole way. When we all got together, it was as though God had lead us here and wanted us to be together in this place -- while he was welcoming mom to his kingdom.

God's peace is always there and when we take the time to look around us, we can see and feel his spirit upon us. My grandson randomly selected this devotional scripture for me. I found it amazing that this scripture talks about everything that I experienced during the passing of my beautiful, faith-filled mother. God's peace truly 'passeth all understanding.' (Philippians 4:7)

May we all continue to find the joy, hope, peace and love that God provides to us when we seek him.

**Libbie Butler**

December 6 Psalm 27:1-4

## THE LORD IS OUR GUIDE

Psalm 27:1-4

The Lord is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is the strength of my life: of whom shall I be  
afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes,  
came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.  
Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall  
not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be  
confident. One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I  
seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the  
days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to  
enquire in his temple.

Trust in the Lord. He never fails!

Troubled? Afraid? Lonely?

Have you asked the Lord for the guidance? He always  
answers, yes he does! Listen to Him. Do not question the  
answer when it comes for it will truly come and it will be  
the right one for you. The Lord is our guide if we would  
only trust in His word.

The motto let go, let God applies here! Think about it and  
try it. You'll like it!!

Dear Lord give us the ability to let go and trust in your love  
in our time of need.

Pat Dixon

# December 7 Psalms 119:105-106

## LIVING PEACE

So many significant people have shed a light on what peace is and how we achieve it.

**Proverbs 14:30** - A heart at peace gives life to the body.

**Isaiah 52:7** - How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who brings good news, the good news of peace and salvation, the news that the God of Israel reigns!

**John 16:33** – Jesus said, “I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”

**Mahatma Gandhi** – There is no way to peace, peace is the way. An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind.

**Dali Lama** – **When we feel love and kindness toward others it not only makes others feel loved and cared for, but it helps us also develop inner happiness and peace.**

**Make peace with yourself. Do not let the behavior of others destroy your inner peace. If you wish to experience peace provide peace for another.**

**Jesus** – Matthew 5:9 - God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.

**Romans 12:18** - Do all that you can to live with peace with everyone.

**I Corinthians 14:33** – For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

**Thomas Jefferson** – Peace and friendship with all mankind is our wisest policy, and I wish we may be permitted to pursue it.

**Benjamin Franklin** – There never was a good war or a bad peace.

**Martin Luther King, Jr.** – The beauty of genuine brotherhood and peace is more precious than diamonds or silver.

It is true that over the years many wise people have told society what needs to be done to have peace, and yet, look around. Where in today’s world do you see peace? This makes me believe, the peace you find will be peace within. That is something you can accomplish with God’s help. Some of the quotes give us advice we can apply to our lives to find peace with in. Prayer, music, reading scripture and inspirational books, as well as associating with peaceful people, can all be the foundation of your effort to find personal peace.

This brings me to a favorite hymn: **Let There Be Peace on Earth.** Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me. Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be. With God as our Father, brothers all are we. Let me walk with my brother in perfect harmony. Let peace begin with me; let this be the moment now. With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow: To take each moment, and live each moment in peace eternally! Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.

Prayer: Our Father God, help us to find that inner-peace, that calm and quiet state within. In Jesus name. Amen.

Lois Settles

December 8 John 12:35-36

## **DARKNESS AND LIGHT**

*35) Then Jesus told them. "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. 36) Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." In John 8, Jesus refers to himself as the light of the world and says that if we follow him, we will never walk in darkness.*

In my life I have had two remarkably different experiences with light and darkness. When I lived in Kentucky I visited Mammoth Cave. The guide led our group into this huge, brightly illuminated room full of stalactites and stalagmites. It was magnificent! Then the guide turned out the lights. I had never experienced darkness like that. I could see nothing and felt very uncomfortable, a bit claustrophobic, and a touch of panic.

The other experience was in the outback of Australia. One night the hotel staff drove us to a remote location where we found tables and chairs set up for dinner. Lanterns brightly lit the area and we had an enjoyable meal. After dinner the staff said they were going to extinguish all of the lights. I immediately remembered my experience in the cave and began feeling uncomfortable. Once my eyes grew accustomed to the dark, I looked up to see an infinite expanse of stars across the sky, and a feeling of peace came over me.

If we feel that darkness is overtaking our lives, we can find peace in our Lord, Jesus Christ, who brings us His light in our darkest hour.

Prayer: Loving God, thank you for bringing us the "Light".

Ross Royce

December 9, 2016 Ephesians 5: 6-14

## PEACE FROM THE STORM

As if our daily life is not filled with cold fronts and warm fronts breezing through, who would have thought our small corner of the world would see so much destruction? For years, as a television reporter I was used to blocking all that out...even as I drove INTO the storm (while everyone else was driving in the opposite direction, often at a rather high rate of speed). I was invincible. I was driving into another county, another city, sometimes even another state.

Early October 2016 was different. I was out of “the business” and well into my second career. My wife was out of town, safely hundreds of miles away but I had my sons. And my mother-in-law. And our dog. The day before Hurricane Matthew rolled past Flagler County I spent hours inside the county’s Emergency Operations Center, perhaps the safest spot in the entire county watching strangers come together to prepare for the inevitable. The storm was coming and there was nothing anyone could do about it. But this was about to happen in MY county. MY city. MY state.

Yet I had a peace in my heart. Even as action whirled around me, there was calm. I was able to ride out Hurricane Matthew with family friends (since our house was in the evacuation zone). These friends took me, my boys, my mother-in-law AND our dog in, no questions asked. We watched as the bands of the hurricane roared past and at the end of the day, we emerged unscathed.

The following days would place me along the beach, helping facilitate a hopeful message to my fellow neighbors in Flagler County even as we were surrounded by unprecedented damage. There was beautiful sunshine and blue skies, as is often the case when a large storm leaves. We heard people say then, as we all hear they say today “We will rebuild. We will be okay.”

That is what I do each day. I rebuild. I’m okay. There is a light in my life and the lives of my neighbors which allows us to get up, rebuild and be okay with a peace that even the strongest of storms cannot shake.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, I pray you bring peace and joy to the world around me; not only in times where peace and joy come naturally, but when the skies around me grow dark and I struggle to believe.*

Jason Wheeler

December 10 1 Peter 2:5-9

## **PEACE IS WHAT WE SEEK**

Peace is what we, as Christians, ultimately seek. We focus on our daily struggles and forget we have the power to draw peace out.

As a child of the 60's, peace was an overused word. I grew up in Amherst, Mass during the Vietnam War.

Protests and vigils were popular with the college students as well as the townies. There was a giant tree in the town center common which was decorated with lights at Christmas. The "Merry Maple" was part of our tradition and also became the site for the the longest running Peace Vigil. Every Sunday - no matter the weather- people gathered from 11:00-2:00 to protest Vietnam and, after that war ended, they stood against all war. It was the "Peace Movement".

I know they drew strength from each other to remain through the snowstorms and rain, but did it help bring any real peace?

As a growing Christian I have seen that a mindful attitude will help bring peace to any situation. Christ is with us and we can draw strength from him to find our own true Peace.

Romans 8:6. The mind of a sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.

Dear Lord help us draw strength from you as we struggle daily to find inner peace.

Tracy Martin



Dec. 11 Isaiah 60:1-3

## THE BEAUTY IN THE SKY

I spend time each day sitting on my balcony looking out at the very blue sky and the white puffs of clouds that pass in front of me. Some look like toys and others resemble animals as they continue to change shapes. As I see the jet planes streak across the sky I think of God sharing the beautiful sky with us humans. Here we are God and man using the space together .We try so hard to understand all that is supplied for us--this planet and more. Will we ever know the plan of the future for the skies and beyond?

Prayer: Dear Lord above, Our knowledge is limited but yours is endless. Thank you for the beauty of the skies and for the endless opportunities to learn and to care for all the people of your world.

Joan Morris

## FROM FOG & BLURRY VISIBILITY TO CLARITY

2 Cor 4: 6: For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

I remember the fog, billowing and turning all objects into shadows of themselves. The drives to and from school in fog that made visibility most difficult left me hoping I was guessing correctly at the shapes ahead. Of course, I was too young to even consider pulling off the road rather than driving on through the fog. I was in college. I owned my first car. I felt invincible.

I felt invincible as I started my English Grammar class. I thought I knew it already. Then I met my professor. He would switch the language he used part way through the lecture to either Latin or German. Then he would look at us in shock and disbelief when he could tell that we students did not understand him. Trust me, I had a lot to learn. Likewise I felt invincible as I sought to balance my childhood teachings about religion with new ideas and teachings I was hearing both from friends and at church. All these experiences led me into an intense period of testing ideas and my beliefs. My boyfriend had a faith very different from mine. So did my roommate. They knew their beliefs were right. I felt uncomfortable and ill at ease with those beliefs. I was searching for peace.

This was a period of struggle and growth. It did not come instantly, but over months. I searched for clarity in the classroom, in my friendships, and in my religion. I longed for “peace like a river” to wash over me. However, it was necessary to have this time of discomfort so I could find my own beliefs. It was not a short journey, but one I needed to take. I found a new boyfriend, I considered my roommate as a friend, not a faith coach, and I buckled down in the classroom and learned what the professor demanded I learn. I found that the challenge of resolving many conflicting ideas led to clarity and peace as an individual. This search in my 20’s has helped me over the years. For as Jesus taught “Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid (John 14:27).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Thank you for the tests you give us in our lives. Help us use them as a way to learn our true selves and beliefs. Help us persevere and keep our focus on You. Only then, can we find the Heavenly peace you promise us, the peace that passes all understanding. Amen

December 13 1 John 1:4-7

## **A FORK IN THE ROAD**

I have always been intrigued by the comparison of God to light. Jesus was both God and Man and only by the science of the twentieth century, do we learn that light has a dual nature too, being both wave and particle. It seems to be human nature to reject difficult concepts especially those ideas that are beyond our understanding. Even some clergy have trouble with the concept of the Trinity or with Christ's dual nature, yet science has taught us that reality is not always something we can wrap our minds around. Fundamentalists have been mocked for believing that creation took only six days as described in Genesis and now science has shown us that the entire universe was created in a brief second during the big bang.

Believe is a word that has a dual meaning. I would assert that it is wrong to think that believe as used in John 3:16 is simply an intellectual assent. Believe also means trust and that definition is more appropriate.

I use to enjoy spending time at an airport watching skydivers jump from airplanes. I came to believe that parachutes were extremely reliable and safe, but the only way I could trust that notion was to strap on a parachute and try it myself.

The only path to salvation is not only to believe, but to trust in the blood and sacrifice of Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, keep us mindful that salvation comes from trusting in your grace and not from our own goodness. Amen.

Sinclair W Stickle

December 14 John 3:16

## PEACE

“For God so loved the world, he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” This familiar verse was probably one of the first Bible scriptures we all learned as children. Over the years we have heard sermons preached, books written and even displayed on a sign at a sporting event. Why does God love us so? What did we ever do to deserve that kind of love?

God created us in His image. He wanted a relationship with us but we all “like sheep have gone astray.” We need a shepherd! We need a savior. Psalms 23 is probably the second-most quoted scripture-” The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.” We pray this on Sundays and at funerals. The words are so comforting. He leads me. He restores me. He comforts me. He walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death. If you have never read Max Lucado’s Book TRAVELING LIGHT, get it and read it. It is in our church library. In it, Lucado dwells on each verse of the 23rd Psalm. I have read this book at least three times and have given it to family and friends. The peace that these familiar words bring is priceless. With all that is happening in our world-wars, natural disasters, racial unrest...I could go on and on. We need some peace!

How can we be at peace in our souls? By believing in the One who came as an innocent baby. The One God sent-His Son.

Ephesians 2:14 says “For He Himself is our peace...” He came and preached peace.

Hebrews 13:20 “Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep...”

During this Advent Season and every day of our lives, I pray we fully understand the love of God; For God so loved the world...”  
Amen.

Jane Lippian

December 15 Isaiah 40:1-11

## **COMFORT, COMFORT MY PEOPLE SAYS YOUR GOD**

In these anxious days of hour-to-hour uncertainty, global issues of hunger, poverty, homelessness and terrorism, natural disasters, political unrest, and human cruelty and ignorance, it is sometimes hard to believe comfort is anywhere near at hand. Where is it when we need it? How can so many bad things happen? Why is there so much suffering in the world? Will we ever be able to “fix” things? We want answers to age-old questions we can barely frame. Solutions are not speedily forthcoming.

As it is told in Isaiah, we, like grass and flowers, will wither and fade, yet the word of our God will stand forever. He will “tend His flock like a shepherd,” and so we must believe that he is here for us and will lead us through these troubled times, guiding us in ways that perhaps are beyond our human understanding.

Every day amongst the rubble of destruction and despair we find evidence of Gods presence. The tiny flowers escaping the pavement that attempts to eliminate them, the “wobble” that changed Matthew from a certain annihilator to a storm that effectively shook us awake to the powers of nature, and the many small miracles which we hardly recognize as we go about our business are all here to show us that God is among us.

Prayer: Gracious God, help us always to trust in you and to feel your tender, loving comfort.

Wendy Rogers

December 16 John 9:1-7

## THE POWER OF LOVE

Ever since I was 12 years old when Bill Hailey hit the charts with "Rock Around the Clock" I have been a huge fan of rock 'n roll. I loved going to concerts and still do.

In 2003, I attended the Farewell I Tour of one of my favorite groups, the Eagles in Philadelphia. At that concert, the group introduced a new song "There's a Hole in the World Tonight". That song was about the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. One line of that song has dominated my thoughts since. The words said, "Until we learn to love one another, we will never see the Promised Land."

Since that time we have seen the outbreak of terrorism around the world like never before. Peace, as we once experienced it, seems to be a thing of the past. Every day we wake up to shootings and all kinds of horrible acts of terrorism both in the United States and around the world.

Christ came to teach us about a new way of life, a way of life in which love must be shared with our neighbors and the world if we are going to have peace. In John we heard him say: "A new commandment I give you -- love one another as I have loved you." I believe that is one of the most important teachings of Christ.

Love is the most powerful force in the world. It can move mountains and bring peace to the world and inner peace for each of us. We need to learn to put aside hatred and instead learn to show strong love in our daily lives if we ever hope to find both inner peace and peace in the world. Let's show that love to the world so we may see the Promised Land.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to show the strong power of love in our daily lives, as Christ commanded us, so that the world may know peace. In his name we pray for the strength to share the strongest love we are capable of with the world. Amen.

Pastor Don Scott

December 17: Luke 3: 1-6

## **So all may come**

On a recent visit to the Holy Land we stopped at Yardenit, a site believed to be near where John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. The entryway was lined with stone slabs with the inscription of Jesus' experience of baptism recorded in dozens of different languages. This experience as translated into English is as follows: (Mark 1: 9-11)

*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of water, immediately he saw the heavens opened up and the spirit descended upon him like a dove, and a voice came from heaven; 'Thou art my beloved Son, with thee I am well pleased'.*

Unlike many of the earlier religious beliefs, Jesus' followers subscribe to the idea that all who come, are baptized, and believe are welcome among His followers. This baptismal site was only one of many around the Sea of Galilee and across modern Israel that inspires the ancient Word to spread across our modern world.

Prayer: Our gracious father, we thank you for the many blessings we have received through your son, Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen

Bob Settles

Sunday, December 18    Isaiah: 11: 1 - 10

## The Peaceable Kingdom

Today's Scripture from Isaiah is the very well-known image of a Messianic time of peace in which the wolf will be friendly with the lamb, and the lion will eat straw as an ox; never mind that it would be physiologically impossible for a lion to exist on a diet of straw. Maybe the ox can at least hope that the lion will forgo a diet of oxen.

This passage, for me, immediately calls up the painting by the American folk artist Edward Hicks called *The Peaceable Kingdom*. In this painting an assorted collection of incompatible wild and domestic animals, along with a few children, are lounging together while in the background William Penn is shown negotiating a peace treaty with a group of American Indians.

Speaking of incompatible; when you read this devotional in December our national elections will be long past. But I am writing this in October when the outcomes of all our elections are yet unknown. We are being flooded with evidence of incompatibilities; every issue has incompatible sides, each defended fiercely by candidates who point out their incompatibilities with their opponents. Will there be real peace after this election? Not likely; we live on earth, not in the Peaceable Kingdom Isaiah foresees. We live with compromise. Otto von Bismarck said that politics is "the art of the possible"; that is, being willing to not get everything you want so the other side will get some of what it wants. That's life. This is Earth.

Advent is a time of looking forward, toward Christ's coming at Christmas, as well as His coming again, bringing in the Peaceable Kingdom. What will that be like? I have no idea. I still don't think that lions can subsist on straw, and if there are politicians in the Kingdom I doubt that they will be in perfect accord. But then I am thinking like an Earthling, and Advent teaches us to look forward to a time when God will make all things well.

Prayer: Peace go with you. God's quiet within the noise. God's hope within the uncertainty. God's rest within the toil. God's presence within your soul. Peace go with you.

Del Smith



## December 19 Zephaniah 3:14-17

### *IF AMERICA IS FAITHFUL TO HIM, GOD WILL BE FAITHFUL TO US*

Zephaniah lived in Judah during the reign of King Josiah over 2,500 years ago. This was at the time of the second Siege of Jerusalem (587 BC) by the Assyrians which God allowed because of the rampant corruption and injustice that then existed in Judah. Zephaniah was telling the Judeans if they would only follow the covenants they agreed to with God he would heal and protect them from the tribulations they were experiencing and restore their status and His protection that they had previously enjoyed.

How appropriate Zephaniah's words were to the Jewish people then and to the people of the United States today. God is just and slow to anger but when His patience finally runs out he is not opposed to sending His just judgement. Just as He let the Judeans be defeated by their enemies, their city destroyed, and their people taken into captivity without His protection we also risk losing the many blessings that He has bestowed on our great country in the past.

When one considers current laws that limit praying to God or discussing one's love for his Son in public, or allow killing of innocent beings while many law breakers are never prosecuted, you must ask yourself, are these signs of rampant corruption and injustice in our Country today? No one knows how much patience God will allow our country before His day of judgement comes. The words of Zephaniah should give us hope telling us that if we return to following God, then He will be in our midst, will rejoice over us with gladness and will renew us in his love. How can we possibly refuse?

Realize that no one person can make our country's return to God happen entirely on their own. It is an obligation that we all share, must accept responsibility for, and take the individual steps that will lead us back into the loving arms of our Father. Don't delay; take your first step today to help accomplish this goal for our country.

**Prayer:** Our Father, during this Advent Season, help us to be mindful of the many instances in the past, in which you have guided our lives and protected our Country. Going forward help us fulfill our responsibilities, to you, and allow us to return our country to one that is God fearing and just. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Redeemer—Amen.

Jef Amsbaugh

## *December 20 Matthew 1: 18-25*

### **Do you believe in angels, even if you've never seen one?**

The angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

East Coast residents recently experienced the ravages of Hurricane Matthew with many prayers being lifted up for safety for family and loved ones. My own being no exception. My husband was admitted to Flagler Memorial emergency room on the Tuesday night before Matthew's Friday arrival with gall bladder pain. Gov. Scott declared state of emergency and Flagler Hospital was in the evacuation zone. Consequently he was evacuated to Shands Hospital, Gainesville where he would be safe. On Friday the procedure for the removal of diagnosed stone blockage was accomplished without requiring surgery. Thank God for all prayers.

In June, Bob and I traveled to Pennsylvania along with supporting family members, trying to beat the clock to arrive before our daughter lost her battle with pancreatic cancer. With my sister Joyce behind the wheel we were pulled over by a State Trooper in the State of Virginia. He explained that if we were found driving 20 miles over the limit we would be charged with reckless driving and would have to appear before a court hearing. Fortunately he recorded our speed a little under the reckless driving speed and just gave us a speeding ticket. After a few minutes on the road my sister admitted she was well above the miles he recorded, we reduced our speed and arrived safely in time.

Our daughter spent her entire life in service to others and raised thousands of dollars for so many charities over her 60 years and it became so evident to us at her memorial service where hundreds of people came to honor her and tell us their stories.

During World War II an imprisoned Nazi intelligence officer told his captors: With the striking of your Big Ben clock each evening at nine, you used a secret weapon which we did not understand. It was very powerful and we could find no countermeasure against it. From 1940 until the end of the war Prime Minister Winston Churchill and the people of the Commonwealth observed a silent moment of prayer at 9 P.M. each day.

Book: *The Truth About Angels* by Terry Law.  
So do I believe in angels? What do you think!

Heavenly Father, enlighten those who live in gloom and darkness, to step into the light to protect our much loved country.

In His service,  
Edwina J. Tabit

December 21 LUKE 2:8-20

## **SHEPHERDS FOR GOD**

IN THESE DAYS WITH SO MANY TROUBLING EVENTS GOING ON, NOT UNLIKE THE TIMES IN THE LIFE OF JESUS; WE NEED TO BE SO THANKFUL FOR THE BIRTH OF GOD'S SON, JESUS, AND WORK TOWARD LOVE AND PEACE FOR ALL OF US.

IMAGINE THE FEAR THAT THE SHEPHERDS HAD WHEN THEY SAW AN ANGEL APPEARING FROM THE SKY, YET THROUGH THEIR FEAR THEY FOLLOWED THE MESSAGE OF THE ANGELS TO FIND OUR SAVIOR AS A BABY, WHICH WAS THE BEGINNING OF THE WORD OF PEACE.

WE ARE STILL STRIVING TO HAVE -PEACE ON EARTH- AND NEED TO BE DILIGENT IN SPREADING GOD'S LOVE TO ALL PEOPLE, SO THAT WE CAN HAVE A WORLD THE GOD INTENDED FOR US. WE ALL WANT TO BE LOVED AND NEED TO GO AS THE SHEPHERDS DID AND SPREAD THE WORD.

PRAYER: HELP US, DEAR GOD, TO BE YOUR GOOD SHEPHERDS, SPREADING THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS.

JUDY MURGITROYDE

December 22, Matthew 4:14-16

## FINDING PEACE

Often I am told people find peace in a special place in their home...a corner chair in the bedroom, somewhere outside their house on a special bench, or even the bathroom. I know several people who say the mountains are a place where they find special peace. These folks often go for a vacation or a retreat in the mountains. Some people say they find peace when they read their Bible or inspirational readings (I can find peace there, too). Others find peace in church or a chapel. I have myself been in hospital chapels that seem to give a special peace.

But my really special place is the beach, where I can hear the ocean and watch the waves come in and retreat repeatedly; leaving a reflective glow behind if the sun is shining. Even on a cloudy day there are grays and blues of various colors and the sun brings these out even though it is hidden by the clouds. At times the ocean is docile and other times ragging and angry. So like life, itself.

Many members of our church and other friends know my love of the sunrise, as I take pictures of the sunrise almost daily and put them on Facebook. The sunrise is so special to me. It signifies a new day, a new beginning, even the beginning of God's creation. Often God's paint brush is so vivid in yellow, orange, purple, rose, red, and colors hardly named that it is awe inspiring, exhilarating, and almost takes my breath away. I remember each time HOW GREAT THOU ART when we sing about God's creation with all its beauty and splendor. I find great peace, deep peace with the significance of the light that has come through Jesus, Our Savior, who we remember especially at Christmas when we recognize His birth. With peace comes grateful prayer, acknowledging all the blessings that have been bestowed on us.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, thank you for all the wonderful sunrises. I ask this day that you will help others feel the peace of the sunrise. Amen

Lois Settles

December 23 Isaiah 2: 1-5

“Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

When we returned to the United States from Nairobi, Kenya the Vietnam War had begun and the prayers of many of us children were that we would like to experience a Christmas without war. We saw the updates of the war on the nightly news and we saw some of the men who returned disabled, ill, and worse. The images of war saddened our hearts with fear.

Today, war is still a very ugly reality and we are still praying for the unrest in our country and around the universe to cease. This Christmas we can still imagine a world filled with concern and compassion for one another. We can start in our own neighborhoods with a gift of a smile, a hand with a chore, a plate of cookies, or a simple acknowledgment of a “hello”.

This Christmas is a time to gather with one another and share our faith experiences. It’s a time where we entrust one another with a caring spirit and living in the season of the Messiah who was born to walk with us; through the good and the evil. And as we take each step forward toward peace and reconciliation in this Advent season we remember to pray, and move toward becoming better Christians by embodying the spirit of the One who is the first and the last; our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Wishing you and yours a Merry Christmas!

Gracious God, enliven your people with a spirit of compassion, listening, and sharing. So that through understanding of one another we may realize the peace of Christ in our lives and in around the world.

Rev. Sheryl Sumlin-Walker

December 24 Luke 2:25-33

## **“Don’t Drop the Baby!”**

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

‘Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.’

And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.

Holding an infant is always an emotional experience, but for the very young and the very old, it is also physically challenging. When siblings are old enough to hold a baby brother or sister, they do so with great care; likewise, a great grandparent takes that infant in their arms delicately. In both cases, everyone watching is thinking one thing: “Don’t drop the baby!” They may not be saying this out loud, especially in the case of the great grandparent, but protection of that child’s young life is the job of a parent or parents.

The incarnation of Jesus has always filled us with the unique problem of God coming to us as a helpless child. We cannot understand God’s purpose for this, but we can hold that child dearly. When celebrating Christmas, we must be careful. “Don’t drop the baby!” The baby Jesus and his birth is what we prepare to celebrate each Christmas. If done properly, such a celebration is tender, emotional, and a bit cautious. We are reminded how fragile human life is. We are reminded that God put the life of his son into our hands the way that all life is in our hands, to cherish, to honor, to celebrate, and to protect.

Christmas might overwhelm you, but when you think once again on the birth of that helpless child, remember how vulnerable life is. Remember to treasure life this Christmas as well as the Lord, the giver of life. Amen.

Ron Watson

## Index of Contributors

*Thank you to all the volunteers who shared their personal experiences for this season of Advent*

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# Notes



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Make every effort to live in

*peace*

with everyone and to be  
holy; without holiness no one  
will see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14

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