



Trinity Presbyterian Church

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Trinity Presbyterian Church

2021 Advent Devotional

“Close to Home”



If life was a home, then we would pray—

May love be the foundation.

May God be the cornerstone.

May the Spirit be the windows—ushering light in.

And may hope be the walls—holding us together.

-a sanctified art

Trinity Presbyterian Church's 2021 Advent Devotional

This is our 17th issue of Trinity's Advent Devotional. Since 2005, the Christian Education Committee has provided the congregation each year with a collection of devotions written by members and friend of Trinity Presbyterian Church. Our Theme for this year is "Close to Home." This theme comes from [A Sanctified Art](#) and we will be following these theme in our worship and in our virtual Bible Studies.

Our *Close to Home* theme has us thinking when something hits close to home, it affects us deeply. During the Advent and Christmas season, we journey through scriptures and rituals that are tender, heavy with emotions, and vulnerable. We carry the memories and truths of this season close to our hearts. *Close to Home* acknowledges the "already but not yet" tension of our faith: Emmanuel is with us and yet, God's promised day-our everlasting home-is not fully realized. It names our deep longing for God to come close to us.

The Advent and Christmas scriptures are rich with home metaphors and imagery. John the Baptist prophesies about One who is to come, but reminds us that we are still wandering far from God's promised day: his message hits close to home especially for those experiencing inequity and oppression. Mary retreats to Elizabeth's home, seeking refuge and safety. Christ is born in the midst of a journey home. The Magi travel far from home to pay homage to Christ.

This Advent, may we be comforted by the One who dwells intimately with us. May we expand safety and sanctuary for everyone wandering far from home.

Written by: A Sanctified Art



Thank you to all of our contributors who shared their stories of testimony to God's love in life's challenges and successes. Your words help make our Advent Devotional meaningful and with purpose.

May we come home-whenever home is found-to live fully with joy, hope, and courage.

In Christ, The Christian Education Committee

Take Sabbath

Nourish and sustain yourself with rest. Commit to a Sabbath activity today, perhaps one of those listed below:

- ♦ *Go for a walk outside.*
- ♦ *Sit quietly and meditate.*
- ♦ *Plant something indoors or outside.*
- ♦ *Spend time with a friend or loved one.*
- ♦ *Explore a new area of your town or city.*
- ♦ *Cook or bake something using a favorite or new recipe.*
- ♦ *Do yoga or exercise in a way that feels good for your body.*
- ♦ *Write and mail a letter to someone you haven't talked to in a while.*
- ♦ *Organize or redesign an area in your home.*
- ♦ *Draw or create something.*
- ♦ *Dance or play music.*
- ♦ *Write a poem or a song.*
- ♦ *Watch a movie.*
- ♦ *Take a nap.*
- ♦ *Read a book.*

—A Sanctified Art

Thank you to our 2021 Contributors

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*The committee wishes to thank Kelli Jebbia for editing and putting together the
2021 Advent Devotional*

Homesick

Luke 21: 25-36 (read from your bible)

How do you describe homesickness to a child? You don't. They know. Children know the feeling of being away from home. It's fear, dipped in loneliness that, "What if I've been forgotten?" sonnet, or the "What if I can't go back?" refrain. Even a healthy, scrubbed-clean, showered-with-love child knows the longing of home. But if I had to. If I had to describe that aching feeling, I would say: "Homesickness is when longing and grief wrap themselves around you like a blanket. It's the door to comfort thrown open. It's an eye on the horizon for what could be and the only way out is to keep walking, to keep dreaming, to keep looking for signs that will point you back home." And if you tell that to a child, you may just realize that a part of your spirit has shoes on and has always been walking, always been dreaming, always been looking for the home that could be. The door to comfort has been blown open. Tell God I'm homesick. I'm on my way.

Written by: Rev. Sarah Speed Sanctifiedart.org

November 29, 2021

Don't Let the Flies In!

You will be blessed when you go in and blessed when you go out.

Deuteronomy 28:6

"Shut the door so the flies don't come in!" This was something my parents would say to one of us four kids as we played in and out of our home during the summer months. "In or out, but don't stand there with the door open!" Those words now bring a smile to my heart because I can hear my father Don's or my mother Lou's voice ring out those wishes. Hearing my parents voice as an adult can still make me sit up straight! Even if it's in my imagination.

Moses' instructions to the people of Israel were clear. "If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. (Deu. 28 1-3) He also spoke in Deu. 28:15 the *curse for the disobedience*.

I have never accomplished perfection, but I keep doing my best. My maturity teaches me that I will never attain this goal in our fallen world, but I can make positive differences that reflect the teaching of Jesus. If I open the door or close the door with the purpose of spreading good among God's people, the "flies" will not encroach. I can avoid the bothersome "flies" and focus on the blessings given to me in my going ins and going outs when I keep God in front of me. Keeping a focus on what is important based on Jesus's teaching in the New Testament helps me not be annoyed by the buzzing "flies" that can happen when you put yourself out there. Doing good works, even doing good works badly, has me seeing positive outcomes. Clumsy hard work can still produce beautiful blessing to others. For that I am grateful!

Prayer: *Father, please give me wisdom to see what you would have me do with whatever new distraction appears in my life. May I follow your call to minister, whether you're asking me to keep on with what I've been doing or calling me to a new people in a new place.*

Kelli Jebbia

December 24th, 2021

At Home in Your Heart

Christmas Eve

On this night, perhaps more than any other night, we crave that place called "Home." This place called "Home" is where we expect to find HOPE, LOVE, JOY, and PEACE. The reality is that there are those who still seek this place called "Home." Those who have very little HOPE, or may be void of HOPE altogether. Those who have not experienced LOVE, or may feel unloved. We speak of good tidings of great JOY, but there are those who've not known JOY. And PEACE, who are we kidding? In the midst of a chaotic world, day in and day out, many find themselves without PEACE. And yet, Ephesians 3:16 reminds us to allow, "Christ to settle down and be at home in our hearts by faith." It is here, and only here, that one can expect to receive HOPE, LOVE, JOY, and PEACE. On this night, as well as any other night, we can be assured that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is waiting for us with open arms. And it is here, and only here, where we encounter HOPE, LOVE, JOY, and PEACE. And it is here, a place called "Home." The invitation, to allow Christ to settle down and be at home in your heart is yours this day and every day.

Prayer: Thank you, Heavenly Father, for guiding us through this journey to Bethlehem with Mary and Joseph where Jesus will be born. We are all travelers seeking the Christ Child. . .as He travels in our hearts. Jesus is our hope and our blessing. Help us to carry His light and His love into the world. In His holy name we pray. Amen

Devotion by Jeff and Cyndy Beebe

Prayer by Karen Thomas

December 23nd,

Try It, You'll Like It

TASTE and SEE that the Lord is GOOD. How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him! **Psalms 34:8**

Holiday time is known for so many delicious foods, mindboggling displays and the classical decorations of years past when we think about our holiday homes. We look forward to so much that our hearts and minds can be overwhelmed with expectation. Imagine some of your favorite Christmas memories: the sights, sounds, tastes, smells and feelings.

As our families have expanded with marriages, in laws, grandchildren, stepchildren, "family" (friends you think of as family). New traditions, tastes and activities become melded into our own traditions. Tasting new dishes, different spices or flavors in the casseroles you remember or brand-new cookies or cakes give us the opportunity to TASTE or try something new. Going to Midnight Mass with my husband's Catholic family, a much nuttier fruitcake (which is a vast improvement to the old), and taking a night-time walk through the Edisto Gardens (in Orangeburg, South Carolina) with all of the beautiful lights and displays are just a few of the traditions that have changed my holiday experience.

Job 34:2-4 Hear my words you wise men, And listen to me, you who know, For the ear tests words, As the palate TASTES foods. Let us choose for ourselves what is right; Let us know among ourselves what is GOOD.

The thing about TASTING or trying is we aren't sure if we are going to like it so we just take a small bite or nibble. Then we SEE just how GOOD it is! Our eyes and noses might give us a hint but to really SEE we use our teeth, saliva, tongue, tastebuds and digestive system which communicates to our brain to know if it is really GOOD for us or to us. I've heard, "Try it, you'll like it.", "You can't taste with your eyes." and "One little bite won't kill you." The action of TASTING or trying something requires us to take action or make an effort to know it's GOODNESS. We may find that we liked it so much that we want to include it and make it a part of our tradition. Sharing it with those we love and care for!

Think about how you TASTE and SEE how GOOD our Lord is! How can we be more actively tasting all that He has to offer and including His GOODNESS in our lives? Share this GOODNESS with all! Christmas can be your beginning conversation (your taste this, you might be inspired) to offer a taste to someone else. Then you can revisit with them (see how they like it or how it's going or invite them to come with you to a church event).

Luke 1:19 The GOOD news of great joy for all people"

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for all of the beautiful blessings you have created for us to experience. Be with us as we are learning about you and work to become the people you want us to be sharing your GOOD news. Amen

Jan Markiewicz

Songs: Taste and See That the Lord Is Good song <https://youtu.be/K3RifXQAkDY> Go Tell It on the Mountain <https://youtu.be/NsX3tYbai1Q>

November 30, 2021

Choose Whom You Will Serve

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. **Joshua 24:15**

Near the end of Joshua's life, he called all the leaders of Israel to Shechem. The people around the tribes of Israel served other gods. Joshua said to his people, "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." The people said they would serve the Lord for He is their God and had brought them to this place.

This quote from Joshua has been meaningful to me most of my life. When my husband and I were married, there were two ministers in my family to officiate in our wedding ceremony. One my father and one my brother. So my brother "officiated" at the beginning of the ceremony and Dad walked me down the aisle. They shared the scripture readings and Dad gave the meditation and what was his text? "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" and he, of course, advised us to take this text to heart and live accordingly. A few years after our we were married, we received a small wall plaque with this text on it. It is a constant reminder.

Joshua told his people that they were witnesses to their choice of serving the Lord. We had witnesses at our marriage ceremony. We are all witnesses to our Lord whom we serve. At this Advent Season, let us be reminded that there were witnesses to His birth by shepherds, angels, wise men, the inn keeper, plus so many more. Let us all serve our Lord by witnessing to those around us so that they will see our loving Lord, who came to us as a baby in the manger, living in us here in Palm Coast. Hallelujah!

God blessed the people of Israel and He has blessed my home and family and our church and the world around us. Thanks be to God.

Prayer: *Oh Lord, help us to serve you better, love you deeper, be witnesses to your love with joy and thanksgiving every day of our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen*

Lillian Warner

Dec 1, 2021

Notes of Love

Some practical instructions for Christian living “Never let your brotherly love fail, nor refuse to extend your hospitality to strangers - sometimes men have entertained angels unawares.” Hebrews 13:1

I love this scripture because it reminds me that God is all about love. During my life no matter how much or how little I had materially I always had God's love and his gifts to me. I can always cook for others in need - whether it be in a soup kitchen, for the family coming home with a newborn, or Thanksgiving Dinner for colleagues at work with no one to share with.

His gift of music for my soul has brought me great joy all through my life as I sang with the three-year old cherubs in my home church in NC, in Ireland with my College Choir, or in the six member choir in the 38 member church in N FL. Music is where I feel at home.

When I taught, I tried to create a safe and hospitable environment where students and teachers could ask questions, search for new ideas, explore solutions to improve the situation or find solutions. Of course, this love for mathematics, students, and teachers was born out of God's love for me and all life. Another place I feel at home.

By trying to see everything I do through that lens of God's love, I can only hope I have extended some hospitality to a few angels unaware and encouraged them to do the same!

Prayer: *Lord, help me never to forget that your love through Jesus Christ has given me a place to be at home, a place where I can extend your hospitality to others and an opportunity to spread your love. In Jesus Christ's name. Amen.*

Martha Gioielli

December 22nd, 2021

Watching Over Me

Surely goodness and Mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Psalm 23 Verse 6

When I was a young girl, I went to church each Sunday with my grandmother to the Methodist Church in the town where we lived in Northern New Jersey. I went to Sunday School and she went to church. During those years I had to memorized the 23rd Psalm.

Fast forward to my church life at Trinity. I joined Rebecca Circle and during one of the Bible studies we learned about breath prayers. I chose part of verse 6, goodness and mercy. I still use it today when I need it to smooth out the rough spots while driving. In meetings and when Jon died. One of my friends sent me a group of bible quotes which included the 23rd Psalm. They were a great comfort to me. The Lord has always been my shepherd.

When I say my prayers at night I end with Psalm verse 6. It reassures and gives me peace. When I die I know that they Lord will welcome me home in heaven.

In one of [These Days Devotionals](#) there is a poem that I have kept with me. It is called, *“God is Watching Over Me”*. It reads, “And when it's time to leave it all I trust the Lord will make the call, and when I look, I know I'll see that God is watching over me.”

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for your guidance and love during my life. You have always been by my side, blessed Jesus. Amen

Carol Graff

December 21st, 2021

Fourth Sunday of Advent—Love

Seeking Sanctuary

Luke 1: 39-55(read from your bible)

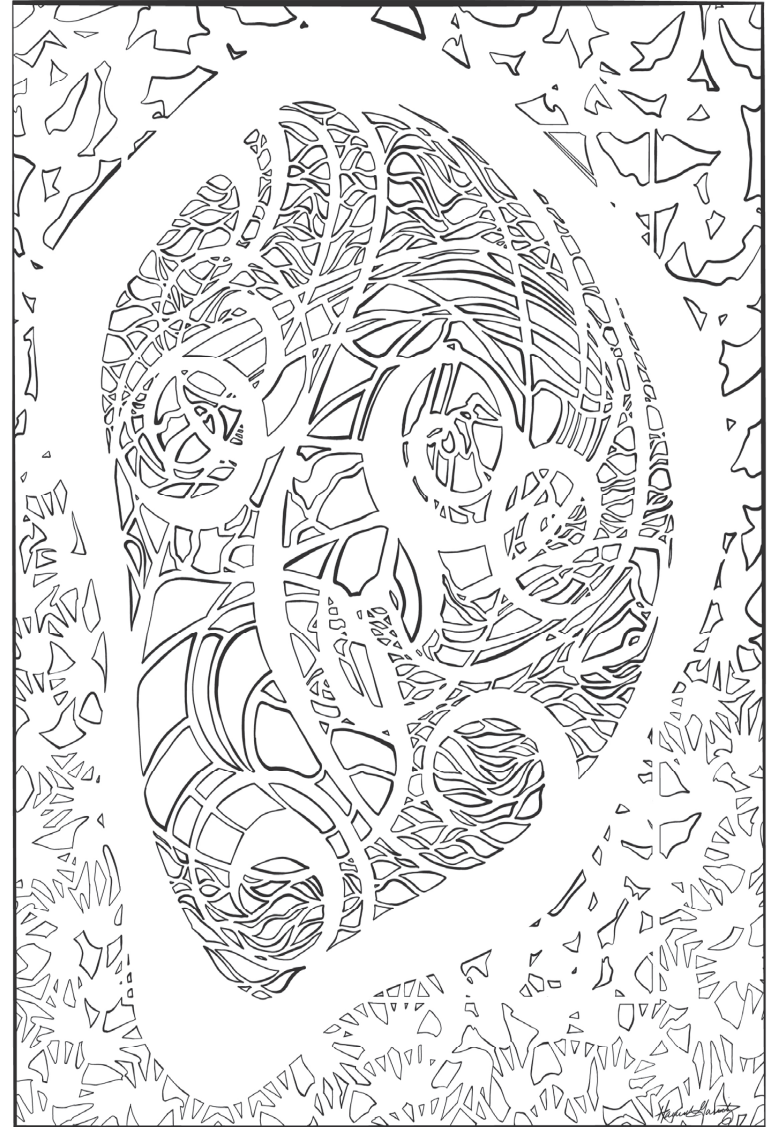
Come On Home...

We all know the feeling--the shaky ground, sinking sand, water-is-rising, sun-is-fading feeling that makes steady breathing an entire miracle, and holding back tears a marvel in and of itself.

And when those days come. I call my parents. And I call my church, and I call my friends, and they say in unison what God has said from the very beginning, which is, “Come on home.” Is there anything more healing than an open door? If you’re seeking sanctuary, if the waters are rising-- listen. It may be hard to hear, but God is always saying, “Come on home.”

Written by: Sarah Speed sanctifiedart.org

December 2, 2021



Trace with your finger or color

December 3, 2021

Traces

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:46

It was routine when our family was young to eat our evening meals together. We socialized with friends from our church. We worshiped regularly. When the children were in high school, we found that their activities and sports demanded our support. In particular, with the twins both in marching band, we became band parents, working the concession stand on Friday nights or traveling to away games or competitions. We all happily returned to our more normal routine once marching season ended.

One year, friends invited us to a tree trimming party. They had lived all over the country. When they opened the boxes of ornaments, we found a treasure. Each ornament was in a small bag which had the date and place of purchase. When decorated, their tree was a history of their lives together. Then we trimmed our own tree and found our ornaments, though not labeled with date and place, traced our lives together. We had ornaments dating from our childhood, our early apartment years, ones made by our children at various ages, and remembrances from the many places we traveled together. Our tree traced our lives together beautifully.

We are seldom all together at Christmas any more as the children want to celebrate with their families. We were all together one Christmas when all their children were small. Now we travel to one of their homes if no one can come to us. It is fascinating how each family has its own traditions as they celebrate, but all include togetherness, sharing special foods on Christmas day, and wonder at the story of the impact of baby Jesus born in a manger. Through singing carols, sharing gifts, having time with special friends, we all continue our family traditions and strengthen our faith.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, Be with us as we gather with family and friends during the holiday season. Let us rejoice in the message of Christmas. Let us renew the joy in our hearts. Help us to share this message of hope and joy with others, especially those who need it now. Amen*

Carol Corson

December 20th, 2021

Peaceful Easy Feeling

My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest. Isaiah 32:18

Prior to this verse the people of Judah were in chaos...every person for himself...take what you want regardless of the other person...they were trying to muster troops for the pending invasion of their city...looking out only for themselves.

However, God made it very clear through Isaiah that His people will live in secure homes, peaceful dwelling places and undisturbed places of rest....time to put down the weapons and learn how to live together in peace.

Having lived through several hurricanes in St. Thomas our family experienced the most incredible outpouring of sharing and caring from our Church, friends, neighbors, coworkers,...people on the street. We had a large generator and were able to power our home and the 2 closest neighbors...what a privilege to share with them and they with us.

I saw the devastation on the media after Irma and Maria in September of 2017. A few weeks ago I visited our old neighborhood and witnessed many homes still in disrepair and many neighbors had left island or died...I was sharing my concerns with 90 year old Tia who lived across the street from us and she said "It was bad but I have my house and my family and I thank God for that"....then she said "...you came to visit me...you make me so happy"... she has peace, security, and an undisturbed place of rest.

Prayer: Dear Lord...Help us all remember to live in peace, feeling secure in your Love, finding undisturbed rest for our souls...Amen

Judy Spurrell

December 19th, 2021



December 4th, 2021

Home is Where the Heart Is

*By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established;
by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant
riches.* **Proverbs 24:3,4**

When we were children we moved almost every year, from one state to another. As a pre-schooler, home was wherever my parents were at. When my dad was stationed out of the country, we relocated to my mother's small hometown. My mother and grandmother had grown up in the house that my great-grandfather had built circa 1900. He had come from a Presbyterian background, and, over time, that house and town became "home" to me, even though I had only lived there for a short time. When we moved away, I would (for years) have a recurring dream of trying to walk back to there from wherever we were living, and frequently getting lost on city streets along the way, never quite making it "home". My siblings have their own memories and places and churches they call "home", which is as it should be. I joined the Presbyterian church when my firstborn was baptized in the early 1970's, and immediately felt at home. It's almost impossible to try to explain the connectedness with being "that close to home".

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord, for all of those people who serve as strong Christian witness over the many years that we spend trying to "get home". In Jesus' name, Amen!*

Maudie Parker

December 5th, 2021

Second Sunday of Advent—Peace

Laying the Foundation

Luke 1: 57-80 (read from your bible)

Words For The Beginning...

If I could give you words for the very beginning--for the stretches and the yawns, and the opening of eyes, for the first hiccups, and the first smiles, and the first purse of your lips, I would say, "Oh, dear child, how you are loved." But the thing about love is you can't stop there, so I would go on to say, "You are strong, stronger than you think. And you are not alone--look at these parents who adore you and these doctors and nurses fighting for you. And you are enough, already enough. You haven't done anything yet. You've just been here, breathing, sleeping, and already, you are enough. And then I might say, "This world is a mess, but it is your home, and you can make it better, so always try to make it better. And maybe most important of all: there is love that is bigger than my understanding, that moves through this world, and I call that love God. And that love is here, here in this room, and that love knows your name by heart."

Written by: Rev. Sarah Speed Sanctifiedart.org

December 18th 2021

Invited Home

Luke 2: 1-20 (read from your bible)

Invitations...

I've been thinking about a universal truth--the way we all want to be invited in. We want the door to be opened with cheers of, "You're here!" We want the clerk at the store to ask how we're doing, and the waiter to wink at us and whisper, "Good choice." We want the barista to learn our names, which people call being a "regular," but it feels more like being known. We want the stranger to help us pick up our sodas when the case breaks, and the woman to put her bag in her lap on the subway, which is to mean, "Come, you can sit by me." We cherish every open palm wave from the child in the grocery store and every city church with open doors when the organist plays.

At the end of the day we are all just a collection of heart and bones walking through this world, exchanging invitations, saying to one another in a million little ways--come matter here. Come make a difference here. Come be you, here.

Jesus didn't receive much of an invitation. No one moved their bag to their lap, or opened the door to the inn and said, "You're here!" Still, he came.

What a gift it is to have a God who does not wait on my invitation. What a gift it is to have a God who can't imagine being anywhere but here.

Written by: Rev. Sara Speed sanctifiedart.org

December 17th, , 2021

Sunsets

How Great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! 1 John 3:1

When I was growing up my mom always used to say that I was God's child. She instilled a wonderful faith based life for me. I was taught that God would always watch over me and if I stayed close to him, he would stay close to me. As I got older I realized there was more to that phrase, as my single mom was not just saying it to help me handle life, but also to prepare herself for a life after my sister and I left home.

One of the most amazing divine interventions that God gave us right after Tiffany was born was the cardiologist who was on-call that morning. We loved her and felt her faith filled personality immediately. When Tiffany was about 2 months old she was transferred to Shands Hospital by helicopter for further testing on her heart. The news we got from Shands was devastating in that it looked like Tiffany would not make it to her first birthday. Ti's cardiologist commented to us after getting this news that 'Tiffany is a child of God. No one can take his place. Medically speaking she might not look like she will have a long life, but it's not up to us.' She strengthen our faith and gave us hope that we desperately needed. She and Tiffany had an amazing faith filled relationship for 14 years. The day that Tiffany went home to be with God was the saddest day of our lives.

We had friends who had come to visit Tiffany at the hospital and, thank you dear God, they were able to drive our car back home. On the way the most amazing thing happened on the highway. Looking to the west was the most incredible sunset we had ever seen. We, along with others, stopped to look at this amazing site. It was as if God was talking to us and showing us that Tiffany was fine, she was with him. God had welcomed her home. The peace that we felt from that sunset could only be given to us by God.

The theme for advent this year is 'Close to home'. We never know how long we have here on earth, but as long as we stay close to home, to God, who loves us and will be with us no matter what, we will one day be welcomed home to our eternal life with him.

Prayer: Thank you God for Tiffany's life here on earth. May we ALL find peace, joy, hope and love this advent season by staying closer to you. Amen.

Libbie Butler

December 6th, 2021



O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

O come! O come! Emmanuel!
And ransom captive Israel;
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.

Refrain

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall be born for thee, O Israel!

O come! Thou Rod of Jesse! free2
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them victory o'er the grave. Refrain

O come! Thou Day-Spring! come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine Advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight. 2a Refrain

O come! Thou Key of David! come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery. Refrain

O come! O come! Thou Lord of Might!³
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times didst give the law,⁴
In cloud, and majesty, and awe. Refrain

Refrain

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall be born for thee, O Israel! Amen.

Song by The Piano Guys

December 7th, 2021



December 16th, 2021

Our Home is where God Lives

For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything.

Hebrews 3:4

We were blessed with a life with children. From a family day care home to a private school God was in control. I worked part time for searching talent for a television channel in Philadelphia, mostly children's shows. I had a half time show at the Playhouse in the Park that I auditioned children talent. That all led to my own kids learning to be flexible and responsible and depending on God for the next challenge. We needed more talented children so God helped us open a program in West Chester, PA that resulted in our moving there.

In 1972 God had a new foundation for us to challenge. It was; keeping a friendly loving divorce, a son with leukemia, a daughter in her last half of her high school, a dog and a vision plan of a single woman needing a family home. We were walking in HIS hands and we knew it every day.

And so it goes....Lauri graduated and ran the office. Jim went into remission and his charismatic personality brought dozens of young friends to our Discovery home over all those years. They loved Discovery. They had soft ball and soccer fields the basketball court, treehouse, 4 H Club with a pony, llamas, goats, sheep, rabbits, turkeys, and chickens and many foreign exchange kids and families of camp kids and international guests, interns and teachers all were always there 24/7.

Prayer: Dear God Thank you for the gift of children and the families who make a Christian home a family of love, caring and sharing. Help us to build our homes with the beauty you created. Help us to cultivate into our homes the international friends and guests who help us enrich our lives and mold our world with love and understanding.

Robin Johnson

December 15th, 2021

God is Great, God is Good

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Deut. 6:5-7

Devotional: “Close to home” brought me to this point in time. I am a recent transient to Florida from New Jersey. In New Jersey, we raised our family and we had a Christian base. I was raised in Pittsburgh (until the age of 10) and my parents were also devoted to raising us as Christians. We said grace before dinner, every night. “God is great, God is good, let us thank him for our food, Amen.” And we said grace before going to sleep, every night. “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord, my soul to keep. If I die, before I wake, I pray the Lord, my soul to take.” This was all I knew as a child. I look at my life now. My husband and I had our daughters baptized as infants. They went to Sunday School, were both confirmed, but as young adults, and starting their own families, it’s hard to know what impact these Christian morals have had on them. I hope and pray religiously, that my beliefs and teachings were enough, are enough. Both daughters are not active in a church, or part of a church family. But, when I offer prayers, and support in their daily lives, from a faithful perspective, they are receptive. So, I feel I’ve instilled some Christian beliefs into their lives. I know that God is present and meets those who reach out, right where the need is presented. I forever pray for my daughters and their families as they navigate this life, with the hope my influence has made a difference.

Prayer: *Dear God, I pray for all those in this house, that as they come and go, you will keep them safe, but also will help them, exemplify you, Lord. I pray that as we enter this home, we would feel your presence and would only bring what will be helpful for us and others as we enter. Lord, thank you for always being with us, in Jesus’ name, AMEN.*

Leslie Russo

December 8th, 2021

Called to Connect

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. IN a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as they sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished! “ Luke 1: 39-45

This summer at Montreat Youth Conference our theme was, “Called to Connect.” On the first day, our keynoter read to us from Luke 1: 39-45. This scripture follows the angel’s announcement that Mary was with child and that her cousin Elizabeth was also with child.

I have heard this scripture many times during Advent, focusing on Elizabeth and the baby leaping in her womb upon seeing Mary pregnant with the Christ child. This time though, our keynoter chose instead to focus on the journey that Mary had to take to get to Elizabeth.

The journey to Judea was over 80 miles and would have taken Mary 9 to 10 days to complete. Can you imagine making that difficult journey after hearing the news that the angel had given Mary? Mary needed to be with her cousin to help her sort out all that she had heard. Although the journey was tough, Mary felt called to connect with Elizabeth during this time.

Christmas can be a hard time for many people. Who is God calling you to go the extra mile for this Advent? Who could use your presence? Who could you use in your life to help strengthen your faith or help you work through a difficult time? Who is God calling you to connect with this Advent season?

Prayer: *Dear God, Walk with me on this Advent journey. Lead me to who you know could use my presence and lead me to who can strengthen my faith. Amen.*

Brooke Tucker

December 9th, 2021

Mysteries

Beyond all questions, the mystery of godliness is great **1 Timothy 3:16**

I have always enjoyed reading detective stories. I'm not much for violence, blood, car chases, or shootouts. My tastes lean toward the authors of the "Golden Age of Mystery"; the intricate plots of Agatha Christie or the clever repartee of Rex Stout are more to my liking.

"Mystery" is a word that frequently appears in the New Testament; 28 times by one count (depending on the translation used). Paul uses the word frequently. In today's scripture reading from I Timothy he says: "... great indeed is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh ...". Here he refers to the mystery appropriate to the Advent Season; the mystery of the incarnation.

"Mystery" as used in the New Testament doesn't mean quite the same thing that Agatha Christie means, which is something that can be discovered by investigation and logic. Rather it means a truth declared from eternity, and prophesied in the Old Testament, but only discoverable by revelation. As Paul says in I Corinthians 2:7, "...a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began."

The mystery of the incarnation refers to God "...becoming flesh and dwelling among us...". Becoming flesh to put a face on God, to meet us where we are, to be subject to the weaknesses of the flesh as we all are. This happened on that night long ago in Bethlehem, an occurrence we are preparing ourselves to commemorate during this time of Advent.

So while you contemplate the joy, the hope, the wonder of Christmas, may I suggest that you also contemplate the mystery of Christmas, the mystery of the incarnation. I think this idea of mystery is something like the feeling I get when I look at the stars on a clear night sky, the ocean at sunrise, a drop of pond water under my microscope.

Prayer: *Lord, increase our faith and open our hearts to the Mystery that is God Incarnate.*

Del Smith

December 14th, 2021

The Gift of Faith

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a room for you? **John 14:1-2**

Home for me is family and friends, the people that have known me most of my life. These family and friends I speak of always love me unconditionally. They never bat-an-eye of dismay and are always supportive. To know people are there for you during your highs and lows in life is everything. When I think about my children, I don't think it will be an actual house that is home to them - I believe it will be the heart of the people they love and trust.

Throughout their lives- my husband and I have tried to have them see the world with an open heart and open mind and to know that HOME is a safe place for them to feel that whatever they may be going through- it will be ok. HOME is acceptance and understanding. HOME is a place of love.

Writing this piece has left me with great interest in asking my children this question; to see what their perspective may be today and what their outlook will be later in life once they have left our nest. I do hope that my children will be able to reflect on their life and see that the greatest gift I could ever give them was the gift of faith.

Prayer: Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that something is real even if we do not see it.

Jennifer Kaczmarek

December 13th, 2021



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 ev'ry 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

Songwriters: Jill Jackson / Sy Miller

December 10th, 2021

Peaceful Sleep

You can go to bed without fear; you will lie down and sleep soundly.

Proverbs 3:24

Like many people, I have trouble going to sleep sometimes. In many cases, stress or worry are the root cause of the problem. I try to sleep, but my mind keeps focusing on the problem, the cause of the problem, or what I can do about it.

When I read this verse, it occurred to me that the potential solution, like many solutions in life, is to turn the problem over to God rather than trying to solve it myself. God is much more capable of taking care of my problems than I am, and I can trust that God will find the best possible solution for me.

The holidays can be a stressful and problematic time. But God is always with us, especially when we need Him the most.

Prayer: *Lord, help me to remember that YOU are the solution. You love me and you have the infinite wisdom to take care of me and those I love in the best possible way.*

Kathy Cooke

December 11th, 2021

Precious Gift

GIVE us this day our daily BREAD. Matthew 6:11

Flashback: My hometown had a Sunbeam bakery which would have the most delicious aroma as you are heading home along the road in that area. That is one of the most wonderful smells I can recall and definitely a memory scent. Many of us have those very vivid memory scents as you return home after being away. Close your eyes and think of a favorite time you returned home for a special event like a Christmas Celebration with a marvelous smell memory. Just imagine the sounds, smells, feelings, sights and eventually those wonderful tastes!!!

GIVE us this day our daily BREAD, is straight from The Lord's Prayer. Our greatest gift, Jesus, teaches us this is the first request in this prayer. Every day our bodies need nourishment. Bread is a cross cultural form of nourishment. Cultures of the world consume some form of bread. How many can you name? (cinnamon rolls, challah, naan, pizza) So many people can understand and relate to bread as something we need. We are so blessed as a congregation to have the nourishment we need daily, supporting our community's food banks and we are so thankful! There is another type of BREAD that we also need.

Jesus is our BREAD of life. John 6: 33, 35 reminds us "33 For the BREAD of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (our God GIVEN gift...Christmas) 35 I am the BREAD of life. He who comes to Me shall not hunger and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

Christmas is our reminder that God GIVES this precious gift to us. The only gift we truly need to accept, receive, believe and share! Who's GIVING BREAD this Christmas?

Prayer: *Dear Lord, Thank you for giving us bread for our nourishment and especially the bread of life for Christmas and every day. Guide us as we live to give to others and share your blessings. Amen*

Songs: The Lord's Prayer [The Lord's Prayer sung by Won Cho, Bass, January 28, 2015 - YouTube](#) OR Bread of Life ["Bread of Life" Lyric Video \(official\) - YouTube](#)

Jan Markiewicz

December 12th, 2021

Third Sunday of Advent—Joy

A home for All

Luke 3:1-18² | Zephaniah 3:14-20 (read from your bible)

John the Baptist's good news sounds harsh, but he preaches a home for all where inequities are banished, valleys are lifted up, and all have the resources they need for collective flourishing. Ultimately, John's message is one of joy. We are called to collectively build and repair the structures of our society; we are called to be kin-dom builders. Wherever we build, God is there. What we build should be a place with a large table and room for all.

Written by: Rev. Sarah Speed Sanctifiedart.org