

Summerville Presbyterian Church
Advent Devotional

This year's Advent Devotional has been authored by several members of Summerville Presbyterian Church. Beginning on the first day of Advent, November 29, there is a reading for each day through December 27. Devotions sometimes reference the themes of Advent (Hope, Love, Joy, Peace), phrases from the carol "Joy to the World," or Scripture passages commonly read during this season.

Day	Date	Scripture	Focus	Person
1	**11/29/26**	Isaiah 64:1	Advent	Anita K. Herbert
2	**11/30/26**	1 Peter 1:13	Hope	Diana Barth
3	**12/1/26**	Romans 15:12		Ralph R. Herbert
4	**12/2/26**	Hebrews 6:19		Suzie Ryan
5	**12/3/26**	Romans 8:24-25		Ellen Carney
6	**12/4/26**	Hebrews 11:1		Carol Wilkins
7	**12/5/26**	Romans 15:13		Ralph R. Herbert
8	**12/6/26**	Mark 1:1-8	John the Baptist	Amanda Prochaska
9	**12/7/26**	Romans 5:8	Love	Candace Hayes
10	**12/8/26**	John 3:16		Sandy Lindsay
11	**12/9/26**	Romans 8:38-39		Diana Barth
12	**12/10/26**	Ephesians 3:17-19		Amy Price
13	**12/11/26**	1 Corinthians 13:1-3		Anita K. Herbert
14	**12/12/26**	1 John 4:19		Ellen Carney
15	**12/13/26**	Luke 1:46-55	Mary's Song	Suzie Ryan
16	**12/14/26**	Luke 2:10-11	Joy	Sandy Lindsay
17	**12/15/26**	Psalm 96:11-13		Anita K. Herbert
18	**12/16/26**	1 Peter 1:8		Michael Hayes
19	**12/17/26**	Psalm 51:12		Diana Barth
20	**12/18/26**	John 15:11		Sandy Lindsay
21	**12/19/26**	Matthew 2:10-11		Frances Via
22	**12/20/26**	John 1:1-5, 12, 14	In the beginning was the Word	Anita K. Herbert
23	**12/21/26**	John 14:27	Peace	Mary Lou Semones
24	**12/22/26**	2 Thessalonians 3:16		Zachary Storti
25	**12/23/26**	Isaiah 9:6		Candace Hayes
26	**12/24/26**	Luke 2:1-7	Christmas Eve	Frances Via
27	**12/25/26**	Luke 2:8-20	Christmas Day	Diana Barth
28	**12/26/26**	John 1:14		Frances Via
29	**12/27/26**	Isaiah 61:10-11	1st Sunday of Christmas	Anita K. Herbert

Day 1
November 29, 2026

O that You would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at Your presence.
Isaiah 64:1

Advent is an interesting season in the liturgical year. The name means "coming," and it refers to Christ's coming to earth. In our music and Scripture readings, we primarily focus on His first coming, celebrating the familiar story of Christ's birth in Bethlehem, attended by shepherds and animals and cared for by Mary and Joseph. But this season also reminds us about Christ's second coming when he will fulfill his promise that he will return to earth. This means that His kingdom, now inaugurated, will completely be fulfilled and Christ will reign on earth as He does in heaven. Isaiah 64 is one of those texts that seems to speak to both aspects of Christ's coming. Isaiah acknowledges the human need for salvation and the forgiveness of sin, which has already been granted through Jesus' work on the cross. But the world made right, where every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord---that is yet to come.

Spend some time thinking about what it would look like for Christ to return and begin His earthly reign. What would be set right? How can we work toward that reality today?

Dear God,
I pray that Your will be done and Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.
Help me to trust in Your promised return and to live expectantly
with the values that will one day be exemplified in all your creation.
Amen.

By Anita K. Herbert

Day 2
November 30, 2026

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at His coming.
1 Peter 1:13 NIV

Hope focuses on the future. For Christians, hope is not wishful thinking. It is, instead, rooted in the knowledge that Christ will come again and God's will eventually will be done. After all, every Sunday during worship we pray for that time, saying, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." What Peter adds to our understanding of those words is a description of the mindset we should have as we await that eventuality. In Peter's day, one tied up one's long robes as one prepared to go to work. A direct translation of the above passage from the Greek starts like this: "Wherefore, having girded up the loins of your mind, being sober-minded…" With those words, Peter tells us to strengthen our minds and put them to work on behalf of God's kingdom. Then, he says, our hope for the future will be based in the trust we have that God's grace will be with us when Christ returns.

Think about what can we do to "gird up the loins of our mind." Read the Bible? Make prayer a habit? Perform acts of service? What can you add to the list?

Dear Lord,
strengthen our faith, allowing us to trust in the grace of God.
Help us to use that strength to bring God's kingdom into today's reality.
Amen.

By Diana Barth

Day 3
December 1, 2026

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Romans 15:13

Wiliam Barclay wrote, "It is said there are no hopeless situations, there are only men and women who have grown hopeless." Yet the Christian hope is not rooted in our struggles but in the certainty, "If God is for us, who can be against us." For joy is not dependent on our troubling circumstances; instead, it is a derivative of the ever-present indwelling Spirit of God, who never leaves us or forsakes us. This produces a divine serenity that lacks all bounds and consummates in a peace with God that is forever settled in heaven! By the power of the Holy Spirit, we have an eternal hope that despite perilous and troubling times, we have overcome the world!

For Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world." John 16:33

Reflect

- Are there situations about which you have grown hopeless?
- What are some of your tendencies when you feel that way?
- How does reflection on God's power, presence or attributes change the way you see that situation?

God of all hope,
Fill me with all joy and peace in believing.
Holy Spirit, empower me so that your hope abounds in me!
Amen.

By Ralph R. Herbert

Day 4
December 2, 2026

We have this hope as an anchor for our lives. It is safe and sure and goes through the curtains of the Heavenly temple into the inner sanctuary.
Hebrews 6:19

Advent is a season of hope, a time to nurture peace and experience joy in our hearts and lives. It is a time of expectations, when we prepare our church, homes and our families to celebrate the birth of Jesus. It is a busy time in our lives. We **hope** our homes get decorated, we **hope** the gifts will be wrapped, and we **hope** Christmas dinner will be delicious. It's easy to become distracted by all the worldly preparations. Sometimes we forget where to place our **Hope**—in God, our Savior. Advent is when we need God the most! Make it your goal to keep your heart and mind on God throughout Advent.

Wake up each day with this purpose in mind. What will you do today to experience the joy of Advent? How can you share this hope with others?

Dear God,
this Advent help me to slow down, listen to your voice
and focus on what is most important.
I place my hope in you as I prepare my heart to celebrate the birth of Jesus.
Amen.

By Suzie Ryan

Day 5
December 3, 2026

For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.
Romans 8:24-25

What is hope? The dictionary defines hope as "the desire for something and confidence in the possibility of its fulfillment." Emily Dickinson called hope "the thing with feathers that perches in the soul." God's people hoped for a Messiah, and that hope was fulfilled with the miraculous birth of a baby in a stable in Bethlehem. Our hope in Christ is the promise of our salvation and our inheritance in the glory of the age to come. Our hope is made possible by the solid assurance that our salvation is a promise from God. The season of Advent is a season of hope—of the knowledge that we are God's people both now and forever.

What reminds you of the hope that was fulfilled by the birth of a tiny baby in Bethlehem? Is it seeing the church decorated for Christmas? Singing the words of your favorite carol? Or maybe watching a family light the Advent candle on Sunday morning? Do not allow the news of the world to cause you to forget the hope that we have in Christ.

Dear Lord,
thank you for the gift of hope in Jesus Christ.
Do not let us forget that we are your people,
and our salvation is promised through Christ. "Hope of all the earth Thou art."
Amen.

By Ellen Carney

Day 6
December 4, 2026

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for
and assurance about what we do not see."
Hebrews 11:1

Advent is a season of waiting… In a world of fast food, instant access to information, shorter attention spans and unrealistic expectations, waiting is rarely tolerated.

As we look around at the unfinished stories in our lives—broken relationships, unanswered prayers, pain and suffering—it can be overwhelming. We desperately want to see God at work as we look at the gap between what we see and what we hope for in this broken world. And so we wait.…

The writer of Hebrews 11:1 speaks to this tension as hope that is not merely a wish for things to be better, but a trust in God's faithfulness to His promises. We are given the "Hall of Faith" list in the rest of Hebrews 11 as a reminder of His presence throughout the ages as His followers waited. He invites us to be anchored to His character even when the path is obscured. In this season of waiting for the second coming, may we embrace the hope revealed in His word and may we extend this hope to those walking this journey with us.

Spend some time thinking about where you are waiting? Where are you anchoring your hopes? How can you extend this hope to someone today?

Dear Lord,
renew my heart and steady my spirit.
When the things I hope for seem distant and unseen,
help me to lean not on my own sight,
but on Your unfailing promises.
Teach me to wait with joy and trust Your timing.
Amen.

By Carol Wilkins

Day 7
December 5, 2026

And again Isaiah says,
"The root of Jesse shall come,
the one who rises to rule the Gentiles;
in Him the Gentiles shall hope."
Romans 15:12

In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul reminds the Gentile believers that at one time, "you were separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in this world… But now in Christ Jesus, you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ… who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall." (Ephesians 2:12-14)

Before Christ's Advent, there was a time of hopelessness when the vast nations of the world didn't possess the covenant promises made to the Jews. But that was all about to change! Now in the descendent of Jesse, the son of Joseph and Mary, God was going to open up a door of hope for the Gentiles. In doing so, a miracle of hope would occur. God would heal the divisions and break down the walls of separation, uniting the two groups to become one in Christ.

Hope is a universal invitation to trust in the divine uniter who was born in a humble stable. Hope is to believe in God's future: Where the lion will lie down with the lamb, where we can hammer our swords into plowshares, and where Jesus "will wipe away every tear… and there will no longer be any death, no longer mourning, or crying or pain… He will be making all things new!" (Revelation 21:4-5)

Dear Jesus,
thank you that because of Your coming,
You have opened the path for relationship with You
and for the healing of divisions among people.
May we always be prepared to give the reason for the hope that we have in You!
Amen.

By Ralph R. Herbert

Day 8
December 6, 2026

"The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight,' "

so John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."
Mark 1:1-8

'Tis the season for traveling! Whether you are traveling down the road or across the globe, plans have to be made ahead of time during this busy season. Added traffic around shopping malls, extra trips to the grocery store, longer lines at the airport, higher demand for hotel rooms and rental cars. It is nearly impossible to predict exactly what obstacles you may encounter along your journey.

I love to travel. I have a nearly perfect check list that I have created over the years to be sure that we leave the house with everything we need. There is a system for packing suitcases and backpacks. Each person is in charge of collecting certain items and we all manage to get out of the house with what we need. Most importantly, we always pack snacks!

In our scripture today, we are introduced to John the Baptist. We always seem to portray him as a scraggly guy who was a little odd, maybe because we are told he wears camel hair clothing and eats locusts and honey. Being from South Georgia, I always just pictured him as one of the guys I grew up with that liked being in the woods. They could identify any plant and hunt anything from a squirrel to a wild boar. John was resourceful and because of that, he was the perfect person to prepare this world for something truly unexpected.

As prophesied, God sent John as his messenger to prepare the way for the coming Christ. Had folks been paying attention, it may not have been so shocking that the Savior of the world showed up to a teenage mom born alongside the animals in the hay. John's preparation involved repentance of sins and the symbolic washing away of those sins with water. But his preparation also included a promise. This baptism was simply the beginning of the story; Jesus would soon be baptizing us all with the Holy Spirit.

So, what does that mean for us in this season? Between the boxes and bows, the road trips and the food preparation, we are called to reorient our hearts towards the Lord. I can't claim to have a near perfect packing list for this type of journey. A good start is reading this daily devotion and digging into the Word. I often take for granted that I "know the story" of Christmas. When I stop and truly listen, I learn something new every year.

This Advent season, spend time listening to scripture with a fresh perspective. Consider placing yourself in the shoes of each "character" in the story to gain a new understanding of God's desires for you.

Dear God,
help us to have eyes to see you more clearly through the business of the season,
help us to have ears to hear your desires for our hearts,
help us to be your hands and feet on this earth
so that we may share your kingdom with all that we encounter.
Amen.

By Amanda Prochaska

Day 9
December 7, 2026

But God demonstratesHhis own love for us in this;
while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Romans 3:8

These are among the most comforting words in the Bible. God saves us while we were still sinners. Paul had an intimate understanding of this. Paul had committed great sins, yet God's love for Paul was greater. Christ stopped Paul in his tracks *while* he was sinning! Paul knew that "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."(John 3:17)

The Bible is very clear that grace is an undeserved gift, yet most people persist in believing that they must work their way into heaven. Even believers who know better can feel that they shouldn't approach God because of something they've done or left undone. We must constantly remind ourselves that God's love is not conditional. God has loved us from the start and doesn't stop loving us---ever. Peter backslides by betraying Jesus, yet Jesus brings Peter back into the fold to become the rock upon which He builds His church. When we are feeling unlovable, we should not hide from God like Adam and Eve, we should spiritually run back to Him, and like a little child throw our arms around His legs, asking for forgiveness. knowing that He has loved us through it all.

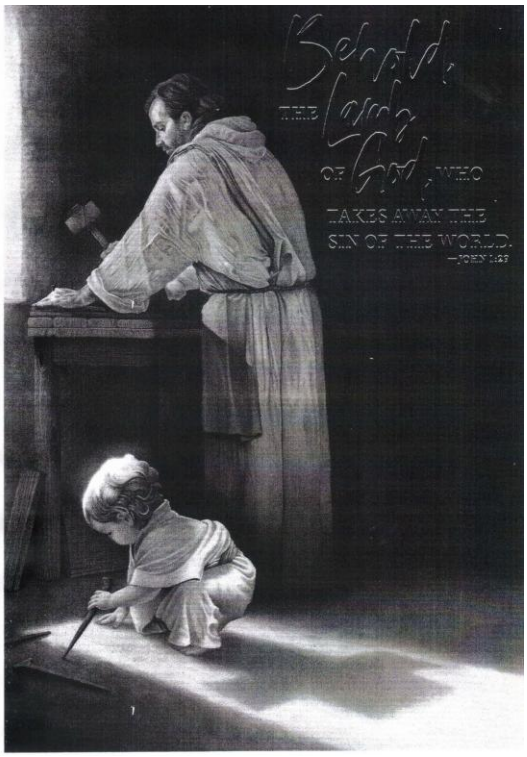
Reflect on how amazing it is that God loves us, flaws and all. Reflect on your relationships and see how we can mirror His love. "We love because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

Lord,
thank you for your endless and all-encompassing love
that truly passes all understanding.
Keep our hearts and minds open to your love.
Let Your love comfort and motivate us throughout this and every day.
Amen.

By Candace Hayes

Day 10
December 8, 2026

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son,
that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.
John 3:16



My first encounter with this picture was in a Bible bookstore many years ago. I am still compelled by the image. Joseph is depicted in his carpenter's shop as the toddler Jesus plays at his feet. Light streams through the doorway. The shadow formed behind the child is in the shape of a cross. God sent His son, knowing the pain that He would endure, as the ultimate sacrifice to wash away our sins. Oh, what a gift of love we have received. How often we acknowledge this gift without really thinking about its full impact. During this Advent season may we spend time in reflection and prayer that our understanding will be greater and our actions purer in His name. The third verse of "Joy to the World" can be our reminder of God's love and promise to our world. "No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground, He comes to make his blessings flow, as far as the curse is found."

Dear God,
thank for the gift of Your Son.
Walk with us as we stive to be your faithful servants.
May the shadow of our lives reflect the love and grace
that would honor your precious gift.
We pray in Your holy name.
Amen.

By Sandy Lindsay

Day 11
December 9, 2026

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers,
nor things present nor things to come, [39] nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing,
shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 8:38-39 NKJV

Paul wrote to the Romans to lay out his understanding of our relationship to God. That relationship had changed. Jesus' sacrifice created a new covenant with God's people. Paul laid out his thinking in preparation for a stop in Rome, as he was going to visit there on his way to Spain, where he wanted to preach. In writing to the Romans, Paul makes it clear from the first to the last lines of the letter that the foundation of that new covenant is **love. Love** is meant to govern our relationship with God and our relationship with others. As Christians, we need to root everything we do in **love. Love** of God and **love** of our fellow man should govern all our relationships.

As the above passage from Romans says, nothing can come between us and God's love. However, that statement begs the question: Can we, ourselves, cause such a separation? What do people do that separates them from the love of God? Intentional wrongdoing, lack of true repentance for our sins? Lack of faith? Shame that keeps us from accepting forgiveness? Making worldly success more important than following Christ's example? Let's take a moment in this Advent season to ask ourselves what barriers we've raised between ourselves and God's love.

Dear Lord,
help us to know that God's love is always there for us.
Help us to break down any barriers we've raised between ourselves and God,
allowing us to feel the love and joy that comes to us
when our relationship with God is whole and the Holy Spirit guides us.
Amen.

By Diana Barth

Day 12
December 10, 2026

17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.
Ephesians 3:17-19

A Love Bigger Than Our Understanding

In Ephesians 3, Paul prays that believers would be rooted and established in love and would begin to grasp the immeasurable dimensions of Christ's love. Consider the image of roots. A tree's roots grow beneath the surface, anchoring and nourishing it long before anyone sees the evidence. Deep roots allow it to withstand storms. Paul suggests that God's love is meant to be our foundation, too. Not our accomplishments, approval, or circumstances, but the unchanging love of Christ. Then Paul introduces a beautiful paradox: He prays that we might know a love that surpasses knowledge.

How do we know something we cannot fully comprehend? Perhaps there is a difference between knowing about love and actually experiencing it. We can study it, define it, and talk about it, but some things can only be understood through relationship.

This is the wonder of Advent. God did not remain distant. In Jesus, love took on flesh. The infinite came near. We may never fully comprehend the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ's love, but we can spend a lifetime growing deeper roots in it.

Reflect

- What are some things you tend to build your security or identity upon?
- What might change if you lived each day from the assurance that you are already deeply loved by God?
- Which aspect of Christ's love do you most need to experience right now?

God of love,
root us deeply in You.
When we seek security in things that cannot sustain us,
remind us that Your love is our foundation.
Help us not only know about Your love,
but live as people transformed by it.
Thank You for coming near in Jesus.
Amen.

By Amy Price

Day 13
December 11, 2026

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.
1 Corinthians 13:1-3

1 Corinthians 13, particularly verses 4-8a, is very familiar even to non-church goers because it is often read at Christian weddings. The reason is obvious; this passage is the quintessential one about love, the primary quality we believe is necessary for a healthy marriage. Love is not simply an emotional state; it is expressed through loving actions and attitudes, many of which are mentioned in those verses (e.g. Love is patient, etc.)

But Paul is writing this letter to the church in Corinth, so he is focused primarily on relationships between brothers and sisters in Christ, not husband and wife. In other words, love is the most important quality for healthy relationships in the church, too. This chapter follows another well-known chapter, chapter 12, where Paul talks about how members are each a part of the body of Christ, and to function well, each part needs the others. This is most interesting when we know that this particular church was struggling with a range of internal divisions, moral crises and cultural friction.

Perhaps it's encouraging to know that at no time in our history, even in the earliest days, has the church perfectly lived out the "peace, unity and purity" to which we are called. The Corinthian church is a poster child for church disfunction, and yet, here we are, the church of Jesus Christ, still proclaiming the good news and faithfully seeking to live out our calling.

What is it that enables us to do that? Love. This is a love that is not self-generated; it comes from God. Because it is not innate, we must seek to be refilled and refueled so we can act in loving ways and share that love with others. It is a love we experience when we realize how much we are loved by God, demonstrated so clearly through the gift of God's Son which we are celebrating this Advent season.

Reflect

- Who are you finding it hard to love right now?
- How does reflecting on God's love for you help you be more loving to others?

Dear Lord,
to receive Your gift of love all I need do is hold out my hand.
But, Lord, I leak.
Fill me again so I might love others in the same way that you do.
In Jesus' name,
Amen.

By Anita K. Herbert

Day 14
December 12, 2026

We love because He first loved us.
1 John 4:19

My family has been blessed with a new baby to love this Advent season. We kiss her sweet fuzzy head and marvel at her chubby baby fingers and toes. We hold her and talk to her and sing to her. We listen to her baby coos and babbles and believe that she must be the smartest and most wonderful baby ever. When I hear the choir sing "mild He lays His glory by," I am reminded that Christ came to earth in the form of a small baby, and I can imagine Mary kissing his fuzzy head and marveling at his baby fingers and toes. The love we have for babies reflects the way God loves us. His love does not depend on our deeds or accomplishments; he loves us because we are His.

Remember as we move through the Advent season that God loves you because you are His. How can you share God's love with someone else today?

Dear God,
please help us to remember that You loved us first
and that our love for others reflects Your love for us.
Help us to share Your love with those around us.
Amen.

By Ellen Carney

Day 15
December 13, 2026

Mary's Song

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked with favor on the lowliness of His servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, according to the promise He made to our ancestors, to Abraham and His descendants forever."
Luke 1:46-56

Mary's song of praise, The Magnificat, shows Mary did believe. It is a joyful hymn spoken by Mary after visiting her cousin Elizabeth and sharing the joy of knowing that God has chosen her to give birth to Jesus. Mary acknowledged her own lowly state as a young woman and recognized that her blessing comes from God's grace. Mary's Song reminds us to be joyful and grateful when God speaks to us and keeps His promises.

Let's strive to be like Mary, who yielded to God's will. Remember with gratitude that God knows your heart as He knew Mary's. Let her grateful and trusting words be ours during this Advent season. Do you feel called by God to do something that seems impossible?

Dear God,
thank you that Mary humbly submitted to Your plan for her life,
and please Lord open my heart and guide me to do the same.
Amen.

By Suzie Ryan

Day 16
December 14, 2026

But the angel said unto them,
"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people.
Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."
Luke 2: 10-11

A Miracle in Bethlehem

Many years ago, a colleague and a good friend, but not a believer, listened while another friend and I expressed our sadness that the atheist wife of yet another colleague had died without the comfort, peace and joy of assured salvation. A few days later the listening colleague asked me to explain what I meant by the comfort, peace, and joy of salvation. I don't remember all that I said, but I started with the essence of Luke 2: 10-11. How would you start if you were asked to explain the miracle that happened that night more than two thousand years ago?

I love that verse 10 starts with "But the angel said to them, fear not." Because the group of shepherds to whom the angel appeared were initially terrified—as we would have been until we understood the reason for the appearance. The reason for the appearance, as I told my friend, was to announce the birth of the Christ child, whose life and ultimate death on the cross would assure that any who believe in Him will have everlasting life. What joy, what peace, what comfort that brings.

Dear God,
thank You for the gift of Your Son and for the opportunity to share
the "Miracle of Bethlehem" with those who do not yet know You.
Amen.

By Sandy Lindsay

Day 17
December 15, 2026

11 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
Let the sea roar, and all it contains;
12 Let the field exult, and all that is in it.
Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy
13 Before the Lord, for He is coming,
For He is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness
And the peoples in His faithfulness.
Psalm 96:11-13

One of my favorite parts of C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* is when, in "The Magician's Nephew," Aslan the Lion, the Christ-figure, sings the world into being. The writers of Scripture often depict the world singing back to God in response, such as in the excerpt from Psalm 96 above. The world is exploding in joy in response to its creator!

The pinnacle of God's creation, the human being, is called to sing as well. This is why we sing in worship. I'm always a little grieved when I see people standing during congregational songs and responses who aren't singing. I assume this is because you feel like you don't have a good voice, but you have the voice God gave you, and I assure you to hear it lifted to him in praise gives God pleasure. So sing anyway!

Another reason for rejoicing is the knowledge that God is coming to judge the earth. Sometimes people fear judgment, but Scripture depicts judgment positively for God's people. This is when the world is set right and there is true justice for all. We also need not fear judgment because of the character of the one who judges, for God is righteous and God is faithful, keeping his promises to us.

Now God has given Jesus the authority to judge, and our response to him is the standard by which we are judged, according to John 5:22-23: *22 For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, 23 so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.*

But Jesus is the judge we want, for his purpose for his first coming into the world was not to condemn it, but to save it. As we think about Jesus' second coming, we can continue to have confidence in Him. For in Him, our salvation is secure. So let us lift our voices in song this and every season. Let heaven and nature sing!

Creator God,
we lift our voices to You in joy and praise!
For You are coming to set things right and make all things new!
Amen.

By Anita K. Herbert

Day 18
December 16, 2026

Although you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and rejoice with indescribable and glorious joy…
1 Peter 1:8

Nearing the end of his life, Peter was writing to a later generation of Christians who had not seen the incarnate Jesus. They nevertheless believed in Him and rejoiced at the salvation of their souls. Earlier, in response to Thomas's doubts, Jesus said, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (John 20:29).

That would include those of us who are living now. We have not seen Jesus, yet we love Him. Because we love Him, we long to be like Him. We can take comfort from 1 John 3:2: "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as he is."

Advent is a season for waiting. Reflect on how painfully slow your sanctification seems to be. Then rejoice at the knowledge that when you see Him, you will finally be like Him.

Dear God,
I am trapped in Romans 7, and most days
it seems like I am the same stubborn sinner I have always been.
Please keep Your promise to complete the work You have begun in me
and remind me that no matter how slow my progress seems to be,
my salvation is assured.
Amen.

By Michael Hayes

Day 19
December 17, 2026

Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.
Psalm 51:12 NKJV

Psalm 51 is a prayer for forgiveness. After King David committed adultery with Bathsheba, he thought that the extent of his sins would never be known. But God knew all that he had done. After the prophet Nathan confronted him, David confessed. In Psalm 51, David writes about how miserable it is to live in a state of sin.

David lived in a time when the rituals around forgiveness involved animal sacrifices and sin-and-guilt offerings. However, when he asks God for forgiveness, he offers, instead, a broken, contrite heart. He also asks for help in maintaining a Godly life. He knows a return to fellowship with God will also bring a return to joy. As we prepare to celebrate Christ's birthday, we can live in the assurance that the gift of forgiveness—a gift which God's forgiveness of King David foreshadowed—is ours just for the asking. That's because Christ's death was a sacrifice that paid the price for our transgressions. We can approach the Christmas season with joy, celebrating both the birth of Jesus and the joy of knowing that, if we, as believers, truly repent, not only will our sins be forgiven, our fellowship with God will also be restored and the Holy Spirit will be with us always.

How often, as we prepare to give gifts to friends and family, do we believers stop to think about the magnitude of the gifts we received through Christ? Take a moment to think about the big ones: eternal life, forgiveness, the presence of the Holy spirit. Then take a moment to prepare your heart for Christmas joy!

Dear Lord,
help us to comprehend the awesome magnitude
of what You have given us and to give thanks for those gifts.
Help us to be truly sorry for our sins and to do our best
to pay for their consequences with a contrite heart.
Return us to the joy of a closer fellowship with You.
We pray in Jesus' name.
Amen.

By Diana Barth

Day 20
December 18, 2026

I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.
John 15 :11

The Source of Joy

What brings you joy? Perhaps family, the companionship of good friends, the healing of someone dear, a major personal accomplishment, or other moments in life have filled you with joy. Maybe, like me, you experience awe and wonder and joy in the beauty of nature. We cherish those memories and seek opportunities to increase the frequency of the feeling that joy creates within us.

As Christians we proclaim a very special kind of inner joy that comes from the knowledge that we are loved by an almighty God and are saved by grace we do not deserve. Unlike the fleeting moments of joy mentioned above, the joy of salvation is different. We can't show you a physical source of this joy. We can't touch it or see it, but it is surely there. In our deepest times of sorrow or fear or even our mundane daily routine, we can still turn our focus to God and reconnect to our source of joy as expressed in John 15. Jesus is talking with his disciples using the metaphor of the vine and the branches. He reminds us that He is the vine and the Father is the gardener. We are the branches with a direct connection to Him as long as we keep His commands and remain in his love.

Dear God,
I pray that this Advent season and all the days that follow
will find us offering praise and thanksgiving to You
for our ability to connect to the joy of knowing You
and having the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

By Sandy Lindsay

Day 21
December 19, 2026

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly . . . and going into the house they saw the Child . . . and they fell down and worshipped Him. Then opening their treasures they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.
Matthew 2:10-11

It came upon a midnight clear: a baby's cry as a fiery star hovered over a stable. Wise men came with birthday gifts. We still remember that night, celebrating it with lights and stars on Christmas trees, with the ringing of bells, and with gifts – especially with gifts. We remember almost everyone, except that Holy Child. After all, it is His birthday that we are celebrating. May we set our hearts to remember that. We might ask ourselves what He would wish for the most. Then let us each give our share: Patience for each other's failures, hearts that love the unlovable, tolerance in the face of differences. These are the gleaming gifts that make the difference between peace and strife in our fragile world.

Dear Father,
Thank You for Grace upon Grace, your matchless gift to us.
Amen.

By Frances Via

Day 22
December 20, 2026

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. [3] All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. [4] In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. [5] The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

[12] But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.

[14] And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.
John 1:1-5, 12, 14

John wants us to understand that Jesus' origin story really doesn't begin with angelic appearances to either of His earthly parents. It goes all the way back before that moment of creation: "In the beginning was the Word." There already existed a concept of the Word in both Hebrew and Gentile thinking as the rational, organizing principle of creation. It's what John says in v. 14 that would have been the head scratcher, an almost inconceivable notion**:** ***the Word became flesh and lived among us.*** Eugene Peterson translates this text as "the Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood." Now the "principle" was being described as a person.

In his carol "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing," composed in 1739, Charles Wesley was probably inspired by this verse when he wrote:

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see
Hail the incarnate Deity
Pleased as man with man to dwell
Jesus, our Emmanuel.

Surprisingly, both Charles and his brother John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, struggled with the concept of grace. After years of faithful service, both had dramatic conversion experiences when the "principle became a person." Wesley famously writes of his conversion experience that he felt his "heart strangely warmed," helping him to finally declare with certainty, "I believe!" This is the reason John writes v. 12: ***But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God.*** Wesley acknowledges that this was the purpose of the incarnation in his final stanza:

Mild He lays His glory by,
born that we no more may die,
born to raise us from the earth,
born to give us second birth.

Dear God,
you have given us a gift that is meant to be opened.
May we receive the wonderful gift of Christ's presence this Christmas season!
Amen.

By Anita K. Herbert

Day 23
December 21, 2026

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives.
Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.
John 14:27

What comes to mind when we think of peace? It might be "peace and quiet," less stress, more harmony (in our lives, country and world), safety/security and much more. We sing hymns this time of year about Peace on Earth, Goodwill to Men. We send Christmas cards wishing family and friends peace at Christmastime and throughout the coming year. But what does peace *really* mean? The inner peace that Jesus gives is permanent and transcends all understanding. Through trials, set-backs, fears, misfortunes, etc., the one true constant in a believer's life is the love of God. We live in a fallen world and in uncertain times. We need to continue to put our faith and trust in Jesus and to draw on His strength, not on ours. Jesus always wins! Daily prayer and scripture reading is the antidote for the troubled heart. The Spirit's inexhaustible peace is the stability of a Christian's life.

How would it feel to lay all your worries, cares and concerns at the feet of the Prince of Peace? No doubt a sense of calm, love and contentment will overwhelm you.

Father God,
we give You thanks and praise for all our blessings.
During this holy time of year, we especially give thanks for the gift of your Son,
our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Let us rejoice in the knowledge of eternal life,
along with peace and joy in this life.
Amen.

By Marylou Semones

Day 24
December 22, 2026

Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times in all ways.
The Lord be with all of you.
2 Thessalonians 3:16

As Christmas draws near, we often find ourselves caught up in the busyness of the season. There are gifts to purchase, meals to prepare, gatherings to attend, and countless other things that compete for our time and attention. Yet, amid all the hustle and bustle, it can be pretty easy to lose sight of one of the greatest gifts that Christ has to offer us: peace.

In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul reminds us that true peace comes from the Lord Himself. Notice that Paul does not pray for peace only when life is going well or when everything falls into place. Instead, Paul asks that the Lord provide peace "at all times in all ways." This is an important reminder for us because God's peace is not dependent on our circumstances. Even during times of uncertainty, disagreement, hardship, or loss, we can always find comfort in knowing that God is present with us.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, we are reminded that Christ came into a world filled with struggles and uncertainty, much like our own. His arrival did not immediately eliminate the world's problems; however, it brought the promise of hope, reconciliation, and lasting peace. As followers of Christ, we are called not only to receive that peace but also to share it with others through kindness, forgiveness, understanding, and love.

As Christmas approaches, take a moment to reflect on where you need God's peace in your own life. Are there worries that you may need to surrender? Are there any relationships that need healing? Opportunities to bring peace to someone else? How can you become an instrument of Christ's peace in your family, church and community?

Dear God,
thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.
In the midst of our busy lives and the challenges we face,
please help us to remember that true peace comes from You.
Calm our worries, strengthen our faith, and guide us
to share Your peace with those around us.
As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ,
may our hearts be filled with Your presence,
and may our words and actions reflect Your love.
Amen.

By Zachary Storti

Day 25
December 23, 2026

For a child has been born for us,
A son given to us;
Authority rests upon His shoulders;
And He is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Isaiah 9:6

Isaiah's words soar with the magnificence of what will occur:Oour God will come to us as a baby! How would we ever guess this could happen if it wasn't foretold by prophets and heralded by angels? This baby would become so significant that Isaiah must immediately praise Him: "And He will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

What a mixture of intimacy and Glory! Mustn't Christ on earth have been like that? He was someone who men left everything to follow. He healed *everyone* who asked, raised the dead, loved the "unlovable," and ultimately sacrificed Himself for us then was resurrected! Still, He got tired, hungry, needed sleep and had to deal daily with all sorts of people. He had intimate knowledge of our humanity with which His Spirit could *Wonderfully Counsel* us! The next name, *Mighty God,* is so frighteningly powerful, righteous, holy and perfect. *Mighty God*—the Creator of the Universe. We could be justifiably terrified had not Isaiah next called Him, *Eternal Father*. Jesus used His awesome and overwhelming power to save and perfect us instead of destroying us. He knows us intimately yet still loves and cares for us better than we can imagine. He wants us to trust in Him, to rest in His loving care and constant presence. *Prince of Peace*.

As believers, we have a deep reverence and love for these names for our Savior. Upon His second coming, all the world will recognize Him by them.

Reflect on how Jesus has manifested these names to you.

Dear Lord,
help us to always remember that you are
our Mighty God, Wonderful Counselor, Eternal Father,
and, through grace, the author of our Peace.
Help us to be ever aware of Your graciousness to us.
Help us to exhibit it and share it with all those around us.
Amen.

By Candace Hayes

Day 26
December 24, 2026
Christmas Eve

And she gave birth to her first-born Son and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths,
And laid Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.
Luke 2:7

"No place for them." I wonder if things have changed very much in the last 2000 plus years. That's 20 centuries! Mankind has made so much progress, going forward with the intricacies of civilization. Medicine has become a true and effective science. Education has been refined, filtering down to every stratum of society. Hey, we even have computers and AI! Yet the phrase "no place" echoes from the Scriptures. Have we become so sophisticated, so progressive that we have no room for the Christ Child—and the Savior that He became—in our society? Comedians recognize the name Jesus. The name makes a fine punchline and is used freely as profanity. But how often do I talk of Jesus as my Savior, the One who suffered and died to pay for MY sins. Have I made a place for Jesus in my daily living? Have I shared the Good News with anyone?

Heavenly Father,
forgive me for taking too lightly that which I know is the basis for my salvation.
May I make room for Jesus, sharing Him with someone every day.
Amen

By Frances Via

Day 27
December 25, 2026
Christmas Day

8 "And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby,
keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory
of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not
be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town
of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you:
You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 13 Suddenly a great company of
the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,14 "Glory to God in the
highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests." 15 When the angels had
left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and
see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."16 So they hurried off and
found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen Him,
they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this Child, 8 and all who heard
it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things
and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all
the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."
Luke 2:8-20

In 1915, as World War I raged, English novelist Thomas Hardy, then 75, had lost all faith in what he had come to see as an indifferent universe. That Christmas season, however, he remembered a local legend he heard as a child. He and the other neighbor children were told that at midnight on Christmas Eve barn animals like cows, sheep, oxen all kneel in their stalls in honor of the Christ Child. In recalling the story, he realized that if someone were to come to him and ask him to come out to the barn to see the cattle kneel, that he would go, hoping he could see it happen. His recollection of that story inspired him to write a poem, the last line of which acknowledges his thirst for a return to the faith he once had.

On this day, as we echo the angels and the shepherds of the first Christmas in praising God and spreading the good news, may we, like Hardy, find ourselves re-experiencing the faith and innocence of the small children we once were. Unlike Hardy who hoped that a fanciful story about Christ's coming were true, however, we know the true story and can rest secure in the knowledge that Christ has come among us, then, now and forever.

Dear Lord,
help us to regain and keep the simple faith of children.
Let us join with all of God's creation in celebrating the joy of His birth.
Amen.

(See poem on next page)

By Diana Barth

The Oxen by Thomas Hardy

Published in 1915 in The Times of London

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
‘Now they are all on their knees,’
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen;
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
‘Come; see the oxen kneel

‘In the lonely barton by yonder coomb barton
Our childhood used to know,’
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.

Day 28
December 26, 2026

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.
John 1:14

Yesterday at sunset, it was as if the sky were on fire. Perhaps it's this time of year, or global warming, or some other environmental circumstance that made the red-orange splendor completely overwhelming. I stood and looked on in awe. The brilliance gave me pause to wonder about the Apostle John's words that have become Scripture: "We have beheld His glory..." If the sky can take on that resplendence on an ordinary afternoon, what will we behold when God goes to work to present His beloved only Son to the world! During Advent, we prepare our hearts to receive the Baby Jesus and to recall His being born on that night of miracles. But when the promised day comes for God to present Jesus our Savior in unimaginable splendor, heavenly trumpets sounding, in His long-awaited Second Coming… well, yesterday's remarkable sunset will seem as a dark cloud. We ourselves will behold His glory, the glory of the "Only Son from the Father." Come, Lord Jesus!

We join with the heavenly angels in adoration!
Grant us, Lord, Thy salvation!
Amen.

By Frances Via

Day 29
December 27, 2026

10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord;
my whole being shall exult in my God,
for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
He has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
11 For as the earth brings forth its shoots
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.
Isaiah 61:10-11

And so, as we have reflected throughout this Advent season, we are reminded yet again of the purpose of the birth of the Christ-child. It is so we would receive new clothes! No, these are better than any outfit from Ann Taylor Loft. These are the "garments of salvation" and the "robe of righteousness." This is the covering that only Christ's atonement could provide. For always in the cradle there is the shadow of the cross, that Christ was born to die, but born so that we would no more die!

The church is the bride of Christ. Let us put on jewels that reflect the beauty of the Lord and all His gifts that we have been celebrating this season--hope, love, joy and peace!

Joy to the world; the Lord is come;
Let Earth receive her King;
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room,
And heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the Earth, the Savior reigns;
Our mortal songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains,
Repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love.

By Anita K. Herbert