American Baptist
Women's
MINISTRIES

Advent DEVOTIONAL

Wishing you a season of reflection and peace this Advent Season



A Word from Our Executive Director

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined." — Isaiah 9:2 (NRSV)

Dear Sister,

There is something profoundly sacred about a God who does not wait for the darkness to disappear before sending the light. That is the miracle of Advent. Christ did not enter a world that had finally gotten itself together. Jesus was born into a world marked by political unrest, uncertainty, injustice, and suffering. God's people had spent generations waiting for a promise that sometimes seemed impossibly distant. And yet, in the fullness of time, God came near. Advent reminds us that God does some of God's most extraordinary work in the very places where life feels most uncertain. Perhaps that is the word some of us need as we approach the end of 2026. For some, this has been a year of extraordinary blessings and answered prayers. For others, it has been a year of loss, disappointment, difficult transitions, and prayers that remain unanswered. Some of us are entering this season overflowing with gratitude. Others are simply grateful to have made it this far. And many of us are carrying both.

One of the greatest gifts of Advent is that it does not require us to pretend. We do not have to manufacture joy, deny our grief, or disguise our weariness to make room for Christ. The promise of Emmanuel is not that God will only be with us when life is beautiful. The promise is that God is with us. Period. And because God is with us, we can dare to hope again.

As you journey through this devotional, you will encounter the voices of women and ministry leaders who have generously shared their faith, wisdom, and experiences. Their reflections remind us that we do not walk this journey alone. Across generations, congregations, and communities, we are united by a faith that declares God's work in the world is not yet finished. But Advent also calls us beyond ourselves. We cannot celebrate the Prince of Peace while remaining indifferent to a world desperate for peace. We cannot rejoice in the light of Christ while ignoring those who are struggling in the shadows. The light we celebrate is also the light we are called to carry. So, this Advent, I invite you to do more than count the days until Christmas. Make room for reflection. Give yourself permission to rest. Extend compassion to someone carrying a heavy burden. And wherever life has made it difficult to imagine a hopeful future, ask God for the courage to believe that something beautiful is still possible. Above all, remember this: The darkness does not get the final word. Not in the Christmas story. Not in the story of God's people. And not in your story.

On behalf of American Baptist Women's Ministries, I offer this devotional with gratitude to every contributor and a prayer that these reflections will strengthen your faith and renew your hope. May peace settle where anxiety has lived. May joy find you in unexpected moments. And may the love of Christ remind you that you are never beyond the reach of God's grace.

The light has come. The light is still shining. And the darkness has not overcome it.

With love, hope, and Advent blessings,

Rev. LaThelma Armstrong
Executive Director
American Baptist Women's Ministries

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The Advent Wreath

November 29, 2026

Isaiah 9:6

The word “Advent” refers to arrival of a notable person, thing or event. For Christians, it holds a special meaning at Christmas time, as we celebrate the arrival of Jesus to the earth. It also refers to the future second coming of Jesus. For us, this can signify a sacred time of preparation and anticipation. The traditional lighting of the candles of the advent wreath in our church services during the dark days of December has always held a special meaning to me. Hearing Scripture read relating to each theme and joining the congregational readings helps me concentrate on the focus of the season – Jesus.

The candle of Hope is lit on the first Sunday of Advent. It reminds us of the prophets who looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. In Isaiah 9:2, it says, “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.” The preaching of the prophets centered on calling the Hebrew people to repentance, but it also called for them to prepare for the coming of the Messiah.

The candle of Peace is lit on the second Sunday. We recall the words of the angels to the shepherds, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth Peace to men on whom his favor rests.” Today, we live in a time of war, violence and conflict. Asking God to bring peace to our world is our constant prayer. We also remember that because of Jesus’ birth, we can have peace in our hearts.

The candle of Joy, lit on the third Sunday, recalls Mary’s words, “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” This time of year, can be difficult for many people who are experiencing grief, health struggles, loneliness, or loss. The shadows of suffering and sadness surround us. However, we as Christians can find joy in our relationship with God and rejoice in the miracle of the coming of Jesus.

The candle of Love on the fourth Sunday is lit to remember God’s immense love for us. John 3:16 states, “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.” This love of God revealed in the gift of Jesus transcends all other loves. The scriptures also call us to love one another as he has loved us.

The Christ Candle is lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas day. It calls us to rejoice in the mystery of incarnation, of Emmanuel – God with us.

The light of all five candles reminds us that Jesus, who is the Light of the World, came among us to dispel the darkness and to bring us eternal light. How will you use this Advent season to prepare your heart for the Hope, Peace, Joy and Love that Jesus brings us today?

Janet Rife,
First Baptist Church
Lincoln, Nebraska

Surprised By Joy **November 30, 2026**
Luke 1:6-7

Luke begins his gospel introducing John, the one God chose to be the forerunner of Christ, the Messiah, the Righteous One who of course is Jesus (Acts 3:14, 7:52). Luke elaborates by detailing that both the mother and father were from a priestly background, "both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments of the Lord, but they had no child" (Luke 1:6-7). Luke begins with a paradox, a surprise.

Barrenness is a biblical hallmark as the most righteous ones are surprisingly barren like Sarah and Hannah. This enigma shows that babies don't come into this world accidently but by the will of God (Psalm 139). Paradoxes get our attention.

Have you noticed paradoxes in your life? Perhaps you received something you did not deserve, or you were not recognized for something you did deserve. Why did my husband divorce me when I was a good wife? Why did my child die when I was so careful during pregnancy? Why are my children a mess when I raised them in the admonition of the Lord?

Our predicament is not God's fault. We live in a world that is not fair because evil entered. We seem to be chased by evil intentions: co-workers who do not cooperate; neighbors who deliberately make our lives miserable; friends who desert us; family who betrays us and more.

God created this world “good.” Let me repeat that. God created this world “good” and pronounced his creation of human beings “Very good.” God’s initial creation was perfect. Another term for perfect is the term “righteous” like John’s parents. How were they chosen? Indeed, they were “favored.” God sets apart certain people to accomplish His will.

Questioning God’s choice is doubting God’s ability. God is completely capable of making the best decision. Trusting God is our part. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him and he will direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6). To not trust is to rebel. Amazingly, God lets us decide. Do you want to trust the sovereign God who loves you and will never leave you, or do you want to fight Him? To love the God who called us for a purpose is to trust Him even when life seems unfair.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were surprised to finally be parents. They trusted the God who loved them. They submitted to the will of God and found joy in doing so. Even though they did not understand, they trusted God. **For what do you need to trust the Lord for this Advent?**

Jesus turns evil intentions into joy, “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated prophets.” (Luke 6:23)

Rev. Dr. Marilyn Bennett

Community Church of Hayward, California

Retired ABCCPC

Luke 1

In chapter one of Luke, Elizabeth transforms from a disgraced woman to a pregnant one. One would think she would be shouting praise to God from the rooftops, but she remains in seclusion for 5 months. Why? She admits, "*In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.*"

What did she do those 5 months? Did she regret all the days of her youth being gone as she was about to raise a child? Did she wonder if she was still blessed being an ancestor of Moses' brother Aaron?

Even though only men followed the Scriptures in those days, Luke is careful to point out Elizabeth was righteous in the sight of God, blamelessly observing all the Lord's commands and decrees for Jews. He also points out that even though both Elizabeth and Zechariah were righteous, they were childless.

God sent an angel to tell Zechariah the good news, not Elizabeth. Did Elizabeth wonder why an angel did not come to her, the mother of this child? The angel would not appear to Mary or Joseph for another 5 months. Meanwhile, Elizabeth remained in seclusion for those 5 months. Was this a God command? Soon, she would have an encounter with God that would be even better than a conversation with an angel.

Yet, during those 5 months, she had no assurance of God's presence. Perhaps she took the scrolls and read Jeremiah 31:3 where God assures his people that he will make a new covenant with them: "*For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*"

Perhaps she read about her ancestor, Aaron, who was the very first high priest called by God to be a mediator between God and the Hebrews during their exodus from Egypt. In Psalms 106, Aaron is described as a saint. Was Elizabeth intimidated or encouraged? Certainly, her lineage was better than her husband's who was chosen that year to forgive sins in the annual atonement in the Holy of Holies.

Quiet times before the Lord are often quiet. Retrospection is needed for learning. I believe God was getting Elizabeth ready to encounter the greatest event in history, the unique conception of the Messiah, Imanuel. Perhaps Elizabeth read some of the passages in Isaiah that would lead to the appearance of this Messiah, the hope of the Jews. But as time passed, many wondered if God would really keep his promise.

God did keep his promise. Soon Elizabeth would meet the mother of the Messiah, her cousin, Mary. When they met, Elizabeth's unborn child leaped with joy in her womb. No matter her worries or doubts, God was present in a way that renewed her hope that all of God's promises would be fulfilled.

Rev. Dr. Marilyn Bennett

Community Church of Hayward, California

Retired ABCCPC

Westcoast Region

Trust and Faithfulness

December 2, 2026

Luke 2:1-21

How was this year for you so far? Was your year fabulous? Any unplanned events? Any falls, breaks or illnesses that set you back? Perhaps some family drama that made you wish you had been an only child?

If at the year's start you had any inkling of the events that would transpire, would you have taken a pass? Had a little visit with Jesus and said, "Thanks, no thanks Jesus. I think I'll sit this year out."

Back in the first chapter of Luke, when Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel and agreed to become the mother of the Messiah. Do you suppose she had any idea of what she was signing up for? She replies, "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled." She is faithful.

In the 2nd chapter of Luke, we encounter Mary as she is bringing Jesus into the world. There is no birthing room, no birthing tub, and no ball to bounce on as she labored. Mary labors on the back of a donkey over the course of several days of traveling, giving birth in a barn in the ancestral home of her husband. No close female relative to help her with the birth, tend to her afterward and assist in the first few weeks with a new baby. And, if we believe the Christmas songs we hear, a small boy comes to the barn and begins to play his drum loudly.

Mary and Joesph don't return home immediately. They stay in Bethlehem and after some time, whether it was weeks or months or years, we don't know, they are visited by the Magi confirming that this baby has a special purpose. Mary has shown such a willingness and obedience through this whole story. I wonder if she realized the depth of the commitment she had made to the angel.

Over the years Mary watches Jesus follow the will of God, live a nomadic life, be misunderstood by many, and be accused of crimes by Jewish priests. Only to experience the trauma of watching her son die by crucifixion. Not at all what she would have planned.

There is a reason why God does not show you the full picture in advance. You cannot prepare for everything and you shouldn't. God doesn't want you to spend your time planning and preparing for every event and possibility. Your job is to focus on sharing the Good News and how Jesus has changed your life.

There is great wisdom in Proverbs 3:5, in my favorite version, The Message, "Trust God from the bottom of your heart, don't try to figure out everything on your own."

The year ahead of us will be a great year for you! Will it be filled with wonder, joy and celebration? Will it be filled with difficult and trying experiences that will test your faith and belief? Your job is not to worry and fret, instead, follow Mary's example. God will show you what you need to know at exactly the right time.

Nola Crooks
ABWM President, State of Nebraska
First Baptist Church, Fremont, Nebraska

Mary's Magnificat

December 3, 2026

Luke 1:46-47 ESV
"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

Mary was visiting her cousin Elizabeth when Elizabeth recognized that Mary carried the son of God and blessed Mary. Mary's answer in song is the Magnificat or Canticle. In it she proclaims the greatness of God. She is overwhelmed by joy as she is grateful for his favor. Read Luke 1:46-55.

Have you ever felt entirely happy? Christmas is a time of joy but as adults it is difficult to give ourselves over to joy as Mary does here. We can't help but remember that slight from a friend who gave you the beautiful sweater or think about the joy of your child without remembering the public tantrum they threw in the grocery store last week.

Mary's song is fierce and even revolutionary. A young, working-class girl who has surely felt the heavy hand of the Roman government. She has no power, wealth, or prestige, yet she put that aside to revel in the love and power of God. She proclaims, "He who is mighty

has done great things for me." (Luke 1:49) This young revolutionary goes so far as to praise a God who has "brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate." (Luke 1:52)

The modern holiday season can become a quest for perfection. Can we lay aside those things that distract from joy and delight in the perfection of what is? Sing with Mary this season, "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

Prayer:
Prince of Peace, bring peace to our hearts this holiday season as we put aside the negatives and celebrate the joy of the season of your birth. Let us sing with Mary in joy at your greatness and mercy. Fill us with good things and exalt those who are humble. In your Name we pray. Amen.

Dawn M. Doerr Johnson
First Baptist, Ames, Iowa
Mid-America Region

Remember

December 4, 2026

Luke 1:26-38

God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. The angel said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, " 'Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.' 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.' ...'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word be to me fulfilled.' Then the angel left her."

Mary was blessed to see an angel of the Lord, had faith and obeyed. How many times do we get the feeling there's something we ought to be doing? How many times do we know the right thing to do and struggle to do it? Mary did not struggle. She knew what she was supposed to do and did it.

The bible says in the end times, people will become lovers of themselves (2 Timothy 2:1-2); the love of many will grow cold (Matthew 24:12); many will fall away from the faith (1 Timothy 4:1).

We see fewer people in our churches. Many people become offended, walking away without asking what the offender meant. Mary asked, "How can this be since I am a virgin?" God overshadowed her and graced us with a miracle. If we have questions, we need to ask them calmly so conversation can flow and we can continue to meet as some others do not (Hebrews 10:25). Can we obey that command during this season when commercialism entices us to spend our money and time in other ways? When the world tried to pull us away from God, Church and other Christians. We should remember the best way to fight Satan is to rest in Jesus, letting the power of the Most High overshadow us. Our Lord is always with us (Matthew 28:20).

Prayer:
Lord Jesus, you left Your throne. You left paradise to live a lowly and humble life, not only for me but for all of society. Please help me remember what you did for me no matter what was done to you. Remind me that others come first. You forgive people that I don't want to and you are always with me to watch, forgive and make me strong. I love you Lord, Amen.

Laurie May Johnson

Ponder The Promise

December 5, 2026

Isaiah 9:6-7

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. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

James Boren, an American public servant and humorist born about 100 years ago, once offered three guidelines for other bureaucrats: "1. When in charge, ponder. 2. When in trouble, delegate. 3. When in doubt, mumble." His guidelines were obviously satirical, but I'd like to suggest we learn from his first suggestion and try a little pondering this Advent. I believe we'll be blessed if we take time to deliberately meditate and reflect upon Isaiah's amazing description of the promised Messiah who finally came in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ.

Pondering is not something people do much anymore. We may talk with a friend about important issues in our lives, but moments later daily life has swept us up and moved us on. With many mornings bringing much more bad news than good, sometimes we can hardly stand to read the headlines, let alone meditate on the needs of the world around us. Meditation doesn't seem to fit our fast-paced, troubled world. We just keep moving along. But as another humorist Lily Tomlin once said, "For fast-acting relief, try slowing down."

This Advent, let's slow down. Let's claim at least 15 minutes each day to ponder contemplatively before God. Isaiah 9:6-7 is a great place to start. There are rich truths there worth reflecting upon and claiming more deeply. Read the passage until a word or a phrase strikes you and then stop and spend some time dwelling on it. You could spend a whole day just pondering each of this promised child's names-- *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. And w*hat does it mean to say *"he will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness?"* Ponder the Word made flesh.

And while you are pondering the Word, let it be joined by pondering the world. The world is with us daily. It comes to us by email; it meets us at work; it joins us at family gatherings. We're deluged with war and violence and inflation and AI fears. Meet it with pondering. Chew it over with God. Sigh, cry, and pray over it. Ask questions like, *How does the Prince of Peace feel about this reality of human life? How can I participate with the God of justice and righteousness in response to what I've read or seen?* Then wait for what God will reveal. Time to ponder may be the best Christmas present you give yourself this year!

Karen Selig

Servant of the Lord

December 6, 2026

Luke 1:26 – 38

"I am the servant of the Lord."
However perplexed Mary may have been, and however much or little she may have grasped of what the angel was saying to her, when the talk with the angel was over, Mary knew one thing for sure: that she was the servant of the Lord God, with whom nothing is impossible. That was all that mattered. As the servant of the Lord/Master, you obey and submit to the Lord. So, Mary submitted to the Lord and said, "Let it be to me according to your word." As some commentators point out, her "question" of "how can this be?" is an expression of her wonderment and not an argument or doubt. Needless to say, she had firm faith in the Lord God Almighty.

"Let it be to me according to your word."
I am an Army chaplain. In the military, submitting to the higher authority is something ingrained in every Soldier. We have a glimpse of it in the story of a Centurion in Luke 7. However, in our secular, non-hierarchical (at least formally) American society with its rugged individualism, the idea of submitting to anyone, not to mention surrendering your whole life, doesn't seem to come naturally to many people. In fact, I was one of them. Growing up, I acquired such phrases as "I am the master of my own fate" and "I am the captain of my soul" as my mottos. I didn't have any religion and I did everything according to my own will and desire.

"Let your will be done."

But God “interrupted” me—through a series of events in my life by His grace and mercy (stories I cannot share in this limited space). My spiritual ears and eyes were finally opened and I began to seek God. As I began to perceive who God is and to know who I really am, I began to understand what it means to submit to God and the Lord Christ Jesus. As in the story of Mary, it is not a blind submission but one based on personal faith in the Lord God Who chose to reveal Himself to us. Thus I became a Christian. I was given the gift of faith by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:9) and I submitted to the Lord God. I could say, from my heart, “let it be to me according to your will.”

What about you? Do you know who God is? Do you know who you are? And do you, and can you, submit to God?

Rev. Miranda Kwon, Chaplain, USAR

By His Name

December 7, 2026

Isaiah 9:6

“For unto us a child is born. Unto us a son in given”

During the Christmas season, or even before, a lot of energy is put into finding the perfect gift. If you have kids, you know the gift for one child has to be the right size, the right color, the right brand, and you must not spend more or less on the gift for another child. And inside of two months, that gift may be forgotten or put away and not played with anymore.

In Isaiah, we are reminded the ultimate gift-giver is God and his gift is the perfect fit. Jesus isn’t a temporary fix that will soon wear out or become broken or go out of fashion. We won’t outgrow Him. He is beyond price.

Which of the names of the Son are most meaningful to you this Christmas? When you are confused or facing a difficult decision, He is Wonderful Counselor. He offers wisdom beyond human understanding. When you are overcome with weakness, He is Mighty God. He will carry your heaviest burden and never falter. When you are lonely and disconnected, He is Everlasting Father. His protection is deep, endless and personal. When life is chaotic and you are stressed out, He is the Prince of Peace, calming you and

your anxious thoughts in a way no earthly power can do. This is not a lame family gift either. He is for us as individuals. Jesus meets you exactly where you are.

Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. You are the perfect gift from our Father, God. Let us look to you in our lack and find a fullness of love that will never be eclipsed by a mere bauble. When a very good and perfect gift is from the Father, it outshines them all.

May we rest in you this season and find all that we need.

Dawn M. Doerr Johnson
First Baptist Church, Ames, Iowa
Mid-America Region

Staying in the Moment

December 9, 2026

Luke 2:1-24

I live and serve in Puerto Rico as a self-supported missionary. My finances are tight, but due to an event this past summer, I arranged a trip to see my brother. Before I did that, I planned to surprise my mom first. I haven't seen her since March of 2014 and it was important to me, if I was able, to make the trip to the States and do everything possible to see her, too. God provided and I was able to make the arrangements.

A few days before I left, I jokingly said to a few of my friends that I should have someone record the moment my mom opens the door and sees me standing in front of her. That way others could see and experience her shock. One of them responded by encouraging me not to record her reaction but to, rather, stay in the moment.

Stay in the moment. This advice reminds me of Mary in Luke 2:19 where is says "Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart." She didn't want to forget anything. She wanted to keep the special event in her life always in her heart.

The shepherds in Luke 2:18 were just the opposite. An angel had come to the shepherds in the field and told them about the birth of the Messiah. After the angels left, the shepherds

went with haste to find the baby Jesus. After they found him, Luke 2:17-18 states “they made known the saying that had been told to them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.”

They recorded the encounter and immediately went and shared the moment with others. Just like we do with our social media accounts. In a matter of seconds, the entire world can view the video, share, repost, hit the heart button and leave messages of congratulations. But not Mary. She didn’t spread the news on her social media feed but rather, she held close to her heart everything that happened. She stayed in the moment.

Now, don’t get me wrong. Spreading the Good News of Jesus’ birth and all that He has done for us is important. Jesus even told us to be like the shepherds, to spread the Good News and make disciples of every nation. But, as you spend time in reflection this Advent season, what is God calling you to treasure up and to ponder in your heart? What moment is he calling you to stay in?

Let us pray:
Holy God, during this season of Advent, may we be like Mary and stay in the moment while we ponder the treasures you have given us in our hearts. Amen.

Brenda Taylor, The Journey Ministries, Puerto Rico

Peace: Trusting God’s Calm Presence

December 8, 2026

Scripture: Luke 2:8-20

This passage describes the participants to our Savior’s birth. These participants, the shepherds, represent how God cares for His people. A shepherd who is good, has a deep personal knowledge of the flock, a protective instinct against danger, a commitment to providing daily sustenance, a servant-hearted leadership by example, total self-sacrifice, a deep relational investment, and unwavering vigilance.

Later in Jesus’ ministry, we find He is called the Good Shepherd (see John 10:11,14). Jesus had the qualities of a good shepherd as mentioned above. It is interesting to note this since the shepherds were chosen to be participants in the birth of our Savior.

Shepherds were human beings, just like you and me. They were terrified when an angel of the Lord appeared to them. Of course, it had to happen "suddenly," they couldn't just "ease" into the angel's appearance. Those "sudden" events can be shocking to anyone who is not expecting them. In this passage, we find two "sudden" events and both times the scripture unfolds angels into the picture. Seeing an angel is not an everyday occurrence. If the human population were polled, there would be a small percentage of people who have ever witnessed seeing a real angel, not just a figure in the clouds making one think it was an angel.

What must be understood is that angels do not want to bring fear, but rather peace, as God's representatives from heaven who at times appear on the earth. When we discover God's peace, we discover His presence.

Problems may abound all around us and in this world, but we can choose to celebrate God's peace through His presence. How do we find His presence? By spending time with Him through prayer and Bible study. Sometimes even a walk in nature can reveal His peace and His presence. Seek ways to find God's peace during this Advent season.

Rev. Karen Norton
Newton First Assembly of God
Retired

God's Gift

December 10, 2026

Isaiah 9:6-7

Advent is a season of reflection, a time to think about the coming of Jesus, our Savior. When we think about the first "coming of Jesus," and as we read Isaiah 9:6-7, we are remembering the promise of Jesus birth.

At the time, God's chosen people, the Israelites, had turned from God and were worshipping idols, living sinful lives and were about to be utterly destroyed because of their disobedience to God. But God's heart of love and forgiveness is told here in the

scripture. God gives them this promise of hope which is actually fulfilled approximately 7,000 years later with the birth of Jesus as a baby in Bethlehem.

We as American Baptist women are followers of Jesus in today's world. We, too, are His chosen people. We have experienced the coming of Jesus. That happened the day we invited Jesus into our hearts and decided to follow Him. This has allowed us to experience real peace that only comes from true worship of God, reading His Word and following the examples of Jesus. As we serve Jesus, showing kindness, forgiveness and understanding to everyone we encounter, we experience the joy of Jesus coming into our hearts and lives.

Those of us who know the Messiah are looking forward to an even greater action of God's love. Throughout the Gospel, we read about the second coming of Jesus Christ. As Christian women, we are looking forward to that event. It will be a time when we will see the Glory of God as Jesus comes to rescue us from this evil world and establish the new kingdom of God, a pure and righteous world. As we go through the Advent season, let us be serving and loving Jesus so we will be ready when He appears.
As we look forward to Christmas Day, as we make plans to be with family and friends, let us remember to thank God for the gift of love. Let us thank Him for the first coming of Jesus who gave His life and blood for the redemption of our sins. That is the greatest gift we will ever receive until His second coming, when we will see him face-to-face.

Mary Moffett
First Baptist Church, Eagle Grove, Iowa
Mid-America Region

The Light of the World

December 11, 2026

John 8:12

One of my favorite childhood Christmas memories was riding around town in the family car and seeing all the houses decorated for Christmas! Streets that were dark for most of the year suddenly were transformed by the bright lights. It was as if someone had turned on a light switch.

Light was the first creation of God. Everything that was going to be created next depended on the light. At the end of six days, creation was done and God and man had the perfect relationship. All of creation was filled by the light of God. Then Adam and Eve chose to

disobey God's command and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The world became very dark with sin.

The Jewish people (and everyone else) had no hope for salvation from their sin and no way to dispel the darkness. They patiently waited for the Messiah to come and "turn on the light." Isaiah prophesied in the book of Isaiah chapter 9:2-6 that the people who walked in darkness were going to see a great light and the Light's name was going to be Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) had already planned before the creation of the world (Eph.1:4, Rom. 5:8, 1 Peter 1:20-21) to send Jesus to be our Savior and light. Around the year 4 B.C., in a stable in Bethlehem, the light was born. God's plan had begun. John 1:4-5 tells us that Jesus is the Light and darkness cannot overtake it.

Jesus flooded our world with the light of God's love and salvation. John 1:16-17 reminds us the law was given through Moses, but Jesus Christ brings us grace and truth. Now, we have the choice to accept God's payment for our sin and be filled with the light of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus came into the world saying, "I am the light (John 8:12)" but before He returned to heaven He told us, "You are the light (Matthew 5:14.)" We, His followers, keep flooding this world with God's light. We keep spreading God's grace and truth to each person we touch.

When I was teaching, one of my favorite books to read aloud during the Christmas season was called "The Light of Christmas" by Dandi Daley Mackall. She explains Christmas lights remind us why Jesus was born and how He saved us from our sins.
So, this Christmas season, turn on your Christmas lights and tell the world about Jesus!

Louan Bagley
First Baptist Church, Scottsbluff, Nebraska
State of Nebraska Region

An Invitation to Sing

December 12, 2026

Luke 1:46-55

"And Mary said, "My Soul doth magnify the Lord." Luke 1:46 (KJV)

Advent is a time of reflection, celebration and expectation. Many congregations will light candles symbolizing Hope, Peace, Joy and Love as we await the arrival of Jesus. Christ is *still* coming in Word and Spirit.

Throughout Advent we will be summoned to repeatedly sing, "O come, O come Emmanuel" This Advent hymn highlights that God is with us.

God is with us in our sorrow and grief.
God is with us in our joys and pains.
God is with us in our victory and through our defeats.
God is with us.

Mary's song in Luke invites us to sing, too. We are enlisted to allow our souls to magnify the Lord in Song. Let's sing together, **"My Soul doth magnify the Lord."**

Imagine how this chorus would sound in the amphitheater of heaven if everyone opened their lips allowing the harmonies of all voices (i.e. sopranos, altos, tenors, baritones, basses, tone deaf and the like) to sing, **"My soul doth magnify the Lord."**

One might ask, what does it mean to magnify the Lord? The Greek word for magnify is me-ga-lu-no. It means to make great, to magnify, to declare great, to esteem highly, to extol, to laud, to celebrate, to get and praise.

Mary's song of praise invites us to fully "love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls and minds." (Matthew 22:37) Following the example of Mary, we are encouraged to sing to the Lord this Advent season. Sing with me, **"My Soul doth magnify the Lord."**

Finally, my prayer is that we render our praises to God, we will celebrate the Word (Christ) being made flesh in our midst. We will expect Christ to show up in victory in our lives and

allow Christ's Hope, Peace, Joy and Love to always spring eternal in our journey of faith. Please sing with me, **"My Soul doth magnify the Lord."**

Rev. Nikita McCalister
Director to the ABWM Board

We Have This Hope

December 13, 2026

Hebrews 6:19; Isaiah 9:2

"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure." — Hebrews 6:19
"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." — Isaiah 9:2

The Advent and Christmas season, with all of its hustle and bustle can be a hard time. While the world outside blinks with artificial cheer, many of us carry quiet heaviness. We look at our lives, our families, or the world around us and feel the weight of deep darkness. Isaiah spoke directly into this kind of gloom. He didn't promise a quick fix or a shallow distraction. He promised a person. For a society stumbling through the shadows of grief, anxiety, or unmet expectations, the prophet announced a dawn. This isn't a flickering candle easily snuffed out by a harsh winter wind; it is the blazing, unshakeable light of Jesus Christ, arriving to shatter the night. But how do we hold on until that dawn fully breaks?

One of my favorite verses is from Hebrews. In this verse, we are given our tool: hope. In scripture, hope is never a fragile wish or a desperate "maybe." It is a fierce certainty. The text compares it to an anchor for the soul. Think about an anchor. It isn't dropped into calm, shallow waters for decoration. It is thrown into the deep, murky dark during a violent storm. It holds fast to something completely unseen beneath the surface.

When your emotions swirl and the holiday rush threatens to pull you under, your anchor is securely hitched to the throne room of God. Your stability does not depend on how strong you feel today; it depends on the strength of the rock holding your anchor. You don't have to fabricate your own light this season. Rest your weary soul in the truth that the Light has already dawned, and He is holding you fast.

Prayer:
Lord Jesus, thank You for being my anchor when the storm rages and my light when the night feels long. Secure my heart in Your promises today. Amen.

Laura Palada
President, American Baptist Women's Ministries of New York State

God's Weaving

December 14, 2026

Psalm 139:14-15; Jeremiah 1:5

I had a dear friend undergo semi-emergency heart surgery recently. Through a series of phone calls, monetary donations, traded vehicles, and friends who were willing to open up their homes, we were able to help as best we could so he and his wife could feel supported in the midst of a really scary time.

It was a "no brainer" to help them. We always intended to do the things to get them the support they needed but it definitely complicated my life for a few days. It involved so many phone calls, people organizing and keeping track of who-knows-what and what needs to be done now and what was also going on and needing to be done for my own family. I let myself get enmeshed in all of it and I stumbled and started complaining in my heart. I was tired and already burned out with my own stuff and I didn't have much else to give. But, in the midst of my fretting and whining, God met me there.

He asked me to look around and see all the strings, the connections that had been pulled on to surround this couple with the help they needed. All the moving pieces God so beautifully orchestrated for such a time as this. Whether it was my dad, who I have known my whole life, who let me borrow his car because it was bigger and more comfortable or the doctor, who I never met, who had gone through years for education to prepare himself for surgeries just like this one, each and every person had their lives woven together in such a way that we convened right when and where God planned for that moment, for my friend and his life.

Zooming out and looking at the situation from that perspective was incredibly humbling. What a gift to be allowed and asked to be a part of such an experience. And then, if you

zoom out further to consider all the other things that had to be woven together for the immediate things to line up, it's almost overwhelming.

As you prepare your heart for Christmas during this advent season, reflect on your life and the places you have been over the past year, ten years, even more. Look at the threads God has woven into your life, how He provided a blanket of people and experiences to catch and protect you before you even knew you needed it and allow yourself to be wrapped in it. Carry with you the image of the Savior of the World wrapped in the threads of cloth and also wrapped in threads of time, people and faith that led to His promised coming. God cares for you and loves in the very same way. Trust in that blanket. Also, trust and rejoice in how God wove you into the blankets of those around you as well.

Brittany McDaniel
Worship Leader, First Baptist Church, North Platte, Nebraska
Nebraska State Region

Treetop Angels

December 15, 2026

2 Samuel 5; 2 Kings 6

According to the Internet, stars and angels are the favorite toppers for a Christmas tree. In different years, I've used an electrically lit star and a rustic angel made from a cotton mop. One church I belonged to used a blonde angel with a candle in each hand. Instead of inspiring holy awe, she reminded many of us of an airport employee directing planes into their gates. We called her the Runway Angel.

I recently found a story about angels in the treetops, but the narrative has nothing to do directly with Christmas. It has to do with God's protection and His sovereignty.

In the fifth chapter of 2 Samuel, the Philistine army, King David's nemesis, attacked again. David asked God if the Israelite army should deploy against the Philistines and God gave him an unusual strategy. Don't be quick to attack, God said. Circle around behind them to the front of the poplar trees. "As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the poplar trees, move quickly because that will mean the Lord has gone out in front of you…"

This isn't the only incident in Scripture that includes angelic warriors. In the sixth chapter of 2 Kings, the prophet Elisha's servant is terrified when he sees an enemy army. Elisha tells him, "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Elisha asks God to open his servant's eyes and then the man see the hills are "…full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

Back to the sound of marching on the treetops. I asked a group of kindergarten through third graders, "Who or what could make the noise of marching in the trees?" They guessed a variety of answers from birds to bumblebees and then I told them what I thought: Angels. There were angels on the treetops.

After hearing marching on the treetops, David and the Israelite army and God's angelic army prevailed over the Philistines. How stunning that the invisible God cared enough to send an invisible army to protect his people. It was God saying "I love you. I am for you. I am with you."

So, when I see the angel on the top of the Christmas tree, I think of the army of angels in the treetops bringing both King David and Elisha victory

God with us. Emmanuel. Maybe this is a Christmas story after all.

Roberta Tucker Brosius
First Baptist Church, Milton, Pennsylvania

You Are Not Alone

December 16, 2026

Matthew 1:18-22 NKJV

Advent is a season of anticipation, refection, and preparation in the Christian faith, marking the four weeks leading up to Christmas. Rooted in the Latin word "adventus," meaning coming or arrival. It is a time when Christians prepare their hearts to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ while also looking forward to His promised return.

During Advent, as believers we focus on the themes of hope, peace, love and joy which are often symbolized by the lighting of candles each Sunday. This season invites us to pause

amid life's busyness and reflect on the profound significance of Christ's coming, embracing the spirit of expectancy and renewal. Advent recognizes waiting can be a lonely experience. In many ways, it reflects the longing of people throughout history. It reflects the Israelites as they await the Messiah longing for connection, healing and salvation.

This waiting, often experienced in solitude, mirrors the isolation people feel when separated from loved ones or when facing difficulties alone. For those who feel disconnected or distant from community, Advent can bring both a reminder of what is missing and an invitation to draw closer to others and to God. It emphasizes God comes to meet us in our isolation.

Through Jesus' birth, God chose to dwell among humanity, to bridge the gap between the divine and human and to offer companionship to those who feel alone.

The message of "Emmanuel," meaning "God with us," reminds us God seeks to enter our loneliness and be present with us regardless of our circumstances.

Communal aspects of Advent such as gatherings, worship, lighting Advent candles and acts of giving, also serve to counter isolation. People come together during Advent to share in hope and to lift up one another. It reinforces the idea that no one is meant to journey alone.

For those experiencing loneliness, Advent can be a time to reach out, to connect with community, and to be reminded of God's unending presence and love. In this way, Advent offers both comfort and challenge, inviting people to find peace in God's presence amid loneliness and to open themselves to connection with others in a season focused on compassion, love and shared anticipation.

Deacon Joyce Kellam
Vice President ABWM
Berean Baptist Church, Raleigh, NC Eastern Region

No Room, but He Came Anyway!

December 17, 2026

Scripture: Luke 2:7

And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

When we think about the birth of Jesus, we tend to make the scene look picture perfect. We see Mary and Joseph gathered around baby Jesus, the animals quietly nearby, and everything peaceful, calm, and holy. But the truth is that first Christmas was probably a lot messier than the nativity scenes we're used to seeing.

Mary was pregnant, tired, away from home, and about to give birth. Joseph was trying to find somewhere, anywhere for them to stay. Bethlehem was extremely crowded, and when they desperately needed a place to rest, they heard, THERE IS NO ROOM!

Imagine carrying the promise of God but not being able to find a place for the promise to be born. Some of us know that feeling. You prayed and the door still closed. You believed and things still didn't work out. You did your best and still ended up disappointed. Sometimes life leaves you asking, "God, how did I end up here?" But the manger reminds us of something powerful. No room didn't mean no promise. There was no room in the inn, but there was still room in God's plan. Jesus came anyway.

He didn't wait for everything to become comfortable. He came right into the middle of the mess. He still does. Maybe this Advent finds you tired. Maybe you're carrying disappointment, grief, financial pressure, family problems, or an unanswered prayer. Perhaps you're smiling on the outside while quietly struggling on the inside.

God is not intimidated by the place you're in, and He is certainly not surprised by it. Jesus was laid in a manger, a rough, ordinary feeding trough, hardly the place anyone would look for a King, but that's the beauty of Christmas. God has a way of bringing something holy into places that look anything but holy.

A manger looked insignificant **until Jesus was in it.** So don't count out the place you're in right now. Your circumstances don't have to be perfect for God to be present. Everything

doesn’t have to make sense for God to still be working. Bring Him your tired heart. Bring Him your questions.

Bring Him the little faith you have left. That first Christmas was inconvenient, imperfect, and unexpected. But hope still showed up. Whatever this season looks like for you, hold on to this: **Jesus still comes into messy places. Jesus still meets tired people. And because He comes, there is still hope for you.**

Prayer:
Lord, meet me in the places that are tired, messy, and unfinished. When life doesn’t go as planned, remind me that You are still present and working. Help me trust You and make room in my heart for the hope only Jesus can bring. In Jesus Name Amen.

Reverend Lynn Marie Bethea
Associate Pastor, Bible Way Baptist Church
ABW Board Member/Treasurer
President ABWM-PBA (Philadelphia Baptist Association Region)

Angels Are Making Their Rounds **December 18, 2026**

Luke 1:12-25, 26-38, Matthew 1:18-25

One of the special things about Christmas is the music and whether I listen to songs being sung or sing in a choir, I am always moved by the music and by the lyrics and how they tell the amazing story of Christ's birth.

Like most cantatas I sing in, there is usually one song that continues to delight me, speak to me and is constantly on my mind. This year, the song special to me is "Angels are Making Their Rounds" in the cantata "Night of the Father's Love."

The time has come for Jesus to appear, and God is following the prophecy found in Isaiah by making sure this special child is born in the city of David. He enlists his sentinel angel, Gabriel, to confront Zechariah during his priestly duties and tell him he will soon be a father and the role that child is to play in the life of Jesus, son of God. Next assignment takes Gabriel to tell Mary she is the vessel God is using to give birth to the Christ child. Then, an angelic visit comes in a dream to Joseph to assure him that what is happening to Mary is from God and what his part is to play in this miracle birth.

In between the "Fear Not" of each angel's message we sing, "Angels making their rounds. Oh my, what a beautiful sound. Heaven's glory comes down when angels are making their rounds." I find myself picturing a group of angels dancing around before they appear on their assignments.

Yes, angel sounds and activities are when life from heaven invades earth, and we are often left speechless, sometimes fearful and overwhelmed until we experience His glory. Then, we are transported to another realm and given a taste of heaven.

Personally, I am alert for those angels who are making their rounds. I long for their visitations and words spoken to me but most of all to experience heaven.

Thank you, Lord, for using angels who are capable of descending from heaven to do your bidding. Our world needs your heavenly touch. Our job is to be welcoming to these

heavenly visitors. Help us to keep our ears attentive to that heavenly sound during this time of Advent.

Prayer:
Dear Heavenly Father, The Sweet sounds of Christmas are here. May they drown out the materialistic culture we live in so we can be free to once again be present at your holy birth. Thank you for sending your Son in such a well-orchestrated way. Help us to prepare the way to make this season Christ centered.

In Jesus' Name, AMEN

Marcia Street

I Am Your Servant

December 19, 2026

Luke 1:26-38

As I picture Mary on the day when Gabriel appeared to her, I wonder what she was doing. Was she working busily around the kitchen, involved in the usual womanly tasks of those days? The scriptures do not give us the time of day when this unusual event occurred but wherever she was and whatever ordinary task she was undertaking – the angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and Mary was shaken!!

Remember that angels are not as we usually picture them today. Instead, they are described in God's Word as large, powerful beings with voices that shook thresholds (Isaiah 6:4.) So, God sent his messenger, the angel Gabriel, to Mary and she was awestruck! Expectedly, Mary was troubled or upset at his words to her. She may have not even understood what he was saying in this burst of sound and light that interrupted her daily routine. Imagine for a moment, a sudden burst of blinding light appears next to you with a large supernatural being speaking in a loud, powerful voice. The angel had to follow his initial words with calming advice, "Do not be afraid, Mary." I'm sure I would need those reassuring words as well.

As Mary listened to Gabriel, surely her mind began to race, thinking “Are you sure you’ve got the right girl? I gave my promise to marry Joseph and now this angelic being is saying I will have a son from God. I should name him Jesus. He will be called the Son of the Most High. Really?! His kingdom will never end? Oh my! I can hardly breathe.”
Then she asked the angel, “How will this happen since I am still a virgin?” As the angel continued to explain God’s plan for her and her cousin Elizabeth, Mary began to feel a great sense of peace come over her. He assured her that, “No word from God will ever fail.”

Mary knew her future was in God’s hands and He would take care of every detail. She only needed to be obedient. After quieting her questioning mind, Mary responded, “Yes Lord, I am your willing servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel disappeared, leaving her alone…shaken but knowing that God was going to do something wonderful and she would be a part of it.

You and I will probably never have a visit from the angel Gabriel, but we learn from Mary’s example to be obedient and resolve to be used by God, even when we don’t think we are the “right” person for the task. God knows what needs to be done. He has prepared you or is preparing you for something that only you can do for Him.

God’s obedient young servant girl, Mary, was chosen to give birth to Jesus, our Savior. As we celebrate this time of Jesus’s birth, let’s remember Mary’s words and follow her example by saying, “I am the Lord’s servant.”

Take some time to pray now and ask Jesus to use you in whatever way He pleases. You will be blessed as you trust Him fully, knowing that “No word from God will ever fail.”

Joyce Camp

Mary's Journey

December 20, 2026

Luke 2:4-5

"So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him, and was expecting a child."

With the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941, the United States entered World War II. My mother was 4 months pregnant with my older brother. Years later, I remember asking her if she was concerned about the war or the state of the world. She said she was so immersed in being pregnant and planning for the new baby, she really didn't think about it. I thought that was odd because I would certainly have been worried in her position. Worried about my husband potentially being drafted or bringing a baby into such a chaotic world. But she said, "No." She felt serene, happy, excited and busy nesting.

I think Mary was feeling the same peace and excitement. As she and Joseph traveled, mostly on foot, to Bethlehem, she was not thinking about the state of the world. She was thinking about her baby. As she rode on their donkey or walked beside it, she felt the baby move and was reminded with every step that she was going to have a baby. And not just any baby, but the Messiah.

There was no reference as to how far along Mary was in her pregnancy, so we don't know how difficult the journey was for her. There is also no reference as to how long they were in Bethlehem before she gave birth. Luke 2:6-7 states, ***"While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her first born, a son."*** It could have been days or weeks. There were no computers and the process of registering that many people was probably a long one.

As we are in the Advent season, awaiting the birth of the Christ Child, let us be like Mary. Let us focus on Him to the exclusion of the world and wait in peaceful anticipation.

Susan Howell
ABWM Board at Large
First Baptist Church, Beatrice, Nebraska

The Winter Solstice

December 21, 2026

Genesis 1:14-15 (The Message)

"God spoke: 'Lights! Come Out! Shine in Heaven's sky! Separate Day from Night. Mark seasons and days and years, Lights in Heaven's sky to give light to Earth.' And there it was."

Today, December 21, 2026, we mark the winter solstice at 3:50PM(EST). The time is different in each time zone. It is the day with the fewest hours of sunlight throughout the year, making it the shortest day of the year. Then after we reach the Winter Solstice, the days begin to grow longer until we reach the Summer Solstice, the first day of summer and the longest day of the year.

Historically, the first recorded observations of the Winter Solstice began at the end of the Stone Age. The rocks at Stone Henge were placed to align with the night of the Winter Solstice. Ancient civilizations celebrated this in different ways and some of those rituals and customs like lighting candles, the Yule Log, decorating with garlands and holly remain today.

Although the Winter Solstice means the start of winter, it also means the return of more sunlight. We watch autumn days grow shorter, shadows lengthen, temperatures cool down. In fact, if you stand outside at noon (in your time zone) on the Winter Solstice, your shadow will be the longest of the year. After that, it shortens because the daylight hours are longer. It only gets brighter from here!

This season mirrors Advent – a time of waiting, longing, sitting in the dark. As December 21st approaches, the earth begins to tilt back toward the sun and days grow longer. Light wins! This is the heart of Advent. Jesus was not born when the world was shiny and bright. Under Roman rule, many were oppressed, broken, ignored, nameless and shamed by the Romans and religious leaders.

Advent is a good time to reflect and meditate. What do you need to leave behind, to be rescued from? Light a candle and envision your hopes and dreams for the upcoming

season of renewal. Who can you encourage? What are the gifts you can bring to the world? How will you mark this season of light, love, peace and joy? Light wins!

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."
John 1:5

Pray and reflect on how your light will grow brighter and reflect Jesus, the Light of the World.

M. Joanne Strauss
Former ABWM Eastern Region Coordinator
Current ABWM Alumnae Coordinator

Interrupted At Work

December 22, 2026

Luke 2:8-20

The shepherds weren't waiting for anything that night. They were working.

It was an ordinary shift – the kind that blurs into all the others. Count the sheep. Watch the perimeter. Stay awake past the point of fatigue. There was no anticipation in it, no sense that this was *the* night. The low hum of tasks had to be done again because someone has to do them.

If you're a woman reading this in Advent, you probably know that hum well. The list that never fully clears. The meal that needs making even during a season about waiting for something holy. The work that keeps running underneath the church services and the calendars and the pageantry – work that rarely pauses long enough to notice what season it is.

That's exactly where God shows up.

Not in a temple. Not during a Sabbath rest carved out for reflection. In a field, mid-shift, to people who had no time built into their day for an angel. Luke doesn't tell us the shepherds cleared their calendars to receive good news. The good news came and cleared it for them.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace. That announcement didn't wait for a better moment. It broke into the only moment there was – a working one.

Notice what the shepherds do next – they don't finish the shift first. They don't tidy up, explain themselves or wait until it's convenient. They go. Let us go now – right now, in the middle of everything - and *see this thing that has happened*.

There's something for us there. Not a call to add one more thing to an already full list but a reminder that God doesn't require an empty calendar to enter. The interruption itself can be the invitation busyness doesn't have to be cleared away before Grace arrives. It can arrive right inside it, in a field, on a shift, in the middle of a Tuesday.
So, if this Advent finds you mid-task rather than mid-reflection – folding laundry instead of lighting candles, running a to-do list instead of sitting in silence – you're in good company. The first people trusted with the news of Jesus' birth weren't the ones with space cleared for wonder. They were the ones working when the wonder found them anyway.

Reflection:
Where is God interrupting your busyness this week? Not asking you to clear space first but meeting you inside it.

Prayer:
God who breaks into ordinary shifts, meet me in the middle of what I haven't finished.
Amen

Teresa Robinson-Duane
Urban Grace the Downtown Church, Tacoma, Washington
Western Region

Do You Have Room?

December 23, 2026

Isaiah 54:1-10

By this point in December, many of us are carrying full Christmas lists. Gifts to buy. We have people to care for, places to go, deadlines to meet and traditions to keep. Our schedules, minds, and hearts become so full preparing for Christmas that when something holy wants to enter, there is no room left to receive it. Advent asks us a different question: Do you have room?

In Isaiah 54, God speaks to people who know emptiness. The passage begins with an unexpected command, "Sing, O barren one who did not bear…break forth into singing and cry aloud." God calls for joy before circumstances change.

We often think joy comes after: after the prayer being answered, healing comes or we know how the story ends. But Isaiah offers another kind of joy. Joy is not simply a reward at the end of the story. Joy is the courage to trust God in the middle of it. Then God instructs, "Enlarge the site of your tent…do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes."

You enlarge a tent when you believe you will need the room. God is saying, prepare for something you cannot see yet. Make room for healing you cannot picture, healthier relationships, unexpected opportunities, joy after disappointment and for God to surprise you. Sometimes our struggle is not believing God can do something. It is imagining God doing it for us. We believe God parted seas, healed bodies, and raised the dead. Yet disappointment can shrink our imagination.

But Christmas itself is an impossible story. A virgin conceived. God entered human flesh. Hope arrived in a manger. So, God says: Stretch. Stretching creates tension. Making room may require releasing old fears, expectations, and ways we learned to protect ourselves. Then comes the hardest instruction: Do not hold back.

We hold back hope because we remember disappointment. We hold back trust because we remember betrayal. We hold back joy because we learned not to expect too much. However, Advent gives us permission to hope again. Not because grief has disappeared

but because God is still working in empty places. Finally, strengthen your stakes. God invites us into resounding hope, not shallow optimism. Strengthen your stakes in prayer, community, truth, rest and love. And remember God's promise: "My steadfast love shall not depart from you."

Reflection:
Where has disappointment caused you to make your life smaller? What would enlarging your tent look like?

Prayer
Gracious God, enlarge my imagination. Stretch my faith. Teach me not to hold back because of yesterday's disappointments. Strengthen my stakes in Your steadfast love. Make room in me for wonder, possibility, joy, and Christ. Amen.

Carry this with you
Joy is the courage to make room for God in the middle of the story.

Rev. LaThelma Armstrong
Executive Director ABWM

Are We the Shepherds or the Magi?

December 24, 2026

Luke 2:17-20

"When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about the child, and all who heard were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."

I grew up in the 50s and 60s. My family was the typical family of the time. My father worked. My mother was a stay-at-home mom who took care of the home and did volunteer work in the community. There were 3 children – my older brother, my younger sister and me.

Christmas was a special holiday. The aroma of baked cookies and cakes filled the house. The dining room table was decorated with candles and garland. We decorated the Christmas tree with ornaments that were a mixture of pieces that were either handmade or had a family story to go with them. My father always waited until the last minute to buy a tree because he could get a good price! As a result, the tree was often a bit like a Charlie Brown tree that had one side that needed to face the wall and a trunk that was not quite straight. But it had character and once it was decorated, it was beautiful with garland, tinsel and little lights that bubbled.

We attended a special church service in the center of town in front of our church. The ministers of the 3 churches in town (Presbyterian, Catholic and Episcopal) read the Christmas Story from the Bible. The whole town came and sang Christmas Carols while the high school band played. There was a reenactment of the Christmas story on the front lawn of the church complete with Mary arriving on a donkey.

When I reflect on my childhood Christmases, I remember and cherish the memories but recall few of the gifts. At the time, the gifts were exciting and fun to open but when I look back, they are not what stands out. What was important was being with my family and celebrating the birth of Jesus.

In Luke, the shepherds, after hearing the news of Jesus' birth from the angels, rush to see Him. They brought no gifts, but when they had seen him, they told everyone they encountered "what they had seen and heard." They returned "glorifying God…"
In Matthew 2:11-12, the Magi came with expensive and exotic gifts but after they worshiped Jesus, they returned home to their country. There is no mention of glorifying God or spreading the good news.

So, in the Bible, the offerings presented were not the focus of the event and should not be our focus. The focus is on God's gift to us of the baby in the manger. The one who would bring light and joy into the world.

May your Christmas be filled with warmth and memories and joy and may your gifts to each other be your presence and your love.

Prayer:
Dear Lord, help us to focus on the things you have given us that matter… loving family and friends, a loving church family and sharing the gift of YOU. Amen.

Susan Howell
ABWM Board, at large
First Baptist Church, Beatrice, Nebraska

The Best Gift Ever

December 25, 2026

John 3:16-17

"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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him"

It's Christmas morning! Yay! Many of you opened your gifts on Christmas morning. So that meant children up at the crack of dawn. Lots of laughs and giggles. Lots of torn bright red and green paper all over the floor. And it's over in a second.

Our tradition was a bit different. We opened gifts on Christmas Eve and opened our stocking on Christmas morning. I'm not sure of the origin but it was the way we always did it. Our stockings often contained small but important things. I remember my brother got his first shaving razor (one with actual blades!) I got a beautiful simple pearl necklace from him. There was always an orange in the toe of the stocking. We loved that Santa filled our stockings overnight. It made the Christmas celebration last a little longer.

The anticipation of Christmas morning and the excitement is usually over by 10:00am and then it is on with the day. Now is the work of cooking Christmas dinner. Ah, the smells that filled the house! But the rest of the day could be a bit anti-climactic. A bit of a letdown, if you're honest.

Today, as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, we need to remember what the verse above tells us. The reason for Christmas, the anticipation, the excitement, is never done, is never over. God gave us the gift of his Son. Jesus came to the earth to perform a task. He came to save us. There is no end to his work. We continue to receive the gift of forgiveness, salvation and eternal life even over 2,000 years later.

The festive Christmas lights will soon come down and be put away until next year. But the Light of the World will always be shining on us.

Prayer:
Dear Lord, on this day of Christmas, let us remember God's gift to us of the tiny baby who would change each one of our lives and change the world. Amen

Susan Howell
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