



*A gift of daily devotionals written by members and  
friends of Ocean View Presbyterian Church.*

It may seem odd, in the season of Advent, that the texts I'm drawn to are in the Book of Hebrews, but here's the thing: Hebrews discusses waiting in such an impactful way! The great long term of struggle toward our Messiah is characterized by the lives and faithful service of the heroes and heroines of the faith. This long arc of patient service through history is juxtaposed to the long term of the Sabbath rest we will enter, once for all, when God in Christ has renewed, refreshed and reconciled the creation. Both in our waiting, and in its reward, is precious time spent deliberately in the presence of our God, learning God's will and aligning our own wills accordingly. All of this hangs on "the hinge of history", Jesus' sojourn with us in the flesh.

Thus, Ch. 2: 10-11, 14a, 17: "It was fitting that God, for whom and in whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings; for the One who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father: for this reason, Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters... Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, He Himself shared the same things... He had to become like His sisters and brothers in every respect".

Then, opening Ch. 12, the "Great Cloud of Witnesses", on account of whom we can say (13:6b): "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" It is in this stance we wait, through the dwindling days and through the pregnancy of Mary, which is "the whole cosmos groaning in its birthpangs". How do we wait?

I want to suggest we consider, each day, our own cloud of witnesses: at home, in our families, in our histories, in our church and churches. How did they shape us, how did they form us, how did they equip and resource us? How grateful we need to be for them!



*The Worship Committee would like to offer special thanks to all of those who participated in the production of this Devotional Booklet. The result is a sharing of special talents, gifts from God, whether they are authoring daily meditations, providing artwork\*, organizing the writings, generating the computer version, or printing and assembling the finished product.*

*“We are strengthened by these experiences to continue to live as God’s people”.*

*\* cover artwork for this devotional has been provided by Elaine Wolf*

*Ocean View Presbyterian Church  
67 Central Avenue  
Ocean View, DE 19970  
(302) 539-3455  
www.ovpc.org*

How fitting that, in gratitude, we can wait as well, we can trust as well – and we, too, can be midwives of our tradition.

In the following pages, your sisters and brothers tell the story; my prayer is that each one finds its way into your heart, there to sing the great heavenly chorus of all those who live, and who have lived, in the faith.

May you be visited with every blessing of Advent,

Pastor Terry



# Season of Hope



*"Hope is like the sun, which, as we  
journey toward it, casts the shadow  
of our burden behind us."  
- Samuel Smiles*

# ADDITIONAL READINGS

## NATIVITY OF THE LORD I

First Reading     Isaiah 9:2–7  
Psalm             Psalms 96  
Second Reading   Titus 2:11–14  
Gospel             Luke 2:1–14 [15–20]

## NATIVITY OF THE LORD II

First Reading     Isaiah 62:6–12  
Psalm             Psalms 97  
Second Reading   Titus 3:4–7  
Gospel             Luke 2:[1–7] 8–20

## NATIVITY OF THE LORD III

First Reading     Isaiah 52:7–10  
Psalm             Psalms 98: 1-9  
Second Reading   Hebrews 1:1–4 [5–12]  
Gospel             John 1:1–14

*Sunday December 01, 2019*

Morning Psalms 24; 150

Amos 1:1–5, 13–2:8

1 Thess. 5:1–11

Luke 21:5–19

Evening Psalms 25; 110

*Worship Readings*

Isa. 2:1–5

Psalm 122

Rom. 13:11–14

Matt. 24:36–44

“Abandon hope, all ye who enter here,” is the warning Dante saw at the entrance to *The Inferno*. Like him, we have come to know and can tell that there are many levels of hell, and many ‘holidazed’ handbaskets that can get us there.

We could well despair amid our warring nations and factions and blaring would be emperors, but instead, with the often tossed and battered apostle Paul, we all can look ahead and follow the star and the call:

“Don’t be like those who have no faith;  
faith, hope, and love abide.”

So we not only keep faith, but also hope, and love the world that God loved enough to get real and down to earth in the births of Jesus and us.

Our Godspell today breaks us out of hell to hope for – well, even expect – heaven to break in on us in the fresh flesh of a baby or even in the worn yet reborn skins of old waiters like us, who, above the bad tides battering our shores, can hear the glad tidings of one who came and implored:

“Stay awake, for you don’t know what day your Lord is coming.”

Tom Bentz

**Monday, December 02, 2019**

Morning Psalms 122; 145  
Amos 2:6–16  
2 Peter 1:1–11  
Matt. 21:1–11  
Evening Psalms 40; 67

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Jesus approached Jerusalem on a donkey. It was simple without grandiose fanfare. However, the people who welcomed him did so by honoring him – they threw garments on the road and spread branches from trees before him. This, I believe, is because his presence gave them HOPE. He was the son of David – Jesus the prophet from Nazareth,

Beginning in Biblical times, great people were revered and honored. Those that believed in Jesus were those who could worship him because he could give them HOPE and bring salvation into their lives. A very humble man riding on a donkey, but he was their King.

Bruce Hobler



**~ The Boarding of Flight 2020 has been announced ~**

Your luggage should only contain the best souvenirs from 2019

The bad and sad moments should be left in the garbage...

The duration of the flight will be 12 months. So, tighten your seatbelt.

The next stop-overs will be: Health, Love, Joy, Harmony, Well-being, and Peace.

The captain offers you the following menu which will be served during the flight –

A cocktail of Friendship, A supreme of Health, A gratin of Prosperity, A bowl of Excellent News, A salad of Success, A cake of Happiness, and All accompanied by bursts of laughter...

Wishing you an enjoyable trip on board flight 2020.

Before 2019 ends,

Let me thank all the good people like you, who made 2019 wonderful for me.

I Pray you blessed with a successful year ahead.

I wish you a wonderful 2020.

## *A story shared in Bible Study by Don Benjamin*

*I Said a Christmas Prayer for You  
Because the season's near.  
I didn't ask for riches  
But for gifts so much more dear.*

*I asked for joyful gatherings  
With your family all around,  
And for carols to inspire you  
With their old familiar sound.*

*I asked for quiet moments  
In your heart on Christmas morn,  
For a special time to celebrate  
The Savior who was born.*

*I asked for friends to send their best  
That you might know they care.  
I asked for peace and love and hope,  
And I know God heard my prayer.*



As some of you know, Fiorello LaGuardia was mayor of New York during the Depression, and he was quite a character. He would ride the city fire trucks, take entire orphanages to baseball games and whenever the city newspapers went on strike, he would get on the radio and read the Sunday 'funnies' to the children.

At any rate, one bitter cold winter's night in 1935, Mayor LaGuardia turned up in a night court that served the poorest ward in the city, dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself. After he heard a few cases, a tattered old woman as brought before him, accused of stealing a loaf of bread.

She told LaGuardia that her daughter's husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick and her grandchildren were starving. But the shopkeeper, from whom the bread was stolen, insisted on pressing charges. 'My store is in a very bad neighborhood, your honor,' he said. 'She's got to be punished in order to teach other people a lesson'.

The mayor sighed. He turned to the old woman and said, "I've got to punish you," he said. "The law makes no exception – ten dollars or ten days in jail."

But even as he spoke, LaGuardia was reaching into his pocket and pulling out a ten-dollar bill. "Here is the woman's fine," he said, "and furthermore, I'm going to fine everyone in this court room fifty cents for living in a city where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant."

The following day, the New York Times reported that \$47.50 was turned over to the bewildered old woman. It was given by the red-faced store owner, some seventy petty criminals, people with traffic violations and city policemen – and they all gave their mayor a standing ovation as they handed over the money.

*Tuesday, December 03, 2019*

Morning Psalms 33; 146  
Amos 3:1-11  
2 Peter 1:12-21  
Matt. 21:12-22  
Evening Psalms 85; 94

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### **Hope & Faith & Prayer**

In today's Gospel passage, the disciples; Christ's followers - who had accompanied Him during His years of ministry and had seen many miracles were "shocked" by what happened to the fig tree. Yet, Jesus assures them, "If you have faith and don't doubt (aka, hope) .... you [too] will be able to do even more".

I, too, was shocked to read how (almost) vengeful Christ was to that little fig tree. "No figs??" ...zap...all dried up. Yet, as I pondered the rest of the message, I better understand what Christ was saying to His disciples....and to us, his followers. You, too, if you have faith and don't doubt, you can even move mountains.

To that end, I believe that I should pray for God's "walking with me" during difficult times. Rather than praying for a specific outcome (e.g. to cure a specific ailment), I pray for God's presence, pray for God to strengthen me to endure, pray for God to provide patience and compassion for my family.

Praying this way helps me to keep focus on God's will, that "Thy will be done, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else." instead of on what might be of benefit to me (that specific outcome). Sometimes, a specific outcome (cure me of this cancer) is not God's plan....so it's not that I didn't pray hard enough, or good enough, or that my prayers were not worthy enough, it's just that that specific outcome was not meant to be.

## *CHRISTMAS DAY (cont)*

- We have eternal life
- God comforted his people
- Take refuge
- Declare his glory
- Worship the Lord in splendor
- Shout for joy
- Rejoice and Praise
- God is Love

Jesus said: 'Take up My cross and follow me'; 'Let this assurance of my continual presence fill you with Peace and Joy, Love and Hope'.

Merry Christmas  
Thanks be to God!

Elsie Young





# CHRISTMAS DAY

Morning Psalms 2; 147:1-11  
Micah 4:1-5; 5:2-4  
1 John 4:7-16  
John 3:31-36  
Evening Psalms 98; 96

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Are we ready for Christmas? Are the presents wrapped, cookies baked, cards mailed, house decorated and the turkey in the oven? OH! – the question wasn't 'have you completed your 'to do' chores!

For twenty-four days, the Advent Season, we have been looking forward, preparing our hearts and minds; we have participated in a lot of Christmas activities; 'The Way Home', providing for families at Lord Baltimore school so they might have a Christmas, preparing food for students at Cape Henlopen, hosting a Nativity Festival, delivering 'Meals on Wheels' and so much more; we have participated in Worship, Christian education, Bible Studies, sharing our Advent Devotionals – all to restore and refresh ourselves as individuals and also the community.

So, are we ready for Christmas? The Holy Child, born in a dark cave, grew to become a man. He is calling us to service – showing us how to live, giving a love that took him back to a dark cave; a tomb. We know that God is the 'Light of the World', that God is Love, the Gift that keeps on giving. We need to be ready to serve using the gifts we have been given. Today is Christmas Day and our scripture selections give us some thoughts chosen for this celebration – but not just for a day – but as a reminder that Christmas continually gives us a full life:

- Hope comes when we trust God with our Lives
- Don't be afraid. Love is a gift from God
- Christ Jesus is God
- The Spirit of God pours out generously

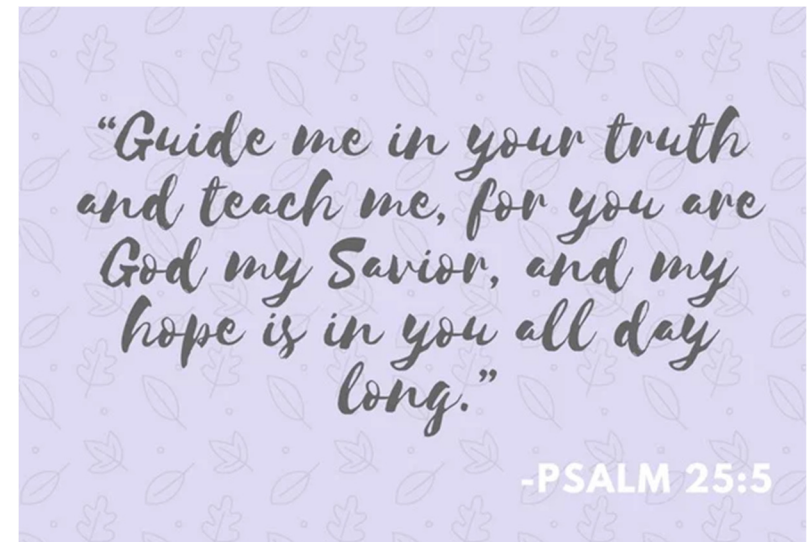
Tuesday, December 03, 2019 (cont)

So, yes, with God's help, through prayer and supplication, we - as Christ's Disciples, can move mountains.

## Prayer For The Day

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit...grant us clarity to hear the words You speak to us, to accept the directions You have for us, and the courage to know that You will always be with us.

Dale Smith



Morning Psalms 50; 147:1-11

Amos 3:12-4:5

2 Peter 3:1-10

Matt. 21:23-32

Evening Psalms 53; 17

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### **Don't You Love a Good Mystery?**

In today's reading from 2 Peter 3:1-10, the Apostle Peter, who walked and talked and ministered with Jesus, shares his interpretation of what Jesus told him about the Second Coming: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed" (vs. 10).

The Second Coming is mentioned more than 300 times in the New Testament and also gets cryptic mention in the Old Testament. I'm drawn to these Second-Coming scriptures, because I love a good mystery, and because if something is mentioned more than 300 times, I'd be stupid not to pay attention.

Jesus made it clear that the date, time, and day of this event was not for us to know – that even HE didn't know it. Therein lies the mystery! But he told one parable after another to put us on notice that it was our job to be prepared for his return. He phrased and rephrased this warning, hoping that if we didn't get the message in one parable, we'd get it in another – Don't let anyone lead you astray, he said; and the one who endures to the end will be saved; and keep awake.

For example, in Matthew 25:1-13, is the familiar story of the 10 virgins waiting for the bridegroom – five wise, five foolish. The foolish ones were not prepared. They didn't bring enough

## *CHRISTMAS EVE (cont)*

mind; ...." Our hearts provide the first, and strongest connection with God.

Christmas is about the heart: the hymns we sing, the nativity scriptures, the communion with our friends and family, and our renewed understanding of the living Christ. Like Mary, these are pondered in our hearts. While we may study the Christmas story with our minds, we are blessed by the Christmas joy that fills our hearts. This is our glorious gift from God.

William H. Colwill



# CHRISTMAS EVE

Morning Psalms 33; 146

Isa. 60:1–6

Gal. 3:23–4:7

Matt. 1:18–25

Evening Psalms 32; 114

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Luke 2, Verses 1 through 20 present the beautiful story of the Nativity. You know it well: Joseph and Mary travel to Bethlehem. No room at the inn. Their first-born laid in the manger.

The shepherds are visited by an angel, who tells them that this day the Messiah is born to them. They travel to Bethlehem, to the manger, and tell their incredible story. “All who heard it were amazed.” The shepherds’ words had a powerful effect on Mary. Verse 20 is eloquent: “But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”

Think of Mary’s joy as she is reassured by God, through the shepherds, that her son is indeed the Christ child, born for the salvation of all. These words are not considered in her mind, God works in her heart.

God works through our hearts as well. We might study a hymn with our mind, but its power works through our hearts. For me it is: “Here I am Lord. Is it I Lord?”. My mind tries to stop the emotional reaction, but my heart reacts. First there is the tingling tightness in my chest, followed by the welling up of tears. This, to me, is the sweet pondering of the heart. Words that flow into my heart bring emotions that the mind cannot stop.

I believe it is no coincidence that the Greatest Commandment tells us to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your

Wednesday, December 04, 2019 (cont)



oil and when the bridegroom was delayed and their lamps were going out, they tried to borrow oil from the wise virgins who were definitely prepared. Alas, the foolish girls had to skedaddle to the oil store and buy their own.

When they returned, the bridegroom had locked the door and refused to let them into the wedding, telling them that he didn’t know them. The parable ends with a warning: “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

In mainline Protestant churches, we don’t hear much about the Second Coming, but many early Christians believed that they would live to see it. Paul’s epistles mention that Jesus would return soon and that the end of the world as they knew it was not far away.

You’d have to live under a rock to miss the daily barrage of news about evil, injustice, and war. We’re told that the Second Coming is when Jesus Christ returns to the earth to defeat evil and establish His reign of justice and peace. I’m looking forward to that. How about you?

Marie Cook Waehler

**Thursday, December 05 2019**

Morning Psalms 18:1-20; 147:12-20

Amos 4:6-13

2 Peter 3:11-18

Matt. 21:33-46

Evening Psalms 126; 62

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My help and glory are in God  
granite-strength and safe harbor God  
So trust him, absolutely, people;  
lay your lives on the line for him.  
God is a safe place to be.

Our daughter and her family entered into what was supposed to be a six-month project renovating their Virginia home. Because a third floor was added and the roof was removed for a time, they moved into an apartment for the duration. The time passed and they grew impatient with the slow progress and apartment living and insisted that they move back into the basement of their home while the project continues well beyond the projected time. We visited them in their basement abode this weekend and saw a makeshift kitchen and bean bags and cots used as their beds. Moving boxes were stacked everywhere. Despite all of this, this is their home, their safe place to be.

The psalmist tells us that GOD is our safe place to be, that we should absolutely trust in Him, but also lay our lives down for Him. After all, dying on the Cross, He laid down His Life for us. Granite-strength and safe- harbor God is our Help and a permanent safe place to be. Reassuring words, indeed.

Heavenly Father, even in the tough times, when we feel uncertain and bewildered, remind us that in YOU we find our safe place. Amen.

Jim and Lorie Hartsig

**Most telling is the specific moment he drops it: when he utters the words, "fear not" (at :39 seconds).**

Looking at it now, it is pretty clear what Charles Schultz was saying, and it's so simple it's brilliant.

The birth of Jesus separates us from our fears.

The birth of Jesus frees us from the habits we are unable (or unwilling) to break ourselves.

The birth of Jesus allows us to simply drop the false security we have been grasping so tightly, and learn to trust and cling to Him instead.

The world of 2015 can be a scary place, and most of us find ourselves grasping to something temporal for security, whatever that thing may be. Essentially, 2015 is a world in which it is very difficult for us to "fear not."

But in the midst of fear and insecurity, this simple cartoon image from 1965 continues to live on as an inspiration for us to seek true peace and true security in the one place it has always been and can always still be found.

Jason Soroski  
Jasensoroski.wordpress.com  
Dec 14, 2015



## Just Drop the Blanket: The Moment You Never Noticed in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*

*Although this was written in 2015, as the author states, this message lives on and is as timely now as it was then....*

This week *A Charlie Brown Christmas* aired on national prime time television for the 50th time. In a world where the latest greatest technology is outdated in a matter of months, and social media trends come and go in a matter of days, 50 years of anything becomes quite meaningful.

I am a fan of all things nostalgic and all things Christmas, and so when the two are combined I am hooked, and the Charlie Brown Christmas special falls squarely into that category.

I was in the first-grade back when they still performed Christmas pageants in schools (less than 50 years, but still a very long time ago), and our class performed a version of the Charlie Brown Christmas. Since I was kind of a bookworm and already had a blue blanket, I was chosen to play the part of Linus. As Linus, I memorized [Luke 2:8-14](#), and that Scripture has been hidden in my heart ever since.

But while working so diligently to learn those lines, there is one important thing I didn't notice then, and didn't notice until now. Right in the middle of speaking, Linus drops the blanket.

Charlie Brown is best known for his uniquely striped shirt, and Linus is most associated with his ever-present security blanket. Throughout the story of Peanuts, Lucy, Snoopy, Sally and others all work to no avail to separate Linus from his blanket. And even though his security blanket remains a major source of ridicule for the otherwise mature and thoughtful Linus, he simply refuses to give it up. **Until this moment. When he simply drops it.**

In that climactic scene when Linus shares "what Christmas is all about," he drops his security blanket, and I am now convinced that this is intentional.

*Friday, December 06, 2019*

Morning Psalms 102; 148  
Amos 5:1-17  
Jude 1-16  
Matt. 22:1-14  
Evening Psalms 130; 16

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Who among us has not met one of these challenges? Who has cried out to God in prayer? Who has asked for the divine one's intervention?

And yet we can see, if we look closely, the opportunities among the challenges. We've called to God in prayer and praise. The divine one's involvement in our daily lives can fill us with hope and thankfulness. If we would only seek ...

Gloria Bartholomew





*Saturday, December 07, 2019*

Morning Psalms 90; 149  
Amos 5:18–27  
Jude 17–25  
Matt. 22:15–22  
Evening Psalms 80; 72

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For some time now, I have been pondering the real weight of the word ‘authentic’ after hearing it used in a sermon several years ago. While discussing this with Pastor Terry, he said that in recent years ‘authentic’ has become a popular buzz word in Christian circles – a fact that I don’t doubt at all - but I think at its core, it conveys a responsibility that cannot be ignored; an expectation of us set when God made his covenant with Israel – ‘I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts’ (Jeremiah 31:33).

I wonder if this isn’t part of what Amos is trying to tell Israel as he admonishes them for their practices and cautions them about wishing for the Day of the Lord to come so God’s judgment would destroy their adversaries; because as he warns them, the judgment will be against them! At the heart of his message is that no matter the number of celebrations, offerings, feasts, and acts of ritual worship we participate in, they are all hollow and meaningless to God unless they are rooted in justice and compassion for others. ‘But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream’. (Amos 5:24)

So, do I know anyone who I believe is authentic? Absolutely! I am surrounded by people who love, who study and crusade for social justice; who develop imaginative missions and ministries to help others; who are humble enough to recognize their own shortcomings; all while being led by Christ. In short, they are my heroes!



*Christmas, my child, is love in  
action. Every time we love,  
every time we give, it's  
Christmas.*

*Dale Evans Rogers*

***Monday, December 23, 2019***

Morning Psalms 122; 145  
Jer. 31:10–14  
Gal. 3:15–22  
Luke 1:67–80 or Matt. 1:1–17  
Evening Psalms 40; 67

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Just as Jesus and His fellow Jews journey up to the Temple in Jerusalem, so we go “up” to our churches every Sunday.

Just as Jesus and His fellow Jews knew the Temple to be the home of God, so we know our hearts to be the homes of God, occupied by the Spirit of Christ.

Just as Jerusalem is unified, built and bound firmly together, by the thanksgiving of the people, by the unity of the people, so are we unified, by our preparation for Christ’s coming, by how we pray, and how we decorate, by our togetherness in worship,

Just as Jesus and His fellow Jews sang and praised and worshipped with joy in three festivals, so we sing, and praise, and celebrate with joy the approach and the arrival, and the Advent of our ord.

As St. Augustine said:

“A Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot!”

We can live Advent all year: Our Lord... with us today, tomorrow and always.

Pam Dougherty

***Saturday, December 07, 2019 (cont)***

It’s no secret that this time of year is hard for so many, myself included; the beauty of past Christmases overshadowed by the onslaught of commercialism starting earlier and earlier – the memories of loved ones no longer with us, maybe a sense of regret; but I believe that this time of quiet anticipation, is a glorious gift and when surrounded by our heroes will bring us back to wholeness, put us back on track for finding our authentic selves.

Why do I call this a time of quiet anticipation? God gave me a little nudge the other day while walking the dog early in the morning – as usual, we went outside and I greeted the cool, crisp day – but then it I noticed how quiet it was – there wasn’t a sound! The perfect time to offer a silent prayer. Then, I was reminded about a similar nudge I received in early spring when we went out, again greeted the day, and were met with the sounds of birds waking and rustling in the trees. But this time it was an occasion to rejoice in the awakening of everything around me after a time of rest and replenishment.

One of the last pages of this devotional is a simple illustration with a verse from Psalm 46: ‘Be still and know that I am God’.

Friends, my wish to you is that you have a peaceful and blessed Advent and Christmas season; a time where we all can be still and reconnect or reinforce our authentic relationship with God; and maybe even find our calling for the upcoming year.

Bob Wolf



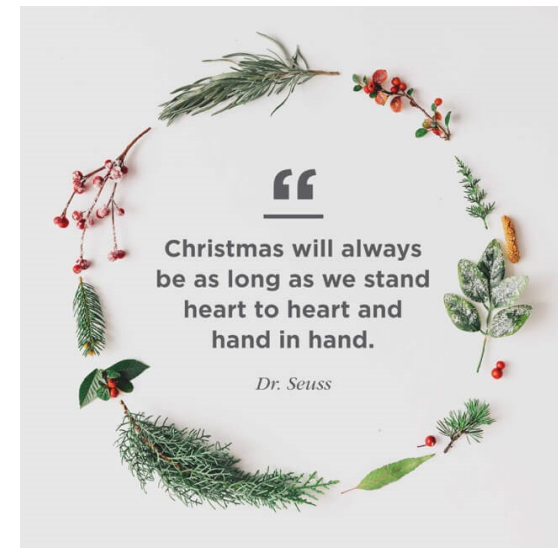
**Prayer For The Day**

Loving Father, thank you for loving me. Help me to be an example of your love to everyone I meet. Help me to remember that your love is always here to protect and guide and comfort me as I journey through my earthly walk. Remind me every day, and especially during this Christmas season, that you blessed me with the amazing love gift of your only son. Amen.

*Hymns italicized are from our hymnal 'Glory to God'; numbered in the order of their appearance*  
188, 134, 366, 224, 268, 833, 838, 824

Judy Reich

WHEN WE PUT  
OUR PROBLEMS IN  
GOD'S HANDS,  
HE PUTS HIS PEACE IN  
OUR HEARTS.





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Morning Psalms 24; 150	<i>Worship Readings</i>
2 Sam. 7:18–29	Isa. 7:10–16
Gal. 3:1–14	Ps. 80:1–7, 17–19
Luke 1:57–66	Rom. 1:1–7
Evening Psalms 25; 110	Matt. 1:18–25

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### **A Gift of Divine Love**

*Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.* When I was a child, I thought like a child. I didn't know how this truth would become so consequential to how I live my life.

When I ponder the love that God has for me, I am awed and amazed. In His infinite wisdom, He reveals Himself to me through His love for me. He comforts and protects me with His love. He strengthens and builds me up through His love. He blesses me through His love. And amazingly He forgives me because of His love for me. He loves me because of who He is, not because of what I am or what I do. He loves me because He IS LOVE.

Our hymnal abounds with the story of God's love ... *the wonders of his love ... Love divine, all love excelling ... Love so amazing ... crown Him the Lord of love ... love that will not let me go ... standing on the promises of Christ the Lord, bound to Him eternally by loves strong cord.*

Seeking God's will, I find myself close to His heart and discover peace and joy laced with an undefinable love ... *a place of quiet rest near to the heart of God.*

This love is never more evident than in the gift of His son. He loves me so much He gave this gift knowing the suffering and pain that He would bear.

A gift I clearly do not deserve; a gift I will never be able to earn; a gift of grace...

### **A GIFT OF DIVINE LOVE**

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Morning Psalms 24; 150	<i>Worship Readings</i>
Amos 6:1–14	Isa. 11:1–10
2 Thess. 1:5–12	Ps. 72:1–7, 18–19
Luke 1:57–68	Rom. 15:4–13
Evening Psalms 25; 110	Matt. 3:1–12

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Psalm 72 is a blessing for the king-- the one who, in the Hebrew imagination, was chosen by God to carry out God's will for the nation.

The psalm charges the king to act with compassion and justice on behalf of those most vulnerable-- the poor, the needy and the oppressed-- and to be as generous as rain falling on fields.

Christians explore this text during Advent to celebrate Jesus Christ as fulfilling this blessing for the one King.

The psalm is an occasion to bless our leaders as well as their governments and citizens with courage and humility.

Taken from <https://www.psalmmersion.com/psalm-72>

When I think of peace, I think of loving relationships not burdened by fear, anxiety, pain or anger. I also think of clean air, rich soil and colorful gardens.

What are we doing as a church family to build peace in ourselves, our relationships, our country and our world? I will take this time of Advent to pray for our leaders and for those who do not know of Jesus the King and life everlasting. I will pray for courage and humility in all of decision-makers at the United Nations and in Washington D.C. Let's all pray for our leadership here at OVPC and for our work that has yet to be completed. Let it rain!

*If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.*

Mother Teresa (Nobel Peace Prize 1979)

Cindy Woodruff

***Monday, December 09, 2019***

Morning Psalms 122; 145  
Amos 7:1–9  
Rev. 1:1–8  
Matt. 22:23–33  
Evening Psalms 40; 67

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“See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people, Israel.  
I will never again pass them by!”

Amos 7: 8b

The Lord is gracious, and merciful, slow to anger and abounding  
in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and His compassion is  
over all that He has made.

Psalms 145: 8-9

Words of judgment; words of grace – all within the emotional  
range of our God, who passionately relates to us, and for us, in  
love. God confronts, corrects and consoles us, out of an  
abundance of loving forgiveness, again and again restraining the  
justice to which we rightly are subject. How wonderful is it, to  
know it’s not just us? *God* waits; *God* hopes! *God* endures our  
distance, our failures, our doubts and our fears.

We are meant to grow straight, and strong, and upward. We have  
all we need to do so. But we are vines; we are branches. We  
may grow in a thousand different directions in our search for  
light, and not one of them straight up!

How comforting to know the God we wait for, waits up for us,  
like a loving parent, deep in the night; pacing and praying for our  
safe return.

*Loving God, we thank you and praise you for your vast  
forgiveness of our vast stubbornness and shame. Love us all the  
way to wholeness, we pray, in your Beloved’s holy name.*

*Amen.*

Terry Dougherty  
18

Season  
of Love

*Let all that you do  
be done in Love*

1 Corinthians 16:14

*Saturday, December 21, 2019*

Morning Psalms 90; 149  
2 Sam. 7:1–17  
Titus 2:11–3:8a  
Luke 1:39–48a (48b–56)  
Evening Psalms 80; 72

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As we continue to celebrate this season of anticipation, we are reminded that many of the world's people have nothing to look forward to. Their daily lives are defined by constant suffering and hopelessness.

God weeps for the pain of His children. When He intervenes in the lives of suffering people, God does so through others, those who will “speak” God’s comfort to them through kindness, through assistance, bringing hope and change to the lives of the world’s suffering. We are the embodiment of God’s love *when we* change lives through our compassion and commitment, enabling others to have hope and to experience life in all its fullness.

God blesses us so that we may bless others in His name. He has given us gifts and talents that He expects us to use to help others. It’s really as simple and profound as that.

The blessed baby that is awaited grew up to teach: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your entire mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Mike & Jen Read



RELAX!

Take a few moments and grab your crayons and color!

## Happy or Content?

Bill Digleria

Since I was diagnosed with cancer about seven years ago, I have had time to reminisce, contemplate, and do all those things you're supposed to do when you've almost met your Maker. I've been confined to a nursing home since my cancer surgery, and I've learned some essential life lessons here. One conclusion I've come to is that there's a difference between being happy and being content.

During my earlier years, and in my former life, I spent lots of time seeking happiness. Here at the nursing home, it's contentment we're after.

When I first arrived, an aide took me on a tour around the place and we ended up in a room with a piano. I asked if I could play a tune or two and got the OK. I played for five minutes and then pushed my wheelchair away from the piano. Just then another aide arrived to ask me to wait a minute. Apparently, a resident down the hall had heard me play and wanted to hear more. She arrived moments later in her wheelchair, and I played a couple more piano pieces for her. I noticed that she was crying and realized that my music had touched her inner self. That scene has stuck with me throughout my time here. It definitely falls into the contentment category.

Another clarifying experience happened soon after that. I made a friend who couldn't hear or speak but who had the most beautiful smile you ever saw. I talked with the speech therapist and suggested we take my friend to the piano and try something. I had seen deaf people dancing before, and I knew they listened to the music by feeling the vibrations through the floor. So, we placed my friend's hands on the piano while I played. All of a sudden, her face beamed with the glow of the sun in summer. That moment was one of the most beautiful things that has ever happened to me.

*Friday, December 20, 2019 (cont)*



*“When  
you  
choose joy,  
you feel good.  
And when you  
feel good, you do good.  
And when you do good,  
it reminds others of what joy feels like.  
And it just might  
inspire them  
to do the same.”*

Eric and Ellen Neumann

*Friday, December 20, 2019*

Morning Psalms 102; 148

1 Sam. 2:1b–10

Titus 2:1–10

Luke 1:26–38

Evening Psalms 130; 16

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“My heart rejoices in the Lord! Oh, how the Lord has blessed me! Now I have an answer to my enemies, as I delight in your deliverance. No one is holy like the Lord! There is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.”

1 Samuel 2: 1b - 2

Last Christmas, we were given a Grateful Journal. We recorded our blessings throughout the year. Recently, we looked back through the past months and realized we were most grateful for the people in our lives.

This past year we both faced some health issues, but neither of us felt weighed down by these challenges. Instead, we felt buoyed up, lifted by the support and prayers of family and friends. The care we received was given by people, but it came from God. What better way to show the spirit and love of God than by bestowing it on someone else. We felt God's presence. With every visit, meal, card, call, thought and prayer; with every blessing showered upon us, we felt Christ's love. Love in action!

Advent is a time of waiting, anticipating and preparing. We do not wait idly. We wait with action. We wait for Christ to return and deliver love, peace and justice to our world. While we wait, we must actively seek love, peace and justice in Christ's name.

This Advent season we wish all of you Christ's joy....and may that joy be shared!

There's a lady on our floor whose husband comes every morning and brings her a rose from the garden at home that she had nurtured for decades. She and her husband came to listen to me play the piano one morning – playing daily is what I call 'my therapy'. After listening for about ten minutes one morning, she wheeled over to me. To my astonishment, she offered me the rose her husband had picked that morning. I tried hard to hide my grateful tears from her, but they flowed down.

Here's one of the most important lessons I've learned in the nursing home about sharing contentment: if you see someone in the hallway and you say 'Hi, how are you?' make sure you mean it! Skip the perfunctory greetings and rely on the sincere greetings that come from your heart. Give a little tap on the wheelchair with your warm hello. People will now when you are being genuine. And therein lies contentment.

From 'These Days'  
Jan, Feb, March 2019 Issue



*Tuesday, December 10, 2019*

Morning Psalms 33; 146  
Amos 7:10–17  
Rev. 1:9–16  
Matt. 22:34–46  
Evening Psalms 85; 94

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### Three Abrahamic Faiths

For more than fifty years, Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church (BHPC), our former church in Bethesda Maryland, has shared building space with the Bethesda Jewish Congregation. While there have been bumps in the road, the relationship between the congregations has grown through the years. About fifteen years ago, the two congregations undertook a joint capital campaign to, among other things, build Covenant Hall. Shaped in the Star of David, Covenant Hall is adjacent to the original church sanctuary and is used by both congregations for services and various events.

For many years, as part of its interfaith witness, BHPC has held a joint service and lunch with the Bethesda Jewish Congregation and a local mosque the Sunday before Thanksgiving. At this annual service, a Pastor, Rabbi and Imam share common and sometimes differing views on various themes from our sacred texts. Members of all three congregations attend and gain greater understanding of our common Abrahamic faith roots, and have conversation over a meal.

So Karen and I were delighted to hear that beginning this September, the House of Abraham (Maqaam-e-Ibrahim), a local mosque, began holding weekly Muslim prayers in Covenant Hall on a six month trial basis.

## THE SEASONS OF LIFE

There was a man who had four sons. He wanted his sons to learn to not judge things too quickly. So, he sent them each on a quest, in turn, to go and look at a pear tree that was a great distance away.

The first son went in the winter, the second in the spring, the third in summer, and the youngest son in the fall.

When they had all gone and come back, he called them together to describe what they had seen.

The first son said that the tree was ugly, bent, and twisted.

The second son said no – it was covered with green buds and full of promise.

The third son disagreed, he said it was laden with blossoms that smelled so sweet and looked so beautiful, it was the most graceful thing he had ever seen.

The last son disagreed with all of them; he said it was ripe and drooping with fruit, full of life and fulfilment.

The man then explained to his sons that they were all right, because they had each seen but one season in the tree's life.

He told them that you cannot judge a tree, or a person, by only one season, and that the essence of who they are – and the pleasure, joy, and love that come from that life – can only be measured at the end, when all the seasons are up.

If you give up when it's winter, you will miss the promise of your spring, the beauty of your summer, fulfilment of your fall.

Don't judge a life by one difficult season. Don't let the pain of one season destroy the joy of all the rest.

**Thursday, December 19, 2019**

Morning Psalms 18:1-20; 147:12;20  
Zeph. 3:14-20  
Titus 1:1-16  
Luke 1:1-25  
Evening Psalms 126; 62

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As I consider the scripture readings for today, the theme for the week – Joy, the date I have chosen, December 19, and the season of the church – Advent, I can't help but think of my paternal grandmother born on this date in 1903.

While my childhood, growing up an 'Air Force Brat' prevented me from always spending Christmas with my grandmother – whenever I visited was always JOYFUL – no matter what time of year. If it was Christmas it was extra special because she was a God-fearing and traditional woman. She was hard-working and frugal so it wasn't about gifts but the joy she gave to all who visited. She was loving, strong, committed, the rock of our family and her home demonstrated "A place for everything with everything in its place". She was a wonderful gardener, growing vegetables and fruits which at Christmas had been canned and lined shelves in her cellar. In the winter in Pennsylvania it was too cold to enjoy her flowers and bushes in the yard but instead we enjoyed the pots of colorful African violets lining the windowsills. Visiting her home was the definition of joy.

### **Prayer For Today**

O Lord, help us to walk in the footsteps of those who have gone before us to lead the way, clinging to their values.  
Amen.

Carole Rhoten

**Tuesday, December 10, 2019 (cont)**



BHPC Pastor David Gray wrote about this new relationship: "As BHPC seeks to be a source of healing in our world, we believe Christians, Jews and Muslims worshiping under the same roof in our area can be important witness to connection, collaboration, peacemaking and hope."

Love your neighbor as yourself  
- Matthew 22: 39

From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind  
- Psalm 33:13

Return evil with good and your enemy will become your  
friend  
- Quran 41.34

### **Prayer for the day:**

God of Love, give us strength and courage to love our neighbor. Amen.

Phil Hamilton



Morning Psalms 50; 147:1-11  
Amos 8:1-14  
Rev. 1:17-2:7  
Matt. 23:1-12  
Evening Psalms 53; 17

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### Follow God's Path

God expects his people to follow the paths He has taught them...honor Him, be thankful for His gifts, and show devotion to Him. In return, he will protect them from their adversaries and provide prosperity and peace.

He shows disdain for those who deny Him...selfish, devoid of love for others, no care for the needy. Instead, he directs us to a rich and fulfilling life loving and helping others, devoted to Him as we follow the paths, He has laid out for us.

Marine Lance Corporal Lyle Carpenter, in 2010 in Afghanistan, saved the life of a fellow Marine by diving onto a hand grenade which had been thrown at them. (Carpenter endured many extensive corrective surgeries.) When asked why he had done so, he replied he had been taught to protect his fellow Marines.

Each of us may never have to show our love for others in God's world in such a drastic manner, but we can live each day, loving and caring for His people, as God has taught us to do.

### Prayer For Today

Show me your ways, O Lord, and teach me  
your paths...for you are my God and Savior. Amen  
(Ps 25)

Carolyn Lees, Friend of OVPC

Much effort has gone in to growing Jesus' church during the past 2000 years. However, a new generation has grown up largely outside the church. Many do not know or share the church traditions or experiences that we have had and cherished throughout our lives.

I believe that God is calling us to move outside of our comfort zones and traditions, to reach out to others in a positive and caring way to share the good news of God's Word. By taking the initiative to reach out to others where they are, at a soccer game, Starbucks, the boardwalk, or family gatherings, we can provide a positive example to encourage others to desire a fuller relationship with God. Like the disciples, who were fearful of their ability to spread the church on their own following Jesus' ascension, with God's will, guidance, and blessings, and our sincere efforts, we can.

Jim Dugan – Stamford, CT & Ocean View, DE.



"What does  
*ministering*  
look like?  
... It looks like  
becoming part of  
someone's life and  
*caring*  
about him or her."

-Sister Jean B. Bingham



*Wednesday, December 18, 2019*

Morning Psalms 50; 147:1-11

Gen. 3:8-15

Rev. 12:1-10

John 3:16-21

Evening Psalms 53; 17

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These three passages form the primary foundation for my writing for today:

- “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

John 3:16

- “God looks down from heaven on humankind to see if there are any who are wise, who seek after God.”

Psalms 53:2

- “Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me; to those who go the right way I will show the salvation of God.”

Psalms 50:23

As we look at the Advent season today, and reflect on the gift that God brought to us in Jesus, I believe we are in a similar place as when Jesus’ ministry and church first began in Bethlehem and Nazareth.

Church membership in the U.S. was steady at approximately 70% throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the past 20 years, it has declined to 50%. Much of this is driven by young millennials, who have the lowest rate of church membership at 40%, as well as an increase in those with no religious affiliation at all.

I live in a vibrant area in Southern Connecticut, where there are many new apartments and a growing population, however a church in the midst of this area and dating back to 1635 recently closed, due to lack of attendance.

## *The Nativity*

A scene so peaceful in the night,  
The starry sky is soft and bright,  
A stream of light shines from a Star,  
To guide the Wise Men from afar.

A stable’s where the Christ Child lay,  
Asleep so precious on the hay.

Mary and Joseph are close by,  
With angels singing from on high.

The shepherds kneel down to adore  
The Babe Who comes to bless the poor.

A King has gold to give this day,  
A drummer boy, a song to play.

As God’s Own Son has come to earth,  
May we behold His wondrous birth!



**Thursday, December 12, 2019**

Morning Psalms 18:1-20; 147:12-20  
Amos 9:1-10  
Rev. 2:8-17  
Matt. 23:13-26  
Evening Psalms 126; 62

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God's Servant Leonard

The message to the Smyrna includes "I know your troubles; I know that you are poor – but really you are rich!" (Rev 2:9)

This is true of many people in Rwanda that I have had the honor to meet. I want to tell you about my friend Leonard.

The first time I met Leonard was in his clay wall, dirt floor home which had no electricity and he read the bible to us by flashlight. Leonard is poor in material goods but rich in love of family, friends, and especially God. Leonard's motto can be summed up in Psalm 62:5 "I depend on God alone: I put my hope in him."

About ten years ago Leonard lost his job at the church due to new regulations requiring education. At the age of 39 he had not ever attended school which was a problem for he was leading worship and this was now against the law. He decided the only answer was to become a pastor starting his education at grade one! Leonard began studying right along side of his seven children. Psalm 126:2 captures his feelings, "How we laughed, how we sang for joy! The Lord did great things for them". This has been a grand journey for all of them into learning. This year as always, we had several visits with Leonard. The most rewarding was a visit to his school where he is in his junior year of high school at the age of 49. He is excelling in his studies and believes "God will not let any harm come near us". (Amos 9:10) He has pledged to his fellow classmates that he will help them all complete their studies

**Tuesday, December 17, 2019**

Morning Psalms 33; 146  
Zech. 2:1-13  
Rev. 3:14-22  
Matt. 24:32-44  
Evening Psalms 85; 94

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"Sing joyfully to the Lord.....Sing to him a new song; play skillfully and shout for joy."

PSALM 33:1-3

The theme for the third week of Advent is Joy. When we feel joy, what does that mean – dancing, singing, happiness, laughter? What is it really? Webster's dictionary defines joy as "a very glad feeling; happiness; delight."

The Biblical Definition of Joy, however, is different according to author and minister S.D. Gordon. He says "Joy is distinctly a Christian word ... the reverse of happiness ... Only Jesus gives that joy." Matthew 5:11-12 and James 1:2-3 tell us to find joy in trials and suffering; this is only possible because joy comes from gladness in the Lord alone."

When Bev Bailey became the Choir Director for OVPC many years ago, she asked for volunteers to join the choir. For some reason unknown to me, I joined the choir. It must have been a God thing, because as I explained to Bev, I have no experience, cannot sing, carry a tune or even read music. All I can do is add a body to the group. Despite this, I wanted to help but even with my "don't think I can do much attitude", she welcomed me.

Thirteen years later I am still in the choir because I have found biblical JOY by being a member of the choir; by learning and loving Jesus through the words of every hymn or musical piece we present: by "Singing Joyfully to the Lord" and "Singing to him a new song."

Liz Hobler

Morning Psalms 122; 145  
Zech. 1:7–17  
Rev. 3:7–13  
Matt. 24:15–31  
Evening Psalms 40; 67

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It's been said, "there are two kinds of Christians in the world. There are gloomy Christians and there are joyful Christians". There is little doubt which kind we prefer. And why not? Joy is what our faith points to. Even Saint Paul, in a way the gloomiest of Christians, in the end, while in a Roman lockup wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4)

"Let the nations be glad and sing with Joy for you judge the people with equity"

Psalm 67:4

"Rejoice for the Lord watches all who fear him"

Psalm 145:20

Flora Beaver



and graduate together. This is an enormous task since many students drop out of school in Rwanda. Leonard starts each day leading bible study with his classmates. He counsels and tutors his fellow students. His head teacher reports that Leonard is an excellent role model and motivates the other students. "Make no mistake about it, responsibilities toward other human beings are the greatest blessings God can send us." (Dorothy Dix)

When speaking with Leonard he quietly talks about his privilege of helping his classmates and the blessings he receives in knowing them. He talked about the joy he feels in knowing he will finish high school next year and attend college to realize his dream of being a pastor. Leonard is an amazing human being and a friend that I cherish. His strong beliefs are a true testimonial to his faith in God and a wonderful example for us all!

"Now thank we all our God, with heart and hand and voices. Who wondrous things hath done in whom his world rejoices."

Catherine Winkworth

Sue Rizer

## *Friday, December 13, 2019*

Morning Psalms 102; 148  
Hag. 1:1–15  
Rev. 2:18–29  
Matt. 23:27–39  
Evening Psalms 130; 16

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This is the week of Peace in the Advent season. Naturally we think of Luke 2:14 –

“Glory to God in the highest, and on hearth peace among men....”

Many of our Advent prayers are for world peace, the end of wars. But our nation is divided by conflicting ideologies and so is our world. The prayer for peace may be sincere but peace among men will not happen in our lifetime. Our measure of time is not the same as God’s. Read Psalm 02: 25,27 –

“Of old thou didst lay the foundation of the earth, ... but thou art the same, and thy years have no end”.

In October a tornado hit Dallas causing much damage and destroying the little church Primera Iglesia Bautista Mexicana. Standing untouched in the rubble was the cross. Relying on his faith, pastor Sam Lara said “I guess God wants us to build it (the church) even bigger and better. We learned a lesson ... the church is more than a building. It is the people that comprise it.” It is this sense of Christian community that gives us peace.

In Psalm 16 David professes our confidence in God –

“Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust”

## *Sunday, December 15, 2019*

Morning Psalms 24; 150  
Amos 9:11–15  
2 Thess. 2:1–3, 13–17  
John 5:30–47  
Evening Psalms 25; 110

*Worship Readings*  
Zephaniah 3:14–20  
Isaiah 12:2–6  
Philippians 4:4–7  
Luke 3:7–18

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“Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.

This week our theme is Joy. Today is a day of joy to me and always will be. It is the Anniversary of my Father’s ordination in to the ministry of our Lord. We never had any big celebrations; it was a day of joy quietly observed with a Pot Roast dinner and all the trimmings and special dessert. I remember us sitting around the table, Dad telling us about his ordination in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. A day remembered with great joy.

In 1980 we finally had a celebration and special coffee hour to honor the 25<sup>th</sup> year of Dad’s ordination. He was given a small wrapped gift. Dad could not believe what he saw inside the box. Several years before, his ordination cross had been lost when the chain broke, and there in a little box in his hand was an ordination cross. With a great joy Dad declared, “You found my cross”. The act of such a loving gift being given to him was overwhelming. He then told the congregation, family and friends gathered, “I am so happy, you found my cross. Please let me just believe you **found** what was lost.”

Jesus was sent to us by God to find the lost. Jesus came to bring us great joy. Jesus came to give us a gift even better than a lost cross. Jesus came to give us life eternal. Rejoice in the Lord always; and again, I say with great joy, Rejoice! Amen

Cathy Yantz

*Season  
of joy*

We trust in the Lord to hear our prayers thanking him for our health and happiness, our friends and family and all the blessings showered upon us. We trust that when our days are ended we have the peace of mind knowing there will be a room for us in the House of the Lord.

So, maybe because of our faith and trust in the Lord we are able to pray for Peace on earth, good will to men.

Merry Christmas,

Lee Grace

*Make a joyful noise unto the Lord,  
all ye lands.  
Serve the Lord with gladness:  
come before His presence with singing.*



Morning Psalms 90; 149  
Hag. 2:1-9  
Rev. 3:1-6  
Matt. 24:1-14  
Evening Psalms 80; 72

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### PEACE AND QUIET

Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife.

Proverbs 17:1

Two words that are often used together, peace and quiet. How many times have I said, "I would just like some peace and quiet"?

We vacationed with friends at a beach where all the homes have names. Ours was a duplex, one side peace, the other side quiet. We stayed in "peace" which did, indeed, live up to its name with its beautiful ocean views. I'm sure quiet would have been nice also.

Here in Bethany I always look for quiet and peaceful places – my early morning walks on the beach, sunsets on the back deck, and our never-ending search for a quiet restaurant.

Our pastor shared a quote from Mother Teresa during a Sunday service in June. "We need to find God, and God cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature – trees, flowers, grass – grows in silence. We need silence to be able to touch souls."

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

2 Corinthians 13:11

### Prayer For Today

Dear Heavenly Father, at this busy time of year we pray for peace, and, if you can throw in a bit of quiet too, that would be great! Amen.

Carol Kester

