

# God With Us

*25 daily reflections for  
Advent & Christmas*





# Editor's Note

This advent series features themes from the book *Honest Advent* by Scott Erickson.

As we embark on this season of Advent, we wait with anticipation for the 25 days until we celebrate the birth of Christ. As Scott Erickson shared in this book, "Advent means 'coming' in Latin, and these weeks are meant to prepare our hearts, minds, and souls for the arrival of God-with-us, Jesus Christ, born to the virgin Mary a couple of millennia ago. You're supposed to feel the wait—the anticipated arrival of something you want so badly—and by feeling the wait deeply, you'll be even more satisfied by the celebration of the arrival on Christmas Day."

We invited 25 individuals from Mentor United Methodist Church to share a personal reflection (in art, poetry, or prose) around a selected theme and verse. We are so grateful for the incredible truths that they have shared. I hope you find meaning as you read through these each day this Advent season. We invite you to consider how God is speaking to you through this experience and add your own reflections at the end of the book.

*'May you experience grace embedded in your own hidden vulnerabilities..and may you let that symbiotic mystery fuel your Advent wonder.'* – Scott Erickson

Anna Cherian *and* Sally Carr



# Annunciation

*Gabriel appeared to her and said, 'Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!' Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. Luke 1:28-19*

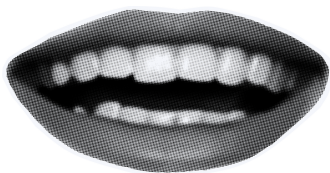
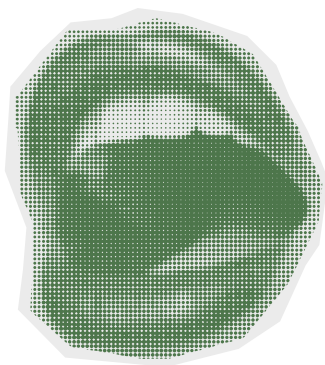
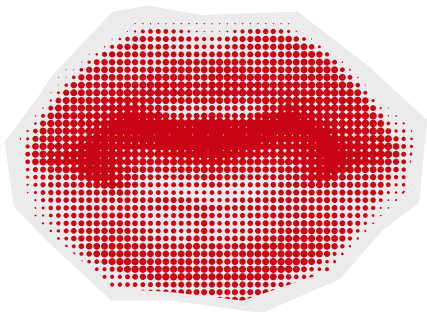
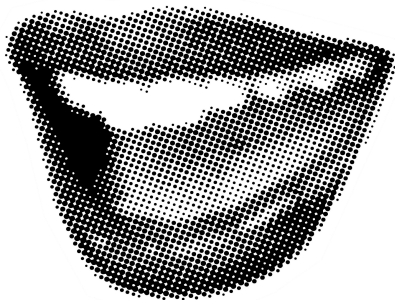
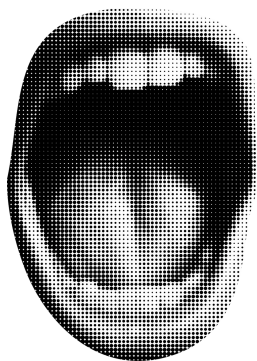
I've always had the bad habit of looking down at my feet when I walk. I'm not sure why, maybe a fear of tripping and falling. I've even caught myself rubbing out tension from my shoulders and neck when walking due to my constant downward posture. But this year, the incredible, once-in-a-lifetime events in the sky have caused me to look up! How blessed we have been to see, not only a solar eclipse in the path of totality, but also the Northern Lights descend this far south.

Perhaps this is how Mary felt when she first saw the angel and heard the unusual announcement. She may have had feelings of awe at the beauty and the wonder and the power of God, but perplexed about what it all means and how it came to be. She must have been overwhelmed with all that was happening. But Mary chose to look up and to ponder the important message God had for her.

So, I am working on my posture and the intentionality to look up, to ponder all the good things around me. This Advent season, I hope we can all look up and see all the beautiful things that are God's gift to us.

Wendy Rhoads





*an·nun·ci·ate*  
*/əˈnənsē,āt/*



# Light

*In the same way,  
let your light  
shine before  
others, that they  
may see your good  
deeds and glorify  
your Father in  
heaven.  
—Matthew 5:16*

## *Many of us...*

are familiar with "This Little Light of Mine" since we were kids. I remember my grandmother singing that song in the car with me. She used to say, "Let your light shine, Shannon!" I did not grow up particularly religious, though I attended church on holidays and Sunday school. My grandmother had a significant influence on my life growing up. When I was baptized in 2012 and joined the church, she was the one who encouraged me to do so. Though she passed into heaven in 2021, my faith was the light that guided my path through grief. Her life and legacy remain a bright light in my life. We all have a unique light from Christ that can only shine through us. For some, it is service in direct ministry, and for others, it can be caregiving or work in healthcare. What will you do today to shine your unique light for Christ? Do people see the light of Christ in you? The most vital witness we can make as Christians is being the light of Christ to others on Earth. It is our role to spread the light of Christ, and we will know ourselves by our love and light.

## *Shannon Aber*

*In Memory of the light that continues to shine,  
Mary Lou Corlett September 25, 1930– February 1, 2021*





*Mackalyn Figgins*



# Motherhood

All of my life, I wanted to be a mom. I felt it was my calling, something that I knew I would love and be good at. When I found out that this was going to happen, I was overjoyed! Couldn't believe my dream was coming true.

In the months leading up to my son's birth, all the preparation, planning, baby showers, never once did I feel unprepared. After all this is what I had dreamed of all my life, right? When he was born, I was in awe.

***'In pain you  
will bring  
forth  
children.'  
Genesis 3:16***

He was perfect. We came home from the hospital all happy and excited with family coming over to meet him. My dream had come true. I felt so blessed, so humbled, lucky and honored.

Early one morning, shortly after we had come home from the hospital, around 3:00 a.m, I was totally exhausted, staring at this tiny human, who was screaming, miserable, and out of control. There was nothing it seemed I could do to make him happy,

comfortable, and to stop crying. Reality had really set in. I cried thinking what have I done? This was for real, this was forever, and I realized how scared I was, how totally unprepared I felt was. I was afraid I would mess this up, afraid I would not be good at it and make a lot of mistakes. And, boy, I did make mistakes.

But as time went by, I slowly learned not to be afraid, especially of the things I thought I couldn't do for my children. I realized that the most important thing I could do, and still do, is to love, love openly and unconditionally. That is what mothering is.

Being a mom, in my opinion, is the most powerful, most all encompassing job on earth. I thank God for the gift of being a mom, and I know my children are a blessing from Him.

***Cyndie Byrum-Diemand***





# Vulnerability

Jesus came into the world as flesh and blood, born of a woman. As such, he took on the vulnerability of being human. As a young child, Herod had all the boys near Bethlehem killed to maintain his power; fearing for the life of Jesus, his family fled to Egypt. We can imagine Jesus' early life filled with the normal human concerns. Later as an adult, Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness with hunger, injury, and power; Jesus responded by quoting Scripture. Jesus' teachings about anger, offerings, lust, revenge, and money, among just a few, show his understanding of our temptations with specific charges for actions we should take. Those actions reflect the need for us to take the initiative as well as the means in bringing proper resolution. Additionally, his summary of the law focuses on our fundamental need for reconciliation and relationship with God and each other.

When Jesus revealed to his disciples that he would die and be resurrected, Peter rebuked him; Jesus' response is harsh, calling him "Satan" and may reflect the difficulty of anyone facing the stress of death. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus feels the full weight of his humanity as he faces his impending death, and he prays that the cup be taken away, but, in prayer, submits to the will of God. During the agony of the crucifixion, Scripture tells us that Jesus cried out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Often, we are told this was because he took on the sin of the world and was separated from God, but I prefer a different interpretation. The words also have the form of a Psalm, a lamentation, and were part of worship or, if you will, a rote prayer.

With this view, we see Jesus living his last moments in relationship with God and in providing all of us with an example of how we as humans, can live our lives to the end. Jesus took on human vulnerability to provide us not just spoken teachings, but a living example of how we can live. His example is our hope for the kingdom of heaven here on earth.

*Barry Martin*

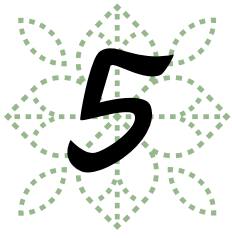
*For you created my innermost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body.*

*Psalm 139:13–16*





*Mackalyn Figgins*



*For to us a  
child is born, to  
us a son is  
given.  
Isaiah 9:6*

*Given*

As a physical chemist, I have an interest/curiosity about the universe. If we examine our increasing knowledge of the universe and the amazing discoveries and pictures from the Hubble and the J S Webb Space Telescopes, we realize that the more we learn, the less we understand about the universe and more discoveries lead to many more questions about what we have observed/learned.

This same process is unfolding with our understanding of physics, chemistry, and biology. Quantum theory and relativity theory are currently at odds; the one explaining atoms, molecules, and other particles on a small scale, while relativity theory involves gravity and space-time. Currently these theories lead to disagreement with each other, although explaining some things very well within their current applications. The problem is uniting these theories, since currently they lead to different outcomes. The Bible: 1 Corinthians 13 verse 12 which states that now we understand unclearly, then we will understand perfectly. All these topics about our world and our understanding of it are gifts from God. The more we learn about the universe, there are always more new discoveries to be explained. There must be a creator with a master plan for this universe. I do not believe everything evolved by chance.

God's greatest gift to humanity was a child, His Son Jesus who taught us how to live, and gives us an example of what God wants us to do; how to live with each other and with Him.

***1 Corinthians 13, Verse 12:***

*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*

*Richard Carpenter*





*Evelyn Leckonby*

*Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why the unease  
within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet  
praise him for the salvation of his presence.*  
*Psalm 42:5*

# 6 Unease

## *From the time...*

we are born, we all experience feelings of unease—from the taking of our first steps to the taking of our last breath and countless challenges in between. When I feel unsure or anxious about a situation, I believe it is God reminding me to look to him for wisdom and guidance. The unease is a signal to trust that God is with me in these moments. It is an invitation to hear direction from Him to move me forward with confidence in my decision-making and actions.

“What have I to dread, what have I to fear, leaning on the everlasting arms? I have blessed peace with the Lord so near, leaning on the everlasting arms.”

*Diane Paroubek*







# Alpha

*Be the first to be last, ...*

said my friend, in one of our many back and forth conversations about what it means to have life in Jesus. It's a phrase that has stuck with me for years, and I was reminded of it in reading today's scripture... "I am the Alpha and Omega."

Many often associate the triumphant Jesus depicted in Revelation as a mighty conquering warrior, finally getting the vindication he deserves at the end of time-sitting on his mighty steed with sword outstretched.

But the thing is Jesus is ALREADY vindicated. His resurrection vindicated him (Eph. 1:18-23)! And because of all this the Bible calls Jesus the Firstborn, the Beginning, the ALPHA.

It's important then to see clearly that Jesus did not 'achieve' this through power, through force, through the sword. But by being the Omega...the last.

He was the First to be Last.

The first to be the least, the despised, the broken, the poor, the needy, the washer of feet, the slave to all. The first to be the Lamb.

An equal if not more important image seen in Revelation is Jesus the Lamb (*Behold I saw one like a Lamb who had been slain standing on the throne...*).

Often I find myself so opposite of this idea. I want to be first! I want the best! (Too often at the expense of others' needs).

Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, because he is God who chose to be Last.

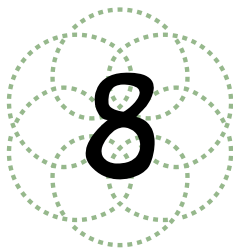
I pray that, by his grace, our lives can reflect this same power of humble love.

James  
Cherian

*'I am the Alpha and the Omega – the beginning and the end,' says the Lord God. 'I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come – the Almighty One.'*

*Revelation 1:8*





# Breath

Breath is life. When a baby is born, it is urgent that the child takes its first breath very quickly. Most people take breathing for granted which is understandable. When you are breathing well, it is easy to voice your ideas.

However if you are anxious or short of breath due to asthma or another disease, calmness helps. Try to think about your breathing, not the anxious situation. Tell yourself I am inhaling, filling my lungs with oxygen and fresh air. I am exhaling fear as well as anxiety. Let your breathing become like a prayer or meditation.

Exercise whether it is walking a little farther each day or as a child is learning to breathe while swimming can help you entire body. A singer or musician with a wind instrument improves as one learns how breathing deeper or differently helps. One must have faith and confidence that God will help improve your breathing and heal your lungs after disease.

Here's a favorite poem of mine from *Kripalu Yoga, A Guide to Practice On and Off the Mat* by Richard Faulds:

*I breathe in All that is –  
Awareness expanding  
To take everything in,  
As is my heart beats  
The world into being.*

*From the unnamed vastness  
Beneath the mind,  
I breathe my way to  
Wholeness and healing*

*Inhalation. Exhalation  
Each breath a 'yes'  
And a letting go,  
A journey, and  
a coming home*

*'I am the Alpha and the  
Omega – the beginning  
and the end,' says the  
Lord God. 'I am the one  
who is, who always was,  
and who is still to come –  
the Almighty One.'  
Revelation 1:8*

*Jane Krehel*

# Blackout Poetry

*I breathe*

*expanding*

*my heart*

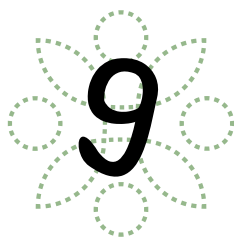
*I breathe my  
Wholeness*

*Each breath*

*letting go,*

*coming home*

*Kenna Tanner*



# 9

# Omega

We will be honest with you that Revelations is not a book that we go to regularly. If we are looking for a “pick me up” or inspiration, many other verses and books come to mind first. However, it is always auspicious how scripture finds us when we least expect it. You may see either of us tearing up when a specific hymn or worship song comes on the radio, pops up in our playlist, or is presented to worship God in a passionate worship service. The ones that always hit home more are those with a strong scriptural basis or one that was influential in our own faith journey.

One such song is “Revelation Song” written by Jennie Lee Riddle, and later performed by Kari Jobe, which is based and named for our verse today. In that song, lines like “Filled with wonder, awestruck wonder, at the mention of Your name” are example verses that remind us that we serve an awe inspiring, all knowing, and amazing Lord, who has ALWAYS been there and WILL still be there, eons after our time on this earth has passed. No matter what struggles we have, what misguided path we may be on that day, or what we are dealing with, we have ALWAYS been able to rest in an overwhelming sense of joy and peace in knowing that our Lord and Saviour is just that, the Alpha and the Omega, the Almighty! But as vast and incomprehensible as our God is, what is even more overwhelming at times is the fact that he loved and cared so much for us that he sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to put on flesh and dwell with us, to die for us, and to save us from sin and death.

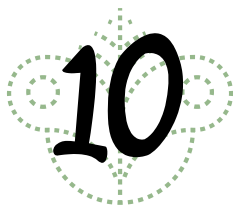
Kate *and* Brad Partee

*‘I am the Alpha and the Omega – the beginning and the end,’ says the Lord God. ‘I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come – the Almighty One.’ Revelation 1:8*





*Mackalyn Figgins*



# Virgin

*'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' Luke 1:34*

When I think of the Virgin Mary, I don't always think about how old she was when the angel appeared to her with the news of what was about to happen. I think about her willingness to say yes and her heart to do God's will. Advent and Christmas in 2014 will always be one that I remember. That was the year my daughter was thirteen...the same age we believe Mary was when she became the mother of Jesus. It was meaningful to me to consider Mary as a thirteen-year-old girl while being the mother of a thirteen-year-old girl.

I remember thinking about Mary's response to the angel and how wise she was for her tender age. I was awed to think how she acknowledged that she was the Lord's servant at her young age and agreed to what the angel told her.

Thinking of Eliana that year at thirteen, I remember thinking to myself what her response would have been. There would have been questions as to why she was chosen. I also imagine that thirteen year old angsty sigh that I would often hear from her. While I do realize that Mary lived in a different time and had a different way of life, it was still meaningful to me to reflect on Mary in relation to my daughter.

Mary was wise for her tender age and acknowledged that she was the Lord's servant and agreed to what the angel told her. Eliana may not have been as wise as Mary at thirteen, but she knew that she was special to God at that age. As a twenty-three year old young person, she still knows this truth about God. My prayer is that we can all have a servant's heart like Mary's and say yes when God calls us.

*Tammy Palermo*





# 11

# Assumptions

This passage, just before the more famous Magnificat or Mary's song, gives us a glimpse into the attitudes of those close to Mary. This passage shows Elizabeth as immediately putting herself aside when faced with Mary. Elizabeth wonders why she is favored and has the opportunity to meet with the mother of the savior and Redeemer. She does not feel that she is anyone important to be visited by the mother of the Lord.

The church can be a place with overwhelming options for becoming involved. With so many facets pertaining to worship and service, it is easy to struggle finding a niche within the church. Many times, we feel unworthy, untalented, or unskilled, like being involved in worship should be left to the 'professionals'. When I joined the church I was scared to contribute and was afraid to make a mistake. With the support of others at the church, I was able to utilize my talents to glorify God and feel satisfied in doing so. Even if I make a mistake, our higher power reminds us of the point of service. We can feel that we are the Elizabeth in Mary's story, uncertain of how we fit into God's plan. We assume that we will fail before we even try, but as Elizabeth became excited at hearing Mary, we should also be excited in our call to spread the word of Jesus. With the support of our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are consoled by a Christian family to guide us.

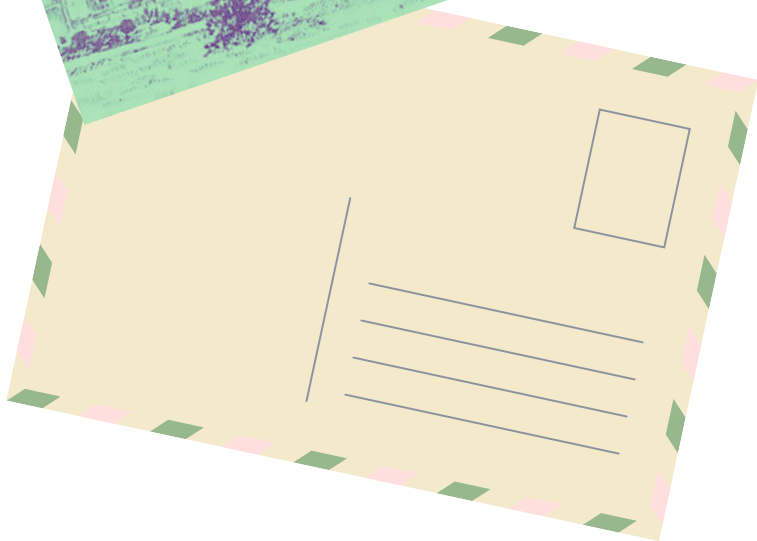
God finds us in the lull of the wave. God finds us peeking through the sunset. In the certainty of the uncertain, God comforts.

*Ben Chiappone*

*'But why am I so favored, that the  
mother of my Lord should come to me?'*

*Luke 1:43*

Greetings from  
Mentor





# Seen

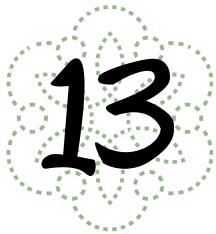
*He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. Isaiah 53:2*

For me God is seen in everything around me.  
Dusk comes to mind. So peaceful.  
It quiets the world, it quiets me.  
This is where I take time to listen to God.  
Peace and Serenity is given to me by His grace.

*Nancy Richards*



*Nancy Richards*



# Sacred

*‘My eyes have seen Your  
salvation, Which You have  
prepared in the presence of all  
peoples.’ Luke 2:30–31*

The origins of the word sacred derive from the Latin *sacrare*. The meaning further includes concepts such as which “consecrate, immortalize, set apart, and dedicate.” Growing up in a Roman Catholic family in a small town in rural New England the sense of the sacred was instilled in me at an early age by my family and the sisters at the parish Catholic school I attended.

First, was the sacred holy scriptures, the word of God, communicated at a minimum every Sunday (attendance mandatory unless you were extremely ill and faking not tolerated) by the parish priest high in the pulpit. Second, it was “enforced” daily, at least during the nine months school was in session, by the aforementioned sisters through daily catechism and religious instruction. There we learned of other applications of sacred, the holy sacraments: baptism, confession, holy communion, confirmation, marriage, ordination and extreme unction (last rites). And places. The church, especially the tabernacle. Crypts where saints were interred. Holy sites where Jesus was crucified and buried. Add to all that instruction several years as an altar boy (acolyte) anyone should get the picture that the respect for the sacred became part of the fabric of my life.

But as I grew older, but not necessarily wiser, my understanding of what is and what is not sacred expanded. Looking back at life experiences, such as standing at the foot of the Grand Tetons in the Wyoming wilderness illuminated by a million stars or holding my newborn granddaughter in my arms, now provides me a different perspective.



Sacred applies not only to concepts learned by rote but to all creation. For it readily follows that creator God, who had his hand in creation, and the word of God, which is sacred, then too is creation sacred. So, are the sacred things of my youth replaced by the sacred ideas of older years? No. They live side by side. Neither replaces nor exceeds the other. And what sacred means for me today may change tomorrow and will only move me closer to God. So, what is sacred to you? Is it a place? An idea? Or simply a feeling that you have inside of you? I believe as children of God we should have a sense of and constantly searching for the sacred that the our God has placed before us. For he is the creator and sustainer of all and there is nothing more sacred than that. Amen.

*Mike Fournier*





# 14

# Counselor

When I first saw the list of words for the Advent booklet, I immediately said, "Counselor! That's for me!". I have so many reasons why this word is important to me. Some of you know I was a psychologist in another life, so, obviously counselor and counseling were very important words in my education. The chance to be a counselor at camp and later at Lakeland was such a joy to be able to use my talents. More importantly, however, have been the counselors in my life: my parents, grandmother, my high school Latin teacher, my grad school advisor, my church 's pastors, all contributed to making me a better person (when I listened and followed their advice!). I also had professional counseling for many years and spiritual direction as well. But the greatest counselor of all was left to us after Jesus ascended into Heaven: the Advocate, the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit. Knowing that He lives within me is an inner strength I can call upon and do, every day. May He guide your paths through this Holiday Season!

*Sally Carr*

*It's obvious, of course, that he didn't go to all this trouble for angels. It was for people like us, children of Abraham. That's why he had to enter into every detail of human life. Then, when he came before God as high priest to get rid of the people's sins, he would have already experienced it all himself – all the pain, all the testing – and would be able to help where help was needed. Hebrews 2:16-18*





# 15

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! Philippians 2:5–8*

# Mighty

Jesus himself suffered to save us but also to help us.

When I think of might, I think of a superhero. Whether it's in the Marvel or DC universe, superheroes are there to help and save. God is the ultimate superhero. Instead of concentrating on one problem at a time, He is able to handle the prayers, requests, petition and yearnings of everyone, any hour, day or night.

The amazing thing is, his might has always been there from the creation of the world in Genesis to the New Testament, "Christ is the mighty power of God." 1 Corinthians 1:24. His might is in our hymnal, "A Mighty Fortress is our God", written in 1529 by Martin Luther. We can always find refuge with God. In 2006 the praise song, "Mighty to Save" was written. Our Savior can move mountains, He is mighty to save.

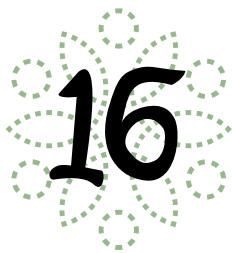
Personally, God has been there throughout all moments of my life. He helped me get a job in a crowded field when I graduated. He made sure I found an awesome life partner and then had 2 wonderful daughters. My husband and I were so blessed to be able to be full time RVers. When Harry became seriously ill in 2022, God made sure we were in a big city, Gulfport, Mississippi, with a wonderful hospital and doctors.

With the collective prayers of those at the campground (and their home churches from Washington State to Massachusetts) to the hospital Chaplain (who was from England, so we had overseas prayer as well). Harry did recover, "Our God is Mighty to Save." When Harry became ill again in 2023, God's strength & might helped us to choose to remove him from life support. What an amazing blessing to be his partner for almost 30 years.

22 years ago Harry and I gave my parents a print of Footsteps in the Sand, with the words and 2 sets of footsteps changing to one. Isn't that such a beautiful image of God's might and strength? He carries us during our struggles and toughest times but is beside us always. This page started with Hebrews, I will close with Hebrews 13:5 - "For he himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Might, indeed!

*Sara Weaver*





# Father

My dad was a quiet man. He wasn't ostentatious and didn't like to draw attention to himself. But we knew he was always there. He was always there for guidance and advice. He was there to cheer us up if we needed it. He was always there to support us in whatever we did, and to love us unconditionally. We could always count on him. But most of the time he was in the background of our daily lives.

I find, for me, that this is kind of how God is. Many times, I don't take the time to pay attention and speak with him. I'm always so busy, and too many times God is left in the background. But like my dad, he is always there waiting for us to ask him to take a more prominent role in our lives. He is there to support us, and he loves us unconditionally. We just need to remember to draw him forward into our daily lives and activities.

Like the hymn says, "Great is thy faithfulness, Oh God my father. Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide. Thou changeth not, thy compassions they fail not. As thou hast been thou forever shall be."

So, my prayer is this: Oh God our father, thank you for your presence in our lives. Not just when we cry out to you in need, but every day, in every aspect of our lives. You are there to guide us, support us, care for us and most importantly, to love us.

*Kay Feiten*

*In the beginning was the Word, and  
the Word was with God, and the Word  
was God. He was with God in the  
beginning. Through him all things  
were made; without him nothing was  
made that has been made.*

*John 1:1-3*





# Peace

*When King  
Herod heard  
this he was  
disturbed, and  
all Jerusalem  
with him.  
Matthew 2:3*

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

King Herod was a ruthless king and enraged at the news from the wisemen that a newborn baby is to be the king of the Jews and rightful heir to the throne. Herod was not the rightful heir to the throne and had many enemies. There was anything but Peace for Herod at the thought of being replaced, and thrown to the side. He thought he was wiser and stronger than anyone and certainly didn't want to lose control of the people and land.

We also like to have control of our lives and situations that we encounter, and feel like we have accomplished things on our own power. However, God is in control of our lives if we let him, and knowing that, why do we fear. He knows all about our struggles and we can always acknowledge his presence and ask for wisdom and peace. Only through Jesus can we know true Peace.

*John 14:27 (English Standard Version)*  
*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.*

Welcome the Prince of Peace into your life this Christmas.

*Cindy Green*





*Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit—The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations.*

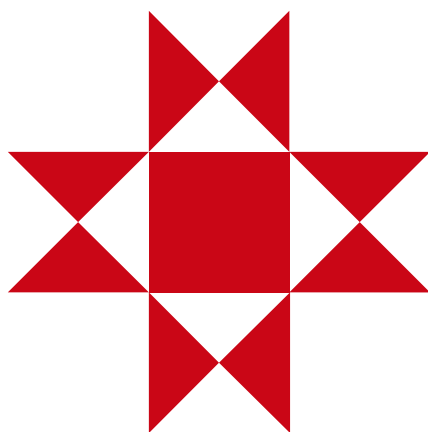
*Revelation 22:1-2*

Often in Advent we think about the birth of Christ and the infant stage of Jesus's life. God is present in our infant and childhood stages as well as God is *With* us throughout our whole lives. In addition to walking with us each day, He gives us the promise of eternal life. As referenced in Revelation 22:1, the water of life is a symbol of eternal life.

The New International Study Bible shares that Jesus used the same image of the water of life as a symbol of eternal life with the Samaritan woman (John 4:7-14). We get a picture of the fullness of life *With* God and the eternal blessings that come when we believe in him and allow him to satisfy our spiritual thirst.

*With* the forgiveness of sin through the blood of Jesus, we can now eat freely from the tree of life (Revelation 22:2) because sin does not control us or destroy us. The promise of eternal life is secure *With* God.

Bev Lee



# 19 Room

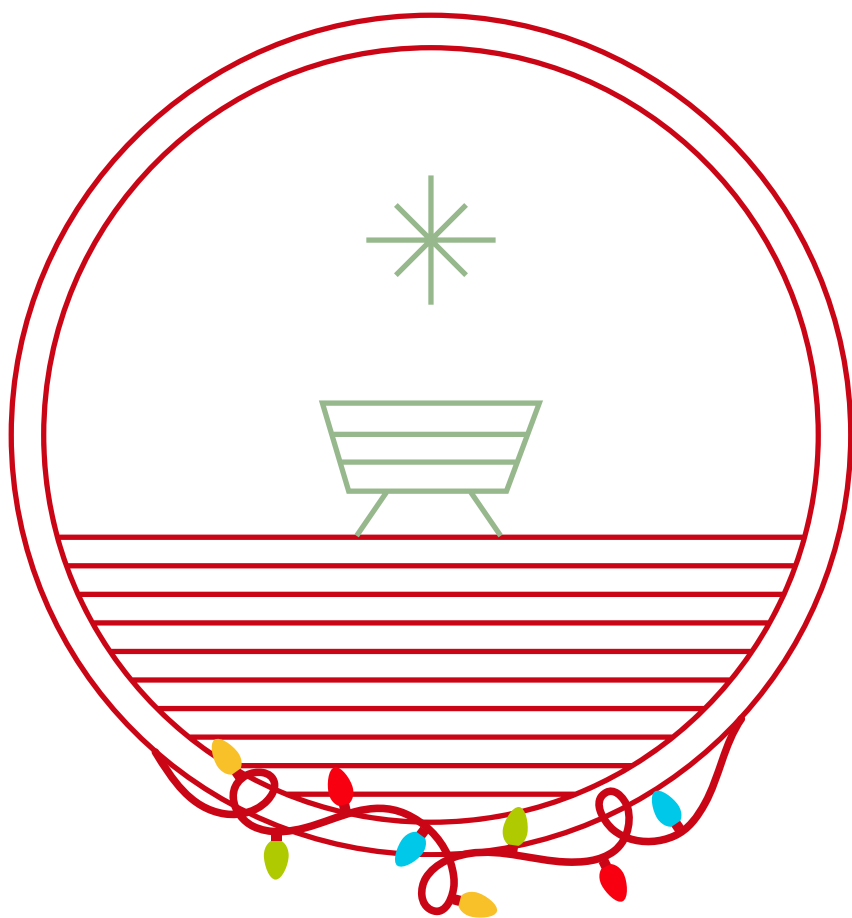
I've made a daily practice of spending quiet time most mornings in a spare upstairs room of our house where I do stretching & toning exercises for 30 to 45 minutes for my physical health. During this time, I also listen to various sermons for my spiritual health. I find it easier than reading the Bible and interesting to hear the different reflections on scripture passages. On busy days, I find that any amount of time set aside in a quiet room can make me feel closer to God. I find so much inner peace by starting my day in gratitude & prayer.

I've read that the disciples not only gathered in the Upper Room for the Last Supper, but also returned multiple times, including Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon them stronger than ever. Jesus taught love, forgiveness, prayer, and served by washing feet.

*Prayer:* Holy Spirit, help me expand those Christ like qualities to others outside the walls of our Church. Help me offer love, patience & grace to all; Serve others & show gratitude to those that serve; Offer prayer by stopping what I'm doing & spending a quiet moment in spontaneous prayer.

*Daley Moy*

*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. – Acts 2:1,4.*





Anna  
Cherian

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# Goop

Jesus, who was fully human and fully divine, was born like every other human in history: in the midst of amniotic fluid, blood, and vernix (the white waxy substance that covers a newborn baby). Added to that, the birth took place in a stable with animals. It was sticky and smelly. Nothing like the sanitized nativity scenes we arrange on our fireplace mantles. Where is the cow poop in the

stable? Where is the amniotic fluid, the blood, the white vernix that covers a newborn?

Imagine your hand, covered in something really sticky—like peanut butter or honey. Our first instinct is to lick it off (if it's edible) or scrub it off (if it's not). The thought of leaving that sticky something on my hand is enough to make me cringe. I worked as an adhesive scientist for a long time, so I had plenty of opportunities to make really sticky stuff, and sometimes it was not easy to get it off (that's the nature of a good adhesive like Super Glue!).

I often feel like I need my life to be put together, to be cleaned up and sanitized to come to God. And so often it is just a big sticky mess. I'm deep breathing to keep from crying as I feel my life falling apart all around me. Yet even though it's uncomfortable, that's where God's presence is found—in the kind word of a friend, the quick hug from a child, a beautiful sunset over the lake that takes my breath away. God's presence is real, and found even in the chaos and the sticky goopy mess.





# Breaking

Those we love don't go away,  
They walk beside us every day.  
Unseen, unheard, but always near,  
Still loved, still missed and very dear.

*Author Unknown*

*The virgin will conceive and  
give birth to a son, and will  
call him Immanuel.'*  
*Isaiah 7:14*

This memorial bench, dedicated to the memory of my husband, Roger Robinson, was a gift from a group of dear, caring friends. It is located on a knoll in the beautiful Wildwood Cultural Center & Park. The poem was included with a sympathy card I received after he passed away. The message is very comforting and offers a sense of peace. It still rings true to me every day, and that keeps me from breaking.

*Jan Robinson*





*Jan Robinson*



# 22 Unexpected

*'Be Still and Know that I Am God' Psalms 46:10*

One reality that I have experienced throughout my life is that no matter how I plan the upcoming day, week, month or year something unexpected will happen that upends the entire vision I had moving forward. Oftentimes it is something minor that I can adjust for, like going to the playground with my grandchildren, but then it starts to rain. Or I plan to leave at a specific time for a meeting and I can't find my car keys. These little unexpected roadblocks can be annoying and frustrating, but they are soon forgotten as I adjust and move forward.

Then there are major unexpected shocks that have thrown my life upside down. My wife, Laurie, was diagnosed this past November with Glioblastoma, a very aggressive, life threatening form of brain cancer. There is nothing expected and certainly nothing more life upending when you learn that the one you love most is threatened with a dangerous cancer. "Unexpected" is probably the tamest word I can label this experience with.

I've never had just one Scripture verse that has been my favorite. I have many that I would turn to in different situations, but not just one. That is, until hearing the unexpected news about Laurie. Shocking, scared, frightened, lost, and, and, and...

But then I focused on Psalms 46:10 - Be Still And Know That I Am God! It tells me that I am not in control but I need not try to be because He is! Be still and let him do His thing, born of love for me and for Laurie. I know who He is, I just need to be reminded and wow, has He done that.

The diagnosis was unexpected. And now, the many miracles since have been unexpected, a very welcome unexpected. Please God, continue to surprise me. You are God!!!

Without going into detail, Laurie is now part of an immunotherapy study that gives real hope that it can save her life. We don't know what God has in store for us, nor can we. I am being still and letting God do God!

Father in Heaven – You are God. Give me the patience to wait for your miracles and to listen for your guidance. Give me the strength to have total trust in You. Your love is boundless. I will be still. Amen

*Craig Eppler*



# 23 Attention

I think of attention as almost a luxury these days. With so many things vying for my consideration, the opportunity to focus on one person, activity, or goal is appreciated. At Christmastime my attention seems scattered. It's in the bustle of the season: the purchasing, the baking, the visiting, and the decorating. However, my favorite place to focus my attention is on the beautiful music of the season. Whether it is secular or religious, the first notes of a song can refocus my attention to the calm and happiness that is music.

Even more than listening to music, there is peace in the attention I give to performing music. Being part of the Canticle Bells particularly, requires a lot of concentration, whether during the holidays or not. To play my part, I must pay attention to the notes, the rhythm, and dynamics of the pieces we play. Are my bells in the correct positions? Have I prepared for what happens later in the song? If I'm not paying attention, I won't play the correct note at the correct time. And for the duration of a particular song, I am a part of a flow of notes from all the bell choir members that come together into a beautiful whole. There is no space in that performance to be thinking about what I need to make for dinner that night or whether I got all the laundry done. There is contentment in being part of a group that is attending to the same task.

May you find peace, love, and joy in the attention you direct to this Advent season.

*'Where is the newborn king  
of the Jews? We saw his star  
as it rose, and we have come  
to worship him.'*

*Matthew 2:2*

*Melanie Lytle*



# *Adoration of the Magi*

*Lorenzo Monaco, 1422.  
Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.*



# Need

*I have always...*

been close to my father and when we found out he had terminal cancer, he came to live with us for the last two years of his life. I will never forget him or the memories we shared. He passed away a few days before Christmas. When summer came and Father's Day was approaching, I was really missing him. A good friend at work noticed and the Friday before Father's Day, there was a beautiful outdoor plant on my desk from her with a note. The note was very kind and filled with love and compassion. All summer I would care for that plant and think of my dad and a very thoughtful friend.

Well, this friend moved to Mentor early spring of this year. Her dad passed last fall so I brought her a plant for her new home and gave it to her Father's Day weekend with a note telling her I was thinking of her this first Father's Day without her dad. I reminded her of how she had been so kind and thoughtful when my dad had passed.

*The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. Luke 2:40*

She sent me a note and included a quote from the author, Bridgette Nicole, "Certain people enter into our life at the perfect time, for the most beautiful reasons, and you know it was a gift from God." There have been so many times in my life that people have been there for me, even when I did not know I needed it. I know that is how God works through his people to supply our every need.

*Sandy Williams*





*‘Be not afraid;  
for behold, I  
bring you good  
tidings of great  
joy which shall  
be to all the  
people.’  
Luke 2:10*

I tend to be afraid of anything new—A new trip, a new computer device, a new challenge, a new responsibility, a first day of school. It has always been that way. Once I am pushed a bit (usually by my husband) I am okay, but anxiety usually pairs with the new adventure. Why is this? I suppose it is fear of the unknown. I don’t like to fail. I don’t like feeling stupid. I don’t like confrontation.

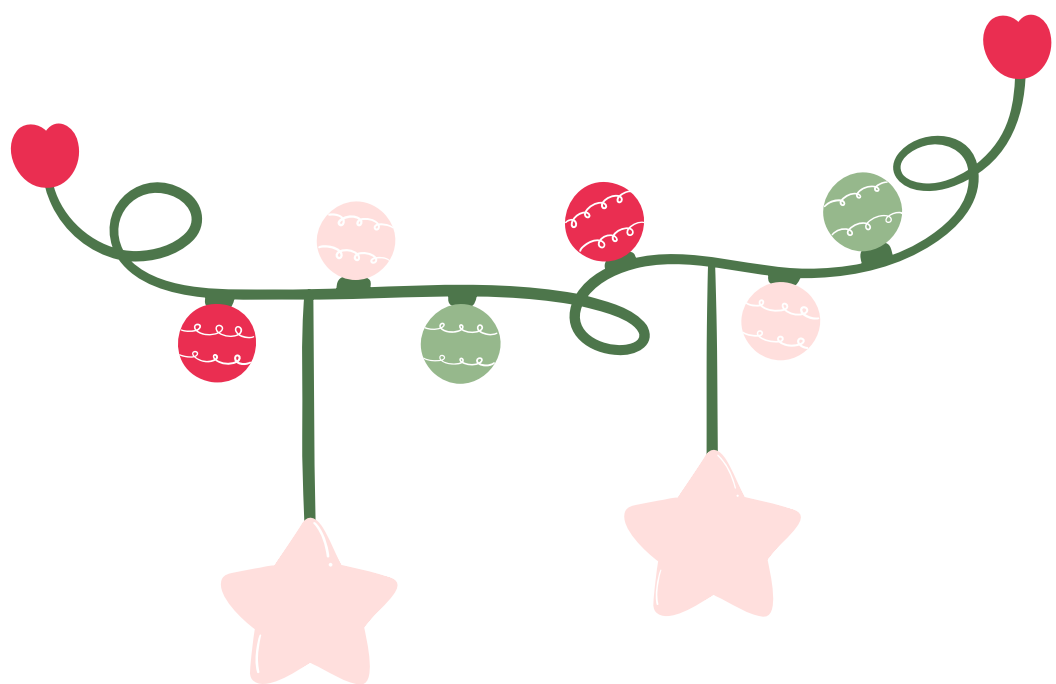
And yet, the angel said “Do not be afraid.” God gave his only Son to redeem and save all the chosen people, whether Jews or Gentiles. Am

I not a child of God? Have I not chosen to believe in him? Perhaps I need to concentrate more on the heavenly future and what I can do to share that future with others.

The joy that comes with the birth of Christ, needs to fill me each day— not just at Christmas time. I need to focus on the strength and talents that God has given me and cherish all that I have been blessed with (good and bad). Each sunrise is an OPPORTUNITY to learn and to grow, whether I make mistakes or not. Focus—Do not be afraid.

*Carol Ryan*







# Notes





# Notes





# Notes





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