

— ✦ — *Jefferson United
Methodist Church* — ✦ —



A COLLECTION OF
ADVENT READINGS

— ✦ — *Advent 1* — ✦ —



HOPE

✦ SUNDAY, DECEMBER 1

Psalm 25:1-10; Jeremiah 33:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36
Dewayne Burnette

I remember very well when I was a teenager, back in the 70's, my parents listing the rules, handing me phone numbers and reminding me to lock the door behind them as they left. They always gave me a warning as well, "Abide by the rules. We could be home early."

In Luke's account of Christ's teachings, Christ was telling us the same thing. He will return. It's a promise. It's a day we long for - Christ's second coming. The day we will see Christ face to face. Oh, what a glorious day that will be.

He will come back and we will be with him forever. He will come in the clouds, this time returning to earth with no human limitations. We have an open invitation to look forward to that day. There is no need for anyone to fear. God is with us. God is with all of us if we open ourselves to him. Oh, what a glorious day that will be.

Prayer:

O God, we look forward, with hope, to that day. Amen.

✦ MONDAY, DECEMBER 2

Psalm 90; Numbers 17:1-11; 2 Peter 3:1-18

Leigh Bradley

I love to decorate for holidays. But with that joy comes frustration - items broken in storage, lights that will not work, and Christmas trees that fall over. I remember the year that our first tree fell over, breaking the Bessie Clay collectable ornaments. The second tree died from being drilled into place too harshly. The third tree fell off the truck on the way home and was run over. But the fourth tree was beautiful and perfect that holy night of Christmas Eve.

We are far from perfect and experience this Advent season broken, fallen and burnt out. But the Christ who came to earth that holy night has made us righteous, to stand perfectly and beautifully at the right time.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank you for the love which came at Christmas to save us from all our frustrations and imperfections.

✦ TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3

Psalm 90; 2 Samuel 7:18-29; Revelation 22:12-16

John & Angela Francioni

Are you ready for Jesus' return? Revelation 22 verse 12 declares he's coming soon. He's bringing rewards to you based on your deeds. What are your deeds? He declares that He is the beginning and the ending – the Alpha and the Omega.

Blessed are those who live according to God's will. Those who remain faithful and obedient will have access to the tree of life and will be permitted into the gates of the city – Heaven.

In verse 15, He emphasizes those who practice sorcery, are sexually immoral, murderers, idol worshipers and all who love to live a lie shall be outside the city. He calls them dogs.

Jesus reiterates that He is the one who sent His angel to give these messages to the churches – us. He reminds us that He is the root and heir of David's throne.

Yes, Jesus is coming – are you ready?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ,

You are our bright morning star, and we ask that you come and deliver us from our fears and the darkness in our everyday lives

– Amen.

✦ WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 4

Psalm 90; Isaiah 1:24-31; Luke 11:29-32

Pat Rogers

One of my meditative practices in the Lenten season is to try to read the entire Psalter between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday. There are beautiful prayers from front to back, but Psalm 90 has always been a personal favorite. Moses's prayer puts the permanence of the Lord in sharp relief against the flashes-in-the-pan before we return to dust.

The verse that I meditate on from this prayer is the twelfth. "Teach us to number our days, so that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." In the context of the Psalm, Moses is praying for us to recognize that our time is limited so that we can spend it wisely. I tend to take an orthogonal reading to it; my working life is a parade of vague, complicated objectives and horizons littered with uncertainty. That certainly isn't unique! The lion's share of the job, then, is working together to turn that uncertainty into bite-sized and legible chunks of work that transmute uncertainty into the achievable. This bite-size planning is a micro-scale numbering of days that helps to quiet the anxiety surrounding the unknown unknowns waiting beyond the predictable future. That quiet is when I feel most able to apply my heart unto wisdom.

When I think of numbering my days, I know that there's a countable number of them until my last. I also know that there is a lot to do between today and that last day because I am a member of Christ's holy Church, and so I pray.

Dear God, as Moses prayed for us, Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. As we your Church count our days until the birth of your Son our Savior, help us to be your hands, your feet, and your voice on this Earth and help us to apply our hearts unto wisdom with the knowledge that through his birth, death, and resurrection we celebrate our eternal life. Amen.

✦ THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5

Malachi 3:5-12; Philippians 1:12-18a

Leigh Bradley

Some people love the Christmas season. I am not necessarily one of them. There are many reasons why the season can be difficult for some but for me the main unpleasant part is the commercialization of the season. Everyone knows we have for the most part lost the “true meaning of Christmas” in the commercials, shopping, spending, and social obligations. Music blares from the mall speakers as the ads tell us we haven’t bought enough.

However, I do love Advent season where we anticipate and celebrate the coming of our Savior. I try to remember that even with all the commercialization at least people are celebrating the birth of Jesus. Paul says “whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed.”

Prayer:

Lord I pray that no matter what we focus on this Christmas season that all people could experience the joy of the coming of our Savior. Amen.

✦ FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6

Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:13-18; Philippians 1:18b-26

Chelsea Kuyath

This is Zechariah's prophecy, also called "the Benedictus," which he shares after regaining his power of speech. God had promised him a son who would "prepare the coming of the Lord" (Luke 1:17), but Zechariah doubted Him, claiming he and his wife were too old to have children. Because of his doubt, Gabriel rendered him speechless until his son, John the Baptist, was born. Upon regaining his ability to speak, Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and shared this prophecy.

Haven't we all doubted because the truth seemed impossible? Sometimes waiting feels like being forgotten. Sometimes silence feels like punishment. And sometimes, there are consequences for acting or speaking outside of God's wishes. But in reality, waiting demonstrates faith. God always keeps His promises, and He always delivers on time. We just have to have faith! Whatever you're facing, remember that God will redeem us and save us from our enemies. He has done this by sending us Jesus, just as He promised.

Isn't God amazing? His love for us is incredible, and His plans are always better than anything we could come up with on our own. And what better time to remember God's great promises than the Christmas season? Jesus is among us, and that warrants celebrating!

✦ SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7

Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 4:1-6; Luke 9:1-6

Kristy Burnette

Luke 9:1-6 offers the story of Jesus sending out the disciples to practice ministry. He commissions these evangelists in training and sends them out on their own. Often when I read scripture, without really thinking, I put myself in the place of one or more of the characters. As I read this story of the 12 heading out, I can only imagine how they must have felt. Maybe they were afraid, unsure, or questioning their decision to follow Jesus. But my guess is they were also walking in hope - hope that Jesus was who he said he was; hope that this work they were doing would bring about healing and wholeness; hope that the Kingdom of God was real and growing.

The Advent season is a season of hopeful waiting. We are waiting for what we already know to be true - God's son will be born to Mary in Bethlehem. But we are also waiting in hope that Jesus the Christ will return someday just as he promised. He will bring with him the full reign of God, a reign of peace, joy and love. This is the hope in which we walk - this is the hope of Advent.

Prayer:

Gracious and loving God, help us to follow the disciples' example and carry the hope of God's kingdom into the world. Amen.

— ✦ — *Advent 2* — ✦ —



PEACE

✦ SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8

Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:1-4; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6

Kathy Collier

If you are a grandparent, you know that it is the best! My favorite thing is being Grandkat. Rhianna was our first, and it was love at first sight. That instant love has been repeated twice with grandsons Josiah and Liam.

A few months after Josiah was born, Rhianna, Josiah, and myself were cuddling together on the sofa. With some concern, six year old Rhianna asked, “Do you love me as much as you did before Josiah was born?” At that moment, I understood love better than I ever had. “Rhianna, I love you even more!”

Love is not finite. It is not something that you have to take away from one to give to another. Love is exponential, it multiplies upon itself. Love lives and grows. Think about your love for God. As you have seen him at work in your life has your love remained stationary? No. Love abounds when you recognize all the blessings that God has bestowed upon you. He has given these blessings, because he loves you. Share His love with your church and community during this Advent season and watch it multiply!

✦ MONDAY, DECEMBER 9

Psalm 126; Isaiah 40:1-11; Romans 8:22-25

Tommy Jones

Loneliness is an unpleasant state that can be magnified by the holiday season. I have been blessed to have an amazing family and to be with them over Christmas no matter how far apart we were at the time.

But sometimes you can feel lonely in a crowd- for a long while my siblings had spouses and families and I wondered if I would always be solo.

Some people are truly alone and very sad over the holidays. I have been blessed now with a family of my own, but I learned that our Lord is a Lord of comfort. He offers comfort to people who are alone and to people lonely in crowds.

Prayer:

Lord, bless those who feel alone with the comfort that only you can give. Amen.

✦ TUESDAY, DECEMBER 10

Psalm 126; Isaiah 19:18-25; 2 Peter 1:2-15

Toria Knox

Biblical themes that describe God as a nurturer have always strongly resonated with me. I grew up spending weeks of the summer at my Grassy-Creek-native Grandma Dot's house in Roanoke, Virginia. Grandma Dot's home garden has always exploded with flowers of every size, color, and texture imaginable. Her heart for the nurture of living things extends to all the critters that live in and around her home - even ones that most people would shun - and she fills her remaining free time and resources in service to people in need. This 88-year-old woman, who had such severe lung disease in her 20s, doctors told her she should not expect to live past her 50s, continues to maintain this fantastic display of pansies, cone flowers, roses, daisies, irises, zinnias, and dahlias (or "dallies" as her mother called them). She also continues to praise God in everything she does - through pain and loss, through illness, through struggles to breathe. Her suffering is turned into joy with the life that she nurtures from God's earth and all the lives that she touches in acts of service and proclamations of her faith.

Prayer:

Dear God,

We lift all our pain, tears, and suffering up to You: our Rock and our Redeemer. You make right all of our wrongs. You bring light where there was darkness. You bring life where there was none. Thank You for the wonder and beauty of Your creation. Continue to tend to our souls to bear Your holy fruits.

Amen.

✦ WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11

Psalm 126; Isaiah 35:3-7; Luke 7:18-30

Peggy Bailey

The word, peace, in Hebrew means a wholeness completeness and overall total well-being regardless of external circumstances. In Greek, the word is defined as a binding or joining together that which is broken, divided or separated.

My father was awaiting surgery. I kissed and hugged him and told him that I loved him. He still seemed uneasy until a kind nurse asked if he would like a prayer. You could see the stress and anxiety leave him immediately. He was at peace which only God could give him.

Prayer:

Thank you for Jesus who is the healer of broken spirits and hearts. No matter how many times we fail or doubt, you show us your everlasting mercy. Help us to be your instruments of peace in this world.

✦ THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12

Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 6:1-8; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Pat Rogers

When I lived near Greensboro, I was on the board of directors for a local nonprofit. The two fundamental questions I learned to meditate on in that role were:

1. Do I feel able to work toward a future where my role no longer needs to exist?
2. Am I able to work toward a mission both in and out of a spotlight?

Nonprofit organizations exist to fill in the gaps left between government services and businesses. There's a sort of negative ease that small organizations may find themselves in, where they can work to meet a need for the people in their community but don't have the energy or capacity or influence to address the root cause of the need.

Donations for these groups surge when their mission is tied to something exciting and bombastic in the news. Unfortunately, the root causes that drive the organization's mission are not often addressed in a news cycle, so the donations eventually ebb and the group returns to subsistence.

Amos prophesied to Israel during a time of economic prosperity and asked the well-off whether it was their intent to eat, drink, and be merry while "putting off the day of disaster." In Matthew 11:28, we are reminded that Jesus wants us to rest. When we find ourselves comfortable, we must ask how to apply that comfort and prosperity to the glory of God and not toward self-indulgent complacency. When a story rolls off the chyron at the bottom of the screen, the helpers confronting that issue don't stop working. Let us pray.

Prayer:

Dear God, we pray that we may find the rest of a soul at peace with you rather than dwell in the complacency of a comfort rooted in the concealment of suffering. We find security only in you, God, and when you make us prosper we pray that we can ease the burdens of those around us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

✦ FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13

Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 8:4-12; 2 Corinthians 9:1-15

Toria Knox

I was in my second year of family medicine residency training when an attending physician on faculty asked me a question that took me a year or more to answer: "How do you have the confidence to care for patients autonomously, and how do you teach others to have this same confidence?" Imposter syndrome is a secular term used often among young professionals stepping into a new role to describe "the subjective experience of perceived self-doubt in one's abilities and accomplishments compared with others, despite evidence to suggest the contrary." In medical school, the most frequent response to anxiety about the future from matching into a residency program to passing boards is "trust the process," which means: trust that you have been equipped with the tools you need to succeed in a career in medicine through the trials and toils of your medical education program.

Growing up in Christian community, this sentiment was second nature to me. The Bible is full of scriptures like Isaiah 12 to remind us to put our trust in God and His ways to accomplish His works in our lives. I have felt His hand guiding me through the decades of school, innumerable exams, interviews, and applications to become a physician. There were (and still are) plenty of times I've felt lost and scared, hopelessly unprepared along the way, but I've always had my faith in God's purpose for my life to pick me up and continue the work. I am so grateful for this body and mind given to me to achieve God's purpose in the world. I know that I am merely a conduit for God's healing love as a physician - the power of healing does not come from me. This knowledge exchanges the burden of accomplishing an exhausting and daunting solo mission with the more realistic responsibility of a woman physician following Christ: to partake in ongoing development of my physician skills and Christian character, to be shaped into the best version of my servant-self through God's ways. It's simply not about me - it's about God! I find this mindset to be helpful in all kinds of hard things put before me at all stages in my life, and I hope it helps you too.

Prayer:

Dear God,

Thank you for the gift of life and the gift of purpose in Your world. Help us to tap into Your strength to accomplish the tasks before us in Your name. Help us to keep our focus on You in times when we doubt ourselves. Amen.

✦ SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14

Isaiah 41:10; Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 9:8-15; Luke 1:57-66

Carol Seaman

Most of you who know me, know that I fell down a flight of 11 stairs in late June, resulting in a broken neck and a badly broken right leg. My recovery has taken me through 3 surgeries, 2 weeks of hospitalization, two 6-week courses of IV antibiotics, and numerous hours of physical and occupational therapy. I am still under treatment by a wound care clinic for a portion of the leg wound that refuses to heal.

One of the most surprising comments made to me during this time by a caregiver was “You must have been terrified while you were falling.” My immediate response was “No, I awoke on the basement floor giving thanks to God that I could think and could wiggle my toes and my fingers.” It never occurred to me to be terrified. God held me through the fall and fills me each day with his spirit of peace and joy and love. He makes that love palpable through the prayers, cards, visits, calls, rides, and gifts my family, friends, neighbors, and church family have showered me with. Thanks be to God for his blessings and gracious care!

Prayer:

Thank you Lord for this beautiful new day. Uphold me with your strength throughout this day and refresh me with your spirit that I may share your joy and peace and love with all whom you send my way. I love you Lord!

— ✦ — *Advent 3* — ✦ —



JOY

✦ SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15

Matthew 7:7-8; Isaiah 12:2-6; Zephaniah 3:14-20; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18
Dan Davis

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

Whenever I need an answer, how to find or do something that I don't know how to do or can't find, I go to God for help. It could be something as simple as finding my keys or as serious as making life decisions. I have found that when I get bullheaded and charge blindly ahead, I do it wrong. God will lead us to the right answer or action every time. It may not be on our timetable, but we need to accept His timing and be patient - the answer is coming.

✦ MONDAY, DECEMBER 16

Isaiah 11:1-9; Numbers 16:1-19; Hebrews 13:7-17

Mike Collier

It was nearing Christmas break my junior year at Wake Forest. I had wasted a year and a half of my college doing things I should not have been doing. I joined a social fraternity and it was a constant party. My grades were not good. A year before, while at home during Christmas, I had received a letter from the Dean of Students that if I did not bring up my grades, I would have to leave college.

As I began the Winter semester of my sophomore year it was time to rededicate my life to God and get down to the business of letting Him straighten out my life. I began studying and got serious about being a student. At the end of that semester, I had made the dean's list. My fraternity brothers called me a Jesus freak, but they couldn't argue that my grades had improved tremendously.

Now, as the Advent season had arrived again, I walked out onto one of the hills on campus late at night and came to one of my favorite spots to be alone and pray. There were three cedar trees on the top of this hill and it reminded me of Calvary. Deep in prayer, I felt the very presence of Jesus Himself beside me. Someone in the music department close by was playing a Christmas carol. I felt extremely close to my Savior at that moment. It's a feeling I want for everyone this Advent season.

“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:

And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord;” Isaiah 9:1-2

✦ TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17

Isaiah 11:1-9; Numbers 16:20-31; Acts 28:23-31

Kathy Collier

There are people things, and then there are God Things. People things can be great, I'll venture to say amazing. However, a God Thing is even more amazing, it is astonishing! You might even say it's a miracle.

Maybe you didn't identify it at the time of the occurrence, but I'll wager that you have been present for a God Thing. And when you realize what's happening, you know that you are in the presence of a God who clothes you in His love.

My husband, Mike, pastored for 41 years, so I've been to many church services, both the usual weekly and special occasions. God can do a God Thing at any time, and He did so at a Hanging of the Greens service at Jersey Baptist Church. Jersey was established in 1755, and the current sanctuary is around 180 years old, so it has seen its share of God Things. That particular Sunday night, the Chrismon Tree had been decorated prior to the service. Tradition dictated that a crown would adorn the top of the tree.

We were enjoying the pageantry of the service, when I heard expressions of surprise from the congregation. Then I saw the source of their surprise. Somehow, a small bird had made its way inside the sanctuary. It fluttered and swooped, we were mesmerized by the flight. Then that small bird did something astonishing, a God Thing. That tiny bird landed in the crown of Jesus the King. Psalm 150:6 reads, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord." If a bird gives praise to the King of Kings, surely we should, also.

✦ WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18

Isaiah 64:1-9; Isaiah 11:1-9; Micah 4:8-13; Luke 7:31-35

Kristy Burnette

I must confess, sometimes I don't wait well - especially when I'm waiting for something exciting like the birth of a new baby or the visit of a cherished friend or loved one. As a kid, waiting for Christmas was almost unbearable, so much so that on Christmas Eve the wait became longer because my sister and I couldn't sleep. But waiting is part of life - we spend lots of time standing in line **waiting**, sitting in waiting rooms **waiting**, held up in traffic **waiting**. It seems we are always waiting on something or someone. What's really interesting is that the church is in a continual state of waiting. As we enter the season of Advent, we are reminded that we live in the time between times - the time between Christ's first coming and his second and so we wait...

As we wait we do so knowing what God has already done. We wait with shocking hope of Christ's return. I say shocking, because sometimes events around us seem to point away from the truth of God's movement in the world. It's sometimes easy to get bogged down in our current circumstances and miss the big picture. Sometimes, it's easy to become complacent and stop looking for God altogether, losing sight of what is most important. This is why we need the season of Advent - to remember what God has done so that we might look with hope to what God can and will do. We remember that God did tear open the heavens and come down - some 2000 years ago God put on human flesh and entered the world to rescue us. We can trust that Christ will come again.

Prayer:

Holy God, we wait in faith that you Christ will return. Give us strength to wait well. Amen

✦ THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19

Psalm 80:1-7; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 10:10-18

The Jones Family

Visualize the nativity scene- the animals, the shepherds, the angel, the parents and the baby in the manger. The baby is Emmanuel, God with us. We take for granted someone being present among us. Our God crossed the Heavenly realm to take on flesh and blood and become human. Most religions are based on reaching up to worship a far away god; our God reached down to us to be one of us. The baby in the manger is a cosmic event that changes human history, God coming to be with us and to save us. God promises a new covenant and this he provides in the baby Jesus Christ. When you enjoy the beautiful nativity scenes, focus on the absolute miracle that is that baby.

Prayer:

Lord, God with us, thank you for Jesus.

✦ FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20

Psalm 80:1-7; Isaiah 42:10-18; Hebrews 10:32-39

Kathy Collier

The joy that shows on a child's face as they discover the gifts Santa left under the tree is contagious. You have to smile, too. However, there's nothing like being that child. I don't remember having asked Santa for anything in particular for my fourth Christmas, but somehow he knew exactly what to bring.

Beside the Christmas tree, sitting on an antique chair, was a beautiful doll. I'm not sure I even noticed the doll. It was the item that the doll held that caught my attention. A football! A fake pigskin, white with black stripes football! I loved it! You can probably figure out which parent picked out which gift.

As the neighborhood tomboy, that football was a favorite toy for many years. You could even say that I cherished it. However, it didn't compare to the Christmas gift that God sent to this world almost 2000 years before. Just a few years later, I would claim that gift, Jesus, as my own. He is my Savior, my best friend, and we have built a relationship together that I could never have with a football.

Some gifts are great, but they're only great for a while. The gift of Jesus to mankind is an eternal gift. Share Him with others during this Advent season.

✦ SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21

Psalm 80:1-7; Isaiah 66:7-11; Luke 13:31-35

Mike Collier

Kathy and I went to see *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* at Parkway Theater last night. I had never heard of it, something my kids and wife couldn't believe, but it was true. The Herdman kids were the rascals of the town and terrorized everyone, especially the other kids at school. The town was putting on a Christmas pageant that was a community tradition. This was to be the 75th anniversary of the pageant.

The director got hurt and the mom who took over promised the best pageant ever. The Herdman kids decided they wanted to be in the pageant because there would be goodies to eat afterwards. The oldest was Imogene and she was the biggest bully. She declared that she would be Mary. As the practices progressed, Imogene was transformed and on the night of the pageant she truly portrayed Mary and showed her love for the baby Jesus. It was the best Christmas pageant ever.

This season of Advent, may each of us allow God to transform our hearts by the memory of the Christmas story and the experience of allowing Jesus God's Son, to be born anew in our lives and the lives of our family and friends.

— ✦ — *Advent 4* — ✦ —



LOVE

✦ SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22

Luke 1:46b-55; Micah 5:2-5a; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45

Brent Livingood

“Through, With Jesus”

I grew up in a home where I was frequently asked if I were “stupid.” I tried to make good grades, but they were never good enough. Regardless of how many times and ways I tried to memorize my spelling words, I couldn’t do it. I realized in fifth grade nothing would be good enough. So, I gave up and was deemed hopeless. The shaming blended with a parental fatigue and resignation. From that moment forward I continued my streak of C minuses all the way to a college desperate for tuition money.

Now, one undergraduate degree and three master’s degrees later, I am doing to myself what was done to me. Nothing is good enough. Failing perfection triggers an internal berating that leaves external scars.

In my spiritual life, Jesus doesn’t help. He says, “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Thanks, Jesus. And if that weren’t enough, one of the most distinctive features of Methodism is John Wesley’s teaching of perfection. It can feel as though we are to lob offering after offering to God only to have our gifts and graces shooed away as insufficient. Nothing is good enough, right? Why try?

In Hebrews 10:1-10, the Preacher, as many commentators refer to the narrator, addresses just this sort of holy labyrinth. Year after year, worshippers at the temple bring their sacrifices and offerings. They are never good enough, which is obvious because they keep trying year after year. No sacrifice is sufficient. How can you satisfy a God who demands perfection with imperfection?

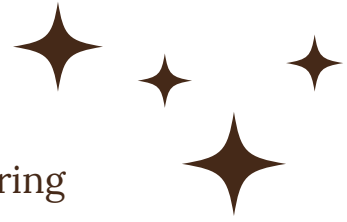
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“Through, With Jesus” continued

Enter Jesus. The perfect sacrifice. “We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all,” the Preacher says.

I get it. This sounds like the la-de-da of tracks offering salvation by abracadabra. Say these words and go to heaven. But I’m not so sure that’s what’s going on here.



We’ve been habituated to these words and words like them; we take their meaning for granted. But not so fast! What does it mean to be sanctified through Jesus? Notice what the Scripture doesn’t say. It doesn’t say *because* of Christ, as though salvation were an afternoon nap. It says *through* Christ.

After indefinite articles and adverbs, propositions are the least important words. I’m kinda a word snob that way. But in this instance, maybe the most important word in verse 10 is *through*. We are sanctified *through* Christ. What does it mean to go *through* Christ?

Advent is this time of preparation. Jesus is coming. Maybe it takes a lifelong commitment to finally know what it means to go *through* Christ, but Advent is that time of preparation where we ready ourselves to liturgically go *through* the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Perfection, this sort of spiritual perfection, is dynamic. It is never fully grasped or achieved. But in as much as sanctification goes *through* Jesus Christ, the way of perfection is a forfeiture of our identity and means of perfect union with God.

✦ MONDAY, DECEMBER 23

Psalm 113; Genesis 25:19-28; Colossians 1:15-20

Angela Livingood

I believe we each play the part of every Biblical character in our own life dramas. The Good Samaritan but also the Pharisee encountering the injured. David confronting our personal Goliaths only to boast of our successes. The flawed disciples doing our best yet not quite getting it right. Perhaps the most private, vulnerable roles we assume are as members of the least, the last, or the lost. In this season of anticipation for the arrival of our Servant Savior, let us honor those who represented Jesus in our times of need...lifting us up, hugging us tightly, and encouraging us to take one more step.

With Humble Grace –

A Hymn of Remembrance for All Who Quietly Serve

F. Richard Garland, 2008

With humble grace they served their Lord:

In quietness their God adored.

They welcomed all those who had need.

Their service was their loving deed.

Behind the scenes they worked
and shared to show the least that people cared.

With little things, done without praise,
their lives became a hymn of praise.

Come, Spirit, come with healing grace:
with righteousness redeem this place,
And comfort all who this day mourn.

In Christ the faithful are reborn.

With Hope and Love,
Angela Livingood

✦ TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24

Psalm 96:1-13; Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14, 15-20

Judy Davis

“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age while we wait for the blessed hope - the appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”

Jesus came to earth to bring salvation to humanity by dying on the cross for our sins, offering eternal life with God through faith. As we wait for His return, it is our purpose to bring glory to God by worshiping Him, living our lives as an offering to Him, and sharing the Gospel with those around us. While we live in an unsettled world, as His people we are called to be His hands and feet. It is a responsibility that we are entrusted with, and we are expected to obey.

✦ WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25

Psalm 98:1-9; Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-4, 5-12; John 1:1-14

Kristy Burnette

John's Christmas story is not like Matthew or Luke. There are no shepherds or stars, no manger or magi. John's Christmas story takes us all the way back to the beginning reminding us that Jesus was there all along. Then years and years later God chose to put on human flesh to come and live as one of us, with us. But why?

Jesus came so that we might have life. Jesus came so that he might shine a light into the darkness of our sin and self-centeredness. Jesus came so that we might know that we are beloved children of God.

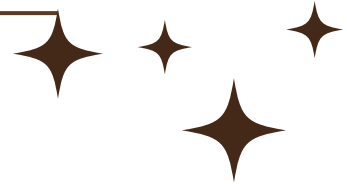
On this holy day, the day we celebrate the birth of the Christ child, may we all rest in the blessed assurance that we are loved beyond measure. And let us make a commitment to carry this love and grace that we have found into the world so that others might come to know God's grace for themselves.

Prayer:

Holy God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, may our lives shine the light of your love today and everyday. In the name of the one born in Bethlehem we pray. Amen.

✦ GRANDMA DOT'S SWEET POTATOES

Toria Knox



Ingredients (all measurements approximate):

4 or 5 Sweet Potatoes (med to large)

1/2 c. Brown Sugar

1/2 t. Orange Zest (either grated from orange peels or from a spice jar)

1/2 t. Orange extract flavoring

1 c. Mini Marshmallows

Directions:

Wash Sweet Potatoes and cut off tips and any bad spots.

Boil Sweet Potatoes until tender, then cool enough to peel and mash them in a large bowl.

Add Brown Sugar, Orange Zest, and Orange flavoring.

Once all ingredients are mixed with a smooth consistency, pour into a casserole dish (greased with cooking spray).

Bake (covered) at 350 degrees F for 1 hour.

Remove from oven, uncover, and add a single layer of mini marshmallows on top of sweet potatoes.

Return to oven and BROIL for just long enough for marshmallows to turn a nice brown color. (Watch constantly to avoid burning)