

# Middlesettlements UMC 2023 Advent Devotional

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*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

1 Corinthians 1:3–9

Cover Art:

*A Visit* by John August Swanson, 1995

# Introduction

The Church has its own calendar—its own way of organizing time around the stories of scripture. There are holy days (holi-days) and seasons, times of remembering and celebrating, days of feasting or fasting and repenting. Each of those days and seasons helps us tell the story of God, helping us love Him with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. These days and seasons of remembering God's story are called the Liturgical Year and it begins every year with the season of Advent. The word Advent means "coming" or "arrival"—and the season of Advent is a time of looking forward to the advent of Jesus. Advent invites us to remember how Jesus has come to us before—how as a baby "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"—and how Jesus will someday come again in glory.

While commemorating a season that celebrates God-with-us, we also remember that God is with us even now. Jesus has dwelt among us and the Spirit currently dwells in us, joining us to the Father and to one another. But even this presence is a foreshadowing, a taste, of what is to come. We await "the blessed hope" and "manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."

While we wait and hope, there is much to be done. We are to live in a certain way: the way of the people of God. We live in gratefulness, remembering our salvation as a gift from God. We remember that Christ has made us his own and that we are to live like him. It can sound a little boring at first, especially during the holiday-frenzy of December. But these are ways of life that not only help us be free, but also offer us hope, peace, joy, and love.

A few organizational notes about MUMC's 2023 Advent Devotional that you might find helpful as you begin:

- Daily entries have two parts: "daily prayer" and "devotion". Take time to read these each day, if possible, at around the same time. If you don't already have a daily Quiet Time, this can give you the "kick-start" you need to make it a regular practice. If finding time for prayer is hard, or feels boring, set a timer for 10-15 minutes each day. No matter what, you're done when the timer goes off and while it's going, nothing else gets to intrude.
- Each daily devotion features scripture, reflections from the people of God, and a prayer. I have loved reading these as I've edited – there is so much wisdom, humor, and honesty in these reflections! **Sunday** daily devotions focus on the scripture passage that will be used in Sunday School and in Sunday Worship! These devotions give you space to hear and respond to the reading for each day, as well as to write down anything you've learned in Sunday School or worship.
- Each "daily prayer" has space for adoration, confession & pardon, thanksgiving, supplication, and reflection. If you're new to these, a few notes:
  - **Adoration:** *This one will probably be the hardest at first, cause you'll be tempted to make it "thanksgiving" – but it's not! This is pure praise. What can you praise God for? What about Him is revealed to you as worthy of your praise that day? If you're looking for examples, the Psalms and many hymns or praise songs offer praise that goes beyond gratitude for His gifts. Here are some praises I've given in the past month (these are ...simple, but struck me as pretty awesome of God too):*

*“You are Creator of leaves & trees & changing colors”, “you designed the color red and cinnamon and clove”, “you worked to include tastebuds in my body”, “you made families and placed them together to live in love”, “you imagined fire and made it real”, “you are head of the church and all things are under you”, “you set things in order, with specific natures and rules and purpose”, and “you are good and your purposes are always good”.*

- **Confession & Pardon:** *You’ve probably confessed your sin before, but here it is: a daily confession of sin. This month, you might realize you’re confessing the same sin each day...or that you rarely acknowledge you’ve done wrong! But important to each daily confession is the acceptance of God’s forgiveness – as God’s people, repentance is followed by mercy. It might seem silly to follow the daily instructions of setting aside a (timed) minute to breathe God’s mercy in and out, but it’s a beautiful, life-changing practice. Try it!*
- **Thanksgiving:** *Daily thanksgivings are so, so good and so, so important. This month, try to find new, specific things to be thankful for – not the same three every day. I’m tempted to often just say “family, job, home”, but when I push myself, I’ve been so much more grateful because while these three are AMAZING, I am surrounded by things to be grateful for. Here’s some of the thanksgivings I’ve given in the past month: a date with my husband, the Christmas earrings I saw brought joy to my heart, lip bows, my children singing in church, the feel of my favorite mug, the color purple, the taste of Panang Curry, my parents’ relationship with my children, a happy text from a friend I was beginning to worry about, the book Ruthless Elimination of Hurry, and that there were ingredients in the cabinet for dinner when I forgot about making dinner.*
- **Intercession:** *This is the space to pray for your requests and for others! Every week we send out prayer requests – take time to pray for the people in our church and community, as well as for yourself and your family.*
- **Reflection:** *In your “daily devotion”, you’ve read the word of God and read/heard a reflection on it. Take time to respond!*
- Every Thursday has a “throwback” entry. Enjoy reading the wisdom of some of the MUMC Saints who have now joined the Church Triumphant as well as an older reflection from the BibleProject, whose book overview videos we’ve been using at Wednesday Night Bible Study.
- Woven throughout are ways for you to observe the season at home. This may be new to you—but surrounding your home, ways, and even meals with discipleship can only be a good thing!

Many thanks to all who contributed, edited, produced, and distributed! As always, I’m grateful for this devotion that encourages me in my personal prayer time, challenges me in my discipleship journey, and binds me together with my church family. May this Advent & Christmas be a blessing to you, teaching you to follow and desire Jesus in every corner of your life and home.

God bless you!  
Pastor Magan



# Living Liturgically: Meal Blessings<sup>1</sup> & Advent Wreath

✠ Preparing Your Heart in Advent ✠

## Meal Blessing: Week 1

O Lord, Our God, help us to prepare for the coming of Christ, your Son. When he comes, may he find us eagerly awaiting him. Send your blessing upon this table and all those who share in this meal. This we ask through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## Meal Blessing: Week 2

Praise be to you, God of salvation, for you have sent the prophets to prepare the way for Christ. Open our hearts to the joy of Christ's coming, and may this meal be eaten in anticipation of the heavenly banquet as we await with hope the blessed coming of our Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

## Meal Blessing: Week 3

Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of David, and radiant star of morning, come and dispel the darkness of our night. Look with mercy upon us who await your coming. Give us our daily bread and grant us the grace to share in the eternal banquet of your kingdom. Amen.

## Meal Blessing: Week 4

**Be glad and rejoice, O Bethlehem, for from you the Lord shall shine forth as the dawn.**

Blessed be you, Lord Jesus Christ, you see the need we have of your saving help. You come to visit us to heal all our wounds. Grant your blessings on this food prepared for our nourishment, and may we find consolation in your coming visitation. Amen.

## The Advent Wreath

*During the time of year when we experience the darkest days of the year, the Church lights candles to remember and take comfort in the Light that is coming to bring light to the entire world. The wreath gets brighter and brighter each week as we anticipate Jesus, the Light of the world, who has come and will come again.*

*Our Sunday morning Advent Wreath readings and prayers also be used at home or feel free to use the verses listed below. If you don't have your own wreath, it's simple to "make do" by putting out 5 candles of any size, color, or kind in a row or circle (like a wreath). If you're feeling dedicated, you can keep to tradition: 3 purple candles, symbolizing the royalty of the coming Messiah. The "rose" candle, lit on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday, represents the joy we feel as Christmas draws near. And a 5<sup>th</sup> candle, the white Christ Candle, is lit on Christmas to represent Jesus. Set up your Advent wreath in a central location, like the dinner table or the coffee table. Light candles while gathered for meals or your devotions.*

## Advent Candle Lighting

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; the one who follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life."

**We light this candle as a sign of the coming light of Christ.**

Week One Reading: Isaiah 40:3-5

Week Two Reading: Isaiah 9:1-2, 6-7

Week Three Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16

Week Four Reading: Psalm 98

## Response

Come, Lord Jesus, our light and our salvation.

**Let us walk in the light of the Lord.**

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## Christ Candle Lighting (from John 1:1-14 & Isaiah 60:1)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him.

In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

**The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.**

Arise, shine; for your light has come!

**Let us walk in the light of the Lord.**

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the Advent Blessings in *Blessings of the Table: Mealtime Prayers Throughout the Year* by Brother Victor-Antoine d'Avile-Latourrette.

# Daily Prayer

## Adoration & Praise

"Praise God for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord."  
*Psalm 150:2, 6*

## Confession & Pardon

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."  
*1 John 1:9*

## Specific Thanksgivings

"I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart;  
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds."  
*Psalm 9:1*

1.

2.

3.

Take a minute to pause and accept God's mercy and love. It is always offered you, but it's easy to forget. For the next minute (set a timer!):

- Close your eyes
- With every breath in, imagine accepting God's gift of mercy and/or love
- With every breath out, imagine his mercy and love covering your life and relationships

## Supplication & Petition

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."  
*Philippians 4:6*

Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion

# December 3

Begin by praying for wisdom and acceptance for reading God's word.

Read today's scripture for MUMC: *Luke 1:5-23*

Spend a minute or two in silence, turning over these verses with an awareness that these are verses God has gone out of his way to share with his people.

Write the passage out in your own words:

What is the passage about? What is your favorite part? If you had to pick, which words speak to you the most?

Was anything difficult to hear/accept/understand? What questions do you have?

How can you apply or respond to these verses? How might God be inviting you to live differently?

Sunday School & Sermon Notes for *Luke 1:5-23*

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# December 4

Jason & Staci Martin

**Read** Psalm 46:10

*Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the Earth.*

Stillness is the furthest thing from our existence. Stillness is not what we have experienced this year. God has sent many opportunities our way, many we did not anticipate and at the time, we didn't think about the good that could come from these experiences. We both had major surgery this past year and had to be caretakers for each other during that recovery. Staci had neck surgery and was out of work for 7 months; however, this allowed her to spend almost 5 months with her mama before she passed away. Time she would not have had if God had not sent that stillness.

This past year, we also got married, decided to pursue major career changes, both completed a year as football officials (Staci year 1 and Jason year 33), and have both started graduate school (something we both said we wouldn't do again). Living life is challenging, rewarding, and at times exhausting. Like most families, living our lives and being still just do not coexist routinely.

God gives us this scripture to give us hope and peace. No matter the circumstances – good or bad, our choosing or not – God is always in control. Now Jason may take this a little too far to justify his sleeping in church (according to Jason, not everyone's conscience is clear enough to do this), but taking time to be still allows us time to be thankful for what we have and remember that even trials are a part of God's plan. Being still isn't always easy or convenient, but we need that time to ask for guidance and give thanks and to know that no matter what is happening, God is our refuge and strength).

During the busy time of the holidays, take time to be still, to pause and reflect, to be thankful, to seek guidance, and to remember that in times of trial, we are not alone. He's got the whole world in His hands. Enjoy Him. Share Him. Prepare for Him.

**Prayer:** *God of all hope and joy, open our hearts in welcome, that your Son, Jesus Christ, at his coming may find in us a dwelling prepared for him, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Prayer of Invocation 11, *The Worship Sourcebook*

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## *Attitude of Gratitude*

**Read** Psalm 95:2

*Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving, let us make a joyful noise to Him with songs of praise.*

Advent is a season of reflection, preparation, and joyful expectations, readying our hearts and homes for the coming of God's indescribable gift. One way I've found to prepare myself is loving God through an attitude of gratitude – simply living a lifestyle of thankfulness. The very act of expressing gratitude recognizes God's hand in our lives and acknowledges His tender mercies to us. Praise is giving glory to God for who He is. Thanksgiving is giving glory to God for what He has done for us. Gratitude, or an act of thanksgiving, may seem insignificant. However, I've read that it is the purest form of worship of God. I can't help but think of music when I think of worshipping and worship songs speak truth in their lyrics. One song that is especially meaningful for me this year has been "Gratitude" by Brandon Lake. I'll share the lyrics:

All of my words fall short  
I've got nothing new  
How could I express  
All my gratitude?

I could sing these songs  
As I often do  
But every song must end  
And You never do

So I throw up my hands  
And praise You again and again  
'Cause all that I have is a hallelujah  
Hallelujah

And I know it's not much  
But I've got nothing else fit for a King  
Except for a heart singing hallelujah  
Hallelujah

I've got one response  
I've got just one more  
With my arms stretched wide  
I will worship You...

**Pray:** Gracious and generous God, the best gift of all is your son Jesus, given out of your great love. Through your Son, we are welcomed into your family and precious in your sight. Help us to celebrate this Advent season with great joy and thankfulness! In Jesus' holy name I pray, Amen.

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## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion



## Traditions

**Read** Matthew 2:1-2, 9-11 KJV

*Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When they heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.*

There is no greater season to honor the memories and traditions that have been ingrained into our lives than Christmas. I have been fortunate to have grandparents and parents who propagated old traditions and created new ones for us to follow. It is a way to honor and remember the people that have meant so much to us and to pass it down to the future generations to come. As I share some of my traditions with the readership, I hope it brings warm memories of traditions that you hold dear.

Dad would take us all out to a neighbor's farm to cut the Christmas tree. Each would holler out when we found a worthy specimen. I don't think any of my choices ever made the grade, but that didn't matter. It was a joyous occasion.

Mom and the kids would decorate the tree. As we got older, Mom turned the decorating over to us. June inherited from Mom the habit of making us put on icicles one at a time and not throw a handful all at once. One special tradition – we never had a star at the top of the tree. Instead, we had a picture of Jesus Christ. Brother Stan was given this and he still puts it at the top of his tree today.

We went to Grandmother "Shenie Maw" Costner on Christmas Eve and to the Loves side on Christmas day at different venues from year to year, depending upon who was brave enough to host the mob.

As family dynamics changed, we ended up at Mom's house on Christmas Eve. We recited the Christmas story from the Book of Luke from memory as far as we could go. Our kids recited their parts or songs they had learned for either their school or church Christmas programs. We turned down the lights and sang "Silent Night".

*Continued*

We opened gifts from Santa and each other on Christmas morning. Gift giving is a tradition that began when God gave his Son to earth to cleanse our sins. Christmas gifts are a tradition that is marked by the gifts of the Magi to the Christ child as illustrated in the Scripture above.

There are countless other traditions we enjoyed. My Christmas wish for those reading this devotional is that you instill the traditions you have acquired to others in your family and friends.

***Pray:** Eternal God, through long generations you prepared a way for the coming of your Son, and by your Spirit you still bring light to illumine our paths. Renew us in faith and hope that we may welcome Christ to rule our thoughts and claim our love, as Lord of lords and King of kings, to whom be glory always. Amen.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> *Prayer for the Day 2, First Sunday in Advent, Book of Common Worship (1993)*

## Feasting & Festivities in honor of Jolly Old St. Nick

December 6 marks the church holiday of the Feast of Saint Nicholas, a Bishop in the early church who became legendary for his generosity. When he died in 345 AD, his generous ways had inspired others and presents continued to appear in celebration of Jesus' birth. There are fun traditions for celebrating St. Nick's day all over the world! Below are some ideas for you to do in your home:



### Read St. Nick's Story

*There was once a little boy whose mother and father died when he was only a child. He had great faith and great love for God and he took very seriously Jesus' words to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor." He wanted to give a present to Jesus, so when he was old enough to receive his inheritance, he gave it all to "the least of these" and helped the poor, the sick, and the suffering.*

*Nicholas became a priest, and eventually a Bishop, in a country we now call Turkey. He did not have an easy life: he was persecuted, exiled, and imprisoned for his faith. When he was released, he went to the Council of Nicea in 325 AD and was among the orthodox bishops who defended the divinity of Jesus against the Arian heresy. Stories say that Nicholas, unable to bear the blasphemy of those who spoke against Jesus' divinity, walked up the leader of the heretics and punched him in the nose (a fun story to think of every time you recite the Nicene Creed, which was the result of the council).*

*Of all the stories about Nicholas, he became most known for his generosity and love for the helpless. Shy, but loving to bless other people, Nicolas would try to work in secret so that no one would know. One story tells of St. Nicholas helping a family by tossing gold coins in through an open window. Another tells of him saving innocent soldiers from execution. Still another story tells of him saving children from a murderer (...who liked to murder by pickling).*

*The stories that we might know best about Nicholas are the stories of how he gave gifts to the needy on Christmas Eve to celebrate the birthday of Jesus. He did this in secret too. Sometimes the gifts were dropped in through an open window. Sometimes they were left by the door. Sometimes they came down the chimney. Nicholas would tiptoe away in the night, leaving the delight of the gift to be enjoyed in the morning. Of course, eventually, word got out and St. Nicholas became known as a gift-giver.*

*When Nicholas died, something amazing happened. The gifts that people had found in their homes on Christmas Day continued to appear. His generosity had inspired others to be generous too.*

*One day the Emperor of Russia heard the story of St. Nicholas. He decided to make Nicholas the patron saint of Russia. Far in the north of Russia, where there was nothing but snow, gifts continued to appear. The story traveled west to Finland, and Sweden, and Norway, and Holland. When Dutch people came to this country, they brought the story with them. Presents began to appear in celebration of Jesus' birth here too, and they still do to this day.*

*This all began with the gifts of Bishop Nicholas for the children of his town, given because he loved Jesus so much. We remember Nicholas because he gave gifts for God.*

### Pray

*God of joy and cheer, we thank you for your servant, St. Nick. May we, like him, defend the faith and bless the needy. Make us thoughtful without need of reward so that we, too, may be good followers of Jesus. Amen.*

### Celebrate

*On the night of December 5, stockings and shoes are set by the fireplace for St. Nicholas to fill with treats like a bag of gold chocolate coins (like the gold he tossed through the window), a candy cane (which are associated with St. Nicholas' Bishop's staff), and money for the kids to give away to someone in need. If you're looking for something simpler, consider celebrating the day by reciting the Nicene Creed, giving secret gifts/blessings to others, and eating at least one candy cane.*

# Daily Prayer

## Adoration & Praise

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Psalm 150:2, 6*

## Confession & Pardon

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."  
1 John 1:9*

## Specific Thanksgivings

*"I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart;  
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## Supplication & Petition

*"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."  
Philippians 4:6*

Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion



# December 7

from 2017's "The Birth of Jesus"  
The BibleProject Team<sup>1</sup>

**Read** Luke 1:68–75

*Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*

For centuries, dating all the way back to Genesis 3, the scriptures would point to a Savior who would deliver the world from the bondage of sin and establish God's kingdom on earth. You can imagine then, when this Messiah finally came in the form of a tiny baby Jesus, born to a young, poor, no-named girl (AKA the famous Virgin Mary) people might doubt. Surely this could not be the savior the prophets spoke of! Baby Jesus was after all born in a barn of all places, placed in a feeding trough, and His birth was celebrated by goat and sheep-herders. These were hardly appropriate accommodations for the King of Kings...or were they?

It all began with an old barren couple, reminiscent of Abraham and Sarah. Zechariah, a priest, and his wife Elizabeth, a descendant of Israel's first High Priest Aaron, tried unsuccessfully for years to have a baby. Even though Zechariah worked in the temple, the couple may have faced criticism, shame, and guilt because of their barrenness.

And then one day, an angel named Gabriel appeared to Zechariah and told him to get ready for a son. He and Elizabeth would name him John. The boy would bring his parents joy, be great in God's sight, and prepare the people for the Messiah. Zechariah couldn't believe the news. How could he and Elizabeth possibly have a baby? Because he questioned Gabriel in disbelief, Zechariah was struck with muteness. He would be silent until John was born and God's prophecy was fulfilled.

Gabriel was, of course, also met with skepticism from Mary when he delivered the second announcement. "How shall this be? Seeing I know not a man?" said Mary. Gabriel explained the Invisible Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost, would overshadow her and "that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." She would call His name Jesus. Mary accepted the angel's words, affirmed her willingness to serve God, and pondered the coming birth of Jesus.

As we read Luke's account of these incredible events, you can imagine the full range of emotion that Mary was experiencing—and Joseph, her fiancé, as well. In this story of immaculate conception, Mary demonstrates that while she might have been the least-likely candidate for the mother through whom God binds Himself to humanity, He does it so that there can be no mistake that His hand is directing it. He makes the impossible possible—conception within a barren Elizabeth and a Virgin Mary.

God's miracle birth announcements are only the beginning of an incredible story orchestrated by God and recorded by Luke. Early in this story, we gain valuable insight into God's plan. He would use those in the low places, the poor and invisible, to bring about his new world order.

**Pray:** *God Most High, your only Son embraced the weakness of flesh, to give us power to become your children; your eternal Word chose a dwelling among us, that we might live in your presence. Grant us a spirit of wisdom to know how rich is the glory you have made our own, and how great the hope to which we are called in Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, in the splendor of eternal light, God forever and ever. Amen.*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> from the BibleProject ([bibleproject.com/articles/birth-jesus-luke](https://bibleproject.com/articles/birth-jesus-luke))

<sup>2</sup> Prayer for the Day 2, Christmas Day, *Book of Common Worship* (1993)

# Daily Prayer

## Adoration & Praise

*"Praise God for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord."  
Psalm 150:2, 6*

## Confession & Pardon

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."  
1 John 1:9*

## Specific Thanksgivings

*"I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart;  
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds."  
Psalm 9:1*

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- Close your eyes
- With every breath in, imagine accepting God's gift of mercy and/or love
- With every breath out, imagine his mercy and love covering your life and relationships

## Supplication & Petition

*"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."  
Philippians 4:6*

Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion

# December 8

Robin Turnmire

## Long-Awaited

**Read** Luke 2:25-38

*Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."*

*There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.*

Waiting. Abiding. Hoping. Anticipating.

Of these, the first sounds the hardest, but they really are variations on a theme. I believe we need these options to make sure we can manage this very important aspect of our faith. Clearly, the concept is part of God's ultimate plan. Before the immediate prophecies of Jesus' birth to Zechariah & Elizabeth about John preparing the way, and to Mary and Joseph for His birth itself, the Jewish people had been in 400 years of silence. Not just waiting, but enduring absolutely nothing that they could recognize as a word from YHWH. Here we are, as Christians with "the rest of the story," but still not all of it, 2000 years and counting.

Waiting. Longing. Sometimes even desperately crying out, "How long oh Lord?" Reminding ourselves of His promises that He is indeed Good and that His Love endures forever. This type of waiting is what I hear in Simeon's affirmation of faith when he encountered the Infant Savior. His faithfulness was rewarded, and he was ready to rest. Nice reminder for us, another separate person who could provide a witness. But, then the story gets even better. After Simeon's public proclamation of Jesus' identity, we are introduced to Anna.

*Continued*

What if we were to take a note from Anna and spent our time worshipping rather than JUST waiting? Because she worshipped, she seems to have been more joy-filled than perhaps we usually get to experience during these spaces between promise and fulfillment.

Anna was married, for what I would imagine felt brief by comparison, and then her security fell completely apart. Luke's description of her then leaps to her decades of worshipping as a widow. I can imagine that her friends and neighbors would not have used waiting to describe her because they couldn't see anything good enough to be waiting for in her future. Nevertheless, she worshipped in the temple unceasingly. Maybe there were times her worship was anticipating the Messiah or even abiding steadily in gratitude. But most of all she was described as worshipping, simply maintaining the correct perspective towards the Almighty.

Perhaps finding this posture changes the way we can experience our own waiting. Whether we are talking about the full Redemption from our Father of this broken world or something as mundane as our cup of coffee, we can worship. We have been gifted a precious moment to recall our King who loves us dearly enough to allow us these opportunities to wait, to remember Him, to feel Him giving us our next breath. As I often challenge our kids, I invite each of you to turn waiting into worshipping.

**Pray:** Faithful Father who is, and was, and ever more shall be, we can never worship You enough for who You are. Please bless each of my dear friends reading this with the joy and wonder Anna seemed to have that carried her through those decades. May each of us turn to You in the moments between, worshipping and remembering we are Yours. We ask this in Jesus' name because You told us to. Amen.



# Living Liturgically

~ Activities for Advent ~

## Preparing for the Big Day

Whatever else your holiday schedule may have you bustling, December 25<sup>th</sup> is of course, actually a birthday celebration. Start planning the birthday now: gifts, card, birthday cake and candles, etc. What gift will you give Jesus this year? Are you a birthday cake, cupcake, or pie family? One fun and thoughtful tradition has families make/write a birthday card for Jesus and place it under the tree. If you're lighting your Advent wreath each night, it's perfect to do while the candles are still lit. On the card, write about how you've seen Jesus at work this year, how you've felt his presence, or through whom you've felt his care. Thank him for coming among us. For kiddos, or for those needing more direct prompts, here are some ideas:

- 1) Happy birthday, Jesus!
- 2) Thank you for...
- 3) I'm glad you were born because...
- 4) This year, I want to serve you by...



*O Christmas tree,  
O Christmas tree!*

Traditionally, Christmas trees were set up on Christmas Eve and left up until Epiphany (January 6th); setting up early was considered bad luck! But “fake” trees and changing customs have the Christmas tree appearing in homes any day after Thanksgiving (...or Halloween).

The trees have a lot of symbolism: the lights represent the light of Christ shining in the darkness, the ornaments represent joy (some still wait until the Rose/Joy Sunday to add the ornaments), and the evergreen boughs represent the life and growth found in Christ. A star or angel is often placed on top of the tree in remembrance of the first Christmas. No matter when you put up your tree, consider gathering around the tree and saying this blessing:

*Lord, bless this tree around which we will make many memories this Advent season.*

*May the lights on this tree remind us that Jesus is the Light of the World.*

*May the (star or angel) on top remind us of the angel's announcement: "A Savior is born! Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, goodwill toward all people."*

*May the gifts below remind us of the most precious gift of all: Jesus Christ.*

*Help us to make room in our hearts for You. Amen.*

# Daily Prayer

## Adoration & Praise

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Psalm 150:2, 6*

## Confession & Pardon

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."  
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## Supplication & Petition

*"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."  
Philippians 4:6*

Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion

# December 9

Kathy Puckett

**Read** Isaiah 9:2, 6

*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.....For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.*

**Read** John 1:1

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.*

**Read** Luke 18:16-17

*But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."*

While visiting my niece, her five-year-old son Cade went to his bedroom and brought back a small book to show me. It was his Bible. He opened the Bible and searched through the pages. Then he showed me a page with a paragraph written in red ink. Pointing to the red letters, he said, "Did you know that the red words mean Jesus said that?" Then he turned to a page that was mostly red words and said, "He said a lot on this page." He was in awe that words said by Jesus are in his Bible. Could it be at this young age Cade instinctively understands that Jesus is the Word? Cade is excited that he will be learning to read and someday can read the red words by himself.

Just as Cade is looking forward to reading the red words of Jesus in his Bible, we are looking forward this advent season to the birth of the Christ Child. We do all the decorating, baking, shopping, wrapping, partying and it's fun and, I suppose, it is something to do to occupy ourselves as we wait the coming of the Christ Child and the hope of salvation that his coming brings. But shouldn't we also make time to quietly contemplate and anticipate this event, the event that changed the world? Let's not get so busy with the activities of this season that we lose sight of the importance of the Word coming to dwell among us. There would be no red words in our Bibles to read if baby Jesus had not been born in a manger in Bethlehem. Children like Cade would not have the chance to learn about and know Jesus the Word. Let's not take those red words for granted.

Something that Cade and I do when he is riding with me in my car is that we sing to a VBS version of "Awesome God". It is a request he makes as soon as he gets in the car. At the first of the song, the singer says, "Here we go" and begins singing. Cade loves that part and joins right in singing. His brother Mason has said that he is not much for singing, but if he wasn't buckled in, he would dance to the song, and he swings his arms and legs to the music. And Mason's first worship experience was playing the part of baby Jesus at the age of two months in a church play. There are many ways to worship, and I love that the boys express their worship in their favorite ways. No matter how you approach the advent season, it has important meaning for each of us individually and collectively and at any age. Let us approach Advent with great anticipation and joy and truly worship.

Oh, and open your Bible and read the red words to your little ones during this Advent season. Jesus wants them to know him.

**Pray:** Dear Father, thank you for the anticipation of Advent. Thank you for the Christ Child born for our salvation. And thank you for the red words. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# Daily Prayer

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Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion

# December 10

Begin by praying for wisdom and acceptance for reading God's word.

Read today's scripture for MUMC: *Luke 1:26-38*

Spend a minute or two in silence, turning over these verses with an awareness that these are verses God has gone out of his way to share with his people.

Write the passage out in your own words:

What is the passage about? What is your favorite part? If you had to pick, which words speak to you the most?

Was anything difficult to hear/accept/understand? What questions do you have?

How can you apply or respond to these verses? How might God be inviting you to live differently?

Sunday School & Sermon Notes for *Luke 1:26-38*

# Daily Prayer

## Adoration & Praise

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Psalm 150:2, 6*

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Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion



# December 11

Karen Lewis

**Read** Matthew 24:36

*But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, not the Son, but only the Father.*

For the last few weeks, I have heard rumblings from Christians about how this must be the end of time because of all the signs. Honestly, this is not a new topic. In my lifetime, I have heard this so many times. We KNOW that Christ will come again and that we do not know the day or the hour.

Some people want to spend their time calculating and estimating how close we are to His return. We need to spend that precious time living each day as though it could be the day and making sure we have our relationship with Christ in order. Not only do we need to make sure our relationship is right, we need to talk to those around us and make sure that they know Christ and that they have given their life to Him!

During Advent is the perfect time to focus and anticipate the coming of Christ. It is also a perfect time to focus on why we need Him so much! Often we get mixed up and think He needs us.

**Pray:** Dear Lord, please help me to anticipate you daily and be ready. Give me opportunities to share the good news with others. During this advent season help me to worship you and give thanks for all you have done for me, the small and the big things. Help me to continue to look for you daily in my life. Amen.

## Setting the (Manger) Scene

If you've set out your manger scenes, consider:

- 1) setting out only the stable and empty manger at first, reflecting on the fact that the son of God, the King of Kings was born in a humble barn,
- 2) putting back the baby Jesus until 12/25, and
- 3) placing the Wise Men somewhere else in the house. In anticipation of the Epiphany (January 6<sup>th</sup>, when the Wise Men finally do meet Jesus), tradition has the Wise Men "journeying" through the house to meet Jesus. Have fun moving the Wise Men all over the place until they finally are able to present their gifts in January. If you've got children, it can be a game to "find" the Wise Men on their journey each day.

## Making Room

Knowing that gifts might be soon making your way into the house, consider making room! Advent is a great time to clean out closets, toy boxes, pantries, and shelves. It's a symbolic action of clearing out and making room for the new things God is bringing and doing—as well as putting off and away the old.

# Daily Prayer

## Adoration & Praise

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## Confession & Pardon

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."  
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Philippians 4:6*

Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion

## Anticipation

**Read** Psalm 130:5-6

*I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.*

When I was a kid, the anticipation of Christmas began in earnest around Thanksgiving – and going to see Santa to sit on his lap to recite our dream gifts started it all off. This was a terrifying task for a shy kid when I was incredibly young, which usually resulted in screaming and crying as I attempted to escape Santa's grasp. It was not until I got a little older that I realized that Santa was my friend who fulfilled the gifts on my long gift list.

Anticipation of putting up Christmas tree came next...a real tree in a galvanized bucket of water that we adorned with silver icicles and glass ornaments collected from long ago and from travels through Europe when my dad was in the Army stationed in Paris, France. We had a large terrier dog who knocked many icicles and ornaments off tree with her wagging tail only after she drank half the water from that bucket.

Anticipation of Christmas Eve when stockings were hung on the bed foot boards of three impatient kids. My poor Mama had just barely crawled into bed after putting all the gifts under tree only to have us all up at midnight clamoring like wild banshees to dig into the goodies those stockings were stuffed with.

Anticipation was Christmas morning when we were all up at the crack of dawn ready to rip open all those fabulous gifts. Many prized possessions arrived Christmas morning like my doll house, Barbie dolls, teddy bears and troll dolls complete with handmade outfits made of felt. We were not the only ones who received fabulous gifts as I remember one year, we pooled our allowances ranging from 5-15 cents depending on your age to proudly present my Mama with a bottle of *Evening in Paris* perfume. After all we had lived in Paris, France so we knew fancy things came from there, right?

Anticipation was the Christmas feast my Mama would make. My Mama was from the Pennsylvania Dutch country, and we ate some yummy stuff with my favorites being stuffing made from my grandma's recipe, mince pie, fudge that she always added a bit of coffee to and of course egg nog.

Anticipation then and as it is now in that we look forward to Advent and the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Anticipation is excitement, waiting eagerly for something you know is going to happen. The Bible goes on to say anticipation is getting ready for what God has told you is coming. The Season of Advent will stir a greater awareness of the anticipation that we hold in our hearts for the fullness of life that God wants for us.

**Pray:** Thank you, Lord, for your gift of Jesus Christ that allows us to eagerly anticipate our salvation. Amen.

# Daily Prayer

## Adoration & Praise

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Psalm 150:2, 6*

## Confession & Pardon

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."  
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Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion

# December 13

Sam Love

## Wonderful Name

**Read** Luke 1:30-31 KJV

*And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.*

My favorite cantata of all time is the Christmas program *King of Love*. We performed this in 1981. It contains a variety of great songs. My most favorite of all the songs in this cantata is "Wonderful Name." I have a copy of the old cassette recording we made that night. The quality is poor and has a lot of background noise, but its message to me is not diminished a single note. I took the cassette to a recording studio to see if they could clean it up, but to no avail. I had copies made into CDs for my mother and siblings.

The program featured solos by Linda Hearon, Kay Long, Kathy Puckett, Bobby Clemens, and Jim Gregg to name a few. It also contained narration by Cindy Phelps and Ron Manges. These distinctive voices and their songs remain tucked away in my memory.

I was 20 at the time and it was one of the first cantatas I had been a part of. Additionally, Dad had some narration, Mom had a line or two of solo, sister June had a solo, brother Mark also had some narration before the song "Wonderful Name" saying "Thou shalt call his name Jesus.... Jesus...the Wonderful Name.... of Jesus!" Brother Stan stood beside me in the bass section. I can remember him helping me with movement and timing in the song "Wonderful Name" during practice. Brothers Mitch and Henry were not in the choir and were probably on the back row cutting up with Allen Ammons.

I did not know that it would be our last Christmas with Dad. Neither did I know that 10 years later brother Mark would be gone as well. Now that my Mother is also gone, her small solo part in the program becomes more special. I cherish that Christmas as my best.

I play that CD from time to time – even when it isn't Christmastime. I listen to the voices of my Dad and Mother and my brother and reminisce in fond memories. Music has always been a large part of my worship. Although I am not particularly blessed with musical talent, I carry a great love for Christ through songs that mean something to me.

I look forward to the day when we will be reunited and can sing this song anew for the King of Love.

**Pray:** Heavenly Father, help all of us to place our trust in your Son, Jesus Christ, whose death has taken away our sins and whose resurrection has given us the assurance of eternal life. Then help us, we earnestly pray, to live righteous and just lives so that when we, too, leave this world and meet you face-to-face, we will hear from your lips, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Amen.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Prayer by David Sweitzer (1936-2022), written for his funeral.

# Daily Prayer

## Adoration & Praise

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Philippians 4:6*

Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion

# December 14

from MUMC's 1990 Advent Devotional  
Mary Blanche Brown (1920 - 2017)

**Read** Luke 2:10-11 RSV

*And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

What does Christmas mean to you? Stores and street decorations. Christmas parades. Giving and receiving gifts. Preparing a bountiful meal. Christmas trees with all the trimmings. Yes, these are a part of Christmas, but if these things are all it means to us, we have missed the real meaning.

Almost two thousand years ago a baby was born in Bethlehem whose birth we celebrate at Christmas. He was the Son of God – God loved us so much he gave his only Son who willingly went to Calvary and died for our sins that we might become a child of His.

My prayer is that we might truly know the meaning of Christmas. God gave the world the Greatest Gift ever given – His Son to be the Savior of all men. Amen.

**Pray:** Thank you God for your love so great that you gave us your Son, and with his birth a time to celebrate. May our joy overflow to those around us. Thank you Oh Lord for your most precious gift. Amen.

## *Middlesettlements UMC Memories ~ Luther Goodson, Jr.*

Our family moved to this farm on Middlesettlements Road in 1946. I was just six years old. MUMC was the first church we started going to regularly because of where we lived and moving around so much. I will never forget how easy it was to make friends. Every Sunday was a great experience. The more I went to church on Sunday, the more I took notice of the people and then I realized the people that lived in the community and the people that I saw in church was the same people. The UMC was a place of happiness and joy.

Even back in the 50s & 60s we had a really strong M.Y.F. for the youth. But it didn't just happen because of the youth. There was a lot of "saints" that worked and made a way easy for us. They would take us to youth programs and rallies with money from their own pockets. There are too many to call by name. It would take too many pages of paper.

A couple of the "OLD Saints" driving their own car and gas took a carload of youth to a country-wide youth rally at Maryville High School football field. Many, many people and youth were there. God spoke to me that night, but I was so shy to move forward and talk to someone I just sat and did not go. But on the way home, I told the people I was riding with all about God's call and on the way home in the back seat of a big green automobile, I asked God into my heart. With lots of help from my friends, God has spoken to me to save my own life and also I was sent on a mission to save another person's life.

When I was in the army stationed in Europe, I received a package from the women "saints." It was books on faith and hope and charity. I still have them today in the box they came in. I will never forget my church family thinking of me so many miles away.

# Daily Prayer

## Adoration & Praise

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Philippians 4:6*

Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion



# December 15

Julia Keylon

**Read** Isaiah 61:1 & 35:4 - 6a

*The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.*

*Say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.*

**Read** Matthew 11:4, 5

*John the Baptist was in prison when he heard about the deeds of the Messiah and sent his disciples to ask Him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "go back and report to John what you hear and see. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor."*

Who knows what I would think about if I was imprisoned unjustly, but scripture tells us that John the Baptist was actively looking for signs of God's presence and faithfulness. He sends his disciples to Jesus, who reassures John in the words of the prophet Isaiah that yes, God's promises are coming true in Jesus.

I try to daily pray for eyes to see and ears to hear Jesus. In October, Chris and I went to Florida. One morning while walking our dog Pepper, I started wondering if there were **any** Christians around me. It's a silly thing to wonder but I had just watched the news and the world is a scary place. A car passed by with a bumper sticker that said, "Jesus loves you". It's funny to think, but that little sign comforted me and made me smile. That was a gift from God for me.

The Season of Advent has many signs to point us to Jesus. We have the lighting of the advent candles each Sunday with Scripture and a focus. I pray that this year I will remember the scripture and think of it throughout the week. That the focus of the Sunday lesson would stay with me. That I would have ears to hear and eyes to see the hope, peace, joy and love we have because He came, because "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." John 1:14.

**Pray:** Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free; from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee. Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art; dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.<sup>1</sup> God, may we see our hope is in You. May we see the joy and peace we have because of You and may we know that only You can satisfy the longing in our hearts. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Prayer taken from "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" by Charles Wesley, 1744

# Daily Prayer

## Adoration & Praise

"Praise God for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord."  
*Psalm 150:2, 6*

## Confession & Pardon

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."  
*1 John 1:9*

## Specific Thanksgivings

"I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart;  
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds."  
*Psalm 9:1*

1.

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Take a minute to pause and accept God's mercy and love. It is always offered you, but it's easy to forget. For the next minute (set a timer!):

- Close your eyes
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- With every breath out, imagine his mercy and love covering your life and relationships

## Supplication & Petition

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."  
*Philippians 4:6*

Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion

# December 16

Cindy Alloway

## Discerning God's Presence

**Read** Psalm 27:1-9, 13-14 CEB

*The Lord is light and my salvation. Should I fear anyone? The Lord is a fortress protecting my life. Should I be frightened of anything? When evildoers come at me trying to eat me up - it's they, my foes and my enemies, who stumble and fall! If an army camps against me, my heart won't be afraid. If war comes up against me, I will continue to trust in this: I have asked one thing from the Lord - it's all I seek: to live in the Lord's house all the days of my life, seeing the Lord's beauty and constantly adoring his temple. Because he will shelter me in his own dwelling during troubling times; he will set me up high, safe on a rock. Now my head is higher than the enemies surrounding me, and I will offer sacrifices in God's tent-sacrifices with shouts of joy! I will sing and praise the Lord.*

*Lord, listen to my voice when I cry out - have mercy on me and answer me! Come, my heart says, seek God's face. Lord, I do seek your face! Please don't hide it from me! Don't push your servant aside angrily - you have been my help! God who saves me, don't neglect me! Don't leave me all alone!"*

*But I have sure faith that I will experience the Lord's goodness in the land of the living! Hope in the Lord! Be strong! Let your heart take courage! Hope in the Lord!*

The book of Psalms expresses worship. Throughout the book we see authors praising God for who He is and what He has done. Some Psalms are prayers and songs for help which usually begin with the Psalmists' complaints and petitions, and then end with affirmations of faith.

In this Psalm, David is first praising the Lord. He also says he will "continue to trust" in the Lord - "that his foes and enemies" will "stumble and fall," and that he "won't be afraid" even if an army is against him.

In the second portion of the Psalm David's tone has changed. Instead of strong faith and confidence in the Lord, he cries out for mercy and help. He pleads with the Lord to hear his cries and answer him!

Sometimes we may feel like an army is against us. Whether it be sickness, hospitalization, mental illnesses, an accident, poverty, a hard job, or something else, many of us and the people we come in contact with every day are facing overwhelming struggles. The feeling of loneliness makes us afraid, and we wonder if God is neglecting us, or if He doesn't hear us. We find ourselves in the same situation that David found himself in this Psalm.

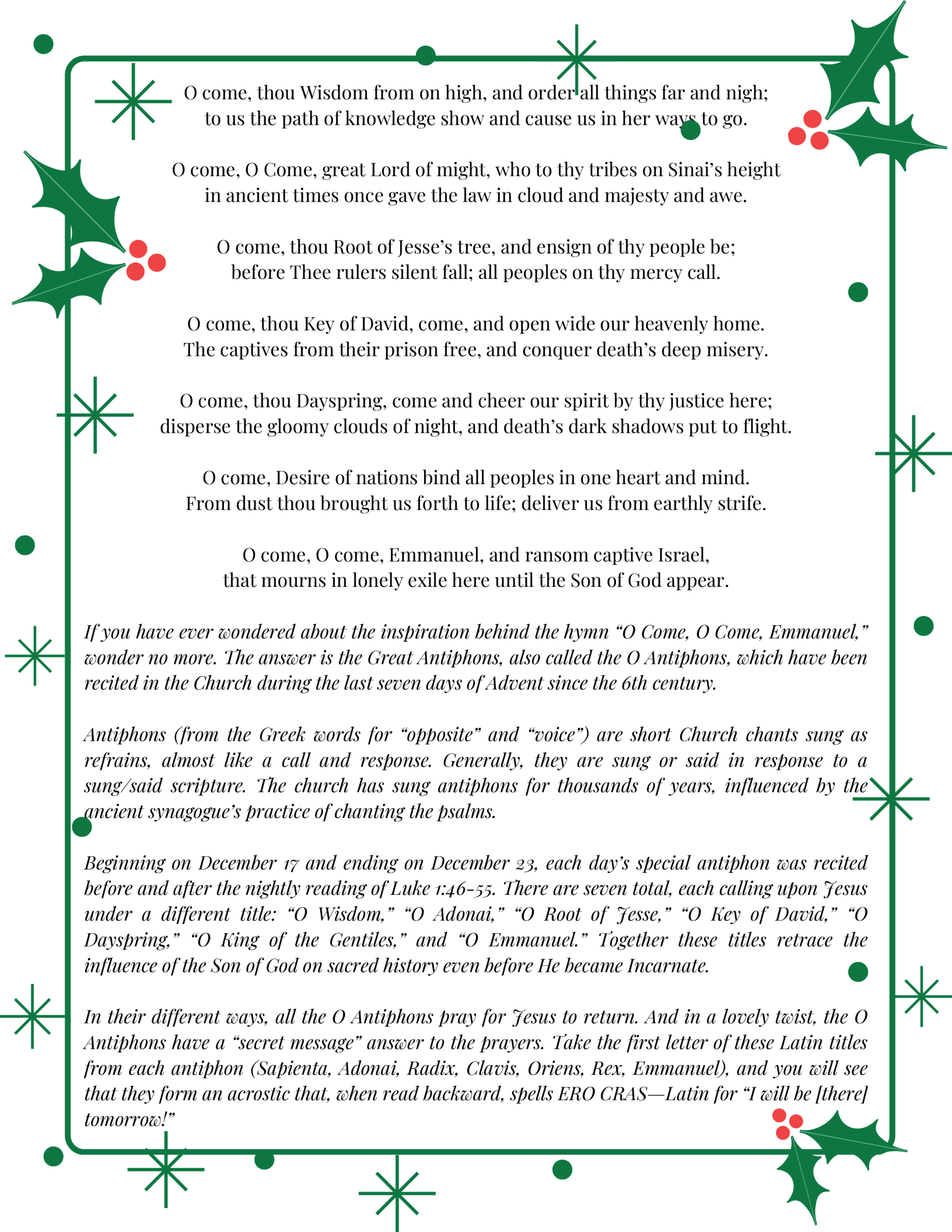
*Continued*

This fall, over the course of the last 4- 5 weeks, I have found myself in one stressful situation after another. Between my car breaking down on fall break, a head-on collision on my way to school, and the worst virus I've had in 50 years (lasted 5-6 days), I have felt like I have been on someone's hit list. One of my friends at school commented that maybe I should have retired this year - to which I replied, "I think you're right! I'm not sure how much more of this I can endure."

In spite of adversity, one thought that comes to my mind is that bad things happen to everyone, even Christians who are trying to follow God's ways. Just because we are trying to live a life that glorifies God does not mean we will not have problems and find ourselves in dire situations. As I read the "Prayer List" from our bulletin each Sunday, I am reminded that many people in our church are faced with overwhelming circumstances that continue for months and months. I'm sure it's not uncommon to wonder, "What have I done to deserve this type of situation, and how do I keep going?"

This is where the words of the psalmist resonate to us. David, even though he had doubts and wondered if God had neglected him, continued to praise God because he remembered that God had sustained him in times of trouble. This advent season, regardless of our situation, let us remember that God has not neglected us, and that He has and will continue to sustain us. Help us to remember to place our faith in God, the one who is the Light of the World and our salvation.

*Pray:* Heavenly Father, show us the beautiful lessons we can learn from Psalm 27. Through David's words, help us to be encouraged. Guide us so that we can experience hope, security, and rest. Help us to know that You are our strength, and in complete control of our lives. You are our light and our salvation, the source of all things good. In Your Holy Name we pray. Amen.



O come, thou Wisdom from on high, and order all things far and nigh;  
to us the path of knowledge show and cause us in her ways to go.

O come, O Come, great Lord of might, who to thy tribes on Sinai's height  
in ancient times once gave the law in cloud and majesty and awe.

O come, thou Root of Jesse's tree, and ensign of thy people be;  
before Thee rulers silent fall; all peoples on thy mercy call.

O come, thou Key of David, come, and open wide our heavenly home.  
The captives from their prison free, and conquer death's deep misery.

O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer our spirit by thy justice here;  
disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight.

O come, Desire of nations bind all peoples in one heart and mind.  
From dust thou brought us forth to life; deliver us from earthly strife.

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,  
that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.

*If you have ever wondered about the inspiration behind the hymn "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," wonder no more. The answer is the Great Antiphons, also called the O Antiphons, which have been recited in the Church during the last seven days of Advent since the 6th century.*

*Antiphons (from the Greek words for "opposite" and "voice") are short Church chants sung as refrains, almost like a call and response. Generally, they are sung or said in response to a sung/said scripture. The church has sung antiphons for thousands of years, influenced by the ancient synagogue's practice of chanting the psalms.*

*Beginning on December 17 and ending on December 23, each day's special antiphon was recited before and after the nightly reading of Luke 1:46-55. There are seven total, each calling upon Jesus under a different title: "O Wisdom," "O Adonai," "O Root of Jesse," "O Key of David," "O Dayspring," "O King of the Gentiles," and "O Emmanuel." Together these titles retrace the influence of the Son of God on sacred history even before He became Incarnate.*

*In their different ways, all the O Antiphons pray for Jesus to return. And in a lovely twist, the O Antiphons have a "secret message" answer to the prayers. Take the first letter of these Latin titles from each antiphon (Sapientia, Adonai, Radix, Clavis, Oriens, Rex, Emmanuel), and you will see that they form an acrostic that, when read backward, spells ERO CRAS—Latin for "I will be [there] tomorrow!"*

# Daily Prayer

## Adoration & Praise

*"Praise God for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord."  
Psalm 150:2, 6*

## Confession & Pardon

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."  
1 John 1:9*

## Specific Thanksgivings

*"I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart;  
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds."  
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## Supplication & Petition

*"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."  
Philippians 4:6*

Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion

# December 17

Begin by praying for wisdom and acceptance for reading God's word.

Read today's scripture for MUMC: *Luke 1:24-25, 39-45*

Spend a minute or two in silence, turning over these verses with an awareness that these are verses God has gone out of his way to share with his people.

Write the passage out in your own words:

What is the passage about? What is your favorite part? If you had to pick, which words speak to you the most?

Was anything difficult to hear/accept/understand? What questions do you have?

How can you apply or respond to these verses? How might God be inviting you to live differently?

Sunday School & Sermon Notes for *Luke 1:24-25, 39-45*

# Daily Prayer

## Adoration & Praise

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## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion



## **Read** Psalm 37:7

*Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!*

Despite my best attempts at controlling my emotions, certain situations reveal all too clearly my lack of patience to wait. I wish I could tell you I had to think long and hard to come up with an example to validate the truth of this statement. Unfortunately, at the time I'm writing this I only have to go back about 4 days. It is very possible that if I were to fully lay out the circumstances of this most recent example, some of you might even feel that my frustration with waiting was at least somewhat justified. Although it would be nice to have some in my support group, it still would not change the fact that I did not handle my frustration properly.

If you are being completely honest, you are not good at waiting either. Look around when you are waiting sometime. Whether it's the doctor's office, car repair shop, restaurant, or even in the checkout line we cannot seem to just sit/stand and wait. They even give us tools to cope with our lack of patience. Magazines, newspapers, books, coffee, peanuts or a whole plethora of fidget tools. Oh, and I left out today's biggest time filler...your phone. Nothing like a 30-40 minute window to scroll on social media, play a game, check email or perform that "I can never get to task" like cleaning up the apps on my phone. Whatever your waiting fix is, we all have them.

Why has it become so hard to just be still and wait? Well, I think I have an answer but it's hard to admit. Practice. Like most everything in life, whatever we put our best effort/time into is what we improve and get good at.

One skill I feel really confident with and that you have also been taught, whether you are good at it or not, is time management. Count the time available and then determine what number of tasks can get accomplished in that window. Now for me that's a challenge and a fun, temporary, way to demonstrate a productive outcome. So, what is being practiced? Answer: squeezing every morsel out of whatever window of time is focused on. Now truthfully this is not in itself a bad thing, right? In fact, that kind of productivity just might get you the next job or promotion you are looking for pretty quickly. But in the context of this devotion, I have to ask myself a convicting question: am I balancing that time management practice with investing intentional time actively waiting but doing exactly the opposite, nothing? Let's just say I'm out of "practice".

Enjoy the wait!

**Pray:** God of power and mercy, you call us once again to celebrate the coming of your Son. Remove those things that hinder love of you, that when he comes, he may find us waiting in awe and wonder for him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Prayer of Invocation 22, *The Worship Sourcebook*

# Daily Prayer

## Adoration & Praise

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Philippians 4:6*

Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion

## Laughter and Joy

**Read** Genesis 21:5-7

*Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."*

**Read** Matthew 2:10

*When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.*

**Read** Luke 1:13-14, 41-44

*But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth.*

*When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.*

If you know my family, it's no surprise that our home was filled with much laughter and joy. This was due, in no small part, to our Daddy's understated humor and Momma's willingness to laugh at our attempts to "entertain." I'll never forget Daddy coming to the supper table after working outside in the garden or hayfield with an unbelievable painful-looking sunburn on his forehead extending up through his hairline (?) to the top of his head. He sat at the head of the table and we kids all stared at his red countenance. "Ooooo...owwww..." we exclaimed, then, "Doesn't that hurt when you blink or chew???" He stated matter-of-factly, "No, it hurts more to be amazed,"--as he raised his eyebrows to demonstrate!

Laughter and joy are meant to be shared. There are real times, of course, that these emotions are overcome by sorrow, worry, and doubt. But God in His wisdom has given us the ability to choose--to choose if we let this sadness overwhelm and overtake us, or to choose joy and allow His love to swoop in and restore us. While on the road, I saw a sign on an Alabama church's marquee--"Don't curse the winds, adjust your sails." Choose how you look at your circumstances. Choose laughter and joy.

Each of us in our family enjoys laughter together and with extended family and friends. In the scriptures listed above, Sarah's laughter, and Elizabeth and Mary's joy are shared with us as they experience the Good News about their coming additions to their families. Sharing is our gift to others, whether it be laughter, presents, our presence, tears, prayers, or precious memories. God sharing the gift of His Son during this Advent Season is a joy we can receive and continue to give to others throughout our lives. CHOOSE that!

**Pray:** Our most loving and giving heavenly Father, give us laughter, joy, and peace in our days ahead that we might be a blessing to others as we choose You. Thank you for the gift of Your Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

# Daily Prayer

## Adoration & Praise

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Philippians 4:6*

Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion

## Mary's Song

**Pray:** Oh come, oh come Emmanuel! In this Advent journey from Bethlehem to Blount County - we worship and draw closer to the birth of your Christ Child, Jesus.

**Read** Luke 1:39-45

*At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"*

Imagine what a mixture of feelings Mary was experiencing as she traveled to visit her older cousin, Elizabeth. I'm sure she was excited with the anticipation of new life growing inside her womb. She could have been frightened and attempting to understand who this child was - God's son?!?! As a young, basically teenager, wondering about all the changes in her body and emotions she was experiencing. Uncertainty as to what was ahead and seeking Elizabeth's wisdom. Think about all that happened during your own pregnancy and/or what Mary and Joseph might have experienced.

Just as God broke through Elizabeth and Mary's greeting - God surprises us. Reflect on the ways that God is breaking through your routine, busy days full of responsibilities. Notice God in your sharing with family and friends. See God in your days of shopping, decorating, baking, and Christmas festivities. Let God break through your tiredness and weariness. Allow God to fill your heart with eager anticipation - fill your heart with the joy, awe and wonder of this Holy season.

**Read** Luke 1:46-55

*And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors."*

Mary in her song and praise to God - proclaimed that indeed the "Lord is with me." How are you experiencing the Lord is with you this season? How do you experience God's presence when you are confused about a decision or direction in your life? In the crisis of illness or death or unexpected news how do you feel God's presence? When you are unsure about what is happening in your life or how circumstances fit into God's plan, how do you really listen, for God's call to grow and go into new, unknown directions? How does God comfort when you feel unworthy to be God's chosen servant. Open your hearts to experience God greeting you with the assurance..."do not be afraid".

**Pray:** God uses each one of us, despite our flaws or inadequacies. Guide our step and carry us through those times of struggle or uncertainty. Lead us to serve you with joy and gratitude. Lead us to be Jesus' hands and feet in the world - to be a witness of your love. Let us sing your songs of justice - let us fill the hungry and house the homeless - let us bring hope to the oppressed - let us be your kingdom here on earth - in our families and our communities. Amen.

# Daily Prayer

## Adoration & Praise

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## Confession & Pardon

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Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion

# December 21

from MUMC's 1992 Advent Devotional  
Nancy Brown (1939 – 2020)

**Read** Isaiah 40:31

*They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

**Read** 2 Corinthians 12:9

*My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*

Sooner or later, all of us have to live through an extremely difficult time, loss of a loved one, disability, illness, loss of a job, financial difficulties, troubled children.

When we reach this low point in life, we may question everything in which we ever believed. We may question God's love for us. This is the testing hour of the spirit. My son said recently, "You can't control how you react to life's circumstances. Trouble can leave us bitter or better. It is up to us."

We must never be afraid of what God allows to happen to us. The trying periods of life are the times that really bring us closer to God. Life is full of peaks and valleys. The exciting thing is that the valleys are placed there to make us stronger, to give us rest, and to make us aware of our dependence on God. The secret is to look to the mountain and not give up.

**Pray:** Almighty God, in love you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine hope and peace into our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*<sup>1</sup>



December 21st marks the longest night of 2022, which serves as a reminder in the Church that Jesus, the Light of the World, comes to us in our darkest spaces. Dealing with the death of a loved one, coping with personal loss, living with disease or pain, struggling with depression—the holidays can be difficult. In the Church, December 21st is also called "Blue Christmas" or "The Longest Night" and is a time to specifically remember and pray about the grief and pain of ourselves and others, as well as to focus on the hope we have in Jesus.

*A Prayer for Blue Christmas: Almighty God, Comfort and heal all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit; give them courage and hope in their troubles, and bring to them the joy of your salvation. Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> from the Collect for Christmas, *Book of Common Prayer* (1979)

# Daily Prayer

## Adoration & Praise

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Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion



# December 22

Megan Marcus

**Read** Isaiah 9:2, 5-7

*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.*

As a social worker, I have the opportunity to sit with people at sometimes the most difficult points in their lives. They come to me with various mental health conditions such as stress, depression, anxiety, insomnia, addiction, negative behavior patterns, and other debilitating emotions. My role is to sit with them in their most vulnerable state and help them understand their repressed feelings, while trying to equip them to face new challenges both present and future. I must remain nonjudgmental and compassionate while carefully listening and analyzing their needs. My goal is to teach my clients skills and coping strategies they need to deal with their issues effectively.

I recently had someone ask me, "What is the most difficult part of your job?" I had to pause before I answered this question because there are so many things about my job I love, but there are also many extreme challenges. After some thought I responded, "The wait". I went on to explain that in my job I must wait until the person is truly ready to change before we see results. I can't make the change happen on my own or on my time. My impatience is often because I see value and worth in them that they aren't ready to see for themselves. Me wanting it for them is not enough, I must wait for them to realize they deserve a better life and guide them through the necessary changes to obtain that life.

Waiting is often a challenging thing to do, especially when you are waiting for something that has the potential to be life changing for yourself or for another. On that first Christmas they were waiting for a savior to come and take away the pain, fear, and chaos in the world. They were waiting for hope - Jesus. In Tim Keller's *Hidden Christmas*, he makes a wonderful statement about the Light Jesus brought into the world, the end to the waiting for the change and healing they were longing for:

*Continued*

*"Isaiah calls him the Wonderful Counselor, which means he's beautiful. And perhaps now we get a glimpse of why he is. He had the infinite highness of being the Mighty God, yet he became one of us, enmeshed in our condition, in order to know our darkness. He saved us by going to the cross, and he did it all voluntarily, freely, out of sheer love. That is beautiful. When we find something to be beautiful, not just a duty, we dwell on it and stand before it because it is satisfying in itself. And so the reason we should obey him, not simply because we have to but also because we want to, is that, in light of all he is and has done for us, he is wonderful.*

*In short, Jesus is the divine light of the world, because he brings a new life to replace our spiritual deadness, because he shows us the truth that heals our spiritual blindness, and because he is the beauty that breaks our addictions to money, sex, and power. As Wonderful Counselor he walks with us even into and through the shadow of death (Matthew 4:16), where no other companion can go. He is a light for us when all other lights go out."*

Now that was worth the wait! No longer do we have to live in sin and darkness, He came to save those who were lost and help us find our way to Him. When I finally get to see the end results of change in my clients, I realize it was well worth the wait. The coming of the Messiah, the Everlasting Father, the Mighty God, the Wonderful Counselor, the Prince of Peace was also well worth the wait because He brought the deep river of joy for us all.

**Prayer:** Dear God help us never forget that You were worth the wait because you brought hope and peace in a time of darkness. Thank you for being a God that truly understands us because just like us you came to this Earth and suffered, and because you came to us a baby you know what we are going through and for that we are forever grateful. Amen.

## Feasting & Festivities

December 21<sup>st</sup> was the traditional feast day for St. Thomas, before it was moved to July in 1969. On December 21<sup>st</sup>, the poor would go “gooding” door to door. Gooding is a little like trick-or-treating, in which homes were presented with the chance to do “good” to those who knocked. Gooding on St. Thomas day was called “Thomassing” and it usually involved singing. Or you could wait until New Years and go from house to house singing, offering God’s blessing on the occupants for the forthcoming year, and being treated to bowls of spiced cider. Wassail (from “Waes Hael!”) means “Good health!” and is probably still a good thing to shout to someone. If you don’t physically go a-Wassailing this New Year, consider praying for good health upon all to whom you’d care to carol.

### Wassail

Joyce Overton, Middlesettlements UMC’s UMW Cookbook

- 2 quarts apple cider
- 1 tsp allspice berries
- 2-3 sticks cinnamon
- 12 whole cloves
- 2/3 cup brown sugar
- Ground nutmeg to taste

*Tie allspice, cinnamon, and cloves in a bag. Combine cider and brown sugar; heat, stirring until sugar dissolves. Add spice bag; simmer 15-20 minutes. Remove bag. Serve piping hot. Sprinkle with nutmeg.*

A-Thomassing, a-wassailing, and a-caroling aren’t exactly the same, but since all three involve singing door to door near Christmas, we’ll call it “close enough.” In the spirit of St. Thomas’ day this week, find the chance to give to the poor, sing someone some carols, pray good health for others, and enjoy a cup of Wassail!

## Christmas Card Prayers<sup>1</sup>

Around the dinner table this week (or at bedtime), gather the Christmas cards your family has received this Advent season and place them in a pile. Read the cards/letters aloud, share special memories you have of that person, but most importantly, pray for them. If you’d like to pray for each family individually, split the cards up, and each person in your family can take a turn praying something like this: *“Dear God, we give you thanks for the friends and family represented by these cards. Bless each one of them this Advent season and in the coming year. May they know the love and joy that comes through your Son, our Savior, this Christmas season. Amen.”*

Since David’s Nonnie passed away in 2018 we have started a new family tradition. Since David and I have been together, we have traveled to Chattanooga to eat supper with his Chattanooga family and then drove home to make it to the 10pm Christmas Eve service at our church. Now we stay home and have supper (Italian Themed & a birthday cake for Jesus) with our family and friends that are family. It is a sweet time to prepare our hearts and minds for the church candle lighting service. - Karen Lewis



### A Prayer for Christmas Eve

O God, you have caused this holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light: Grant that we, who have known the mystery of that Light on earth, may also enjoy him perfectly in heaven; where with you and the Holy Spirit he lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

<sup>1</sup> from *Little Way Advent: An Advent Calendar & Guide for Families* by Alyssa French Case

# Daily Prayer

## Adoration & Praise

*"Praise God for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord."  
Psalm 150:2, 6*

## Confession & Pardon

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."  
1 John 1:9*

## Specific Thanksgivings

*"I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart;  
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds."  
Psalm 9:1*

1.

2.

3.

Take a minute to pause and accept God's mercy and love. It is always offered you, but it's easy to forget. For the next minute (set a timer!):

- Close your eyes
- With every breath in, imagine accepting God's gift of mercy and/or love
- With every breath out, imagine his mercy and love covering your life and relationships

## Supplication & Petition

*"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."  
Philippians 4:6*

Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion

## All is Well?

**Read** Psalm 16:11

*You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

**Read** John 14:27

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

**Read** Romans 8:28

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

**Read** Philippians 4:11-13

*I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

Most of us have heard the wonderful Christmas composition by Michael W. Smith titled *All is Well*. The beauty of the voices of Carrie Underwood and Smith is only surpassed by the beauty of the song's lyrics. I find myself going online to listen to this song throughout the year. It helps me during times of worry or trouble to reaffirm my faith.

I know it is the weakness of my faith, but sometimes I wonder if all really is well. The rise in violent crime, racial tensions, poverty, hunger, childhood cancer, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the violent attacks by Hamas against Israeli citizens are examples. All is well. Really?

Thankfully I am quickly reminded as I read the scriptures and meditate that although it is (at least for me) hard to understand sometimes, God has a plan, and that yes, Doubting Neil, all is well, indeed.

During this Advent season I know that because God sent his only Son Jesus to be born in Bethlehem, to bring us the New Covenant, and to die on the cross for our sins, that if we repent of our sins and trust Him - that all is well. It is wonderful to know He has gone to the Father to prepare a place for us. Jesus told us in John 14:1-4: *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going."*

Yes, all is well!

**Pray:** Heavenly Father, thank You for having a plan for our lives and our salvation. Help us to understand that we must trust You in this Advent season and all year long. Amen.

# Daily Prayer

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Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion

# December 24

Begin by praying for wisdom and acceptance for reading God's word.

Read today's scripture for MUMC: *Luke 1:46-55*

Spend a minute or two in silence, turning over these verses with an awareness that these are verses God has gone out of his way to share with his people.

Write the passage out in your own words:

What is the passage about? What is your favorite part? If you had to pick, which words speak to you the most?

Was anything difficult to hear/accept/understand? What questions do you have?

How can you apply or respond to these verses? How might God be inviting you to live differently?

Sunday School & Sermon Notes for *Luke 1:46-55*

# Daily Prayer

## Adoration & Praise

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Psalm 150:2, 6*

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Prayers for me

Prayers for others

## Reflections from Today's Scripture & Devotion



# December 25

Brenda Crisp

## Miracles

**Read** Luke 2:1-20

*In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*

*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*

**Read** Psalm 77:14

*You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples.*

I believe God still performs miracles, and so in the back of my mind, I guess, I am always looking for them. I found one last month at our Community Luncheon in Friendsville.

*Continued*

The Luncheon is held on the second Wednesday and is open to everyone, but mostly just the older members of the community come. On this Wednesday, I was talking to a lady I had not seen before. She had brought her neighbor who I have known for many years.

I knew the neighbor had health problems and is not able to drive anymore. Then she told me her miracle. The lady had a disease that caused her hands, legs, and feet to shake so badly that she could not feed herself anymore nor could she drive. She was about to enter a nursing facility. Her doctor told her about a new procedure that would put a mechanical implant in her brain (brain surgery) that would hopefully control the shaking, and it did.

Think of all the miracles that had to happen here.

So it is with the miracle at Christmas. The story of Christ's birth, his teaching and ministry, are miracles we hear again. They have not been forgotten or lost. This miracle is as fresh and new today as it was all those years ago and it is for everyone whether shepherd or king.

*Pray:* Dear mighty and compassionate God, thank you for all the miracles in our lives and for the gift of your Son. In Christ we pray, Amen.

## Feasting & Festivities for Jesus' Birthday

The Twelve Days of Christmas – today is just Day One!

Christmas Day begins the 12 Days of Christmas and is followed by 11 more days of rejoicing. If you've been rushed and harried this Advent preparing for the *miracle* of Christmas, give yourself a breather. You've been doing exactly what Advent is about ("getting ready") and now it's time to rest and rejoice. If Christmas Day isn't perfect (schedules, in-laws, exhaustion, family can't make it in until later, presents seem to win over a focus on Jesus, etc.), remember there are 11 more days to do what helps you rejoice in the coming of Jesus. Plan for ways to rest, rejoice, and make merry for the next 12 Days! After all, we're celebrating that, "for us and our salvation," God would come down from heaven & become incarnate.

To help with that, this year MUMC has included a *Twelve Days of Christmas* Activity page, with hymns and activities for each of the 12 days of Christmas. In addition to the *Twelve Days of Christmas* page, you'll want to check out our Living Liturgically Christmastide and Epiphany pages for more ways to celebrate Jesus this season!

# Living Liturgically

~ Christmastide ~

## Meal Blessing for Christmastide

God, our Father, we bless  
you. You so loved the  
world that you have sent  
your Son to us, Jesus, the  
Word made flesh and the  
Light that dispels all  
darkness. As we rejoice in  
you, we ask you to bless  
this table and the food we  
share until that day when  
we all shall feast at your  
eternal banquet. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## Children's Christmas Punch

*Maria Von Trapp*

*(yes, the real Maria Von Trapp)*

1 quart grape juice  
2 quarts water  
2 cups sugar  
½ tsp whole cloves  
1 stick cinnamon

Rind & juice of 2 lemons  
Rind & juice of 2 oranges

*Boil sugar, water, lemon rind,  
and spices until flavored.*

*Mix with the rest of the  
ingredients, boil 5 minutes, and  
serve hot in punch glasses.*

Here we come a-wassailing  
Among the leaves so green;  
Here we come a-wandering  
So fair to be seen.

Love and joy come to you,  
And to you your wassail too;  
And God bless you  
and send you a Happy New Year.  
And God send you  
A Happy New Year!

## Christmastide Feasting & Festivities

1. Try singing the 12 Days of Christmas at least once!
2. Your "Advent" part of the Advent Wreath is done, but starting on 12/25 the white center candle is lit as you remember Jesus, the Light of the World. Keep lighting your Christ Candle through January 5<sup>th</sup> (the 12<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmas).
3. 12/26 is St. Stephen's Day, when the church remembers the Servant Martyr of Acts 6 & 7. Traditionally, it's the day on which the abundance of Christmas is shared with the less fortunate and the "poor boxes" of the church were emptied and distributed to the needy (hence the term "Boxing Day" that you see on your calendars). In honor of Stephen, read his story in scripture and pray for or donate to the poor. If you've received nice gifts that you didn't need, consider passing them onto charity, as well as any items you need to clear out to make more room. You might also want to sing with gusto the hymn "Good King Wenceslaus," which is about St. Wenceslaus' actions "on the feast of Stephen."
4. December 28<sup>th</sup> marks Holy Innocents Day, which remembers the part of the Christmas story we'd probably rather forget: the deaths of the baby boys in Bethlehem at the hand of King Herod. It's a day to remember how others suffer when we act selfishly, and traditionally, a day to pray for children.
5. December 31<sup>st</sup>, New Year's Eve, is also known as "Watchnight"—a night to offer prayers of confession and renew commitments to God as the New Year turns over. If you're someone who makes resolutions at the New Year, accompany them with your prayers and consider setting a new spiritual discipline or habit.
6. If you didn't go a-Wassailing before (not to be confused with a-Thomassing, ha!), New Year's is the traditional time to go. Wassail (from "Waes Hael!") means "Good health!" and is probably still a good thing to shout to someone. If you don't physically go a-Wassailing this New Year, consider wishing good health upon people in your prayers.
7. January 1<sup>st</sup> marks a strange but important day: the day of the circumcision and naming of Jesus (Luke 2:21). 8 days after his birth, Jesus' parents took him to be circumcised as required by Old Testament Law. The church has continued to remember this day as the "name day" of Jesus, celebrating how there is "no other name but the name of Jesus" for our salvation. Sing one of the hymns about the Name of Jesus and give thanks!

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the Christmas Season Blessings found in *Blessings of the Table: Mealtime Prayers Throughout the Year* by Brother Victor-Antoine d'Avile-Latourrette.

# 12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

- December 25*
- 1**
- Sing: Joy to the World!
- Do: Read John 1:1-14 & Celebrate!
- December 26*
- 2**
- Sing: Good King Wenceslaus
- Do: Read Acts 6 & 7; Pray or donate to the LCAC
- December 27*
- 3**
- Sing: What Child Is This
- Do: Read Hebrews 1:1-4; Bake a birthday cake for Jesus!
- December 28*
- 4**
- Sing: O Little Town of Bethlehem
- Do: Read Matthew 2:13-20; Pray for children, babies, and those you've feared
- December 29*
- 5**
- Sing: It Came Upon the Midnight Clear
- Do: Read Titus 3:4-7; Rest and enjoy Christmastide!
- December 30*
- 6**
- Sing: Angels, from the Realms of Glory
- Do: Read Isaiah 63:7-9; Give thanks for all of the blessings you've experienced in 2023
- December 31*
- 7**
- Sing: O Come, All Ye Faithful
- Do: Read Titus 2:11-14 & 2 Cor 5:16-21; Celebrate New Years & New Creation at church!
- January 1*
- 8**
- Sing: Hark! the Herald Angels Sing
- Do: Read Matt 1:18-21, Luke 2:21, Acts 4:8-12; Give thanks for the name of Jesus, which tells of God's salvation!
- January 2*
- 9**
- Sing: God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen
- Do: Read Psalm 98; Make Wassail; Pray for the good health of your family, church, & neighbors
- January 3*
- 10**
- Sing: Angels We Have Heard on High!
- Do: Read Psalm 96; Rest and enjoy Christmastide!
- January 4*
- 11**
- Sing: Go, Tell It on the Mountain
- Do: Read 52:7-10; Pray for missionaries and all who do not yet know Jesus
- January 5*
- 12**
- Sing: The First Noel
- Do: Read Psalm 148; Have a 12th Night Party - celebrate the gift of Jesus!

# Living Liturgically

✿ Epiphany ✿

*The following statement was taken from an old Middlesettlements Methodist-Episcopal Church Sunday School book from 1904:*

December 4, 1904

Today it is wet and rainy. We had no Sunday school. But I trust next Sabbath will be a fine day.

This quarter will soon be out and we will start a new year. I hope everybody will start the New Year with new resolutions and turn over a new page in the history of their lives. I think every body should set out on the New Year with a new spirit, new resolutions, fresh courage, and make the best of it while they live, for life is short and death is certain.

Hoping everybody will start out on the New Year, I still remain and wish everyone a Happy New Year.

I am your faithful secretary,  
Effie M. Milligan

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## Meal Blessing for Epiphany

Mighty God, you made manifest the mystery of your Word made flesh with the witness of a blazing star. And seeing it, the Magi came from afar and offered you gifts. Grant that the star of your holiness may shine forever within our hearts, and that we may find our treasure in offering you our praise and thanksgiving. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

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## An Epiphany House Blessing

Visit, O blessed Lord, this home with the gladness of your presence. Bless all who live here with the gift of your love; and grant that they may manifest your love [to each other and] to all whose lives they touch. May they grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of you; guide, comfort, and strengthen them; and preserve them in peace, O Jesus Christ, now and for ever. Amen.

## Epiphany Feasting & Festivities

1. January 5<sup>th</sup> is also known as “Twelfth Night”: the final day of the twelve days of Christmas celebration. Alternating traditions have it as a good day to throw a party or a good day to take down decorations. If you throw a party, traditional 12<sup>th</sup> Night fare includes the King’s Cake, which somehow got drafted into New Orleans’s Mardi Gras celebrations but originated here. If you want to go all out baking your own King’s Cake, hide a dried bean in the cake: whoever finds it is “King” (or Queen) for the night.
2. January 6<sup>th</sup> marks Epiphany, the day when the Wise Men finally make it to Jesus and the Christmas season draws to a close. If you’ve kept a nativity out, now’s the time to add the Wise Men. If they’ve been wandering through the house, find something star-shaped and have them “follow” the star to the manger (kiddos love leading the star, although it might feel more like a 40-years-in-the-wilderness kind of journey).
3. The way to end Epiphany is to bless your house. You can invite Pastor Magan over (she’d love it!) or you can try this traditional blessing yourself. With chalk, write the initials of the 3 Wise Men above the main door of the house, together with the year and a cross: “20 K + M + B 23” (Scripture doesn’t have the names for the Wise Men, but tradition holds that the names are Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar). The crosses stand for Christ, and the letters have a double meaning: in addition to the Wise Men’s names, they’re also an abbreviation of an ancient blessing that means “May Christ bless this house.” Along with the chalk marks, take time to invite God’s presence and blessings into your home.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the Christmas Season Blessings found in *Blessings of the Table: Mealtime Prayers Throughout the Year* by Brother Victor-Antoine d’Avile-Latourrette.