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Hope
Peace
Joy
Love



Preparing for a Season of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love

As a way to prepare our hearts for Christmas, the story goes that in 1839, a Lutheran minister working at a children's mission in Germany created a wreath out of the wheel of a cart. He placed small candles outside the outer ring of the wheel to be lit each weekday and four larger candles inside the ring, lighting these four candles on Sundays as a way for the children to countdown the days until Christmas.

Advent wreaths were eventually made from evergreen branches, twisted together in a circle. Similar to a wedding ring, the wreath reflects the unending love of Christ and eternal life offered through salvation. As Advent wreaths were used in the context of public worship, the candles took on meaning rather than simply marking time.

The **first candle** symbolizes **hope** and is sometimes called the "Prophet's Candle." The prophets of the Old Testament waited in hope for the Messiah's arrival, as we live in the hope that faith brings.

The **second candle** represents **peace** and is called the "Angel's Candle." The angels announced that Jesus came to bring peace--He came to bring people close to God and to each other.

The **third candle** signifies **joy** and is known as the "Shepherd's Candle." To the shepherds' great joy, the angels announced that Jesus came for humble people like them, bringing joy that would extend to all people everywhere.

The **fourth candle** represents **love**. Some traditions call this the "Bethlehem Candle," symbolizing Christ's manger. God sent his only Son to earth to save us, because He loves us!

A **fifth candle**, the "**Christ Candle**," is placed at the center of the wreath's circle. This white candle reminds us that Jesus is the spotless lamb of God, sent to wash away our sins! Being placed in the center also is a reminder that Christ came down from heaven and entered into our world for our salvation. At Christmas we celebrate that in Christ, "The true light that shines on all people was coming into the world" (John 1:9).

So, what is the meaning of the Advent wreath? We can still draw meaning from its original use: to mark time while increasing light. Advent is all about time for preparation. This advent, as you read the devotionals written by people of the LPC family, don't just mark time. Prepare your hearts, minds, and souls to receive the gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love that Christ brings to your life!

Saturday, December 25

Christmas Day

The Love of Christ

Ephesians 3:17-18

*“so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.
And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,
may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people,
to grasp how wide and long and high
and deep is the love of Christ,”
- Ephesians 3:17-18*

As we go about this blessed day knowing it was the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ, let us meditate on the truth for how much God really does love us. Not only that, but how important it is to show others the love that He has shown us. He sent His one and only son into the world as an advocate for perfect love. For God doesn't just have love, He is love!

Think about the cross relating to this verse - the symbol of salvation.

God's love is wide enough to include everyone.

His love is long enough to last through all eternity.

God's love is deep enough to save the worst sinner.

And His love is high enough to take us to heaven.

Prayer

Dear Lord, I thank you for this day. I pray that I keep in my heart the vastness of your love. I pray that I remember to show your love not only in seeking your grace towards myself, but by giving it to the world around me as well. Reveal to me steadfast strength to go into this day with gratitude. To celebrate the mercy that you show and the blessing of Jesus for how He saved me. You are the true definition of love, and nothing can ever measure up to your goodness. Thank you for saving me. Thank you for what you are doing in my heart. I pray this with confident trust in your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Jaclyne Andrews

First Week of Advent

Hope

The **first candle** symbolizes **hope** and is sometimes called the "Prophet's Candle." The prophets of the Old Testament waited in hope for the Messiah's arrival, as we live in the hope that faith brings.

First Sunday, November 28

**Is there hope?
Hebrews 10: 23**

*“Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess,
for he who promised is faithful.”*

- Hebrews 10: 23

It seemed like every week, it was another one – another friend getting married, another adorable couple holding hands, another picture of the surprised girl in the park with the ring on her finger. And all I could think was – why not me? What on Earth am I doing wrong? Will it ever be my turn? As I graduated college with no ring, entered the workforce with no prospects, and climbed the corporate ladder by myself, it seemed like the single crowd was getting smaller, and girls’ nights were becoming fewer and farther in between, replaced by date nights and preschool musicals.

Ever get the feeling? Maybe for you it was something else – that person who got promoted over you, friends living without the burden of chronic illness, yet another smiling new homeowner while your apartment looked more and more depressing. Whatever your “thing” is, it’s so easy to lose hope as the world seems to pass you by. And, as genuinely hard as all these things are, they’re nothing compared to the people who were waiting for a Messiah. Can you imagine a single day of your life without Jesus?

Here’s the thing – there is nothing wrong with hoping for love, for healing, for hard work acknowledged, or just for a space to call your own. But if we’re putting our hope in any of those things, we’ll never be satisfied or at peace. When we put our hope in Jesus, we can hold onto it no matter what storms come our way – He is faithful, He is good, and He was worth waiting for.

In April, I’ll trade in my last name and start a new chapter of my life. But I’ve learned that won’t take all my problems away. No matter what good gifts God gives us, the greatest one will always be Jesus – the light of the world, the hope of the nations, the king of our hearts. Are you putting your hope in the right place?

Prayer

God, thank you for Your Son Jesus, who renews our hope each day, carries our burdens, and provides us with a path to eternal life with You. Help us to seek Him out every day, and to acknowledge Him as the king of our hearts and ruler of our lives. In His name we pray, Amen.

Rachel Jaynes

Friday, December 24

Christmas Eve

What Love Does

1 Corinthians 13:7

*“It always protects, always trusts, always hopes,
always perseveres.”*

- 1 Corinthians 13:7

“The Love Chapter” (1 Corinthians 13) is regularly read at weddings - but it isn’t just for weddings. Although, I’m sure Paul would approve as his intention seems to be to bring the idea of love into a practical everyday reality so that we can live it out. That’s a good message for all relationships. Paul is interested in us knowing what love is so we can do what love does. Paul wants our actions of love to be like God’s actions of love. God’s love is patient, it is kind, it doesn’t boast. God’s love may seem boring to us, but it is more real than the passions that brings people together. God’s acts of love are the ALWAYS kind of love and our acts of love should be too. This Christmas, in the advent story, look closely to see how God’s love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres as God’s Love made flesh breaks into the world in the midst of human sin and the darkness of evil. The light of Christ born to us in our darkness is the ALWAYS kind of love we read about. What kind of love is yours?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for breaking into the world with your ALWAYS kind of love. It has changed us and made us into your family. I pray that this Christmas the tension of the waiting moments and the joy of celebration would lead us to share this ALWAYS kind of love with others. Amen.

Andrew Johnson

Thursday, December 23
Incarnational Love
John 1:14

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

- John 1:14

The Incarnation is the turning point of history. As the Apostle John says, the Word of God became flesh. The Word that caused planets to burst into being, the Word that spoke life into Adam’s lungs. That Word, became flesh. The Word of creation and ultimate power became a group of cells that grew in a womb. The Word became a baby, fully reliant on a mother and family. The Word learned to crawl, walk, talk. The Word dwelled among us. This word for “dwelling” is the same word used to describe the way God dwelled in the tabernacle. Where God’s presence blessed the Israelites. God was in and among his people, within the tabernacle. Then the Word dwells within his people, as one of them. He once again blesses His people with his presence.

Often, we hear that a name for Jesus is Immanuel, which means “God with us”. We hear this name around Christmas time, we think of it as a one-time name. Immanuel is who Jesus was when he was incarnate with the Israelites. However, it’s important for us to realize that God’s name has not changed. He is still the God who is with us. The incarnation broke down the barriers of space between us and our God. The Word dwelled among His people, and He continues to do so now through His Spirit. Let us remember that the true love of God is clearly seen as he entered into the world, in a stable outside an inn.

Prayer

Lord as we remember your incarnation, help us to see that you are still the God who is with us. Help us to seek your presence and will as you walk alongside us. Thank you for the gift of your son, and for your Spirit that still guides us. Amen.

Stephanie Poblentz

Monday, November 29
Hope that Overcomes
Psalm 42:5

“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”

- Psalm 42: 5

Hope. How often do we use this word in our daily lives? As in, I hope the rain doesn’t last too long; I hope the traffic isn’t heavy . . . and so on. Hope is simply to want something to happen or to be true.

With all the negativity and stress in society today, it’s easy to feel disheartened, to think that some things are just hopeless. We all experience times when we feel that no matter what we do, or hope for, it may not happen. But the good news is that as Christians, when things look the darkest or most hopeless, that’s when God is near us, patiently waiting for us to put our hope and trust in His hands. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior, we know that our hope is confirmed – our hope is Jesus Christ our Lord.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of hope. In our humanness, we often let obstacles and challenges block our way and derail us. We forget that when we place our hope in You, these things will be overcome. Help us realize we do not have to hope alone or in vain. Fill our hearts with the joy of knowing you have given us the greatest hope we will ever need, and it’s in His name we pray. Amen.

Vicki Dalzelle

Tuesday, November 30

Hope for Acceptance

John 15:15

"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

- John 15:15

The wind outside my window is blowing very hard today. It reminds me of how Jesus compares the Holy Spirit with wind in His conversation with Nicodemus. There is the gentle, comforting breeze – and then there is the power of a hurricane. God's power is so much more than I can comprehend, and yet He wants to know me intimately?

Jesus calls His disciples friends. Does that mean we can also be called His friends? I think so. It's sometimes hard to reconcile God's holiness and power with the intimacy that comes with friendship. God, in his unbelievable mercy and kindness chooses to befriend us. Do we really get that? We were born in rebellion against Him. He has every right to zap us, but He chooses to allow us an insight into what He is doing. He even allows us to participate in what He is doing. I can't think of any better hope than to be friends with the Creator of the Universe - to be privy to His heart and personality. What an honor He has given us.

There is no other god like our God!

Prayer

Jesus, there are no words to describe how grateful we are for the privilege of knowing you on a personal level. Thank you for all the ways in which you love us, teach us, and have patience with us. Thank you for taking our sin upon yourself, so that we can take your righteousness upon ourselves. There is no greater love than yours. Help us to be less and less like us, and more and more like you. Amen.

Karen Kilpatrick

Wednesday, December 22

Expensive Love

John 3:16

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

- John 3:16

Some gifts we earn. Some gifts we deserve. Some gifts are a reward. But the gift of salvation is not like that. The Bible says that while we were still sinners - unrighteous and ungodly - God gave his Son to save us.

If you asked me for money, I would give it to you. If you asked me for food or clothing, I would give it to you. If you asked for my car or home, I might give it to you. However, I cannot imagine giving my son to die on a cross. That gift would be too costly.

And yet, in his limitless love, God gave his only Son to save us. We cannot earn it. We do not deserve it. It is a gift of God's grace, freely given. The way we receive this gift is simply by trusting in Jesus Christ and his work on the cross.

Prayer

Gracious heavenly Father, if ever I doubt your love for me, may I look at the cross and remember: You gave your Son to save me. Thank you, LORD, your costly love. Amen.

Peter Larson

Tuesday, December 21
Love All
Matthew 28:19-20

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

- Matthew 28:19-20

The Great Commission is a command to all of us. Our purpose is to take the Word of God into the world, teaching others to live the way Jesus taught us to live. The most obvious way is to become a missionary. That doesn't have to mean crossing the ocean and going to foreign lands! We can be missionaries every day to our families, our neighbors, our co-workers...anyone who is in our sphere of influence. A simple smile to a stranger in the grocery store. An offer of prayer for a difficult diagnosis. Helping to prepare and serve community meals. Donating blood. A monetary offering to those who do cross oceans! At this time of year, hearts are more open to hearing about the love of Christ than any other time. Look for opportunities to share Christ's love and the reason that you are doing so. Open the door in such a way that others want to come into His presence with you.

Prayer

Father God, thank you for the missionaries who showed us Your love, drawing our hearts to You by living for You. Help us to be creative sharing Your love. Send Your Spirit ahead of us to prepare the way. Amen.

Mary Jo Oliver

Wednesday, December 1
Hope and Confidence
1 Peter 3:15

“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,”

- 1 Peter 3:15

Every day on my homebound commute, I pass UC Health and their overwhelmingly large sign that states “In Science Lives Hope.” I laugh and yell at the sign every time---‘Nope---in Jesus lives hope.’ In defense of sounding ridiculous for yelling at a sign, this verse struck me that I am not so crazy in my rants.

Our hope unequivocally is ONLY in Jesus. He has extended undeserved grace to us, the most holy gift we could ever receive. In this season of Advent, I pray that we can offer love and respect to others who may ask about Jesus, while sharing the confidence we feel in the hope offered to us by Jesus. He was born to save and atone for our sins. Now we have hope in eternal life in His presence. May we speak the truth in love.

Prayer

Dear heavenly father, please give us the words and ability to speak to others about you. We are so reluctant to share our faith, but in our hearts, we are committed to you. We praise and honor you with the gift of our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Patty Corfman

Thursday, December 2
Hope for a King
Matthew 2:11

“On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.”
- Matthew 2:11

What a gift from God to the World! He gave us his one and only son in order to forgive our sins. This allows us to live forever in the Kingdom of Heaven. The three wise men gave him gifts. What gifts can we give him? Do we always treat others with love? That is what Jesus would do. Do you do things for others even when it isn't convenient? That is what Jesus would do. Do you treat others with respect even when you don't want to? That is what Jesus would do.

While we can't give Jesus material gifts, we can try our best to live our lives as he would want us to live them. Not an easy thing to do, but we must try to do that 24 . . . 7 . . . 365.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank you for being born and giving your life for our sins. Please help us to give you a gift and live our lives like you want us to, each and every hour of every day. Amen.

Bernie Uchtman

Monday, December 20
Love Forgives
Matthew 18:21-22

“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”
- Matthew 18:21-22

Why would Jesus tell Peter to forgive his brother? Romans 5:8 says “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this; While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Then is forgiveness is a demonstration of love? Yes! And Jesus commanded us to “love one another.” He indicated that loving one another was the sign of His followers. Christ died to provide our forgiveness. How far would we go to forgive one another? Would we demonstrate our love by forgiving, and forgiving, and forgiving without keeping count? Isn't it worth trying?

Prayer

Loving and gracious God, thank you for forgiveness seventy-seven times and more every day. Help us to reflect your love by forgiving and forgetting the “sins” against us. Amen.

Joe McKenzie

Fourth Sunday, December 19
Love that Rescues
Exodus 3:7-8

“The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.”

- Exodus 3:7-8

We live in a broken world where unfortunate events happen and sometimes our lives seem to be shattered beyond repair. In such times, we need to understand that God has not denied us His best. He's offering us the very best by offering Himself. He is our only source of perfection on this side of eternity. He sees the perfect plan that He has for our life. We may be afraid of all the disappointment in this broken world, but God isn't afraid. He is aware, so very aware of His ultimate plans and purpose to keep our hearts and souls connected to Him. Feeling pain is the first step toward calling out and being rescued by God. Our pain and suffering can and will hurt us, but it can also save us. Saving us from a life where we are self-reliant, self-satisfied, self-absorbed and set up for the greatest pain of all – separation from God. If we want His promises, we must trust His process. God loves us too much to answer our prayers any other time than at the right time and in any other way than the right way.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, may we trust in your grace to rescue and redeem us in your perfect timing during this Advent season and in the new year. Amen.

Sharen Benner

Friday, December 3
Luke 15:10

“In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

- Luke 15:10

When we have hope for things we think are important to us, we are happy when they come true. However, sometimes God steps in and our hopes are changed. When we are able to see that this change is greater than what we had hoped for, it is time to celebrate. To celebrate our hopes it takes time to sit back and reflect on what God has planned for us. Always keep in mind, God wants the best for us.

Prayer

Father, help me to follow the path you have set for me. In all things I give thanks. Amen.

Marilyn Brown

Saturday, December 4
Waiting in Hope
Psalm 33:20

"We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield."

- Psalm 33:20

I didn't understand "waiting in hope" until I encountered situations beyond my control (parents will understand this). I'm learning to "wait in hope" concerning situations I've prayed about for years without seeing an answer, yet. I "wait in hope" for God to "work all things together for good" (Rom. 8:28) when the consequences of bad decisions look hopeless for people I love. Paul exhorts us to "hope in God" and to "wait in hope" choosing to "do good, be rich in good deeds, generous, and willing to share" (I Tim 6: 17-19). Might we be characterized as "waiting in hope" by aligning our actions, words, and attitude with the Lord's promises?

"Waiting in hope" is not a "think positive" strategy. (Think of "waiting" as a waiter "waits on" tables requiring action and service.) "Waiting in hope" is continuing to journey one step at a time through the good and hard, hopeful not in your own strength, but hoping in Christ who is faithful (Phil. 1:6). "Waiting in hope" transcends life circumstances and focuses on the eternal truth that Jesus is Lord of all.

Prayer

Lord I pray for grace to "wait in hope" as I live a life of peace and service knowing You hold the beginning and the end in Your hands. *May Your unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in You - Psalm 33:22. Amen.*

Tari Heath

Fourth Week of Advent

Love

The **fourth candle** represents **love**.
Some traditions call this the "Bethlehem Candle,"
symbolizing Christ's manger. God sent his only Son
to earth to save us, because He loves us!

Saturday, December 18
The Promise of Joy
Romans 15:13

*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy
and peace as you trust in him,
so that you may overflow with hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit."
- Romans 15:13*

This is such a powerful and wonderful verse for those trying to find joy this season. There is so much packed into this single verse to lead us to joy. First and foremost, we must look to God. God is the only source that can provide pure joy to us. We must go to Him first. Second, we must go to Him by trusting Him. Trusting that He loves us, has the best intentions for us, and has a wonderful plan for us. We do this by getting into the Word and through prayer, to see the promises He has for us. As we draw closer to Him, the power of the Holy Spirit will be working inside of us, filling us. We will then start seeing the hope of God, knowing that He has us in His hands. This will then bring us joy and peace over any troubles we may bear.

Prayer

So may the peace of God be upon this season! Be overflowed with Joy, by the power of the Holy Spirit, by going to God and trusting in Him. Amen.

John Untener

Second Week of Advent

Peace

The **second candle** represents **peace** and is called the "Angel's Candle." The angels announced that Jesus came to bring peace--He came to bring people close to God and to each other.

Second Sunday, December 5
Prince of Peace
Isaiah 9:6

*“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.”*

- Isaiah 9:6

Isaiah prophesied the coming rule of Jesus on earth. The purpose of His coming was for “us”. From eternity, God planned to “give” Him and predicted His coming. Jesus is the Son of God. The government of the entire world shall be on his shoulders; Jesus reigns as King of the world; over all men.

When He came He was a wonder; a miracle of God. Unique among human beings. He is supreme above everyone else; He is called **Wonderful** because He is wonderful. He is called **Counselor** because He revealed the mind of God; He gives God’s council. He is called **Mighty God** because He is God almighty; the Son, not the Father, but they are one. He is called **Everlasting Father** because all the ages meet in Him and He is called **Prince of Peace** because peace will reign when He comes again.

How God felt we were worthy of His Son is very humbling to every Christian. Let us rejoice in His coming and celebrate His birth!

Prayer

Father God, thank you for giving us your Son so that we may have everlasting life. May we be mindful of your great sacrifice as we celebrate His birth this advent season. In His name we pray and believe. Amen.

Janice Watsell

Friday, December 17
The Joy of the Lord
Hebrews 12:2

“fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

- Hebrews 12:2

The JOY of the Lord is the gladness of heart that comes from knowing God, abiding in Christ, and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus was born, the angels announce “good tidings of great JOY” (Luke 2:10). All who find Jesus know, with the shepherds of the nativity, the JOY He brings. Even before His birth, Jesus had brought JOY, as attested to in Mary’s song (Luke 1:47) and by John’s response to hearing Mary’s voice as he “leaped for JOY” in his mother’s womb (Luke 1:44).

What does the JOY of the LORD mean? It is the fact that God has found a solution to the problem of sin. He has provided a way back to sensible, sober, wise, helpful, wholesome living. How? By learning to think like He thinks. Begin to see the world from His point of view. Listen no longer to the clamoring voices of the media. Do not take your philosophy of life from what people are saying or the advice others are giving. Listen to the Word of God.

CHRIST WAS BORN.

CHRIST HAS DIED.

CHRIST IS RISEN.

CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN.

Prayer

Thank You, Lord, for the joy of forgiveness and restoration. Thank You for paying for that gift with the precious blood of Your Son. Amen.

John and Fran Morris

Thursday, December 16
The Power of Joy
Nehemiah 8:10

*“Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks,
and send some to those who have nothing prepared.
This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve,
for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”*
- Nehemiah 8:10

Years of exile had ended; the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt. To mark the occasion, the high priest Ezra read the Book of the Law to the assembled crowd, who wept as they listened. Why were they weeping? For some, so young that they had spent most of their lives in exile, hearing the holy scripture produced a realization of what they had missed. Older people wept because they had despaired of ever hearing the sacred words again. Nehemiah encourages the people to delight in hearing the sacred word of God, to share in the Lord’s joy.

The past year and half has been an exile of sorts for many of us—unable to worship in person each Sunday, missing gatherings for family celebrations, experiencing Christmas without observing many of its beloved traditions. And some of us will weep when we hear the familiar nativity scriptures this Advent season.

Yet the “COVID exile” pales in comparison to the exile of sin. It is an exile whose end is signaled only by the birth of a Savior who provides the means of grace that can free us from the exile of sin. This Christmas, let us follow Nehemiah’s exhortation. Enjoy this holy day! Share with those in need!

Prayer

Lord, in this holy Christmas season and forever, You have provided the gift of your Son to lead us out of the exile of sin into the joy of salvation. Glory and honor, praise, adoration, now and forevermore be Thine. Amen.

Nina Dorsch

Monday, December 6
Perfect Peace
Isaiah 26:3

*“You will keep in perfect peace
those whose minds are steadfast,
because they trust in you.”*
- Isaiah 26:3

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. By keeping our minds on Him, we can overcome fears and worries. When Dick had his major accident in 2009 he didn’t worry about the surgery or his injuries. He refused to think too much about it, trusting our Lord was with him every step of the way. His ankle still gives him problems but we know it could have been far worse. The peace from God is not because we have no problems. He just helps us through them.

May we keep our minds steadfast on the Lord during this wonderful season as we celebrate our Savior’s birth.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus to be our Savior and please help us to continually trust in you. We can have perfect peace when we totally trust in you. Amen.

Dick and Donna Kaufman

Tuesday, December 7

Peace Given

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.”

- John 14:27

Like most everyone I get deliveries. Items come right to my doorstep. Sometimes I forget that I ordered something and expectantly open the “surprise.” But what if I never stepped outside to get my delivery or never opened what I paid for? That item would be useless and the cost wasted.

In John 14, Jesus is preparing his disciples for the end of his earthly ministry reminding them and me of his teachings and promises. In verse 27, He promises His gift of peace. Jesus gifts me with peace – not any old peace – His Peace. He left it for me. Fully paid. I must only reach out and use what has already been delivered. Woe to me when I leave ignored, forgotten and unused the precious peace He gave me.

Prayer

Lord, this Christmas, help me expectantly receive your gift of peace. Help me use your peace to be a blessing to a fear-filled world. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Cathy Riggan

Wednesday, December 15

Finding Joy

1 Peter 1:8

“Though you have not seen him, you love him;

and even though you do not see him now,

you believe in him and are filled with

an inexpressible and glorious joy,”

- 1 Peter 1:8

As a child I believed in people I never saw; Easter Bunny, Santa, the Tooth Fairy. I saw people dressed as Santa, etc., but they weren’t real. There is a person I also believe in whom I’ve never seen: Jesus. Jesus is different than Santa, etc. Jesus is real! You can talk to Him, witness his amazing works, listen to Him as He guides you through your life. You can also love Him and feel His love returned.

Inexpressible and Glorious Joy comes from knowing Jesus. Joy that can be felt regardless of our circumstances. Joy that can change the darkest of days to bright, shiny light. Joy that can bring tears to our eyes. Indescribable Joy.

Joy from a person we have not seen, cannot see now, but will see one day. We love our Jesus. He gave us the greatest gifts known to man. He gives us His love. He also gives eternal life when we believe in Him, a person we’ve never seen.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for our Jesus. Thank you for the most wonderful gift ever given to mankind. And thank you for the Joy Jesus brings to our lives, an inexpressible and glorious Joy. Amen.

Larry Oury

Tuesday, December 14
Joy that Transcends Trials
Hebrews 10:34

“You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.”

- Hebrews 10:34

The writer of Hebrews is calling the believers to persevere, holding unswervingly to faith in Christ, and reminding them of their earlier joyful acceptance of great trials and loss of material possessions. How had they been able to have that joy? The answer is that they knew there were better things waiting for them that would last forever. We can choose to be joyful, even in times of great trials, because we too, have the assurance of future rewards and blessings, such as an amazing, glorious, joyful life forever with Christ. That life begins now as we have Christ with us, loving us at all times, with absolutely nothing able to separate us from that love. Let us remember to look up and focus on what is eternal, though unseen, so that we do not lose heart, as we realize our present trials are but temporary, and small compared to the glory that is to come and be ours forever.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for the eternal glory you have prepared for us. May your Holy Spirit fill our hearts with joy as we focus on You. In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

Trish Garrett

Wednesday, December 8
Peace that Overcomes
John 16:33

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”
- John 16:33

The days in which we are living today are difficult. Since the beginning EVERY DAY has been difficult in some form for all of us. But two thousand years ago, life on earth changed. Each day since, just as the many days before then, everything LOOKED the same.

Before Jesus came to earth as a baby, people's habits, traditions, routines, and lives were guided and determined by their own thoughts, actions, and decisions. THEY THOUGHT IT, THEY DID IT! Those people who chose to believe in the Hebrew God were guided and directed by spiritual leaders to act, perform, work, and carry on their lives in a certain fashion, conforming to a list of requirements, which it was determined would “please” God and make believer's lives “better.” Then Jesus began his ministry. For about three and a half years Jesus roamed the region of Israel attracting people from all different lifestyles, ages, and backgrounds, instructing and teaching them how to live their lives in a new and better way. All the trials and problems still existed; the difficulties of everyday life remained. Everything LOOKED the same. But their attitudes changed inside.

When you wake up every day and KNOW that you are not alone; when problems occur; when illness, and even certain death is the prognosis, yet you are at peace with whatever the outcome may be. That is the love Jesus gives. We are promised and assured that those who place their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior will not suffer as those who do not believe. Problems still happen; difficulties in life still occur. It is our ATTITUDE that comes from within that guides us through. I heard someone once say “when you become a Christian you don't get a detour around life's troubles, but a guided tour through them”. Come this Christmas season and learn more about Jesus, our ultimate Tour Guide of life.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you each day we're given on this earth to learn more about you and spread your word to eager ears and hearts. Give us strength and wisdom to win each day, shining your light to all the earth. In your name I pray. Amen.

Larry Bracey

Thursday, December 9
Incomprehensible Peace
Philippians 4:7

*“And the peace of God,
which transcends all understanding,
will guard your hearts
and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*
- Philippians 4:7

I don't know about you, but I often find myself completely overwhelmed during the Christmas season with all the expectations that come with the holiday. My work life is especially busy with planning and scheduling events, while my home life is busy with shopping, wrapping, decorating, and hosting. Amid all the busyness, I try to make time for family and friends, yet it's often the meaningful relationships that suffer most when I confuse my priorities.

The Bible reminds me that God isn't about chaos. He's about calmness. So, what can I do to cultivate a calm and peaceful Christmas season? I can remember a calmness that I had never experienced until I surrendered my life to Him. It sunk deep... so deep into my bones that it penetrated my heart. It was peace at its purest. And as I reflect on this, I'm reminded to find time to rest in His transcending peace and to seek His guidance in guarding my heart and mind.

Prayer

Lord, remind us that Your peace cannot be shaken by chaotic schedules or commitments. Help us to intentionally rest in You as You reveal Your priorities for us this season. Amen.

Beth Gully

Monday, December 13
Joy to the World!
Luke 2:11

*“Today in the town of David
a Savior has been born to you;
he is the Messiah, the Lord.”*
- Luke 2:11

Let's be honest, there wasn't much joy in Israel under Roman oppression or King Herod.

But in a cold, lonely field, shepherds (low in Jewish society) saw and heard something wonderful. Angels told them of the birth of a Savior. Frightened as they must have been, they went to seek Him.

How joyful for them to be some of the first to see and worship Him! What a joy to the whole world!

Today, we are facing many challenges that are robbing us of our joy. But it needn't be. We have Jesus and He is our Joy. Rejoice!

Prayer

Dear Lord, when the hard things come, remind us to seek your face and to rejoice in your never ending love and grace. Amen.

Carol Hornsby

Third Sunday, December 12
Joyful, All Ye Nations
Luke 2:14

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*
- Luke 2:14

Imagine a group of shepherds, people of little account, shivering, as they care for their flock in the middle of the night. The small village of Bethlehem is sleeping now, so only the light from the stars illumines the shadows of the hillside. Cold and weary, the shepherds doze fitfully, ever mindful of a predator—whether lion or wolf—that might lurk in the darkness. The youngest shepherd, still a boy, nestles closer to his father for safety and warmth. Drifting deeper into sleep, they are suddenly awakened by a great light shattering the darkness, and as the KJV so poetically reads, “they were sore afraid.” And who wouldn’t be? A band of angels, possibly much taller than ordinary humans, hovers above them, singing and proclaiming glory to God in the highest heaven, the farthest reach of the universe. The heavenly host also promises peace—the peace that passes all understanding—on God’s favored people. Awake! This is no time to sleep! The Savior of the world, the true Shepherd, is being born to Mary tonight!

Two thousand years later, as we remember this holy night, our world suffers from too much neon brightness and too much noise. With such busyness filling every crevice of our lives, we can easily forget how astounding, how dramatic, and how life-changing this message was and still is. Overnight, the world evolved from darkness to light, from despair to hope, from death to life.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, in this season of preparation, nudge us to shut out the static so that we too can experience the wonder of the shepherds, and encounter joy in the birth of the Christ child just as they did. Amen.

Inga Kimple

Friday, December 10
The Blessing of Peace
Numbers 6:24-26

*“The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”*
- Numbers 6:24-26

In Numbers 6:22-23 we read “The Lord said to Moses, tell Aaron and his sons, this is how you are to bless the Israelites.”

This blessing is a love letter from our Lord to the Israelites. When I read this blessing, I feel like the Lord is whispering in my ear and filling me with his peace and love. I believe that when Aaron and his sons read this blessing to the Israelites, they all felt an incredible closeness to the Lord as well.

I share this blessing with others by sending cards with the scripture to those who are in spiritual darkness or who need the love and support of the Lord to get over a rough patch. My hope is that they too will feel like they are getting a thousand hugs from the Lord.

Prayer

Dear Lord, as we prepare for a Season filled with Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love, may your “Blessing of Peace” be shared with believers and non-believers around the world. May they feel your Peace and Love. In your name we pray. Amen.

Terri Catanzaro

Saturday, December 11
Our Peace
Ephesians 2:14

"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,"
- Ephesians 2:14

Each day for the past week we've been reminded of the varied ways Christ imparts peace. Today Paul writes that Christ's sacrifice has resulted in peace between Jew and Gentile since He destroyed the wall of hostility dividing us.

If we would have been fortunate enough to visit the temple mount in Jerusalem in the time of Jesus, we would have been unable to enter the temple courts where Jews were permitted to go and worship. We would have found the Court of the Gentiles cordoned off by a railing to keep us at a distance. In Jesus' day there was little love lost between Jew and Gentile. In fact, a Jewish man would often pray a brief prayer each day thanking God that He hadn't made him a Gentile!

Now Jew and Gentile (all of humankind) are one in Christ. In Galatians, Paul proclaims there is no longer Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. How could it be otherwise in the church, the Body of Christ? Believers the world over have everything of importance in common with the other. How can we let our petty differences divide us any longer? When I've met with brothers or sisters in Christ from other lands there is an inexplicable bonding, a unity that defies description even when we are unable to communicate with one another through words.

Prayer

Let us pray. Father, with all the division and strife in our world today we give thanks for sending Jesus to be our peace. He not only showed us how to love and be at peace with each other, He showed us we now have peace with You. Amen.

Steve Newby

Third Week of Advent



The **third candle** signifies **joy** and is known as the "Shepherd's Candle." To the shepherds' great joy, the angels announced that Jesus came for humble people like them, bringing joy that would extend to all people everywhere.