



# THE WORD MADE FLESH

Advent Daily Devotionals  
2024





The First United Presbyterian Church Communication ministry team would like to thank everyone who contributed to this project. We would also like to thank Victor Parkerson for allowing the use of his beautiful artwork on our cover.

This booklet is available to church family and visitors in several ways:

- As a printed booklet, including **Large Print**. Please contact the Church office at (479) 442-4411.
- As a PDF on the website where you can download and print out for your household, or share with friends.
- As a series of posts at the website, with appropriate hymns.
- As links at our Facebook page and group, so you can easily find the posts at the website.

Consider joining in at our Facebook group to share your devotional insights and pondering. We hope to share insights and questions there throughout Advent as we read these meditations together. Please search for *A Light on the Hill* Facebook group to join.

We look forward to connecting everyone this season as we prepare for the coming of our Lord!

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Sunday, December 1**

**John 1:14**

*And 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.*

In the congregation I last served as pastor, I read the opening verses of John's gospel on Christmas Eve as the sanctuary lights were dimmed and candles were being lit in the pews. In Advent, we make preparations to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. "What has come into being 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." (John 1:3b-5)

The final verse I read before we would sing "Silent Night" was the 14<sup>th</sup> verse. "And 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."

Our Advent worship services this year have a theme of "The Word Made Flesh". We will look at scripture passages where Jesus revealed His divine nature through the description of physical substances we experience on earth. We will look at images such as the Bread of Life, the Salt of the Earth, the Rock of Ages, and the Light of the World. On Christmas Eve we will look at the simple, earthly place where Jesus was born, a manger.

Too often, we take this familiar story for granted. It is astounding, that God chose to come to us in human flesh in Jesus Christ, sharing all of what we experience as human beings. Jesus Christ is "Emmanuel – God with us."

I look forward to sharing these weeks of preparation with you for this astounding event that reminds us of the depth and magnitude of the love God has for us. I pray that these Advent devotions will enhance your preparation for and anticipation of celebrating the Christ child once again. Please make plans to join us for these meaningful services of worship during this special time of the year.

*Contributed by Rev. Stewart Smith*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Monday, December 2**

**John 1:1-5**

*<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup> in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.*

This marvelous passage from John parallels the familiar “story of beginnings” in Genesis. As we begin our Advent season and prepare our hearts to recall the birth of Jesus, it is good to remember that Christ existed long before his incarnation on earth.

Seven hundred years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, it was recorded in Micah 5:2: “But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.”

Where we come from matters; it shapes and imprints who we are. For instance, someone from New York speaks in a different dialect than someone from South Carolina. Our food preferences tend to be different (compare Texas-style barbecue to North Carolina-style barbecue: one uses chili powder, cumin, garlic powder, black pepper, and a bit of sugar, while the other has a tangy, spicy flavor that comes from vinegar-based sauces and is sometimes topped with cole slaw). Our outlook on life, our values, and even our profession can be shaped by our regional origins.

Jesus’s origins show him to be fully God and fully human. It’s hard for us to wrap our minds around this concept; it’s a paradox. Because of this, Jesus was both with God and was God (talk about a mind bender), all things came into being through him, life came from him, and that life was the light of all people—shining in the darkness (refer to Isaiah 9:2 “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light, those living in a land of deep darkness have seen a great light.”).

There is much for us to ponder as we begin Advent season. Emmanuel, God with us!

*Contributed by Isaac Thomas*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Tuesday, December 3**

**Jeremiah 29:11**

*11 For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.*

This verse became important in our family's life when we became a foster family, and it often framed my prayers for foster children as we headed into a courtroom where decisions would be made for them. I knew that the author of time, space, matter, and energy—our loving creator, God—loves us with a sacrificial, extravagant love and that God's grace would abound even in uncertainty and fear. I knew I had to let go of my desire to be in control of what was happening, to let go of my tiny vision of what was best, to trust in the work of God's Holy Spirit to release the future and the hope God had in store for that precious child. Knowing God's love for each of us is far more perfect, God's plans far wiser, than ours brought some measure of comfort and hope in the uncertainty.

Over and over, I've experienced God's presence and faithfulness in amazing ways when discouraged, frightened, grieving, or perplexed. As I learned to be still, to slow down, to be open to God's goodness and faithfulness, I discovered simple, unexpected, unlikely, daily, sometimes difficult, graces in disguise. I recognized again that there is always more grace, more than we dare to ask for or imagine, when we awaken to the wonder of the immensity of God's faithful love for us.

Those experiences then fuel a desire to find new ways to show courageous and compassionate care for others experiencing grief, fear, or frustration in this our hurting world. May God grow our ability to trust God's promises like the one in this scripture. Then we can face whatever the future brings with hope, for truly we know that nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Contributed by Lorraine Brewer*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Wednesday, December 4**

**Jeremiah 33:14-15**

*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. <sup>15</sup> In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.*

*In those days and at that time*

*I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line;  
he will do what is just and right in the land.' "*

Way back in the 1970's we were newlywed and working as house parents at a children's home in Monticello, AR. Communication to our parents in Fayetteville was by handwritten letter or occasional long distance phone call. Months went by. When we were able to take a few days off, we decided to surprise our folks and drive home without giving them notice. It was a drive of over 5 hours at the national speed limit of 50 mph. What joy there was when we showed up on their doorsteps!

The arrival was welcome, but later, my mom admitted that she really liked the anticipation of our visits. She enjoyed the preparation and feelings of expectation that would come as she looked forward to seeing us. The time of our visit seemed to be extended with the promise of things to come.

Jeremiah is doing the early notification of magnificent things to come. God is not going to spring a surprise visit. This is a huge announcement of God's way coming to earth—a righteous Branch. The exact time is not given so we are encouraged to do internal preparation, careful study, joyful waiting. This ancient promise gives hope to people in need of heavenly communication. No matter how the day is going or what events are causing turmoil, we have the Holy Spirit to brighten our earthly travels. There are things we don't know about God's plans and there are often surprises, but the love and grace of Jesus Christ is with us always.

Thank you, Lord, for notification of your gracious promise so that we can look to the future with confidence and hope for heavenly peace.

*Contributed by Carol Van Scyoc*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Thursday, December 5**

**Micah 5:2**

*But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old.*

God does unexpected things. His thoughts are not our thoughts, His timescale is not ours. As Isaiah 55:9 says, “For as heaven is higher than earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” The book of Micah was written long after King David’s rule and after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Perhaps 700 years before the birth of Christ, Micah predicted the Messiah’s birth in tiny Bethlehem, a town of perhaps 300 people six miles south of Jerusalem.

Bethlehem was also the birthplace of King David. God told the prophet Samuel to go to Bethlehem and choose one of Jesse’s sons to be king in place of King Saul. Jesse had eight sons. Samuel looked at the older seven sons and thought one of the tall, mature, older sons would be God’s choice. But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, “The Lord has not chosen these.” So he asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?” “There is still the youngest,” Jesse answered. “He is tending the sheep.”

God’s choices make us hopeful that He can use each of us, too. The Lord works with electrons, atoms, raindrops, snowflakes, children—small things. God values humble people to accomplish His will. He chose as Messiah a person who never owned a home, had no bank account, had no armies. He chose a carpenter’s son from a small village. God cares for us too. We may not be from a powerful, notable, wealthy family, but I am sure God can use the gifts we have.

*Contributed by Don Steinkraus*



**First United Presbyterian Church  
The Word Made Flesh  
Meditations for Advent  
Friday, December 6**

**Malachi 3:1**

*See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.*

The prophet Malachi lived approximately 450 years before the time of the nativity in Bethlehem. Unlike Isaiah, who dreamed and spoke in great visions of joyous upheaval at the coming of the Lord, Malachi spoke of a more personal task of preparation.

Waiting is hard. Waiting millennia, through wars, oppression and exile, the people had lost sight of the promises and teachings of their God. Malachi foretold a messenger who would come before and lead a renewal of faith and a restoration of purpose. Even then it was a cry in the wilderness to hold fast to the faith and continue to trust in the promise of the Lord.

As we prepare for the joy of that Holy Night, we too must search our hearts and minds. Now, two thousand years beyond the nativity, we struggle to follow the One who came. We still exist in a society of oppression, discrimination, hunger, and idolatry. Indeed, there are still cries in the wilderness. And there are the words of Christ Himself to guide our paths.

Are we really listening? Are we following the True Path?

Almighty God and Loving Christ, make us instruments of your peace. Create in us clean hearts and keep us ever mindful of your faithfulness.

*Contributed by Jim Gilbreath*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
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**Meditations for Advent**  
**Saturday, December 7**

**Matthew 24:36,43**

*<sup>36</sup>But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>43</sup>Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*

When I was a child, I was not allowed to stand (or jump) on the couch. But sometimes, when Mom and Dad were gone, my sister and I would crank the volume on the Monkees and have a dance party on the sofa, with one eye and one ear on the driveway in case our parents came back unexpectedly. We knew the rules. We knew the consequences, but so long as no one was there to see . . . When the cat's away, the mice will play.

The passage from Matthew is part of the story of the Signs of the End Times. Jesus left the temple and warned his disciples that someday all of it would be destroyed. The disciples questioned when that would happen and how they will know the end is coming. Jesus answers that they will **not** know. They must live faithfully always since when the Lord will return no one knows. He advises that there will be wars, famines, and earthquakes, false prophets who appear and deceive many people, an increase in wickedness that will cause the love of most to grow cold, "an abomination that causes desolation" in the Holy Temple. People will lose faith, betray, and hate each other, but the Lord will come again and those who have kept the faith will be rewarded and the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Jesus encourages us to have faith even in times of darkness, even when false prophets deceive people and evil grows. Keep the faith. Live through faith. Love the Lord your God and your neighbor as yourself. For the Lord will come again, and His is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever.

*Contributed by Diane Warren*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Sunday, December 8**

**Malachai 3:2-3**

*But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like washers' soap; <sup>3</sup> he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness.*

The story repeats throughout history. Pharaoh is the most powerful individual in the ancient world, but he feels threatened by the people of Israel, so he orders the drowning of every Hebrew male child. Only Moses is saved, through his family's relentless love and the compassion of Pharaoh's daughter. Moses will grow up to challenge the power of Pharaoh and lead his people to freedom. Thousands of years later, Herod is the most powerful individual in his small corner of the Roman empire, and he too feels threatened by the people he governs. He too orders the death of children to protect himself. He too fails, for the child born in his reign will outlive him and bring a new hope to the world that will outlive the Roman empire. Thousands of years later, we hear daily stories of communities weeping for their children because they are no more, and we still see families fleeing their homes to seek safety for their children in distant lands.

This is the dark side of the Christmas story. It is easy to ignore the gathering threat outside the stable in Bethlehem and focus on the cozy scene at the manger. Matthew reminds us not to look away from the stories that break our hearts. Matthew teaches us that the baby in the manger will grow to a man who will call all children to come to him. As his followers, we are called to hold all of God's children in our hearts. In this Advent season, may we mourn with those who refuse to be consoled, and may we see the face of the infant Christ in every child fleeing from oppression. Matthew reminds us to expect great things from these children, for this is also part of God's story in our world.

*Contributed by Phil Harrington*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Monday, December 9**

***Isaiah 11:1-3(a)***

*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. <sup>2</sup> The spirit of the Lord shall rest on Him and the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord. <sup>3</sup> His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.*

We've all seen this while walking in the woods—a fallen tree, its trunk festooned with fungi and woodpecker holes, full of life even in death, and a living shoot springing from its stump. What a hopeful image to remind us that God is always finding ways to bring life from fallen things!

My final year in college I spent the month of January working with a local farmer, scrambling across snowy hillsides helping set up a network of flexible pipelines to tap his maple trees. He was a true forester, and taught me much about identifying trees in winter, by their bark, their buds, their form, their habit. Although there were no mature American chestnuts in his woodlot, there were young chestnut shoots emerging from root systems still alive eighty years after the chestnut blight decimated the American chestnut. He talked about how some of them would live 10-15 years, but eventually would succumb to the blight. We stood in awe of the gallantry of those roots refusing to give up on life.

Today I read about researchers and students at a college in New York state who, after decades of research, have developed a viable and thriving transgenic American chestnut that is resistant to the fungus that causes the blight. And I think, well done, roots! Well done, foresters! Oh, well done, God! You instilled in those roots a delight in life, a wisdom and strength and understanding that didn't give up in the face of calamitous pandemic, and you instilled in foresters and researchers a spirit of counsel and knowledge and loyalty to your creation, and look, a new thing is springing up!

Lord, help us to never despair, but to love what we love as we walk upon this tender, comely planet you have created to be our home. Help us to remember that the grieving Ruth, whose future seemed blighted, lived to become Jesse's grandmother, and the ancestress of our Lord and Savior. Help us to remember that after defeat and exile and subjugation to foreign rule, Isaiah's prophetic vision of a shoot springing from the stump of Jesse was embodied when a young woman gave birth in a stable in Bethlehem.

*“Oh Light born of Light,  
Jesus, redeemer of the world...  
You who once deigned to be clothed in flesh  
for the sake of the lost,  
grant us to be made members  
of your blessed body.”*

Anonymous text from 10<sup>th</sup> century hymn “Cantiones Sacrae”

*Contributed by Jane Steinkraus*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Tuesday, December 10**

**Isaiah 11:3(b)-5**

*He shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide by what his ears hear, <sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he shall judge for the poor and decide with equity for the oppressed of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. <sup>5</sup> Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist and faithfulness the belt around his loins.*

Advent is a time of great joy and anticipation. Christ is coming! Born in a manger with angel messengers to humble shepherds, and kings bowing down with costly gifts from faraway lands. We celebrate the simplicity and innocence of the moment: For unto us a Savior ... *Gloria in excelsis Deo!*

Advent is also a time of reflection and contemplation. Our Christian season of Advent spans four Sundays before the event, and this very book of devotions offers daily opportunities to ponder the promises and visions through centuries of experience of God's people.

We celebrate the birth of a baby and the miracles that brought us to the manger in Bethlehem—moments warm and cozy, filled with love, tenderness, and cheer. But many of the Scriptures that mark these devotions point to a Savior come to redeem a people long trampled underfoot—a Savior who will stand for the people in the face of oppression, greed, and power. There was hurt ... and hunger ... and poverty ... and discrimination ... and longing.

Those conditions remain today.

So, as we rejoice today in this season, let us also remember that His gift to us is a vision of His kingdom—and the means to achieve it. We must stand for the poor, the oppressed, those marginalized into the far corners of society. The King of Heaven come to Earth as human points the way.

*Gloria in excelsis Deo!*

*Contributed by Jim Gilbreath*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Wednesday, December 11**

**Isaiah 10:9,11**

*<sup>9</sup> Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear, say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!' <sup>11</sup> He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.*

This scripture passage starts out boldly: "Lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem ... do not fear ... say 'Here is your God!'"

Jerusalem has had a rough year. My family has had a rough year, too, and our nation has faced upheaval in this election year. The world has dealt with hurricanes, floods, wars, and pestilence. We're probably all in the mood for some words of strength. We can appreciate exhortations to lift up our voices and share good tidings.

Yet the passage very quickly turns much softer, giving us the picture of Jesus gently caring for sheep. Sheep don't seem to have rough years. They hold no political rallies and never look like they're fretting over philosophical issues or worrying about the future. The image of a lamb snuggling in the arms of Jesus is about as peaceful as you can get.

The message for us may be that it is God's strength that allows us to rest in the arms of Jesus and to follow Him confidently as He gently leads us. God shares His strength with us, empowering us to lift up our voices with strength when that is what we need to do ... and also allowing us to rest when we need that peace.

*Blessed Lord, thank you for strengthening us and giving us courage to face the troubles of the world, to do justice, and to show mercy. Thank you, too, for supporting us when we need your tender care.*

*Contributed by Rebecca Haden*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Thursday, December 12**

**Isaiah 11:6-10**

*<sup>6</sup> The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. <sup>7</sup> The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. <sup>8</sup> The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. <sup>9</sup> They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. <sup>10</sup> On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.*

*"Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me...the peace that was meant to be."\**

This passage paints a detailed picture of a peaceable kingdom where all creation lives in harmony and EVERYONE will know God. The passage is full of juxtapositions of animals who would normally be enemies living together in peace, carnivores eating the same straw diet as an herbivore. A little child leads them, small, still nursing children can play over a snake pit, and slightly older and more independent toddlers can stick their hands in the snake pit and not be harmed. Neither animal nor human will hurt or be hurt in this peaceful kingdom.

This passage invites the reader into a place where the disorder of nature is restored. Just as water naturally makes up the sea, the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. The root of Jesse is a person and not a plant, and he will be the source of a shoot that will be hope, a little tendril of growth sprouting up. That signal will be sought after and will be glorious for all to see.

Our hope is found in Jesus, descendent of Jesse, and in this season of Advent we can breathe in and out as we imagine this very peaceful scene where violence, hatred, and harm are not found. Through our hope in Jesus, our own tendrils can grow into a hope and peace that we can share with the world in our actions.

We can live into and shape our daily words and actions by the image of this peaceable kingdom as we move on toward the hope and promise of the coming Christ who will make all things new. Our actions matter! *"Let this be my solemn vow, to take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally. . . . and let it begin with me."* (from *Let There Be Peace on Earth*, by Jill Jackson and Sy Miller, 1955)

*Contributed by Kristi Button*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Friday, December 13**

**Psalm 96:11-13**

*<sup>11</sup> Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; <sup>12</sup> let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy <sup>13</sup> before the lord; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.*

Nobody really wants to be judged, probably because the results will too often be disappointing. And here is a psalmist ready to declare merrymaking and more in anticipation of God's judgment. Don't worry about it, advises scholar Nancy Koester of the Augsburg College faculty. "These verses proclaim that God comes to judge the nations in righteousness. Yet this judgment evokes more joy than dread, for the whole world, both nations and nature, will rejoice—even the trees will sing."

Why all the happiness and hoopla over judgment? It depends on who's judging. God's judgment is to be welcomed, especially compared to the pronouncements that come from those in the world who take on that role. A look at the history of judging, particularly in the ancient world, makes it clearer why God's judgment could be a source of relief.

"The striking thing for most of us is the way these verses look forward to God's judgment joyfully," explained James Boice, theologian and senior minister at Tenth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia who died in 2000. "It is striking because we usually think of the judgment of God differently. We have been taught to have an acute sense of sin and to be thankful that we will be spared God's judgment because of the death of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

"But, as C.S. Lewis points out, the ancients lived in a world where judges usually needed to be bribed and right judgment was exceedingly hard to come by, especially for weak, poor, or disadvantaged persons. In such a climate, the disadvantaged did not fear judgment but rather longed for it, because it meant a day when evil would be punished and those who did the right things would be vindicated."

*Contributed by Dave Edmark*



**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Saturday, December 14**

**Psalm 80**

*<sup>1</sup>Give ear, Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You, who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth. <sup>2</sup>Before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh, awaken your might; come and save us. <sup>3</sup>Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved. <sup>4</sup>How long, Lord God Almighty, will your anger smolder against the prayers of your people? <sup>5</sup>You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have made them drink tears by the bowlful. <sup>6</sup>You have made us an object of derision to our neighbors, and our enemies mock us. <sup>7</sup>Restore us, God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.*

In this passage, the Psalmist is asking for God to be present with the people of Israel. He references God's leadership of Joseph and asks on behalf of Joseph's children to return and save the Israelites. He acknowledges that the Israelites have turned from God and suffered for their sinful behavior. The Psalmist ends with a call for God to intercede and "turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."

As we journey through the Advent season, we eagerly prepare for celebrating the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God's son. As Christians, we are blessed with knowing that Christ's humanity and presence on Earth was God's act of salvation for the world. God heard the lamentation of his people and answered them by sending his son as the bridge between Himself and the fallen world. Christ was the Messiah so highly anticipated by the Jewish people. As Christians, we understand that Christ came to save us from the greatest enemy of all: our own sinful selves. Christ was 'God's shining face' turned on His chosen people as requested by the Psalmist and the path for all humankind to follow.

The Advent season is a time of preparation, reflection, and evaluation. We prepare for Christ's entrance into the world and our lives. We reflect on how we need to turn away from self-centeredness and focus on God. Lastly, we evaluate ourselves by posing the question, "Am I living my life as instructed and demonstrated by my savior Jesus Christ?" God so loved the world that He sent His Son into the world for our salvation, answering the prayer of the Psalmist.

*Contributed by Derrik Olsen*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Sunday, December 15**

**Isaiah 40:3-5**

*<sup>3</sup> A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain <sup>5</sup> Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*

We make a big deal in our culture about being tough and independent. While those are valuable elements of one's personality, Christ models for us and encourages us to develop some additional qualities. Qualities like empathy, kindness, compassion, advocacy, mercy, and service.

In 2017, my mother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Within 6 weeks, my nursing license had been registered in Virginia, my job had been transferred to a Hospice Agency 20 miles from my parent's home, and I was on their doorstep. There was not a single obstacle that slowed me down in any way, shape, or form.

Sometimes, the journey is the thing, and we learn and grow through struggle. Sometimes, the mountains and hills are made low, the uneven ground becomes level, and the rough places a plain, for the LORD needs us to be where the LORD needs us to be: loving and serving others.

When have you experienced the stars aligning so that you could be where you needed to be? How can you approach this Advent season with a willing spirit? Can you hear the angels sing? Can you see the shepherds gather? Can you imagine the approaching Magi? Are you welcoming the child?

That time I got to spend with my parents was holy, and I praise God every day that I had that opportunity. What opportunities are being laid in front of you? Are you able to take a break from your business to see them? This is the gift of Christmas.

*Contributed by Rob Button*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Monday, December 16**

**Matthew 3:1-3,11**

*In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, <sup>2</sup>'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' <sup>3</sup>This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, 'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. <sup>11</sup>I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."*

Repentance is a central theme for Advent, but one that we often overlook. We'd rather focus on the more appealing themes of peace and hope. Still, we can see the importance of repentance even in some of our favorite secular Christmas stories.

Charles Dickens, in *A Christmas Carol*, describes his protagonist, Ebenezer Scrooge, as a covetous, grasping old sinner. Scrooge thinks only of money and hardens his heart against his fellow human beings. With the visits of three ghosts on Christmas Eve, Scrooge rediscovers love, charity, and compassion. He turns away from covetousness and vows to keep Christmas in his heart every day.

The Grinch, in Dr. Seuss's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, is so irritated by the noisy Christmas celebrations of his neighbors, the Whos, that he steals all their gifts and decorations and even their Christmas feast. Contrary to his expectations, this theft does not keep Christmas from coming. As the Grinch hears their Christmas song rising from their village, he repents of his selfishness and returns the goodies. The Whos show compassion to him, and he joins their celebration.

Hallmark Christmas movies tend to center on a basic narrative framework. The protagonists are high-powered but unsatisfied city dwellers who go home to small towns for the holidays. At first, they show dishonesty, pride, and a lack of compassion. Influenced by the good hearts of rural America, they repent and become honest, authentic, and joyful.

We enjoy these stories in many forms every year, but we often miss their central theme of repentance just as we overlook that central theme in our observation of Advent. This year let's make room for repentance and its role in making room in our hearts for Christ.

*Contributed by Rebecca Haden*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Tuesday, December 17**

**Isaiah 40:1-2**

*Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.*

When I read the first verse of Isaiah 40, my body involuntarily breathes a long sigh of relief. After 39 chapters of judgment, wrath, and punishment, the words *comfort, o comfort my people* bring a welcome feeling of hope and reassurance. God is there and will be there regardless of the poor choices I may make in my life. God further *speaks tenderly* to his people, and to us, by sending his son to earth as a baby—the baby that will grow up to pay the ultimate price for our sins.

George Frederic Handel started his first chorus in *Messiah* with these first verses in Isaiah 40. His majestic oratorio is a beautiful telling about the promise of Christ's coming and the fulfillment of Christ's promised work, the saving of sinners to the glory of God. I hope you will listen during this Advent season. (You can hear one of my favorite recordings on YouTube by searching *Handel:Messiah/Voces8* and *Academy of Ancient Music*.)

I learned a really interesting interpretation about the last phrase in verse 2—*double for all her sins*—that I want to share. In one Eastern custom, if a man owed a debt he could not pay, his creditor would write the amount of the debt on a paper and nail it to the front door of the man's house so that everyone passing would see that here was a man who had not paid his debts. But if someone paid the debt for him, then the creditor would *double the paper* over and nail it to the door as a testimony that the debt had been fully paid.

Was Isaiah giving his hearers a concrete, easily understood picture of their debt being paid through the mercy and grace of God? Completely undeserved and unearned? What a beautiful announcement to Israel as a nation that God was bringing restoration and reconciliation to his people. This wonderful announcement of undeserved pardon is for us as well. If we are burdened by wrongs we have done or the hurt we have caused, we have assurance that we are able to receive from the Lord “the doubling” of all of our sins.

*Contributed by Pam Gilbreath*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Wednesday, December 18**

**Luke 1:5-13**

*<sup>5</sup> In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. <sup>7</sup>But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years. <sup>11</sup>There appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup>When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. <sup>13</sup>But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John’*

The story of Advent is part of a patchwork of impossible events God made tangible, woven into the fabric of all the miracles that would come before and after. Let us consider Zechariah and Elizabeth, a couple described as righteous yet afflicted by childlessness in their old age. Their story reminds us that God’s plans often defy human expectations. The angel Gabriel announces that Elizabeth will bear a son, John, who will prepare the way for the Lord. This prophecy challenges our understanding of what is possible, illustrating that with God, nothing is impossible.

All hope seemed lost for Zechariah and Elizabeth, but God’s timing and purpose surprised them even in their abundant faith. What dreams of our own do we file away as missed opportunities and unimportant whimsies? How can we remain open to the notion that God has written our intentions on our hearts as part of His larger plan? John the Baptist’s birth and mission set the stage for the ultimate miracle—the coming of Jesus Christ.

This Advent, let us open our hearts to the miracles God can perform in our lives. Let us prepare for the arrival of our Savior with the same faith and anticipation that marked John the Baptist’s life. In doing so, we celebrate the miraculous events that lead to the glorious baptism of Jesus, our Redeemer.

*Contributed by Christopher Verdery*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Thursday, December 19**

**Psalm 89:1-4**

*I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.<sup>2</sup> I declare that your steadfast love is established for ever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.<sup>3</sup> You said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David:<sup>4</sup> "I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations."*

God's love stands firm forever. What a relief! How often we feel undeserving of a love that is eternal, unchanging, and beyond our human capacity to give.

Written at a dark time for the people of God, Psalm 89 describes the everlasting love of God and God's steadfast covenant with the house of David. There is no contingency, God has not abandoned His promise and will never do so. Disobedience brings tragedy to the people, but God will never forsake them. Many believe that God's wrath creates human misery, but the character of God described here is more like the fruit of the Spirit described in *Galatians 5:23-24*.

In the parable of the landowner, Jesus presents a God who continues reaching out to us, even when we reject God's servants. God will soon send a Son to try once again. The babe in the manger will give His life to open our eyes to our willingness to choose self-interest over self-sacrifice. Those with eyes to see will turn away from judgment and condemnation, following instead Christ's self-sacrificial way of forgiveness and love. That way will save us through faith.

With the coming of the Christ child, we have hope for the future. We are delivered from the evil one (who is Satan, the accuser) when we follow God's eternal commandment to love as He loves, no matter the cost (*Micah 6:7-8*). Even when we fail, God still stands ready to forgive, strengthen, and walk with us.

The Son of Man will soon fulfill God's covenant with David.

*Contributed by Claudia Driver*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Friday, December 20**

**Luke 1:26-35**

*<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' <sup>29</sup>But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. <sup>31</sup>And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' <sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' <sup>35</sup>The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.'*

Mary's story, like all of our stories, is about God. For it is God who initiates, challenges, and provides. He has deigned to use human beings with all of our inadequacies to do His work on earth.

The passage we're considering describes a once-in-an-eternity event. A humble young woman is given an incredible calling. It will include awesome responsibility, puzzling uncertainties, devastating heartache, and, ultimately, wonderful joy.

She turns on its head the maxim that "she who rocks the cradle rules the world." In her case, she rocks the cradle of Him who created the world. While we can't identify with that, there are several things in the story with which we can identify.

God made the call to do the impossible to the improbable. It came literally "out of the blue," unexpected and impractical. Mary, in humility, wonders about the salutation ". . . highly favored . . ." In consternation, she cites the obvious: virgins can't produce babies. She receives a satisfactory the answer: it will involve a miracle. Nor should the virgin birth be a problem to a believer. The world is full of miracles. How can a giant oak come from a tiny acorn? How does gravity work? How can the universe be measured? The creator of the universe is not bound by what human experience expects. And he calls apparently ordinary people like Mary and like us to do the impossible.

How is this privilege and burden to be borne? How is one to cope with the difficulties and inconveniences? The answers were given to Mary. "The Lord is with you," and ". . . nothing is impossible with God." Mary's was the response sought by God, "I am the Lord's servant."

*Contributed by Kent Davis*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Saturday, December 21**

**Luke 1:46-55**

*<sup>46</sup> And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, <sup>47</sup>and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; <sup>48</sup> for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; <sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. <sup>50</sup> His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. <sup>52</sup> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; <sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, <sup>55</sup> according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.'*

Because we share a name, I've always wondered about Mary's "backstory." Every time I hear the song "Mary, Did You Know?" I think about how scared and humbled Mary would have been to find out she was carrying the Christ child. I love this scripture passage because it gives us insight into her thoughts.

Mary's words, spoken with awe and humility, reveal a heart overflowing with gratitude to God, who sees, loves, and lifts up the lowly. In her praise, she magnifies God's power to overturn earthly expectations: the proud are scattered, the powerful dethroned, the hungry filled, and the humble exalted. Mary's song reminds us that God's love does not abide by worldly measures of worth or strength. Instead, His mercy and compassion reach those who feel small, overlooked, or burdened.

In Advent, as we await the birth of Christ, we are invited to ponder how God might be calling us to receive His love with similar humility and awe. This season, may we join Mary in magnifying the Lord, recognizing His presence in our lives, and opening our hearts to His transformative love. In doing so, we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus—the ultimate expression of God's enduring mercy, fulfilling His promises to all generations.

*Contributed by Mary Mann*



**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Sunday, December 22**

**Matthew 1:18-25**

<sup>18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. <sup>20</sup>But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' <sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.' <sup>24</sup>When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, <sup>25</sup>but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

During a children's sermon, an Elder was asked by a five-year-old sitting on the chancel steps, "Miss Susie, where is Jesus right now ... today?" Elder Susie answered, "Jesus is in our hearts. He is in my heart, your heart, and in the hearts of everyone who believes in Jesus."

Can you imagine the ripple effect if we all saw ourselves and other Christians as "Christ-bearers"? As one preacher put it: "Do you realize the same Holy Spirit that overshadowed Mary also hovered over you at your baptism? The power of the Holy Spirit is guaranteed to you as the water is poured over your head. You are named a child of the covenant, marked as Christ's own forever. The blessing of God is invoked in and on your life. *Christ is conceived within you.*"

Friends, God loves each one of us so much that God came to us as a humble baby born to a young, unpretentious peasant girl; He chose to live among common, everyday, first century people, teaching about God's gracious love. He suffered an agonizing death on a cross for our sins, and in just a few days Jesus tore down death's door sending his Spirit among us so that we too can live knowing Christ resides within us. What greater love can there be?

So, what will be your response to God's creation within you? Will you just ignore this gift? Or will you respond with great joy like Mary did? According to Luke (from *The Message*) Mary exploded with these words, "I'm bursting with God-news; I'm dancing the song of my savior God. God took one good look at me and see what happened . . . I'm the most fortunate person on earth!"

And may it be so for you and me during this Advent season and beyond.

*Contributed by Rev. Danny Daniel*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**Monday, December 23**

**Luke 2:1-14**

*In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup> This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup> All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup> Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <sup>5</sup> He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup> And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. <sup>8</sup> In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup> to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!*

There are several interesting events in this scripture: Caesar demanding a census, Joseph and Mary traveling, and angels talking to shepherds. None of these things was by accident. They all were a part of God’s plan.

In the past, God gave very detailed instructions for the tabernacle that traveled with Moses through the desert. The Ark of the Covenant was very ornate with gold inlay. God also gave David detailed plans for the temple in Jerusalem that Solomon built. It would follow that when God’s son was to be born, great planning and care would go into every detail. When God chose Joseph, a carpenter, one would expect elaborate plans for his cradle—maybe the finest wood and wonderful carvings. Maybe the wise men could come early and bring gold to embellish the carvings?

But no, the God of our universe made deliberate plans to come simply and humbly. And to have shepherds instead of the religious leaders rejoice in the angels’ message. When we stop long enough to let the message of this event sink in and ponder the unexpected way God became one of us, it is hard to comprehend. But it reveals God’s heart and demonstrates His message to us. It was the perfect plan. From beginning to the end, Christ’s life showed us real love and what is truly important. His words in Matthew still call to us today.

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

May we come...and learn...and find rest for our souls. *Amen*

*Contributed by Jo Rothrock*

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**December 24**

**Isaiah 9:2-7**

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. <sup>3</sup>You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. <sup>4</sup>For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. <sup>5</sup>For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. <sup>6</sup>For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup>His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold I with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this*

It's Christmas Eve! Tomorrow, we will celebrate Christmas, a day of joyous gift giving in honor of the greatest gift of all—not just a child, not just a son, but God's only son, given because of God's great love for us. Perhaps you have heard of the "Four Gift Rule." It is a strategy suggested to parents to keep spending in check by minimizing the length of wish lists and keeping the focus of the holiday on the birth of Christ. The four gifts are something you want, something you need, something to wear, and something to read.

In the passage for today, four titles are listed for the child: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Imagine you have four beautifully wrapped gifts in front you. The first one you open (Wonderful Counselor) is a foundation of wisdom and knowledge (Mathew 7:24) given to you without judgment if you ask (James 1:15). Now open the second gift—the yoke of your burden, the bar across your shoulder, and the rod of your oppressor are broken (Isaiah 9:4) for you can do all things through Christ (Mighty God) who strengthens you (Philippians 4:13). Put your burdens in that box and give them to God. The third gift is from a store with a No Returns policy. It will be with you always and will care for you always, an Everlasting Father. It's that shepherd from Psalm 23. Last, but certainly not least, is the Prince of Peace, who made peace between you and God. The Prince of Peace also has the power to bring true peace to Earth. We all received a wonderful gift when Christ was born.

Regardless of how many gifts might find their way to you this Christmas, you can keep your focus on Christ by taking a moment to take a deep breath and think of Isaiah's titles for the child whose birth he prophesized and then simply saying "Thank you!"

**First United Presbyterian Church**  
**The Word Made Flesh**  
**Meditations for Advent**  
**December 25**

**Psalm 96**

*<sup>1</sup> O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. <sup>2</sup> Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. <sup>3</sup> Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples. <sup>4</sup> For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods. <sup>5</sup> For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. <sup>6</sup> Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. <sup>7</sup> Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. <sup>8</sup> Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts. <sup>9</sup> Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth. <sup>10</sup> Say among the nations, "The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity." <sup>11</sup> Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; <sup>12</sup> let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy <sup>13</sup> before the Lord; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.*

"Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her king!!"

These opening lines of the well-known Christmas hymn were written by Isaac Watts. Many people don't know that Watts did not write this as a Christmas carol. He wrote a book which was a series of poems on the Psalms and used them to point toward Jesus Christ. The poem he wrote which became the familiar hymn was for Psalm 98 which is very similar to Psalm 96. More than a century later the poem was set to music and the second half of the poem was adjusted to the hymn we sing today.

Psalm 96 is one of several "Enthronement Psalms" in this section of the Psalter. These are psalms of praise that lift up the universal kingship of God. In the 96<sup>th</sup> Psalm, we are encouraged to sing a new song to the Lord and all the earth and to declare His glory among the nations and His marvelous works among the peoples. The fact that "The Lord is king, and the world is firmly established" is worthy of praise by all of creation. "He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with His truth."

I've always been struck by how the world seems to stop to celebrate Christmas. In my first pastoral call in Fort Smith, I would leave the church after midnight on Christmas Eve after cleaning communion cups after the 11:00 pm service. I had a tradition of driving down Garrison Avenue in downtown Fort Smith, normally still busy with activity. But on Christmas morning, all was still. The beautiful Christmas lights were shining—but no cars or people were in sight. The words I had just sung of Silent Night seemed so real, "All is calm, all is bright." For a moment, it seemed that time stood still and the world stopped to acknowledge this astounding event—our King had come to earth in the form of a tiny child.

In the midst of your Christmas celebration, I pray that you can experience a moment of peace and quiet, and prayerfully reflect on the wonder and awe that God sent His Son to dwell among us and to remember what Christ has done for each of us and for the world.

Psalm 96 ends by saying "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; for the Lord is coming!" Today, our waiting and preparation are over!! Let us rejoice—for the Lord is come! May we all receive Jesus Christ in our hearts and lives once again!!

Merry Christmas!!

*Contributed by Rev. Stewart Smith*

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