



“Memories”

A CHRISTMAS & ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

NORTHSIDE DRIVE BAPTIST CHURCH
2018



“Memories”



Memories are a big part of what make Christmas so peaceful, magical, and light. The fond memory of waking up as a child to see what gifts Santa brought. The memory of picking out that perfect Christmas tree and finally getting that last ornament in just the right spot - there's simply nothing like it!

Conversely, memories can also be what make Christmas carry a certain painful and emotional weight. Memories of lost loved ones and those we do not get to be with on Christmas day. Memories of evils of the world both today and in the months leading up to the birth of the Christ child... Yes, Christmas time can be light and cheery, but it can also be impossibly heavy.

As the Body of Christ, I believe it is important that we share these memories, thoughts, and feelings with each other to help spread the joy and peace of Christmas and ease the pain of holiday grief. It is only in the sharing of memories, both good and bad, that our heavy loads are lightened. And, when the load is lightened, we have more room in our hearts to let the Christ child in.

So, come, join with us in the sharing of Advent & Christmas memories of Northside Drive Baptist Church and let us prepare Him room.

- **ALLISON ROLAND**
CHAIR, ADULT EDUCATION

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Sunday, December 2, 2018

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Psalm 25:1-10

Jeremiah 33:14-16

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Gospel: Luke 21:25-36

Today, we light the first candle of the Advent Wreath. For a small candle, it sure wears a big name. We call it *Hope*.

I think of *Hope* as the bravest of all the Advent candles. There is a lot of darkness in the world. Tons and tons of it...and amid all that dark, one little candle bravely steps forward to take it on.

Hope walks into the night and boldly brightens one corner. *Peace* and *Joy* and *Love* will soon do the same. *Hope* emboldens all.

The Good Book says it like this: "And the light shone in the darkness, and the darkness could not constrain it." On Christmas Eve, I'm often the last one to leave the sanctuary. Some on the staff have children to tend. Some have miles to drive. All are ready to relax after a long season of preparation.

I don't mind locking up, lingering, and being the last one out. There is a holy, haunting quietness to our sanctuary on Christmas Eve. It glows in the dark. Sometimes I sit on a pew and remember who sat there. I know where Jim Williams sat. And Louise Davis. And Gerry Humphries. And Wilton, George, and John. Sitting

there in the dark, I cry sometimes. Laugh sometimes. And remember the tough times and the good times.

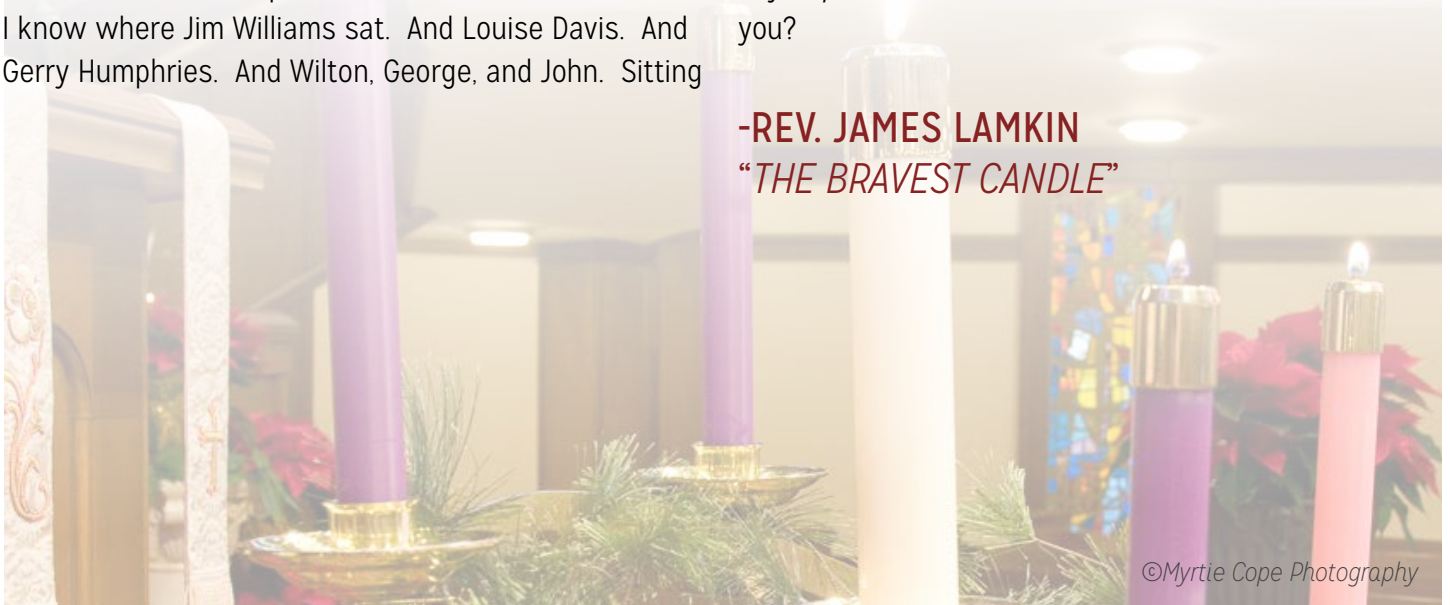
All these memories live in the faint light of *Hope's* flickering faith. *Hope* believes that God is bigger than the dark is darker. God's good future may take a while to arrive; but *Hope* holds out.

In these moments, I remember the line penned by Boston preacher, Phillips Brooks. It is from his hymn, O Little Town of Bethlehem: "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." *Hope* is at home where anticipation and apprehension meet.

So, let's go. Let's follow this candle's lead. We bring our waited-for *hopes*. We admit our weighted-down fears. And soon, we will huddle-up close to the manger. Close enough to hear the message of the angels' song. Close enough to smell the manure of sheep and goats.

As the tail-end of 2018 nears, let's follow the light. I'd say *Hope* is the bravest of the candles. How about you?

-REV. JAMES LAMKIN
"THE BRAVEST CANDLE"



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Monday, December 3, 2018

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

When I first accepted the assignment to write an advent devotional, I didn't know which memory to select. There are so many Christmas memories, and they tend to run together in a sort of "memory blur." But after the terrible shooting at Tree of Life Synagogue, I knew which story to choose.

In December of 1969, I was a senior at Tift College, a Baptist women's school in Forsyth, GA. We didn't go home until almost the middle of the month, so one of our traditions was to have a door decorating contest in the dorms. It happened, that year, to fall at the season of Hanukkah. It also happened that a Jewish girl lived across the hall from my roommate and me. So Glenda and I decided to decorate our door for Hanukkah.

As I recall, this consisted of a large menorah made of construction paper and tissue paper. Each day we taped a new tissue paper flame to one of the candles.

I don't remember Robin's reaction to the door, but she knew we had decorated it especially for her. I don't know if Robin is still alive or where she might live. I do hope that if she is still with us in these troubled times, she remembers the time that two Baptist girls at a Baptist college decorated a door in her honor.

We long for peace during Advent, and sometimes it seems overwhelming. Maybe it would be helpful to consider small acts of kindness and attention. It seems to me that this is the way we were taught by the life of Jesus, the One whom we look for at this time of year.

- MARY LESTER



Tuesday, December 4, 2018

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

While We Wait: Living the Questions of Advent is a study book by Mary Lou Redding. I would be nobler if I had used the book, but honestly, I mostly just like the title. Waiting can be an anathema to a person wired like I am to “take the bull by the horns.” So, I do take some comfort in the spiritual idea of waiting actively. It’s like walking a labyrinth or preparing to teach a session for Art & Soul: at least things are moving along.

Even the idea of shepherds watching o’er their flocks by night is active waiting. I do not think of shepherding as a pressured vocation, but rather sedate on most nights. But, you have to be ready in case one sheep breaks from the bunch or a hungry coyote stirs up trouble. It’s called “scanning the landscape for situational awareness.” Look 25 yards, then 50, and maybe 100 yards if shepherds see that well. What I am saying is: I am having a hard time waiting actively, while scanning for the profoundly holy, grace-filled moments of life. It is especially hard as my brother comes to the end of his life at 62 years old.

I like to control. There, I’ve admitted it. My urge, even compulsion, is to focus on what needs to be done next – banking, obituary, lawyer, or planning the funeral service. Plus, it is hard to know when to go to Asheville to see my brother, and how long to stay once I’m there. If I ask myself, “Liz how is that working for you?” You and I both know the answer: not so well. So, it might do me good to stop, breathe deeply, and scan the spiritual landscape for situational awareness. There is a bounty of love and connection that is next to God’s heart, expressed in simple tones and with complete surprise.

Liz’s 25-yard scan: My brother is comfortable now with symptoms largely managed. He is sweet and loving and present when he is awake. Our relationship has often lacked that. I am grateful for having time to hold his hands. I’m grateful that the phone is not ringing. I am glad he can be present with me right now. Humor has bathed the last few days with silly things. I said, “One ringy dingy.” Then, fifteen seconds he grinned and whispered, “Two ringy dingy.” (It is

a Lily Tomlin bit from the old Laugh In TV show.) If those are the last words he ever says, I will smile and cherish them. That, plus, “I love you,” is plenty.

Liz’s 50-yard scan: I am grateful Phil could be at the inpatient hospice facility for more days than I expected. They provide support for his wife Sarah. Physicians come in, pull up a chair, and stay a while. His outpatient palliative physician, Dr. Neal, came “inpatient” to see him. His cancer navigator, from an entirely different healthcare system, called. The hospice chaplain looked familiar to me. Turns out, we were in seminary together. We told Clinical Pastoral Education stories and exchanged contact numbers. I saw a little boy bear (a cub) walk across the veranda, past Phil’s window, and then cross the street, all within a busy city. The stained glass in the hospice chapel compels gratitude and inclusivity. The blues so bathe the window with color, it hurts my eyes. Local congregations serve homemade meals for everyone, including the staff, three days a week. The cups of lavender tea sweetened with local honey are so nice. Oddly, I don’t usually drink hot tea.

The social worker said to set limits and take care of myself. I’m trying. My cousins have called, loved, and come to visit. Uncle Bob and Bernice brought a chocolate milk shake which Phil devoured. Cousin David, a wise and godly man, said the sweetest prayer while Phil was fast asleep. It all counts.

Liz’s 100-yard scan: I returned to Asheville on a gorgeous ‘blue sky’ morning following a deluge of rainy days. I walked the labyrinth at the hospice center. The hospice staff rolled my brother outside in a reclining chair and we held hands as the sun warmed our backs. I doubt I would have paid attention to the sun if I were anywhere else like the funeral home or the bank. Since the sun is a star, it reminds me of another star. A star that guided searchers from long ago and far away. They endured uncertain days; but found plenty of love and peace at the journey’s end. I will search my heart for a longer view of this holy season. And I will listen up close... for “One ringy dingy!”

-LIZ HARRIS-LAMKIN

Wednesday, December 5, 2018

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

For many years, I have asked myself, "What is Christmas really all about?" Despite participating in church with my whole heart, I was stressed with producing Christmas: gifts, wrapping, shipping, photos, cards, decorations, music rehearsals, parties, special meals. I certainly didn't want my sweet family to be disappointed, but I hated all the work, the busyness, the to-do lists. Often I felt I totally missed the spirit of Christmas. (I highly recommend the book, *Unplug the Christmas Machine*, not because I followed it, but because I meant to; it is so wise.)

Last night at bedtime, after ordering my mailbox decoration from the friends of Children's Hospital (that's good, right?); I felt the pressure start to build again. I must hurry to order my tree from Peace Christmas trees; they donate trees to needy families one for one for all we order (good?).

I realized here we go again. When will I get it right?

I tried to meditate on the subject. Over and over, all I could think was "love, just love." That's all there is to it. It's really quite simple. Christmas is a season we set aside to remember the greatest gift of love, God's precious son. For God so loved the world... Simple, simple. Do for others, remember to be grateful for the gifts of God's love, the gifts of friends and family, of comfort, warmth, and security. Love, love, just love.

And then it occurred to me, JUST love. With gratitude for God's love, we are obligated to work for JUST love; what I mean is this gift of love demands we value and try to create a world of truth, justice, compassion, equality, acceptance of all God's people. That's really all Christmas is... a time to focus on love, love, JUST love.

- PATTI CLARK



Thursday, December 6, 2018

Luke 1:68-79
Malachi 3:5-12
Philippians 1:12-18a

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

*“A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled,
because they are no more.”*

Matthew 2:16-18

Remembering the miracle of the birth of Jesus makes Christmas a happy time. It is also a sad time, as we remember the deaths of the many young children killed by Herod soon after Jesus' birth. Rachel mourned for these children, just like we mourn for the children who have lost their lives to gun violence and those who have been unintentionally killed by guns. Joseph received a vision which told him to flee to Egypt to keep Baby Jesus safe. Our prayer is that our country will visualize how to keep our children safe today.

The sculpture of Rachel in this picture was the work of Marietta artist Norma Finney. Norma volunteered in Virginia's fourth-grade classroom for years and became a good friend. In 1999, parents of Virginia's students purchased "Rachel" and gave it to her as a



Christmas gift . Norma explained that as she sculpted this piece, it took on the shape of Rachel's profile with a tear running down her cheek. We display it in our den year-round, reminding us of the precious gift of children and of our deep desire to try to protect them from gun violence.

- JB & VIRGINIA GILBERT

Friday, December 7, 2018

Luke 1:68-79
Malachi 3:13-18
Philippians 1:19b-26

A significant part of my college experience was participation in the Baptist Student Union on the campus of Oklahoma State University. It was there I first met Rebecca Sue Stidham. It was also there I had my first interaction with cultural/religious diversity.

Each year the BSU provided a Christmas meal to members of the International Students Club on campus, most of whom were Asian and unfamiliar with Christmas. I was asked to speak to the group of 80-100 students about the meaning of Christmas. How could I communicate the story in a way that might affirm their own experiences with God? Reading the story again in Matthew 1:23 provided the theme of my words. The angel's instructions to Joseph to name Mary's baby Jesus was linked to the Old Testament messianic hope, ". . .they shall call his name Emmanuel" which means, "God is with us." That universal, unlimiting reality of Holy presence in all of life's circumstances is for me the essence of Christmas.

I think about Immanuel as the meaning for Jesus during most Advent and Christmas celebrations since

that banquet so many years ago. I have been blessed by God's presence immeasurably; yet, so many of our world live with Presence amid acute sickness, war, gun violence, depression, and despair. It so happens I received the Smithsonian magazine the week of the murders in Tree of Life Synagogue. Its feature story is about Jewish diarists during the Holocaust. It features the publication in English of a diary written by Renia Spiegel, a young Polish Jew writing from 1939 to 1942. An entry just five days before her murder by the Nazis, she wrote on July 25, 1942:

My dear diary, my good, beloved friend! We've gone through such terrible times together and now the worst moment is upon us. I could be afraid now. But the One who didn't leave us then will help us today too. He'll save us. Hear, O, Israel, save us, help us. You've kept me safe from bullets and bombs, from grenades. Help me survive! . . . God, into Your hands I commit myself.

IMMANUEL.

- LARRY MCSWAIN

"CHRISTMAS AS DIVINE PRESENCE"

Saturday, December 8, 2018

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

“Behold, I am making something new.” - Revelation 21:5

Juniperus virginiana. That’s the botanical classification for it, but we just called it a cedar tree. Eastern red cedars grow everywhere in the countryside of East Tennessee, where I grew up. They thrive in soil good and bad, and they’re the scourge of farmers like my father, who had to spend precious working time keeping them out of his fields. Like any other weed or pest, you can’t turn your back on them. They insinuate themselves into fencerows. They choke the rights of way of roads and highways.

But they are evergreen, and at Christmastime, they were the tree of choice, the only other option being spindly pines. Tree lots were a thing we saw only in the movies or on a trip to Knoxville, but even if available, my parents would have been horrified at the thought of buying a tree when there were so many choices right there all around us.

Often we would stake out a good candidate in the summer and come back to claim it in December. Despite the numbers, we had to look carefully. The shape of cedars is unpredictable, some growing straight upward like a troll-doll’s hairdo, others growing rounded and bushy. But some grow teardrop-shaped,

and those were the ones we looked for and brought home most often.

Cedars are a pest. Cedars are homely. Cedars will bite you with a nettle-like sting when you put your hands into them. But once we got our tree inside, it was transformed. With lights, ornaments, and wrapped presents underneath, it looked positively radiant. And the tree rewarded us for our efforts: there is no better smell in a house than fresh cedar.

Once I left home I could not wait to have a balsam fir or western pine for a Christmas tree—that thing of wanting something different from what you had—and I’ve never had a cedar in my house since. But there isn’t a December when I don’t think about the trees that filled the Christmases of my childhood.

And I’ve come to appreciate the practice of the cedar tree. We used what we had, changing something plain into something beautiful, transformed by the love we shared. What an apt symbol for Christmas—Christ’s coming into our world and our hearts, transforming the ugly into something pure and worthy. As Christmas comes again, may we all look for ways we can change the ugly into the beautiful through the sharing of Christ’s transformative love.

- CATHY WOOTEN

Sunday, December 9, 2018

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

*Psalm Luke 1:68-79
Malachi 3:1-4, Philippians 1:3-11
Luke 3:1-6*

"In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberias..."

I've always been struck by the specificity of Luke's account of John the Baptist. Seven people's names are rattled off from the Emperor down to the high priests. The political and the ecclesiastical are merged. Perhaps it is Luke's desire to root his story in the specificity of history. It is harder to accuse somebody of fabrication amidst such details. It's almost like he's saying, this really happened!

That's how I used to read the passage, at least. But this year I have been reading it differently. Perhaps it is projection on my part, but we seem to be quite fixated on political leaders, their ups and downs, their every tweet and breath. In our fixation we may be missing what God is up to. Think about all the levels of authority and bureaucracy. Think about all that could keep a person busy with that system.

And now hear what Luke says. After the list of rulers, he says "the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness." That is Advent,

essentially. The manifestation of God's presence in the most unlikely of times and places. The in-breaking of God's Holy Spirit in a literal desert.

Take each name listed in Luke 3:1-2 and substitute in the modern equivalents in our culture. We could spend all of our available time talking about each of those people, couldn't we? A lot of energy could be expended on analyzing, bemoaning, and desecrating. But if we stopped there, with that ballot box list of candidates for our attention, we'd miss something quite extraordinary: nothing short of the word of the Lord.

Slow down. Eliminate "I'm busy" from your vocabulary for a few days. Wade through the particularities of our human world with all its anxieties and personalities. But do not stay in that world of anxiety. Those names will soon be a distant memory. Tiberias. Pontius Pilate. Herod. Philip. Lysanias. Annas. Caiaphas. Nobody bothers much with those rulers anymore.

Oh yes, Advent is here. And the name of Jesus is on our lips.

- REV. DANIEL HEADRICK

Monday, December 10, 2018

Psalm 126
Isaiah 4:1-11
Romans 8:22-25

In my childhood of the early 1950's, the Christmas tree was a big family project - a trip to my grandparents' farm where we tramped the woods in search of the best small pine or cedar that we could find; sawing and hauling by Dad; and then he made a cross of scrap lumber that was nailed to the trunk. These trees were never perfectly erect - no adjustments for a slightly angled cut or for imperfection in the cross, no stand with water, and in the living room heated by a hot wood stove, the life expectancy was short. But we loved these trees - we decorated with the huge colored lights, a few fragile glass balls, and lot of handmade ornaments and silver tinsel, and we waited for Christmas to come. Our expectations were small, and even today, the smell of a freshly peeled orange brings me close to those childhood longings.



I have nurtured a lot of Christmas décor over these many years - too many lights, too many ornaments, too much tinsel, too many bows, too many angels, too many stars, and now I am dispersing these bits of beauty for a simpler theme in my life and wonder why it took me so long to get here. The real joy has not been the ornament, the gift given, the gift received, but each moment when I have given and received love from the heart.

In our religious tradition, on January 6, Epiphany, we acknowledge the gifts of the Magi to the Christ child. As has been my tradition, on my 75th birthday, January 7, 2017, I defrocked the fir in my living room, stored the vast number of ornaments and went for a walk where I captured this image - a small, handcrafted, wooden tree, dripping with real icicles - not perfectly erect, not perfectly balanced, slowly losing the frozen ornaments and my heart was filled with this epiphany - Christ has come indeed and love has been given!

- RUTH KRAMEDIJIAN

Tuesday, December 11, 2018

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

Google “holiday sadness” and you will get more than 28,000,000 hits. Many people struggle with the juxtaposition of so much joy against a less-than-joyful experience or two during the past year, or in other holiday seasons. I count myself among them. I grew up knowing Christmas was hard for my father and his siblings because, several years before I was born, their beloved sister Lucy died that October, and then about two weeks before Christmas their father, age 58, died quite unexpectedly. The family was devastated, and all of them carried this grief the rest of their lives. Christmas was never quite the same for any of them.

In my junior year of high school, my very close cousin Bill, an only child, was killed two days before Christmas in a horrible car crash. It was an enormous shock and grief for me, and for my family.

The worst for me was the year my husband died of melanoma after several hard months at M.D. Anderson, leaving me with our two young children and unbearable sadness. Having already moved that year from Ohio to Texas for his job, we now moved from Texas to North Carolina to be near family. Shortly thereafter I was hospitalized with serious illness and was facing surgery in January. Christmas for me was one of the

hardest struggles of my life. The memories and the loss were, and still are, overwhelming. It goes on. My husband Jim’s beloved grandmother died on Christmas Eve, and his father died two days before Christmas, his mother having died six weeks before that. My own father, who had been a rock of support for me and for my children, died the day after Christmas in 1997.

But there were good times as well, with a new and wonderful life with Jim, and the coming of grandchildren. When I try to think of a happy Christmas memory, I picture our two little granddaughters, ages 2 and 3, at our home for Christmas. I recall the gentle rapping on our bedroom door, the happy giggles, and the little voices shrieking, “WAKE UP, GRAN!!! IT’S KRISS-MISS!!!” I never heard such joy distilled to such a pitch. That was 1996. I don’t think Christmas was ever better. Dolls! Storybooks! Cookies! Songs! Laughter! Since then, when I even start to think of all those sad holidays, I remind myself to “wake up.” Not just in the sense of waking from sleep, but waking to the pure joy and unimaginable love that Christmas represents, as reflected in the faces and voices of angels from long ago and from not-so-long ago.

- CAROLYN MAHAFFEY

Wednesday, December 12, 2018

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

"The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

The words of the familiar carol took on a more personal meaning to me during Christmas 1990. Our seven-year-old son, Stuart, had been diagnosed with a brain tumor and in November had undergone a lengthy surgery. The surgery went well but there were no medical assurances – and in six months there would be no health insurance for Stuart since Hal and I had only transitional COBRA coverage and Stuart would be uninsurable due to a pre-existing condition. As

December approached, Stuart had a partially shaved head, a fierce-looking scar and a droopy eye, but he was looking forward to basketball and Christmas.

My hopes and fears were constantly commingled that Christmas season. Yet I was reminded that other young parents had carried hopes and fears into Bethlehem. And their example shows that a child can propel us towards hopeful living and assuage our anxiety despite rational fears. May we like the angels keep our "watch of wondering love."

- JO MEEKS



Thursday, December 13, 2018

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

"There is one word that describes the night he came - ordinary. It was an ordinary night with an ordinary sky. An occasional gust stirred the leaves and chilled the air. The stars were diamonds sparkling on black velvet. Fleets of clouds floated in front of the moon. The sheep were ordinary - some fat, some scrawny; some with barrel bellies, some with twig legs. Common animals. No fleece made of gold, no history makers, no blue-ribbon winners. They were simply sheep - lumpy, sleepy silhouettes on a hillside. And the shepherds - peasants they were. Probably wearing all the clothes they owned. Smelling like sheep and looking just as wooly. They were nameless and simple. An ordinary night with ordinary sheep and ordinary shepherds. But God dances amidst the common, and that night - He did a waltz."

- One Incredible Moment by Max Lucado and Tom Fettek

I remember hearing this narration from Max Lucado during my senior year of high school as part of the adult choir's Christmas performance. The music in the cantata was great, but this narration has stuck with me for the past 10 years because of how it describes that ordinary night when the most unexpected, incredible miracle happened. To me, the last line was the most memorable because it shows the joy of that night. Have you ever had a time where you just wanted to dance with joy? To me, that is exactly what heaven and Earth did that evening, and God was there to lead the way. May this advent season give you the same joy where you can't help but dance amidst the ordinary.

Lord, help me to see the joy that You have brought in the middle of even the most ordinary of experiences. And help me to want to dance alongside with you this season as we celebrate your Christmas waltz.

- JOHNNY ELDER

Friday, December 14, 2018

Isaiah 12:2-6

Amos 8:4-12

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

For many years, our family participated in the Live Nativity presentation at our church in Rome, Georgia. There were long-standing traditions related to casting for the presentation. Mary and Joseph were played by high school seniors. The boys in the youth group portrayed the shepherds, and the girls were a choir of angels. There were prophets, wise men, an Archangel, and Elizabeth. And there were usually animals, ranging from horses one year to the recurring presence of sheep and a donkey tethered to the hill above the church's parking lots.

Each "show" lasted about 20 minutes, and they started every half hour. People from the community watched from their cars as the scenes unfolded on the hill side, complete with narration, music, lights, and multiple fog machines. The story began with a brightly lit Archangel announcing the impending pregnancy and birth to a bewildered - but calm - virgin Mary. And the presentation concluded with the chorus of angels - well-lit and enveloped in fog - slowly and reverently waving their arms up and down to the strains of the Hallelujah Chorus.

One year, when Steve was in charge of the Live Nativity, he switched up the recorded narration and music. Instead of ending with Handel's familiar chorus, the presentation concluded with "Gloria" from

Avalon's "Angel Medley" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekVOcpwC6u0>).

Everything went as planned during the dress rehearsal. But, during the first live presentation the Heavenly Host (our daughters included) could no longer stand still and wave their arms gently up and down. They started dancing and singing...and giggling.

As you might imagine, some of the adults were rather unhappy with the ad lib. Some of the folks in the church weren't quite sure how they felt about changing the narrative and music anyway. And this lack of proper reverence on the part of the angelic chorus just confirmed their worst fears that some of the folks in the parking lot might be offended...or at least perturbed. No one actually complained, though. The angels danced and sang their way through the rest of the presentations. And a new tradition was born.

We like our traditions during the seasons of Advent and Christmas. They comfort us and make us feel warm and cozy. But sometimes, perhaps, we need to explore some different ways to express our joy at the birth of God's only begotten son. After all, we wouldn't be surprised if the angels who joined in chorus on the hills above Bethlehem on that night didn't add just a little dancing and giggling to their song....

- STEVE & ELIZABETH SHEELEY

Saturday, December 15, 2018

Isaiah 12:2-6

Amos 9:8-15

Luke 1:57-66

One of my favorite holiday memories from my childhood was when my family would pile in the car and ride through the neighborhoods to look at Christmas lights. As a young child, I was fascinated by the bright colors, the twinkling lights, and the beautiful images and symbols of Christmas. It all seemed so magical to me!

As a teenager, I was a bit more discerning, and I became aware of the strange mixture of images and symbols that was frequently displayed on lawn after lawn in the neighborhood. There was a manger scene with all the shepherds and wise men, along with Frosty the Snowman standing among the sheep and donkeys, Santa and his reindeer flying over the stable, and the Grinch peeking from behind the manger. And, of course, there were candy canes, snowflakes, and Christmas trees mixed in among the angels, the star of Bethlehem, and the Christ child. I remember feeling that there was something sacrilegious and disrespectful about displaying such a “mess” of the

secular and the sacred. It seemed that the true message of Christmas was being diluted by secular trappings.

But, as I have gotten older, I have gotten comfortable with the “mess.” I am reminded that, on that first Christmas long ago, the Christ child didn’t come into a world that was nice and neat. Christ was born into a world that was messy. There was government upheaval; racial, cultural, and religious conflict; poverty; and discrimination against the Jews. The messiness between the secular and sacred has been part of the Christmas story from the very beginning but, for over 2000 years, the message of Christmas has survived and continues to resound anew each year, bringing hope and joy to the world. And, as I have gotten older, I am so glad that the Christmas message still finds its way into my own very messy and mixed up life!

- KAREN MASSEY

Sunday, December 16, 2018

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 12:2-6

Zephaniah 3:14-20, Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:7-18

Joy is the theme for the third week of Advent, hence the Lectionary's inclusion of these words from Paul's letter to the church at Philippi:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

Seasons of grief in our life make joy seem like a distant memory. Perhaps as we anticipate gathering around the table for Christmas we are already anticipating the grief that comes with the sure knowledge that some loved ones won't be there this year.

Paul does not counsel the Philippians to ignore grief and pain. Rather, he encourages them to "rejoice in the Lord always." What does it mean to rejoice in the Lord always? Paul is fond of that kind of extreme thinking. In 1 Thessalonians 5:16 he tells the church to "pray always." It is the same Greek word in both passages. How am I supposed to rejoice always?

Did Paul rejoice always? Was he rejoicing in the Lord when he wrote the Galatians that strident and

chastising epistle? Was he rejoicing when he was shipwrecked, gasping for breath in the high seas? Perhaps not. But it is Paul's imaginative excess in rhetoric that can be both frustrating and inspiring.

Imagine a world in which you held out as a possibility that you could rejoice in the Lord always. Imagine a spiritual landscape where you prompted yourself during seasons of inner turmoil and grief to look for solace in God. Imagine a time that is God's time, and not our arbitrary division of time into 24-hour periods.

How should we find joy in Advent when what we sometimes feel is...frankly...depressed? Perhaps the key is in Paul's enigmatic phrase "The Lord is near." It is both proclamation and prophetic imagination. If the Lord is near, then my fear and anxiety is distant. If the Lord is near, then the pain in the past (if not eclipsed) has some of its sharp edges reduced. If the Lord is near, then joy comes rushing back in.

Imagine that. Pray that. Live that...this Advent, and beyond.

-REV. DANIEL HEADRICK

Monday, December 17, 2018

Isaiah 11:1-9
Numbers 16:1-10
Hebrews 13:7-17

As a child, tradition was a very important part of our Christmas, as it still is.

My family believed in embracing the month of December with love and tradition making the anticipation outstanding. Most of our traditions were common, like decorating, driving around looking at Christmas lights and having parties. Then, of course, talking about whether or not you made the naughty or nice list and making your wish list for Santa. I loved envisioning him sliding down my chimney with a bag full of the gifts that I dreamed he would bring. However, nothing topped the feeling of LOVE and the true meaning of Christmas more than our tradition on Christmas Eve.

It was our family tradition to go to the church service on Christmas Eve. We would have a Christmas play of the birth and miracle of baby Jesus then sing Christmas songs. We would always end the play with the lights out, candles burning and everyone singing

“Silent Night”. Then Santa would arrive and we would fellowship for hours.

After church service, which usually lasted till about 9 o'clock at night, we would rush over to my Grandparents house, eat the large feast that everyone helped to make and exchange gifts with all my aunts, uncles and cousins. Once the festivities were finished around midnight and my Grandparents living room looked like a tornado hit it, we would all go outside for the finale. My dad and uncles would light the sky with fireworks. We would all gather around bundled up and watch the stars shine bright and the colors light up the night bringing LOVE and happiness to us all.

Today Kurt and I keep that tradition because traditions are a big part of Christmas and our lives, so hold onto them with all your heart. In the end, there is no better tradition than “LOVE”.

- SABRINA THOMAS
“LOVE”

Tuesday, December 18, 2018

Isaiah 11:1-9
Numbers 16:20-35
Acts 28:23-31



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In 2006, when Don, Camden and I planned a rendezvous with ever-traveling son Taylor in Sydney, Australia, we knew we would miss Christmas in Atlanta. But, since our boutique hotel near the Charring Cross metro stop in Darlinghurst placed us near St John The Evangelist Anglican Church on 24 December, we went to the Holy Communion service at 11:00 pm. The service even held the promise of champagne and cake at its end.

After the advent candle of love was lit and rector Hugh Cox spoke on God's great gift of love in Jesus, a small white-haired lady came to the lectern to pray. Her prayer lifted up each of the participants in the nativity story, and poignantly suggested how each could be someone with whom we could identify or have empathy.

Mary, the very young mother-to-be, with her great expectation, traveling in a foreign land, and so anxious about what the future would hold.

Joseph, the husband who had taken responsibility for a wife and a child not his own.

The Innkeeper whose resourcefulness found a place of shelter when there seemingly was none.

Shepherds whose humble work, by contemporary standards, made them seem less than worthy to witness the coming of the Christ child.

And the Wise Men, coming from afar to offer precious gifts in praise and adoration in their way.

Every Christmas season, I think of that prayer offered by a little lady on a Christmas Eve in Sydney. And I try to remember that no matter what swirls around us, what we bring each holy season to the remembrance of Jesus' birth in the world is human and personal and can even inspire hope.

- SYD JANNEY

Wednesday, December 19, 2018

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

In December of 1985, as I awaited the birth of my first child, I remember going to my Doctor the week before Christmas. It was December 21st and I remember my Doctor examining me and then pronouncing I would never make it to Christmas. I was delighted, thinking what a wonderful Christmas present for me!

My mother had quite a different reaction. Christmas had always been a stressful time with her. So much pressure for the perfect celebration, the perfect Christmas. She was adamant that I not be in the hospital over Christmas. Every day she phoned me to be sure I had not yet gone to the hospital. Every day she pressured me to do what I could to not have the baby till after the holidays. As it happened my mom did get her wish. My son was not born until January 15th of the following year. But I'll never forget how wistful I felt at the thought of a Christmas where I would be responsible for nothing but bringing this life into the world.

Twenty four years later, I was in the hospital with a cancer diagnosis over Christmas. I was fighting my second battle with breast cancer and my double mastectomy was scheduled for December 21st. This time I would be in the hospital over Christmas. I remember now what a feeling of calm I had. There was nothing I could do to prepare for this holiday. God was truly in control. Christmas day found me recovering in the hospital with my children at my side. I remember Dave and Cathy Wooten came to see me, how touched I felt that they had taken time out of their holiday to come see me. I remember feeling I could understand some kind of essence of Christmas that had previously escaped me.

I think of that Christmas often as the holidays approach. I want to hold in my heart the importance of the day and try not to let the rush and frenzy take over.

Lord let me take time to be still with my soul.

- SUSAN HARLAN

Thursday, December 20, 2018

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

Two thousand fifteen (2015) was my Mama's last Christmas. She died the following May, one month short of her 98th birthday. She loved to cook and had done so for friends and family all of her adult life. Arthritis and macular degeneration had taken her ability to work in the kitchen, so, for the previous two years, I had become her eyes and hands for meal preparation.

When Christmas 2015 rolled around, as usual, Mama wanted to prepare a meal for the family. Over time, the "family" had dwindled to seven people who would be present but that didn't deter her. We would have a meal "with all the fixins!" While I was her eyes

and hands, she was the official "taster" to ensure everything had been prepared correctly. "Needs a little more salt," which she said about everything except the pecan pie!

While the meal preparation was the initial focus, the real joy for her came when the family gathered, shared the meal, told her how good everything was, and then told her stories about what was going on in their lives. She loved her family! Looking back, this was the culmination of a life well-lived, and a family well-loved.

I miss her.

-DAN OAKLEY



Friday, December 21, 2018

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

Once upon a time and long ago, my family made Christmas Eve a special event by celebrating the real Christmas. Thanks be to my Dad who was always there with wisdom and foresight to lead the family into Christmas. Like most families we knew, we went to church for Christmas Eve service and many times some of those folks would come to our house for cookies and Hot Chocolate. This special time was always a part of our family whether it was church folks or relatives.

Once everyone went home my family and relatives would gather and listen to the Birth Story of Jesus. It was special. Candlelight! Christmas music playing in the background. Once Dad had read the scriptures we would celebrate the birth of Jesus with a Birthday cake and one candle. This is one memory that I cherish to

this day. My Dad has been gone for 21 years. I now find myself on Christmas Eve longing for relatives and family to share Christmas Eve with.

My church family has continued to make the Christmas Eve service memorable. When our daughter, Emily was very little we would attend the Family Christmas eve service and go home and Celebrate Jesus' birthday. We would sing "Happy Birthday, Jesus" and read the Birth Story. She has grown up now and someday I hope she will continue the Celebration of Christ's Birth.

I believe it is important to take the time to celebrate and prepare for the Coming of the Lord! Take the time to celebrate with friends, church family and family this season. You will be blessed.

- JADA GETSAY

Saturday, December 22, 2018

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

*Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plains
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains*

*Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?
What the gladsome tidings be
Which inspire your heavenly song?*

*Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly, sweetly through the night
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their brief delight*

*Come to Bethlehem and see
Him whose birth the angels sing,
Come, adore on bended knee,
Christ the Lord, the newborn King.*

*Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!*



Sunday, December 23, 2018

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Psalm 80:1-7
Micah 5:2-5a, Hebrews 10:5-10
Luke 1:39-45 (46-55)

*He has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.*

I have to confess that these prophetic words from the Magnificat hit a little too close to home. I have never experienced hunger in the sense that Mary must have meant it. The kind of gnawing, psychologically tortuous, and constant hunger that those who have inadequate supplies of food or have faced famine know all too well. No, I have always been well fed. Overfed actually. And especially around the Christmas season, this has been true.

Tomorrow is Christmas Eve, which has long enchanted me. It was a time of great familial closeness in my childhood. We would have a meal with the extended family. There would usually be a gift exchange and the children would have some kind of skit or musical number for the adults. I was the “baby” of the family so I was usually given the smallest role. I think there was always a bit of cringing when the show started because you never know what a child might say.

And of course there was food, more food than should have been served. Christmas ham and a million side dishes. Each family had their canonical side dishes and desserts. You had to be seen eating a bit of everything for the common good. “Son, go back in there and eat some more,” my MaMa would say. She would not rest until we had all eaten four times the recommended daily caloric intake.

What a contrast my gorging on pumpkin rolls and Christmas ham is with the poetic imagery of Mary’s song. Mary sings of the present social order being

turned upside down. The hungry are filled with “good things” and “sent the rich away empty.” Think about that for a moment. Imagine what the world would be like if that began to be experienced.

More likely than not the mother of Jesus was dirt poor and a teenager. Perhaps as young as 13 or 14. Mary. Hers was a teenage pregnancy out of wedlock. Her pregnancy began during the betrothal period with Joseph. Her groom to be could have divorced her under Jewish law.

There is nothing in the Gospel accounts to indicate that Jesus’ parents were people of means. No doubt they struggled with hunger, with making ends meet. So Mary knew a thing or two about the desire to fill the hungry with “good things.”

Worldwide there are still famines and here, in the richest country in the world, 1 in 6 children go hungry each night. Perhaps you saw the shocking photograph of the starving child Amal Hussain, whose emaciated body appeared in the New York Times recently. Little Amal is one of 1.8 million children starving because of the brutal civil war in Yemen.

For Amal, and for the 1.8 million innocent children of Yemen, Christe Eleison, Kyrie Eleison. May we do the little we can in our own community to fight for food justice. May we do all we can in our world to end war. Mary’s song becomes more and more prophetic and relevant every year. Christmas is almost here.

Let’s live out Mary’s song this year.

-REV. DANIEL HEADRICK

Monday, December 24, 2018

CHRISTMAS EVE

Psalm 96

Isaiah 9:2-7, Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

Each Christmas Eve, my Mom would prepare a dinner for my Dad, brother, and me. My family would sit down at a candlelit table to partake in our traditional Christmas Eve “feast,” always consisting of a pork roast cooked in a French onion cranberry sauce, potato casserole, sautéed asparagus, and homemade biscuits. During this time of fellowship with one another, my family would sing Advent hymns and read the sacred text of Luke 2: 1-14.

While my brother and I would seldom take this time of family togetherness seriously in our youth, my family’s time with each other on the peacefulness that only Christmas Eve can provide has, for me, become one of the most important and cherished days of the

year. Each year, I am increasingly grateful for my Mom who took thoughtful and deliberate steps to make Christmas Eve a meaningful time in the hopes that, one day, my brother and I would continue her Christmas Eve traditions with our families and pause to reflect on the meaning of Christmas.

On December 24th, most of us around the Christian world will light the Christ candle and read Luke’s account of the birth of Christ. While each family has their own unique Christmas traditions, the Christmas story is what binds us all together and illuminates a beacon of hope, joy, peace, and love.

- WILL BELL

Tuesday, December 25, 2018

CHRISTMAS DAY

*Psalm 97
Isaiah 62:6-12, Titus 3:4-7
Luke 2:1-7, 8-20*

*"Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.*

*The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep in the hay.*

*The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.*

*I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky
And stay by my cradle 'til morning is nigh.*

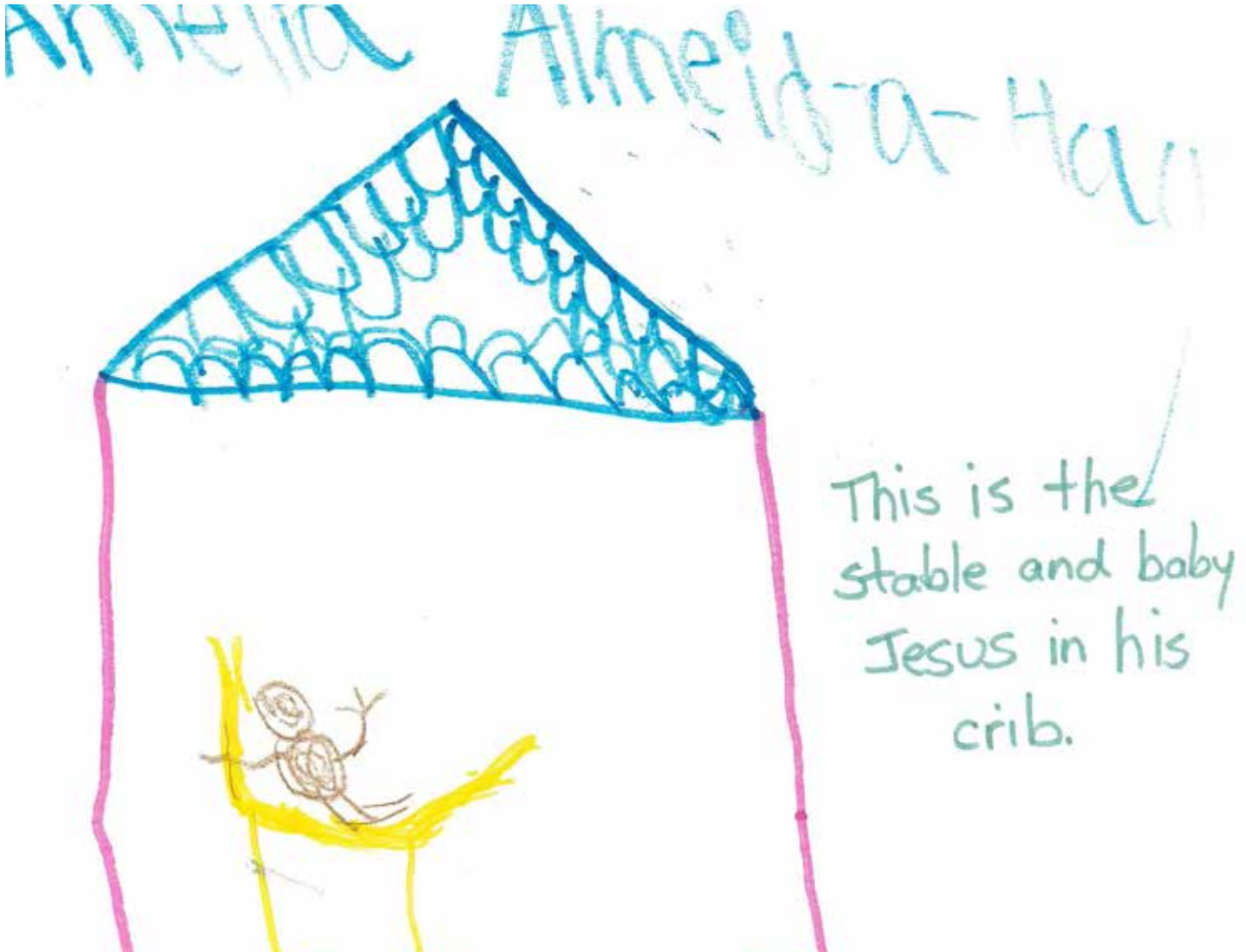
*Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay
Close by me forever, and love me, I pray.*

*Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
And take us to heaven, to live with Thee there."*

Lord,

May we experience your sweet peace this Christmas
as we bask in the presence of your newborn son, the
Christ Child - the true meaning of Christmas.

Amen



Thank You!



The Adult Education Team would like to extend a special “thank you” to everyone who helped make this Advent Devotional possible. Whether you assisted in soliciting written submissions or encouraging children to complete art pieces: we thank you! Like the Christmas story shows us, it takes a Village! And what a wonderful Village we have here at Northside Drive Baptist Church. We hope you have enjoyed this outpouring of hope and love in the form of Christmas and Advent memories from our NDBC Village.

