

From Announcement to Arrival

A 2025 Advent Journey



Trinity Lutheran Church
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Foreword

Dear members and friends of Trinity,

Our Advent journey this year begins the last day of November and culminates on Christmas Eve. With this Devotional, we invite you to join the Trinity community as we journey from the announcement of God's saving plan in Jesus to his arrival in the Bethlehem manger. As you read from day to day, we hope that the experiences and insights of each devotion's author will enrich your experience of this season of anticipation.

May God be with you this Advent as we, together, join in the spiritual pilgrimage to the birthplace of the holy child of Christmas!

Pastor Rob
for all the contributors



First Sunday of Advent | Sunday, November 30

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 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. John 1:1, 14

John begins his gospel by declaring that Jesus is the divine self-revelation of God, who has eternally existed since the beginning. Addressing a likely Jewish audience, John's words would have been a comforting reminder to persecuted Christ followers during the late first century about how God—through Jesus—entered the world and lived among humanity with a very human body and had very human experiences and feelings. They need not be ashamed of their existence and for their belief in Jesus as Savior. For them, Jesus as the “Word became flesh” brought a clearer revelation from God and of God, which includes a God who is willing to suffer alongside creation to fulfill God's purpose in and for the world.

Going through adolescence, I experienced shame for “broken” parts of me that I could not control or change on my own. The more I prayed to God and the more I struggled and failed because of these broken parts, the more ashamed I became of myself. I could not understand how God could truly love me in all my brokenness. I carried this shame well into adulthood. I did not truly experience the freedom which Christ brings until seminary when I studied the incarnation of God in Jesus—when the Word became human and dwelt among creation.

Theologian Karl Barth describes this incarnation as God's ultimate self-revelation as God was able to truly show humanity how God lives and acts and was willing to subject Godself to the same suffering and temptations humans experience.¹ Theologian M. Shawn Copeland says the incarnation—which is the infinite God present—dismantles the systems of this world which seek to control, demean, and dictate identity outside of Christ.² Writer and poet Cole Arthur Riley views God choosing to become flesh as this reminder:

“We were never meant to dismember our selfhoods. My face is my soul is my blood is my glory. When we neglect the physical, it inevitably suffocates the image of a God who ate, slept, cried, bled, grew, and healed. And whether or not the origin of that neglect is hatred, it will indeed end in hatred.”³

When I truly understood the significance of God choosing to become human and that I was created beautifully and wholly in the image of God, it began transforming how I view myself both internally and externally. Internally, I was freed from the shame that had crippled me for so long as I no longer saw myself as a bad person who is unworthy of God's love. Externally, I began to see my body as a gift from God, and no one could tell me how to feel about what I see. Over time, the incarnation of God—the Word became flesh—transformed into an embodied hope for me. Although I am not perfect and still struggle with my self-image, the incarnation is a beautiful reminder of how I bear the image of God and that God is redeeming and restoring my body each day.

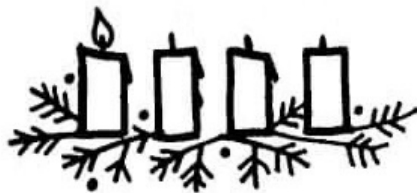
This Advent, my prayer for you is that you will experience the embodied hope which God brought in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. You are wonderfully and beautifully created in the image of God—an expression of God’s glory. As you dive deeper into your relationship with God, may you find the truth of who God has created you to be. For those struggling with shame and/or guilt, may you experience the freedom we have by the grace of God in salvation. You are worthy of love, and you belong—seen and known by the God who loves you. Amen.

Josh Lee
NextGen & Outreach Director

¹Karl Barth. “The Grace of God in Jesus Christ,” in *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*.

²M. Shawn Copeland. “*Making the Body of Jesus, the Body of Christ (Part 1)*,” in *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*.

²Cole Arthur Riley. “Body,” in *This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation, and the Stories That Make Us*.



First Week of Advent | Monday, December 1

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge. The wolf shall live with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the lion will feed together, and a little child shall lead them. Isaiah 11:1-4a, 6

As I have read this very familiar scripture several times, I have the same reaction: a sense of awe at the overwhelming love and promise the words convey. My dad was a nursery man, so we had trees and plants in various growing stages throughout the years as well as selling Christmas trees every year. People would come, select a tree and my dad would cut it down, leaving a stump for future growth which, eventually, became another beautiful tree.

During my growing up years on the farm it was fun for us kids to light the Advent candles announcing the true beginning of the sacred season. Doing so prepared our hearts for the journey to Christmas and paved the way to receive the love that flowed from the manger. When I was older, I directed our church choir for thirteen years and we had the opportunity to sing some beautiful music during this sacred season. I remember fondly how Mary’s and Joseph’s journey to Bethlehem was acted out by our church members, dramatically portraying the struggle to find a place for Jesus to be born but finding no place but a humble stable for our Lord and Savior to enter the world.

Looking back to the Isaiah scripture with its overwhelmingly beautiful portrayal of love and promise, the image of a shoot coming forth from the stump of Jesse is both a vivid reminder of the Advents of my childhood and a powerful glimpse into who the promised Messiah would be. The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord and his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

What do all these wonderful words of promise mean? How are we to understand the kingdom which the bearer of God's Spirit will bring? Isaiah answers with imagery that would fill all agrarian people with awe! The wolf will do no harm to the lamb, nor the leopard to the goat. The lion will not think to do harm to the fatted calf—such will be the peace God will usher in. Who will do all this? A little child shall lead them—all those who see in the miraculous birth of Jesus the greatest gift of Christmas.

Elaine Schomaker



First Week of Advent | Tuesday, December 2

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. You have multiplied exultation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. 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. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. 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.
Isaiah 9:2-6

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” In this promise, Isaiah speaks to hearts that long for hope—the same longing we feel today. Into the shadowed places of fear, grief, and uncertainty, God sends light not as a distant blaze, but as a child—fragile, human, near. In Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace, we see that God's power is not domination but love that serves and saves. This Christmas, we remember that the light still shines—in Bethlehem's manger, in our worship, in every act of mercy and kindness. The darkness cannot overcome it. Lord Jesus, Light of the World, shine in our hearts and homes this Christmas. Kindle our hope and help us bear your light to others. Amen.

Becky Malmo
Communion Assistant



First Week of Advent | Wednesday, December 3

Then Isaiah said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel. Isaiah 7:13-14

Have you ever been in a challenging situation but hesitated to put your faith and trust in God to lead you through the crisis? Instead of asking for the Lord’s guidance and then trusting in His will and His support, did you ignore the voice of God and rely on your own strength and approach to handle the situation?

In Isaiah 7, the northern kingdom of Israel (Ephraim), Syria, and Judah were threatened by the larger and more powerful Assyrian Empire. When Judah would not join forces with Ephraim and Syria against Assyria’s aggression, the two countries attacked Judah around 735 BCE to try to force the kingdom to join their alliance. During this stressful time of high anxiety for Judah, the Prophet Isaiah approached Judah’s King Ahaz with the good news of the Lord’s promise of protection from the attacks of Ephraim and Syria.

Unwilling to put his trust in God, King Ahaz instead sought an alliance with Assyria for protection, which ultimately resulted in the destruction of the two invading countries, but this alliance did not bode well for Judea financially or spiritually during King Ahaz’s reign. His refusal to trust in the Lord and agree to a prophetic sign of success over his invaders frustrated Isaiah, who spoke the words in today’s devotional passage: *Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals that you weary my God also?*

At that point, Isaiah also delivered to King Ahaz the familiar prophesy: *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel.* While it is thought that the prophesy was initially fulfilled during the time of the threat of the kings of Ephraim and Syria, the ultimate prophesy has been viewed as being fulfilled with the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, as recorded in Matthew 1:22-23: *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel,” which means “God with us.”*

Isaiah’s prophesy to King Ahaz, despite the king’s reluctance to listen to the voice of the Lord and his determination to control his own destiny, is a reminder that God’s faithfulness is not dependent on our strength, perseverance, or even our faith. God’s promise through Jesus is that God will be with us and strengthen us, not because we have asked or deserve it but because of His great love for us.

During this Advent season, may you feel the growing assurance of “God with us” and embrace this promise with confidence, gratefulness, trust, surrender, and a spirit of generosity and love toward your brothers and sisters in Christ, as you see God in all whom you encounter each day!

Dr. Carol Fry Bohlin

Choir member & Communion assistant



First Week of Advent | Thursday, December 4

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. 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. A voice cries out: In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 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. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." The grass withers; the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. Isaiah 40:1-4, 8

Isaiah 40 begins, "Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God." This is a tender and most reassuring statement but, comfort from what? For me, Isaiah 40:1 makes the most sense when one engages in a preliminary and full reading of Isaiah 39. Quite a disturbing future is explained by Isaiah to King Hezekiah!

Not all of scripture describes safe and reassuring things; but, it does put across the message that humans will have to work for, and at times fight for, justice. Verses 3 and 4 are quite a metaphor illustrating the amount of effort one must produce to make ready for the coming of the Lord. It all seems to be more than humans can accomplish yet verse 8 provides the reassurance that "the word of our God will stand forever." In the steadfast word of God is where we find our hope.

Advent provides us with time for reflection on our commitment to justice and to God and how we can continue to grow in this commitment. Isaiah 40:1-5 is the text used at the beginning of the monumental oratorio "Messiah" composed by G.F. Handel. I invite you to listen to it to gain more insight to this powerful text.

John S. Hord
Director of Traditional Music



First Week of Advent | Friday, December 5

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. Micah 5:2

We know the feeling: the heavy bag of gifts digging into your shoulder as you rush through a packed parking lot, your phone buzzing with one more schedule change. That stress is the sound of our modern 'Jerusalem', a bustling, loud place that demands our hurried attention. But the King of kings didn't choose the capital; He chose Bethlehem Ephrathah, a town so small the prophet had to point it out specifically. The birth was in a stable, quiet and humble. God often meets us in the places the world overlooks.

This Advent season, let's consider what it means to look for Christ in the 'small' things—not in the giant gestures or the elaborate ceremonies, but in the small, quiet acts of service and worship that often go unnoticed, just like a stable on the edge of a village. Can you find 10 minutes of uninterrupted pause when you silence your phone and just breathe? Can you practice more of the unseen grace this season—small, humble acts of service? This might mean doing chores and not seeking credit, but simply as a quiet offering. Maybe it's sending a note of gratitude to someone often overlooked, or silently praying for the overwhelmed cashier instead of just enduring the long line. In these simple, Bethlehem-like moments, we might just find the true Prince of Peace waiting for us.

Eileen Donnelley
Assisting Minister



First Week of Advent | Saturday, December 6

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more. Jeremiah 31:31-34

In these verses, Jeremiah tells us—reminds us, *assures* us—that God has made a NEW promise to His people (*that means us!*). This new promise is that we are His people and that our sin is forgiven. All our sins—every sin we can name, every sin we hold in our hearts as too terrible to be forgiven, those we forgot to repent of, those we thought weren't so bad and maybe don't need to be brought up and shared—are completely and forever forgiven.

Believe me—this is great news. We have heard that promise repeated many times. We have read it in the Bible and in devotional material. We have been told it by caring friends. We hear it in sermons all the time. And still we worry. When we face serious illness, or sit at a funeral and hear scripture verses that proclaim God's forgiveness, we wonder: “Am I *really* forgiven?”

Luther struggled with this question—we modern Lutherans, not so much. “Are you baptized?” is a more likely question. How do we answer? Are we simply answering that the act has been done to us or are we taking hold with both hands this redemptive gift from God and rejoicing aloud: “Yes! I am baptized!”

In baptism these are the words prayed over us: “We give you thanks, O God, that through water and the Holy Spirit you give us new birth, cleanse us from sin, and raise us to eternal life. [Stir up in your people] the gift of the Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever.”

Read again then in Jeremiah, chapter 31: “I will make a new covenant says the Lord. I will put my law within them (*that is us*). I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they shall be my people. They will know me, from the least of them to the greatest. I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.” All for Jesus’ sake, Amen!

Margie Back
WELCA



Second Sunday of Advent | December 7

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Isaiah 61:1-2

Isaiah 61, verses 1 and 2, is a proclamation—a Messianic prophecy—that the Lord is coming. These verses are important because they indicate that an individual, chosen by God, is foretold to be coming to Earth to lift up those who have experienced suffering, to comfort those in grief, and to provide a declaration of freedom for those who place their faith in God.

This prophecy provides the promise that a Messiah will liberate and uplift the faithful from the troubles that they face. As we know, Jesus fulfills this prophecy when he comes to Earth and provides healing to those he encounters during his teachings and travels through ancient Israel.

Much like those awaiting his arrival over 2,000 years ago, today we place our hope in the Lord that things will get better and that we will get through whatever tough situation or affliction we are faced with. We don't have to wonder about the Messiah who was promised, because we know that the Lord Jesus, God's only Son, came down to Earth to save us from the captivity to our sins. Jesus died for us on the cross to unbind us from what captivates us, to shed light on what blinds us, and to console us as we mourn. Jesus didn't simply come to this Earth to proclaim the good news—he *is* the good news.

So I ask, do you know the good news? In this Christmas season, we are often reminded to spread joy to others, but it is important to remember why we are spreading that joy. We spread joy because on that first Christmas night, good news was proclaimed for the world, and all those who believe in it are saved.

Wyatt Czesinski
Council Treasurer



Second Week of Advent | Monday, December 8

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases, yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. Isaiah 53:4-5

This Scripture foretells the depth of God's love for us through Jesus. Through Jesus' suffering, He took on our sins and carried our sorrows. Jesus, the Sacrificial Lamb, did this to make forgiveness available to all people. When I think of those who sacrifice, I think of family, friends and even an unknown stranger.

In this first case, I want to speak about teachers. One of my sisters, Jan, taught at a San Francisco Christian elementary school for 25 years, mostly 1st through 3rd grades. Though she would not speak of her sacrifices, she shared many stories with me over the years. Jan spent her own money purchasing extra supplies to decorate her room, tutoring students who needed extra help at no charge and many other ways she put her students first.

Does this sound familiar? During those 25 years, she drove the same VW Beetle rather than a newer car. On October 18, 1989, at 5:04 p.m., the Loma Prieta earthquake hit. My sister rushed to her school where 40 students were in after-school day care. The on-duty teacher needed extra help. San Francisco was in upheaval, phones were out and most public transit was out too. Some of the parents had to walk miles to the school; one was temporarily trapped on the Bay Bridge. Yet, my sister and the other teachers did not leave school that day until every student was picked up.

So many teachers sacrifice their extra time and often give in different ways to reach their students. I don't think we know how much teachers give of themselves for the sake of their students. This scripture tells us of the Messiah's impending sacrifice for our forgiveness. Is it any wonder one of the ways we know him is as the great teacher.

Liz Davis
Altar Guild member/Usher



Second Week of Advent | Tuesday, December 9

I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, "You are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession. Psalm 2:7-8

Advent is a time for hope! A time when we wait with anticipation to celebrate the birth of Christ.

In Psalm 2:7-8, God has set a decree that His Son IS that hope!

If hope is based on something we lack, and if the Advent season anticipates Christ's birth, how do we yet hope for something we already have? How do we enter into the 'Hope of Advent' if things hoped for have already come? Psalm 2 helps us to answer that question by making it clear that in David's time what they hoped for—and what we're still hoping for today—was not just the Messiah's appearance but his *reign*!

We pray that in this Advent season that, sharing the message of Jesus Christ with our friends, family, and even strangers, will not only strengthen our bond with Him, but also theirs!

Debbie Moe
Altar Guild member



Second Week of Advent | Wednesday, December 10

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of his possession? He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in showing steadfast love. He will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old. Micah 7:18-20

September 27, 2025—the day that set my life in a new direction. I had not been feeling well for many months. Nausea, headache, weight loss, balance issues and walking into walls indicated that something was wrong. I'd been to the doctors several times but hadn't gotten any answers. On this day at the Fresno VA, a CT scan was done on my head. There it was, a massive tumor attached to my brain. After discussion with doctors, it was decided that I should be transferred to the Palo Alto VA, then later to Stanford to remove the tumor.

Some may ask, “Why me?” Or “What sin did I commit?” “why is this happening? Payback? Revenge? Punishment?

Doctors presented all the risks. Although slight, risks included stroke, loss of balance, hand-eye coordination, blindness, memory loss, and severe headaches. Not having surgery was not an option at this point. The surgery, scheduled to take 7-8 hours, took 13. Most of the tumor was removed. Some was left because it was too close to my brain stem and attempting to remove it presented unacceptable risks.

With physical therapy, I am now learning to get my balance back and walk again. It was a surprise to me and to the medical staff that the severity of my symptoms had not risen above a two on a scale of 1-10. Also surprising was that I had very few headaches. I believe this is a result of prayer, love, and support of my family and Trinity family.

I may never know the answer to “Why me?” It’s not a question I ask. As to “What sin did I commit?” Micah 7:18-20 answers, *Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of his possession? He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in showing steadfast love. He will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.* Micah clearly states that God is love. Sins are forgiven, not used as a reason for punishment against us. My lifestyle will change and adjustments will be made. Lingering effects of the surgery I’m facing now will be overcome. And God, friends, family, and especially Lisa, will be with me. God is love.

Frank Collins
Council President



Second Week of Advent | Thursday, December 11

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 2 Samuel 7:12-13

In these verses, the Lord is speaking to King David through the prophet Nathan . He makes two promises. First, the line and lineage of David will continue. Second, the temple will be built by a descendent of David (after his death). Both promises are fulfilled. Jesus comes from the line and lineage of David. Solomon, David’s son builds the temple in Jerusalem, the city of David.

What are Gods promises to us Christians? Love and faithfulness, salvation and eternal life, guidance and wisdom, help and comfort for those who seek Him. His mercy is available to all who repent . . . and the list goes on.

During Advent we celebrate the promise of a Savior, Christ the Lord, who comes to save us from our sins. Another promise that has been fulfilled —Jesus came, He Died, He rose again. Thank you, Lord!

Karen Gregory
FMAT member



Second Week of Advent | Friday, December 12

But now thus says the LORD he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel;

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. Isaiah 43:1-3

We recently had an opportunity to be reminded of life lessons, when we hit some rocky times. You might call these upper division classes; after you have lived through Life Lessons 110 and it's second semester partner class, Life Lessons 210. I have grown up in the church; I have lived the dark night of the soul already. I know with certainty that God is with me in the difficult times. I know my name is engraved on the palm of God's hand.

I was called to a new journey, changing a medication I had taken for 30 years. I knew it would not be easy; but I was taken to a new level of pain and confusion beyond anything I could have imagined. During this upper-division class, my husband was diagnosed with cancer of the pancreas. What was this? Where was this coming from? In this class, I stood facing the Professor with wide open eyes, dazed and confused.

Based on earlier lived experiences, I could say to myself that it would be okay. I could do this medication thing even though I was in over my head in a swift current. God was right beside me in the dear friends holding me up.

But with the "double whammy" of my issue plus my husband's cancer diagnosis, I had no reserve energy stores. And yet . . . and yet . . . we came through the fire, not even smelling like smoke.

By this point in the book of Isaiah, God has told the Israelites that, yet again, something big is coming and that it is going to be good. They need to be faithful and keep their eyes on him. He also reminds us that he is the LORD our God, the Holy One of Israel, our Savior. When we maintain our faith in the God we know, we can be assured that we will come through the storm, even back-to-back storms, held firmly by his right hand.

Sharon Rowley
Sunday Morning Bible Study Leader



Second Week of Advent | Saturday, December 13

You who have done great things, O God, who is like you? You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depths of the earth you will bring me up again. Psalm 71:19-20

As a mom, I hate to think that the baby born in Bethlehem, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas, is destined for such a brutal death as a young man. That's what Advent is all about, though—the arrival of God's solution to our problem of sin. It comes as no surprise as Jesus' birth (and death) are foretold in many places in the Bible. This Psalm is one of those places, but one place where the sacrifice Jesus will be called to make is tied in with God's power to raise him up again.

The writer of this Psalm asks a question worthy to be considered in Advent and throughout the whole year: Who, O God, is like you? Who is like God? Who can do the things he can do? Who else would willingly give up his only son for us? And, when the giving was done, who else could raise Jesus from the depths of the earth?

The answer is no one, no one but God, that is. No one could do what God did for us. The good news is, when we experience trouble, hardship and struggle in our lives, God has promised to do for us what he did for Jesus. He promises to be with us through the dark valleys and to see us through, even through to the very end.

As a mortal, I don't like to think that any of us will have to experience death. But, as someone who believes in the One born at Christmas and in God's power to make good on his promises, I know that my ultimate destiny will not be in the depths of the earth. My destiny will be to be raised to new life all because of the life that began in the manger, all those Christmases ago.

Kristen O'Berg
FMAT member





Third Sunday of Advent | December 14

As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed. Daniel 7:13-14

Not since the days of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible have I seen the term *Son of Man* used in this verse. The NRSV has supplied *human being* as a more faithful rendering of the original Hebrew term that isn't particular to either gender.

Except when it doesn't. How this term is used gets a little trickier in the New Testament when it emerges as Jesus' favorite way of talking about himself, as he does over 80 times in the four gospels. As a title for Jesus, *Son of Man* isn't merely a poetic way of saying "human being;" it's used to refer uniquely to Jesus as the Messiah—the one who was with God in the beginning, now sits at the right hand of God in eternity and will return at the end of time to claim his own.

Here's how the NRSV uses it in Matthew 24: *Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will . . . see 'the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven' with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other [verses 30-31].*

Sounds a lot like the "human being" coming with the clouds of heaven in Daniel, doesn't it? So, who is the Son of Man: a human being just like all of us or the one-and-only Messiah, Savior of the world? The answer is . . . both!

The miracle of Christmas and the focus of our Advent anticipation is the arrival of God in the flesh—the pre-existent, co-eternal Son of Man/Son of God—and the son of Mary and Joseph. This is not a confusion of terms; it points to the central mystery of our faith—that Jesus, in his humanity, was born as we all are and died as we all must; that Jesus, in his divinity, conquered sin and death in his resurrection; that Jesus, in both his humanity and his divinity, will return on the clouds to gather us into his everlasting kingdom. Just as Daniel foretold.

Pastor Rob



Third Week of Advent | Monday, December 15

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. John 3:16

Leo: It's like how we give gifts on Christmas. To make people happy. Since Jesus was born on Christmas, it was our Christmas gift from God to the world.

Max: I feel that this is true and that we should believe it. Jesus was born on Christmas day.

Leo Dyer, age 14

Max Dyer, age 12

(As told to their mom, Katie Willis)



Third Week of Advent | Tuesday, December 16

By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and the farthest of the seas. By your strength, you establish the mountains; you are girded with might. You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples. Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the mourning and the evening shout for joy. Psalm 65:5-8

This Psalm describes God as a powerful and awe-inspiring creator who rules over nature and all the nations, and as the source of salvation for all people everywhere. It emphasizes his might through his control of mountains and seas, his quieting of nations, and his universal reach to “the ends of the earth.”

When we feel distant or in turmoil, we must trust in God's steady presence and remember that he offers us comfort and strength. No matter where we are, when we call upon God, he is always listening and guiding us! (As long as we let him).

We find a reflection of this in the benevolence and universal reach in good Ol' St. Nick. I remember, as a child, how magical it was that Santa could know every single child, everyone who's been nice and who's been naughty, no matter where they lived. And deliver presents to all, in one, single, magical night!! But, as the Psalm reminds us, God's power is greater than magic—his reach and love are miraculous . . . and meant for us!

Shawn Swaim and Gillis Gibson



Third Week of Advent | Wednesday, December 17

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7

These two verses remind us of the power of prayer and gratitude in coping with anxiety and finding peace in challenging times. I am a worrier and a quasi-perfectionist. I become anxious, frustrated, and stressed especially when under the pressure of time constraints, preparing for the “perfect” holiday, personal special events, projects or entering new situations. As I looked at the list of focus scripture passages Pastor Rob had selected for this year’s Advent Devotional, naturally, my first choice was Philippians 4:6-7.

The Apostle Paul is writing a letter to the church in Philippi from a Roman prison. The scene is dimly lit cell, with Paul sitting on a small stool, his hands busy with parchment and quill as he writes his words of encouragement and exhortation to the Philippian faithful believers.

Despite the bleak surroundings of his confinement, Paul’s words carry a message of hope and peace that transcends physical boundaries. He reminds the Philippians that the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. As Paul prays for his beloved friend, the presence of the Holy Spirit fills the damp, cramped cell, giving Paul a sense of divine comfort and assurance.

Verse 6 reminds us of the power of prayer and gratitude in coping with anxiety and finding peace in challenging times. When we are facing uncertainty and worries, it is natural to feel anxious, but this verse calls us to communicate our concerns with God and do so with a heart filled with thanksgiving. Sharing with God allows us to experience a sense of peace that goes beyond understanding.

Verse 7 invites us to reflect on anxieties and uncertainties in our lives. Do we allow worries to overwhelm us, *or* do we turn to prayer and gratitude as sources of comfort and strength? This verse teaches us a valuable lesson in trusting God’s plan and seeking solace in His presence by emphasizing the importance of prayer and thanksgiving. This provides a roadmap for navigating life’s storms with faith, resilience and a heart full of thanksgiving.

Paul’s words in Philippians 4:6-7 offer a timeless prescription for *God’s* peace. He assures us of a peace that surpasses human understanding by inviting us to present our worries to God through prayer. This peace is a gift that guards our hearts and minds, enabling us to navigate life’s challenges with confidence and trust in God’s faithful care. You can turn your anxieties into prayer as you reflect

on these verses. Think about how you can cultivate a habit of thanksgiving in your life. May the peace of God find you as you place your trust in Him!

Nancy Newsome
Sunday Morning Hospitality Hostess



Third Week of Advent | Thursday, December 18

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and night wraps itself around me," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you. Psalm 139:7-12

"Bidden or unbidden, God is present." C.G. Jung

That our relationship with God is infinite in breadth and constant in time is not a new theme in the Bible; after all, Adam and Eve were constantly attended by His presence in the Garden of Eden. There is nowhere God is not, so don't even try to hide! We have all foolishly tried, at one time or another, to keep secrets from God. Perhaps we were ashamed of something we had done or found it difficult to face up to our failure to live up to God's standards for our behavior. Regardless, there is no place, literally and figuratively, that God is not. This is, in the final analysis, comforting. By virtue of the grace won for us by Jesus, we can be assured of our deliverance into the constant presence of God...Instead of hiding ourselves, let us be open to and welcome the constant advent of God into our lives.

John Malmo
Communion Assistant



Third Week of Advent | Friday, December 19

He does not deal with us according to our sins nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him. Psalm 103:10-13

At nine years old, my conversation with Mom about God was really dozens of shorter conversations as she planted seeds that led to my profession of faith later that year. Jesus sounded a lot more real when Mom talked about him than when the preacher did.

I was raised in a conservative church, and the preacher talked a lot about God, sin and eternal damnation. My favorite stories were the ones where he talked about hellfire and brimstone getting the bad guys. I was sure that God was the ultimate superhero, and Jesus was his sidekick sort of like Batman and Robin. I loved it when a big sinner got zapped until one day I realized that God might just zap me too! I told Mom about my concern and asked how I could avoid that. My mother pointed to the Ten Commandments as God's rules to live by. Imagine that! All I had to do to avoid getting zapped was to *JUST BE BETTER THAN I COULD POSSIBLY BE!* Jeepers Creepers! I knew that I was doomed, DOOMED!

Mom was a great mind reader and she often talked with me about my "God" concerns. She'd smile, give me a big hug and tell me how God lives forever and was in charge of everything—including me. I asked if she had ever seen him and she shook her head "no", but she still absolutely believed in him. It was a lot for me to consider. Then she asked me if I believed that she loved me. I couldn't "see" her love but she really loved me a lot and I knew that truth in my heart without a doubt. She also said that God's love for me was even bigger than hers. WOW!

Mom said that God has a son whose name is Jesus and he loves me as much as his Father does. He was born, grew up to be a man and then mean people killed him. He wasn't guilty of anything but his death was payment for every person's sin, including mine. If I believed in his death and resurrection, He would take away my sins.

She told me that she could show me an example. She took a hand full of sand and added a couple of spoons full of metal filings. She stirred them up and then then put a "U" shaped magnet in the plastic tub and stirred it again. The magnet had become fuzzy from all of the metal filings that had stuck to it. Mom said that the magnet was able to attract and remove all the metal from the sand. In a similar way, God uses a special magnet that takes the sin out of my heart if I had faith in him.

I trusted Mom and added her faith to mine in accepting Jesus as my Savior and Lord. Even though God did forgive my sins, I still got a few more spankings over the years before better judgement took over!

Ed Brewer
Council Member





Third Week of Advent | Saturday, December 20

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you. O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Psalm 118:26, 28-29

These words from the Psalms are foundational to the Bible and everything that it teaches us and represents. There is a reason we hear these verses when singing from our hymnal books or listening to Christian radio stations. It is a fundamental truth that is present in all of our daily lives: “*for he is good*”. Those are four simple words, definitive and clear, yet they carry the weight of all creation. “*He is GOOD*”. That statement explains, vindicates, encourages, and propels forward everything that God is about and justifies the rest of the verses in the Psalm.

Anyone that comes in the name of the Lord (truly in the name, as Jesus did after the Psalms were written), are blessed because the Lord is good. God is the conquest over evil, the remedy of misery, the creator of life and the universe itself, the forgiver of sin, and lover of mankind and that is good. God is goodness itself and anyone who can truly come from his house, who can accept in their heart that they are his children, are blessed.

Because God is good, his steadfast love endures forever. Forever! All of the space and time in the universe cannot come close to representing the amount of love the Lord has for us! Nothing you can do will ever make him not love you. No matter how many times you fall, God will be there with a helping hand to lift you up again.

That is why we must exalt him, praise him, and give thanks to him every day in whatever small way we can. We must sing in the car even when we’re offkey, see him in every person we meet on the street, thank him when we break bread and reach for him when we find ourselves in dark places. He is jealous and deserves our love, he desires that most from us. Every morning sunrise, family dinner, walk through the park, stranger lending a hand, movie night with your partner, wave from a neighbor, should show us that all the little daily good things are reminders that our Father, Creator of all things good, is watching us and loves us beyond all things. He loves us, *for he is good*.

Mat Czesinski





Fourth Sunday of Advent | December 21

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Luke 1:26-29

"A Disruptive Greeting"

Advent is a season of holy interruption. In this passage, Mary's quiet and plain life in Nazareth is suddenly disrupted by a divine messenger. Gabriel's words are shocking, not just because of his appearance, but because of what he says: *"Greetings favored one! The Lord is with you."*

Mary's reaction is deeply human: she is *"much perplexed"* and begins to *wonder*. This moment captures the tension of Advent. God breaks into the ordinary with extraordinary purpose, and our first response is often confusion, and not clarity.

But notice this: before any instructions are given, before any miraculous news is shared, Mary is reminded of two things, her identity (*highly favored*) and God's presence (*the Lord is with you*). These truths anchor her in her understanding of what is to come in her future.

As we experience this season of Advent, consider this: what if God is trying to interrupt your routine with a message of favor and presence? What if His plans for you begin not with action, but with identity?

Take a moment to sit with this greeting. Let it speak to your heart: You are seen. You are favored. The Lord is with you.

Jeff Willis
Council Member



Fourth Week of Advent | Monday, December 22

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear

him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.” Luke 1:46-55

The story of Mary, the mother of Jesus, is an interesting case of faith, surrender, devotion, and obedience, especially from one so young. Have you ever really contemplated Mary, the mother of Jesus? We see quite a bit of her in the Gospels, but do we know her? What does Scripture really teach us about this incredibly important woman in Jesus’s life?

Many people will be reading the Christmas story over the next couple of weeks. Most will focus on Luke chapter 2 which includes the classic telling of the birth of Jesus—“*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus...*”.

Did you know Mary could have been executed for being pregnant before marriage? In two of the Gospels, we learn the story of the birth of Jesus. Matthew’s Gospel focuses on Joseph and how the angel came telling him the news about the child Mary would have and that he was to call him Jesus. Luke’s Gospel focuses on Mary, her reaction and her perspective.

In both cases we learn that Mary and Joseph were betrothed at the time of Jesus’s birth but had not yet married. Early on, Joseph considered ending his relationship with Mary after learning she was pregnant, as society’s way to account for the pregnancy would be to suspect Mary of an illicit liaison. Even if the death penalty was not imposed, Mary would have been disgraced and become permanently unmarriageable. One can imagine Mary’s need to leave her hometown for a while (3 months) to and visit her kinswoman, Elizabeth, far from local suspicions.

There’s a curious moment when the two women greet each other. In the Old Testament and New Testament days prior to Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was seen only in selected people. For instance, Pharaoh recognized that the Spirit was in Joseph (Genesis 41:38). Joshua is chosen as Moses’ successor because the Spirit was with him (Numbers 27:18). Daniel was another one (Daniel 4:8; 5:11-14; 6:3) in whom the Spirit was evident.

And now, Elizabeth has her encounter with the Holy Spirit as Mary draws near: *When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”* (Luke 1:41-45)

Mary’s reply to this forms today’s reading and is known as the *Magnificat*, from the first word of the reading in Latin. There’s speculation among some that this song was penned by Luke, the book’s author and historian. I would tend to agree with many others who believe that Mary’s song merely

reflects the powerful and uplifting *Prayer of Hannah* in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, which Mary would have known. Being steeped in Jewish tradition, Hannah, Elizabeth and Mary all knew their Scriptures!

In fact, Mary is a primary source, a firsthand account, of the story of Jesus's birth. Who else would have detailed knowledge of the birth, the visitation of the Magi, and young Jesus getting lost in the temple? Imagine Mary holding these moments and memories for years knowing how they would impact people in future generations.

Fast forward to Jesus on the cross. Here again, we see Mary full of faithfulness, surrender, devotion and incredible love. She pushes past the pain and agony she felt as her son gave his life and focuses on the promises of God, the promise her son's death makes available: the forgiveness of sin and life everlasting. This empowers her presence with Jesus in his final moments when so many others fall away in fear.

What we see in Mary reflects what we see in Jesus. His death on the cross is proof of God's love for us. Jesus will never abandon us: even in our worst moments He is with us. As there was nothing that could keep Mary from her son's darkest moment, there is nothing in this world that can separate us from the love of Jesus!

What does this promise mean to you? Are you hurting, are you feeling lost, unheard or unsure of your relationship with Jesus? Let me reassure you: God loves you! Jesus is the proof. He will never turn His back on you; he will never walk away; He is always waiting for you. Jesus says: *Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with you, and you with me.* Revelation 3:20.

Mary's Son, our Lord Jesus, is knocking. He's inviting you to invite him into your life. You have only to ask and he will come into your life, forgive your sins and give you a share in eternal life. What better way to welcome Christmas this year than to join the angel chorus, "Raise, raise the song on high, the virgin sings her lullaby; haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary!"

Lisa Lindeman
Children's Ministry Coordinator



Fourth Week of Advent | Tuesday, December 23

But just when [Joseph] had resolved to [divorce Mary quietly], 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. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. Matthew 1:20–21

Dreams have always been one of the mysterious ways God speaks to His people. In Matthew's Gospel, Joseph receives a divine message in a dream that changes his life, his future, and the entire story of salvation. His dream brings reassurance in a moment of deep fear and confusion: "*Do not be afraid.*" The child that Mary carries is not a source of shame, but of salvation. The angel reminds Joseph that what feels uncertain is actually sacred, part of God's plan unfolding in real time.

I also had a dream that changed my life. It was not an angelic visitation, but it was certainly unexpected. I was living in the Ivory Coast, West Africa, in October 2010, just as the first signs of a civil war were beginning. One night, I dreamed that I was so pregnant I could not fit through a doorway or go down the stairs. My friend and I laughed about it the next morning, but when she suggested I get a pregnancy test, I learned the truth. I *was* expecting a child.

That dream marked the beginning of my own season of fear and faith. Like many new mothers, I worried about the health and safety of my baby. But there was more. The instability around me, the fear of separation from friends and family, and the unknowns that come with bringing new life into a world that felt uncertain all weighed heavily on my heart. Thankfully, Trinity Lutheran Church was there for me in ways I will never forget.

Joseph also stood on the threshold of uncertainty. His world was upended by news that did not make sense. Yet in the middle of his confusion, God spoke: "*Do not be afraid.*" The next words were a call to faith and obedience: "*You are to name him Jesus.*" That name, "Jesus," means *the Lord saves*. Even before He took His first breath, Jesus' name declared His mission to bring salvation, to restore what was broken, and to bring peace in the midst of chaos.

My son's name does not carry a divine prophecy, but his life is a constant reminder of God's faithfulness in my own story. Just as God protected Mary, Joseph, and the child Jesus during turbulent times, He watched over me and my unborn son in a country torn by conflict. When I look back on that season, I can see that God was present—guiding, protecting, and weaving hope into the fear.

As we move closer to Christmas, may we remember that the God who spoke to Joseph in a dream is the same God who speaks to us today. Sometimes He speaks in quiet ways, sometimes through moments that seem ordinary or even strange. He meets us in our uncertainty and says again, "*Do not be afraid.*" The same Jesus who was born to save His people from their sins is still Emmanuel, *God with us*. Let us carry that promise into this season.

Mariah Cushing





Fourth Week of Advent | Wednesday, December 24

In those days a decree went out from Cesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. 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. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 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 in the guest room. Luke 2:1-7

At this time of year, we all know the story of how the world changed that night Mary gave birth to the one who would become the Savior of the world. We celebrate the birth of this human, created in a mysterious way, to a normal woman, living a normal life, hopeful for a normal marriage to her normal fiancé. God did not come to an affluent house, or a ruler of the people to birth Jesus. God did not come to a married couple who had wanted children but were not fortunate enough to be able to conceive. No, God came to this woman and this man, in this unwed circumstance and blessed their lives with being parents to Jesus. “Then he 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’” [Luke 1:35]. I don’t know about you, but those words would freak me out! But Mary replied, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Luke 1:38 She understood.

The birth of a baby that was to change the whole world, to an unwed mother, born in a strange place without support or home, was just the beginning of this tale. Mary’s strength in carrying and birthing the “Most High” had to have been nerve wracking, at the very least. But then she had to raise Jesus! She had to parent Jesus, and love Jesus and walk through all of the hormone changes and sassy pre-teen to teen things that happen. (This is hitting close to home because I am in the throes of this phase of life.) This just scratches the surface of the life that Jesus would live, and I can imagine the life that Mary would live while watching her son grow into this radical, mystical, fascinating manifestation of God on earth.

I am in a season of life with the boys, that my “mom” role is changing. They don’t need me like they used to. And I am struggling to find where I fit into this next phase of life with and for them. I am so thankful that they are growing and learning and becoming lovely young men, but I struggle to find where I am needed in their daily movements. I can imagine that this transition was even harder for Mary, because Jesus was so much more than any human on earth. I imagine he would have been in gifted programs, and skipped a few grades, and ready to tackle the things of the world before his age would say he was qualified to do so. And she watched, as he moved in the world. And we do that, not just with our children, but with those we do life with. We watch how their lives change, and sometimes that is all we can do.

I was talking with my mom about the changes in her neighbors—everyone is getting older and losing spouses and gaining walkers and caretakers. People are selling their homes and moving into care facilities or smaller more manageable places. And I commented on how wild it is that we have watched these changes in the neighborhood. We talked about how, just as I've watched the boys grow older, it must be so strange for her to see me with teenagers and gray hair. These changes mark the pivot points in our lives. It's the death of one part of life, so that the birth of another part becomes the next stage. Jurgen Moltmann writes about death and resurrection being the central point of the Christian life. It is what gives each of us hope. Hope in the new creation, hope in a new heaven and a new earth.

This night in Bethlehem, Mary ended her life as Mary, fiancée to Joseph, and began life as Mary, mother of Jesus. Her resurrection into motherhood, to nurture God's most precious gift—and then to lose that gift—is part of what saved each and every one of us. So, on this Christmas Eve, we thank you Mary, mother of Jesus, for being willing to lean into this new creation that saved the world.

Peace be with you all. Merry Christmas!

Katie Willis

Assisting Minister/Acolyte Coordinator



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A special word of thanks is due Lisa Collins. In the midst of a fraught Advent journey of her own, she managed to knit together these 25 reflections into the Devotional you hold in your hands. Many, many thanks, Lisa!

Of course, first and final thanks belong to God, whose great love for us “became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory.” Yes, we have . . . as the stories contained herein so admirably attest.

Soli Deo Gloria



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