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2019

ADVENT DEVOTIONALS

## Reflections

[illegible]

A Place for Everyone this Christmas

Once there was a man named Zack. Zack was the weatherman for his town. There was no problem with being the person who predicts the weather except for the fact that he was wrong half the time! Especially in the winter time when the snow began to fall, Zack had a hard time predicting the weather because there were so many clouds it was hard to see where they would go. Christmas was coming very fast and he was having trouble getting the weather for the big holiday right. Soon he saw a warm breeze coming into his town so he told everyone that it would be warm on Christmas. Days passed by until it was Christmas Eve and he was almost positive he was right. When suddenly he saw a black cloud in the distance. "Uh oh," he thought. He knew that people were going to be so mad when they dressed for spring when it was snowing. One hour later everybody was going to church to worship the Lord in their spring clothes when it started to snow. The people rushed back inside to change into their snow gear except Zack. Zack stayed where he was in the snow, feeling depressed. "I have ruined Christmas," Zack thought. When the people started heading outside again, Zack walked home as slow as a turtle. Then somebody approached him and asked him, "Why must you leave now, the worship service has not even started yet?" Zack could not believe it. The people forgave him. He celebrated Christmas so happily that he was positive this time that this was the best Christmas ever, and with his joyful heart, he shouted, "PRAISE JESUS!"

The Author's Notes: This story reminds me of the story of Zacchaeus. When the people in my story forgive Zack it is the same as Jesus telling Zacchaeus in Luke: Chapter 19 verse 9, "Today salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham." I hope you will show love and forgiveness to your neighbors and know that there is room for everyone this Christmas. How can you make someone feel welcome this Christmas?

Will Brezina

## December 3

**Exodus 14:11** They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt?"

You may wonder, "What, on earth, does such a bitter question have to do with Advent?" For that matter, you may wonder what the Exodus has to do with Advent? Fair enough. Advent is the time of preparation. We are preparing to celebrate an event almost 2000 years old. We are preparing to celebrate an event that changed the world forever, opened us to a new relationship with God, and fulfilled the ancient promises of good news to the coastlands, good news to the world. We are preparing to celebrate the new creation promised, anticipated, and longed for. And yet....

We are not fully in that new creation. Individually we are each of us growing more and more, day by day into the fullness of who exactly God would have us be. We Wesleyan Christians call that "going on to perfection." But few of us have completed that journey yet. As a society, we aspire to the highest good, the glorious expression of holy living made possible by Christ's birth. But we have more than a little way to go yet. Globally, the good news has made its way into most cultures. But not all and not freely either. We are on the journey. We are preparing now to celebrate what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen in the fullness of time. The delay may cause some to doubt. The Israelites did at times on the Exodus. The delay may cause us to question from time to time. The Israelites did at times on the Exodus. Certainly, there were more than enough graves in Egypt.

## Advent Calendar of Events

December 1	Worship	Hanging of the Greens
December 7	9:00—12:00	Christmas Cookie Shoppe
December 7	9:30—11:00am	Journey to Bethlehem <i>-with Mike &amp; Muffins</i>
December 8	5:00 pm	Children's Musical and Plum Pudding
December 15	5:00 pm	Community Carol Festival <i>"The Word Became Flesh"</i>
December 17	6:00 pm	Service of the Long Night
December 24	3:00 & 4:00 pm	Christmas Eve Service Children & Families
December 24	6:00 & 8:00 pm	Christmas Eve Service -Festival of Nine Lessons with Carols, Candles & Communion
December 24	10:00 pm	Meditative Services with Candles & Communion

**December 25**

**What Advent and Christmas mean to me...**

- Christmas and Advent mean family to me. How would Christmas be possible without a family after all? During Christmas, you're with family and we are all children of God, brothers, and sisters, and not just family your whole family is the world. I think Christmas and Advent should be family time, not just presents and Santa.

Lilly Jacobs, 5th Grade

- Christmas to me is when Jesus was born, and we celebrate him by giving things to each other because he has sacrificed himself for all the generations of children to come. Advent to me is when we prepare for Christmas by lighting a candle for a word in the bible. The five words are love, joy, peace hope, and the candle of Christ.

Klyne Underwood, 4th grade

- What Christmas and Advent mean to me is a time for family and friends to gather and think about the birth of our savior.

Wyatt Blackwell, 4th Grade

We, however, are on the journey. We follow a God of life, not of death. We are preparing to celebrate the birth of the One who offers the New Birth to everyone. We are on the journey, preparing, anticipating, participating. We will get there. Walk with one another. Learn from those ahead. Wait for those behind. Help those who stumble. It is not a grave but new life we are journeying towards this Advent.

God's Blessings

Rev. Dr. Brad Gabriel

**Psalms 37:4** “Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.”

As children, we are instantly instilled with a desire to want things. Things such as toys, video games, or really anything that can be purchased with money. Every year at Christmas we make long "Wish Lists" and give them to our parents, and from there, we sit waiting.

As a child, I remember anxiously waiting for Church to end on Christmas Eve, being in such a state of excitement I sat waiting by my window at night, hoping to catch a glimpse of a glowing red nose and a red bag filled with presents, presents for me.

The following morning my brother, sister, and I would fly down the stairs and begin tearing into our presents, even though we need what was inside. That feeling I got as I tore open the paper was the most amazing feeling I could quite describe. That feeling of hope placed inside a box, with an object inside that would find a home under my bed in no more than six months, forgotten, useless.

I began to realize the only joy in gifts was that faint moment of ripping open the toys, not knowing what the gift was. As I've gotten older my wishes have become more practical, socks, gift cards, even a phone, all things, things that will all break, get lost, or just become irrelevant.

I want you to think of your current Christmas wish list, is there a single item in there that you think could last forever? That is so amazing that that feeling of excitement will never fade, even after the wrapping paper is ripped off?

As a Christian, we take for granted the gifts we have already been given. Gifts of love, of medicine, family, strength, just about anything. We constantly are in search of objects, things of materialistic value, temporary gifts. In John 6:27 Jesus tells us, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on Him God the Father has placed His seal of approval."

### What Advent and Christmas mean to me...

- My family opens family Christmas presents on Christmas Eve. We go to Christmas church on Christmas Eve also. On Christmas morning we run downstairs to get our presents. Later we go to our grandparents' house and open those presents.

Carter Ruffin, 5th Grade

- Christmas is a holiday to celebrate Jesus' birth. We get presents at Christmas because Jesus got gifts when he was born. For Christmas, I go to my family's house and we all celebrate.

Parker McNeal, 5th Grade

- Advent is getting ready for Jesus. We put a bright star on top of the tree.

Chris McSwain, 5th Grade

our salvation. The story of Jesus does not start at His birth. It does not start at Abraham or even Adam. This Christmas, I urge myself and you, to remember that the hand of God has been sovereign and faithful since the beginning of time and that Jesus Christ was waiting for the fullness of time to come down to earth, that you and I might be reconciled to the Father. Our Lord humbled himself, took on flesh, and suffered the wrath of God that you and I deserve. As we meditate on the incredible love of God, let us also take comfort in knowing that we have been sealed by Him since the foundations of the world. Praise the newborn King, church! Sing your praises to Him, for He has come to save us!

Prayer:

Father, we praise you for your wisdom. We thank you that, in the fullness of time, you sent your Son to earth, that He may reconcile us to you. As we see your incredible plan unfold in Scripture Lord, I ask that we would be humbled, just as our Lord humbled Himself. May we worship you all the days of our lives, in spirit and in truth, for your glory. In the righteous and gentle name of Jesus, we pray, Amen.

Josh Jacobs

Freshman, University of Arkansas

We are flawed to desire things of the world, things that will spoil, things that through money we deem of value. But what defines that value? A currency that has been changed time and time again? That currency is so high that we spend years saving it to finally sign off on that car, that house, that game system? Do we feel inflated when we finally get those things? Does that inflation leave us permanently filled, without any chance of feeling broken?

The answer is no. Because in the world there is brokenness, there is loss, defeat, and disaster. These temporary items we buy and ask for will be taken from us. That new house may be taken away in a flood, that car totaled by a crash, that game system broken from years of use. These things we give to people are just that, things that will one day lose both purpose and our desire. We will constantly seek for more, and that grand inflation we get when we first unwrap them, will fade, and our satisfaction with it.

There is one gift that will never fade, that won't ever leave us empty, and that is the gift of Christ. In John 10:28 we are told, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand."

Here we are told of the one thing that never perishes, that one gift we will get whether we write it on our Wish List or not. Through Jesus, we are given eternal life, a gift that never can be destroyed, and as said in

1 Peter 1:4, "Into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. The inheritance that is kept in heaven for you." Through Jesus, we are given a gift so limitless, so indescribably pure, that no mere object will ever amount to it. Upon unwrapping that gift of life given to us through Christ, we will be released, filled, brimming with love, spirit, and happiness. When we unwrap this gift, no desire will be left unfulfilled, for it is God's will by which we are given all things.

So, I urge you to rethink your upcoming Wish List and seek first His kingdom, His gift that will never spoil, a gift He will give without limit.

**John 3:16** “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Prayer: Almighty Father, I thank You for this gift You have given to me. I thank You for this gift that will leave me fulfilled, never to shake or tremble upon the loss of the things I find my purpose in. I pray that You lead me to You and away from this earth's meaningless possessions. I pray You help me see that these things I want are just that, wants that are incomparable to the gift given to me through You. I thank you God and pray to be able to share this gift with others, knowing that this love is for all, a love and gift without limit. In Jesus's name, I pray, Amen.

Emily Photopulos

Scripture: Matthew 1:1-17

It is almost Christmas, and what a joy to look forward to celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, the God-man, our Savior. Many of us will spend this season going to the Gospels to re-read the beautifully humbling, sacred story of the birth of Jesus. And yes, our Lord did come to earth as an infant child, fully God and fully man to one day save His people from sin. In Matthew's gospel, though, before we get to the familiar stories of Jesus' birth, there are seventeen full verses giving a genealogy of Jesus, starting with Abraham. Many Christians, including myself, have quickly skipped over these verses during our reading of the Scriptures in order to get to the parts that are easier to read and that we are more familiar with. However, 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that all Scripture is breathed out by God, and I urge you to take the time this Advent to sit down, open your Bible, and read through Matthew 1:1-17. In these verses, we see a plan, a plan of God to save the world through His Son. This plan did not start when an angel appeared to Mary. No, the Lord has had your soul in His mind since before the foundation of time. As God tested Abraham, He was preparing us for Jesus. As the Lord showed His love to people like the Gentile prostitute Rahab, He was preparing us for Jesus. As David committed adultery with the wife of a soldier he murdered, God was preparing us for Jesus. In the genealogy of Jesus, we see that just as much as our Savior is a man, He is just as much God. Since time began, the plan of the Lord was for the earth to be saved by His beloved Son. And Matthew tells us that through Abraham, Isaac, Ruth, Solomon, and many more, our God was preparing for us

Open my eyes that I may see  
 Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me  
 Place in my hands the wonderful key  
 That shall unclasp and set me free  
     Silently now I wait for Thee,  
     Ready, my God, Thy will to see  
     Open my eyes, illumine me.  
     Spirit Divine!

Open my ears that I may hear  
 Voices of Truth thou sendest clear  
 And while the wavenotes fall on my ear,  
 Everything false will disappear.  
     Silently now I wait for Thee,  
     Ready, my God, Thy will to see  
     Open my ears, illumine me.  
     Spirit Divine!

Open my mouth, and let me bear  
 Gladly the warm truth everywhere  
 Open my heart and let me prepare  
 Love with thy children thus to share.  
     Silently now I wait for Thee,  
     Ready, my God, Thy will to see  
     Open my heart, illumine me  
     Spirit Divine!

*I sure hope you're singing along....*

Gracious Father, once again, I come to the place where shepherd and wise men alike bear witness that Jesus Christ is born.

Please grant me:

- the eyes of the wise men so that I, too, may see that the star is not just an ordinary star—that it is leading me to you.
- the ears of the shepherds, so that I, too, may hear the good news,
- the heart of Mary—so that I, too, may do your will.

Open my eyes, my ears and my mouth, illumine me, Spirit Divine.

May I, too, bear witness to your birth! Amen

Brenda West

**Philippians 4:6** “Do not be anxious or worried about anything, but in everything [every circumstance and situation] by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, continue to make your [specific] requests to God.”

The Holidays. Just two simple words, but two words which bring to mind different thoughts to everyone who is reading them right now. The Bible relays the story of Christmas as one rich in joy and hope, but nowadays, the holidays have become much more than simply praising the birth of Jesus. To little kids, it's SANTA! Sure, every parent tries their hardest to get the kids to realize there is more to the holidays than the guy in the jolly red suit, but let's face it: it's a losing battle. For teens, the holidays are fun but full of stress and expectations. A multitude of questions float through their minds all the time, such as are they going to do well on midterms, how are they going to afford presents for all of their friends, have they found a significant other to spend the holidays with so they aren't alone on their couch watching Hall-mark Christmas movies with their parents (oh wait, that's me). And then adults...where to begin. Work doesn't stop just because school is slowing down, and then on top of that the season is tasked with planning and juggling holiday get-togethers, cooking, shopping for presents (while trying to stay on a budget) and simply making sure everyone else's holidays are good that you sometimes start to neglect your own holiday wish: getting some time to relax. While all of these things I just listed, and more, are inevitable by-products of the Christmas season, it's important to recognize that by worrying about them, the meaning of Christmas is passing you by. Philippians 4:6, or any part of the Bible, in fact, doesn't proclaim that once you accept God into your heart \*poof\* all your stress disappears. God never lies and says that distracters won't come into your life and try to upset you. But what

God says is that while things TRY to throw you off, by setting your mind on Him and his promises, you can stay tuned in on the bigger picture and not be so stressed out on the details that try to unhinge you. This Christmas, if you find yourself spiraling and forgetting what the season is truly about, stop for a moment and pray to God about what is worrying you and also thank Him for all the blessings that may be going unnoticed around you. God is good! He remains faithful through the storms and is never too busy to listen to you and grant you peace if you ask for it. And remember, while the surface of Christmas remains different to everyone, at the heart of the Holidays, everyone is united together because of God's love, which shows we are never alone in our tribulations. Merry Christmas to all of you!

Maggie Coblentz  
High School Senior

people were found. Right now, God is trying to bring us out of hiding. He will look and look and look and never give up, as a shepherd looks for his lost sheep. Don't run away from God. Don't hide from him. Run to him with open arms. Pray to him. Talk with God. Because he is looking for you. He loves you. This Christmas, find your place with God. Amen.

## Finding Yourself

A short devotion by Caroline Brezina, age 11

Have you ever played the game “hide and go seek?” If you’re like me, I bet you have. The rules are simple- the seeker closes their eyes, counts to 30, and the hider tries to find a place to hide (hence the name.) the seeker looks and looks and looks, and if they can’t find the hider, they give up. I play hide and seek with my brother all the time. One of the best places to hide is in the shoe closet. A verse from Proverbs 5:21 says “The Lord’s eyes watch over every person’s path, observing all their ways.” one story from the Bible that I believe ties into this verse is the story of Jonah and the whale. God told Jonah to go to Nineveh to tell the people he loved him, to restore love in their hardened hearts. You see, God was trying to find them. To bring them out of hiding. Jonah? He was scared. He did not want to go to Nineveh. So he devised a plan- to sail away from Nineveh. To run away from God. On the ship, there was a terrible storm. The wind was howling, the water splashing and drenching everyone. Jonah knew he was the cause of the storm. He told the sailors to throw him overboard. SPLASH! The storm immediately ceased. Then, a giant fish swallowed Jonah right up. God saved him. Even when he ran away from God. God saved him. Jonah prayed for God’s forgiveness. After three days inside the belly of the huge fish, he was spat out onto dry land. He went to Nineveh, and spoke of the wondrous love God has for us! The people listened to Jonah. The

## Come Lord Jesus

Come, Lord Jesus “Come, Lord Jesus,” the Advent mantra, means that all of Christian history has to live out of a kind of deliberate emptiness, a kind of chosen non-fulfillment. Perfect fullness is always to come, and we do not need to demand it now. This keeps the field of life wide open and especially open to grace and to a future created by God rather than ourselves. This is exactly what it means to be “awake,” as the Gospel urges us! We can also use other words for Advent: aware, alive, attentive, alert, awake are all appropriate! Advent is, above all else, a call to full consciousness and a forewarning about the high price of consciousness.

When we demand satisfaction of one another, when we demand any completion to history on our terms, when we demand that our anxiety or any dissatisfaction be taken away, saying as it were, “Why weren’t you this for me? Why didn’t life do that for me?” we are refusing to say, “Come, Lord Jesus.” We are refusing to hold out for the full picture that is always given by God.

“Come, Lord Jesus” is a leap into the kind of freedom and surrender that is rightly called the virtue of hope. The theological virtue of hope is the patient and trustful willingness to live without closure, without resolution, and still be content and even happy because our Satisfaction is now at another level, and our Source is beyond ourselves. We can trust that he will come again, just as Jesus has come into our past, into our private dilemmas, and into our suffering world. Our Christian past then becomes our Christian prologue, and “Come, Lord Jesus” is not a cry of desperation but an assured shout of cosmic hope.

Reflect:

What expectations and demands of life can you let go of so that you can be more prepared for the coming of Jesus?

## December 9

- Christmas is the day we celebrate the birth of Christ. Advent is how we prepare for the birth of our Savior. We light candles each Sunday throughout Advent to prepare for the big day. Each candle means something different. These candles include hope love joy peace and the Christ candle that we light on Christmas. On Christmas day we celebrate with family and friends for Jesus. At our house on Christmas morning, we open presents eat a big breakfast and then later celebrate with loved ones.

George Underwood, 5th Grade

- I like going to church and the Huddle. I like being around my friends and teachers. It's a good experience because I get to learn about God and Jesus. It makes me feel safe.

Lucy Underwood, 4th Grade

## For Christmas Day

Hark! the herald Angels sing,  
Glory to the new-born King,  
Peace on earth and mercy mild,  
God and sinner reconcil'd.  
Hark! the herald Angels sing,  
Glory to the new-born King.

Joyful all ye nations rise,  
Join the triumph of the skies,  
With the angelic host proclaim,  
Christ is born in Bethlehem.  
Hark! the herald Angels sing,  
Glory to the new-born King.

Christ by highest Heaven ador'd,  
Christ the everlasting Lord!  
Late in time behold him come,  
Offspring of a virgin's womb.  
Hark! the herald Angels sing,  
Glory to the new-born King.

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,  
Hail, the incarnate Deity,  
Pleased as Man with man to dwell,  
Jesus our Immanuel!  
Hark! the herald Angels sing,  
Glory to the new-born King.

Hail the Heaven-born Prince of Peace!  
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all he brings,  
Risen with healing in his wings.  
Hark! the herald Angels sing,  
Glory to the new-born King.

Mild he lays his glory by,  
Born that man no more may die,  
Born to raise the sons of earth,  
Born to give them second birth.  
Hark! the herald Angels sing,  
Glory to the new-born King.

Charles Wesley

**Psalm 19:14** “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.”

At this point in the holiday season, many of us are toiling away at cleaning and decorating our homes in anticipation of family coming in from out of town. And, as they begin to trickle in you hear comments about how lovely your home is and how much time you spent on making it so. However, we all know that one family member that always has something to say about how you did not clean to their expectations or how they would have draped the tablecloth a certain way on the table instead of the way you have it. Everyone else seems to ignore the comments, but your heart sinks thinking about how much time and effort you put in to getting the house ready for guests. You start to get frustrated on how they seem to comment on everything as they move through the house.

Then, you remember the Psalm above and begin to feel your heart and mind rise above the negativity. You remember that the ugly thoughts plaguing your mind are not the thoughts that should be present during the Christmas season. Our savior was born and from there the world was made good.

I implore you to have positive thoughts when faced with negative words. Remember that kindness weakens those with pessimistic tendencies. Remember that our strength comes from God and you will realize that no one can dampen your Christmas spirit.

Rachel Moore

### *Amazing Peace*

Thunder rumbles in the mountain passes  
And lightning rattles the eaves of our houses.  
Floodwaters await us in our avenues.

Snow falls upon snow, falls upon snow to avalanche  
Over unprotected villages.  
The sky slips low and grey and threatening.

We question ourselves.  
What have we done to so affront nature?  
We worry God.  
Are you there? Are you there really?  
Does the covenant you made with us still hold?

Into this climate of fear and apprehension, Christmas enters,  
Streaming lights of joy, ringing bells of hope  
And singing carols of forgiveness high up in the bright air.  
The world is encouraged to come away from rancor,  
Come the way of friendship.

It is the Glad Season.  
Thunder ebbs to silence and lightning sleeps quietly in the corner.  
Floodwaters recede into memory.  
Snow becomes a yielding cushion to aid us  
As we make our way to higher ground.

Hope is born again in the faces of children  
It rides on the shoulders of our aged as they walk into their sunsets.  
Hope spreads around the earth. Brightening all things,  
Even hate which crouches breeding in dark corridors.

In our joy, we think we hear a whisper.  
At first, it is too soft. Then only half heard.  
We listen carefully as it gathers strength.  
We hear a sweetness.  
The word is Peace.  
It is loud now. It is louder.  
Louder than the explosion of bombs.  
We tremble at the sound. We are thrilled by its presence.  
It is what we have hungered for.  
Not just the absence of war. But, true Peace.  
A harmony of spirit, a comfort of courtesies.  
Security for our beloveds and their beloveds.

We clap hands and welcome the Peace of Christmas.  
We beckon this good season to wait a while with us.  
We, Baptist and Buddhist, Methodist and Muslim, say come.  
Peace.  
Come and fill us and our world with your majesty.

So we may learn by your shimmering light  
How to look beyond complexion and see community.

It is Christmas time, a halting of hate time.  
On this platform of peace, we can create a language  
To translate ourselves to ourselves and to each other.

At this Holy Instant, we celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ  
Into the great religions of the world.  
We jubilate the precious advent of trust.  
We shout with glorious tongues at the coming of hope.  
All the earth's tribes loosen their voices  
To celebrate the promise of Peace.

December 17

**C** is for caring wherever you are.

**H** is for helping others near and far.

**R** is for righteousness, a trait we need because we love.

**I** is for inspiration from Jesus Christ and God above.

**S** is for sharing at Christmas and all year long.

**T** is for thanksgiving, even when things go wrong.

**M** is for the magic of God's love and His grace.

**A** is for loving adoration shown in a Christian's face.

**S** is for the Savior who makes our world a better place.

Prayer: May we give thanks to God and His Son this special season and throughout the New Year. Amen.

Ann Jennings

December 16

**Matthew 14:23a** After he dismissed them (the disciples), he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.

There are several places in the Gospels where Jesus went away by himself to pray. He knew the importance of prayer and He knew that God listens and answers prayer.

Over 25 years ago, when we lived in North Carolina, my husband Don was offered a job in Memphis. That would be a big decision to move away from my parents and take our two middle school-aged children to a new place. Don and I prayed about the move and finally decided it was the right move and that God was leading us here. I had a hard time adjusting – turning 40 right after the move didn't help!

A little over a year after we moved, our 15-year-old son Scott was diagnosed with bone cancer. He was treated at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital for a year. That was over 25 years ago and Scott is a healthy father with 3 wonderful children. I am convinced that God led us to Memphis so that Scott could be treated at the best children's hospital in the world!

Sometimes we forget to talk to God about the big things as well as the little things. But when we do, God is there for us. I am glad we prayed about the move to Memphis. I just need to keep remembering to pray about the small things and the large things in my life.

Dear Lord, thank you for answering my prayers even when I'm not sure of your answer. Please help me to remember to come to you for all my decisions. Amen

Laura Hinshelwood

We, Angels and Mortal's, Believers and Non-Believers,  
Look heavenward and speak the word aloud.  
Peace. We look at our world and speak the word aloud.  
Peace. We look at each other, then into ourselves  
And we say without shyness or apology or hesitation.

Peace, My Brother.  
Peace, My Sister.  
Peace, My Soul.

Dr. Maya Angelou

## December 11

### What Advent and Christmas mean to me.....

- Advent Season means when you spend time with your family and everyone has a good time. Also, I think it means when you get along and you are kind to each other.

Mary Campbell Elmore, 4th Grade

- Advent and Christmas to me means a time to be kind to others and be grateful for what you have.

Sophie Slabaugh, 4th grade

- It means love to me. It means loving all.

Claire Dickerson, 4th grade

- What Christmas and Advent mean to me is a time to give. I believe this because Christmas is known for giving, but not only to relatives but to charities and the homeless.

Hugh Elrod, 6th Grade

- Christmas, in my opinion, is a time to spend with family and to celebrate God. Christmas is not a time to think about the presents but to think about family and how you can thank them.

Chloe Rottman, 5th Grade

without expecting something in return.

Father God, after all the decorations have been packed away and we prepare for a new year, may we continue to follow your teaching to be a blessing to others, especially those who are in need. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Ruth King

## December 13

**Acts 20:35** In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

During Advent, it is difficult not to allow the commercialization and busyness of getting ready for the holidays steal the joy of Christmas. When our children were growing up, we were often so caught up in the frenzy of decorating the house, entertaining guests, and buying presents, that we often failed to live like we were preparing our home and our hearts to welcome the Christ child. Therefore, they sometimes were more caught up in the anticipation of what presents they were getting rather than thinking of giving to others without expecting a gift in return. However, one Christmas when they were teenagers, they experienced what Jesus meant when he said, "it is more blessed to give than receive."

Our extended family had the tradition of driving to our parents' home in Kentucky on Christmas Day. That meant we had to get up early, open presents, and drive three hours to arrive in time for Christmas dinner.

After finishing a delicious meal and exchanging gifts, one of my sisters-in-law received a phone call from her mother, a receptionist at a motel in a nearby town. In their conversation, she shared about a family with several children who were stranded at the motel because of car trouble and would not be able to travel to their Christmas destination. The parents did not have any presents for their children. When all the cousins heard about the family, they were very concerned and wanted to do something. They decided that each of them would select a gift he or she had received and deliver them to the motel to be given to the family. When the kids returned, it was obvious from their faces and voices what a joyful Christmas blessing they had received in giving to others

- Romans 12:10. Advent is getting ready for Jesus. We decorate our house. We bake cookies. We do a nativity scene. These things help us think about Jesus. We give gifts as God gave us Jesus on Christmas. Dear God, thank you for everything you have given us, are giving us, and everything you will give us. Amen.

Owen James, 5th Grade

- Romans 12:10 Advent is getting ready for Jesus. We hang stockings, put a tree up, and put up a nativity set. This makes our family think of Jesus. We give gifts as God gave us Jesus on Christmas. Dear God, thank you for sending Jesus. Amen.

Zane Kisner, 4th Grade

- Romans 12:10 Advent is getting ready for Jesus. We put up a tree and we put up stockings and we bake cookies. We give presents to open as God gave us Jesus. Dear God, thank you for everything you do for us. Amen

Carter Moore, 4th Grade

December 12

**Luke 1:38 “Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her.”**

A person's identity in Jesus' day was defined by two things, family name, and community. To bring disgrace to either was unthinkable. We still honor those things today. Imagine the potential scandal that went through the mind of Mary as the angel Gabriel appeared to her. The Bible said that she wondered at what type of a "greeting" this was. Gabriel then told Mary God's plan for her was to be with child of the Holy Spirit before she was married. This plan had the potential to be a complete scandal. She could lose the honor of her reputation.

Mary's village of Nazareth was tiny. It had a population of fewer than 250 people. It was also insignificant in its day. Of all the villages for which we have a record in Galilee at that time, only Nazareth did not appear on the maps of the day. The entire village was so small that the area is now completely underneath the cathedral in Nazareth. In an insignificant town of less than 250, it would not have taken long for everyone to know her scandal.

Yet she agreed to be the servant of the Lord. Mary did not think keeping her reputation's honor was as important as receiving the honor of bearing Christ.

She traded honor for honor.

Mary's example teaches us that no one should consider oneself or anyone else unusable by God because of reputation or place in society. Nor should one refuse God simply because God asks something difficult. Above all, Mary's example teaches us to choose God's kingdom over worldly reputation in the world. It is better to be on God's side even when your situation seems difficult.

Israel had expected God's Messiah to be a warrior and to lead Israel to political freedom. Yet God came as a baby, with the mother's willingness, to lead the world to peace. God's plan was not accomplished by force, but by the acceptance of God's invitation by a faithful young woman in a tiny village with no standing. In the words of Mary, "Let it be to me according to thy word." In light of the situation, Mary's faith was nothing short of remarkable. The incarnation of God in Christ was a culmination of Mary's trust in God's actions. Indeed, the original glory of the entire Christmas story was the result of ordinary people in relationship with God; people like Mary.

Mary traded her honor for God's honor. And it made all the difference.

Tim Carpenter