Do You See What I See?

2026



First Presbyterian Church Advent Devotional

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Do You See What I See?

The picture on the cover of this devotional is from a Christmas Eve years ago here at First Pres Greenwood. It is a magical experience in person – having watched a nativity by children filled with wonder and yawns, being surrounded by a church full of loved ones and warm, flickering candles, singing hymns that touch your heartstrings. There is hope and love and peace and joy all at once regardless of what waits outside the doors. It is a space and time where all your senses can go immediately there when you conjure the thought in your mind.

As you look at the image and imagine the space and time, what do you see? Who do you see? Can you see expressions on faces in your mind's eye? Do you see your sibling or child as part of the nativity? Can you hear the organ playing – what carol?

I love the song "Do You Hear What I Hear." It's one of my favorites starting simply and growing into a powerful refrain. God hears, sees, and knows all. He has so much to teach us. I'm reminded of this passage from Isaiah 55: 8-13:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,"
declares the Lord.
9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
10 As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.
12 You will go out in joy
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and hills
will burst into song before you,
and all the trees of the field
will clap their hands.
13 Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper,
and instead of briers the myrtle will grow.

This will be for the Lord's renown,
for an everlasting sign,
that will endure forever."

God sees beauty in the mundane, potential in the broken, and love in all of us. Looking at this image, do you see the person who is hurt, lonely, grieving, holding it together? God does. Do you see the person who is hoping and praying and searching for a sign? God does. Do you see the mother's love, the father's admiration, the sibling's laughter, the grandparent's sigh, your neighbor's snicker, or your friend's teary eyes? God does. God sees deeply, and he sends each one of us to be the balm, the light, and the hope for others. Each of us needs the light. Each of us can be God's light. Friends, let us see with God's eyes, hear with God's ears, and know with God's heart this season. Let us kick off an Advent of seeing deeply . . .

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This devotional was lovingly compiled by Elise Collins and Lea Jones.
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Sunday, November 29
First Sunday in Advent
HOPE

Reader 1: What is Advent?

Reader 2: Advent means coming!

Reader 1: Who is coming?

Reader 2: On one hand, we celebrate the arrival of baby Jesus at Christmas.
On the other hand, we anticipate when Christ will come again.

Reader 1: Who is this Christ? *From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him.*

All: Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Reader 2: *Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.*

All: Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Reader 1: *Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name.*

All: Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Reader 2: *Beware, keep alert, for you do not know when the time will come.*

All: We will keep awake! Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved, our Potter, Creator, Restorer, & Light.

Reader 1: Light penetrates darkness and brings hope.

Reader 2: Today we light one purple candle – the candle of HOPE.

Light 1 purple candle

All: Let us be filled with hope today and always.

(*from: Isaiah 64:1, 8, Psalm 80: 4,7, 18-19, Mark 13:33, 37*)

Monday, November 30



Susie & Her Pink Motorcycle

It's no wonder this is a favorite of Dale Culbertson. I bet we all have one that we love for the same reasons. We see our babies when they were younger – their little feet, their sweet little faces, tiny hands, adorable little outfits and morning hair. And the expression on the face - pure wonder, excitement, and delight.

I bet your memories are racing through images you have catalogued of just such moments. Treasures. Instant warm fuzzies as you sift through each one.

This is how God looks at you every day. He sees all you ever have been and all you will be. He sees pure love and wonder in you, his creation, his chosen one. He remembers joyful and sad moments, hard and good times. He knows who you are at your best and he is drawn to you at your very worst. God loves us heart and soul just the way we are.

Prayer: Lord God, let me see others in the gracious way you see me. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Tuesday, December 1



Jake at the manger.

- Ginger Newlin

There is something mesmerizing about a manger scene. We gaze in wonder imagining that original scene. We think about the people involved – what they would have looked like and felt. We are curious about what it must have been like when Jesus was born. We conjure sheep baaing, cows lowing, a donkey braying, and maybe ever a rooster crowing. We tend to think of a serene and peaceful baby Jesus, but all babies cry, right? Knowing it really happened and wanting to be part of it makes a manger scene magical . . . for us humans. Yet, here we have a dog prostrate before this carved nativity. Such reverence. Coincidence? Who knows. I like to think all creation knows God.

Prayer: Lord God, may we always see with eyes of wonder. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Wednesday, December 2



BUT THEN…THERE CAME A KNOCK AT THE DOOR!
By Penny Cannon

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Psalm 46:1

Frank and I had had a hectic year and we were way behind preparing for Christmas. Even the tree was waiting on us to get with it. The live Balsam tree sat in the tree stand in the dining room begging for us to get it dressed for Christmas. It was Advent, December 19, 2006 when we got the call from our 25-year-old son, Jesse, that he was going to have emergency surgery. Jesse had just completed his Masters work at Clemson in engineering and had only moved to Moncks Corner in August to begin working for Santee Cooper. Suddenly he was facing a surgery scheduled for December 21st.

That Fall of 2006 had already been the "best of times and the worst of times." Our daughter Blake had married a wonderful young man in August; but then Frank was diagnosed with Myasthenia Gravis (MG) in October; and now this. We packed hurriedly and unceremoniously chunked the Christmas tree outside in a bucket of water not knowing when we would return.

I drove like a bat…flying down I-26 as Frank had double vision from MG. Frank was worried, and rightly so, about my driving and using my cell phone at the same time. I was calling our church's prayer team, my Shalom Bible Study, and anyone else I could think of who believed in the power of prayer.

The morning of December 21st, we gathered in the waiting room: Blake and Pat, Jesse's minister Sam Cooper (1st Pres of Moncks Corner), and the Santee Cooper CEO's wife. (Sam had grown up at 1st Pres of Greenwood which was a comfort as we shared many friends.) The CEO's wife was also a member and officer at 1st Pres of MC. She said she was only there to be of assistance. She sat off to the side reading a book and from time to time would check to see if we needed anything. I will never forget her kindness and that's when "it was brought home to me" that just being present was enough.

Jesse's surgery was successful, the surgeon was well pleased, and we were grateful. We were all thoroughly exhausted but relieved to return home two days later. By that time, I could not have cared less about celebrating Christmas. But then…there came a knock at the door. It was Jesse's 1st cousin Eric (his "partner in crime growing up") along with Eric's fiancée Nikki. Jesse's face lit up for the first time in days!

After a while Nikki quietly asked about a Christmas tree. I explained it was outside sitting in a bucket of water. She and Eric fished it out and put it back in the tree stand. The next thing we knew, all three of them were happily decorating the tree with lights and ornaments and just chattering away.

Later several knocks at the door were followed up by family members and friends bringing food for Christmas. And what a joyful, grateful Christmas it was! And, Jesse…well, the very next week he was up in Nashville with family and friends pulling for the Clemson Tigers in the Music City Bowl!

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for the good times in life and for helping us through the tough times in life.
Great is your faithfulness!
Amen

***If you or a family member have a prayer request, please phone the church office 229-5814. Our prayer team is the best and requests are confidential.
***If you or a family member need a trained Stephen Minister to be present with you through a difficult season in life, call Brad Christie at the same number.
The Stephen Ministers are very caring and all requests are confidential.

Thursday, December 3



I love December and Christmas time because it gives me a chance to slow down and appreciate my family and friends and what's important to me each year. This is one of my favorite December pictures because it's the first time I got to build an actual snowman with one of my friends last year.

- Shirley Gardner

Snow is certainly not something we see a lot of in our area. So, when we do, we get excited! We buy all the milk and bread out of the store with a forecast of flurries. And with even the mildest threat, we shut down. We all hunker down in our homes for just a bit. We get to slow down.

Sabbath. Rest. God intended for us to set apart times of rest and rejuvenation. Our bodies need it. Our minds need it. Don't wait until you're forced to slow down. Make time. Enjoy resting.

Prayer: Lord God, help us make time for you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Friday, December 4



Some pictures hold a lifetime of memories, and this is one of them. ❤️ This Christmas tradition represents so much more than stockings hanging at Mom's house. It represents my parents, their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren—a family that has grown and created so many beautiful memories over the years. I love my family and have treasured watching it grow. This is one of my favorite traditions, one I will always cherish. Every time I look at this picture, I am taken back to my childhood and to the excitement of Christmas morning with my own children. It's where the magic of Christmas begins, where memories are made, and where family is at the heart of it all. ❤️ 🎄

- Lisa Buchanan

Belonging. We all want to belong and to be loved unconditionally. Many of us are blessed with families who have done that job well.

Being part of God's family means we are known by name, loved unconditionally, and never alone. That is the ultimate belonging. And if we know it, then our joy is to share it so others can experience Christ's love for themselves. Amen!

Prayer: Lord God, we are yours and you are ours. Praise God! In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Saturday, December 5



The annual Chrismon tree picture.

- Meg Stevens

Ah yes, the annual family photo in front of the Chrismon tree just like we also have for Easter in front of the flowering cross. Or even after we've been imposed with ashes on Ash Wednesday. It's a must. Why?

For me, it's because it's a church thing. We can take pictures in front of our trees at home. They're lovely. But taking the picture in front of the Chrismon tree marks another year's passage in our church lives. Our church family marks time together. We start the church year with Advent and Jesus' birth. We celebrate both his birth and his eventual return. Then we move towards Lent and reflect on Jesus' life and death among people like us. Most of the year we're in what is called ordinary time with the highlights of Pentecost, All Saints, and others.

As church people, we journey together through these seasons and they are special to us. We want to signal their importance and thus the pictures. We want our children to realize these are special occasions and important parts of life.

Prayer: Lord God, we celebrate you! In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



December 6
Second Sunday in Advent
LOVE

Reader 1: What is Advent?

Reader 2: Advent means coming!

Reader 1: Who is coming?

Reader 2: On one hand, we celebrate the arrival of baby Jesus at Christmas.
On the other hand, we anticipate when Christ will come again.

Reader 1: Who is this Christ? *Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.*

Reader 2: *A voice cries out in the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

Reader 1: *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.*

Reader 2: *Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

Reader 1: *A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass; their constancy is like the flower of the field.*

Reader 2: *He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom and gently lead the mother sheep.*

Reader 1: God the shepherd loves us.

Reader 2: Today we light two purple candles – the candle of HOPE and the candle of LOVE.

All: Let us be filled with God's love today and always.

From Isaiah 40:1–6

Monday, December 7



This was the only year we rang the Salvation Army Christmas Bell. But we did it as a family and had the best time. The girls were so proud at every dollar they raised!

- Dale Culbertson

There is something special about the Christmas season that encourages and empowers us to get festive. We don silly hats and jingly bells - the brighter and more colorful, the better! We traipse around town greeting perfect strangers with enthusiasm. We laugh and look around us with wonder. What better place for all this festivity to overflow than when serving our community. Our energy and cheer are seriously contagious! You watch people coming in and out of the store, and for the most part they are amiable and kind. It is a wonderful experiment in spreading cheer. People may donate or they may have already donated but support your efforts. It really is a special experience. Our children may learn from it, but we adults learn equally that good ripples out positively affecting others in an expanding pattern.

So whether dollars or smiles, give freely!

Prayer: Lord God, may we be generous with all we have to offer. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Tuesday, December 8



This is one of my favorite Christmas pictures for so many reasons. It serves as a reminder to me that sometimes it is easy to get caught up in all the "Holiday Stuff" so much that we forget to keep "The Main Thing, The Main Thing." It also serves as a reminder of Mathew 8:2 where Jesus says that we must "become as little children" in order to enter the kingdom of God. Meaning that we put away ambition, pride, and haughtiness and remain humble and teachable.

The innocence in this picture is a beautiful reminder to us all- keeping our focus on Christ each and every day- not just during Christmas. The way that Cooper and Quay are looking at the Baby Jesus in such awe, is a reminder to me of how we should look at each day. Each day is an opportunity to learn more, and show the love of God to those around us. The way that Quay is holding the "Baby Jesus" is also a reminder to me that we have got to hold strong to our faith each day. In a world that is increasingly grabbing our attention in other directions, we need to hold strong to our faith and give our children a strong, faith based, foundation on which they can build upon.

Each day is an opportunity to show the love of God in our words and actions (sometimes much easier said than done)! Let this serve as a reminder to "Keep the Main Thing, the Main Thing" not just during this Advent Season, but each and every day!

Dear God, thank you for this Advent Season where we are reminded of the gift that you are! Help us to be mindful of you each and every day and show your love to all those we encounter this day. Amen.

- Beth Pruitt





These are Jacob's first Christmas photos. Mom sent her partner David to Santa school and he played Santa for Jacob during COVID when you couldn't go out - the quintessential baby crying in Santa's lap ...

- Meredith Rendall

Unless they're sitting in the chancel of the church for the children's sermon, most children will tell you Christmas is about Santa! I have such fond memories and warm-fuzzy feelings about the Rudolph Claymation movie and all the rest – yes, even the one with Snow Miser and his brother Heat Miser. These are so precious and I love them! I wanted my children to love them, too.

Of course, I also wanted my children to know the real reason for Christmas and the best gift ever is Jesus! Are the two mutually exclusive?

Who do we anticipate with so much excitement?

Who expects us to make the best choices we can?

Who offers gifts?

Who extends good will?

Who is part spirit/Spirit and historically part human?

The difference, of course, is that Jesus offers eternal gifts as opposed to fleeting material goods. Jesus died for our sins. Jesus loves us and wants us to be with him forever when he comes again. And he leaves His Spirit to dwell within us! Wow!

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for the spirit of Christmas that is so contagious! In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Thursday, December 10





This Moravian star was a gift in memory of a baby who lived just a little while. Her name was Sarah and she brought much joy in a short time. Her parents gave these stars as gifts to remind others to shine in this dark world. What a beautiful way to celebrate their daughter.

It's been over 20 years since this picture was taken. I think of this story every time I see a Moravian star. At first I found it so sad. But, although their loss was sad, the way Sarah's parents handled the loss is amazing. Their trust in our good God despite the difficulty of the situation is inspiring. They chose to respond in grace and joy. They chose to believe no matter what.

It makes me think of our sweet service-dog Violet who passed in 2025. She loved being part of our church family and we miss her. But we are all praying for Michelle to soon have another companion.

The beauty of the church is that we celebrate life and death. As we lose loved ones so also we have the joy of new arrivals as pictured below.

Prayer: Lord God, may we choose to trust you in all we face. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.





My granddaughter ‘s baptism at First Presbyterian during the Hanging of the Greens service in 2022. My son and daughter-in-law requested Alessandra be baptized and it made this Christmas season very special for me. Her parents from Queens, NY, were also able to attend and they loved our church.

- Carol Umphress

Friday, December 11



What fun it is to have the name "Noel" at Christmas time. Of course, the first thought is of the carol, "The First Noel", which had its roots in the 13th or 14th century in England. My research said it was likely written for or inspired by "Miracle Plays" – popular outdoor dramas that reenacted Bible stories for the public. Because it was a folk song for ordinary people, it was sung outside in the streets rather than in the strict confines of a church.

The word Noel primarily means Christmas or birth but also can mean news and shouts of joy. The carol is about the announcement of Jesus' birth to the shepherds and the celebration of the birth of Christ.

Every Christmas our family celebrates that birth in all the traditional ways and some non-traditional ways as shown in this picture. What joy we had spelling out NOEL, celebrating being together and remembering the greatest Christmas gift of all . . . the birth of Christ.

Now that's great news!!

Our Noel family wishes each of you a very Merry Christmas and asks that you join us with joy in celebration of this Christmas season.

- Lou Noel

Prayer: Lord God, you fill us with joy! Noel! In Jesus' name, Amen.

Saturday, December 12



Elf On the Shelf

The Elves on the Shelves watch you in only December. But God is always watching you. The Elf watches you and doesn't give you much. But God gives you his love and heaven. He loves us no matter what. The Elf on the Shelf can't give you all that but still provides fun.

- Baxter Penney (6th grade)

He sees you when you're sleeping. He knows when you're awake . . . Are you humming the tune yet? *He knows if you've been bad or good* . . . Well, this is about Santa. The Elf was created for the purpose of watching boys and girls and reporting to Santa if they deserve Christmas or not! If children don't behave, they get coal – that's their punishment.

If we don't make good choices, what's our punishment from God? Did you say hell? Because I was actually thinking, we get another chance, we get to say we're sorry and try to do better. We can't "deserve" all the gifts God has for us and he knows it and says it up front! He knows we're going to mess up and he loves us more than our inevitable failings. Now, that's a message worth sharing and celebrating!

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for seeing me for me and loving me no matter what!
In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



December 13
Third Sunday in Advent
JOY

Reader 1: What is Advent?

R2: Advent means coming!

Reader 1: Who is coming?

Reader 2: On one hand, we celebrate the arrival of baby Jesus at Christmas.
On the other hand, we anticipate when Christ will come again.

Reader 1: Who is this Christ?

Reader 2: *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,*

Reader 1: *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion-- to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.*

Reader 2: *I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my whole being shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

Reader 1: *For as the earth brings forth its shoots and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.*

Reader 1: *Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."*

All: The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

Leader 2: *May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.*

All: *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you*.

Leader 1: God sent his son to bring joy.

Leader 2: Today we light three purple candles – the candle of HOPE and the candle of LOVE and the candle of JOY.

Leader 3: Let us be filled with joy today and always.

(from Isaiah 61:1–3, 10–11, Psalm 126: 2-3, 5-6, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24.)

Monday, December 14



I remember this as a very Happy Christmas! Two of my very favorite people!

- Dale Culbertson

Family (born or chosen) makes holidays. Being with our loved ones, laughing about old stories, getting big hugs and smiles, and just breathing the same air of people who helped shape us – that is priceless.

As we grow up, get older, start our own families, have our children start their own families, holidays become even more special. We still love big, but we have fewer occasions together. It's bittersweet.

We get excited about the opportunities and events when we can be together. We try to make the most of them. But they are fleeting and a melancholy hits when the time has passed. So snapshots like these become treasure. A glimpse at that one moment that sums it up. These are my people. They make me happy. They love me unconditionally as I do them. I'm so grateful.

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for the people you put in my life. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Tuesday, December 15



Here's my advent picture. It's my favorite. John looks very serious about his job as a shepherd in Christmas play! ❤️ ❤️

- Cindy Stokes

It's amazing how many people have pictures from the nativity play. Why is that? It's just kids dressed up and sometimes acting silly retelling the story of Jesus, right?

No. It is so much more. It's hard to put into words for me. Yes, there is the potential for costume malfunctions, a shoe flying across the chancel, sleepy sheep falling asleep in a lap, playful shepherds using their staff in an ill-advised manner, wise men tripping over robes, angels waving at grandma across the church, big yawns, the occasional twirl, children getting a little too close to a burning candle, and maybe even a little tug of war over baby Jesus. Distracting? Sure can be.

But here's the thing: I think Jesus would love it. What we hear and learn of Jesus loving on people, engaging children, and telling stories makes me think he would so lean into a children's nativity. I can see him sitting among the shepherds and little sheep falling asleep in his lap. I

think he would stifle a laugh at the baby Jesus tug of war thinking we should all be that possessive of our Jesus! I think he would look at the faces of the little angels with tinsel halos, and he would think it was almost just as beautiful as real angels. I imagine him watching the wise men walk forward with one child dressed as a camel and I think he would say, “Great idea having a girl be a wise man, too.” I really have no doubts at all that a children’s nativity is one of the most powerful ways to reach people and make them feel the presence of Christ.

What do you think?

Prayer: Lord God, give us child-like wonder this season, please! In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.









Wednesday, December 16



Lyle and Jesus.

Each year, for the Hanging of the Greens service, our children carry forward the beautiful and fragile pieces of the creche. First of all, whose idea was it to give children the most breakable décor? Every year I think about this as we pass the delicate and decorative pieces out to the eager, slippery little hands, and every year not a single piece is broken. It's amazing. The children mostly nestle the piece so gently in their hands and they walk quite deliberately knowing they carry a special treasure for all to behold. Every so often there is a child who has the misfortune of having to share a piece with an older sibling. A subdued little tug of war begins as soon as they are out of reach of an adult - the older sibling trying to keep the piece stable and the younger trying to assert authority as the one in charge of the special mission. *This job is important! I am worthy! Let me have my chance!*

Friends, wouldn't it be incredible if we each clung to Jesus like that throughout life? *That's my Jesus – always with me and at the center of my thoughts – the most important thing in my life!*

Prayer: Lord God, help us treat you as a valuable jewel! In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Thursday, December 17




Our first Christmas in Greenwood three years ago. Baxter and William hit it off!
What a blessing to have become part of this church just 6 months after moving to a new town, starting new jobs, and making new friends!

- Caroline Souter

Who in the church is responsible for welcoming others, new and old? All of us!!! Isn't that exciting! Each of us makes a difference when we reach out to those around us. A simple hello and a smile, a handshake or a hug, telling someone, "Hey! We're so glad to see you!" Each of these can have a profound effect. We, you and I, have the opportunity to show God's love and greeting to others whenever and wherever we are! Don't let the opportunity pass you by.

Feeling shy or like you are not equipped? Raise a hand and wave from a distance. Smiles reach across a room. Come up with a phrase you can use all the time in all circumstances: "God is good!" or "Happy Sunday!" or "Welcome!" or "Have a great day!" It doesn't have to be perfect or fancy. Something very simple goes a long way.

You know what else goes a really long way – saying someone's name. My girls are always so happy when someone calls them by name – "Hey! They really know me!" Makes me giggle. Yes, that is what church family does! Learn the names. Use them. If you stumble, make a point to figure it out. Introduce or reintroduce yourself as many times as it takes to help someone else remember your name. When we make the time and effort to do this, it speaks volumes to how we love each other – in the image of our Father.

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for church family! In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Friday, December 18



Rebecca and Akers

We want to pass on what's important to us. What's the best way to do that? Many people try to tell us things. Words are often not enough. The best way to convey something important is to show someone what it looks like.

My grandparents and parents showed me what it looks like to love people – loved ones and strangers. My children show me what it looks like to be less certain and more curious. My husband shows me what it looks like to work tirelessly for our family.

When I look out in the congregation at our church family, I see people who have shown me how to:

- handle grief with thanksgiving
- smile and be joyful in the face of scary unknowns
- love difficult people
- forgive graciously

- not be crushed under the weight of an unwanted burden
- agree to disagree and still be friends
- speak truth in love and gentleness
- apologize for something I didn't even know needed an apology
- make good come from bad
- wait patiently
- pray and pray and pray
- take better care of yourself
- see what God sees in others
- advocate for others when needed
- and so much more!

What do we show others by how we live and by the choices we make and the words we use?

Prayer: Lord God, help me live what I believe and may I always strive to do better and better. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Saturday, December 19



My girls and me leading the songs at the Birthday party for Jesus.

- Meg Stevens

The Birthday Party for Jesus is a fun church tradition reminding us all that Jesus' birthday is the real reason to celebrate Christmas. We sing and dance together and we blow out the candles on Jesus' birthday cake. It's a special occasion for all ages. And you can see it in the children's faces. You can hear it in their questions: How old would Jesus be? Why don't we have all the candles for his age?

You can see it in the adult faces as well as they look at the children and see the wonder in the little eyes and faces reflecting the wonder we adults once knew as children. And we miss it and cling to the beauty of our children experiencing it. We get a little glimpse of the memory of our own wonder and innocence.

We all celebrate. We laugh. We feel spirited and festive. That's how Jesus makes us feel. He fills us with joy, love, peace, and hope! Amen!

Prayer: Lord God, we celebrate you! In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



December 20
Fourth Sunday in Advent
PEACE

Reader 1: What is Advent?

Reader 2: Advent means coming!

Reader 1: Who is coming?

Reader 2: On one hand, we celebrate the arrival of baby Jesus at Christmas.
On the other hand, we anticipate when Christ will come again.

Reader 1: Who is this Christ?

Reader 2: *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.*
Reader 1: *And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."*

Reader 2: *But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.*

Reader 1: *The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

Reader 1: *Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"*

Reader 2: *The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God."*

Reader 1: *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.* Luke 1:26-38

Reader 2: The angel says “Do not be afraid.”

All: God offers us peace.

Reader 1: The angel says, “For nothing will be impossible for God.”

All: May we find peace knowing we are in God’s hands.

Reader 1: God sent his son to bring peace.

Reader 2: Today we light four purple candles – the candle of HOPE and the candle of LOVE and the candle of JOY and the candle of PEACE.

All: Let us be filled with peace today and always.

Monday, December 21



It's not often enough that my sister, her husband, Preston and I are together at Christmas! It is always such a great time and so special being with them! And now their son Elliot!

- Dale Culbertson

Isn't it amazing how someone we love can bring a complete stranger into our lives and they become family! It is a wonderful thing!

People are meant to be connected. One by one a chain of connections forms linking us all to each other. Some of us may have grown up in our current church. We may know people of all generations because we've seen them and worshipped with them for years.

Others of us may be in a church that we did not grow up in. We gradually get to know people. It can be hard to forge new friendships when so many older connections are

established. But God made are hearts to expand exponentially with love for others. We have an infinite capacity for love.

Make a point to connect with someone you may not know very well. Call each other by name. Ask questions to get to know each other. Make coffee or dinner plans. Go out of your way to speak to others. God will nudge you. We do this to grow our family, our connections, our love.

Over time, God will use others to pour his love into you, to offer wise counsel and encouragement, and to provide resources when least expected. Likewise, God will use each of us to do the same for others. What a beautiful gift . . . family from strangers.

Prayer: Lord God, give us courage to connect with others in meaningful ways so that you may use us to help each other. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Tuesday, December 22



This is one of my favorite pictures from Christmas because it brought the fam together and pitted us against each other (me using B as a human shield).

- Lily Collins

Holidays are a great time for family antics, silliness, new and old traditions. Anything that can be used to bond or connect with each other – to create new memories together – that's the goal! And, like life, who better to hide behind than those who have loved you longest. We're made to defend each other, to cover each other when needed. We can count on each other. That's love. It may not all be sunshine and roses, but we always have each other. And as much as all our human people love us, God somehow loves us that much more! Amazing!

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for your love that covers and defends.
In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Wednesday, December 23



The Beaudrot siblings read scripture together at a Christmas Eve service.

The Beaudrot siblings have a beautiful family tradition. On Christmas Eve, they recite the Luke passage together in front of the whole family. I wonder how many years they have been blessed by doing this?

When a family takes the time to create traditions, it can have a lasting impact making it important not just to the originators but now also to their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Younger generations are learning what really matters because it has been modeled for them year after year. Hearing the story of Jesus, not just read, but important enough to be memorized, and in the voice of a loved one you treasure so much, that is priceless.

What do we deem important in our homes? What legacy are we leaving our younger generations? When they remember Christmas with the family in years to come, what will they consider priceless?

Prayer: Lord God, teach us what is important to share in our own homes.
In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



Thursday, December 24
Christmas Eve
The Christ Candle

Reader 1: What is Advent?

Reader 2: Advent means coming!

Reader 1: Who is coming?

Reader 2: On one hand, we celebrate the arrival of baby Jesus at Christmas.
On the other hand, we anticipate when Christ will come again.

Reader 1: Who is this Christ? *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.*

Reader 2: *And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.*

Reader 1: *Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,*
to the glory of God the Father.

Reader 2: Today we light four purple candles– the candles of HOPE, LOVE, JOY, and PEACE- and the white Christ candle.

All: Let us be filled with Christ today and always.

From Philippians 2:5-11



Friday, December 25
Christmas Day

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while[a] Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." 15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." 16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

- Luke 2: 1-20

Do you see what I see?