

Advent Devotional Booklet
Table of Contents

Advent Devotional Booklet Introduction.....	1
<i>Rev. Dale Swihart</i>	1
November 27.....	2
<i>Rev. James Foster</i>	2
November 28.....	2
<i>Jan Foster</i>	2
November 29.....	3
<i>Cheryl Kopplin</i>	3
November 30.....	3
<i>Peggy Fulcher</i>	3
December 1	4
<i>Peggy Allen</i>	4
December 2	4
<i>Peggy Fowler</i>	4
December 3	5
<i>Bev Tippett</i>	5
December 4	5
<i>Lindsey Gibb</i>	5
December 5	6
<i>Sue Lantz</i>	6
December 6	6
<i>Gary Smith</i>	6
December 7	7
<i>Bev Welch</i>	7
December 8	7
<i>Jan Jacobs</i>	7
December 9	8
<i>Beverly Cort</i>	8
December 10	8
<i>Vivian Hamilton-Hammer</i>	8
December 11	9
<i>Marylou Young</i>	9
December 12	9
<i>Debera Bard</i>	9
December 13	10
<i>Rev. Max Hayden</i>	10
December 14	10
<i>Patti Nelson</i>	10
December 15	11
<i>Carol Campbell</i>	11
December 16.....	11
<i>Bruce Nieuwenhuis</i>	11

December 17	12
<i>Fran Moore</i>	12
December 18	12
<i>Ellen Harper</i>	12
December 19	13
<i>Greg Dean</i>	13
December 20	13
<i>Mitzi Uebel</i>	13
December 21	14
<i>Lorraine Eshleman</i>	14
December 22	14
<i>Diane Marsom</i>	14
December 23	15
<i>Rev. Lloyd Hall</i>	15
December 24	15
<i>Rev. Larry McMellen</i>	15

Advent Devotional Booklet Introduction

Rev. Dale Swihart

In making a pitch to the congregation for writers for this Advent Devotional Booklet, Bob Nelson said that it was an opportunity to share a gift with the congregation. He was right. Our stories are precious gifts. To let others into the hidden parts of our lives takes a lot of trust.

Thank you to each person who has not only taken the time to share these writings, but who has had enough trust in us to share memories, thoughts, and inspirations. For those of us who are on the receiving end of these gifts, let us handle them with reverence and care.

Advent begins the long journey to Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection. Jesus has given us the gifts of salvation and the hope for a life which is eternal. These readings are given in His honor and wrapped in His love. So, as you read, remember that we have all received so very much.

Again, we must thank Rhea Adgate who first put forth the idea of the Advent Devotional Booklet 14 years ago. Nikki Black worked tirelessly this fall as our coordinator to keep Rhea's dream alive. Bev Cort, Bob Nelson, and Barb Rankin assisted her. Taking painstaking time, Nancy Berger, Julie Jacobson, Connie Morrison, and Bill Black served as our proofreaders. Karrie Baldwin and an able group of volunteers also assembled and prepared the booklets for distribution. It takes a lot of people to make the project go. They all deserve our praise.

Thank you to all who have taken the leap of faith, revealing a glimpse into your hearts as you have shared your stories with us. You have blessed us with a precious gift, a glimpse into your heart and soul.

Shalom,

Dale

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

November 27

Rev. James Foster

© 2011

*Psalms 24 & 150; Amos 1:1-5, 13-2:8;
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Luke 21:5-19; Psalms 25 & 110*

Preparing (For) The Way

My maternal grandfather was “detail-oriented.” Every fall back in the 1950s, he’d travel with my grandmother, via Greyhound Bus, from our farm in central New York to Buffalo (a journey of over 200 miles) for his annual cancer checkup. I knew their departure was near when my grandfather’s fully-packed suitcase appeared in their bedroom about a week before the scheduled departure.

Since he knew when the bus would stop at our driveway, it seemed odd that he would be ready so far ahead, but for him this was logical. He’d never risk forgetting anything by waiting until the last moment. You might call it “active waiting.” This reminds me of a theme for Advent: preparation – a central principle in the prophecies of the coming Messiah. For example, when John the Baptist proclaimed the imminent arrival of the Christ in Matthew 3:3, he quoted Isaiah 40:3, “...prepare the way of the Lord.”

Devote Jews then, and now, recognized that an essential part of awaiting any promise from God was how that expectation was illustrated in the lives of His people. For example, the prophecy of Isaiah, that the Lord would lift the valleys and level the mountains, began with their responsibility to “*Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*” God’s transforming Grace often operates through His people, a point Jesus Christ offered: “*Let your light so shine before people that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*” (Matthew 5:16).

During Advent the Lord continues to give us the obligation – and opportunity – to prepare His way. How might we do this? What “Good Works” from us will illustrate the Kingdom of God? The answers are as personal and special as the season.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

November 28

Jan Foster

© 2011

*Psalms 122 & 145; Amos 2:6-16;
2 Peter 1:1-11; Matthew 21:1-11; Psalms 40 & 67*

Lessons

Advent is the season of waiting with anticipation – and never had I seen waiting with eager anticipation better illustrated than watching those hungry, tired, ragged men lining up outside the Albany City Mission for a nourishing hot meal. Our Youth Group had been told the rules – including that no one was to be fed after 6:00 p.m. As the men filed in, politely accepting plates of homemade food, I noticed one looking around, searching for someone. Not seeing his friend, he sat down to enjoy his food just as his friend rushed through the door. The friend glanced at the clock, his face falling. It was 6:02. There would be no hot meal for him this night. Accepting a cup of coffee, he slumped down beside the other man.

The man looked over at his friend, looked down at his nice hot dinner, and looked back at his friend. Without a word he pushed his plate toward his friend. “No,” whispered the friend, “I got here too late. This is yours.”

The other man shook his head. “I’m OK,” he sighed. “You eat it.”

With a soft “Thank you,” the friend tucked into his only hot meal of the day.

As a chaperone I felt bad, but rules were rules, and I had to set an example, didn’t I? Our Youth, there to demonstrate the love, grace, and generosity of God, were not so blind. Quickly they assembled a fresh plate and rushed it out to the generous, nameless, homeless man who had taught us what it meant to sacrifice all he had for another person. Kinda the way Jesus gives His all to us.

What lessons will your words and deeds be teaching this Advent Season?

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

November 29

Cheryl Kopplin

© 2011

***Psalms 33 & 146; Amos 3:1-11;
2 Peter 1:12-21; Matthew 21:12-22; Psalms 85 & 94***

Psalm 33:6 “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made...”

On July 21, 2011, the space shuttle Atlantis rolled to a stop at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, marking the conclusion of the final space shuttle mission. As this chapter of space exploration comes to an end, I recall the excitement of a Christmas season many years ago.

The year was 1968. My father was an engineer with the AC Spark Plug Division of General Motors. AC Spark Plug was under contract to NASA to fabricate the inertial, gyroscope-stabilized platform for the Apollo spacecraft. On December 21, the Apollo 8, the first manned launch from the JFK Space Center, became the first human spaceflight to leave earth orbit, travel to and orbit the moon, and return to earth.

While Christmas was always a special time of celebration, this year was especially full of wonder. My family crowded around the television to get the latest news of the space flight. We were proud, excited, anxious, and awed as the drama unfolded. We were particularly concerned during the first orbit around the moon. The crew had to perform a critical maneuver while on the far side of the moon and out of radio contact with Earth. We were relieved when the spacecraft emerged from the far side having successfully entered into lunar orbit on December 24.

The next few hours provided extraordinary descriptions and pictures from space. The earthrise, witnessed by the crew, showed a world of beauty and vulnerability. The awe of creation was shared worldwide on that Christmas Eve during a television transmission as the astronauts each read verses from the Book of Genesis. Commander Borman concluded with, "And from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with good night, good luck, a Merry Christmas, and God bless all of you, *all of you on the good Earth.*"

Peace and joy reigned in our hearts that night as the world joined together in the first extraterrestrial Christmas celebration. May the wonder and excitement of that celebration be with you and yours this holiday season.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

November 30

Peggy Fulcher

© 2011

***Psalms 50 & 147:1-11; Amos 3:12 - 4:5;
2 Peter 3:1-10; Matthew 21:23-32; Psalms 53 & 17***

We spend a lot of our time waiting: for people, appointments, a place in line, a “live” person on the phone. Waiting is something we all have experienced; most of us do not enjoy it.

As Christmas approaches, the waiting intensifies. We find that children are impatiently counting the days and attempting to improve their behavior, so it will be recorded positively on Santa’s “list.” We see that adults are stressing about everything that needs to be done and fretting over the annoying problems that have interrupted that “all important” holiday schedule.

So where is the enjoyment? Where is that joy of the spirit that radiates from the “reason for the season?”

During the 1970’s, a song by Carly Simon became a hit – *Anticipation*. Somehow, to me, anticipation seems a lot more positive and inviting than waiting.

Advent is all about (the) waiting – or perhaps, a better word – anticipation. We are all anticipating the day we commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ. Along with the birth, we look forward to the tree and the decorating, the exchanging of presents, the baking and other preparations and the love that accompanies them.

As we all experience these weeks of Advent and focus on the birth of Jesus Christ, let us anticipate this holy season with the reverence, the love and the joy that honors its arrival.

- A Anticipate the Anniversary of the Arrival of the
- D Divine One’s birth. Demand
- V Vigilance from – Virtually
- E Everyone – for the Everlasting Love Emerging throughout our lives
- N Not Naturally – but supernaturally. Now is the
- T Time to prepare for Truth: His coming.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 1

Peggy Allen

© 2011

*Psalms 18:1-20 & 147:12-20; Amos 4:6-13;
2 Peter 3:11-18; Matthew 21:33-46; Psalms 126 & 62*

Luke 2:15 *“Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place....”*

Remember the old song “Over the river and through the woods to Grandmother’s house we go?” Well, my coming home journey was:

Over the mountains and through the desert
to Fenton First Pres I go
Back in the choir singing God’s praises in the
“church families’ ” lap of support,
Where daughter Peggy sings and plays
bells along with others I know,
Returning to Dale’s Bible class to learn how
the Word brings God’s sureness and comfort,
In Book Club various authors may take us
from different religions to a “Good-bye Quilt,”
Joining our “family” as they give their money,
time, expertise for a renewed church to be built
Awe-fully watching the new remodeling evolve
to better serve us all,
Seeing how our committees work together
To show Christ’s presence and love.

Be it prayers, concern, food, building
Habitats, or taking time to call,
Here comes Christmas with candles, carols,
church family, mine and angels from above,
Mitten trees, sparkling lights, children laughing,
the smell of cookies in the oven
Mixed together conjures up visions of heaven.

Merry Christmas, Baby Jesus;
Happy New Year to you all
Glad to be back with you
Let us rejoice greatly and have a ball!

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 2

Peggy Fowler

© 2011

*Psalms 102 & 148; Amos 5:1-17;
Jude 1-16; Matthew 22:1-14; Psalms 130 & 16*

I truly had lost track of time between being asked to write this devotion and actually submitting it. There were many distractions going on in this busy life, and I had put it out of my mind. When I received the reminder call that it was time to submit my writing, I had literally not sat down to think or write. But I was not worried because I knew that God would provide. And, of course, the Lord did just that.

Hush and be still...the Lord is coming, so listen and hear.

Hush and Be Still

A Psalm for Advent

Hush and be still for the Lord

Comes to us.
His spirit pure and lovely;
Righteousness is His cloak.
In Love He heals and cures the sick and lame, sinful and lonely.
So strong is His love and spirit among us now and always!
Truthfully, God lives among us!

In a lowly manger,
So silently delivered and tended to by shepherds and angels.

Be aware and be ready.
Only God can approach us this way and through Christ’s birth
Renders sin into forgiveness.
Newly born, Christ comes.

Hush and be quiet for He loves us totally to give us His Son.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 3

Bev Tippett

© 2011

*Psalms 90 & 149; Amos 5:18–27;
Jude 17-25; Matthew 22:15–22; Psalms 80 & 72*

I have a quote on my office wall that says: *“Change of any sort, requires courage.”* It is easy to understand why difficult changes require courage, but why good changes? Some of it has to do with habit and routine. It is easier to do things as we have always done regardless of the need to change. And often we feel we are not in control when things change...even the good changes. I have noticed that sometimes I dread change; I fight it. But after the change has happened, I see God’s plan, and life is really better because of the change.

Our church is undergoing a lot of changes...great physical changes. Getting to the end of our change is stressful — we’ve been uprooted, displaced, parking- challenged, crowded, and unsettled. I am reminded, as we approach Christmas, of the changes that Mary and Joseph faced. It is easy to understand how they could be confused, disturbed, upset, and fearful of all the changes. The first Christmas changed everything. The truth that we share with Mary and Joseph is the fact that God does not change. He is our steadfast love and support through all types of changes. Malachi 3:6 says, *“I the LORD do not change.”*

Nobody knows what the future holds. We do know that God has a plan and purpose for our lives. We know that God is going to change our plans sometime. We know that God will always be with us no matter what we go through.

On Christmas Eve I will be sitting in our sanctuary, enjoying the tradition and things that do not change—the love of God for us. And then I will walk into the new fellowship hall and thank God for the things that do change.

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

~ Reinhold Niebuhr

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 4

Lindsey Gibb

© 2011

*Psalms 24 & 150; Amos 6:1-14;
2 Thessalonians 1:5-12; Luke 1:57-68; Psalms 25 & 110*

Why Christmas Is Special To Me

Christmas is special to me because it is Jesus’ birthday. It is also special to me because the holiday spirit of love, joy, peace, and hope is all around.

I love Christmas because my aunt comes from New York to spend a week with my family. Christmas is a time of family, friends, and rejoicing.

I like to decorate cookies, open presents, eat turkey, spend relaxed time with family, and decorate the Christmas tree. Our family cuts down our own Christmas tree each year.

I also like to see the Christmas play on Christmas Eve at church. I enjoy spending Christmas Eve with my grandparents, cousins, and aunts and uncles. I love the “Breakfast with the Christmas Angel.” The French toast is amazing! I like to color the pictures, too. My mom organizes the whole thing. I’m really proud of her!

That is why Christmas is special to me.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 5

Sue Lantz

© 2011

***Psalms 122 & 145; Amos 7:1-9;
Revelation 1:1-18; Matthew 22:23-33; Psalms 40 & 67***

Although we first anticipated our church's remodeling to have been completed by early fall; it somehow seems fitting that its completion ties into our season of Advent – a time filled with expectations and hope, all to the glory of God.

Our scriptures also beautifully lift up this theme.

Psalm 40:

*I waited patiently for the Lord's help
He taught me to sing a new song – O Lord our God
You have made wonderful plans for us
How I love to do Your will, my God!*

As Christians, we excitedly prepare each year for the festivities leading to and the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, this glorious fruit of Love given to us by God. Jesus' teachings and way of life have transcended through generations and continue to unite us today in the spirit of Love, Hope, Forgiveness, and Salvation.

As we prepare for Christ's birth, I pray we will also prepare our hearts and lives to use this building to fulfill his teachings.

From Psalm 122:

*Let us go to the Lord's house...it is a city
Restored in beautiful order and harmony.*

From Psalm 145:

*I will proclaim Your greatness, my God and King
What You have done will be praised from one generation to the next.*

From Revelation 1:

Grace and peace be with you from God, who is, who was, and who is to come....

Merry Christmas!

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 6

Gary Smith

© 2011

***Psalms 33 & 146; Amos 7:10-17;
Revelation 1:9-16; Matthew 22:34-46; Psalms 85 & 94***

Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus defines the word *community* as a locality where people reside having common interests, possession, or enjoyment. A few years ago I found myself in strong need of gaining a foothold within the community of a church where perhaps some of my needs and the needs of my family and friends could find betterment through prayer and shared experience. The First Fenton Presbyterian Church could and does provide that strength that I could not find as an individual.

I am not well versed in either scripture or theology, but it is through the words and actions of our church membership that I know I am not alone. I know that I can continue down the roads of life even though these roads are not often well lit or illustrated on a well-defined map.

Finally, as I continue to attend services, worship, meditate, and ask for blessings upon the people in my life, I have come to understand that by praying for others I am ultimately praying for myself as well. The pain of others extends to all of us and the strength of wellness – mentally, physically, and spiritually – extends to all of us as well. This church, through God's grace, helps to make this happen.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 7

Bev Welch

© 2011

***Psalms 50, 147:1-11; Amos 8:1-14;
Revelation 1:17 – 2:7; Matthew 23:1-12; Psalms 53 & 17***

Christmas! I'm sitting at the table on one of the warmest, sunniest days of October. It is hard to imagine that in less than two months, we will be having a Christmas party at our house.

I've looked at magazines and tried to decide on a few Christmas crafts that I hope to make but haven't started yet.

I've pondered, "What would Jerry like for a Christmas gift? What does our son need? How about our daughter and son-in-law? What will I choose to give my friends? Will it be the "right" gift?"

I wonder how much time God took in deciding to give the gift of His Son to the world? How much planning went into that first Christmas? Yet, He gave the ultimate gift! No matter how much we spend or how much we plan, we could never come close to giving that one gift. God gave His Son!!

Do we take time to say 'thank you'? Have we ever written that long overdue thank you note?

Dear God,

Thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus. It is a gift I will cherish forever!

Love, Bev

Merry Christmas!

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 8

Jan Jacobs

© 2011

***Psalms 18:1-20 & 147:12-20; Amos 9:1-10;
Revelation 2:8-17; Matthew 23:13-26; Psalms 126 & 62***

Sometimes there is so much "Christmas," it is overwhelming. And yet, often, it's the simplest things that create the lasting memories, like last year when I went to stay with my grandchildren while my daughter attended a teachers' training session. Jenna was eleven years old then and Gavin was seven. Jenna had an idea. "Let's go out and pick up sticks shaped like candy canes and paint them for presents for Mom and Dad." So we bundled up and headed for the woods behind their house. It was cold and windy, so we quickly found sticks that satisfied us. They really didn't look like candy canes, but they would do.

When we came in, we drank hot cocoa while we made our plan. Jenna had cheerleading practice, so while she was there, Gavin and I would buy the paint – we already had brushes. When we got home, we hid in the furnace room so Mom and Dad wouldn't see our projects.

We chatted while we painted until Gavin said, "Enough!" Then Jenna and I finished and let everything dry overnight. The next day Jenna hid their gifts up in her closet, and I took mine home to surprise Grandpa.

They were presented Christmas morning. Everyone knows that the imperfect gift, made by a child with love, is the most perfect gift of all. (I hope that's how God feels about me.)

So may you have a simple, wonderful, fun-filled, love-filled Christmas season. This is my prayer for you – asked for in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 9

Beverly Cort

© 2011

*Psalms 102 & 148; Haggai 1:1-15;
Revelation 2:18-29; Matthew 23:27-39; Psalms 130 & 16*

Psalms 130:7 "Oh, Israel, look for the Lord. For in the Lord is love unfailing, and great is his power to set men free."

Burning Love

Holy One, help us to love You with a passion
So intense that all other desires are burned away.
And yet, our loves' lights grow dim
In the brilliance of that fierce, burning love
You have for us.
So entwine our hearts with Yours into one
Beautiful bond of love, consuming our
Flickering flames --- and we will be one.
Amen.

An Open Door

An open door, offering an opportunity to serve, can be as grand as a palace door or as humble as an oven door. To bring the gift of love in the form of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, or in the shape of a loaf of fresh baked bread, is to bring hope to hungry, needful hearts. Mary and Joseph, though they did not know it, were going to journey to Egypt to save Jesus' life, and God knew they would need financial help. He provided the gifts from the wise men to be used as currency to travel with a safe caravan to Egypt. Nothing is said in the Bible about how they traveled to Egypt, but caravans were constantly following the trade routes that curved through the Fertile Crescent. Offering fresh baked bread to weary travelers may have been a common practice as the caravans passed near villages. We also can serve others in their journey through life. If we offer our gifts in love, they become as precious as gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 10

Vivian Hamilton-Hammer

© 2011

*Psalms 90 & 149; Haggai 2:1-9;
Revelation 3:1-6; Matthew 24:1-14; Psalms 80 & 72*

During my last trip to Fenton, a friend asked me why Fenton First is such an important part of my life even though I've lived in Florida for over ten years. I began to think of the wonderful Christmas memories I have.

Thirty-two years ago this year, my late husband John and I were looking for a church home. One Sunday in Advent we attended the 11 AM service where Bob Strom, his brother and their father Ryan were part of the Christmas message, walking through the sanctuary dressed as the three Magi. This is the first of many vivid memories.

There were the many Christmas decorating parties involving our five grandchildren, a highlight of their youth years. The men of the church put up the tree, the children made ornaments, and then everyone went to the sanctuary to participate in the birth of Christ pageant.

John and I were choir members. There were the many hours spent preparing music for Christmas pageants and Christmas Eve services with everyone raising their voices in praise of the birth of Christ.

There was the year members of the church prepared and delivered meals to the elderly who would have gone without during the holidays since they were dependent on Meals on Wheels. Of course, there were many years of meal and gift giving for people in need in the Fenton area.

The list goes on of Christ's work of giving and love that is so strong in the family of Fenton First.

These memories of the church and the doing of Christ's work are what bring me back to my church home several times a year.

God bless you all and Merry Christmas!

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 11

Marylou Young

© 2011

*Psalms 24 & 150; Amos 9:11-15;
2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, 13-17; John 5:30-47; Psalms 25 & 110*

Psalm 150:1 "Praise God in His sanctuary."

Last year and now this year, I unknowingly received this same favorite verse for my devotional. A year ago in my last paragraph, I asked that we come and praise God in His sanctuary and expect great things. Did God guide us and help us achieve great things? We only need to look around us for the answer. Our renovation is a visible sign of God's faithfulness to us. He is helping us every step of the way – the obstacles we've met were worked out and the project is nearing completion.

God has faithfully brought us to an exciting place in the life of Fenton First Presbyterian Church. The psalmist said, "Praise God in His sanctuary." Therefore, now let us all who are physically able, attend church regularly as a visible sign of our faithfulness and thankfulness to Him! Can we not, all of us together, better know and fulfill the reasons why He helped us make enough room to do great things for Him? Come, again expecting great things!

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 12

Debera Bard

© 2011

*Psalms 122 & 145; Zechariah 1:7-17;
Revelation 3:7-13; Matthew 24:15-31; Psalms 40 & 67*

Christmas Past

Our children are grown. In fact, we now have grandchildren the age our children were in this story.

Christmas is my favorite time of year! We get to celebrate the birth of Jesus and we get together with family and loved ones. Jesus and family, what makes life better? When the children were young, I loved reading Christmas stories to them. I always read *Twas the Night before Christmas* and the real *Christmas Story*. One Christmas Eve, after my mom, step-dad, brother, sister, and their families had gone home for the evening, Rick left to go to my brother Pete's house to return the borrowed folding chairs. I got Nathan, Jessica and Mathew in their pj's and all ready for bed. The Christmas tree was lit and beaming with all the pretty lights and glass decorations. The kids were ready for Santa!

We had a collie puppy, named Lassie, who was only a few months old. She was a curious little thing. The kids were lying on the couch. I began reading the traditional *Christmas Story* when all of a sudden Nathan yelled, "Mom, Lassie is peeing under the tree!" Thank goodness there weren't any gifts there yet! Lassie got tangled on light cords and down went the tree. I tried, but couldn't catch the tree. Beautiful glass ornaments went everywhere, breaking. I cried and the kids laughed. We got the tree upright, everything straightened out the best we could, and the broken glass swept up. I continued to read to the children. The curious puppy did it again; down went the tree! The kids couldn't keep from laughing and at this point, I also had to laugh. I did get to read to them and the tree got put back up, a little crooked and with fewer ornaments, but it has been a memory we all still laugh about to this day. Oh, Rick missed the entire fun, of course!

Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night!

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 13

Rev. Max Hayden

© 2011

*Psalms 33 & 146; Zechariah 2:1-13;
Revelation 3:14-22; Matthew 24:32-44; Psalms 85 & 94*

Advent Journey 2011

The first year I was in seminary in Minnesota, Sandy and I decided to come home to Indiana for Christmas with our four young children. With a shortage of funds, we decided to take two days and drive. We loaded the kids up in the back seat of our 4-door sedan early December 23rd and began the journey. We hadn't passed the Minnesota state line before we heard the first, "Are we there yet," "He is in my space," "She is touching me," "I'm hungry," and you know the rest of the questions and bickering we endured for the rest of the car ride. And with four kids in one seat, it was hard to get them all to fall asleep at the same time.

We arrived at my parents' home in time for dinner and the Christmas Eve service, but Sandy and I really didn't fully enjoy that Christmas visit; we were drained and we were already planning the ride home. We had discovered an important insight – when you plan the journey to be meaningful, the destination will not be disappointing.

Advent is a wonderful journey to discover and celebrate the joy of the birth of God's love on Christmas. Advent is filled with priceless opportunities at home, at church and in the community to assure that our hearts are prepared for the gift of Christ when Christmas arrives. Don't get so busy or focused upon the event that you short-circuit the journey or fail to take full advantage of daily opportunities God will give you. You do not want to miss the angels' chorus or the shepherds' proclamation of halleluia and praise of the special gift awaiting you on Christmas morning.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 14

Patti Nelson

© 2011

*Psalms 50 & 147:1-11; Zechariah 3:1-10;
Revelation 4:1-8; Matthew 24:45-51; Psalms 53 & 17*

As the Christmas season approaches, I find myself often tempted by Christmas cookies that appear out of nowhere, at any time of the day or night. There are hard ones, soft ones, big ones, little ones, gorgeous ones and not so gorgeous ones!

I am reminded of my mother who was really a maverick in her time. Born in 1913, she did not marry until she was 25! She never had children until 30 years of age, and then had four children (I'm the youngest) between 30 and 40. She worked all her life in spite of having a family of six! We always had dinner on the table and a tuck in bed at night, no matter what kind of day she had had.

At Christmastime my mother would dig out an old Scottish recipe for Christmas cookies that was given to her by her mother. Mom got a big kick out of reading that the recipe only said: "makes many." These cookies were not fancy. They were made with basic ingredients – butter, sugar, and flour – but they were such great fun to make and even more fun to eat. For a woman who often had to settle for what was quick and simple, she pulled out all the stops when it came to these cookies. We used multi-colored decorating sugars, sprinkles, cinnamon chips, and the most fun of all, Grandma's cookie cutters. The whole Christmas story could be told with the awesome collection of tin cookie cutters. We had to be patient because once the dough was made, it had to be refrigerated for several hours or even until the next day. It was well worth the wait. The house smelled so good as the cookies began to come out of the oven, cookie sheet after cookie sheet.

I thank my mother for these GREAT memories! Bring on the cookies!!

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 15

Carol Campbell

© 2011

*Psalms 18:1-20 & 147:12-20; Zechariah 4:1-14;
Revelation 4:9 – 5:5; Mark 25:1-13; Psalms 126 & 62*

Reflecting on Psalm 62:

God is a rock! How well Gary and I have come to know that. This past year has been one of changes for our families; because of God we will not be broken, we do not fear, and we have a place of strength and refuge. Having our church family embrace us and enable us to grow spiritually has been uplifting. We both believe that it is because of our deep, abiding faith and trust in the Lord that we are together. Gary said it best in his wedding vows to me that God brought us together and, through Him, our love will never fail. He is our rock, our symbol of strength, refuge, security and reliability. He is a part of our lives, and without Him, we would not be who we are.

In this world of uncertainty, turmoil, war, poverty, and financial instability, it is good to know that God is a rock and that we can turn to Him in prayer. We can trust that He will provide for us a place of refuge and security. Believe in God and trust that He will be there for you. He will not let you down. Pray for the wars to end, for our leaders to find a way to revitalize our nations and turn our financial woes into a thing of the past, and that homelessness and poverty will be wiped out. Pray that we as a nation can lift our hearts to God and not fear retaliation from other countries for believing in our rock, our salvation, our refuge. Let us also not retaliate against others for their beliefs.

We ask this of you not only during this holiday season, but each and every day of the year, throughout your life. Believe that God is your rock and through Him all things are possible.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 16

Bruce Nieuwenhuis

© 2011

*Psalms 102 & 148; Zechariah 7:8 – 8:8;
Revelation 5:6-14; Matthew 25:14-30; Psalms 130 & 16*

The symbols of Christmas are important to us. The items hung on Fenton First's Chrismon tree include several that are very familiar, and some that are significant to us only when explained, but then lead to understanding important aspects of our faith.

Several years ago I was made aware of a Lutheran practice which symbolically shows the connection between Christmas and Easter in a way that families can easily practice. It involves cutting the branches off your Christmas tree after the season is over, but keeping the center trunk. Then at Easter, cut the trunk into two sections, tie them together to form a cross, and display it in your home.

This makes a vivid visual connection, showing that these two holidays have a common center and that Jesus' birth is not the end but the beginning of a life that led to the cross. I have occasionally done this and felt the strength of this two-phased symbol.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 17

Fran Moore

© 2011

***Psalms 90 & 149; Zechariah 8:9-17;
Revelation 6:1-17; Matthew 25:31-46; Psalms 80 & 72***

Today is the birthday of our firstborn son. We, like Joseph and Mary, traveled a distance to get where he would be born. Dean was in the Army and was assigned to Ft Monroe, VA. We had no place to stay, but soon found one.

Soon it will be time to celebrate the birthday of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. How do you suppose He celebrated His birthdays as he grew up? Did they make birthday cakes back then? I Googled “birthday cake history” and found an answer.

The ancient Greeks made round or moon-shaped honey cakes, put a candle in the middle that made it glow like the moon, and took it to the temple of Artemis, the Goddess of the Moon.

Or, the tradition of birthday cakes may have started in Germany in the Middle Ages. Sweetened bread dough in the shape of Baby Jesus was used to commemorate his birthday. In later times, the Germans baked a cake in layers and called it *Geburtstagorten*.

In early times, the dough was shaped into a ball like bread. Items were added to make the cakes sweeter. As they baked, they would flatten out. That tradition of round cakes lives today. With our modern baking pans of various shapes and sizes, we can have a variety. A good oven, our refined white flour, sugar and baking powder make for a better tasting cake.

The lighting of candles as a symbol of reverence toward God is part of both pagan and Christian beliefs. The smoke from the flames is believed to take wishes up to heaven. From this belief, the practice of making a wish and blowing out candles developed.

We should all make a small birthday cake for Christmas, put a candle on it, and sing *Happy Birthday* to Jesus. He is the reason for the season.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 18

Ellen Harper

© 2011

***Psalms 24 & 150; Genesis 3:8-15;
Revelation 12:1-10; John 3:16-21; Psalms 25 & 110***

Our family has a lot of Christmas traditions. We cut down our own Christmas tree, load it up with our bottomless boxes of ornaments, drive to Indiana to meet our family, and much more.

One of my favorite traditions is making cookies. Every year our family spends countless hours in the kitchen, reading and re-reading family cookbooks, measuring out just the right amount of everything, and most of all, covering anything and everything we can in chocolate. By the end of the cooking weekend, we have heaps of delicate treats scattered throughout the kitchen – and one dirty room. Before we begin the cleaning process, we complete my favorite parts: arrangements and delivery.

We attach handmade Christmas tags to overflowing plates of holiday goodies. Over the years, we have learned who likes what, so no two plates are alike. After all this is done, we begin to bundle up – coats, hats, gloves, scarves, everything. You know how Michigan winters are. Now ready for the cold, we load up all the platters, and make our way to the first house. I’m put in charge of balancing the overflowing plates across the slick walkway. Since both of my hands are full, my brother Charlie reaches out to ring the doorbell. As he did so, I thought about handing over all my hard work to someone else. Did I really want to? Then I remembered that God gave His one and only Son so that those who believed in Him would not perish, but have eternal life. Compared to God’s sacrifice, this was nothing. Before I could think any deeper into the subject, the door popped open. We exchanged hellos and Christmas greetings with the neighbors, and I handed her the platter of sweets. Her smile was so bright, and she was so happy. I then remembered how much God loves each and every one of us and will make any sacrifice to show His love and care for us. I smiled even brighter, and I’m sure that I looked happier too. That Christmas I learned a lot, but the most important thing I learned is how much God loves me.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 19

Greg Dean

© 2011

*Psalms 122 & 145; Zephaniah 3:14-20;
Titus 1:1-16; Luke 1:1-25; Psalms 40 & 67*

My Best Day in Real Estate

It began like any other day – check my emails, return phone calls and make appointments. Some folks called and wanted to look at a nondescript 3-bedroom rental house in Grand Blanc, also known as The Big White, whether rightly or wrongly. I could tell from their voices that they were a family of color. As a realtor and more importantly as a Christian, this made no difference to me and to how I would serve this potential client. I met the family that evening at the house in Grand Blanc; we were both on time. Cleo and Yolanda were a very nice couple with children, one of whom was a teenage girl. While the rest of the family was looking throughout the house, the teenage daughter walked out back and immediately struck up a conversation with the next-door neighbor girl while we continued on through the house.

After about a half hour while I was discussing the qualifications and leasing procedures, the young daughter came up to her folks and announced, “The neighborhood is okay!” She went on to explain that there were a few other minorities living there along with some Hispanics (I guess it all depends on your point of view) and they all got along and, more importantly, it was a “good neighborhood” where everyone treated each other well. Just like our reading from Titus – “*a person who is pure of heart sees goodness and purity in everything*” – we should all be as pure of heart as this young lady. She confirmed many lessons for me that day.

As I was driving home that evening, I couldn't help but wonder why I felt so good about this rental property. After all, I wouldn't be making much money from it and it wasn't close to Fenton, but it sure made me feel good. Then it came to me that this is the way it is supposed to be – we have to live somewhere and we all should be good neighbors, regardless of our ethnicity and/or color. Sounds like something I've heard around my church before, and now I've experienced it. Life is good!

Blessings on you all.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 20

Mitzi Uebel

© 2011

*Psalms 33 & 146; 1 Samuel 1b-10;
Titus 2:1–10; Luke 1:26-38; Psalms 85 & 94*

Advent Prayer

Lord, it's almost time to come to the Stable;
And we'll arrive, not so much with grateful hearts and giving hands,
As with unkind words and greedy plans,
And anger for those we perceive as different from us
In beliefs or ethics or imagined goals.
Remind us that you love and value us all,
That we all belong to the same Family of God.
Open our eyes as we sing our carols,
So that we may truly see You in each other
And work for the Common Good,
That by next Christmas we will meet
At the Stable in love.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 21

Lorraine Eshleman

© 2011

*Psalms 50 & 147:1-11; 2 Samuel 7:1-17;
Titus 2:11 - 3:8a; Luke 1:39-48a (48b-56); Psalms 53 & 17*

Upon reflection on:

Luke 9:58 *“Jesus answered, “Foxes have their holes, the birds their roosts; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”*

Matthew 25:30 *“And the king will answer, “I tell you this: anything you did for one of my brothers here, however humble, you did for me.”*

For the Homeless on a Snowy Christmas Night

Where would the Baby’s dear head be laid
If He came once again on this night?
Off some snowy street? In an alley nook?
Amid shadows and stark neon lights?

We’re told He was homeless that ancient night.
Could He be homeless once more?
No place for His head – see these people the same!
And see how they roam past my door.

“This is my personal opinion, but I do believe we are creating, little by little, a Charles Dicken’s world [of forgotten persons] in America. It need not be. Let us seek to make room in our hearts ... for Him in them this Christmastide, and help to turn it around for Christ’s dear sake.”

– Rev. Robert H. Crilley

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 22

Diane Marsom

© 2011

*Psalms 18:1-20 & 147:12-20; 2 Samuel 7:18-29;
Galatians 3:1-14; Luke 1:57-66; Psalms 126 & 62*

Christmas has changed in many ways through the years. Just in my lifetime, it has gone from a celebration that started Thanksgiving Day, with a big parade and a Lions game in Detroit, to stores pushing the season before Halloween. It has become a huge money maker for the merchants, the same ones that will no longer greet you with a “Merry Christmas” in fear that they may offend one of their potential customers.

Instead of celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, people are in a hurry to get all their wish lists fulfilled. In their haste they become cranky and appear to miss the “peace on earth, goodwill toward men” message that the season used to bring. Their thoughts are more directed toward fighting over the latest toy sensation for their children than in taking care of those in need. What has happened to the true Christmas spirit?

In the *These Days* devotion for today, it says to stay focused, focused on the true meaning of Christmas. Although many things do change through the years, one thing will never change: Christmas is all about the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. It is about the celebration of life, *“...a life through Christ Jesus to a life above.”* (Philippians 3:14).

Enjoy the Christmas season, stay focused on its true meaning, celebrate, and have a Merry Christmas.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 23

Rev. Lloyd Hall

© 2011

Psalms 102 & 148; Jeremiah 31:10-14;

Galatians 3:15-22; Luke 1:67-80 or Matthew 1:1-17; Psalms 130 & 16

Galatians 3:15-22 *"...the law, which came four hundred and thirty years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God."*

The problem Paul addressed in his letter was not entirely new at the time, nor has it gone away. The seemingly inescapable temptation of religion is for us to believe that the truth we "discover" must (1) be defended against any further enlightenment and (2) be the standard by which we judge our fellow religious sojourners.

Christmas is an excellent time to remember that what God has done cannot be "annulled" by personal or institutional religion. When we focus on the birth of Jesus, we turn our attention away from the minutia of doctrine, creed, and denomination, remembering that God's covenant with us is in Christ alone. It's not about believing, saying, or even doing as much as it is about experiencing God's act: Immanuel, God with us.

There are those in our lives whom we love, and love deeply. We know that it is not really what we can tell of their appearance, their generosity, their credentials, or their roles that matters. "For better or for worse," as the ancient wedding ceremony goes – what matters is their unwavering presence in our lives. God calls us to Bethlehem for nothing less.

A PRAYER: God, as we come to the birthplace, help us to see. Spare us from the limitations of our parochial interpretations and the projections of our personal needs. Deliver us from the temptation to think that this is about us and not about You. Give us joyful and grateful hearts, remembering that You came because You love us and not because we have earned that love. When WE celebrate, when WE perform our rites, when WE tell the story again – please, Lord, be with us then.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

December 24

Rev. Larry McMellen

© 2011

Psalms 90 & 149; Isaiah 60:1-6;

Galatians 3:23 - 4:7; Matthew 1:18-25; Psalms 80 & 72

Think 'Christmas Eve' and your memory could be overloaded with far too many experiences to process! So I ask you to keep all those in the background, adding just the right understanding of the "reason for the season," as we check into the Apostle Paul's explanation of what God has accomplished through the Christ Event.

To do that, I want to consider phrases from Paul's letter to the Galatians that not only add significance and wonder about God's awesome gift that Christmas highlights, but also opens a door to understanding what it could mean to each person.

Consider the enormous number of years implied in "...when the fulfillment of time came, God sent His Son" (Galatians 4:4). Creation, human history, the people of God, kingdoms, empires, languages, roads and ships, and NOW the fulfillment of time came! We will celebrate Christmas Eve duly awed by the wonder of God's control of history and time.

While we ponder the manger scene and watch the Mother tenderly care for the Child, we begin to answer the question "What child is this?" with earth-changing understandings! Hold that thought and hear Paul say, "You are all God's children...all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:26, 27) "...so we could be adopted...you are no longer a slave but a son or daughter." (Galatians 4:4, 5, 7)

By the grace of God, we are made one with the Christ! God shares with each of us the glory, the wonder, the love, and the fulfillment of what happens on Christmas Eve. There is no greater gift. Unwrap it with care, renew your baptism and celebrate Christmas Eve!

[Back to Table of Contents](#)