



ADVENT

Memorial Chapel at UCW, photo by Frank Laski

A Devotional Booklet for the Season of Advent - 2017 The Union Church in Waban

ADVENT

ABOUT THIS BOOK

From Pastor Stacy Swain

In the Christian liturgical year, Advent is a time of preparation and waiting. We are to ready ourselves to receive again on Christmas the gift of God's love made manifest in the person of Jesus.

This booklet is intended as a resource to you as you move through these four weeks in Advent and make your way to the manger.

The booklet is arranged in four sections corresponding to the four weeks in Advent. I encourage you to take your time and make your way slowly through the pages. You will find an opening with Scripture, followed by reflections of those among us, and each section concludes with a prayer.

I invite you to go slowly through the readings each week. Read with your heart as well as your mind. Listen for an invitation that may be present to you this season.

May this booklet be a blessing to us in this time of preparation.

For All Ages — Suggestions for Using this Booklet with Children **From Rev. Amy Clark Feldman**

In this booklet, we have also included pages called "For All Ages." On these pages the prayers, activities and songs are age-appropriate for children, as well as adults.

If you have an Advent Wreath at home, you may want use this booklet as you light each candle. The scripture passages, all-age prayers and songs can accompany your weekly candle-lighting. If you don't have an Advent Wreath, but would like to try lighting candles this year, know that you can use any four candles to create one (perhaps tying 3 purple and 1 pink ribbon around them to symbolize the colors of Advent, or placing them on purple/pink construction paper "coasters"). You can even make a wreath out of paper, adding yellow paper flames to the "candles" each week. Of course, you don't need a wreath to share the scripture stories, prayers, songs and ideas!

However you journey though Advent this season, we hope you (and the kids in your life) enjoy this booklet and find it a helpful companion on your walk toward the Hope, Peace, Joy and Love of the manger.

HOPE

WEEK 1 - READINGS AND A PRAYER

Reading 1 - Isaiah 64:1-9

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence-- as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil-- to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. 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. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.



Art: Mary and Joseph
2011 Scott Laumann

Reading 2 — Mark 13:24-37

“But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake--for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

A Prayer for Hope

Holy One, When our eyes are heavy and so are our hearts, when we see more endings than beginnings, and when we have lost the Way and do not know where to turn, come to us.

Kindle your Hope in our hearts.

Have its warmth awaken our own compassion for ourselves and for the world.

Have its light bring delight into our lives again. Have it take us by the hand and lead us home to you.

In the name of the one who brings us Hope we pray, Amen.

HOPE

WEEK 1 - REFLECTION

Reflection—Advent 2017: A Contradiction in Terms? By Priscilla Lasmarias Kelso

How do we reconcile the “irrational season” of current events with the timeless story of the birth of Jesus? How many Advent seasons have I been through when a cyclone devastated the Philippines or children were murdered at a school in Connecticut? It is 2017 and the news has not improved --- one more government scandal exposed, more saber-rattling about nuclear arms, catastrophic weather, church worshippers killed with automatic weapons. The list is long and the mind is numb.

In 1919, in the aftermath of the first World War, the poet, William Butler Yeats, wrote: “Things fall apart/ The center cannot hold....The best lack conviction/ While the worst are full of passionate intensity....And what rough beast ... slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?”

In A.D. 55, the Gospel writer recorded this: “Do not be afraid, for see -- I am bringing you good news for all the people” -- a proclamation of hope despite Herod on the throne, bad government using taxation to oppress people’s lives, the murder of infants decreed by a deranged ruler.

In an ironic juxtaposition of today’s current events and the historical background of Jesus’ birth, I find some hope in knowing that the worst of times can also co-exist with the best of times. In the mire of human sin, hope is not completely lost. In the ashes of history’s sad record of pillage and plunder, the voices of hope have not been completely silenced.

Jesus came into a messy world. It is 2017 and we’re still trying to make sense of society’s short-falls. Perhaps as I slug through the bad news that rattles my sensibilities and breaks my heart, I can also claim the countervailing fact that Christ is here to stay in our beleaguered planet – and intends to love us till the end of time.

That is my Advent hope – in the midst of all the contradictions and the dissonant voices that tend to drown and compete with the original song of the angels about a holy birth for a needy world.



HOPE

WEEK 1 - REFLECTION

Hope

by Bob Pazmiño

There is much in our nation and world during our Advent season 2017 that can lead to a sense of hopelessness and even despair as we consider the problems and challenges confronting us today. Yet the coming of Jesus Christ into this troubled world invites us to consider the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 5:5: “And hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” The coming of God’s Son as the fullest expression of love and his later sending of the Holy Spirit into our lives assures us of another perspective and another Comforter to journey with us.

One great teacher of the Christian faith tradition, Augustine of Hippo observed that “Hope has two lovely daughters, anger and courage. Anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they need not remain as they are.” Besides Jesus and Paul in this faith tradition, Augustine stands as a highly influential teacher, though flawed, over the centuries. This quote from Augustine has impacted my thoughts this season because I too have two lovely daughters, one by birth and one by marriage. Rebekah is my daughter by birth. She is an attorney who advocates for the needs of those marginalized in the area of criminal defense in New York City. Larisa is my daughter by marriage. She was a development officer and grants writer for “Facing History and Ourselves” that is an international educational organization whose mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and anti-Semitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed society. She is currently working in the higher education field. Larisa is also the mother of my two grandchildren. When I think of my daughters’ lives and their vocational commitments I think of hope for the future where the common good and need of others leads to lives of service in the wider community. How is it possible to foster hope for our children, youth, and young adults in their life choices and vocations? I think the expression of rage in the life of local and global communities is related to a sense of hopelessness that many young people may be experiencing in their lives and in a world preoccupied with numerous fears and persistent injustice and violence recounted in the news each day.

Our Christian faith offers an alternative and fosters a sense of hope for persons, families, groups and communities. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians described the experiences of persons before coming to faith as “having no hope and without God in the world.” (Eph 2:12) In his influential work *Race Matters*, Cornel West advocated for a politics of conversion that provides “a chance for people to believe there is hope for the future and a meaning to struggle” that religious faith provides for all persons. Certainly, Black lives matter and all lives matter. This was also the message of the prophet Jeremiah to those exiles in Babylon: “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” Because of Advent and Christmas we have a future of hope gifted to us by God in Christ that sustains us in this broken and beautiful world.

A two-week visit to China back in 2000 with a group from Andover Newton Theological School convinced me again of a living hope as evidenced in the lives of Chinese Christians. They were sustained through the great trials of the Cultural Revolution as their churches and seminaries have now reopened or have been newly built to accommodate increasing numbers of youth and young adults with their spiritual hunger and calling. This hunger is being satisfied in the teaching and living of faith communities that both forms persons and allows a place for questions and doubts.

(continued on next page)

Hope by Bob Pazmiño (continued)

Christian teaching, as in a confirmation experience, extends a formative ministry to enable followers of Jesus to mature in their faith and to express their faith commitments in the world. Initially this teaching includes the opportunity to explore and consider faith among a wide variety of options in a pluralistic world. Christian teachers honor the place of questions and doubts as opportunities to wrestle with the full implications of any topic under discussion. Dialogue in the Christian tradition enables persons to consider loving God, neighbor and all of creation where hope extends into all of life with its ever-present challenges today.

Celebrating Advent and Christmas this year is an inherently hopeful invitation. It encourages us all to see, imagine and dream what God hopes for humanity and all of creation. It offers the possibility of new ventures of faith to those at different points in their life journeys. My reflections represent the hope of a grandfather who longs for a better day for his grandchildren and all grandchildren globally. But much more, it represents an abiding assurance of God's active involvement in the human drama from creation to consummation evidenced for Christians in the coming of Jesus the Christ and his anticipated Second Coming. The writer of First John makes a noteworthy connection: "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure." (1 John 3:2-3) This Jesus has begotten through adoption many children and grandchildren of faith and here is an abiding source of joy that offers hope to all generations.



Detail from Memorial Chapel — Frank Laski

HOPE

WEEK 1 - BLESSING

A Blessing for the Journey —

Advent arrives so quickly it seems and so now we wait.
We wait with the joy of a baby to be born.
The Prince of Peace.
The love this brings, the anticipation of hope and joy and peace.

A young couple..travelers..following a star?
Not knowing where it will lead them, or us.
Their journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem then on to Bethlehem.
Dusty roads and a long lonely path.
Guided by a star.

A star that glitters in the night... so clear that night
that Mary and Joseph were offered a stable to rest.
With child she gave us hope, love, peace and joy.

But how can this be?
A baby born in a stable?
We have heard this story and with so many questions...
Questions we ask through our lifetime
and with the hope, love, joy and peace we look for in our lives.

Maybe we can start with one. Maybe Joy.
Maybe that will lead to hope and then peace and then love? No particular order.
This child has started something big –
Let us hope and be joyful with the peace of love.
And with that same star may it hold the same guidance in all of us to follow.

And so, “in the same way, let your light shine before others
So that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father
In Heaven.” (Dear Libby)
Merry Christmas to all, may that star twinkle now and then so that we may find
peace in our hearts. — Deb McGovern



HOPE



It is the first week of the journey of Advent, a journey through four weeks of wonder and waiting. It is a journey of preparing — not just our homes, but our hearts and our whole selves — to welcome Jesus again, and to open ourselves to receive anew the gifts of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.

As we look ahead with HOPE at the season, and are invited to pause and consider our path to the manger this season. How and with whom will we journey this season? What baggage or expectations do we carry with us?

LIGHT THE CANDLE OF HOPE: Tonight in our homes — and hearts — we light the first candle of Advent, the Candle of Hope, as we sing *O Come Emmanuel, God Among Us*, praying that God will light our path back to the manger this Advent. Light the candle as you sing and pray.



SING: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.

O come, O Wisdom from on high,
who ordered all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show
and teach us in its ways to go. **Refrain**

Ideas for This Week:

- Make an Advent Wreath at Union Church or find 4 candles (real or out of construction paper!) and prepare your own wreath at home
- Light the first candle together as you sing *O Come Emmanuel* and take turns reading this week's Scripture and Prayer
- Choose a mitten (or two or three!) from The Union Church Mitten Tree and find gifts that will bring Joy and Hope to our neighbors in need.



PRAY

May this Advent season be more than busyness and buying;
More than candy and candles.
May we travel with the shepherds,
wait with the magi,
wonder with Joseph,
ponder with Mary,
sing with the angels
and open what we have
with the innkeeper.

May we live out your nativity
today,
tomorrow,
and every day following.
For we believe, O God,
this is not just a story
on a page of the Bible,
but a celebration
of you becoming human
to save us,
show us,
call us
to live your Way.

May we respond to your love
like the shepherds,
follow it like the magi,
trust your love like Mary and Joseph,
celebrate like the angels
and share it like the innkeeper.
Today we can only say thanks
and tell you, O God,
we will share this love and hope
with the world.
AMEN

From Spillbeans.org.uk

PEACE

WEEK 2 - READINGS AND A POEM

Reading 1 - Isaiah 40: 1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. 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.



Cover Art from Story Warren

Reading 2 - Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The Peace of Wild Things by Wendell Berry

Offered by Mark Smith

When despair for the world grows in me
And I wake in the night at the last sound
In fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
Rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
Who do not tax their lives with forethought
Of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
Waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world and am free.

PEACE

WEEK 2 - REFLECTION

JOSEPH, MAN OF PURPOSE

By Bart Kelso

“Joseph. . . did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took Mary as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.” (Matthew 1:24-25)

Of the four Gospel writers, only Matthew and Luke tell us of the events leading up to Jesus' birth. But the contrasts between the two are striking. Luke peoples his account with a broad cast of characters. In chapter one we meet the old priest Zechariah, his aged wife Elizabeth, a flock of their relatives and neighbors, the angel Gabriel, young Mary herself, and even the infant John the Baptist. All of them, knowingly or otherwise, play their part in Luke's drama of the Incarnation.

By contrast, Matthew's stage is sparse. In chapter one he spotlights a single figure: “Joseph the [not yet] husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Christ”(1:16).

Both writers show their subjects trying to deal faithfully with the unexpected: Mary's pregnancy by the Holy Spirit. Matthew shows Joseph planning to break off their engagement “quietly,” to spare Mary public disgrace. that word “quietly” points to another contrast. While Luke's characters express their faith and wonderment in prophecy, conversation and song, Matthew records not a word, not a syllable, from Joseph. Instead, his actions speak for him, revealing his character; and they show him to be obedient to God, honorable, unselfish, caring and strong.

Here indeed is a man for God's purposes: as Mary's loving and supporting husband, as one fit to father the child Jesus, and as one worthy of our emulation.



Green Shores

By Brian Donovan

While skipping down the shores of green
Twin hearts as one so clearly seen
The novel nuptials surely sung
In celebration of the young
Such lust for life like when a teen

The blinding carnal love between
(Passion kisses are what I mean)
Can steal the breath from very Lung
While skipping down the shores of green

The future table may be lean
So remember the day that's been
As sometimes life is like the dung
When relationships may be hung
But together you're strong and keen
While skipping down the shores of green

A Prayer:

As the winter solstice draws near, the days grow shorter and darker. This reminds us to seek our inner light, which is waiting to come forth.

**BLAZE FORTH, OH LIGHT OF GOD
THAT NEVER FAILS.**

By Gerry Elion



PEACE

An Advent Reflection by Rick Chrisman

Advent—the approach, the arrival.

A time of waiting.

And waiting for a baby is, like, forever.

Waiting reminds us we are always waiting,

Always partly lost partly found,

Waiting for the Temple veil to be torn aside and know the full presence of God.

Mary waits. And Mary knows.

I am waiting, because, I *don't* know.

Don't know whether Dante will trump Trump.

(Why are poets necessary but never sufficient?)

Would like to know, wheresoever do men put Love?

(Trump recalls Weinstein recalls Cosby recalls Woods recalls Polanski recalls..)

Don't know whether our national Memory is ever honest enough.

(All monuments lie, except for one.)

Just can't know if Reparations will ever come to pass.

(Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod..!)

Don't know that I have ever closed the distance between Thought and Action.

(Does preaching about civil rights count as an action?)

Don't know either, whether I'll ever become what I imagined I was.

(If only aspirations were achievements!)

Joseph waits. He knows too!

They know who's coming, their baby, who he is.

He arrives, and then after those startling visits to the Temple,

After some surprising manifestations on hillsides, shorelines,

Having sat down for meals, an intimate with astonished strangers,

Having arrived, he goes again,

Leaves me, waiting,

Waiting for a promised second advent

Till when? I remain partly lost partly found,

Waiting forever without knowing,

Yet ever living, somehow, in Christ.

PEACE



We light the second candle of Advent: The Candle of Peace. We journey with Mary and Joseph to the manger. Sometimes the journey isn't easy. It can feel like we'll never get there. Sometimes we get lost, take the wrong path, or feel tired or scared. There are times when we miss the people who used to walk with us that aren't with us anymore. Through it all, we can know that we are not alone. We can find comfort and courage, knowing that God walks with us, leading us to the Peace of the manger. We can share God's Peace by sharing the journey and walking with others.



SING: Let There Be Peace On Earth

Let there be peace on earth,
And let it begin with me.
Let there be peace on earth,
The peace that is meant to be.

With God as Creator,
We are family,
Let us walk with each other,
In perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me,
Let this be the moment now.
With every step I take,
Let this be my joyous vow.

To take each moment,
And live each moment
In peace eternally,
Let there be peace on earth,
And let it begin with me.

Ideas for This Week:

- Light the second candle of Advent, the Candle of Peace. Read Luke 3:1-6; Pray and Sing.
- Go for a walk in nature—breathe, listen, notice God's creatures and beauty around you. How is God preparing you and your family for your journey this season?
- Watch *A Charlie Brown Christmas: The Meaning of Christmas* (If viewing online, [CLICK HERE TO LINK](#))



PRAY

'Let me tell you how I love you,'
goes the song of God,
a song that never ends,
instead becoming more elaborate
as time goes on.

The God of love
goes to extremes
to show us how
we are loved beyond measure.

God never tires
of finding new ways,
revealing to us
when least expected
the height,
and depth,
and width
of Love.

And, just when we think
we've got the message,
we are stunned again
by the enormity of such love
that pursues us
to the ends of the earth,
stopping us in our tracks,
in our daily grind
compelling us
to look up and wonder,
and be filled with hope
and with joy and peace
as we bask
in God's love for us.

Loving God, thank you! AMEN

From Spillbeans.org.uk

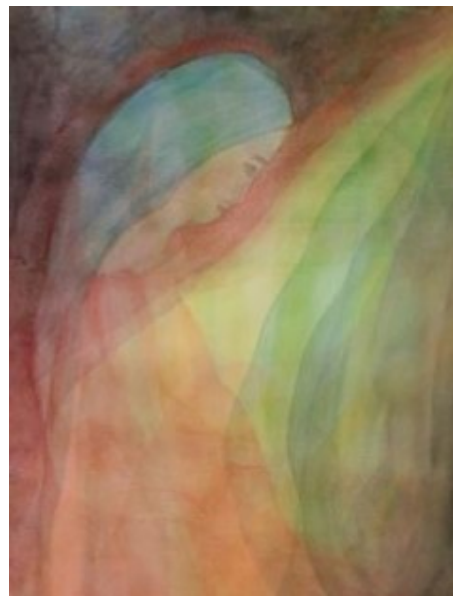
JOY

WEEK 3 - READINGS

Reading 1 - Isaiah 62:1-4, 8-11

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, 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. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed. 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. 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.



Art by Nicole Besack

Reading 2 - John 1: 6-8, 19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

JOY

WEEK 3- REFLECTION

Recollections of a Most Difficult Year **By Nancy J. Laste**

This past year has been a difficult one. It seems like everywhere you look there is anger, aggression and pain. Hatred and exclusion seem to be front and center. I feel like I don't recognize the world that I have been living in and the people I have been living alongside. Everywhere there is tragedy: human suffering in all corners of the world, natural disasters on a scale never before seen and repeat gun violence...but through it all, I have felt his presence. I hear it in the little anthems running through my head. After the election it was "Where do we go from here?" (You must love me). From there in the wake of the disasters and tragedy it has been "Amazing Grace". I have also found solace on social media (Facebook) where I rapidly found those who were like minded and discovered concrete ways to try and make a difference. This community has allowed me to feel less alone. I have tried to use my voice. I have had the conversations (about Black Lives Matter, about kneeling at Football games, about Criminal Justice reform, about hunger and homelessness, about mental illness). Maybe I have made a difference, maybe not... but I am always trying. As a family we talk and we try to "walk the talk"... and we pray. Somehow amid all this despair I have felt a guiding light so strong that tells me what is next. I am seeing little bursts of color as the shoots come up from these seeds of kindness that so many have lovingly sowed. Now my anthem has switched to "We Shall Overcome". I am starting to feel a warmth that suggests maybe the sun will shine on us all again.

It has been an interesting time to be a woman. To find that over 50% of Caucasian woman voted for our current president was shocking and eye opening. Initially it felt like a big blow. But soon came the women's marches that took place all over the world. What a moving experience it was to attend with my sister and the two of my three children that decided they wanted to make signs and be part of the day. The call to action and future candidacy was heard around the world. Apathy and inaction have yielded their just rewards. Now we have the #metoo campaign, and with it another issue that divides people (Is she really telling the truth?). Again I have found myself needing to explain why yes, in fact, many of us were (and still are) victims of power inequalities and might not speak out or may even forget it happened. I choose to see this is a healing process, that the only way to rid the healthy tissue of disease is to open up the diseased parts and let them see the light of day. Let each of us take the time to examine our own behaviors (in humor, in action, in accepting excuses) and raise the standards. The bar needs to be raised and we need to hold each other accountable for basic human decency.

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Recollections of a Most Difficult Year by Nancy J. Laste (continued)

I remember a few years back when I was having a particularly difficult time and it felt like everything was going wrong. It became almost comical how even the little things were raining down on me. I remember one day when life felt particularly difficult, I was listening to Joel Osteen (TV Evangelical with a megachurch in Texas) and he was talking about how when you were struggling, it was God that had you in his slingshot and was pulling you back. So the further back or down you were pulled, the deeper the despair, the greater you would be flung into all that is good in the future. Soon after, I was released into a better place than I had ever been before. So I am hoping that maybe the world is in God's slingshot right now and that we are going to arrive in times that are more fulfilling than ever before. In seeing the ugliness of the world, and no longer being able to deny that ugliness, we are made aware. Then we can look within and we can find the Mission inside all of us to do God's work. To right what is wrong. To fight for those who cannot fight for themselves. To listen and to seek to understand and then be understood and try to unite and find solutions. As TRUE Christians, let's speak out against those who bear false witness in the name of Jesus. Together we walk, we sing, we march, we kneel and we pray...

While I face the holidays, I am so thankful for my family by birth and my family by choice. I am healthy and well and able to face the challenges that God has in store for me. I am strong and I am good and I live in his image. We all must rise to the challenge of living in this most extraordinary time. I am grateful to you, my Church Family for indulging my ramblings. I look forward to hearing about the anthems you have running through your head...



JOY

Reflection

For the Lives of All Children by Alan Cody

The announcement of our conversations about “growing together for good” made me wonder what has been meaningful to me throughout my life and what do I hope to change in this world? I thought of the heartbreak that I feel every time I read of a child without loving parents, or one who is hungry or sick! When I saw a picture recently of a desperately malnourished child in Africa, I had to stop and think, how could this be happening in our world with all the joy and promises of life that could come from loving parents, siblings, education and a chance to grow. Their suffering and loss of the kind of childhood that I am so grateful to have had is especially hard for me to understand in this season of our joyous celebrations.

I am thankful for all the blessings given to me by my parents, brother, sister, son and beloved fiancée, but also sad that my childhood has passed and my parents are gone. As I begin this Advent Season and Christmas, I am really glad to have rediscovered the scripture passage below reminding me to become a child again and welcome all children to a Kingdom of God without fear, hunger, illness or lack of love. More than ever I pray for the faith and hope to do whatever I can, together with those I love, in this Advent and thereafter, to remove the stumbling blocks that remain for so many children in the world today, more than two millennia since Christ spoke these words below. That hope is the gift of this Advent for me.

Bible Passage: Matthew 18: 2-6

He called a child whom he put among them, and said “Truly I tell you, that unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.”



JOY

A POEM FOR ADVENT

TO FIND THE CHILD

Where is the child
We left behind
In our becoming
And unfolding lives

Whose seasons of anticipation
And nurturing love
Welcomed us
To lives so blessed

What child will come
To us this Advent Season
To renew again our
Joyful narrative of life

Each child Christ
Puts among us
Will show us
Heaven's Kingdom

When we seek
With humble heart
And grace to restore
Life's promise

To every child a home
With food and health
And love of family
That never ends

And leave none
With any impediments
To a life as blessed
As we have had

- Alan M. Cody

JOY

Sonnet to Christmas

By Sandra DaDalt

HOPE is the angel announcing his birth;
With the multitudes, her song becomes clear.
They brighten the sky with heralding mirth,
That whisks away the centuries of fear.

JOY is the star perched high in the sky.
With streams of light radiating to earth,
She marks dusty paths to the babe most high,
Who sleeps in a barn to hide his true worth.

LOVE is the mother quiet, meek, and mild;
So humbly born, she brought life to a king.
No silks no satins to swaddle the child;
All she can give is tender embracing.

May your Joy and Hope and Love never cease;
Welcome, alleluia, the Prince of PEACE.



JOY

FOR ALL AGES



We light the third candle of Advent: The Candle of Joy! This week we remember Mary's Joy in saying 'Yes!' to God's special call for her. We can remember that when Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth, Elizabeth's baby leaps for Joy inside her womb. We can feel the Joy of our own journey through Advent, knowing that Christmas will soon be here! It is a Joy born from the Love and Peace and Hope that Mary's little baby will bring into the world.



SING: Joy to the World

Joy to the world
The Lord has come
Let earth receive her King
Let every heart prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and heaven and nature sing

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.

Ideas for This Week:

- Light the third candle of Advent, the Candle of Joy. Read the story of Mary, the Angel and Elizabeth (Luke I). Pray and Sing.
- Dance with Joy! Looking for an Advent soundtrack? You can listen to kids' music, *Rain for Roots: Waiting Songs* for Advent at: rainforroots.bandcamp.com/album/waiting-songs. Scroll to the bottom to find the full songs for free.
- Watch: *The Christmas Story*, created by St. Paul's Church, Auckland, New Zealand

(If Online: [CLICK HERE TO LINK](#))



PRAY

*One leader reads, and then all respond with the **BOLD** together*

When God had a job, the angel said

All: YES!

When God needed help, Mary said

All: YES!

When she heard the news, Elizabeth said

All: YES!

Lord God, when you have a job and when you need help, may we always say

All: YES!

Help us, like the angel, to share the good news of your love; help us, like Mary, to carry the good news of your love; and help us, like Elizabeth, to rejoice in the good news of your love so that everyone who hears it will shout

ALL: YES!

AMEN!

From Spillbeans.org.uk



LOVE

WEEK 4 - READINGS

Reading 1 - 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you." But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in?

I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

Reading 2 - Luke 1: 26-38

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

LOVE

WEEK 4 - REFLECTION

Adventurous

Hope, peace, love and joy

Nicaragua Union Church

By David Spertner

I was offered a chance to write something for Advent and realized I wanted a better understanding of Advent before I put my pen to paper. It seems Advent is the time for preparing ourselves and reminding ourselves about all the good things to come and that come with the birth of Jesus.

I have been at the church for about 10 years and this concept of waiting and preparing struck me funny as this church puts its **Hope, Peace, Love** and **Joy** into unrelenting action with a grace and steadfastness that truly displays the work of God.

As write this, I am sitting in the small seaside village of San Juan del Sur and can reflect on what this ministry means and how I relate it to Advent. The fifteen year church journey alongside the people of Nicaragua has certainly been a blessing.

There has been **Hope** that things will get better there by clean water projects, improved access to books, formal educational opportunities and our commitment of caring for our Nicaraguan friends in many different ways.

There has been **Peace** with prayers and song, side by side, sometimes not understanding the English or Spanish in a church in another country.

There has been **Love** in many ways. By getting to know families and people in a deep and meaningful way. By seeing them grow up, rooting them on — from a 12-year-old boy who carried in your suitcase and spoke no English to the same boy going into his second year of college to become an architect (Andy Gomes) and conversing nicely. By seeing our church-sponsored student (Yarisleidy) graduate, become a dedicated and smart community leader and an amazing friend to many. And even one by the formality of marriage.

(continued on next page)

Adventurous: Hope, peace, love and joy, Nicaragua Union Church (continued)

And there has been **Joy**. The joy in working together, celebrating together, the joy of getting to know new people through sharing a meal, playing kickball, soccer, reading some books in Spanish or just smiling at each other even when we cannot communicate in the same language. The joy of human connection has been vast, deep and seemingly always growing.

It seems **Hope, Peace, Love and Joy** are all intertwined throughout the stories, connections and ministry of Nicaragua, both with each other in the church group and between us and our good friends in Nicaragua.

So although **Advent** may be a time of preparing and waiting, there is no time like the present for kindness, **Hope, Peace, Love and Joy** to be spread around the corner and around the world.



LOVE

Advent Reflection **by Soo Laski**

As we walk through this season of Advent, we are reminded of God's promise of hope, peace, joy, and love, all of which our 1K partnership with Sandra Okiror from Wham's Cafe in Lowell represents.

We faithfully embarked on this journey trusting in God, and hoping that even with our limited expertise in micro loans, we would find a good partner. Little did we know that we would find a partner in Frank Carvalho, who has worked with many in need of business advocacy and willingly shared his expertise with us and blessed our ministry abundantly. Because of Frank's support and guidance, even when the process of finding an appropriate loan recipient was taking longer than expected, we were all at peace that a match would be found, according to God's will.

After studying the Bible, engaging in prayer together, and many months of waiting, we joyously celebrate that we have developed a beautiful and life-giving partnership with Sandra, a restaurant owner who wanted to expand in order to continue her community work. Her love of people and community is one of hope and joy.

Thanks be to God, whose love overflows and for a Congregation who was ready to engage in the 1K process.



LOVE

Forgive me!

When Stacy asked whether I wanted to write something for the Advent booklet, she gave me the usual four choices for topics: Hope, Peace, Love and Joy. And for the longest time, I couldn't figure out what to write about because I just couldn't find the right topic. But in the end, I decided to approach this like I do with desserts: Just take a bite of everything. So forgive me for not quite following the rules....

As some of you may know, forgiveness is a topic that is on my mind a lot. First of all, as a good calvinist, I do believe we are all born sinners and can only be saved by God's forgiveness and grace. Reflecting on my actions and inactions every Sunday morning during our "Prayer for God's Grace" is one of the more important parts of my weekly ritual. But forgiveness has also been important to me this year because of the trials for two of my assailants from three years ago, causing me to reflect more on forgiveness and on my own ability to forgive others. This is what I learned.

Forgiveness creates Hope. Forgiveness leads to new beginnings because you've allowed to close the book on the old. And that is true both for yourself or the other person.

Forgiveness creates Peace. How could we ever achieve peace if we are not able to forgive the other? Without forgiveness, we will remain divided.

Forgiveness creates Love. Who has not needed the forgiveness of a loved one? And then felt that love come back again through the act of forgiveness?

Forgiveness creates Joy. Forgiveness allows you to let go of any bitterness. And that opens you up for joy.

Jesus died on the cross for us on Good Friday for the forgiveness of our sins. I can not think of more beautiful symmetry with Christmas. All the Hope, Peace, Love and Joy that make up the birth of Jesus comes pouring over us in the form of forgiveness at his death and resurrection.

So maybe this advent is a time to find forgiveness and create all those powerful ingredients. Whether it is people you need to forgive, or people you need to ask to forgive you. You don't need to do it in person, they can even be deceased, as long as you do it with your whole heart. And remember, the most important and most difficult person you may have to forgive is yourself.....

Merry Christmas!
Jaap van Reijendam

LOVE

Just Imagine

by Jay O'Bierne

You have opened a new EVITE on your PC and find an invitation to you to a very, very important man's birthday party. Although he owns everything, he wants to celebrate with you. What do you bring him as a gift? You have to bring him something. Something special. Something he'll cherish. WHAT TO GET?

Christmas is Jesus' birthday, and you're invited to be there. We know He has everything. We also know He wants us to love one another. So let's hand-make that love during Advent by "little acts of kindness." Each day we work on our Christmas gift to God by building a spiritual Advent calendar of loving others. Those who fret us, love them back. Those who hate us, pray for them back. Daily do a good deed and don't tell anyone you did it.

When Advent ends at Christmas your gift of daily Advent love will be a perfect gift to Jesus. Just imagine Him saying to you, "IT'S JUST WHAT I WANTED ON MY BIRTHDAY!"

Sun and Moon

By Brian Donovan

The sun with rays of gold does shine her light
To glimmer away darkness in this life
The moon, the calm, the quiet guarding knight
A conscious beacon, charity is rife

When Sun she rises beginning the game
A chase across the sky – for ages tied
The Moon in lead, or following - the same
A brilliant expression of love – denied

Than celestials cast to human shape
This sunlit bride, who's touched by heaven's kiss
This moonlit groom, that's brushed by nightly cape
And destined purpose, becomes wedded bliss

The pursuing of heaven's love now done
By Gods own craft both hearts have become one

LOVE

Why the heart when we think of Love

by: Brian Donovan

Why chocolate to woo
And companions you knew

Why wedded bliss,
And children we miss
as they head out the door.
A feeling so bold it begins at your core.

Why the playful dance
Of the unconditional stance

So - then
Why the
heart when we think
of Love - when seven
words
define
that
above

Words of Greek

Eros and Philia
Pragma, Storge, and Philautia
Ludus and Agape all
Define Love over-all

Yet, in

Seven

Letters we can say the

Grecian words to-day:

God

Love

So, why the heart when we think of Love?



LOVE

A Story for Advent

I went to visit Beulah recently at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, where she has spent much of the day, every day since July 14th. I walked into the Neonatal Intensive Ward and there she was, holding her preemie daughter Daveen in her arms nursing, with only a breathing tube. This summer when I first visited her, after the baby was born, Daveen was twenty-three weeks, she weighed 1 pound, 2 ounces. She was the smallest baby I have ever seen, you could hold her in one hand. At 23 weeks the high tech incubator took over the work of Beulah's womb, and Beulah carried her through her presence and prayers day after day, week after week, and slowly she gained ounces and then pounds. Beulah told me with tears in her eyes, she now weighs over six pounds, and all is well! Her daughter is the youngest surviving preemie in the hospital's history! Daveen is a miracle, but the steady, faithful daily presence of Beulah, the patience, the love of being able to be with what is without knowing what the next day would bring was no less wondrous.

A month ago another woman in the neonatal unit had delivered a very premature baby, two and half pounds and she was in a very bad state. The nurses asked if Beulah might talk to her. The woman could not enter her baby's presence with anything but fear. She asked Beulah, "How do you keep your spirits up, how do you keep coming to be with your baby without bringing in all the heaviness of this time of deep uncertainty? How did you find a way to be joyful in her presence?"

Beulah said this to her. "Each and every day I would walk into the hospital and ask, "Is she breathing?" They would say, "Yes." And then I would ask, "Has she moved a limb, an arm, a leg?" And they would say, "Yes." And each day I said, "Praise the spirit of life moving in her." And then I sat with her, sang to her, prayed for her, talked to her, touched her when I could --- and then I just waited and prayed."

Not all stories in the neonatal intensive care unit end in joy. Tragic deaths happen, and none of us is protected from bad things happening to us sometime. Beulah lived knowing her baby had a five percent chance of surviving, still she chose to focus on the good of each day, to celebrate the life which was given to her, precious and fragile, though it was and to love her the best she could. Advent is a time of waiting in the dark, hoping without knowing the outcome. We wait trusting in the dark of unknowing and the uncertainty that the spirit of life can move in us, through us and all around us and will break through at the most unexpected of times.



Prayer: Holy One, whose spirit moves in the darkness, breathe your spirit of life and trust in us in times of unknowing and fear. Awaken within us the assurance that You are with us no matter what. Amen

Brita Gill-Austern

LOVE

FOR ALL AGES



Our Advent Journey is almost at an end; our holy waiting is almost over. This week we light the Fourth Candle of Advent: The Candle of Love.. This week we celebrate Love — God’s great Love, for us and for the world, shown to us in a humble manger and in the life of Jesus. As we light the candle of Love, we can pray that the light of God’s Love will shine brightly in us and through us — Lighting up our lives and the lives of those around us, as brightly as a star over a manger.



PRAY

Dear God:

Thank you for the lovely presents.
For the dawn sky
unravelling in pinks and purples.
For the night sky
opening to a scattering of glitter.
For winter days
wrapped in sparkling white
or draped in rich brown.

For family and friends
of all shapes, sizes and talents.
For all that we have received
through the kindness of others.

Most of all we thank you,
this special season
this almost-Christmas Day,
for the gift of your son, Jesus.
We know how much it cost you.
We know how priceless he is.

Dear God
thank you for the lovely present
that knows our past
and points to our future.
May we treasure him
with hands and with hearts
not just today, not just this season,
but every day.
Amen.

From Spillbeans.org.uk



SING: The Friendly Beasts* (or your favorite Carol)

Ideas For This Week:

Jesus our brother kind and good
Was humbly born in a stable rude
And the friendly beasts
 around Him stood
Jesus our brother, kind and good

I said the donkey, all shaggy and brown
I carried His mother up hill and down
I carried His mother to Bethlehem Town
I said the donkey, all shaggy and brown

I said the cow, all white and red
I gave Him my manger for His bed
I gave Him my hay to pillow His head
I said the cow, all white and red

I said the sheep, with curly horn
I gave Him my wool for a blanket warm
He wore my coat on Christmas morn
I said the sheep, with curly horn

I said the dove, from the rafters high
I cooed Him to sleep so
 He would not cry
We cooed Him to sleep, my love and I
I said the dove, from the rafters high

Thus every beast, by some good spell
In the stable rude was glad to tell
Of the gift he gave, Emmanuel
The gift he gave, Emmanuel
The gift he gave, Emmanuel.

** Technically, this is a Christmas Song, not an Advent Song, so you may want to save it for Christmas! It tells of the Love and care of all God's creatures for Jesus. Not familiar with this tune? Find a version by Sufjan Stevens here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMeXfQJXM5w>*

- Light the fourth candle of Advent, the Candle of Love. Read the story of Jesus’ birth in Luke 2. Sing and Pray!
- Take time to look at the lights and all your Advent preparations. Remember all you saw and did on your Advent journey, and all of those who have walked with you. Where have you seen God’s Love? How can you share that Love with others tonight?
- If you are able, come celebrate Christmas Eve together with your fellow Advent pilgrims at Union Church, as we light the Christ Candle!

CHRISTMAS EVE

FOR ALL AGES



Image from the Jesus Storybook Bible

A Prayer — by Brita Lynn Gill-Austern

Holy One cradle our heart this advent in a manger
a lowly, humble place where we may come to know You.
Just for this Advent help us to shift perspectives.
Help us to imagine the gift you would most like to receive.
Convince us we cannot buy it at a store and wrap it up.
Rather awaken our heart to welcome you into the center of our Advent by:
Cultivating peace within and without,
Finding joy in the simplest of things,
Bringing into our homes the lonely and broken,
Feeding the hungry, rather than our appetites for more of what we don't need,
Visiting someone who needs a warm presence,
Letting go of the resentment we have held far too long,
Opening our heart to someone to whom it was closed.
Remind us you were born in a humble place,
Waiting to be found by kings and shepherds in this vulnerable place.
Help us to look for You in holy vulnerability where you will reveal Your love.
Bless us with the gift of finding You.
Amen.

With gratitude for all those who so generously contributed to this Advent Booklet.

