



Daily Devotionals
Written by Members of Our Suncreek Family



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10 Families Left

Christmas

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of the Boys & Girls Club - W Dallas

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by December 5th

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Suncreek Presents the
CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

Featuring Music with W.A.M.

Final Rehearsals
Nov. 30th, 4-5PM
Dec. 6th, 10-11:30

K-5th Grade
Performance on
Sunday, Dec. 7th
in the MAC



SUNCREEK
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
CHRISTMAS ORNAMENTS
Benefitting the Suncreek Music Ministry

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2018 "Alpha & Omega"
2017 "Glory Be"
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2019 "Holy Communion"
2021 "Baptism"
2022 "Noah's Ark"
2025 "Sapfirum Garden"



Gloria!

Christmas Concert

Presented by the Suncreek Music Ministry

Sunday, December 14th
5:30PM at Suncreek UMC



The Longest Night

Service

A service of *Hope and Healing*
for those grieving during the holidays.

Thursday, December 18th
7:00 p.m. in the Round Room



Advent Services

Begin November 30th

Suncreek United Methodist Church



CHRISTMAS EVE
CANDLELIGHT SERVICES

3PM	5PM	7PM	11PM
Family Children's Music	Traditional Adult/Youth Choirs Bell Choir	Contemporary Worship Team Band	Acoustic Coffee House Christmas

Suncreek UMC - 1517 W. McDermott Dr. in Allen, Texas



Poinsettia DEDICATIONS

In honor or memory of your loved ones

Order Online
SuncreekUMC.org/poinsettias
Poinsettias can be taken after Christmas Eve services.

Visit suncreekumc.org/newsletter for all signups and updated information!

Advent Devotional 2025

In this year's Advent devotional, we are following the traditional weekly themes of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. That means throughout the first week, the devotions all touch on the theme of hope, the second week is focused on peace, the third is focused on joy, and the final partial week is focused on love. You will see the same themes guiding us in worship each week as well.

As you read these scriptures and reflections on hope, peace, joy, and love, we also hope you will join us in worship each Sunday. In order to better tie this devotional to our times of worship, each Sunday will offer space for you to write down your reflections from the hymns, prayers, and sermon in worship.

We hope this devotional helps you in your faith journey through the season of Advent. Advent means arrival. It is a time of anticipation, preparation, and wonder for the arrival of Christ. This year, we hope you continue to see how divine hope, peace, joy, and love have arrived and continue to arrive among us in this special season and beyond.

Won't you join us on this year's journey through the season of Advent?

Unless otherwise indicated, scripture is from the New Revised Standard Version.

1 The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

2 In days to come

the mountain of the Lord's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.

3 Many peoples shall come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

4 He shall judge between the nations
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation;
neither shall they learn war any more.

5 O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the Lord!
Isaiah 2:1-5

On this first Sunday of Advent, we hope you'll spend some time reflecting on this passage that guides our time of worship today. If you are able to come to worship, listen to the hymns, prayers, and sermon and use the space below to jot down any insights that emerge. If you aren't able to come in person, no worries - you can always be a part of our online worship anytime today by visiting <https://suncreekumc.org/videos>.

As you record your reflections, also consider: How do these words of Isaiah convey hope?

1 The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. 2 He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them and bowed down to the ground. 3 He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. 4 Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. 5 Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." 6 And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." 7 Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. 8 Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared and set it before them, and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

9 They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." 10 Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I be fruitful?" 13 The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' 14 Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." 15 But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. He said, "Yes, you did laugh."

Genesis 18:1-15

What does hope look like? Anticipation? Like Abraham and Sarah expecting a child through old age? My kids, Isaac and Lucy, began expecting and preparing for Christmas back in October when they started making their lists for Santa. I can only imagine that the agony they've had to live with in waiting these past two months for the fulfillment of their hopes is topped by the agony of Abraham and Sarah waiting until they were 100 years old for the promised offspring.

Or does hope look like the excitement that builds in our mundane lives until it blooms from a divine visitor gracing our mundane lives? Like Abraham relaxing under the oaks on a normal day, until that normal day is turned upside down when God comes to dinner. I'm not sure I know what "normal" days are this season of the year, but it seems there are countless divine interruptions that only feed my hope when I pay more attention to them.

Or maybe hope springs from unexpected wonder. I've always been confused by the end of this passage. I still don't know why Sarah laughs or what it means, but I know I've laughed at many inappropriate or unexpected times. And it usually jolts me into a fresher way of being in an exhausting, anxious world.

What does hope look like to you this season? Anticipation? Divine interruption? Unexpected wonder?

By Patrick Littlefield

9 After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the Lord. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. 10 She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. 12 As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. 13 Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. 14 So Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine." 15 But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. 16 Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time." 17 Then Eli answered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him." 18 And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your sight." Then the woman went her way and ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.

20 In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the Lord."

1 Samuel 1:9-10, 12-18, 20

Hannah demonstrates an intense level of hope in this passage. In a few weeks, you will read her prayer of joy which she offers after her hoped for son is born and dedicated to God. But for now, sit with her prayers of distress and hope and pray along with her in a form of contemplative prayer called breath prayer.

For the first 30 seconds, sit comfortably and plant your feet squarely on the ground. Let any stray thoughts slip through your mind and out into God's care.

For 2 minutes focus on your breath in this way:

Inhale - breathe in God's hope, peace, love, and joy

Exhale - breathe out any despair, turmoil, hate, and pain crowding your soul

Inhale - breathe in God's goodness and care

Exhale - breathe out self doubts and apathy

Continue breathing in the good and breathing out the bad, allowing God to refresh your spirit.

For 2 minutes focus on your breath in a slightly different way:

Inhale - breathe in the pain of the world and allow it to meet the calm assurance of the Holy Spirit within you

Exhale - breathe out the peace you can offer the world

Inhale - breathe in lamentation

Exhale - breathe out consolation

Continue breathing in the troubles around us, allow them to be transformed by God's presence in your soul, and breathe out the holiness we are called into.

For the last 30 seconds, sit comfortably and readjust to the day before you. Hold onto God's spirit breathing with you and find new life in every breath you take.

1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

2 Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

3 If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?

4 But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

5 I wait for the Lord; my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;

6 my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

7 O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.

8 It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

Psalm 130

This Psalm speaks powerfully to people across the centuries because this Psalm speaks for us - and to us - in the darkest of our moments. "Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord". No matter our age, no matter the chapter of our lives, no matter our socioeconomic status or relationship situation - we know the feeling of being in "the depths".

Grief at the loss of a loved one. Disappointment in, or realizing we have disappointed, one we hold dear. The hard truth that a long held dream will not be coming true. Bad reports from a doctor. Overwhelming broken-heartedness at the unkindness of the world. That hard look at ourselves in the mirror when we have failed ourselves. The realization of how we have fallen short of a life worthy of the unconditional love of God. Yes, we know what "the depths" means.

But we are loved by a God who is not absent in the depths. We are loved by a God whose love does not keep record of our sins, our failures or our depths. God offers unfailing love. God offers hope. God loves us, even in the depths of our lives.

This Advent journey we celebrate the birth of "The One" who makes that love clear to us.
Thanks be to God.

By Barry Hughes

5 And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, 6 for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' 7 And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything out of friendship, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

9 "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 11 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asked for a fish, would give a snake instead of a fish? 12 Or if the child asked for an egg, would give a scorpion? 13 If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Luke 11:5-13

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

We all recognize this verse for the intense action and imagery. Knocking on doors at night, asking for food, children in need. There is a juxtaposition of harm instead of health: a snake for a fish, a scorpion for an egg. Internally hard-wired for visceral reactions to fang and sting, the images engage our human nervous system and make an indelible impression on it. As earthly parents, it's abhorrent to think we would engage with our children this way. But if we enter the picture not as the parent, but as the child receiving gifts from God, and all God's gifts are good, why pain?

Pain is a messenger. It saves us from harm and tells us to pay attention. We can be thankful for the gift of spiritual pain and the lessons it teaches us about faith! Knowing this, we can pray with hope, because whatever we receive is a good gift, though it may be hard to recognize. And how does this relate to the season of Advent? The key is in the closing statement: "how much more will the Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" When we ask for that, we will never be disappointed, never surprised, never have to search for hidden meaning. The Father gives of himself through the act of incarnation into our earthly life through his son Jesus. Come, Messiah, come!

Prayer:

Dear Lord,

Remind us that while other outcomes might not be what we want or expect, we have one hope that will never disappoint: when we ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit, God will pour it over us in infinite abundance, providing for our every need.

In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

Sharon Hudak

Trained Spiritual Director

25 "All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

John 14:25-27

If there's one thing my mom talks about constantly, it's traffic in Allen. If there's ANOTHER thing, it's that she's not going to be there when I head off to college.

"When you go to college, I won't be with you to pick up your stuff."

"When you're off in college, I won't cook for you."

"When you're in college, I can't help you clean when it smells like something died." (Thanks for the encouragement, Mom.)

But she says it all the time, like it's breaking news.

And I stand there like the responsible person I am, not really listening. (Ignore the one time I turned my whites pink, or forgot to put water in the microwave mac and cheese and almost burned the house down.)

But she keeps saying these things because she's preparing me for the day she won't be there to double-check that the chicken I cooked isn't raw.

That is more or less what Jesus is doing here. He knows he's about to leave. The disciples have no idea what to do without Jesus right in front of them. They feel unprepared, underqualified, and honestly a little lost. (Just like me when my mom tells me to vacuum.)

So Jesus tells them: "I'm not abandoning you. I'm sending the Holy Spirit. He'll teach you. He'll remind you. He'll guide you." Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to guide them every day, in every situation. Helping them. And then Jesus gives them something else. Peace.

Not your normal everyday peace, like your room is clean, mom's happy, and the Aggies are 10-0. No, Jesus gives them REAL peace. It's steadfast, deep, not rooted in us, but rooted in Christ. Jesus is assuring the disciples that it's about to get overwhelming, but his peace, in the Holy Spirit, is omnipotent. We are not alone. We are not left to figure life out by ourselves. That is a huge gift from Christ.

Dear heavenly father, thank you for not leaving us alone. Thank you for giving us your Spirit to guide us and your peace to steady us. When life feels confusing or overwhelming, remind us that you are with us and that we can trust you. Help us listen to your voice, lean on your strength, and rest in your presence. Help us continue through this season, spreading your light, your love, and your grace to the world. Amen

By Jackson Grenier (youth)

12/6/25

Day 7

And for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day the deposit I have entrusted to him.
(2 Timothy 1:12)

Finding Hope

From Streams in the Desert by L.B. Cowman (p. 138):

“Sometimes you cannot see the sun or the stars to help you navigate when the storm is bearing down on you... You must anchor yourself steadfastly on God. And then, come what may- whether wind, waves, rough seas, thunder, lightning, jagged rocks, or roaring breakers- you must lash yourself to the helm, firmly holding your confidence in God’s faithfulness...”

As a native Rhode Islander, I spent much of my childhood around the ocean. On warm, sunny days, the ocean feels friendly, embracing, almost like a playmate, and for me, deeply restorative and home-like. But sudden waves have also sent me tumbling and spit me out, gasping onto the sand or panicking get the boat back on course. On wind-whipping, bone-chilling days, the ocean and beach almost feel hostile. And life can feel this way too, evoking joy, connection, and progress, as well as sadness, isolation, and seeming regression.

But if I keep God as an anchor, I believe that the storm will pass and somehow, in some way, I will become a little stronger and more faithful and perhaps be a bit better prepared to do whatever next plan God has for me.

By Kristine Springate

1 A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
2 The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
3 His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see
or decide by what his ears hear,
4 but with righteousness he shall judge for the poor
and decide with equity for the oppressed of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
5 Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.
6 The wolf shall live with the lamb;
the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the lion will feed together,
and a little child shall lead them.
7 The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
9 They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.
10 On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire
of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.
Isaiah 11:1-10

On this second Sunday of Advent, we hope you'll again spend some time reflecting on this passage that guides our time of worship today. If you are able to come to worship, listen to the hymns, prayers, and sermon and use the space below to jot down any insights that emerge. If you aren't able to come in person, no worries - you can always be a part of our online worship anytime today by visiting <https://suncreekumc.org/videos>.

As you record your reflections, also consider: How do these words of Isaiah convey peace?

41 Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob." 42 But the words of her elder son Esau were told to Rebekah, so she sent and called her younger son Jacob and said to him, "Your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you. 43 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran, 44 and stay with him a while, until your brother's fury turns away— 45 until your brother's anger against you turns away, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send and bring you back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?"

1 Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. 2 He put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. 3 He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother. 4 But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

Genesis 27:41-45; 33:1-4

Jacob's story is full of so many twists and turns, the greatest of which is the unexpected peace he finds upon meeting his brother Esau after years of living in fear of his anger.

I invite you to practice a form of Ignatian Prayer (outlined below) in order to dig deeper into this story. This form of prayer was pioneered by St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), a Spanish convert who started a new monastic order called the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits.

Here's how to do it:

Get settled in a comfortable chair in a quiet place where you won't be distracted. Ask God to open your heart and imagination.

Then read through the scripture once slowly and put it down. Begin to imagine the scene as if you are standing right there. What is around you? Who else is there? What do you hear in the scene? Any conversations? If you are in a house, what noises are in the house or in the street outside? What are the smells you can pick up?

Continue to allow the scene to form and transform in your mind. What is the mood – tense? joyful? Confused? Angry? Place yourself in the shoes of each brother.

Follow wherever your imagination takes you, paying special attention to where you find signs of peace bubbling up. Don't worry about historical accuracy, but do pay attention to how God is present in the passage and in your imagination.

After you have spent some time in the scene, slowly gather your attention back to the present moment, back to reality. Thank God for all the ways we can experience scripture.

1 In days to come the mountain of the Lord's temple shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised up above the hills.

People shall stream to it, 2 and many nations shall come and say: "Come let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

3 He shall judge between many peoples and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore;

4 but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

Micah 4:1-4

Days to Come

The Holy Mountain of the LORD: No more swords, no more weapons of violence. Learning God's ways at his feet and walking in God's path – not just you, not just me – all of us, every one.

Can you imagine it? I can hardly wait. This world of tumult and violence and strife will give way to peace. Not peace that is merely the absence of armed conflict, but God's peace. Everywhere and for everyone.

Can you imagine it? Israel and Palestine breaking bread together, laughing together. Russia and Ukraine abandoning battle and using their weapons as instruments of building, creating, working together. Armed conflicts across the globe turning to arms of welcome and generosity.

Can you imagine it? No one's skin pigment causing a second glance, or making the person wearing it fear for safety.

Can you imagine it? No starving children. No power-hungry war mongers and politicians. God arbitrating the differences justly and God's creation welcoming it with joy.

Can you imagine it?

Jesus, we long for you. We long for the new heavens and new earth. We long for the peace spoken in Micah. We invite your peace, hope, and love to take us over. We long for you. Come, Lord Jesus, quickly come.

By Cindy Peterson

Psalm 131

1. Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty:
neither do I exercise myself in great matters,
or in things too high for me.
2. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself,
as a child that is weaned of his mother:
my soul is even as a weaned child.
3. Let Israel hope in the Lord
from henceforth and forever.

A Quiet Soul

REFLECTION

Advent is a season of waiting, a time to slow down and prepare our hearts for Christ. It is easy to get lost in the rush of holiday shopping, planning, and expectations. We are restless and stressed. Psalms 131 invites us into a quieter kind of waiting, one of humility and peace.

PRAYER

Lord, teach me to rest in You this Advent season. Quiet my heart when I grow anxious and distracted. Help me to wait not with worry, but with peace like a child held in your arms. My hope is in You, now and forever. Amen

By Norma Longabaugh

38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic let him have your cloak as well. 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

Matthew 5:38-42

Peace

As humans, there is something deeply instinctive in us that wants fairness. When someone hurts or offends us, our immediate reaction is to defend ourselves, or to respond in equal measure. In this scripture Jesus acknowledges human impulse by referring “eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth”. But instead of encouraging this mindset, Jesus introduces a new way of responding to wrongdoing. He calls us into peace that does more than just avoid conflict, it disarms it. In this passage, Jesus is showing us that revenge does not heal or fix anything but instead, continues to escalate the issue at hand. When we choose to respond to hostility with peace, that is something that is far more fulfilling than responding with anger. When we give generously, walk the extra mile, and let go of our instinct to fight back, we are practicing the peace of Christ and demonstrating the kindness that he has shown to us. Every time we choose patience over anger, gentleness over harshness, and mercy over retaliation, we demonstrate the peace of Jesus.

Dear Lord,

Thank you for being such a loving and peaceful God. Let your calming presence quiet every fear within us. Let your peace guide our thoughts, our words and our steps so we may bring your gentleness into every place and situation we enter.

Amen

By: Ada-Grace Ross (youth)

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Mark 4: 35-41 (ESV)

The fact that Simon, Andrew, James, and John, who were experienced fishermen, were afraid along with the rest of the disciples, gives credit to the ferocity of the storm these men faced that night. It shows that even the most seasoned can be overwhelmed by life - the anxiety we feel driving during rush hour, the stress of planning a wedding or getting a divorce, the fear with the loss of employment and means to support oneself and family, or the sorrow after a terminal illness diagnosis - life offers plenty of opportunities for us to be fearful. The storms are real - there are real struggles every season, and our fear and anxiety are part of the human experience. The solution has always been there, even if we need reminding, that God is with us in every storm, with every challenge. Peace is not found in the absence of struggles but in the presence of God. Only God has the power to calm any storms.

Dear God, thank you for everything you have blessed us with. We acknowledge that we can get overwhelmed with the stressors in life. We pray for you to help us find peace by trusting in you, in calm waters as well as in chaos. We pray that we keep faith in your power and light. Amen.

By Sarah DeOrian

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we no longer know him in that way. 17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. 20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 5:16-20

“I just need to make it to 11:30 PM on Christmas Eve.” After nearly 20 years in music ministry, this thought still crosses my mind every December. The exhaustion is real—for clergy, program staff, volunteers, and anyone navigating the whirlwind of Advent programs and preparations. In the busyness, it’s easy to slip into survival mode and forget why we prepare in the first place.

But Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 5:16–20 that in Christ, we no longer see the world from a merely human point of view. God is at work reconciling all things—and entrusts us with that same ministry. Advent, then, is not a countdown to “making it through” Christmas Eve; it is a season that teaches us to see differently. It reorients our hearts toward God’s renewing love and the work Christ came to begin.

Every year after Christmas, I rest and reset. But I also reflect on my old mantra about just surviving until Christmas Eve. In those moments, Howard Thurman’s “The Work of Christmas” helps re-center me.

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.

Advent is the doorway into that work. It prepares us to welcome Christ not only into a manger, but into our lives and communities. May this season renew our vision and strengthen us for the ministry of reconciliation we are called to embody every day.

By Trey West

2 When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples 3 and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" 4 Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. 6 And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

7 As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 What, then, did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. 9 What, then, did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written,

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.'

11 "Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Matthew 11:2-11

On this third Sunday of Advent, we hope you'll again spend some time reflecting on this passage that guides our time of worship today. If you are able to come to worship, listen to the hymns, prayers, and sermon and use the space below to jot down any insights that emerge. If you aren't able to come in person, no worries - you can always be a part of our online worship anytime today by visiting <https://suncreekumc.org/videos>.

As you record your reflections, also consider: How do these words of Matthew convey joy?

1 Then Hannah prayed and said: "My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn[a] is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance.

2 "There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.

3 "Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the Lord is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed.

4 "The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength.

5 Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry are hungry no more. She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away.

6 "The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up.

7 The Lord sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts.

8 He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor.

"For the foundations of the earth are the Lord's; on them he has set the world.

1 Samuel 2: 1-8

Hannah's song overflows with praise because God has answered her deepest prayer and blessed her with a son. Her faithfulness—expressed through years of longing, surrender, and trust—is met by God's kindness. In her moment of need, God sees her, remembers her, and responds with compassion. Her song becomes a testimony that God hears the cries of His people and delights in turning sorrow into joy. With humility, she gives thanks for the blessings she has received, offering her gratitude to the One who heard her prayer and transformed her sorrow into rejoicing.

We can learn from Hannah to respond to God with joy. Life is certainly not without hardship, and God's timing rarely matches our own. Yet Hannah shows us that when we remain faithful—when we trust God in the waiting—He meets us with grace. In His time, He brings blessings beyond anything we could imagine. Her story encourages us to hold on, to trust deeply, and to rejoice in the God who never forgets His people.

God, we thank You that You are our rock. We rejoice that You are always with us—meeting us in our deepest need. Thank You for Your compassion, Your grace, and Your unfailing love. Amen.

By Kimmi Cramer

12 It was told King David, "The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him because of the ark of God." So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing, 13 and when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatted calf. 14 David danced before the Lord with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. 15 So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet.

2 Samuel 6:12-15

David danced before the Lord

I remember reading years ago an article entitled, "Why Should the Pentecostals Have All the Good Moves?" It was written to encourage Christians of the major denominations to consider worshipping God with all of their bodies and not just their head. The writer suggested that worshiping involves the whole person and not just a part of that person. Protestants tend to be a very "heady" group of folks. We come to worship to sit and occasionally stand engaging our brains in thinking, speaking and occasionally singing. The other eighty percent of our bodies are just there as extra baggage.

Many people ask me why in worship do I often make the sign of the cross or bow toward the altar during the singing of the Gloria and the Doxology. Some are amazed that I lift the Bible so high in the air when I say, "This the Word of God for the People of God!" I began these practices after reading that article about worshipping God with our whole bodies. It has become a transforming experience for me. Now I feel I am putting my whole self into the adoration of Almighty God.

What if during these next few Sundays, you try using a bit more of your bodies like David did before the Ark of the Lord. (I don't encourage dancing up and down the aisles, but a bit of movement of hand or body while singing or praying might add a new dimension in the act of adoration and praise for you and others in the congregation.

You can follow my lead or make up your own moves. As you dare to do so, you will not only be joining me but David and a host of others who took seriously the words of the Psalmist who wrote "O God I will praise you with my whole being" (Psalm 108:1) and the Apostle Paul who admonished us "To present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." (Romans 12:1)

Prayer

Help me Lord to discover new ways to worship you and free me to lose myself in exaltation and praise. Amen.

By Milton Gutierrez

10 Say among the nations, "The Lord is king!
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
He will judge the peoples with equity."
11 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar and all that fills it;
12 let the field exult and everything in it.
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
13 before the Lord, for he is coming,
for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness
and the peoples with his truth.
Psalm 96:10-13

Psalm 96 is full of rich imagery of the whole earth expressing joy. Today, let your creative right side of your brain guide you in devotion. Use the space below to sketch out what the scene might look like of the whole of creation joyfully praising God.

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Luke 1:39-45

Joy is one of the central themes of Advent, but it can be so easy to misunderstand. We think of joy as something that comes only when your life is going well. When you get the promotion you wanted, when you hit every green light, or even when your favorite football team comes back from a 27 point lead (Gig 'em)!

But the joy that Luke talks about goes so much deeper than just things going right. It's a joy that grows out of trusting in God. In Luke, joy doesn't start because everything is easy and simple, but because God is at work. When we trust that God is working, even when we don't see it, our hearts are open to the joy that He has to offer. This means that joy doesn't come from having everything together, nailing all your goals, and knowing exactly what's next. Advent is an invitation for us to slow down and remember that God is faithful, and we can trust in His promises. The more we choose to trust Him, the more our joy grows. And as we look for the signs of His presence each day, we receive the joy that He freely gives. The Youth have a tradition on Mission Trips, where at the end of every night we share where we saw God that day. I encourage you to ask yourself that question during this season, and I pray that you find joy in the promises that God has given us each and every day!!

Dear Lord,

Thank You for this day and all its many blessings, help us to trust in You and Your promises even when the waiting feels hard. Teach us to see how You're working in our lives and in the world around us. Fill our homes and communities with Your joy, Your peace, and hope. And help us to walk through this season with hope and excitement for what's to come.

In Jesus name we pray, Amen!

By Madison Warren (youth)

“And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.””

Luke 1:46-55

Faith and Praise

This passage, known as “Mary’s Song,” from the gospel Luke must first be examined with some background context. In the previous verses, the birth of Jesus Christ is foretold and the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she will bear the Savior. Luke 1:46-55 is about Mary praising God for His works and faithfulness throughout her life and the world. While Mary played a crucial role in the life of Jesus, she was also a person like us in need of salvation. In her “song”, Mary shows us different ways the Lord is faithful and good. Firstly, she points out how God’s mercy is for all who believe in Him. There are no ifs, ands, or buts; if you truly believe and follow God, His mercy is extended to you. Mary also points out during her praise how God will provide and is all you truly need. He provides our daily bread, and shows that we don’t need power, wealth, or status to enter the heavenly gates. All we need is the Lord, and that is who we should put our faith and trust in. Mary teaches that praise is important because it highlights how good the Lord is; at all times and in all places. He is a gracious, merciful, and loving God who has never failed us and never will fail us, so put your full faith and your whole heart into Him because He will provide.

Questions:

How does this passage inspire you to praise God in your everyday life?

How can you allow God to challenge the “proud” and “idols” in your life?

How can you live a life of humility, belief, and obedience to God?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your everlasting faithfulness. You are full of love and grace, and extend your mercy to all who seek you. Please reveal to me how to live a humble and obedient life, finding ways to seek and praise you each and every day. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

By Emily York

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Philippians 2:1-4

It can be really tough to not solely focus on yourself and your best interests. We live in a culture today that edifies this nature of being self-centered; caring only when it affects you. I struggle with this daily; trying to look outside my personal bubble and putting others first in college is no simple task. With classes, organizations, the fraternity, and spending time with friends, the importance of being united through Christ's love can get lost in the shuffle. This pattern of the world that emphasizes division differs greatly from Paul's message to the people of Philippi as he is proclaiming to them to humbly place others before themselves and to convey true unity.

While I think that this imagery of the same mind is helpful, but I like to think of our unity in Christ through love as more of a choir. No two people in choir have the same exact voice. There are sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses with subsections in between them. Rather than focusing on what separates the voice parts, they all come together to form beautiful music. They embrace their differences to create something bigger than themselves.

This relationship is exactly what Paul is striving for us to reach. He's asking us to reflect the love of Christ to everyone around us to be in full accord and of one mind to overcome worldly division. By reflecting Christ's love we reflect his humility through his death on the cross, we reflect his selflessness by healing those with leprosy and breaking bread with outsiders, and we complete joy of being of one accord and mind through his teaching; love your neighbor as yourself.

Prayer:

Dear Lord,

I pray that as we entrench ourselves deeper into this advent season that we grow more like you. I pray that we reflect your love to reach that greater unity that you want us as a community of believers to reach. I pray that you heal division in our world and help us to be selfless and humble, just like you were many years ago.

It is in your wonderful name we pray,
Amen

By Luke Cramer

1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth
2 before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your might,
and come to save us!
3 Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.
4 O Lord God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
5 You have fed them with the bread of tears
and given them tears to drink in full measure.
6 You make us the scorn of our neighbors;
our enemies laugh among themselves.
7 Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

17 But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.
18 Then we will never turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name.
19 Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we hope you'll spend one more time reflecting on this passage that guides our time of worship today. If you are able to come to worship, listen to the hymns, prayers, and sermon and use the space below to jot down any insights that emerge. If you aren't able to come in person, no worries - you can always be a part of our online worship anytime today by visiting <https://suncreekumc.org/videos>.

As you record your reflections, also consider: How do these words of the psalmist convey love?

Ruth 1:14-18

14 Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

15 So she said, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return

after your sister-in-law." 16 But Ruth said,

"Do not press me to leave you,
to turn back from following you!

Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people
and your God my God.

17 Where you die, I will die,
and there will I be buried.

May the Lord do thus to me,
and more as well,

if even death parts me from you!"

18 When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

Incomprehensible grief. Certain poverty. Uncertain future. Such was Ruth's life when fate left her a childless widow in a time when dependency on a man was the only way for a woman to survive.

Yet Ruth chose love. And faith. And action. In her darkest moment, she held fast to her connection with Naomi, and found the courage to take the literal and figurative steps that would change both their lives forever.

I love this story, but I love the fact that it's in the Bible even more. In a world where the lives of poor women were footnotes, God put them front and center. Hagar had it right. God sees us, all of us, even when society doesn't. And being truly known and valued like that gives us the strength to find our footing when chaos surrounds us.

Prayer:

God, thank you for valuing every life, no matter how small it may seem in the eyes of the world. Please help me to be like Ruth, having the courage to keep moving towards the light, especially during those times when darkness closes in.

By Courtney Aberle

18 I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground, and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. 19 And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. 20 I will take you for my wife in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord.

Hosea 2:18-20

Encounter this passage through the early church tradition of “lectio divina.” Lectio divina is a Latin phrase that means sacred reading. You can follow these 4 steps to dig into the scripture deeper.

Lectio (reading) - Slowly read the passage and begin chewing on it.

Meditatio (meditation): Read again and consider certain words or phrases from the passage.

Pick a specific word or phrase to focus on and allow the Spirit to speak to your heart and mind through it.

Oratio (prayer): Talk with God and others about the passage. Share the word(s) or phrase(s) that have rested on your heart.

Contemplatio (contemplation): Read one more time. Rest in and savor the words of Scripture. Consider how they bring you closer to God and into new rhythms of life.

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 5:43-48

Love for Enemies

Who is our enemy? Enemies can be seen as opponents throughout our lives- in sports, competitions, work, and many other places. People oppose us all the time, but an 'enemy' is different because they often do not treat us with respect. These people are irritating, but are still a part of God's creation.

This passage makes me imagine Jesus as a kindergarten teacher. He stands before an inquisitive crowd as he tells them how to behave, like a teacher explains the 'classroom rules'. Jesus then explains that God treats all people the same, sharing the sun and rain with all humankind. If they truly want to honor God, they must follow the same treatment.

Jesus is the perfect person to make this speech. From the day He was born, Jesus was seen as a threat to all in power, causing him to be persecuted. He faced criticism and disrespect from the Pharisees and Sadducees throughout his ministry. Even on the days leading up to His death, the people of Jerusalem shouted, "Crucify Him!". Jesus had no reason to show kindness to these people, given how ugly they treated Him.

We need to take a page out of Jesus' book. It's easy to love those who love us. It does not take much effort to love our family and friends, but Jesus says that being a Christian isn't supposed to be easy. Part of the cross we take up is being kind to everyone. Jesus spent the majority of His ministry with the outcasts of society, reminding them that God is there for all. We are expected to do the absolute best we can for ourselves and for others, regardless of the situation or difficulty.

Dear Heavenly Father,
Help us to love like you. Please fill us with your patience and understanding of those around us, and give us the strength to show kindness to everyone. Thank you for all you have given us, and help us to be disciples of your faith, spreading your light, love, and grace to the world.
Amen.

By Eli Cramer (youth)

12/25/24

Christmas Day

If you find a lull in the festivities today, take a moment and read (or re-read) the story of Jesus's birth. Enjoy this day and this good news!

Luke 2:8-20

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,
 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
 and on earth peace among those whom he favors!'

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Merry Christmas!