



# WORDS FOR WAITING

*Daily Devotions for  
Advent 2018*





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# JANUARY 1

## Read Psalm 8.

It feels appropriate to conclude a season of Advent reflections with Psalm 8. It's a passage that flows like a song of praise, giving reverence and gratitude to God for making the world, and for creating us to be agents of its care. Psalm 8 is doxological in nature – meaning there's a structure and rhythm that guides our reading and our actions in response to it. The psalmist describes the work of God's hands, intentionally crafting everything in the universe, like an artist creating a grand masterpiece. A masterpiece that includes every one of us. And as we are filled with awe at the beauty of life on this floating rock, we also have the responsibility to love and protect it. If we are made in God's image, then the whole world also reflects God's divine goodness. So as we rejoice in the coming of God through the person of Jesus, may we also rejoice in our ability to be stewards of this planet – celebrating, as the psalmist does, the biggest wonders down to the smallest details.

## Pray

Holy God, how majestic is your name and the work of your hands! Who are we that you would be so mindful of us and care so deeply? May we never stop being in awe of what you've done. Give us guidance, patience, and peace as we do all we can to care for this Earth and for each other. Amen.

*Erin Guzmán*  
Campus Minister  
UKirk Wooster

Advent is all about waiting. But that whole patience thing is way easier said than done, right? We hear, "Wait and hope! Jesus is coming!" But the world feels overwhelming sometimes and there is work to do right now. In an often grief-filled world, waiting can feel too passive and hope too naïve.

If you're overwhelmed by the things on your plate, this devotional is for you. If you're feeling great about the way life is shaping up, this devotional is for you. If you can't wait to spend time with your family this holiday season, this devotional is for you. If you are missing someone this Christmas or if your family dynamics aren't what you wish they were, this devotional is for you.

So wherever you're coming from, grab a Bible (or your phone), and spend a few minutes with us each day. On every page you'll find a Scripture reading, a reflection, and a short prayer. Altogether, the contributors here include six groups of students, three individual students, and 22 campus ministers representing 28 campuses in 17 different states, all associated with Presbyterian faith communities. Our contributors have offered paragraphs, images, and poetry. They use a variety of words to refer to God, and engage the world around us in myriad ways too. May there be reflections here that resonate with you, ones that challenge you, and maybe even some that do both.

In hope,

Rev. Allison Wehrung  
Editor | Campus Minister, UKirk Ole Miss

# DECEMBER 2

# DECEMBER 31

Read Hebrews 6:13-19.



*We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. . .*

Having an anchor doesn't promise calm seas. I mean the whole point of one is to hold a boat in place when winds or currents might shift it off course, right?

But God promised Abraham that God would be with Abraham's descendants through the generations. In Jesus, God promises us that even when this "human" thing is hard, we have an example

to follow – that we aren't left to figure it out alone. And that even when we don't quite get it right, grace grounds us and nudges us onward. The hope of Advent doesn't mean we have to pretend like everything is great all the time. Sometimes hope is as simple and as hard as remembering that we will never go where God is not.

Try praying the words below (from Psalm 139) as a breath prayer. Repeat it as long and as often as you need to, praying the first phrase with each inhale and the second with each exhale.

## Pray

Search me O God. . .and know my heart.

*Rev. Allison Wehrung  
Campus Minister  
UKirk Ole Miss*

Read 1 Kings 3:5-14.

Imagine being a young person given the responsibility and the burden of leadership in a complex and politically uncertain realm. Imagine being that same young person encountering God in a direct and intimate way as you begin to ask yourself what it takes to lead people. Solomon, the young person in our reading today, was not perfect and was not predestined to the wisdom or the discernment he has become famous for in our Bible discussions. Solomon was an imperfect, unsure, and nervous leader standing before God and asking for the kind of wisdom and discernment that could only come from a God who loved this imperfect young man. Wisdom, long life, honor, and other benefits were not earned by this imperfect young man, they were offered to him through the love of a God who sees in us eternal potential.

We are a people of promise often standing before God in uncertainty, complexity, and challenge as we try to exist in a world that is no less complicated than that of our young friend Solomon. Do we ask God simply for strength or resilience in the face of a challenging world; or, do we ask God for a loving wisdom and a sense of discerning grace that gives us the tools to enter this world with a desire to lead? The first tool we need is already granted to us...God's love for us.

## Pray

Gracious God, may we always seek to lead in a wisdom founded in your love. Amen.

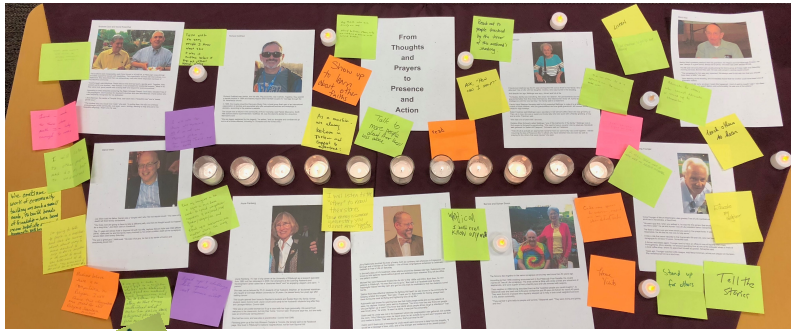
*Ben Fitzgerald-Fye  
Student Pastor  
Calvary Ukirk (Indiana, PA)*



# DECEMBER 30

# DECEMBER 3

Read Colossians 3:12-17.



We continue the work of community building on such a small scale, to build bonds of friendship + love based on our belief in the oneness of humanity. With love we work.

Ask: How can I help? (then do it...)

I will listen to the "other" to know their stories. I am an enemy to someone whose story you do not know.

Lend a smile to those whose path I'm lucky enough to cross.

A synagogue. A shooter.  
11 faithful followers gone.

How long, O God?

A community gathers and prays  
the prayers of many traditions.

And over all these things put on love,  
which is the perfect bond of unity.

This is our healing balm.

We are all God's choice, holy and loved.

Today we choose:

Compassion

Kindness

Humility

Gentleness

Patience

And love, always love.

Thanks be to God!

## Pray

Holy and gracious God, you lead us through darkness to light. Today give me the strength and courage to show up in a world that needs your love and my kindness. In the name of Christ, the Prince of Peace, Amen.

*Ekklesia at Missouri State University*

Read Psalm 122.



## Pray

Lord of gladness and peace, we come to you today with full hearts as we remember those who have led us to You and our worshiping communities. May we continue to gather together in deep joy to celebrate the goodness of Your grace. During this season of waiting and preparation, our images of peace point our community in the direction of unity and goodness. It's in Your holy and precious name we pray. Amen.

*UKirk South Alabama*

# DECEMBER 4

# DECEMBER 29

**Read** 2 Samuel 7:18-29.

Well, okay then, David.

A humbly-starting prayer ends boldly. David decides to remind God of all that She promised to David and his descendants. And, given that God's promises include the Messiah's birth from the house of David, I don't really think She needs to be reminded of much. David apparently disagrees with me.

Today is December 4th, the third day of Advent and also probably an exam day or a day near the end of your Fall semester. You probably feel like there's simultaneously no end in sight, and there's too much to get done because the end lurks around the corner. Fear not! If Advent promises us anything, it's that God has chosen to be present with us. Remember that – God chooses to be with you, even in the midst of finals!

So, maybe we should take our cue from David here. Perhaps we go to God boldly, reminding ourselves by talking with Her, that we can do it, that we'll make it, and that God has promised to be present with us. David rightly says, "O Lord God, you are God, and your words are true."

## **Pray**

O Lord God! Your Word is everlasting. News of the Messiah's birth foretold in the Holy Scriptures is not fake news, rather Your Word is true and Your promises are right. God be present. Now. Steady my spirit. Strengthen me to finish the semester well. I will faithfully await Your promise, the birth of our Messiah, Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Rev. Katie Barrett Todd  
Campus Minister  
UKirk Greensboro*

**Read** 1 Corinthians 3:10-17.

God's Spirit is here. The baby has come, and with it, the mess of making a life. The waiting is over. God's Spirit is HERE.

Often in a group, I have a lot going on in my head. Am I talking too much? Did I just interrupt them? Ooo, but I *really* want to say this thing. The process. The social dynamics. The outcomes. Sometimes, I get a whiff of that Spirit from this text – of the beloved nature of our gathering, of the beloved nature of the people I am with, of a glimpse of God in them. When I do, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for being among them, and awed by what God is doing.

Real community is real messy. Sometimes that truth overwhelms the Truth that we are God's temple, the very place God lives in the world. In this season of God-with-us in Christ, remember how messy that reality was. The stink of the stable. The stink of the baby. The bags under Mary's eyes that are left out of every Nativity scene. Next time you are gathered with a group that is *real* community to you – a small group, a church, a worship community, a campus ministry, a retreat group – look around. See the messiness. See the reality. Set aside all the narratives in your head and really look. And embrace that God's Spirit is not present despite the messiness, but in it. Remember that God's temple is sacred, and together, you are that temple.

## **Pray**

Loving God, thank you for showing up among us. Remind us of who we are when we gather – that our gathering is where you live. Empower us to notice and to build communities of true grace and love.

*Rev. Abby King-Kaiser  
Associate Director  
Common Ground & Center for Faith and Justice (Xavier University)*



# DECEMBER 28

# DECEMBER 5

**Read** Revelation 21:1-7.

## Hope in the Face of Empire

In an apocalyptic book filled with metaphor and confusion, we are given this passage of undoubtable hope and coming change. The community to which the book Revelation was written needed this hope desperately. Much like the community in which Jesus was born and died, they faced persecution and despair at the hands of the Empire.

This passage embodies the Advent season. Because of an incarnate God, there is hope that things can be different. It has been almost a century since we have labeled any governing force an “Empire” in name, but the spirit of empire is still alive. Most of us don’t (at least I don’t) feel its effects like the first and second century hearers of this text. Empire manifests itself in our society and around the world. It is at play everywhere that greed and fear rule. However, because we serve and are loved by an incarnate God, who promises to dwell with us, we should be vigilant for ways we can dwell with those whom Empire affects, and we should continue to resist its presence in our own lives.

## Pray

Lord, we pray that you would help us to see empire when it inevitably manifests itself around us. We pray that you would help us to stand strong in the face of empire. Lord help us to know your love and make it known to those who need to feel your presence. Thank you for dwelling with us, Lord.

*Rev. Micah Watson  
Campus Minister  
UKirk MTSU (PSF @ MTSU)*

**Read** Psalm 90:13-17.

## where are you?

dear mama-god, where can I find your son?  
ar-15s are pointed at your black and brown sons now;  
cages are erected on our borders  
to keep your mothers and your daughters  
separated.  
where is he?

papa-god, don't you hear the cries of the  
separated mommas for their caged babies?  
I thought you did hear the cries of your unwed momma.  
where is he?

break the cages and demolish the gun industries  
don't delay.  
your brown and black brothers  
gonna be shot dead;  
they can't celebrate your coming.  
come now jesus!

i thought you are coming today (?)  
don't be “ ”  
where are you?

## Pray

Our Dear God, help us to yearn for your coming into the world by working together to heal the wounds we have caused. With hope and desperation, we look towards your manger that was surrounded by war, genocide and anticipation.

*Trevor JS  
Student  
Atlanta Oikos & Columbia Theological Seminary*

# DECEMBER 6

# DECEMBER 27

**Read** Philippians 1:12-18a.

I watched the *Great British Baking Show* while cleaning my house, and I got progressively faster at cleaning as the contestants neared the end of their challenges while the violins and tempo of the background music quickened. Time pressure moves us forward to get stuff done, but it also can blind us to everything else around us. When Paul talks about being imprisoned, I feel like our new prison is not bars, but is time. Deadlines loom. Exams come around every year. The tiredness of college students can be plotted on a graph with almost eerie accuracy. It seems like we are in a cage of the pressure of time where the end of the semester is a freeing moment, released from our bondage for a few months only to go back into the cage again, with ever-quickening violins.

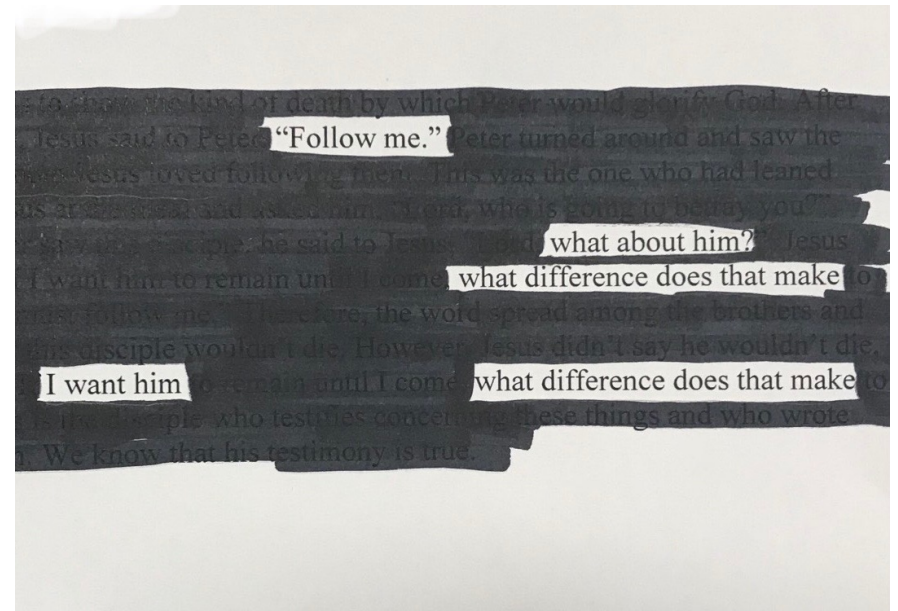
However, even while in prison, Paul could see beyond the bars. He connected with the guards and with his siblings in Christ. So, I wonder what it could mean to look beyond the prison bars, even if it's a prison of our own making. What could it mean to look past the cage of busy-ness and to learn to live as Paul exhorts us: in Christ, with our siblings, and seeing the Jesus in all people we meet. As we prepare for Christ's coming, may we wonder what it looks like to live in this world slowly, and see beyond the limits.

## **Pray**

God, you came to earth to set the prisoners free. Set us free today. May we see glimpses of you in all we encounter. Amen.

*Rev. Krystal Leedy*  
Associate Pastor for Campus Ministries  
UKirk Austin at University Presbyterian Church

**Read** John 21:19b-24.



## **Pray**

Wondrous God, you ask us to follow you and we cannot help but wonder why, how and what about everyone else? Remind us in this season of waiting that your call to us is to follow you. Certainly to love our neighbors as well, but to follow you. Amen.

*Rev. Kelsey Penn*  
Coordinator of Purposeful Lives & Associate Campus Minister  
Schreiner University



# DECEMBER 26

# DECEMBER 7

**Read** Psalm 148.

In having been created, we were created capable of praising our Creator. Our existence is praise – as even the incorporeal ocean depths can praise the Father. But as sinful humans, we fail, not just again and again, but continually. Our thoughts and actions can fall out of divine expectation and cease to be praise, while the mountains and the stars praise by their very existence. This psalm is a reminder that we must praise, even when we think we can't – like how we think the inanimate objects and unthinking animals can't praise, but they do. Our existence should be praise, and so we must make it so. As humans, our work to make it so is our praise.

## **Pray**

Heavenly Father, may all of us praise you in all our thoughts and actions, and when we fail, may we learn.

*Annie Jo Baker  
Student  
Maxwell Street Presbyterian Church UKirk  
(Lexington, KY)*



**Read** Philippians 1:18b-26.

Paul, in his letters to the Philippians, encourages us to find support and companionship with each other and in the hope of Christ.

At the same time, Paul calls us to remain jubilant in this season of waiting. We try to remain positive as we face exams as well as the stress of the holiday season. Paul reminds us that there is always light; there is always hope; there is always someone there for you even in people and places you least expect. Paul reminds us also to be present where we are – even

if we wish to be elsewhere. We can live out this hope in two ways: accept support and love from others, while also putting out light and love into the world.

## **Pray**

Guide us, Lord, to speak boldly in support of those who struggle. Help us to be allies and companions to one another as we each grow in our relationship with God. In this hopeful season of anticipation, remind us to find strength in our community. All God's children say, Amen.

*WVUKirk-PSF  
Art by alumni Hunter Robinson*

# DECEMBER 8

# DECEMBER 25

**Read** Luke 9: 1-6.

In our biblical reading for today, we read that Jesus has given the disciples authority to cast out demons and to heal the sick. But as he commissions his followers to go out and do this awesome work, he also tells them to take nothing with them on their journey. No extra shoes, no clothes, not even any food or money. Jesus tells the disciples to be fully dependent upon the hospitality of the folks they meet along their travels.

Not taking anything with us is hard. Many of us like to keep a little extra cash stashed in our wallets for emergencies, or a spare phone charger with us in case we need to contact someone and our phone dies. Can you imagine setting out with absolutely nothing? Just the clothes on your back and the shoes on your feet. No baggage. No drama. Just you and your commission to go out and heal the sick, and a promise that others would care for you along the journey.

This Advent, I want to challenge you to take nothing with you. Take this time to focus on your own faith journey, and how you feel called to listen to God in this season. Leave behind the unnecessary baggage, the things weighing you down. Trust that God has got you and will provide.

## **Pray**

Dear God, this Advent season, help us to leave behind the unnecessary things we cling to. Help us to focus on you and your calling for us. Amen.

*Rev. Kate Morrison  
Former Campus Minister  
UKirk @ EWC*

**Read** Luke 2:1-20.

## **Christ's Birth Turns the World**

To the tune of "O Come All Ye Faithful"

Verse 1:

Without awaiting  
Sheep stand idle grazing  
Never suspecting the  
world has transformed  
Angels above them  
Wait to sing their blessing

Refrain:

But Christ this little baby  
Could I hold you maybe  
Just one more moment as your  
Birth turns the world

Verse 2:

State-hoods are shaken  
Hearts are overtaken  
From fields and from palaces  
They're drawn by the sound  
Oh how the Heavens  
Tell of your arrival

## **Pray**

Wondrous Christ, your arrival in this world was heralded by the glory of angel song to the most ordinary of people. May we hold that same song in our hearts and treasure it, always singing glory to you and enacting your peace among the earth. Amen.

*Rev. Sarah Hooker & Drew Wilmesherr  
Campus Minister & Intern  
UKirk Atlanta*

Refrain:

But Christ this little baby  
Could I hold you maybe  
Just one more moment as your  
Birth turns the world

Verse 3:

Now the world seeks you  
For the whole world needs you  
Your healing for broken hearts  
That long to be whole  
You will redeem us  
You will recreate us

Refrain:

But Christ this little baby  
Could I hold you maybe  
Just one more moment as your  
Birth turns the world



# DECEMBER 24

# DECEMBER 9

**Read** Isaiah 52:7-10.

There's something special about the penultimate, the almost-end. In music, the penultimate chord in a closing chord progression often contains the most interesting harmonies – not yet resolved but full of anticipation, leading and pointing toward what comes just after.

That is, perhaps, where we find ourselves on Christmas Eve, this penultimate day before the birth of Christ. We wait in anxious expectation of what is to come. We hold vigil, awaiting the arrival of perfect peace in the form of the Incarnate God. Our voices, rising over the flickering candlelight, beckoning the coming of the Christ-Child like the singing of Isaiah's sentinels: keeping watch together, singing for joy.

Enjoy today. Enjoy the waiting, the hoping, the expectation. Enjoy the taste of peppermint and the smell of cypress and fir; enjoy the sound of jingling bells and the smoothness of wrapping paper on those last-minute gifts. Enjoy the carols and the hot chocolate and the time you spend with your family and friends who feel like family. Present in each of these is an intangible joy, which embodies the fullness of the in-breaking of God into this world.

This is our last day of waiting. God is nearly here. Take a moment and imagine a world filled with Incarnate Light: abundant tables, welcomed strangers, cared-for creation. The arrival of Christ is a celebration. It is also an invitation to participate in this Good-News bringing, Light-Bearing life. Revel in the not-yet-resolved, and prepare yourself to join the unending song.

## **Pray**

God of Light, we wait in hope and expectation for the Mystery unfolding before our eyes. Help us to prepare our hearts and minds for your Incarnate love, that we might be ready to share that love with the world. Amen.

*Rev. Anna Owens  
Associate Pastor/Campus Minister  
UKirk Auburn*

**Read** Luke 1:68-79.

Ever put Mentos in Diet Coke? Here's what you need: Mentos, a 2 Liter of Diet Coke, and outdoor space. Open the 2 Liter, drop in Mentos, run for your life, then watch Diet Coke shoot into the air in all its foamy glory. Or, don't be wasteful and just YouTube it.

Zechariah is the Diet Coke and the Holy Spirit is the Mentos. Remember, Zechariah hasn't been able to speak during Elizabeth's pregnancy, and now she's given birth to John. I suspect Elizabeth missed Zechariah's voice during pregnancy – a familiar voice to comfort and encourage her – and now she can't get him to shut up. But who can blame him?! He's been bottled up with excitement, and now John is born, his speech is back, and his hope can't be contained!

*By the tender mercy of God,  
the dawn from on high will break upon us,  
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

Sometimes hope builds within us, maybe because we're waiting, searching, doubting. And then something wonderful happens that ignites the hope we've held within. Next time that happens, do your soul a favor. Go outside and shout with joy. I promise, it's even more fun than putting Mentos in Diet Coke.

## **Pray**

God of faithfulness, thank you for filling us with hope and guiding our feet in the way of peace. Amen.

*Rev. Patrick Harley  
Campus Minister  
UKirk Birmingham*

# DECEMBER 10

# DECEMBER 23

**Read** Isaiah 40:1-11.



*“A Highway Still Rugged”*

## **Pray**

Jesus, my great shepherd, I praise you for your arms, which are mighty enough to carry the wayward lamb back into your fold – regardless of how far that lamb has strayed. Strengthen me for the days ahead and meet me in the wilderness like a father running to meet his lost child. Grant me courage to climb the highest hill and shout your Good News. Grant me the confidence to boldly proclaim that you meet me even when the highway I have prepared is still rugged. Reveal your glory to me and through me. Amen.

*Rev. Beatrix Weil  
Chaplain  
Rhodes College*

**Read** Luke 1:39-55.

Even before Christ’s birth, Mary offers us a glimpse at the subversive nature of God’s loving presence in the world. Societal norms are about to crumble. Those who hide behind their pride will be made vulnerable. Those who manufactured false structures of power are going to lose them. Those who are pushed to the margins will have their humanity and dignity restored to them. The hungry will be fed, and those who engorged themselves with riches will finally know what it is like to go without.

Mary speaks with a prophetic voice. She offers a sharp critique of the way things are and offers hope to those who have been trampled over, or forgotten. In this sense, Mary speaks directly to Elizabeth, who essentially asks: “Why would God ever bother with me?”

Mary’s answer reminds Elizabeth (and, us) that God cares for us because we are worthy of being cared for. Remember, Elizabeth does not become pregnant until late in life, meaning that she lacked both social status and financial security in her context. God cares for her, and is present with her, because God’s love reaches all people – especially those at the margins.

## **Pray**

Through your Spirit, O God, grant us the vision to recognize the ways you turn our world upside down. Push us to break down the ways we hide behind our own pride and power so that we may lift up the lowly as part of Christ’s body and ministry. Amen.

*Rev. Chris Bailey  
Campus Minister  
Marshall UKIRK*

# DECEMBER 22

# DECEMBER 11

**Read** Psalm 80:1-7.



We are a people who grow frustrated in our lives, and feel entitled to instant gratification. We find ourselves feeling abandoned, because we first abandon God. We long for tangible signs of God's presence, even though we know the Holy Spirit does not always appear in the ways we desire. We ask that God does not turn God's back on us, even though we turn our backs on the other.

### **Pray**

Oh God, we pray that you will not only show your face to us, but to the other in our midst as well. We pray for all who have experienced traumas and sufferings unknown to us. We ask for your grace and your mercy. Amen.

*UKirk Memphis*

**Read** Psalm 126.

Walter Brueggemann offers a framework for reading the psalms in terms of orientation, disorientation, and re-orientation. In Psalm 126, Israel has endured a terrible disorientation – ripped from their homeland and forced into exile by the Babylonian empire. After 70 years, the people are allowed to return to their lands. The psalmist leads them in giving thanks to God for their return. However, things have changed. The younger generation has no memory of how things were before. They have to re-orient themselves based solely on the stories they heard as children.

Most of us cannot image being in exile. You may have left home to attend college or maybe you are living at home. Either way, things have changed. It can be disorienting. Standing out in this otherwise positive psalm is verse 5: “May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy” (NRSV). Verse 6 follows in the same vein. Dealing with change involves grieving what once was in order to fully live into what is and will be. In other words, change is hard.

Psalm 126 is about remembering our disorienting seasons of change and learning to give thanks for God's presence in every season, as God is always inviting us into new ways of being (re-orientation). During this season of Advent, may we be faithful in reflecting on and anticipating God's presence each season of our lives.

### **Pray**

Always Present God, by your Holy Spirit guide us as we seek to follow in the Way of Jesus – a way of way of hope, peace, joy, and love. Even as we grieve the loss of old ways of being, help us to give thanks for the ways you are always inviting us forward. Amen.

*Rev. Dr. Eric O. Ledermann  
Campus Minister*

*UKIRK Presbyterian Campus Ministry at Arizona State University*



# DECEMBER 12

# DECEMBER 21

Read Luke 7:18-30.

UKirk – St. Louis read this passage together and reflected on these questions. As you read this Scripture and think through these questions for yourself this day, what words resonate with you? What words would you want to add? How does the Living Word speak to you this day through these words?



What does your wilderness look like? What are you seeking?

How do you see – or yearn for – God’s justice moving in this world?



Read Hebrews 10:32-39.

Although Hebrews is a lesser-known New Testament text, you’ve probably heard Hebrews 11:1 from the pulpit, at the dinner table, in a thoughtful Hallmark card, or from the lips of a supportive friend in the midst of a difficult season. *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* In the preceding passage from chapter ten, the unknown author of the Letter to the Hebrews speaks of “earlier days” involving suffering and persecution to an unknown audience, likely of suffering Jewish and Gentile women and men who were tempted to renounce their faith. Scholars tell us that the word “conviction” is best understood and interpreted as “evidence.” This seems like a bizarre definition of faith by twenty-first century standards. We’ve seen the police procedurals. Doesn’t evidence imply something we can grasp and visualize? Doesn’t it demand to be seen?

More than ever before, living in these times requires an unparalleled visibility of faith. It compels us to make visible the injuries and the injustice that have been hidden by the powers that be. It invites us, as Christians, to connect with our experiences of suffering in order to become for others what Henri Nouwen has famously described as “wounded healers.” The writer of Hebrews gives us a tall order by encouraging us towards “compassion,” “confidence,” and “endurance.” These practices remind me of the famous theological trio that Paul acclaims: faith, hope, and love. Could compassion, confidence, and endurance be a foundational lens for a new era of Christianity? How might you respond to this calling in your own ministry as a child of God?

### Pray

Strengthen us, O God, that out of past sufferings, we may confidently serve in the ways of your compassionate Son, Jesus Christ.

*Rev. Meg Vail*

*Assoc. Pastor for Christian Education, Youth, and Young Adult Ministries  
First Presbyterian Church Logan, UT  
(Utah State University)*

# DECEMBER 20

# DECEMBER 13

**Read** Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Don't you hate it when this happens? You're minding your business, reading sacred texts, and BLAMMO, gendered title. Or BLAMMO: references to slavery being cool...not cool!

I love these passages from Jeremiah. They talk about God redeeming the children of Israel, restoring them and all that surrounds them. Cool, cool. But as a woman, especially as a woman married to a woman, the "husband" title is problematic. So, I see there's a note! Maybe there's a better word! But wouldn't you know?! The Bible tricks me again, the other word is "master," ugh. That one should be problematic for everyone, but maybe you didn't see that "note," and you were saved. Either way, we know there are a lot of other titles in the Bible for God, our Father, Creator, Mother, Friend, Savior. And it's okay to lean into those when the harder words come up. And some words are often less cool for certain people, and that's okay, too. I don't think God wants us crying out: Mother, Father, or **Master**, if those words are hurtful at the same time. And, just in case you need a refresher (we all often do): it's really not cool to force words on other people. *No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest...*

## **Pray**

Praise the Lord Almighty, Mother and Creator, all the titles we need, don't need, and don't know. You became and are becoming us. Forever and ever. Amen.

*Rev. Lindsey A. Groves  
Campus Minister  
UKirk Nashville*

**Read** 2 Corinthians 8:1-15.

I started multiple times. I was eager to get it done, but it wasn't going to happen. The words would not come to the page. I promised I would write. The deadline was drawing near. My thoughts raced to ten other things on the looming to do list, instead. Frustration whispered unhelpful words inside my mind. I had all I needed to do what needed to be done, to share what needed to be shared, to finish the assignment, complete the task. Yet I couldn't bring it into being. Over and over I read. What profound thought would I offer? How long would I have to wait? Would it ever come? Down one road I began, changing courses mid thought then starting down another path with no clear direction. I paused and changed perspective, then realized it had been there all along. GRACE. God's freely given gift is always ready to be received by every one of us. Are we ready to receive it? The gift is for you and me. It is a gift meant to be shared generously with others and ourselves. We have what we need. Thanks be to God.

## **Pray**

Dear God, Thank you for the gift of grace embodied in Jesus Christ. Help us to receive and share this gift generously with others. Amen.

*Neil Meyer  
Campus Minister  
UKirk at MSU (Michigan State University)*

# DECEMBER 14

# DECEMBER 19

**Read** Isaiah 12:2-6.

The world is getting darker by the hour.  
My hope for peace is diminished.  
I'm at my breaking point . . .  
Yet your love enters in,  
    bringing new joy, new life, new hope.  
As I look around at how your light shines,  
    my soul cries out in great joy.  
My song turns into my rallying cry –  
    to let all creation know of your glory.  
No longer do I fear the darkness of this world –  
    for my trust is affirmed anew in you,  
    for there is where my hope of peace resides.

## **Pray**

God of light, at times our world is dark – when fear takes over, when hope is lost, when peace is just a distant dream – break into our darkness. Open our eyes to see your light shining in the night. Break open our hardened hearts with your love so that we may sing of your mercy and power. Amen.

*Rev. Maggie Alsup  
Chaplain  
Lyon College*

**Read** Luke 7:31-35.

we who wish upon a star forget the star we wish upon  
and waiting for the star at night forget the sun at day  
waiting for the perfect song, we never join the dance  
wondering if it's okay to cry, we never take the chance  
to find wisdom in the flow, where serenity speaks yet  
we flee from wisdom and fly towards clickbait  
dazed like insects toward electric fury  
crazed like rabbits in a frantic hurry

the way has shown us to drink with the sinners  
when ego and id tells us to keep with our tribe  
tear down the walls, build a bridge of hope  
climb out of your tower or let down the rope  
and open our eyes to the world around us while  
the real star shines bright above our heads  
free to cry till our bodies shaken  
free to dance like kevin bacon

## **Pray**

Mother God, reveal yourself to us as you desire to be experienced and help us to recognize your presence both in the light and in the night. Amen.

*GJ Frye  
Peer Minister  
UKirk @ UMich*



# DECEMBER 18

# DECEMBER 15

Read Acts 28:23-31.



Rev. Dr. Shelly Barrick Parsons  
Director of Presbyterian Ministries  
WVUKirk-PSF

Read Luke 1:57-66.

*What then will this child become?*

Our scripture reading for the day ends with a question that I believe sums up our childhood through our college years. *What then will this child become?* From an early age we are continually asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” I know for me, and likely for others, my answer went through a number of different choices as I grew older. Eleven-year-old me wanted to be a scientist, while twenty-one-year-old me was really unsure what I wanted to do with my life. In life there are direction changes. We change majors, careers, and the locations where we live.

John’s relatives and neighbors asked this question in response to his parent’s radical departure from the tradition in naming children. His father’s declaration that “his name is John” challenged their tradition, but shows us that this child was unique and known by God, just as each of us are. This season remember that, while the “*What then will this child become*” may change, you are, and will always be, known by the one who created and formed you.

### Pray

Lord of all, today you awaken us to new mercies. Give us the assurance that you know us by name, and have a plan for our lives. Surround us with a community that encourages us to follow You. Strengthen our hearts, when fears and uncertainties of the future creep in. In the name of Jesus, we pray, Amen.

Ryan Landis  
Campus Ministry Coordinator  
UKirk MS State

# DECEMBER 16

# DECEMBER 17

**Read** Philippians 4:4-7.

During the holidays, it is easy to get overwhelmed with buying presents, family drama, and traveling. This chaos isn't much different than what Mary was experiencing leading up to Jesus' birth. She was processing the news that she was carrying the son of Man, dealing with Joseph questioning their engagement, and dealing with the stress of having nowhere to deliver Jesus. She ended up in a manger, surrounded by animals and with little help. In the middle of this turmoil an angel appears, and tells her, "do not be afraid" (Luke 1:26). This served as a moment of trust and understanding for her.

This story can be related to Philippians, where Paul is imprisoned for his faith in God. He writes in his letter to "rejoice in the Lord always" and "do not be anxious." In fact, he reminds us twice to rejoice, and states that we shouldn't be anxious in anything, no matter the situation. While sitting in jail, Paul was able to write this. Just like Mary, he was able to trust and rejoice in the Lord. God transcends what is happening in our lives, and we rejoice in him. We challenge you to take time during this season to take a step back, notice where you see God, and rejoice in him.

## **Pray**

God, thank you for the assurance of peace when we fully trust in your ways and timing. Help us to notice you and rejoice in you more. Amen.

*Students Leaders  
Common Ground (Xavier University)*

**Read** Isaiah 11:1-9.

Isaiah's prophetic words give the Jews a glimpse of what's to come after the occupation of the Assyrian empire. In times of trial and hardship, Isaiah reminds us that as God's people we are called into the work of creative imagination. What does God's realm look like, and what can we do to start preparing the way? What do we have to hope for?

I look forward to the time when truth will prevail and justice, mercy, and peace will be abundant. But in this scripture, Isaiah knows that just painting an abstract picture using these thematic concepts doesn't cut it as prophetic work. Isaiah gives details of the coming reign of God. We're shown exactly the specific kind of world-altering stuff that's in store. God's kingdom is as unnatural as a calf in relationship with a bear cub, or a lion who's gone vegan. We're given the details because God's work is specific. It is not enough to demand justice, equity, and affirming love for all. We must be specific and call our beloved siblings by name, just as God does, and imagine the explicit reforms necessary to prepare the way of the Lord in ourselves, our communities, and the larger structures in which we operate.

In this Advent season, we can use our imagination to picture the details of what's to come. In this work we will be told that what we want is unnatural, or that we are ourselves are unnatural, but the text tells us that the very realm of God is unnatural, so let us be bold in our actions and self-love.

## **Pray**

Holy God, inspire within us the courage to envision an unnaturally better world. Help us to ask big questions and not shy away from complicated answers. Help us abide in undying hope, and be with us as we take the first step in the ordained work of creating. Amen.

*Garrett deGaffenreid  
Student  
UKirk Austin*