



Words for Waiting

*Daily Devotions for
Advent 2019*

Words for Waiting

is provided by the UKirk Collegiate Ministries Association in partnership with the Presbyterian Mission Agency's Office of Christian Formation.



www.ukirk.org

Instagram: @ukirknational

Facebook Page: UKirk



Presbyterian Mission
**Office of Christian
Formation**

presbyterianmission.org/formation

Facebook Page: Office of Christian Formation PCUSA

Welcome to *Words for Waiting*, a collection of reflections for the season of Advent through New Year's Day. 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.

Wherever you're coming from, grab a Bible 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 group collaborations, six individual students, and 13 campus ministers, representing 23 Presbyterian-supported student faith communities on 34 campuses in 14 different states. We're also joined this year by eight neighbors in other areas of ministry. 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 a myriad of ways too. I hope you'll feel free to mark up the margins, crinkle the pages, and even embrace a coffee stain or two. 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 1 Represented

Read Isaiah 2:1-5.



God of the highest mountain,
You call the nations to put down their swords.
You teach us to walk in your path,
Begging us to tear down our walls,
Calling us to overcome our differences.
As Isaiah prophesies, we trust that one day
Our swords will be replaced with plowshares
of love, learning, and understanding.

Pray
Loving God, help us this Advent season not to wait idly, but to realize Isaiah's vision, continually relying on God. May we learn to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you. Amen.

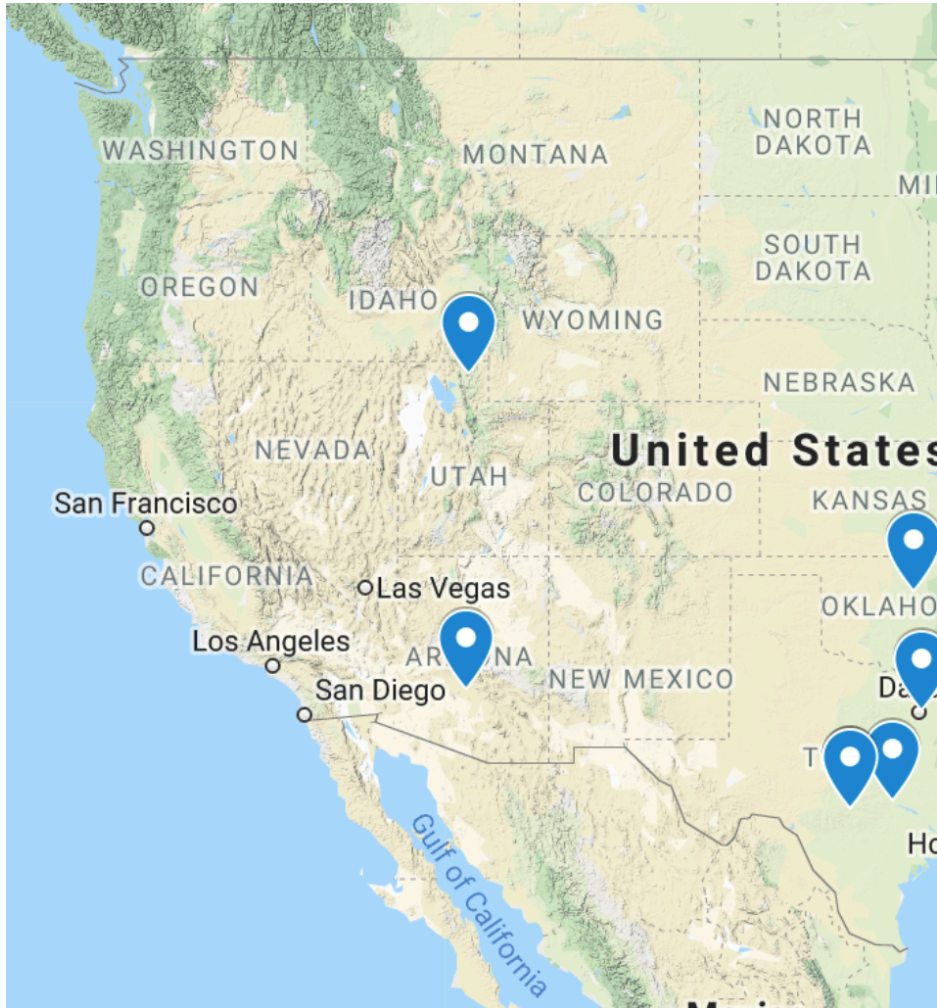
UKirk Memphis



- UKirk at ASU
- UKirk Atlanta
- UKirk Austin
- UKirk Collegiate Ministries Association
- UKirk Greensboro
- UKirk Memphis
- UKirk MTSU
- UKirk at Schreiner
- UKirk SMU
- UKirk St. Louis
- UKirk Stillwater
- UKirk at UMich
- UKirk at UVA
- UKirk Wooster
- Union Presbyterian Seminary
- University of Dubuque
- Westminster Christian Fellowship at Georgia Tech

Ministries

December 2



Read Genesis 8:1-19.

God remembered.
God remembered Noah.
God remembered all those
alive.
God remembered all the
animals.
God remembered.

God sent rest.

Noah waited.
(Patience is a fruit of the
Spirit, you know.)
Noah waited.
Noah waited for the waters to
recede.
Noah waited for the raven to
return.
Noah waited for the dove to
return.
Noah waited.

God spoke,
inspiring a new creation.

God remembers.
God remembers you.
God remembers me.
God remembers all of
creation.
God remembers.

God sends rest.

We wait.
(Patience is a fruit of the
Spirit, you know.)
We wait.
We wait for God's breath to
blow over all of creation.
We wait for God to arrive.
We wait.

God speaks,
joining creation and creates
anew.

Pray

Creating God, remember us and remind us to rest. Guide us in ways of patience as we join all of creation in eager anticipation of the coming of Christ. Amen.

- Beaumont Presbyterian Church
- Chartiers Valley United Presbyterian Church
- Columbia Theological Seminary
- Ekklesia
- First Presbyterian Church (Logan, UT)
- Hope House - UKirk at UTC
- Lyon College
- Marshall UKIRK
- MSUKirk
- PCM at Duke
- PC(USA)
- Presbyterian Student Center at UGA
- Rhodes College
- True North Campus Ministry

*Rev. Jenny Hardin
Associate Pastor/Campus Minister
First Presbyterian Church/UKirk Stillwater (Stillwater, OK)*

December 3

January 1

Read Genesis 9:1-17.

The covenant God makes with Noah after the flood is the hopeful “ending” to a narrative filled with death, violence, and destruction. After the rain stops, the ark drifts at sea for what maybe felt like an eternity – bobbing up and down in waters of unknowable depths. Eventually, the waters subside, and Noah and his family emerge from the ark to see an Earth ravaged by an apocalyptic, divine-ecological event on par with what many scientists predict may be a future for our world in a climate crisis.

It’s hard to read this story and not think of all the ways in which we are also living narratives and experiences filled with death, violence, and destruction. I’m sure Noah and his family struggled to hold onto hope for deliverance – knowing they carried the future of their world in the hull of a sturdy, but also fragile, hand-made boat. Perhaps many of us are feeling the weight of worlds on our shoulders, struggling to stay afloat, as the rains come day after day, and the waters rise up like a flood.

Maybe this is the very story we need this Advent. The covenant God makes with Noah is the “future story” we dream of, in the midst of crisis, uncertainty, and grief. It is the embodied hope that no matter how big or overwhelming things seem, we can come out on the other side with potential and opportunity. Though waters rise around us, we are anchored in the promises of a God who does not let us drift alone; there has always been a rainbow prised in the sky.

Pray

Holy God, in this season of Advent, may we cling to your promises and signs of guidance, as we make our way through this world, swimming the currents of life as followers of your cause. May we be fruitful and multiply your Love in how we live our lives every day. Amen.

*Erin Guzmán
Campus Minister
UKirk Wooster*

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-13.

Happy New Year! Welcome to 2020, the year I’m sure every eye doctor in the world has been waiting for so they can make some lame jokes every day about “focusing on 2020 vision.” But that is kind of what we do on January 1st, isn’t it? Make resolutions so we can refocus our lives.

That makes starting this January 1st with the passage from Ecclesiastes such a gift. The author basically says, “You stand at the edge of a new year. A bunch of stuff is going to happen – stuff you’ll do yourself and things that will happen because that’s just how life is. Some of it will be amazing, while some of it will suck beyond belief, and a whole bunch of ordinary, routine, day-in-and-day-out decisions will have to be made. You may not even see how God is working for good through it all (even though that’s what we know God does). But don’t spend time worrying – that’s just a waste of time. Just see the life – eating and drinking and the work you do (homework, work-work, classwork, relationship-work, self-work, faith-work) as a gift from God to you.

“Because God’s gift to us is the happiness we get from our food and drink and from the work we do.” (Ecclesiastes 3:13 CEV)

Not only is the life you have right now a gift to you, but you and your life as it is are also a gift from God to the world right where you live. Maybe the only resolution we need to make this year is to try and remember this.

Pray

God, thank you for my life, for this year, and even for the work I will do (even if I don’t see how it all fits together). Help me remember your gifts to me, and that I am a gift from you to others. In Christ’s name I pray, amen.

*Rev. Gini Norris-Lane
Executive Director
UKirk Collegiate Ministries Association*

December 31

December 4

Read Psalm 20.

I'm always a bit surprised when the Bible starts talking about filling our heart's desires. Somehow church always gave me the impression that my dreams were selfish unless they were about helping others. I worry about putting my dreams above others, above God. But here we are, with this psalm praying confidently for God to fill our heart's desires.

That's not the only prayer, of course: the psalm also prays for joy, for God's presence and protection, for many chances to praise God.

This is a prayer for our lives to be full of good things, in other words. And dreams can be good, in the right context; they're not always selfish. Sometimes we're leaning into the gifts that God has given to us; sometimes we're looking forward to how things will be. We dream of good things, just as God dreams of good things for all of us — not just for you, not just for our community or the people who look like us, but for every single person and for the entire world.

Alleluia!

Pray

God, thank you for every good thing that you give us. We look forward to the time when every good thing that you dream of for your people will come true. Until then, show us the way. Amen.

*Alina Kanaski
Pastor*

*Chartiers Valley United Presbyterian Church/Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
(Carnegie, PA)*

Read Matthew 24:23-27.

@God will arrive, when @God is not #trending.

Gurus announcing super-rich cars and fancy homes in return for your faith in Jesus are everywhere. It is a two-way traffic, announcing-selling Jesus for money and receiving money by investing one's faith in Christ. The instant and constant buzz of this capitalist Gospel announces 24-7 God's arrival right here if you can invest.

This proliferation of trending verses and chants put Christ's piety to shame. A scintillating, repackaged version of the gospel has dethroned the Gospel. The signs and wonders announcing Christ's presence via prosperity is the new Gospel, perhaps. Trending #gurus of the capitalist gospel are deceiving the gullible believers, announcing Christ's arrival with #love. For these gurus, Christ will arrive only if the believers follow their message of a @prosperousChrist.

These cool new-age Christian gurus announce God's love freely for all who can afford to donate a fat check. They say Christ is here and Christ is there, where the money is. The @guru pronounces that wealth will save you and me from the illnesses of the world till God arrives. Our God in Christ, who not even had a place to rest his head, has become the poster boy of capitalist wantonness.

"Poverty will be gone and afflictions will disappear" is the incessant chant that sounds almost like the love-thy-neighbor rule. Sadly, believers remain like the unattended paralyzed person at Bethesda. @God will arrive, when @God is not #trending; then we can hope this mode of manufacturing God will cease.

Pray

Oh! My God, save me from my self-serving assurances in a capitalist system that makes me believe as if you are only there where there is wealth.

*Trevor J Raj
Seminary Student*

Union Presbyterian Seminary (Richmond, VA)

December 5

December 30

Read Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19.

No one can rule a nation or a people (or really do anything) just based on their own ability. Everyone needs God. He will always defend us and bring everything that the world needs. His love will remain even after death. God is in everything that was, is in everything that is and will be in everything that is to come. He is with us always. Though it may be hard to see God in some situations, His love and care shines on us throughout all time. While there are tough times, we must not forget that He will always be righteous. He will always defend those who need defending and will be fair to even the ones who are cruel.

Pray

Dear God,
Open our eyes to see the truth, open our ears to hear your word, and open our hearts to gain understanding and wisdom. We know that you are with us as we learn. Help us to seek you daily.
Amen.

*Meaghan O'Donnell & Chrissy Stevens
Students
UKirk at Schreiner University*

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

“Do not lose heart.” That’s a tall order these days. The violence; the divisive rhetoric; the hatred against immigrants, LGBT+ persons, and other marginalized communities — it just seems like so much. One gets the sense that Paul is writing to a very fragile community, one that is being afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down. I can think of many people in these times that might find such conditions alarmingly familiar.

When I get overwhelmed by the brokenness of the world, I often turn to this piece of wisdom from our friends in the Jewish community:

“Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief.

Do justice, now.

Love kindness, now.

Walk humbly, now.

*You are not obligated to complete the work,
but neither are you free to abandon it.” (The Talmud 303)*

So take a moment this day and breathe. Find one way today to breathe in God’s mercies for yourself and then breathe out God’s mercies to another person. Such a small act can have reverberations you might never expect. We do not lose heart because God doesn’t lose heart in us! The proof we have of this truth is right here in our arms, in the Christ-child, God-with-Us.

Pray

*Read or sing this to the tune ELLACOMBE (“I Sing the Mighty Power of God”):
Be strong, take heart, for God is good and goodness shall prevail.
Our hope is in the Lord, our Light, and God will never fail.
God’s love is pure, our faith is sure, with courage we live on,
for we will stand on living land with God, our hopeful song.*

*Rev. Stephen M. Fearing
Pastor
Beaumont Presbyterian Church*

December 29

December 6

Read Matthew 2:13-23.

Join the Journey

As college students, we are called to leave our homes for a period of time and make our home someplace else. Most of us are fortunate not to have to flee from our homes. Yet while we are away studying, we miss many momentous moments of family life: a sibling's birthday, a meal with family.

Out of our hometowns and in far off places, we gather on campus for a common purpose: to study for a degree in hopes of making a better livelihood for ourselves. We do not know when or if we shall return to our families and friends as we make new ones in college.

Help us to see others who are on this journey, particularly those who have crossed borders and seas to be here in our places of wisdom and study.

We pray for those fleeing for their very lives across borders and boundaries, leaving their homes and not knowing if it will ever be safe to return.

We weep for all of those children lost to war and conflict, famine and disease.

We dream of the day when all God's people will be welcomed home to a place of peace and prosperity, of safety and solace.

Pray

May we all step out of the shallows and into the shalom of this season of Christ's birth. May the Prince of Peace, the One who comforts and consoles us, also challenge us to join the journey of the immigrant family across all borders and boundaries.

Read Acts 13:16-25.

I've got a list of things that I need to do before Christmas can arrive: stockings must be hung, a pecan pie must be baked, the tree must be decorated (with white lights!), Christmas cards should be mailed, and I need to make space to display any received Christmas cards. Before Christmas can arrive at my house, I have a checklist of what I feel needs doing. If I'm being completely honest, by December 6th each year, I've usually gotten 80% of my shopping completed, too.

Paul, in talking about Jesus here, shows the Israelites a checklist as well. He's letting the members of the synagogue know everything that God has done in the past to prepare for the Messiah's arrival. It's an intense list, and like John, we may not feel worthy of the gift, given everything that "still needs to be done." But that's where we're wrong.

Don't let the "to dos" ruin your Advent. Rest in the truth that God did, and still does, all of the work so that we can receive the gift of Jesus Christ with freedom and without guilt or shame, whether or not the stockings are hung or the tree has white lights. It's all been prepared, and we will celebrate Christ's birth yet again this year, because God says we're worthy of the gift of the Messiah.

Pray

Giver of all the best gifts, be with us now as we work through any checklists we've created. Remind us to find joy in the waiting. Some may say we are not worthy of the gift of Christ, but you say otherwise, and for that we are grateful. Amen.

December 7

December 28

Read John 1:19-28.

In the reading for today, we see an exchange between John the Baptist and the Jewish authorities, the priests and Levites. These Jewish authorities don't know how to label John, so they keep asking him questions about who he is.

The Jewish authorities don't know how to feel about John because they don't know what category to put him in. They don't know if they should embrace him or feel threatened by him.

Sharing testimony, like John does, is a way to tell your own story. It is an opportunity to define yourself on your own terms and not let others do it for you. Every day we encounter classmates, friends, and neighbors, each with a unique story. We also learn new things about ourselves. Sharing those pieces of ourselves isn't easy.

During this season of Advent, we're in a time of anticipation and waiting. Waiting for the Christ child and preparing ourselves for the celebration of his arrival. As part of that preparation, how can you better understand your relationship with those around you? What are ways you can reflect and tell your own story – on your own terms? Take one step today to tell your community who it is that God created you to be.

Pray

Creator God,
During this Advent season,
Help us to see those around us as you made them,
not as we define them.
Help us to love ourselves and one another,
And give us the strength to share our own stories.
Amen.

*Rev. Max Hill
Campus Minister
UKirk St. Louis*

Read Matthew 18:1-5, 10-14.

My friend Paul Demer is a talented singer-songwriter who wrote a song that I love called, "Teach Me How to Wonder," in which he reflects on the natural curiosity he had as a child. He sings, "When I was five I had so many questions / My eyes were open wide to the brightness of it all / Like fireflies and drinking in the raindrops / Where did it go?"*

If there's one thing we often lose as we age, it's our sense of wonder. Children, on the other hand, are incredibly skilled wonderers. Kids can spend hours engaging their curiosities. Kids are good at noticing and celebrating the small miracles of life: crisp and colorful fall leaves, ladybugs and butterflies, clouds that look like animals, the first snow of the season.

It's not surprising, then, that Jesus tells the disciples to become like children. Interpreting the parables of Jesus, like the parable of the lost and found sheep, requires imagination. Wondering allows us to humble ourselves, to be more imaginative by admitting that we don't have all the answers. This posture, Jesus says, is required for seeing and entering the kingdom of heaven.

Advent is a season for waiting—waiting in eager anticipation for Christ's return. And so, Advent is also a season for embracing the gift of wondering. How will you embrace your curiosity today? Spend time noticing and wondering at the small miracles of life, and pay attention to the joy and eager anticipation that comes as a result.

Pray

God, teach us how to wonder. Make us curious, help us anticipate the extraordinary, and attune every part of us to the wonder of living. Amen.

*Rev. Jessie Light-Wells
Campus Minister
UKirk SMU*

*"Teach Me How to Wonder" is on the 2018 album *I'm Glad You're Still Around*, released independently on pauldemer.bandcamp.com.

December 27

December 8

Read Proverbs 8:22-31.



Pray

Artist of Creation, in this season of purposeful waiting, help us watch for signs that you are making all things new.



Life-Giving Word, create us anew and empower us to build communities that delight in all humankind.

Architect of Beauty, give us wisdom to become your partners in the healing of all creation.

Amen.

Read Romans 15:4-13.

Paul writes to a divided community in his letter to the Romans. Gentile and Jewish converts are having trouble getting along with each other, largely due to cultural differences, and Paul spends a great deal of energy mediating their disagreements in this letter. Knowing this frames our reading for today.

Paul encourages unity between them in our reading for today. However, in doing this, Paul is not asking them to homogenize and give up their unique identities. Instead, Paul leans on the example of Christ’s hospitality. Christ welcomes all, regardless of their background or social status. In doing so, Christ honors the humanity of each and every person. The hospitality that Christ embodies invites us to come as we are and find a home.

At the same time, this example of hospitality urges us to show meaningful hospitality — even to those with whom we are uncomfortable. This can be a tough call to live into, especially on campus. Many of the social aspects of college life are inherently exclusionary. Among other things, we divide ourselves by major, club, and Greek letter. We compete with each other over grades and class rank.

Yet, Christ calls us into a community that is hopeful for the future and supports one another in the midst of a shared struggle.

Pray

God of hope, offer us encouragement in the midst of finals. Remind us that our majors, our grades, and our extracurriculars are not what define us. Give us the confidence to know that you love us, honor us, and recognize us just as we are. Help us to be a community that welcomes freely, just as you welcome us. Amen.

December 9

December 26

Read Isaiah 30:19-26.

Like the Light of the Son

There is a part in Michael Cervantes' masterpiece *Don Quixote*, wherein Don Quixote and his companion Sancho encounter another knight and his squire, deep in the woods, under the cover of darkness. Although ready to fight one another, all parties agree to wait until morning, that they might face one another after sizing up their opponent. The squire declares, "God will bring us His light, and then we'll see what we'll see."*

We like to know what we're up against. We want the illumination of day to bring us clarity. Light sounds like the answer to all of our problems. We forget that in the darkness we get to conceal all of the things that we'd rather not see. To this end, Isaiah promises a light that is overwhelming in its brightness, yet healing in its coming. We are not promised that we will like what we see, the idols and afflictions illuminated on that day. Yet we are promised comfort, our Teacher, seen at last and guiding us forward, and the healing that comes with the dawn.

Pray

In the waiting of Advent, we find ourselves peering through darkness, impatient for the light that we so anxiously anticipate. Lord, give us patience in our waiting; do not allow us to adjust our eyes to the temporary darkness, that the light may not blind us when it dawns. Let us listen for you calling, knowing that you are drawing near. Help us bring our shame and hurt into your glory, that these things may fade away in the sunshine, made new by the light of day. In your son's name we pray, amen.

*Ellen Louise Keyser Endelman
Seminary Student
University of Dubuque*

* Saavedra Miguel Cervantes, *The History of That Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote De La Mancha*, Trans. Burton Raffel (New York: Norton, 1996).

Read Psalm 148.

Praise the Lord! Yesterday was Christmas! Hallmark's countdown is over, the music is no longer playing, and life moves toward a new year. Yet, praise the Lord! The story of Jesus is just beginning. The one who is to change the world has been born, and this is a call to celebrate. Praise the Lord! All the universe and creation are charged to shout out praises to God. Praise the Lord! We are part of creation. We can join the angels and sea monsters. We can stand with the mountains and trees. We can sing with the cattle and the creeping things. We are a part of the young and old. We can praise the Lord! I invite you to praise with all of creation. All things big, small, young and old can praise God, and so can you. Christmas has come, praise the Lord. The new year is approaching, praise the Lord. Each morning that we wake, with all of creation, praise the Lord! Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! Take the joy of the season into each day and Praise the Lord!

Pray

"To you, God of creation, we sing a new song of praise.
A song of trees planted by streams of living water,
a song of mountains clapping their hands for joy,
a song of cities delighting in heavenly harmony,
a song of people that were lost and have been found.
for the earth is the Lord's and we shall be glad in it.
Hallelujah."*

*Patrick "Fish" Lane
Seminary Student
Columbia Theological Seminary*

* Prayer written by the people of Pitt Street Uniting Church in Sydney, Australia. *Prayers Encircling the World: An International Anthology* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 6.

December 25

December 10

Read John 1:1-14.



The Difference A Day Makes

Discomfort and fear
Expectation of the new
Everything with change
Sacrifice for the future

A cry of innocence
New life and love
Commitment for life
Exhaustion
A new light smiling
A future for all

Pray

Breathe in. Breathe out.

Holy One, As we celebrate the gift of your life, may we pause throughout the day to see one another as you might and give thanks.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

Amen.

Read Romans 15:14-21.

Paul is an extreme guy. When we meet him in Acts as Saul, he's not just a participant in the stoning of Stephen, he's something of an emcee as people lay their coats at his feet. He breathes threats and murder against followers of Christ until, of course, he becomes one. After his conversion, in contrast, nothing escapes his lips except words of Christ's work. Once he becomes a follower and evangelist, he becomes the most extreme one he can be. Paul does nothing halfway. It makes sense then, as we read letters he intended for the church in Rome, that he writes boldly and speaks of the power of signs and wonders. Paul is an extreme guy, and his experience of following Christ is extreme as well. What encouragement can ordinary people find in his letters? God still speaks in signs and wonders today. But God also speaks in the still, small voice that whispers kindness over disrespect. Understanding over assuming. Connection over hatred. It is a sign and wonder when you preach the gospel with your actions, even if this good news is proclaimed without words. "Those who have never been told of him shall see, and those who have never heard of him shall understand" not only by the ways that Paul did it, but even today by the ordinary ways that you do it. Listen for that still, small voice to guide you.

Pray

God for whom all things are possible, we praise you, for your yoke is easy and your burden is light. Teach us what to say and how to act at every hour, such that your good news is fully proclaimed. Amen.

Hope House-UKirk at UTC

*Rev. Beatrix Weil
Chaplain
Rhodes College*

December 11

December 24

Read Genesis 15:1-18.

An old man runs toward a bunch of buzzards, yelling and swinging his cane to scare them away from the increasingly putrid carcasses in the middle of the road. As the birds flap away to a safe distance, the man looks up to the sky and asks — or maybe demands — “What am I doing here, God?!? I was captivated when you showed up out of nowhere. I believed you when you promised a family, and again when you promised a homeland...but then you just disappeared. Now, I ask for a sign, and you repeat the same old promises, and tell me to make a sacrifice. So, here it is; here we are, dead and good as dead, waiting on you to show up...yet again. Am I a sucker for believing you? For chasing those damn birds away...yet again?”

As soon as Abram’s eyes close, the buzzards are back at it, but by this point, he is too tired to care. As the predators return, and the last daylight fades, an old man drifts off to sleep and the universe seems utterly, terrifyingly void.

To this point in the story, Abram’s experience of God has been limited to the promise of blessing. God exists — as far as he can tell — to solve problems. To establish utopias. But here, for the first time, Abram perceives God’s presence amid the more complex and harsh realities of created life: slavery, oppression, pain, some of which endures seven lifetimes. It turns out that the promise is not a life free of want, pain, or injustice, but one, in spite of it all, free of despair.

Pray

O God, make haste to save us.

*Rev. Will Norman
Campus Minister
Presbyterian Student Center at UGA*

Read Luke 2:8-20.

The Shepherds and the Angels

It’s a story many of us know well. Imagine the shepherds in the field: picture them hopping from foot to foot to stay warm, looking after the sheep like any other regular night. Maybe they were joking with each other, talking and laughing. Can you see the look of shock and fear register on their faces when the angels appeared in all their splendor? Listen closely for the sound of the heavenly singing! Lord God, send us their courage — for they did not look back after the sign had been given! On to Bethlehem, these faithful shepherds went to see the miracle wrapped in cloth and lying in the manger.

The text indicates that the shepherds shared what they had seen and heard with Mary and Joseph, who were amazed. Take extra note, though, of Mary’s reaction: “But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”

God sends signs often. Treasure the words that are sent to you, through those who spread love and light. Pay attention to what is happening in your heart as another year comes to a close. Open your hands to receive what is next on your path. Trust with Mary’s conviction, and rejoice! The God of the heavens and the earth looks after you.

Pray

All-Knowing Father, send us your peace on this night. Help us to ponder these words in our hearts like your servant Mary, and to truly recognize the miracle of Jesus’ birth. Your grace and peace are unmatched gifts to us. May every cup overflow with gratitude and love.

*Maya Speckhard
Student
Ekklesia at Missouri State University*

December 23

December 12

Read Galatians 3:6-14.

A Better Way

In the passage today, Paul reminds us that Abraham entered into God's family not by impressing God with his behavior, but by believing in God. Abraham's faith alone brought him acceptance into God's family.

As you read this, most of you are probably exhausted. You've spent hours trying to find the perfect gift for everyone. You're beginning to worry if Amazon really can ship your gift in one day. Some of you have baked enough cookies or desserts to feed an army (or small campus ministry). Maybe you've traveled for hours or days to get to where you will celebrate Christmas.

You're exhausted physically, emotionally, and spiritually from trying to impress other people. It's ironic that as Christians we celebrate that we belong to God by faith alone, yet our celebrations of Christmas are often defined by doing a long list of actions to impress people and to feel like we belong.

Take a moment today to remember that we do not earn God's love. We are selfish, broken, and weak people who celebrate Christmas because it was the birth of that little baby that allows us to fully experience acceptance into God's family. Our value, our worth, and our strength come not from trying to impress God or other people, but is a gift that came in the form of a baby in a manger, as well as a man on a cross.

Pray

God, help us remember we do not earn our love from you, it is freely given. Show us how to celebrate Christmas as people already loved, and not trying to earn it.

*Jon Keyser
Director*

Westminster Christian Fellowship at Georgia Tech

Read Ruth 1:6-18.

In a scene from A. A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh*, Winnie and Piglet check on their friend Eeyore, who confesses to feeling "really rather Sad, and Alone, and Not Much Fun To Be Around At All."* Eeyore says that to be near him would be a waste, that Winnie and Piglet should go on and enjoy themselves. But the two sit. Just sit. And, Milne writes, "Eeyore started to feel a very tiny little bit better." Because Pooh and Piglet were "There. No more; no less."

In this passage, we see a woman, desperate and hopeless. Naomi is mourning — she is Mara, bitter. She's empty. We might even say that Naomi is "really rather Sad, and Alone, and Not Much Fun To Be Around At All." But, Ruth gives her a gift that goes beyond words: her presence. For Naomi, Ruth commits to an unknown future among an unknown people worshipping an unknown God. To be "There. No more; no less."

As we await the birth of our Savior, let us not hurry to the cross and the glory of the empty tomb. Let's remember the gift that Christ gave us first, for thirty-three beautiful and difficult years. Jesus came down to Be. Simply be. To live and grow, speak and listen. To dwell among us. To give the gift that goes beyond words, that heals even hopelessness.

Pray

God, as we near the manger and prepare for your Arrival, we remember the gifts that You have given us, not only by healing and preaching, living and dying, but also by Being. As Ruth gave to Naomi, so You give to us the gift of Presence. Thank You.

*Grace Smith
Student
Presbyterian Campus Ministry at Duke*

* A. A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 2017).

December 13

December 22

Read 2 Peter 3:8-13.

People have been trying to predict the end of the world for as long as humanity has existed. Groups have gathered in anticipation, only to wake up the next morning and go home. With so much emphasis on the future, we sometimes forget about the present. We can become so obsessed about an upcoming exam or paper that we struggle to pay attention to the beauty, love, and wonder right in front of us.

By the time the second letter of Peter began circulating, all these predictions and preparations had simply started to get old. People started to lose faith. This scripture is trying to encourage them to keep the faith.

Is it possible, though, that not only is God's measure of time different from ours, but that God's idea "kingdom" may be different? Is it possible that, as is written in Luke 17:21, God's reign of love is already among us whenever we gather and choose to live in the Way Jesus showed us? What might it look like to live as though we are already living in the kingdom Jesus preached: a kingdom of radical welcome, radical grace, and radical love? How might the world look different? How might you behave differently?

Pray

O God, open the eyes of my heart and let me see the truth of your kingdom. Help me to look into another's face and see the beauty of your creation and the love you have for all your children. Help me be present today with you, with those I love, and with those you love. Help me to follow in the Way you have shown us in Jesus. Amen.

*Rev. Dr. Eric O. Lederman
Campus Minister
UKIRK at ASU (Tempe, AZ)*

Read Isaiah 7:10-16.

In one moment
the breath of his words vibrates the ears of a hearer.
Ahaz takes speech and turns it to reality.
A snap of fingers.
Gratification of the most instant variety.
But his own ears tremble with
the weight of Isaiah's vision.
A wait familiar to many women.
Hagar, seeking relief from abuse,
calling out in the desert.
Vashti, refusing to entertain powerful men.
A claim upon her own body
meaning certain exile from her own land.
Shiphrah.
Puah.
At the birthing stool.
Ruth on the threshing floor.
And Miriam.
A song of waiting.
For freedom from slavery.
For entry into the promised land.
For return to community after seven days of exile.
They have all carried the wait that trickles down through voices.
A heavy inheritance of story.
A way of being in relationship with Being.
A form in which we see ourselves
still waiting.

Pray

Infinite God who is with us in the wait, give us strength to see your story in action. Show us your work in the lives of those who have come before us. Bring us together into community so that we may create new stories of a world enacting your vision, for those who are here with us now and who are yet to come. Amen.

*Kate Trigger Duffert
Program Assistant for General Assembly Business
PC(USA) Office of the General Assembly*

December 21

December 14

Read John 3:31-35.

Today's reading is from early in Jesus's ministry, when he meets with John the Baptist. In fact, John is speaking in this passage, telling the crowd listening that he is not the Messiah and that the Messiah is much greater than we can comprehend. "The one who comes from above is above all." John finds this important enough to tell us twice. Jesus is the Prince of Heaven; he is above all and knows all. Sandwiched in between the repetitious statement is that those of the earth belong to the earth. While one can assume that "one who is of the earth" means all humans other than Jesus, may I present to you the idea that those of the earth are those who either do not know God or do not believe, those who, as said in Romans 12:2, are "conformed to this world." We are all created by God and, as said in Genesis 1:27, we are all created in his image. A piece of God is in each of us; we just need to accept it and honor it. By using the gifts God gave us, we are accepting God's word and showing God to the world. We are then less of this earth and can speak our testimonies of God, instead of just speaking of earthly things.

Pray

Dear Lord, thank you for today and for making us in your image. Please help us to use our gifts to help others and glorify you, and please forgive us then we fall short. Help us to do better. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

*Nora Chisamore
Student
UKirk MTSU*

Read 1 Samuel 2:1-8.

Hannah asked God for a son and promised to give that son to God. When she takes Samuel to the Temple, fulfilling her promise, Hannah sings a song of thanksgiving. It seems like an odd time to sing. It's not the song we might expect from a mother who has just left their child in the care of others. On the other hand, how could one leave their child in the Temple unless one trusts in God's faithfulness? Hannah stands in the long tradition of people yearning for God's justice and shalom. Her dedication of Samuel to God is the result of her faith in God's justice and care. She trusts that God will take care of her small boy and the entire world.

Hannah longs for and sings about a world where divisions between rich and poor, weak and strong, empty and filled, honored and dishonored are erased. She trusts God to accomplish this. Hannah's longings for a just world are echoed by the psalms, the prophets and Mary.

Hannah's longing and her song are the longing and song of the poor, weak, disenfranchised and dishonored, in her time and in our time. Her song is still worth singing.

This Advent, what will you sing about? Will you join your song for justice and peace with Hannah's?

Pray

Holy One, in these days of anticipation as we await your advent, help us to align our song with the songs of all who long for your kingdom. Open our eyes and hearts. Grant us the faith and courage to join in the age-old song of justice and peace. Amen.

*Nancy Janisch
Campus Minister
True North Campus Ministry (Grand Rapids, MI)*

December 15

December 20

Read Luke 1:46b-55.

Mary, like many of us, questioned her faith. However, she found favor in the eyes of the Lord. When she discovered she would carry God's son, she found what faith and love looked like. In this passage, Mary magnifies the Lord's love for all His children; regardless of who you are. Mary reinforces that God takes care of people at their lowest points. This reassuring passage gives hope.

God has a plan for everyone, and He remembers all His servants. Those who are humble will be rewarded, while those who are envious and proud will be sent away empty.

In this day and age of social media, it is easy to get into the habit of posting to show off or brag, instead of being humble. This Advent, remember that real blessing comes from humility. This passage reinforces that our humility does not go unnoticed; God will always see if we are being true within our hearts.

Try taking a step away from social media this week and ask yourself — is what you're posting in good will? Does what you post humbly praise God for His blessings in our life?

Pray

Dear Lord, we pray that you help us to take a step back and reflect on what is important in this season of Advent. As we spend time with loved ones, help us remember the power of humility and to enjoy the company of others rather than stressing over the more superficial aspects of our lives. Help us look out for those neighbors who may not be with their loved ones this season or who are questioning their relationship with you. In your name we pray, amen.

*MSUKirk
(Starkville, MS)*

Read 2 Samuel 7:18-22.

This is a pretty stellar time for King David. No more enemies to fight, which means he gets to stay at home, resting and getting ready for the future. Add to that a new covenant with God, that there will be more permanence in the kingdom, that a temple is to be built, and that David's family line will be prosperous for generations to come. #bestlife #blessed

Which makes it remarkable, and even a bit admirable, that at this news David turns to God in prayer and asks "who am I to matter a little bit to you, God?" Who is he that these things should be promised?

As we look at the world around us, as we see struggle and pain alongside abundance and joy, we might ask ourselves "who are we to deserve any of this, God?" Why pay attention to us at all?

We are four days away from celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ into the world. A human, entering a human world. Who are we to deserve such a gift? The gift of a new covenant, one that we are active participants in? This is the fantastic thing about God and God's relationship with us. There is never a point where we can say "yep, I deserve these wonderful things because I'm on par with you." But that doesn't even matter. God came among us because we do matter. We matter a lot. God's covenants with us show us that we mean more to God than we could ever comprehend.

Pray

Thank you, God, for reminding us over and over (and over) again that we matter to you. That even in our times of sorrow and joy, we matter enough that you sent your son Jesus to this world, to live among us and be an example of your perfect kin-dom. Amen.

*Rev. Sarah Hooker
Campus Minister
UKirk Atlanta*

December 19

December 16

Read Galatians 3:23-29.

Long ago, we were imprisoned
by self-made divisions.
We boast that we are all God's children,
that we have overcome all that divides.
Yet our divisions continue to exist as we live in denial.
We put up barriers — to set us apart from them —
for our comfort, our safety, our security.
What good is comfort, safety, or security,
if it doesn't apply to all?
In a world that grows more divisive by the hour,
colder by the minute,
darker by the day,
Let your light break us —
tear down our walls,
heal our divisions,
correct our false sense of peace.
In your breaking,
may we recall that we are all your children —
beloved, complex, beautiful heirs of your grace.

Pray

Loving God, too often we cling to the laws of this world, thinking they will provide us comfort and peace. When we do this, we lose our selves and hurt our siblings. In this Advent season, bring forth your peace and love — break us of our old habits, so that we may live in joy with all of our siblings. Amen.

*Rev. Maggie Alsup
Chaplain
Lyon College*

Read Isaiah 29:17-24.

Finding Hope in God's Promises

If we take a moment to contemplate the world around us these days, we might wonder where God is. All around us we see injustice, hunger, war, hate, violence, etc. It seems like evil has taken over this world. I myself have thought about what world my future children will grow up in; it's scary enough already for me. And yet, some people say we are living in the safest time in history. This year is coming to an end, and as I reflect on it, our country has many things to mourn. I think about all those families that were broken by the mass shootings that took place, the natural disasters that have taken the homes of many, all the refugees seeking asylum, and those who have been separated from their families. I wish I could do something to help heal the wounds of their hurt. Isaiah 29:17-24 reminds us that, despite the brokenness of our world, we must remember to find refuge and hope in God's promises for us. A world where darkness will fade, the blind will see, corruption will disappear, those who had been deprived unjustly of their freedom will be liberated and everyone will rejoice in the Lord.

Pray

Dear God, help us to see your work amid a troubled world. Allow us to find peace in your world. Heal the hearts of those who have experienced loss this year. May we share your love with everyone around us, and share your promises to bring light with those who have been consumed by the darkness of this world. Amen.

*Monika Ruiz
Alumna
UKirk at Schreiner University*

December 17

December 18

Read Zechariah 8:1-17.

As we read from Zechariah, we find ourselves moving from a place of despair to one of hope and promise! Yahweh has great things in store for Jerusalem, the “faithful city,” and counts on strong hands from the community, as well as peace and truth among the people, in order for restoration to take place. Everything is possible, now that the Lord’s covenant with Israel is reaffirmed.

In the beginning of this book, it is reported that the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, but if you review the preceding chapters, you’ll find that God does not speak directly to the prophet until chapter 7. Until this time, the Lord has communicated through a messenger or angel, who interprets God’s intentions to Zechariah so that Zechariah can report visions. Yet, here in these verses from chapter 8, we are reminded eight times that the Lord has now spoken directly to Zechariah. What a relief and comfort it must have been for the prophet to once again serve as an authority on God’s intentions!

Can you relate to Zechariah’s position? How often do we feel that God has been radio silent with us, that we must patiently wait for a direct sign of God’s presence and goodness? Take heart, and in this season of Advent, in this season of finals! Pause and pray for the people that have been bearers of Good News to you and for you in all seasons. Notice the ways in which God has powerfully moved through your family, community, and church family. Get ready, for the arriving Savior who makes all things new is counting on strong and loving hands to restore the peaceful kingdom of God.

Pray

Here I am, Lord, ready to do your will. I trust in You.

*Rev. Meg Vail
Associate Pastor
First Presbyterian Church (Logan, UT)*

Read Psalm 42.

The gray skies of deep winter only amplify what our mental landscapes already struggle with. In the same way I long to feel the warm glow of the sun against my skin again, so too I long for God to liberate the world from the forces that defame and defile creation. Like the psalmist, we can point to the ways that God has shown up time and time again in our lives and our collective history, but now that we are here once more in a time of anxious anticipation, we get restless. Where is God? When will God show up? Even still, in our deepest being we know that God will come again to sanctify that which God loves. Now, this understanding of what is to come rarely distracts from the pains of the present, but that is precisely why we live in community together. We must help one another remember the ways that God has shown up, point out the ways that God is still present, and support one another as we sojourn through the wilderness toward liberation. When our souls are downcast at the state of our lives and the world, remember. Hold on to hope, the sun will shine again, bringing warmth to melt away our despair and light to illuminate the path of salvation.

Pray

Dear God, as we continue this journey with one another, help us to remember that we are not alone. Remind us once more that you have been, are, and forever will be with us, nudging us toward you. Thank you. In your Son’s name I pray, amen.

*Garrett deGaffenreid
Student
UKirk Austin*