



WORDS FOR WAITING

*Daily Devotions for
Advent & Christmas 2020*

WORDS FOR WAITING

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



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Welcome to *Words for Waiting*, a collection of reflections for the seasons of Advent and Christmas. As some fellow UKirk Board members and I brainstormed what it might mean to anticipate and celebrate the birth of Christ at the end of a year that has been...unique, to say the least, we were struck by the wide range of emotions that being human actually entails, and we kept coming back to one phrase in particular. So, this year *Words for Waiting* has a theme — **CRY OUT**. We thought of the lyric from the hymn “Canticle of the Turning” that proclaims, “my soul cries out with a joyful shout,”¹ but we also couldn’t forget David crying out in Psalm 13, “how long, O Lord?”

Whether your exclamations are for joy, justice, lament, or simply the uncertainty of it all, we hope that this year’s devotional will honor the fact that Jesus came to earth to stand right in the middle of it with us.

On each of these pages you’ll find a Scripture reading, a reflection, and a short prayer. This year’s contributors represent 24 different Presbyterian-supported student faith communities on 41 college campuses (plus a few neighbors from other areas of the Church). They use a variety of words to refer to God, and engage the world around us in a myriad of ways too. As we imagine a way forward together, 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

NOVEMBER 29

REPRESENTED

Read Isaiah 64:1-9.

When we think about 2020, we're reminded of the stress, pain, injustice, and uncertainty all of us have faced. How we long for God to come down the mountain and put things right in the world. No more pandemic, injustice, or stripping people of their God-given dignity and worth. In 2020, we have been angry, we have protested for racial justice, we have struggled, been hurt, and found ourselves wanting to cry out to God. We cry out because we long to see, hear, and experience God's love here in the present in the midst of all of this pain we ourselves have felt. We cry out because of the harm we have caused to others through our words, actions, social media posts, and silence. Now we wait, anticipating God's coming in the midst of all of these experiences and feelings.

Yet, we know God is present and will come. God is crying too. God sees us amidst the hurts and problems and loves us still. God is here, creating, shaping, and forming us to love as Jesus loved others, especially the oppressed, forgotten, and overlooked of the world. So, this Advent season we anticipate, move, and cry out because we know that Christ is present, forming us to be change agents to build God's Kingdom here on earth.

Pray

God, as we begin this Advent journey, we pray for peace, courage, and wisdom. God, we pray that you will not remember our shortcomings forever, but instead form us in your divine Image. Give us the ability to forgive, love, and see the Image of Christ in each person. Amen.

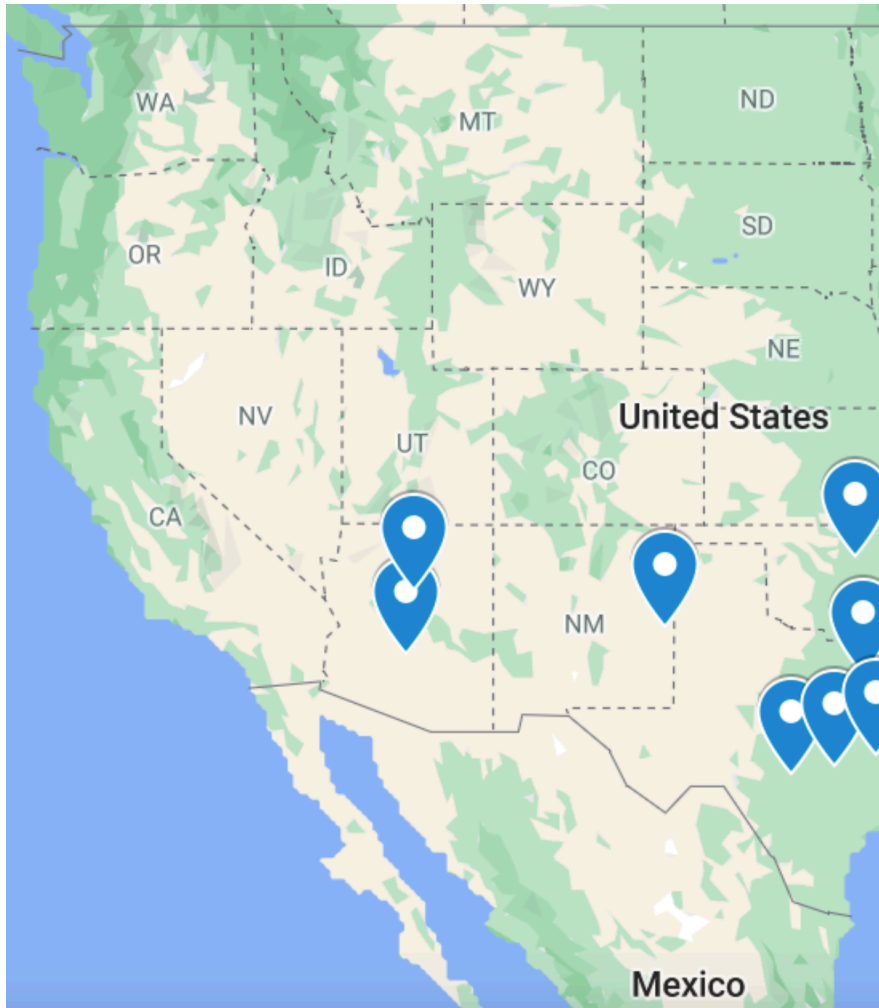
Arise Campus Ministry
George Mason University & NOVA Community College



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MINISTRIES

NOVEMBER 30



Read Micah 4:1-5.

This first week of Advent, hope is on our hearts and in our prayers. The 8th Century BCE prophet, Micah, turns our attention to the hope for a different world order, a reordering of priorities. He offers a “mountain top” vision of a time when many nations will settle disputes and beat their swords into plowshares and train for war no more (4:3). Micah invites us to dream with him of a time when we can live off the fruits of our labor. Enough is enough. Workers are not exploited. Our consumer appetites are tamed, allowing us to discover a life where well-being is restored. A world transformed where no one will make them afraid.

Micah’s vision is one of prophetic imagination and possibility. While seemingly impossible at the present, he reminds us that with Yahweh, the future is full of possibilities, that the suffering and injustice in this world need not be. Imagine the world unshackled by greed and violence.

So, we come to this season of Advent cultivating a renewed hope of possibility for our lives, our communities, and for the world.

Pray

God of possibilities and our hope for a world transformed, soften our hearts and open our minds to Your ways. Help us to dream new dreams and pursue a reordering of our lives in which we participate in ushering in a new world order where no one needs to be afraid; a time when no one is exploited, and a time when we war no more.

- Arise Campus Ministry
- Bama UKirk
- Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian
- Campus Ministry Connection (Northern AZ)
- Ekklesia
- ENMU Campus Ministry
- First United Presbyterian
- Lafayette College
- Lyon College
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- Maryville College
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- PCM at NC Central
- Princeton Theological Seminary
- PSF at Penn State
- River Road PC
- Rhodes College
- Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy

Rev. Kathleen Day
Campus Minister

Campus Ministry Connection at Northern AZ University

DECEMBER 1

NOTES

Read Micah 4:6-13.

In our reading for today, Micah addresses a community of faith that is in the midst of distress and uncertainty. We, as readers, should recognize that Micah acknowledges the reality of their suffering. In the shadow of this distress, Micah attempts to offer reassurance by alternating back and forth between this community's current agony and a promised hope in the future. Through Micah, God assures those overlooked and pushed to the margins that they will be gathered in and welcomed.

Without question, the circumstance of this pandemic continues to bring forth instances of suffering and injustice within our own communities — especially among people of color. As people of faith, we are called to work toward this justice and ease this suffering. We are called to labor toward the future filled with hope that God points to through Micah. Otherwise, we become complicit in that suffering.

Pray

God of grace and compassion, help us to realize the reality of our own suffering, but further, push us to acknowledge the suffering of others in our community. By your Spirit, give us the strength to push against systems of oppression, and the humility to recognize our own participation in those systems. May we work for justice as we look toward the coming example of Christ. Amen.

1. Welcome Letter

Rory Cooney, “Canticle of the Turning” (GIA Publications, Inc, 1990).

2. December 20

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov Book 2*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Modern Library, 1996), 60.

3. December 28

Michael Mershon, “Statement by Jim Wallis on Healthcare,” *Sojourners*, July 25, 2017, <https://sojo.net/about-us/news/statement-jim-wallis-healthcare>.

4. January 1

A New Zealand Prayer Book/He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa (The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, 1988), 184.

Rev. Chris Bailey
Campus Minister
Marshall UKIRK

JANUARY 6

DECEMBER 2

Read Matthew 2:1-12.

Everyone seeks a sign—
that they may know God made flesh.
Powers that be stand in fear
Incapable of controlling such love.
Perhaps they know their end draws near.
However, we press ahead to find
love personified.
Aware,
No gift we bring can embody our gratitude.
Yet, we come as we are and offer our very selves
to this great babe, knowing
that in his cry, life forever changed.

And so to this day,
wise ones still seek him.

Pray

Holy One, you chose the form of a babe to show your power, turning this world upside down. Wise ones once sought this child, knowing of the great love and mercy that dwelled among them. Come to us this day, reveal to us your ways, your love, your wisdom. May we seek you in all we do. Amen.

Rev. Maggie Alsup
Chaplain
Lyon College

Read Luke 21: 34-38.

There are moments where I have to remind myself that melancholy is not the “only” mood one is allowed to exist in, much to the dismay of the overly dramatic side of my personality. Now, I’m not saying melancholy is not an appropriate state to exist in, but I do think many of us (including myself) have a tendency to dwell there longer than we should. It reminds me of that TikTok challenge that was really popular this summer, the #rainchallenge, where you would go lay down on the ground, in the rain, with the music of Natasha Bedingfield serenading you into existential conundrum. Because, while laying on the pavement waiting for an entire season of Advent to pass me by would certainly be dramatic (and possibly viral), its not the kind of waiting that Christ calls us to do.

In Luke, Jesus is summoning us to a different type of waiting; an active and alert type of waiting. Because there is something coming that we don’t want to miss. There is change, renewal, rebirth, joy, hope, love, and peace just around the corner. But there are so many things that are distracting us from that time to come, and so often that distraction can come from ourselves. So friends, stay alert. Even if you need to lay in the rain for a bit, pay attention to what God is doing around you and how you are preparing for what Jesus will bring.

Pray

Holy Creator, we cry out in impatience because we don’t know how long we can wait for your promises to be fulfilled. Create in us an urgency to do our part; to love you, our neighbors, and ourselves as actively and fully as you love your creation. Amen.

Rev. Sarah Hooker
Campus Minister
UKirk Atlanta

DECEMBER 3

JANUARY 5

Read Psalm 85.

The Psalmist speaks of God's care and provision for God's people, but he also speaks of a God who has or had good reason to be "hot with anger" towards God's people. There seems to be a cadence of not just the people crying out, but God crying out to the people as well. I like how in *The Message* translation, in v. 6, David is asking God to give the people a "fresh start." What a powerful image of God's redemptive work! "Then your people will laugh and sing!" Relent → Fresh Start → Laugh → Sing → Good deal!

Often, we think of people crying out and asking things like "how long" or "this is too hard and miserable," kind of fist shaking to a God who it seems like can end this at any moment. You know... "Hey, God... end this pandemic! We want to laugh and sing again." But here in Psalm 85 it is almost as if God is asking "how long?" Are you ready to not live so foolishly? Are you ready to be my people? Are you ready for my arrival? How might God be crying out with an invitational tone to each of us?

I can't help but think of all the students I have worked with over the years who often hesitate to do or try what God is calling them to do, because they are not yet adequately credentialed in ways that makes them feel "certified." We all feel like we can be more prepared. But how long are we going to wait while God is crying out to us... How long? Aren't you ready to laugh and sing and praise the one who comes again and again?

Pray

Lord, give me the courage to respond to your invitation upon my life. Help me to feel equipped today to honor the unique call you have given to me. I hope in Your truth, that "sprouts green from the ground," that will bear fruit. Amen.

Rev. John Rogers
Executive Director
Presbyterian Collegiate Ministries of North Carolina (PCMofNC)

Read Luke 6:27-31.

It's counter-intuitive, maybe even counter-biological! Our lives depend on our fight-or-flight response. Our nature is to defend when we are threatened or hurt. But the Way of Jesus is different: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you." Is Jesus teaching a sadistic "kill them with kindness" kind of thing? No. It's about loving God by loving our neighbor as "self" (Lev. 19.18). The original call to love neighbor could be translated: "Love your neighbor 'as you.'" When we love our neighbors, we exercise our love of God. And to truly love God, we must love our neighbors, including our enemies. We are intricately bound together by the love and creative power of God. Our well-being is very much dependent on the well-being of those around us.

The great Epiphany of Jesus is that he showed us what a life faithful to God's creative intent looks like: loving God is to love neighbor; loving neighbor is loving God. For me to live in peace, I must actively seek my neighbor's peace. Have you sought your neighbor's peace? If so, how? If not, why not? How might God be calling to embody the love of God in your way of life?

Pray

Holy God, whose creative power has been infused into creation itself, guide my mind in this new year that I may shed any hate I may have in my heart and that my love for you may become manifest in the loving of those who hate me or those I perceive as enemies. Help me to see not enemies, but fellow children of yours. In the Way of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Eric O. Ledermann
Pastor, University Presbyterian Church (Tempe, AZ)
Campus Minister, UKIRK at Arizona State University

JANUARY 4

DECEMBER 4

Read Proverbs 3:1-12.

In the reading for today, we read about trusting in the Lord. King Solomon lays out these pieces and tidbits of wisdom to help shepherd us through our future, to live wisely and faithfully in the coming days. In this section he alternates from the actions we must take to live wisely, and how those actions will be rewarded by our loving Father.

As we travel through the path of life it is easy to forsake the teachings and wisdoms of God, it is easy to learn to rely on oneself rather than trusting in the Lord. As we have entered into the year 2021 and reflect back on 2020 I find it easy to see where my faith had wavered amidst a pandemic, how I grew weary and tired looking to my own wisdom to control anything at that time, in a time when the world had seemed to flip upside down. It is within human nature to seek control, and to trust in the Lord is giving him that control which is in our nature to hold onto. Wisdom is to know when it is no longer in our hands and we must lay down what we believe and trust in the Lord to help guide us through our coming days. I challenge each of us to do just that, lay down our arms, our own understanding, and trust in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Pray

Heavenly Father, give us the strength to trust in your plan. I admit that my heart has been troubled, and I have been fearful of the change that has happened. Allow us to trust in you and the peace you provide. We choose to no longer control our current situation as we can fall back on the steadfastness you, your son, and the Holy Spirit provide when we trust in you. Amen.

Kier Hull
Student
Maryville College

Read Jeremiah 1:4-10.

OMG! I can't do it. I'm too young!

These are the (modernized) cries of Jeremiah, in response to God's call. A call based on the mighty works of God who formed, set apart, and appointed Jeremiah as a prophet. Jeremiah's doubts and objections are based on his evaluation of his own ability. His cries are surely enhanced by the political atmosphere in Judah that is tenuous at best. Assyrian dominance is over, but trouble is brewing to the North and to the South. Jeremiah's fears do not sway God. No, God goes on to give Jeremiah a more intense, and frankly, frightening preview of his prophetic call. The good news is — God promises continued provision and presence with Jeremiah.

Advent calls us to Hope, Joy, Love, and Peace as we celebrate Christ's coming into the world and watch with expectant hope for his coming again. Like Jeremiah, this is possible for us because of God's promises, provision, and presence. We cry out in dismay as Jeremiah did AND we cry out in praise and gratitude as God cares for and comforts us in the midst of trouble and turmoil.

Pray

Creator God, 2020 has upended our world in almost every way possible. Sickness. Death. Grief. Mental Anguish. Unemployment. Financial Stress. Lost Opportunities. Social Unrest. Political Division. Natural Disaster. Environmental Erosion. Christ our Savior, you know our suffering, you died for us, you rose for us, you lift us up, you pray for us, you are with us, you reign in victory for us. Spirit of the living God, we pray for your power, each moment, as we faithfully answer your call to love and serve.

Rev. British Hyrams
Campus Minister
PCM at NC Central University

DECEMBER 5

JANUARY 3

Read Mark 11:27-33.

By what authority?
is another way of saying
Who do you think you are?
Why are you here?
You'll never belong in this
temple.
You're not one of us.

Have you ever noticed
that one's authority is only
questioned
when boundaries are pushed,
when a line is crossed,
when tables have been turned?

Authority is only an issue
when the wrong people –
the people who are meant
to stay in their place,
to keep quiet
and fall in line –
wield it.

Authority is for
the authorities –
the ones who have earned it.

By what authority?
is the same question
asked of people of color who say:
Black Lives Matter. Stop killing
us! I can't breathe.
asked of women and LGBTQIA+
folks
who step into pulpits and preach
sermons;
asked of refugees and migrants
who seek safe asylum at our
borders;
asked of all who dare to speak
unpopular truths to powerful
systems.

To be fair
to those who questioned him,
it's difficult to recognize
the way, the truth, and the light
in human form.

Pray

*God who crossed boundaries and turned tables, lift our voices
in songs of protest against unjust authority, and help us
recognize you in our midst. Amen.*

Rev. Jessie Light-Wells
Campus Minister
UKirk SMU

Read Ephesians 1:3-14.

According to tradition, Paul wrote this letter from a jail
cell in Rome. Remembering this, it's touching to notice the
language of family used so repeatedly.

As he sits alone, uncertain of his fate, Paul writes in the
language of Christian community, not isolation. He uses "us"
language — God "chose us," "destined us," "lavished on us,"
"made known to us," and so on. Paul speaks of salvation,
relationship with God, and ties to each other in familial terms,
choosing the language of "adoption" and "inheritance."

You can imagine that remembering God's commitment
to family and community was a way Paul battled back the
inevitable feelings of loneliness he experienced in his cell. He
took the time to encourage himself and others in the truth of
God's love for us.

While I don't suppose many of us are planning to spend
much time in prison this year, feelings of loneliness and
separation are part of the normal routine of our lives. For
many, 2020 has been a marathon of isolation.

When we feel alone, it's tempting to frame our faith in
the language of isolation: "God doesn't feel close to me;" "I feel
abandoned." In this new year, I encourage you to remember
that God called us family, adopted us. Do not give in to the lie of
isolation. Instead, encourage yourself (and others!) with the
truth of God's invitation to family.

Pray

*God of community, God of family, God of "us," remind us that
we are part of your family. You adopted us, you chose us.
Teach us how to grow and care for your family every day.
Amen.*

Jacob Christiansen
Director for Youth and Young Adult Ministry
First United Presbyterian Church (Fayetteville, AR)

JANUARY 2

DECEMBER 6

Read James 3:13-18.

Presbyterians are called to look at the world using a lens of abundance. There is enough food and housing for all. Presbyterians are also called to be truth-tellers. People are hungry not because America has a lack of food, but because the minimum wage is not enough to feed a family. People live outdoors not because America has a lack of housing, but because America has a lack of affordable and compassionate housing. Hoarding wealth is a sign and symptom of bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, and living in ways that deny the truth. A select few owning the majority of wealth and power is disordered and evil. The Kingdom of God does not look like that. How is God calling you to cry out with wisdom from above? How is God calling you to sow the seeds of justice by your peaceful acts? The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, God's mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. The kingdom of God breaks forth when we speak the truth of God's abundance.

Pray

God of abundant love, grant us hearts to understand injustice for what it is. Grant us strong voices to cry out against disorder and everything that is evil. Replace our selfishness with wisdom from above. Sow seeds of justice by our peaceful acts. Grant us strength for the struggle.

Rev. Beatrix Weil
Chaplain
Rhodes College

Read Isaiah 40:1-11.

“Comfort, comfort my people! says your God.” Today’s passage begins with the prophet Isaiah promising God’s comfort to the people of Israel. This was a message of hope given to a people in need of hope, as the Israelites had been exiled from Israel and were living under Babylonian rule at that time. Even though we have not been exiled to live in a distant land under foreign rulers, we are living in our own exile of sorts, exiled from the comforts of pre-pandemic normalcy.

The good news continues throughout this passage. Isaiah tells us of a voice crying out from the wilderness, telling God’s people to clear a path for the Lord and that they will see God’s glory. Six hundred years later, John the Baptist preached the same message (John 1:23).

This passage closes with an analogy that Jesus himself later used. Isaiah tells the people of Israel that “like a shepherd, God will tend the flock”, just as Jesus said “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11). Like a shepherd provides for their sheep, God promised to provide for the Israelites while they were exiled in Babylon, and God will provide for us as we live through our exile in this world full of Covid-19 based restrictions.

Pray

God, help us to remember that even in these troubled times you are there to comfort us. Help us to remember to look for you when we feel lost. Help us to remember that you are looking after us like a shepherd looks after their sheep. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Andrew Pinches
Student
UKirk at Michigan State

DECEMBER 7

JANUARY 1

Read Acts 2:37-42.



Pray

God of Light that overcomes all darkness, we cry out to you this season of Advent. Hear our concerns for our loved ones, our relief that this semester is almost done, our fear of uncertain futures, our hope that you are working through us, in us, and with us, and our joy grounded in your love. Send your Holy Spirit to us and the communities we call home, our ministries, our families, our friends, and neighbors, so that we may more fully devote ourselves to you through prayer, fellowship, service, and teaching. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Shelly Barrick Parsons
 Director of Children and Family Ministry
 River Road Presbyterian Church

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-13.



Pray

A New Year Prayer, adapted from “A Night Prayer” in the *New Zealand Prayer Book*⁴, which we’ve been using this Fall — we’ve left some words out for you to adapt yourself!

Lord, it is a new year. The new year is for _____.
 rest/activity/acceptance/renewal

Let us _____ in God’s presence. It is a new year after a long
 grow/rejoice/be at peace

year. Some awful things have happened; We have all had to
 adjust our dreams; Let us be. The new year is _____.
 quiet/blank/unsure/timid

Let our fears of the world’s _____ and of our own lives rest
 uncertainty/insecurity/change

in you. The new year is _____. Let the peace of your _____
 free/unbounded love/embrace

hold us, Hold all those we love and miss, and all those who have
 no _____. The new year heralds _____.
 knowledge/confidence transition/ connection/opportunity

Help us to expect good things. New dreams. Good _____.
 days/weeks/months

In your name we pray. Amen.

Bonus points: listen to “Turn! Turn! Turn!” by the Byrds.

UKirk Nashville

DECEMBER 31

DECEMBER 8

Read 1 Kings 3:5-14.

New Year's Eve has always been the ultimate day of reflection. It is a unique day in that we are at the precipice of a New Year, yet are given one last moment to reminisce about the past year.

Our 1 Kings passage is one such passage that balances a precious moment, a dream, in which the past, present, and future are considered together. When God tells Solomon, "Ask whatever you wish, and I will give it to you," Solomon's response begins with reflecting back on his father's time as king.

Let's take a moment to pause together. What knowledge and understanding have you been filled with over the past year?

Next, considering the past, Solomon makes the request, "Please give your servant a discerning mind." Interestingly, the Hebrew word used for "discerning" comes from the root word, "to hear."

Let's pause once more here. What words have you heard during this Advent and Christmastide season that have made you stop and listen?

Finally, God expresses pleasure in Solomon's request, and grants Solomon "wisdom and discernment." Or, translated literally, "understanding and hearing" as Solomon becomes king.

Take a final moment to allow your reflections on 2020 and the words you have listened to during this season. Considering your past and your present, what is it that you would ask God as part of your understanding and hearing for 2021?

Pray

Holy One, open our hearts to hear the words of your servant, Solomon, and allow them to guide us as we pause in the in-between on this final day of 2020 and on the cusp of 2021. Amen.

Rev. Rachel Hébert
Campus Minister
UKirk Williamsburg

Read Psalm 27.

While camping in the woods of Western North Carolina, the slow and heavy steps of a bear could be heard in the darkness outside our tent. Fear gripped and immobilized us so that our whispers became wordless. We knew what to do — but doing it was a different matter.

We needed to start making noise.

When the Psalmist is beset by enemies, armies of the wicked who are encamped all around and eager to eat flesh, the Psalmist says, "Whom shall I fear?" Within the tabernacle of the Lord, there is peace and security. The tent of God is a place of shouting, singing, and crying aloud — even while providing hidden shelter from enemies.

Just as the tabernacle moved through the wilderness, so the presence of God moves with us through this world. This presence is ours in Christ who gives us his Spirit and draws us to his Father. In him, we find shelter and refuge from our enemies. Christ is the rock under our feet which allows us to lift our head above our enemies.

The Psalmist wants one thing: to be in the presence of God. In that presence is an ongoing, life-giving conversation. "Seek my face," says the Lord. "Your face, Lord, do I seek," replies the Psalmist. Whether in conversation or in crying out — God's presence is here for us.

Pray

O Lord Our God, hear us as we pray, and speak to us. To you we cry out and your face we seek. Shelter us in your tent and protect us in the midst of our enemies. Be present to us we pray, Amen.

Rev. Noah McIntee
Campus Minister
UKirk WCU

DECEMBER 9

DECEMBER 30

Read Luke 1:5-17.

I can't stop thinking about the angel's appearance in this passage. We are given a lot of background information about Zechariah. And just as he is lighting the incense, an angel appears. (This makes one wonder: how much of a hand did God have in Zechariah being chosen to burn the incense? If Zechariah hadn't found himself alone in the sanctuary, would the angel have found another opportunity to deliver this message? Do Zechariah's fellow priests worry or wonder about him or try to check on him when he doesn't come right back out?)

"Don't be afraid," the angel said. If I were Zechariah, I would still be terrified. And yet, I feel a sense of calm wash over me when I read the angel's remarks.

"Don't be afraid. Your prayers have been answered." To be honest, that angel lays a lot on Zechariah, but I also imagine this experience to be humbling. For a prayer to be answered in such a clear way (for a literal messenger from God to deliver this exciting news) is not a "look at me!" moment for Zechariah. Rather, he finds peace and humility, even amidst the fear he feels at the appearance of this angel and the message they bring.

Pray

May we feel peace, even amidst our anger.

May we experience joy, even amidst our sorrow.

May we know hope, even amidst our despair.

May we be humbled, even amidst our fear.

Amen.

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

Read Proverbs 9:1-12.

Skilled living gets its start in Fear-of-God. (MEV)

The Book of Proverbs is the Bible's quintessential wisdom literature. Along with Job, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon or other wisdom texts, Proverbs identifies essential values and advocates faithful practices for human wholeness. In today's passage Wisdom (personified as feminine, Sophia) bids we join her sumptuous banquet, its table replete with savory food and drink (cf. Isaiah 25:6-10) — a table Wisdom declares only fools refuse.

Admission to Wisdom's generous banquet necessitates at least one caveat, however: fear the Lord. Few words better echo the tenor of our times than fear. Prowling and roaring like a lion across this viral wilderness (see 1 Peter 5:8, et al.), fear today is as pandemic as COVID-19 itself.

Wisdom's form of fear however does not cower in hopeless dread or helpless defeat — roaring lions or not. Instead, Wisdom's kind of fear is contingent upon humility — genuine humility sprung from an authentic, singular reverence that honors God. Wisdom's is a reverential fear inspired by a thin place awareness where human smallness meets God's greatness.

Sound medical science along with public health practices promise to ease COVID-19's treacherous effects. Well-informed folks especially during a modern pandemic-plague take medical science seriously and practice healthy lifestyles accordingly. That's smart work. But in addition to that informed, life-saving counsel Christian wisdom adds another vital, acquired skill: reverence toward God. Wise and faithful folk seek God still.

Pray

Creative-Sustaining-Redeeming Lord: grant us wisdom; grant us courage. Amen.

Rev. Bruce A. Chapman, D. Min., HR
Board Member
Presbyterian Collegiate Ministries of North Carolina (PCMofNC)

DECEMBER 29

DECEMBER 10

Read Isaiah 49:5-15.

When I take a look at my hands
I see the this past year reflected
The lines of weariness
The scars from cuts and bruises
The death, brokenness and grief
The uncertainty, fear, and
loneliness
All of these things that made me
want to make fists
And raise them to the sky
When I take a look at my hands
My heart begins to break

When I take a look at my hands
I begin to wonder how long
How long will I carry so much
How long will our systems be
broken
Will the burden be heavy
Will each day be uncertain
When I take a look at my hands
I'm filled with doubt

When I take a look at my hands
And really let my eyes settle on
the connections
The bones, ligaments and
muscles
The stories, fingers, and
memories
That live within these palms
I begin to see more than what my
newsfeed
Makes me digest
When I take a look at my hands
Hope begins to surface

When I take a look at my hands
And see how they have lived
How they have kneaded bread
Dug in the earth
Written letters
Held protest signs
I see how they have made fists
and spirit fingers
How they have not stopped
reaching for tomorrow
When I take a look at my hands
I see this isn't the end of the story

When I take a look at my hands
I see I am not forgotten
That I do not walk this way alone
I see a life that was formed, skin
that is known
A body that is loved
I still have my questions, my
scars, my doubt
Yet they balance with strength,
fire, and hope
When I look at my hands
My hands made by my maker
I see a new day dawning.

Pray

*Holy One, we pray you
remind us of who you created
us to be, and how we are
called into this world. Wake
us up so that we might find
you in new and surprising
ways.*

Rev. Rachel Penmore
Campus Minister
UKirk University of Tennessee

Read Habakkuk 2:1-5.

Hope is a dangerous thing. What if the thing you hope for doesn't come to pass? The prophet Habakkuk cries out to God for God's people and hopes and waits for justice. This is classic lament: we rail at God and hope for a just response. And then what do we do in the waiting time?

Habakkuk, while waiting for justice, stands at a watchpost, devoting himself to wait with full attention. This is a dangerous thing. What if the waiting ends up being a waste of time?

In my work, I get asked continually why we keep fighting for justice. Why do we keep lamenting the broken pieces of our systems into a seemingly silent void? Why do we hope that anything will actually change?

And it's because of the hope of good news. We hope that eventually the people who are holding up broken systems will turn around. We hope that Christ, who knows all about the brokenness of humanity, will listen and respond. We hope that the prophetic words that God speaks through us will be heard as good news for the poor, downtrodden, and brokenhearted. When we make room for hope, we make room for Christ to enter into our brokenness, and we get to be right there when the good news arrives. You will always put your hope in something. May whatever is good and just come to pass.

Pray

Dear God, make room for hope within me, that I may see how you are working for justice in our broken world. Even in my lament, speak to me. Open my eyes to see your good news preached in unlikely places, keeping me ever-watchful for your coming into the world. Amen.

Rev. Krystal Leedy
Pastoral Fellow
Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy

DECEMBER 11

DECEMBER 28

Read Philippians 3:12-16.

No matter where we are on our journey of faith we've all set a goal. Granted, it might have been unconsciously set, but it was set ever the same. Like Paul throughout his letters, we orient and re-orient ourselves to Christ, Christ's crucifixion, and the promise revealed to us in Christ's resurrection. Paul reminds us that we move forward along our faith journey, "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead."

Reaching the "goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" (ie: resurrection) is unobtainable while we still have breath in our lungs. In fact, it is only because Christ has made us his own that we even have a singular chance of reaching this goal. Our promised resurrection is the finish line. Meanwhile, we've got a lot of ground to cover before we cross that finish line.

Our resurrection is something that will be obtained eventually. In the here and now we are propelled forward by the goal of making "as it is in heaven" a reality in this moment. Because Christ has made us his own we are able to place a hope in the goal of our resurrection while remembering that resurrection and liberation are eternally intertwined.

Pray

Holy God, encourage us to keep our eyes, ears, hearts, and minds open to the calls of the needy. Remind us that we do not walk alone, nor do we only walk for ourselves. By the power of your Spirit may we remain a hopeful Advent people, on this day and forevermore.

Rev. Andy Spaulding
Associate Pastor for Campus Ministry - Bama UKirk
First Presbyterian Church (Tuscaloosa, AL)

Read Jeremiah 31:15-17.

All the Little Children

*A voice is heard in Ramah,
mourning and great weeping,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted...*

As I read these words from Jeremiah, I can't help but think of the over 500 children still separated from their parents. In 2017 and 2018, the Trump administration — acting on our behalf as the leadership of this nation — separated over 5,000 families at our southern border. And those who are reunited will need years of tender loving care to repair their familial ties.

Jim Wallis, President and Founder of *Sojourners*, echoes the prophets when he says our nation will be judged by how we treat the poor and vulnerable.³

Epiphany continues our time of crying out... as we await the Christ-child to remind us of the in-breaking of the Kin-dom of God. May we also be reminded of the children who are parent-less because of our policies. May we work to reunite all who are orphaned and abandoned. In this way, we are sharing the reminder that God loves all and is parent to all, and there is hope for our descendants.

How are we remembering these children? Are we weeping for them? Do we hear their voices as they cry out? Or the voices of their lamenting mothers? Let us not forget them, lest they be no more.

Pray

Dear God, may we hear the cries of mothers everywhere, and not turn away, but reunite all in Your Love. Amen.

Rev. Evans McGowan
Campus Ministries Coordinator
UKirk@UMich

DECEMBER 27

DECEMBER 12

Read Luke 2:22-40.

Two parents and a newborn travel on a dusty road after the mother gives birth in a cave full of livestock. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph travel 90 miles to arrive at the temple in Jerusalem when he is eight days old for Judaism's required ritual cleansing of newborns.

Two elders await them: Simeon and Anna.

Simeon speaks of the justice that Jesus brings. He holds their baby and declares his life's purpose. On top of that, Simeon has news. Mary's pain will increase because of Jesus.

In true patriarchal fashion, the readers never hear Anna's prophecy. They know of her devotion, her spirituality, and none of her truth. And yet. Perhaps it was so precious Mary and Joseph never shared the prophecy. Perhaps those were the holiest words they ever heard, and no retelling could capture them.

Think of the words that have changed your life. Of the truth spoken to you by dear ones and by God. These are the phrases that you nestle within yourself when you forget whose and who you are. They remind you that you are loved, forgiven, and free.

What shouts of praise and warning do you carry? What kinds of adversity have you endured? What will you take with you, as you nurture the Christ child, the one who uncovers both joy and pain?

Pray

God, you journey with me on the dusty roads of life. Teach me how to discern the difference between your words and the words others believe God gives them to share with me. Reveal within me the spirit of Mary and Joseph to endure and the boldness to speak like Simeon and Anna. Amen.

Rev. Michele Ward
Associate Pastor
Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church

Read Matthew 21:28-32.

Matthew's 21st chapter includes a range of stories about who Jesus is and how he's received by the community: the entrance into Jerusalem, the cleansing of the Temple, the cursing of the fig tree, and parables to illustrate qualities about the kingdom of God. Each scene is an invitation to consider the connection between truth-telling, grace, and how to live boldly into the messy work of faithfulness.

In the Parable of the Two Sons, Jesus speaks about two people whose intentions and actions are very different. For the son who said he would not go work, grace is extended because he changed his mind. We don't know what led to his decision change, but ultimately he did respond to a call to action. Sometimes we might hesitate to do the right thing — out of fear, doubt, or not having all the information we need to give a confident "Yes." There is a beauty in being able to chart your own growth, change your answer, and show up in the moments and spaces where you initially did not imagine yourself to be.

Jesus reminds us that changing our minds can be holy and good. In unlearning old "truths," we can name and claim new ones — just as God names and claims us as beloved children who are still learning, growing, and doing our best to figure it out. It's in the struggle and questioning that new lessons about who God is and who we're called to be are illuminated.

Pray

Holy God, in this season of Advent, may we respond to your calls for justice, mercy, and forgiveness. Help us reflect on the realities of the world around us, question that which we think we know, and encourage us to speak new truths in love. May we extend grace to all those we meet, and to ourselves, as we do our best to show up authentically each day. Amen.

Erin Guzmán
College Chaplain and UKirk Advisor
UKirk Wooster (The College of Wooster - OH)

DECEMBER 13

DECEMBER 26

Read John 1:19-28.

2020 has been a year of crying out. We have cried out for the lives lost to COVID-19. We have cried out for the black lives lost to police brutality and racial injustice. We have cried out for our earth and its people as wild fires and hurricanes ravage our communities. And on, and on, and on.

And here in John's gospel, we see John the Baptist, who also cries out: "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" John the Baptist is clear about who he is and what he doing. He is preparing the way for a new world in which God comes to us in human form, and overturns the status quo of political and spiritual disenfranchisement.

Despite the millenniums between us, the world that John the Baptist speaks to feels eerily similar to our own: vast wealth disparities in which a few hold the majority of the wealth and capital; social and political structures that disparage folks on the margins; even rampant disease.

But in the example of John the Baptist, I think we find a kindred spirit as we respond to the chaotic time in which we live. When we cry out against injustice, we are doing something similar; we are naming the ways in which we are not living up Christ's calling to protect the least of these, and failing to live as though Christ is the ruler of our lives. We are crying out for a better world. This is a holy cry.

Pray

May we find strength in our spiritual ancestor, who helped to usher in the reign of Christ. May we continue to do so in our cries today. Amen.

Rev. Elizabeth Doolin
Campus Minister
UKirk Memphis

Read Psalm 148.

The day after Christmas and all through the house, all things were stirring even my computer mouse! Yes, even after a flurry of gifts and exchanges, I find myself wanting to click, explore, add to the online cart. The beautiful Christmas holiday pause is now over, and we are again in a new season, at least according to consumer trends and the call of commercialism. Now we enter the season of returning, exchanging and preparing for the New Year.

Yet as we rush into the new season and toward a new year, something feels incomplete, something yearns within us to stop, center our attention, and feel the depths of life with no price tag. The yearning is felt in the words of the Psalmist which cries out "Praise the Lord." Today we hear the gracious invitation:

"Let all of these praise the Lord's name
because only God's name is high over all.
Only God's majesty is over earth and heaven...
Praise the Lord" (vv. 13-14)

The day after Christmas is a deep reminder of the fading nature of all things. Just as a present has a momentary high which rapidly turns to the desire for more, just as the connection to family and friends, then quickly turns into the hope for another get together...what truly satisfies? What truly and eternally does not change? Today we hear the call... "Praise the Lord." It is as we praise the Lord that our hearts have the rest and wholeness we are ultimately seeking.

Pray

Praise you oh Lord for being the One who magnificently creates; thank you for satisfying for our deepest hunger and thirsting. You graciously give us the ability to join with all of creation to celebrate you and our hearts are full of gratitude for this season to pause, rejoice, and to praise your greatness. Oh Lord...Praise You!

Rob Musick
Campus Minister
UPIKE Campus Ministry

DECEMBER 25

DECEMBER 14

Read Luke 2:8-20.

Being a shepherd in the first century sounds like a pretty socially-distanced job. Shepherds spent most of their time outside while guarding their sheep in fields, isolated from those who lived in nearby communities. Frankly, it sounds kind of lonely.

Or maybe it was not as lonely as I think it was. Maybe the shepherds had fun together, talking as they watched their sheep and telling stories around the fire at night. Maybe I am just tempted to assume that the shepherds felt lonely because in the midst of a pandemic, I sometimes feel lonely. And I want to be like the shepherds. I want my isolation to be broken by “news of great joy.” But despite my hope, I am unsure. After a year dominated by disease, racism, and conflict, will the angels really appear tonight?

And yet they do appear. They reveal themselves in our night sky just as they did the night of the first Christmas, crying out: Christ has come! He is here! Come and see!

So even in the midst of isolation, loss, and frustration, we come. We come before our Lord, and we join with the heavenly host in crying out “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

Pray

Lord, we come before you today with mixed feelings. We are sad at the loss of our brothers and sisters, we are angry at the injustices committed in our world, and yet we are hopeful. Reveal to us the joy of your coming once again and remind us that even in the midst of the longest night, the Messiah is here. Amen.

Sarah Rutherford
Student
United Campus Ministry of Aggieland (Texas A&M University)

Read Ephesians 6:10-17.

my armor of God isn't armor
it's a cute outfit that expresses who I am.
i'd rather have nail polish that speaks my truth
a tattoo that shows the justice I cry for
or heels that make me feel ready to stand tall in Christ's peace
my shield is my faith
that this person i am is exactly
who God continuously molds me to be
even when that doesn't make sense to everyone else
my salvation is the pronouns through which
i decide how the world should know me
and my spirit is the connection I feel with a friend a lover
or chosen family which grounds me and challenges me
to cultivate who i am —
helping me to believe
that my identity is sacred in God's eyes

Pray

God help me to consider what my “armor” might be today. What are the things that represent my truth, justice, passion, trust, salvation from oppression, and connection? Help me to know the love you in which I am created and give me peace. Amen.

Rev. Max Hill (they/them/theirs)
Campus Minister
UKirk St. Louis

DECEMBER 15

Read Acts 3:17-4:4.

In the Advent season, we wait just as the masses in our reading had, but this year our waiting feels different. We have longed for things to return to “normal,” to be close to peers, friends, and family, to feel as if we have some control in the midst of the situation we have found ourselves in since March — all while we wait for the Lord.

How have we spent this time of waiting? What are we doing in our waiting now? Have we sought out the Word of God? Have we cried out to God with our fears, hesitations, and doubts, or have we kept those things bottled inside ourselves? It is in our release of these feelings and emotions that we can more clearly hear the Word that is being shared with us this day.

In the third chapter of Acts, we find many Jews waiting for God’s promise of a Messiah for many, many years. Waiting was not easy for the Jews, nor is it any easier for us today. The Advent journey reminds us that true peace comes from the waiting, watching, listening, and acting upon the words of the prophets, similar to the message Peter preached to the masses. Peter’s call and witness to a loving and faithful God in the midst of waiting speaks to us this day, just as it did for the five thousand that heard the Word preached and proclaimed.

Pray

Lord God, give us strength as we wait, to be steadfast in our faith. Forgive us when doubts and fears fill our minds and hearts. Move us to cry out to you and to seek your truth through your Word. Surround us with peace, knowing that you will come again to restore our broken spirits and our broken world. Amen.

Rev. Erin Farry
Campus Minister
UKirk Furman

DECEMBER 24

Read John 1:1-14.

So much has come into being this year. So much we didn’t expect. So much that feels hopeless and frightening. So much that has altered our plans and distorted the path before us.

So much. So different. So hard. And we cry out.
Why God? How Lord? When Holy Spirit? Jesus.

This has been a tough season. Words escape us. Words confound us. Words like flesh and breath take on new meaning, carry new weight, hold new angst.

Even as we cry out, a new season breaks forth.
Mystery abounds, light peeks through cracks, making the darkness more bearable, even satisfying, fulfilling, life-giving.

The true light that shines on all people
IS coming into the world, tonight. Again.

The Word becomes flesh and makes a home among us.
Again. Tonight. In this place.
Thanks be to God for life and light and love,
born anew tonight, within us and among us.

Pray

Holy One, help us know you are here. Spirit, stir within us and awaken the dreams that we’ve been afraid to dream. Permeate our flesh with your word that we might embody hope, love, joy, and peace. Pierce our darkness with your light. We love you. We trust you. We thank you. Amen.

Ekklesia
Missouri State University

DECEMBER 23

DECEMBER 16

Read Luke 1:46b-55.

Mary's Song of Praise

We can hear and feel the exaltation that Mary feels in the eminent coming of the Savior of the world. She has strong faith that the child she carries will be the promised Messiah, bringing justice and peace to the world. Her words also demonstrate her humility, and she expresses that God's love is all powerful and always present. She knows that God cares for the poor and hungry, while bringing the rich and powerful to justice. We sense her simple goodness, and know that her gentle influence on her son, Jesus, will be mirrored in his great love and compassion for all humankind, shared with every race and nation.

The Prince of Peace will show mercy and healing to a divided world, and will bring love and salvation to all. If we ask for forgiveness of our sins, God will bestow His blessings on us. In John 3:17, we recognize that God did not send his son into the world to condemn it, but to save us through his grace. Let us rejoice and praise the Lord for the gift of his Son, our Savior and Redeemer!

Pray

Dear Father, we thank you for sending your Son to show us the depth and breadth of your love for us. You sent the Light of the World to guide us through these dark and troubled times. Heal our world from this pandemic, and empower us to share your love and peace with all people. We rejoice in your love and grace as we celebrate the birth and life of our Lord, Jesus Christ! Amen.

Kristin Kuhlmann
Commissioned Pastor
Eastern NM University Campus Ministry

Read Psalm 125.

As we descend into Psalm 125, the mountains of Jerusalem come into focus. Beyond the hills of ancient Palestine lies a scene that feels all too familiar. Wickedness has found a home in earthly rulers; enemies encroach those who do justice; and the anxieties of humanity run wild.

The scholar and author Kate Bowler has a saying which she uses to sign-off Instagram stories. "Have a terrible, beautiful day," she says. Advent is like that, both terrible and beautiful. It's a time when we cry out with the psalmist from both a liberated and not-yet-liberated standpoint.

Psalm 125 is itself a terrible, beautiful psalm. In the story of God's redemption, the psalmist recognizes that we are nestled in the mountains of God's love. The soil of promises is stuck between our toes. The presence of God is with us, and the presence of God surrounds us. While the universe churns around us and tyrants clamor for power, the firm and everlasting arms of the divine hold us fast. I want to extend an invitation this year. In the middle of this tumultuous, exhausting season, lean into the all-encompassing, surrounding presence of God. Enter into the foothills of God's promises and tender Spirit, and keep going. Let this Advent be truly terrible in all the ways it needs to be, but let it be truly beautiful too.

Pray

O God, whose everlasting presence surrounds our every movement, guide our feet along this Advent pilgrimage. Breathe your Spirit into our sore and tender bodies. Stir in us a prayer of jubilee and petition, one prayer, united by your presence. Into your everlasting grace and enduring covenant we commit this day. Amen.

Michael Cuppett
Alumni, UKirk Nashville
Student, Princeton Theological Seminary

DECEMBER 17

DECEMBER 22

Read Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26.

We Sing

My neighbor stands on her porch. I remain four cubits back on the sidewalk. Through our masks we lift up our joys and concerns.

She wraps her arms around herself, rubbing the skin up and down. My soul is glad for her friendship and I imagine her gesture is the hug we eschew.

I stand at the kitchen sink. Her son is in their garden, a blur of blonde curls. He swings a stick like a sword or a lightsaber or maybe a baton or a sceptre. He sings.

My own Advent child bakes cake for every occasion. Monday is an occasion. We sing songs of joy to the dog, who waits patiently for drips of batter to fall.

At the dinner table, our daughter describes someone as Very Religious. We, I tell her, are Very Religious. No, her eyes roll, like religious religious. Like hating everything.

We cling to kindness. We sort canned food. Students show me TikToks and softly tell me of lost jobs and sick grandparents. They pray over FaceTime. Nurses hover.

I dream they are all babies and I cannot get them all where we need to be. Night after night this dream arrives. Unrelenting.

Songs are our second language. We speak divinity. In our songs we swing our faith through the sky. Our mouths proclaim joy. We eat cake. We sing. We wait.

Pray

*Transforming God,
You take our pain and give back joy. You call us to create family and memory. Help us treasure your faithfulness. Encourage us to respond with boldness and exultation. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.*

Rev. Dr. Alexandra M. Hendrickson
College Chaplain and Director of Religious & Spiritual Life
Lafayette College (Easton, PA)

Read 1 Samuel 2:1-10.



Pray

Holy One, you strengthen the weak, nourish the hungry, and bring hope to us all. May we be inspired to see the way you are shaping the world toward justice and peace. Amen.

Allison Maus
Campus Minister
Presbyterian Student Fellowship at Penn State

DECEMBER 21

DECEMBER 18

Read 1 Samuel 1:1-18.

Elkinah had two wives: Peninnah who had a bunch of children, and Hannah who was barren. A barren woman was a family's greatest misfortune. Children meant that the tribe would survive, and if a woman could not have children there was no guarantee of a future for her people, or for her.

Every year, as the family went to Shiloh, Peninnah made sure it was a miserable trip for Hannah. When others would be feasting, Hannah would be sobbing because of the torment of both her barrenness, and Peninnah the tormentor, who reminded her over and over again of her failure.

I think it would have been easy for Hannah to associate this trip and God with nothing but pain and misery. Eli seems to even be "proof" that everyone connected with Shiloh was against her, and if they were against her, was God, too? But Hannah shows us another way to respond. She pours her heart out to both God and Eli about her anger, pain, sorrow, and frustration. Eli hears her, and prays for peace for her. God hears her, and gives her Samuel, which in Hebrew means, "God hears."

Pray

God, it can be so easy to feel like the world is against us. There are even times when all we can focus on is the pain and fear we hold inside, or the things outside of us that threaten to undo us. When we find ourselves angry, sad, and in pain, help us not to blame you but to turn to you and pour out everything we think and feel in prayer. And remind us no matter what is going on, you are a God who always hears us and responds. Amen.

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

Read Hebrews 1:5-14.

Crying Out for News

Most of us have spent this year crying out for good news. As we constantly refresh our social media feeds hoping to see good news, we are often left depressed or frustrated.

Two thousand years ago, a community of Christians was also crying out for good news. Their faith in Jesus was wavering, as they began to see him similar to an angel or one who only talks about news. The community was tempted to fall back into a worldview basing their hope on themselves creating good news in this world.

The author of the book of Hebrews wrote to this community urging them to see Jesus as their ultimate Good News. Jesus literally made the news by bringing physical hope to people through feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and giving worth to the marginalized. He then sacrificed his life so that every single person could spiritually experience hope and freedom over the bad news of sin and death.

As we encounter bad news in our life, do we hope only in our own ability to fix the problems we are facing? Jesus is our Good News that we can desperately cling to and find hope in as we face the bad news of this world.

Pray

Lord, we all cry out to hear some sort of good news these days. Help us to see that you truly are the ultimate source of hope in this world. You have the power to turn our bad news into good. Help us to be the messengers of your Good News to a world that desperately needs it.

Jon Keyser
Director
Westminster Christian Fellowship at GA Tech

DECEMBER 19

DECEMBER 20

Read John 7:40-52.

I find it interesting that the only real criticism the Pharisees can think to offer about the crowd following Jesus is that they do not know the Law. It may have been an accurate observation, but what strikes me is this: even if this crowd did not know the Law, they knew God when they saw Them moving, and maybe that is worth more. This is not to say the Bible is not important; we know that it is, but I can't help but feel like we are in danger of making the Bible into an idol when we prioritize the words on the page over the workings of God in the world. When our neighbor, our sibling, comes to us and cries out against the words we hold so dearly, cries out against all the harm they have done to them, are we not called to choose Love over righteousness? When these words or the people that speak them are not loving, are we not fully justified to choose who we trust the perfect God to be, over the imperfect words used to describe Them? Is this not what we are called to do, over and over and over again?

Pray

Loving God, what do we say to those who claim to know where prophets do or do not come from? What do we do when we find those same assumptions in ourselves? Open our eyes to Your workings in the world, God, and open our ears to the cries of our neighbor. Above all, make us loving, make us kind, make us into who You would have us be in this world. Amen.

Feagin Hardy
Student
UKirk Ole Miss

Read Luke 1:26-38.

Dostoyevsky said that “love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams.”² This is true of expectant parents who dream of what life will be like with a sweet baby. When the baby arrives, it is a precious newborn but this new life can also be a harsh and dreadful thing. They experience a new kind of worry. They come to know a love that is fiercer than anything they have ever known before – a love that requires them to submit their entire being to this new life as their world is changed completely forever.

Throughout the ages, this scene of the annunciation has been sentimentalized, but Mary didn't romanticize this baby for long. In the next chapter, she sings of the harsh reality of how the world is going to change as God's reign of justice and love are birthed in the person of Jesus.

Today, people are crying out for a new world – one in which love in action becomes a reality as the structures of power and wealth are radically reordered. In the same way that new parents cannot imagine what life will be like after a baby is born, I think that we cannot imagine what this new world order will be like. Those who have had privilege will have to submit themselves to a new way of life as the structures are reordered. We as the church are being called to say as Mary, “let it be with us according to your will” as we work to make the whole hope of Christian love a reality.

Pray

Lord, may we give ourselves to love in action. Amen.

Rev. Kathy Carpenter
Presbyterian Campus Minister
UKirk Ministry at Virginia Tech