



*Words for
Waiting*

2022

Words for Waiting

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



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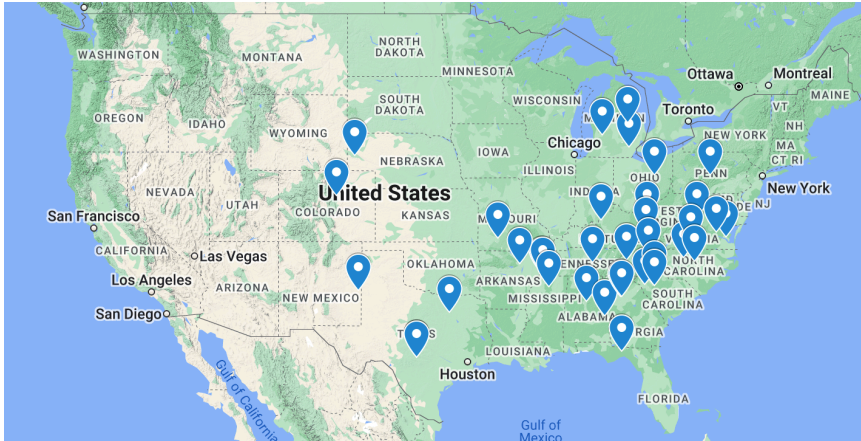


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Where We're From

Welcome to *Words for Waiting*, a series of daily devotions for the seasons of Advent and Christmas. The reflections and prayers on these pages are written by adult leaders and students from Presbyterian-supported campus ministries, along with neighbors from other parts of the Church. Our campus ministry contributors represent 30 different faith communities that are joining in ministry on 42 campuses!

This year we're leaning on some of the ancestors of our faith, gleaning wisdom from the past as we journey through both Testaments and turn toward our futures. What are the places, people, and experiences that have made us who we are? Whether they formed us in good ways or difficult ones, how will they continue to shape who we're becoming? Even as traditions grow in different directions and embody their faith in different ways, what can we continue to learn from one another? As we spend these weeks anticipating Christ's birth and celebrating it, may we remember where we're from, as we imagine together where God's Spirit will lead us next.

May you find meaning in the words and images on these pages, and in these days to come.

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

Words for Waiting is also available as daily blog posts on ukirkadvent.org.

November 27

Notes

Read Isaiah 2:1-5.

Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord...that God may teach us God's ways, and that we may walk in God's paths.

And so it begins. Advent. Prepare, wait, repeat. Go there. Go to God's mountain. God awaits us. But go slowly, and with great intention, because each time we ascend this mountain, there is something new for us to learn about God, ourselves, and the journey. Maybe the instruction doesn't take place on the mountaintop, but rather on the rocky, tenuous, beautiful path we take to get there. And maybe we don't have to get ourselves to the trailhead to get started, but we can start right here, right where we are. God is here, as are companions for the journey.

So let's get started. Transformation lies ahead. Swords into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks, anger into action, sorrow into joy, judgment into curiosity, fear into courage. The prophet Isaiah encourages us to trust in God's faithful presence and also to do the work that is ours for the transformation of ourselves, our communities, and the world. The path is lit by God, but it must be traveled by us, in community, to glean the lessons of this particular moment, to remember once again where we're from and where we're going.

And so it begins. Advent. Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord. Transformation lies ahead.

Pray

God of the waiting and the walking, open our hearts and minds to the transformation that we need, to be the people you've called us to be. This Advent, may we find you and ourselves on the path once again. Amen.

December 11

1. "O Come O Come, Emmanuel" was originally written in Latin in the 12th century (the tune's name remains Veni Emmanuel), versified in the 18th century, and translated into English by J. M. Neale in 1851.

December 17

2. Wright, N. T. *John for Everyone*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002, p.38.

Cover photo by Emma Gossett on Unsplash.com.

January 6

Read Matthew 2:1-12.

In this passage, the wise men saw God through a star. As students, we see God through:

Thin places, where the barrier between heaven and earth fades, our worlds ebb and flow together. We find **connection** and God in community.

Our **community** forms the body of Christ. Connecting to the care and passion in those around us reveals God in our lives.

God is **familiarity**, wrapping us up in a big bear hug, smells of home, sounds like laughter, feels like falling tears. We know it inside and out giving thanks for every last bit.

We revel in the **warmth** revealed to us as God says "Good morning," peeking through trees and smiling through Rhodes' stained glass.

Revealing yourself in **light**, we follow the star, the city lights, the glow of sunset over the river, we know your light, we know we're home.

Grounded are the **roots** in the soil like the lines of God's palms, God's hands in our lives. Never shall we toil in the sun without the promise of cover.

Just as the Magi came from afar to worship, so too should we strive to make God our life's **passion**. Celebrating God's presence in the interactions of our humble house in the heart of Memphis.

Decorated with a multi-colored "open" sign and a Diet-Coke stocked fridge, exemplifying unity and love, Together we celebrate God revealed to us. Together we celebrate our **home**.

Pray

Dear God, we are grateful that you have revealed yourself to us through Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, connection with and passion for others, community, feelings of familiarity, warmth, and light, and a grounding sense of home. Amen.

November 28

Read Genesis 8:1-19.

But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark.

"God remembered" is a repeated theme in scripture. Over and over we're told that God remembered, which is a way of saying that God hasn't forgotten us. And "us" is all of creation. God's remembering isn't merely God reminiscing, or thinking good thoughts. God's remembering involves acting. In this text, God's remembering results in the restoration of all creation.

Remembering isn't only for God to do. In scripture, people are also urged to remember God. Remembering that we are God's beloved keeps us connected to "where we're from." Our remembering, like God's remembering, results in actions of healing and restoration. This story reminds us there is an ebb and flow to all this remembering. Waters rise and fall. Birds fly out, fly back, and then fly off. Muddy earth produces olive trees.

God remembers, you and I remember, ancestors remember, descendants remember, creation remembers. All that has been, all that will be, all that is, remembers where we are from, and where we are headed. Everything held in the loving presence of the God, who remembers it all.

Pray

Remembering God, our remembering brings all sorts of emotions: joy, sadness, happiness, regrets... Advent and Christmas bring all sorts of emotions also. Keep us grounded in your tender love, help us remember where we're from and that you journey with us at all times and in all places. Increase our capacity to love as you love. Amen.

Nancy Janisch

Campus Minister

United Campus Christian Fellowship (Grand Rapids & Allendale, MI)

November 29

Read Genesis 9:1-17.

Can I be real with you? The flood narrative is highly unsettling...and the fact that so many nurseries and children's classrooms have walls bedecked with animals walking two by two onto a big boat — and that this is perceived as both cute and educational — is testament enough to humanity's ability to ignore, suppress, and paint happy faces onto things in our past that we find upsetting or morally ugly.

And yet...these few verses contain within them the first covenant that God makes with humanity...and it's unique. In all the other Hebrew Bible covenants (Abraham, Israel, King David) God asks the covenant partners to make commitments themselves. "I promise this, and you commit to that." But here, God promises to be faithful and trustworthy, and nothing is required of Noah and his descendants. I see in this covenant a seed of an idea...the foundational idea for how God has decided to be in relationship with us. It's the seed of Grace — a Grace that, once planted and tended, in partnership with God, will grow into a garden of Peace and Justice.

Friends, Grace is God's heart for us...for you. There's nothing you must do, no airs you must put on, and no price you have to pay to earn God's favor. You are beloved. You are cared for. You are made very good, and no wrong you have done or will do can change the way God loves you, or change the wholeness and healing God desires for your life.

Pray A breath prayer for us today:

Breathe in *I am loved.*

Breathe out *and I share that love with the world.*

Rev. Chad Wright-Pittman
Associate Pastor, First Presbyterian Church (Anderson, SC)
Alum, UKirk MTSU

January 5

Read Joshua 1:1-9.

I wonder what Moses would have been like as a mentor to Joshua. I wonder what stories he shared — did he share of his growing up years in Egypt? His encounter with God at the burning bush? Or were their conversations primarily about leadership — how to lead such a "stubborn and stiff-necked" people? From what God says to Joshua, it sounds like there were quite a few instructions involved — *carefully obey all of the instructions that Moses my servant commanded you. Don't deviate even a bit from it, either to the right or left. (1:7)*

As I read and reflect on this passage from Joshua, I cannot help but ask you to contemplate this question: who is a Moses figure in your life? Who is someone who has been pouring into you, through story, leadership, and instruction? It might be someone obvious, but it might be someone less obvious than you thought. I had a high school student I met with during my junior year of college, and she was more of a mentor to me than I was to her!

I do not know what season of life you are in right now, beloved, but I do know that God has provided someone in your life to help you be "brave and strong" — all you have to do is discern who that might be.

Pray

Precious Lord, thank you for the Moses figures in our life. Empower us to be brave and strong in the face of new challenges and remind us that we are never truly alone in life's journey. Amen.

Rev. Rachel Hébert
Campus Minister, UKirk Williamsburg

January 4

Read Exodus 3:1-5.

Moses was traveling far from home when he encountered a strange occurrence. As he drew near to investigate, he discovered that God had come to meet with him and to invite him into an amazing adventure that ultimately brought Moses closer to God and closer to his fellow Israelites.

A common feeling that many of us struggle with is feeling distant from God. We often feel alone or that God is not listening to us. In response, we often drown our lives in comfort in order to feel safe and in control of our lives. The story of Moses offers a great example of the importance of stepping outside of our comfort zones in order to experience a deeper relationship with the living God.

Are we willing to travel to the far side of the mountain of our lives, outside of our safe routines and comfort zones? When we see strange sights, unique opportunities, or people who are different from us, do we run from them or are we willing to investigate and draw closer? Finally, when God calls us are we willing to take off our sandals and to follow where God leads? It's often in these uncomfortable moments of the unknown where we are forced to rely on God, and God is truly made known to us.

Pray

God, help us in this new year to see the opportunities that you are calling us to, to step outside of our normal rhythms and experience moments when we fully rely on you. Show us what comforts or fears are holding us back from developing a deeper personal and transforming relationship with you. Amen.

Jon Keyser
Director, WCF at Georgia Tech

November 30

Read Matthew 24:23-35.

We wait

We wait expectantly

hoping this is the day, this is the time
for your entrance to our world.

We wait expectantly

looking for signs,
seeking clues from others,
wondering if this time they are telling the truth.

We wait expectantly

knowing you warn of false prophets,
knowing the world gives signs to deceive our hope.

We wait expectantly

for your great power to turn the world around,
for you to set our world ablaze
with the hope only you can give,
for you to illumine all aspects of our lives.

We wait expectantly this day

for your great splendor and love
to bring new life and peace to our world.

Pray

God of promise, as we begin our Advent journey of waiting and watching, show us signs of your love entering our world. Help us drown out the noise of the world around us, and tune our hearts to your message of peace. May we find joy in our journey of waiting and watching. Amen.

Rev. Maggie Alsup
Chaplain, Lyon College

December 1

Read Acts 1:12-17, 21-26.

The lectionary excludes it, but the whole of this reading includes some details about the graphic death of Judas and offers scriptural justification for his downfall. Peter quotes verses from two separate psalms. Both express dismay over feelings of betrayal, but the latter quotation, taken from Psalm 109:8, deals with the betrayal of someone close to the psalmist. In this psalm, the author acts out of love and is met with hatred and false accusations. Ultimately, the psalmist appeals for the downfall of his accuser and asks that someone else take their place. Peter views the betrayal of Jesus and the death of Judas through the lens of this psalm. Someone else is now called to fill this vacated leadership role.

When stepping into any new leadership role, we inherit the legacy of those who served before us. This reality brings a unique set of challenges. Sometimes our predecessors are beloved, and we face the challenge of living up to their legacy. In other cases, those who come before us leave behind problematic legacies that we struggle to reconcile with and overcome.

We can only imagine the pressure Matthias must have felt when he was called into the role of an apostle. However, we should note that the text explicitly describes the responsibility of ministry as a shared one. Matthias is not alone in his calling, and he has the support of others as he grows into this new role.

Pray

Gracious and loving God, you know the depths of our hearts. Help us recognize our call to participate in the full breadth of Christ's ministry. By your spirit, give us the confidence and humility to serve our community in ways that reflect your unending love for all people and all creation. Amen.

Rev. Chris Bailey
Campus Minister, Marshall UKIRK
Alum, Spartanburg UKIRK (PSA)

January 3

Read Genesis 28:10-22.

Fathers play an important role in the lives of their families. Sadly, many of our homes lack a biblical understanding of fatherhood. Some homes have absentee fathers, others have abusive ones, and still others exude toxicity. However, even present, safe, and healthy fathers do not necessarily meet the biblical standard.

In this story from Genesis, we see young Jacob, not yet a father, but one to whom God promises many descendants. Since Jacob is unmarried and without children, the covenant promise and prescription clearly apply to him even in his singleness. Jacob will, in one sense, represent his family before God, just as Christ, the Head of the Church, represents His Bride and the Heavenly Household before God. Jehovah re-establishes His covenant promise to preserve a people and a place unto Himself. That preservation begins through Jacob as covenant head of God's family.

Does that mean Jacob will be the perfect husband or father? By no means! Just as his forefathers did, Jacob will make mistakes, too. But also like them, God's covenant decree levies expectations from him as a father and husband. He must love his wife as he loves himself (Ephesians 5:28) and must bring up his children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). If you are a Young Man reading this, how do you plan to live as a man of God, a husband like Christ, and a father-figure as Paul? Look to Jesus, who kept the covenant perfectly. Obey His commands and you'd be surprised by the results.

Pray

Holy God, help me not to be conformed to this world but transformed by the renewing of my mind. Amen.

Rev. Eduardo Soto Jr.
Pastor, Altavista Presbyterian Church

January 2

Read Hebrews 11:1-12.

It can be intimidating to step into something new or unknown. And yet, that is where we often find ourselves: on the precipice of the unfamiliar. Maybe it is a new job or school year waiting for us, an impending move to a new city, a change in relationship, a new plan for a future you haven't totally figured out. The new year especially can feel overwhelming with possibility and uncertainty.

It's a good thing then that, when we need a guide, we have ancestors of faith who took that step into the uncertain. Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, and Isaac all ventured out into the unknown: Jacob and Isaac travelled to new places with only God's promises in their ears. Noah built an ark even when others told him to let it go. Sarah and Abraham believed in God's promise that they would have a child even when it seemed impossible.

By faith, these ancestors took steps forward into the difficult and beautiful world. By faith, they entered into a murky future with no guarantees of happiness or success or security. Faith did not protect them (or any of us) from hardship, disappointment, and despair. Instead, faith held them steady as they entered into the uncertainty and possibility that life inevitably brings.

By faith, these ancestors of faith moved forward into the richness of life. And by faith, we can too.

Pray

Dear God, thank you for the people who are ancestors of faith for us. As we enter the uncertainty of a new year, may we follow their example and let our faith guide our steps into something new. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Rev. Caroline Barnett
Campus Minister, UKirk Auburn
Associate Pastor, First Presbyterian Church (Auburn, AL)

December 2

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

When we look at leaders who have ruled and continue to rule our political spheres, we are often faced with stories of self-interest, greed, and injustice. The psalmist instead paints a picture of the type of leaders God envisions for their kin-dom: those who seek righteousness and justice for children and people in need. Those who seek to do away with oppression. Those who look to the environment — the mountains, hills, sun, moon, grass, water — to find a peaceful way forward.

Just as we wait throughout Advent for the birth of Jesus, we too wait for the rebirth of our world so that we may more closely reflect God's way of being. This waiting can be overwhelming, and sometimes painful, as we struggle to see change in the face of seemingly endless work. But, just as we know Christ's birth will arrive at the end of this season, so too do we live into hope that God's kin-dom will come into being. May we find comfort in the psalmist's closing words — that God does wondrous things.

Pray

God who knows who we have been and who we will be, you called us into life and continue to call us to a new way of living. Help us to build on the strength of generations who came before, generations of your people who sought justice in a world that was ruled with oppression. May we work and wait in hope, rooted in gratitude for the gift of Jesus Christ, whose birth reminds us that newness can always break into our world with your help. Amen.

Kate Trigger Duffert
Manager for General Assembly Business and Per Capita Promotion
PC(USA) Office of the General Assembly

December 3

Read John 1:19-28.

When we are asked about the people and places we come from, what does it mean not to deny, but to confess? For White Americans, there can be incredible comfort in denial, especially when faced with questions about white supremacy and its continued workings in our world. "Why should I be held responsible for the sins of my ancestors?" we might ask. "They were just products of their time." These words grant us the distance we crave from legacies we are not proud of, but more often than not, that distance comes with the assumption that these ancestral sins are the stuff of a long-gone past, rather than living memory. Three of my four grandparents were 18 in 1964, the year the Civil Rights Act was passed. The fourth was 27. To claim that the injustices of that era are part of a long-dead past is to obscure the reality of history. To claim that racism and white supremacy died with its passing, or with any of the other examples of progress we've witnessed over the past decades, is to be deliberately, dangerously dishonest, and to deny the existence of that lie further obscures the truth. I do not pretend to fully understand where that leaves us, but I do know this: we did not have to be this way, and we can be something else. Honest, responsible, radical love will be the thing that saves us, and that love requires us to confess, rather than deny, exactly where we're from.

Pray

Loving God, give us courage, kindness, and grace for ourselves and each other, as we seek to confess the realities of our world. Amen.

Feagin Hardy
Student, UKirk Ole Miss

January 1

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-13.

A time ago I lost a few
A few of those I loved and lost and mourn — even still
As they crossed the threshold, we stood and wept.
A time ago I gained a friend,
A friend that listened and loved and left — even still
As they left and took my tears with them.
A time ago I lost myself and cried
A million tears were shed wrestling in my head — even still
As my fear and grief consumed me.
A time ago I gained some hope and love
A feeling quite contrary — even still
As seasons changed and I found the one I'll marry.
A time ago was time enough
A time so sad and dreary — no longer still
As hope continues to abide,
I find myself less and less weary.

As we enter this year, invite yourself to change and reflect on the changing — even if you still struggle. Invite yourself to reflect on the versions of you that have culminated in who you are today, and who you will be tomorrow.

Pray

Heavenly Father, we praise you for the way things change. Even if change hurts sometimes, we thank you for the seasons of our lives that have changed to create our present person. Even if we still experience the same feelings, joy or sorrow-filled, let us learn to love the things that change, and find rest in those that don't. Amen.

Evie Butcher
Student, Marshall UKIRK

December 31

Read John 8:12-19.

What is our testimony for this year? New Year's Eve is often a time for reflection, when we look back on the past and anticipate the future years to come. But this year, with all of the turmoil, it can feel less like calm reflection and more like trying to catch your breath. All of the questions that have been left unanswered in the past year can leave us wondering how strong our testimony really is: where are we going? What is next year going to look like? If only we had the omniscience of Jesus to tell us!

While none of us know the exact happenings of next year, we do know one thing: where we've come from. We come from years of instability, but we also come from years of growth and change. We are witnesses to miracles both big and small, from unexpected healing to a breath of peace in a stressful situation. Our stories are our testimony, testified by both ourselves and by the God who sees us in our struggles and in our triumphs. And because we have a testimony of Immanuel, through the good times and the bad, we know that we go into a future where God is still With Us.

Pray

Dear God, thank you for all the ways you have been with us in this past year. Help us to lean into our testimonies of the good and the bad, and trust that you will be Immanuel again this year. Amen.

Rachel Mumaw
Ministry Intern, UKirk SMU

December 4

Read Isaiah 11:1-10.

What would it take for a wolf to live with the lamb? For the leopard to lie down with the young goat? For one, the wolf and the leopard would all have to change their very nature. They would have to turn away from their predatory inclinations. No longer could they satiate themselves on the vulnerability of the weak, but instead find nourishment elsewhere. However, that is not the only change necessary for this vision of peace and reconciliation to be fulfilled. The lamb and the young goat would have to forgive years of evolutionary and instinctual memory of the violence they have suffered as prey. Though these memories may have once served them during the previous years of injury and trauma, peace also requires the victim to work through that injury and trauma.

It can be hard, perhaps impossible, to ask for a person who has experienced trauma to heal and forgive. What is the guarantee that the wolf will not turn on the lamb again, or the promise the leopard will not once again show its spots? Yet it is this lingering, haunting fear that prevents them from feeling at peace.

Only when the earth is filled with the knowledge of the justice of the Lord, only when the spirit of wisdom, understanding, righteousness, and equity are made tangible and real, may there be reassurance of safety and the guarantee of peace. May it be so.

Pray

Lord, may your justice and mercy reign. May we know peace, true peace, your peace. May we recover from our injuries, heal from our traumas, turn away from our iniquities, and experience your loving mercy. Amen.

John Golden
Campus Minister, UKirk ETSU

December 5

Read Psalm 21.

We were talking recently during our UKIRK Tuesday evening Bible study about being a Christian in the world. We admitted it's sometimes difficult, particularly on a college campus. One student said, "There's a certain stigma that is attached to being a Christian in college and I want to live as a Christ follower, but sometimes it's really hard." And they are not wrong, either. Heck, it's hard being a Christian minister in the world these days. I often find myself answering the "what do you do?" question with, "I work with college students." I don't always want to be associated with being Christian in the southern United States during an election year.

Psalm 21 tells us that God will take care of everything and everyone else if we take care of keeping our praise front and center. That's why Christ came into the world and became human. To remind us that our focus needs to be on God and being a follower of Christ, a leader by our actions, rather than worrying about how we are received or perceived. God's got the rest. I don't know about you, but I'm encouraged by being reminded that we won't stumble because we've got God's faithful love in our corner.

Pray

Most High God, strength for today and tomorrow, be with us as we claim our space as Christians in this world. Sometimes it's not easy, but then, you know that because you sent your child to experience that, too. Nudge us this Advent season, to trust the reality of your presence with us. Give us courage. Give us strength. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Rev. Katie Barrett Todd
Executive Director & Campus Minister, UKirk Greensboro

December 30

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

I am incredibly torn by Paul's words in verse 16. They carry the optimism and hope that we might associate with Christmas and the new year. Yet, in the world's current climate, with a severe mental health crisis on our hands – what do we do with this verse?

What if we are depressed? What if our bodies *are* breaking down, but we do not feel the internal renewal every day? What if the overwhelming emotion of life in this season does not feel like a "minor problem?" It is hard for me to see our collective mental and spiritual struggles producing an "eternal stockpile of glory."

Advent's nuance pushes against the glittery and twinkling picture of corporate Christmas. Christ's coming shows us that hope and grief sit together in harmony. This symphony of emotions is present in the manger. The birth of Christ is intricately tied to His death and resurrection. Grief is woven into the story, as is hope. This is a season to bring your hope and your pain and lay it at the feet of God incarnate. Whoever you are, wherever you are, whatever you are feeling – God loves you and calls you by name. Make intentional time to focus on "those things that can't be seen." Let the peace of Christ lead you to the harmonious fellowship of hope *and* grief. Let us learn to simply be.

Pray

God, see our pain. Lead us to the manger, that we may lay down our humanity as our gift. Let our vulnerability be our prayer which opens us to your love and grace. Amen.

Rev. John Daniel DeBevoise
Associate Pastor for Youth and Campus Ministry
First Presbyterian Church (Spartanburg, SC)
Alum, UKirk Tallahassee

December 29

Read Psalm 20.

I pray that the Lord answers you...

As your hopeful hearts dare to live, dare to dream. As you are being formed, shaped, pressed, challenged, broken down and recreated in the image of a God to whom your soul speaks. As you stumble through the words that don't seem to capture the intent of your soul's desire. As you sigh the prayers that are too deep for words. As you struggle to find the truth, your solid footing, your way forward. As you do the work to heal. As you seek to follow the Spirit.

...whenever you are in trouble.

In the places your feet take you. (Sacred and desecrated alike.)
In the places you had no control over being. In your relationships with people. (Those who healed and those who harmed.) In the times of loss. In the pain you hoped to avoid. (That comes from dying and from new life beginning.) In the times of grief. In the brokenness you can't name. (Both the holy and profane.) At the end of yourself.

Let the name of Jacob's God protect you.

Jacob's God who sees you at your worst, your striving, your conniving. Jacob's God who will wrestle through the long nights, the sleepless nights, the doubting nights, the wandering nights of the soul. Jacob's God who meets you face to face. Jacob's God who transforms you through Grace.

Pray

Remind us today that even when things fall and our chariots fail, we can place our trust in you, Oh Lord. That your eyes see us, that your hand holds us, that your Spirit never fails us. Amen.

Jessica Maudlin
Associate for Sustainable Living & Earth Care Concerns
Presbyterian Hunger Program

December 6

Read Romans 15:14-21.

One of my favorite parts of the preparations for Christmas is decorating the Christmas tree. I have an assortment of ornaments that I've collected over the years. Each one of them has a memory associated with it. As I put them on my tree, I am reminded of all the people who've had an impact on my life.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome as a reminder to them. I think we all need reminders: reminders of who God is, of who we are called to be, of the people who've shown us what love and faith is all about. Paul seems to conclude that ultimately it all comes back to Christ and to the proclamation of what Christ has done for us.

That is a perfect reminder for us as we journey through Advent toward the manger. We have so many traditions that we observe during this time, both sacred and secular. But ultimately all of them can be reminders to us of Christ and what Christ has done for us. As we think about the family members and friends we've spent holidays with over the years and remember those traditions we shared, may they all point us back to Christ and the love God shared through Jesus' life.

Pray

Coming Christ, may the traditions of our faith and culture all remind us of your love for us. May the celebrations we have and the memories we've made all point us back to you and your great love. In Jesus' name. AMEN!

Rev. Jeffrey Fiet
Co-Pastor, First Presbyterian Church (Scottsbluff, NE)

December 7

Read Genesis 15:1-18.

Have you ever looked up to the stars
First thing in the morning
Before the sun comes up
And tried to count?
One light after another
Amidst deep darkness
Light and dark
Filling the sky.

You will be blessed the scriptures say
Even when we don't believe it.
Because blessings feel few and far between
like things to be earned
That only a few have access to.
And yet our vision is pulled skyward
As the God of abundance
Calls to our hungry hearts
In the light and the dark

So don't be afraid to be blessed.
Walk out into the early morning
As the light and dark fill the space
Take a look at the stars
And Breathe deeply.
Count this moment
Count this second
Count yourself
Blessed and beloved
Now and forever.
Amen.

Rev. Rachel Penmore
Campus Minister, UKirk University of Tennessee

December 28

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

In this passage, Jesus reminds us that to enter heaven, one must become like a child. These verses stop me in my tracks every time. Change and become like a child? Is Jesus sure? In our society, where we hold our achievements, our degrees, our hours worked, tests passed, and all-nighters up like gold medals, becoming like a child seems to stand in face of everything the world asks of us.

When the world asks for more work, more grinding, more stress, I wonder what it means to change, to become like a child. Where is there room for more wonder, more play, more rest, more curiosity? I wonder if God looks at all of our achievements, our endlessly checked off to-do lists, and says "this is too much," or "but when have you rested?"

I'd be lying if I didn't say that our capitalism-driven world makes this feel impossible, but I believe that we each have moments of being able to choose rest, delight, humility, and wonder, no matter how tiny those moments may be. In this season, I am curious what it would look like for you to challenge yourself to say no to the constant grind anywhere you can, and to practice becoming like a child, loved and held by God.

Pray

God of childlike delight, we pray today for moments of rest, of unbridled curiosity, of joy that knows no bounds. Remind us what it means to become more like a child, and show us the little ways we can step away from the rat race of life and step into a slower pace with You. Amen.

Kim Rubish
Pastoral Resident, UNC Presbyterian Campus Ministry (Chapel Hill, NC)

December 27

Read Proverbs 8:22-31.

From the Beginning

Before the earth, the seas, the sky,
Before He set the stars ablaze,
Before bright colors, sound and light.
Wisdom came with God's decree.

Oh! Compassion, patience, love,
Joy and laughter, dance and song,
Knowledge, judgment, passion, care,
Was there, great wisdom, by God's call.

In the beginning was the Word,
In the beginning was the Light,
Wisdom knew that it was good,
Wisdom held that it was right.

Light and Life, Love and Opus,
All rejoicing in His sight,
Gentle touch, the spark of life
Harmonic beats our human hearts.

Pray

Gracious and loving Creator, all that is and ever has been— streams from your almighty love and compassion. Our senses come alive, our hearts thrill with gratitude, for the sounds of nature, the cosmic music, the truth in your Word. Guide us to reflect on your wisdom and share your love with others on the path you reveal to us. In faith we pray, with all glory and praise to you, our Lord and Father. Amen.

Kristin Kuhlmann, CP

Commissioned Pastor, ENMU Presbyterian Campus House Ministry

December 8

Read Ruth 1:6-18.



We were inspired by Ruth and Naomi's commitment to walking a winding, uncertain path together. In much the same way, we accompany one another into unknowns, precarious terrains, and questions of faith. This Advent, as we walk together and are led by light toward the coming of God in the incarnation, may we feel the presence of steadfast love and kinship — just as Ruth and Naomi expressed for each other in a time of great need for a hopeful future.

Pray

Holy God, may we have a love and faith as strong as Ruth's, no matter where we're headed next. Amen.

UKirk Wooster

December 9

Read Psalm 146:5-10.

Uphold

Recently, I received a picture from friends on the north eastern coast of Northern Ireland. The picture was of my friend standing next to her 12-foot tall hollyhock. The hollyhock is freestanding in their back garden, which they plant every spring. Hollyhocks are known to grow to an average height of six to eight feet tall, especially if they are grown against a fence or a wall. This one has no support except for its roots in the ground and the sky above its head. It is upheld by creation as we all are.

As I ponder this Advent and the words of Psalm 146, I am leaning into verse seven. In the NIV, we are told that God *upholds*; in the NRSV, God *lifts up*; in the CEB, God *gives justice*. I am drawn to the way the psalm changes, based on the translation, and yet the word *upholds* feels tender in this season of darkness and light as we allow God's promises to uphold us in this time.

This spring, I worked with a Diné (Navajo) medicine woman, and she stated: "The Divine is the Creator of Movement and Measure. Every single particle of creation has God given space, we are all under the Creator's care and it is a great responsibility. I am five feet tall, round, and a medicine woman. My people have been oppressed, and I have a voice to speak and a story to tell."

What is your measure and movement? How are you upheld and how do you make room to uphold?

Pray

Creator of Movement and Measure, uphold creation and me this day. Amen.

Gretchen Sausville
Cultivator of Joy
Member at Large, Presbytery of Denver

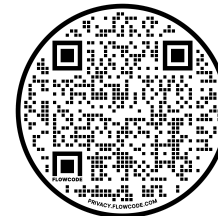
December 26

Read Psalm 148.

Are you still reading these? The buildup has come. The story has hit a crescendo. The wrapping paper and boxes are in the recycling bin. On to New Year's...or are we still reading? I hope so.

Thinking of our theme this year that honors a looking back, if we look back to Psalm 144 a rhythm begins. It is one of praise. Each of these last 7 Psalms begins with a praise of some kind or another. I imagine it starting with a whisper praising God as "rock." Then it slowly starts to pick up and get louder and louder: *Praise your name. Praise the Lord, my soul. How good it is to sing praises. Praise the Lord from the heavens. Praise in the assembly. Praise God in the sanctuary.* When we look back there is a clear pattern of praise for sure. As you look back to yesterday, this season, in the hush of this day after...how is "praise" ringing true for you? Or is it?

Here in this psalm, in verse three we hear, *Praise the Lord, all you shining stars.* I know this is probably drawing our attention to things celestial, but I love thinking of us as the Lord's "shining stars." Kind of like something you would hear in *The Cider House Rules*. How are we carrying on the Advent light long after the apparent party is over? Long past the supposed finish line?



Suggested song: listen to "Psalm 148" by Poor Bishop Hooper. (Scan the QR code to listen on Spotify.)

Pray

Lord, we praise you. Help us shine! Amen.

Rev. John Rogers
Pastor, Peterson House (Chapel Hill, NC)

December 25

Read Luke 2:1-20.

In recent years, I have learned to ask “what are the places that are home to you?” rather than “where are you from?” Some of my students moved around a lot as kids, some are from rural areas far from cities with recognizable names, and some grew up in places that they do not consider home. Their answers are thoughtful and diverse, and lead to story-sharing and authenticity. As a Christian working at a college, it is my role to make my campus feel like home for all of our community members. We look back at the places we call home –where we are from – in order to better understand who we are here, together, today. In our text this Christmas, everyone went to “their own city,” yet Joseph and Mary left their home in Nazareth to go to David’s city for registration. The places that are home to them are many: a tiny village, an ancestral city, each other’s arms. With the birth of Jesus, Christ the Lord, they discover and create a new home. This home welcomes shepherds smelling of sheep. This home reverberates with the refrain “peace on earth.” This home is wonderful, joyous news for all people. Bundled snugly with Jesus is a place they now call home. As it was home for them, may it also be so for us.

Pray

Jesus, child of Nazareth, Bethlehem, Mary, and Joseph, make your home in our hearts. May we find comfort bundled snugly with you, whether we are in a place we consider home or not. Help us to be home for one another, and bring joyous news of peace on earth. Amen.

Rev. Beatrix Weil
Chaplain, Rhodes College

December 10

Read 1 Samuel 2:1-8.

Hannah’s Song: We Are Dreamers

In our Word for today, we are swept up into a joyful song coming from the lips of Hannah, a woman who had been unable to have children until God blessed her with a son, Samuel. Her inability to become pregnant was a source of mockery and shame for her, eventually moving her to cry out to God at the temple. She cries out like many of us do in our own times of darkness: “Lord, do you see all this pain I am in? How could this be happening? Listen up and remember me! Do something!” In this story, God grants Hannah her long-awaited dream.

We know that life does not always happen like this for us. Each of us carries a dream or a hope that may never come to fruition in our lifetime. With Hannah, we dream of a different reality than the one we are living. The truth Hannah offers us in her song is that dreaming is part of our calling as God’s children. She not only envisions a world where a barren woman can become a mother, but she sees a world with no violence, hunger, poverty, or death. Instead, the vulnerable are honored, the powerful are humbled, and everyone has what they need. Hannah invites us into the holy tension of Advent that holds together both our messy reality and our audacious dreams of a future with Christ.

Pray

God of our deepest desires, set fire to our imaginations to envision a world where your love and justice reign. Fill our lungs with your song this day and forever. Amen.

Alli Buikema
Seminary Intern, UNC Presbyterian Campus Ministry (Chapel Hill, NC)

December 11

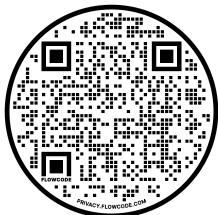
Read Isaiah 35:1-10.

In today's scripture, the Israelites in exile are promised a return home. It feels as unlikely as a desert turning into a garden, but God is proclaiming an unbroken boulevard of green lights all the way home. It calls to mind the first verse of "O Come O Come Emmanuel:" *O come, O come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel that mourns in lonely exile here.*¹

I remember how lonely I felt in my first college semester. I had moved away to live in a different state on my own, but then a miracle happened. I came back from Thanksgiving break for finals. To self-medicate my homesickness, I brought back a copy of the best Christmas movie in existence: *The Muppet Christmas Carol*. Not only is it the most faithful film adaptation of Charles Dickens' classic, it also features some of the best holiday music period. I commandeered the big TV in the common space, put on *The Muppet Christmas Carol*, and during 90 minutes of nostalgia, a small group sat down with me to sing along and laugh at a beautiful redemption story. We watched together as the Muppets helped resurrect the spirit of a lonely old miser. We were more than students coexisting in a freshman dorm. We felt hopeful about our future as emerging adults. We were finding our community.

Pray

Creator God, as we wait for you, we ask for a vision of the way things could be. We ask that as you heal our lonely hearts, you would also heal our communities by bringing us together. Show us how to be your people, and teach us the meaning of redemption. Amen.



Scan this code or visit tinyurl.com/n7rrn2c3 to listen to "O Come O Come, Emmanuel" performed by Drew.

Drew Wilmesherr
Interim Ministry Director, UKirk Atlanta

December 24

Read Isaiah 9:2-7.



In today's reading we are struck with the dichotomy of darkness versus light right from the beginning. This darkness is all too real for some of us, especially during this time of year. Spending extended periods of time with family and loved ones during the holidays can be a beautiful thing, but it can also be triggering for others.

I love this passage because it gives space for those negative emotions during this time of celebration, which is the inspiration

behind this photo. The darkness is made beautiful because of the light. Just as the light creeps in on the leaves in the photo, Jesus' light is calm as it approaches us so as not to manipulate us and obliterate our darkness. The darkness and light coexist together and that is what makes Christianity so intriguing.

On this Christmas Eve, we are given a safe and brave space to feel our feelings and know that we are welcome and loved in this community. Being Christian can sometimes look pleasing on the surface, but a true faith community is one that deals with the highs and most importantly the lows of our everyday lives. Take a minute to reflect on the photo and how it makes you feel.

Pray

Hi God, thank you for being with us in our darkness and existing in it with us. Thank you for sending Jesus to be our light through community and love. We love you. Amen.

Madison Vaughn
Ministry Coordinator, UKirk Birmingham
Alum, Bama UKirk

December 23

Read Galatians 3:6-14.

Recently, a mother of three discussed her peace in the midst of impending death by saying, "It will never be enough, but I am ok with it. If I were sixty I would want to see my grandchildren, if I were eighty I would want to see my great-grandchildren. Honestly, we simply want more, and it will never be enough until we embrace that what we have been given is enough. Eternity will be the reality where it is more than enough. In eternity my desire for more will ultimately be satisfied."

The apostle Paul says that by Christ, people have been redeemed from the curse of the law (death). Christ has brought us near to God through his death on the cross (tree) and now we live out freedom by faith. Just as Abraham lived out his faith through following God to Mt. Moriah with Isaac, faith carried Abraham each step even in the shadow of death. If this holiday season finds you grieving or hurting from the sting of death, please know that Christ is enough, and your faith is enough. In the end you are redeemed by Christ and eternity will heal your heart. God is holding you, and it is enough.

Pray

Jesus, thank you for taking on the curse of death and setting me free. Help me today to live more deeply in faith. Help me to be truly free from the fear of death so that I can help others become free in Christ. Amen.

Rob Musick
Chaplain, University of Pikeville

December 12

Read Acts 5:12-16.

Everyone Was Healed

The last line of this text stands out – *everyone was healed*. Everyone who came to the Apostles were healed; it didn't matter who they were or where they were from, it just mattered that they believed in Jesus and the Holy Spirit to be healed.

The original word in Greek is θεραπεύω (therapeuō), which means "to serve, to give help, take care of another; by extension: to heal, cure; (passive) to be healed." The layers of meaning to this word are striking; it is about acts of service to another person. It is something that is being done for you rather than by you. It isn't something you can necessarily do for yourself.

The definition "take care of another" is particularly interesting. This text shines a light on allowing others to help us heal. Taking care of someone else doesn't necessarily dictate physically curing them. It is open ended and creates so much room for interpretation. During this season, especially with the world in the state that it is, take the time to carry on this practice of the early church – to "heal" each other, to take care of one another.

Who are the people in your life that have helped "heal" you (physically, mentally, spiritually)? What kind of impact did this have on your faith or spiritual life? The Church has hurt rather than "healed" many people; what are ways in which the Church can return to "healing" rather than hurting?

Pray

God of all seasons, help us to seek healing for one another and ourselves, as an act of service unto you. Amen.

Sarah Grace Hall
Program Assistant, Massanetta Springs Camp and Conference Center

December 13

Read Jude 1:17-25.

Today's reading makes me a little uncomfortable. I shrink from Jude's us-versus-them language and feel much more eager to identify with the "scoffers indulging ungodly lusts" than with anyone who might claim to "stand without blemish in the presence of God's glory." I want to confront the author about blaming others for divisiveness. Couldn't they consider a different approach that wouldn't cast aside any beloved children of God in the process?

And yet, I remember how often I, too, distance myself from those I disagree with, thinking, "they just don't really *get it*, do they?" Very often, those thoughts are about communities and traditions that formed me, the very places where I'm from.

In the presence of the great mystery of God, it is so very enticing to convince ourselves that we have it all figured out. It's easy to tell ourselves that others are to blame and that we've somehow found a way to slip right through to truth, goodness, and spiritual enlightenment. In the season of Advent, God shows up right in the midst of our messy world, calling us to the grace, hope, and love that cuts across all borders. We're called to stay grounded in God, the one who calls us out beyond our divisions and builds a wider table of reconciliation and understanding. There, the hope of God rings clear.

Pray

God of deep understanding, meet us in our messiness and help us witness one another with the perspective of your abundant love. You call us to share goodness and grace even when we fundamentally disagree. Guide us when bitterness is easier than mercy. Call us back to your love. Amen.

Rev. Hannah Lundberg
Resident Minister & Campus Ministry Pastor
First Presbyterian Church (Ann Arbor, MI) & UKirk@UMich

December 22

Read Luke 1:46b-55.

Back in October, I read this scripture with one of our students. I watched as her face lit up when we got to verses 51-53. Here is how the conversation unfolded.

RUSS: What happened when you read those verses?

MARY: This is what we are supposed to be doing. We're supposed to be serving others. Feeding people. And lifting up the lowly.

RUSS: I know, right? And what a tough reminder in the middle of a season that can feel so inwardly focused. Is this the first time you have read Mary's song?

MARY: It is. It's really pretty.

RUSS: I know. I love it.

MARY: It's funny that our devotional falls for December 22nd. Around December 22nd every year my family goes to a United Methodist church to help with putting together bags of toys for those who don't have gifts at Christmas. The whole year the church works to collect toys. They collect toys with slightly damaged boxes. Or toys on sale. They store them and then volunteers pack them together for families. We pack them in front of the altar. I think about how special that is. I am reminded of what Christmas is all about.

I am, too. These final moments before Christmas Eve, God still speaks in that stillness like God has spoken to our ancestors all those years before. On this day after the Longest Night, the words "the mighty one has done great things" still ring.

Pray

Light a candle and pray silently for 30 seconds to one minute, inviting God's Spirit into the end of the season.

Rev. Russ Kerr, Student Engagement Coordinator
Mary Wells, Student
The Pace Center for Campus Ministry at VCU

December 21

Read Genesis 37:2-11.

What if Advent is not just about anticipation but also about becoming and belonging? As we wait in hope, peace, joy, and love for Emmanuel, we're reminded of who God created us to be. We've been given incredible gifts to use in making peace and justice wherever we can, even when we struggle to feel validated in them.

Joseph is a teenager with burgeoning gifts for leadership and creativity, but he is not in the most affirming household. He is the favored son — filled with honesty and a gracious spirit — and all his brothers hate him for it. As a dreamer, Joseph is attuned to realities that are not yet in view but have heavy implications for the "way things are," or will be in the future. Instead of being encouraged by his family, he is ostracized as a threat, and I imagine that was a painful experience. Though he eventually becomes a powerful leader and reconciles with his brothers, Joseph's path comes with hard truths about how his identity and gifts were not celebrated by his family. Not everyone will understand the work of God in our lives. We may long for external validation, but God affirms every *fiber* of our being, calling us good and beautiful, just as we are.

Pray

God, help us find value in all our gifts and aptitudes, as we come to know you more and feel the full embrace of your love in this season of Advent. With grateful hearts we pray, amen.

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

December 14

Read Psalm 42.

We self-diagnosed people pleasers dwell in this tension between what we think and what we say. We go on splashing water on the tiny fires sparking in our chests. Our hearts call out to us: *This feels wrong, it's not right for me, I know what is true.* Our mouths say, "I'm sorry," "It's fine," "I don't know." We're all so painfully fine, aren't we?

Deep calls to deep, writes the psalmist. And this author does not mean those rehearsed phrases we reserve for small talk. (I don't think this involves words at all.) This Deep is the innate hungering and craving and yearning we have for some capital-t-Thing that is so much bigger and wider and stronger than ourselves.

I know that capital-t-Thing as God.

In Hebrew, the word *ruach* means both "breath" and "spirit." The Spirit works within our own Deep to reach us, speaking through tear ducts and gut feelings and uneasiness and restlessness.

God works through us and within us. Our Deep stirs in us through our lungs by gasping or holding our breath or losing it altogether.

And this, beloved, is how we will know God and one another: by breath and desire and the Deep alone. This Deep is unrehearsed and unburdened by the weight of others' expectations, calling us to a greater love and truth. As long as there is breath in us, God works through us.

The Deep calls to us still. Alleluia. Amen.

Pray

May we answer to the Deep in us and the Deep in others. Let us speak the words on our hearts and live through the passion within us. Amen.

Jessica Joshi
Student, UKirk Memphis

December 15

Read Galatians 3:23-29.



We love sorting perspectives into dichotomies, highlighting differences as opposition, and choosing a team to fight for. Yet so many of the lines we create are arbitrary, and the goodness of God extends, through, around, and beyond our interpretations of the world. By using Christ as a lens to view the world, some of the dichotomies fall away, and things we thought were finished are brought around full circle. The promises of old and new are swirled together to give us a bigger picture of God's grace and promise.

Pray

Divine Love, your grace is even bigger than we can imagine, your picture of wholeness more than we can grasp. May we find deep belonging in your love that we might see more of the fullness of your goodness. Amen.

Rev. Allison Maus
Associate Pastor for Campus and Young Adult Ministry
State College Presbyterian Church
Presbyterian Student Fellowship at Penn State

December 20

Read Genesis 21:1-21.

The story of Hagar is a story about being second. It's a story of what happens when things don't work out like we had hoped. The hard truths of injustice. The reality that we will not all be great. That most of us will experience moments where we are forgotten, passed over, un-chosen by the world.

But God does not define Hagar by the things done to her by others, or by her own mistakes. And just because Hagar is not the hero of the story, the chosen one, the winner, does not mean that God has forgotten her or the promises that were made to her.

In the same way, God does not forget us.

When things in life do not turn out the way we hoped, it is tempting to think that God has forgotten us. Others will tell us that is a fact. The story of Hagar and Ishmael refutes this. God has a different plan for these two. No, they will not be the ones through whom the treasured promise comes but that does not mean they are not important to God.

Hagar and Ishmael's future was different than either could have imagined, but that doesn't mean it was of less value to God. In these moments, in the face of dying dreams and hopes, God hears and sees our cries. In the midst of the desert God reveals a new source of life, a new purpose.

Pray

Dear God, this Advent when we feel defeated and unseen, help us to see the promises, the future, you have in store for us, even when the road seems blocked and the way forward unsure. Amen.

Rev. Brenna Hesch Overland
Head of Staff, First Presbyterian Church (Bay City, MI)

December 19

Read Galatians 4:8-20.

I have an uneasy relationship with the Apostle Paul. If we were in an empty lunch room together, I'd try and find a seat as far away from him as possible. It's not that I disagree with everything he writes, or the totality of his theology. I just don't think he'd be a fun person to spend time with.

At first glance, this selection from Galatians seems to reaffirm my keep-me-as-far-away-from-Paul-as-possible stance. Quite unlike his usual style, in this passage Paul seems to be erratic, jumping from topic-to-topic with the agility of a terrified cat.

However, we are still able to catch a glimpse of Paul's humanity. Here he makes a personal appeal to the friendship he once experienced with the Galatians. In short, Paul asks the Galatians a simple question: after all we've been through, how can you turn back? How can you possibly turn back to the time when you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods?

While Advent is a time of excitement as we prepare ourselves for the birth of Christ, it can also be a time of personal reflection. This piece from Paul's letter to the Galatians invites us to reflect on the ways that God has been active in our lives especially through people who have had a profound impact on our journeys of faith. We are invited to remember those times and those people when we feel like turning back from God.

Pray

Holy God, we give you thanks for those saints who have journeyed with us along the way. May our memories of time spent with them give us strength to continue our own journey. Amen.

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

December 16

Read 2 Samuel 7:18-22.

What if I told you that God is with you, no matter what your journey looks like right now? That, no matter your past, God loves you? These words are what God told David. David, the shepherd boy whom God called to serve as king. His kingship, though, did not come easily. Rather, 1 and 2 Samuel depict his time before king as fleeing to and fro as his enemies chased him. Yet, in this intimate moment, God tells David a central fact about God's relationship with God's people: that God is with us and loves us.

Our passage tells us of David's response. How else can one respond to their Creator's and Sustainer's love but with humility and awe? David realizes that what God is telling him is not because of something David did. It is a fact about the very nature of God. In God's very essence is a profound love and care for God's people. Friend, hear the Good News, this includes you, too! God loves you and is with you!

The babe in the manger is the ultimate sign that God is near to us and loves us. Therefore, may we follow David and be led to praise God this season. May God's love lead us into an even deeper relationship with the Creator and Sustainer of all creation. May our awe lead us to share this Good News with everyone we meet.

Pray

Gracious God, lead us into a greater awe of you this season. Help us to know in our soul that you love us and are near to us. Use us to share your love with others. Amen.

Will DeLaney
Director of Christian Education, First Presbyterian Church (Laurens, SC)
Alum, Presbyterian College UKIRK

December 17

Read John 3:31-36.

In July, my 13-year old son randomly says one day in the car, "I want Christmas cheer! I'm tired of all the bad stuff going on around the world. I want Christmas cheer to come now — I'm tired of waiting!" Since it was 105 degrees outside, I could have done with at least some Christmas weather.

I had to admit, though, with the heaviness that so often feels like it's hanging over the world, and the drumbeat of all that is wrong serving as the soundtrack to every news story, even in the most wonderful moments it is hard to remember what the spirit of Christmas really is. There is a lot competing with Christmas cheer, isn't there?

New Testament scholar N.T. Wright describes messages spoken by "one from the earth" as those that "have no breath of heaven about them."² Messages that keep us from seeing God's presence around us. Words that keep us from seeing God "pouring out God's love through Jesus Christ into the world" right now, again and again and again. Pouring into our lives the same breath from heaven as Christ had, which brings life and light to all the world.

Whether you are feeling the Christmas spirit or not, pause. Close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths. Remember that the very Breath of Heaven whose birth we again prepare to receive is already within you. Around you.

Pray

Holy God, help me to remember that you are continuously pouring out your love through Jesus Christ upon me, upon every situation and person, upon the world. Help me to receive the truth of the love you give through Jesus Christ. Amen.

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

December 18

Read Isaiah 7:10-16

This scripture presents a tension between God and Ahaz. God wants to provide a sign to demonstrate divine sovereignty. Ahaz claims he does not need one. In reading, you may find yourself solidly on team Ahaz here. We do not often question God's sovereignty. We are trained to respect some sources without hesitation, such as our parents' authority growing up. We intuitively understand Ahaz's motives to refuse.

What is fascinating is Isaiah's insistence that God provides a sign anyway. It is almost as if God needs to provide a sign to satisfy God's needs rather than the needs of Ahaz. Does God have needs like we do? God is so self-sufficient and so complete; however, the sign is one of simultaneous wisdom and humility — it is a woman with a child that will demonstrate the power of God. The power of God is in the "Immanuel." In other words, the power of God comes from God's solidarity with humanity. We recognize God as one who shares wisdom with us in humble ways.

Of course, this is the way that many of us learn best as well. We recall encounters with others who said the right thing at just the right time, far more than we remember theorems that we memorized from text books. Our future (and our present) has been completely shaped by after school talks with teachers, late night coffees with friends, and long walks with people who know us well. With this sign, God is inviting Godself into those common places and consecrating those encounters as transformative and holy.

Pray

Holy God, most of the time I do not need a sign or symbol to remember your goodness to me. However, when I do, please be generous with your signs. Show me who I am and who you are. Give me humility and wisdom. Amen.

Doodle Harris
Chaplain, Hastings College