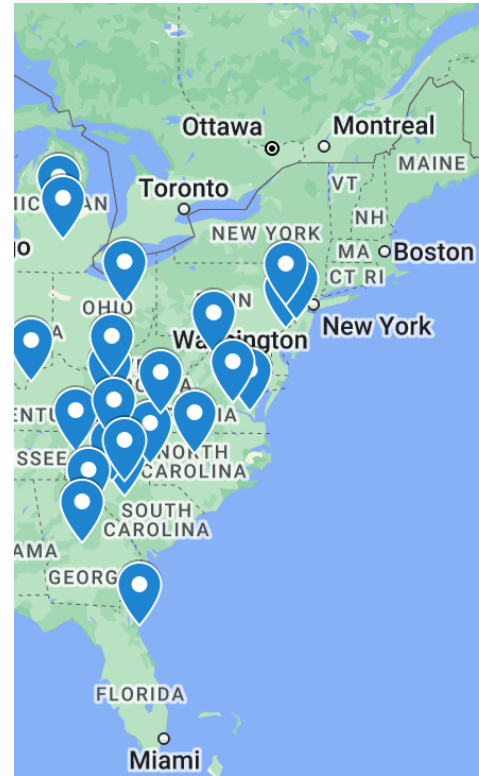




WORDS FOR WAITING

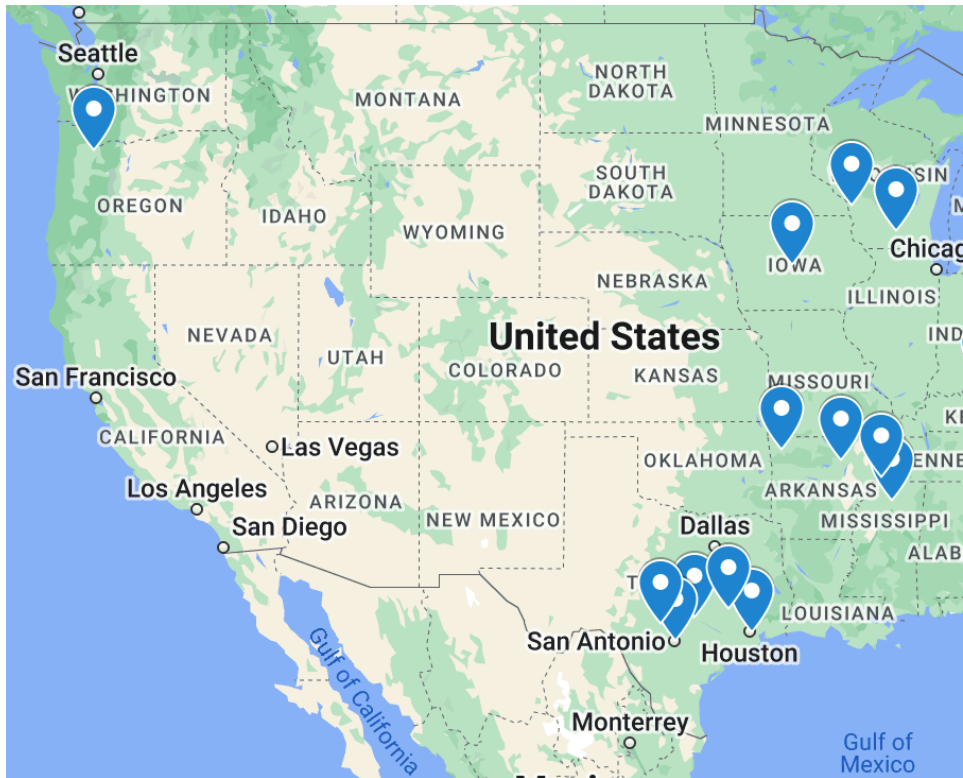
Daily Devotions for Advent & Christmas
2024

COMMUNITIES



- Alma College
- Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary
- Celtic Cross
- Jesuit Volunteer Corps Northwest
- The Christian Association (UPenn)
- Lafayette College
- Lyon College
- Marshall UKIRK
- Memorial Presbyterian UKirk
- Opequon Presbyterian Church
- The Pace Center
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- United Campus Ministry (University of Arkansas)
- United Campus Ministry (La Crosse, WI)
- United Campus Ministry in Aggieland
- United Campus Ministry of Greater Houston
- University of Pikeville
- The Vine at Collegiate Presbyterian Church

CONTRIBUTING



It's pretty widely known that you can find a tree's age by counting the rings in its trunk, but did you know that each ring is different depending on what kind of year the tree had? The rings for years with plenty of nourishment are wide, while harsher years leave thinner marks. Sometimes a forest fire leaves a scar, but the rings that follow persist beyond it.

I never quite know what will happen in the months between when I start preparing for this project (usually mid-August) and the beginning of Advent. What will happen even just in the weeks between when our contributors are writing and creating (October) and when this devotional is released. This year, it feels like those weeks and months have been particularly harrowing. Like if we were trees, for a lot of us this year's ring might turn out pretty thin.

And yet! We are here. Together. This year's contributors represent 37 faith communities in 17 different states, including 32 college groups and chaplains serving students on 39 campuses. Their reflections are honest and creative and faithful.

If you are overwhelmed, may these pages offer you a moment of quiet. If you feel alone, may they assure you that you are anything but. If you are finding peace, may they nurture a continued sense of determined calm in the days ahead. Wherever you're coming from, I'm glad you're here.

WORDS FOR WAITING

is provided by:



Presbyterian Mission
**Office of Christian
Formation**

presbyterianmission.org/formation

In hope (even when it's hard),
Rev. Allison Wehrung
Editor

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

DECEMBER 1

Read Luke 21:25-36.

Advent is the season of anticipation and waiting. A four-week season of remembering and celebrating the arrival of Jesus on Earth. Waiting can be hard and produce anxiety, so we begin Advent with this passage. My partner's grandmother told us a story years ago when we were visiting, recalling a time in her childhood growing up in North Carolina. Her eyesight was nearly gone, but you could see the scene in her voice as she recalled the feelings and things she was telling. She grew up poor, "we really did live on tobacco road!" She said laughing. Walking home from school, she and her siblings heard something they'd never heard. The sound swelled until they finally jumped from the road. They were shaking with fear and watched, hearing the roar as their imaginations told them the long black train they'd sung about in church was nearing! Finally, the machine came around the bend and their eyes saw an automobile; the first they'd ever seen! Of course, they'd heard of these new horseless carriages, having never experienced seeing one first hand. Fear turned to hope.

Passages like this can be used either way, to instill fear or display hope. As we enter into this season of Advent carrying fear and anxiety, we understand how the early Christian church felt. We believe, of course. But how long, O Lord? God is telling us to recognize that God is with us, to open our eyes and look next to us. Help each other, lift one another up while we live through this life. The time will come, sure enough. The challenge is to not miss the beauty of life around us now.

Pray

God, we pray we find hope even in fear and anxiety. Amen.

Mary Runyon

Campus Minister, United Campus Ministry (La Crosse, WI)

NOTES

December 11

1. Jan Richardson, "Blessed Are You Who Bear the Light," in *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons* (Orlando, FL: Wanton Gospeller Press, 2015).

December 19

2. Theophane the Monk, *Tales of a Magic Monastery* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 37.

December 21

3. To see more about this experiment, watch this video from the University of Massachusetts. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FaiXi8KyzOQ>
4. Prayer adapted from Numbers 6:24-26.

December 22

5. bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).

December 23

6. This idea is presented more fully in this sermon by Dr. Brennan Breed, preached at The Table @ UGA on October 1, 2024. <https://vimeo.com/1015079441>

December 26

7. David Lose, "Christ the King," Working Preacher, Luther Seminary, 2010, www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/christ-the-king.

JANUARY 6

Read Matthew 2:1-12.

Jesus has been revealed to us; born to live and set us free. Yet, he was revealed to us as a child. Unable to preach and unable to even lift his head. He did not even know the significance of his life and what would come. What does it mean that Jesus was noticed far beyond the small city of Bethlehem? The halls of power felt his presence in the world.

We can still feel this presence today, the same presence that would later speak truth to power and flip tables in the temple. During this time of year, we are called to remember how Jesus fulfills God's promises to us. Jesus completes what was said by prophets and represents God's continuing covenant with us. What can we do in return?

When the Magi saw Jesus they honored him and presented him with magnificent treasures. Perhaps fortunately, we cannot do the same. So how can we move forward from this season of Advent in a way that honors God's love? In a way that represents our thanksgiving for Jesus? In a way that brings the goodness of this day of Epiphany to every day? By living into hope, peace, joy, and love for ourselves, others, and creation.

Pray

O God of new beginnings and everlasting hope, you have brought your child into this world to be a messenger of peace. Let us listen with joy, love, and all our hearts. Let us carry this epiphany within us until the next, as we remember your revelation to us: your son, our lord, Jesus. Amen.

Kyle Digman

Student, Pres House (University of Wisconsin, Madison)

DECEMBER 2

Read Psalm 25:1-10.



At times God's path may feel simple, clear, and easy. Just like a walk in the park. The verses are relatable, the sermons are moving, and our passion is burning. At other times God's path may feel confusing, strenuous, and discouraging. Like a superhighway, God's path is filled with unexpected but crucial turns. Nothing is making sense, I don't feel filled, where even is God? In the waiting, whichever path you are on — maybe a mix of both — trust that you are still on God's path and remember that God will guide you and remember you according to their love.

Pray

God of guidance, at times we are scared, upset, and nervous — would you be with us to remind us of your love and mercy? God of guidance, at times we are assured, hopeful, and excited — would you be with us to remind us of your love and mercy?

Ryan Obray

Student, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

DECEMBER 3

Read 2 Samuel 7:18-22.

The youngest baby I've ever held was four days old, my friend's daughter. She was so small and felt so fragile. Tiny little fingers, and still trying to figure out these new surroundings. What a curious way for God to enter the world, yet it is each of our stories as well.

When the solar activity happened last May leading to sightings of the Northern Lights throughout the US, it was cloudy where I live in Philadelphia. When it happened again in October, my sister and I drove out to a dark place. Although you couldn't see the lights clearly with the naked eye, the sky looked bright. When we used our phones to take 3-second exposures, the sky was alive with color, blues, greens, and pinks. In some of the photos, you can see the stars, too. It was very cool, the sky dancing with light, feeling like creation praising God.

The fragility of a tiny baby, and the vastness of the night sky. In David's prayer, he seems to be thinking of a similar juxtaposition, God being mindful of him, his family and future, while being a God of greatness, creator of the universe, unparalleled by any other. In this season of Advent, may we be aware of both God's greatness and God's love and concern for each of us, and like David, offering our prayers of thanksgiving.

Pray

God of atoms and galaxies, we praise you. As we wait in this season of darkness and longer nights, remind us that you show up in unexpected and curious ways, and that each of us, small and fragile as we are, belong to you. Amen.

Rev. Megan LeCluyse
Campus Minister & Director, The Christian Association
(University of Pennsylvania)

JANUARY 5

Read Ephesians 1:3-14.

Who am I? *You were chosen before the foundations of the earth were laid.* Chosen before I could even walk? *Yes, you were chosen before you did anything to earn your place.*

What am I to do? *Be hopeful when you awake.* And in the night? *Yes, set your hope on Christ.*

Where am I? *You live in the in-between, between the past and the future.* In-between the person I was and who I am? *Yes, in-between the already and not-yet Kin-dom of God.*

Am I loved? *You are loved so entirely.*

I am loved so completely? *You are loved even with and because of all your messiness.*

Who am I to be? *I have destined you for greatness.* For struggles too? *Yes, and for a role in God's plan.*

I am Chosen, Hopeful, In-between, Loved, and Destined.
You are my beloved child.

I am.

Pray

Heavenly Lord, when we cry out to you, you hear our prayers. You are quick to listen, quick to love, quick to care. You have claimed us and have a plan for us. Help us to embrace the journey, knowing that you are always with us. Amen.

Rev. Emily Sutphin & Rev. Rachel Sutphin
Alumnae, UKirk Virginia Tech

JANUARY 4

Read Acts 7:44-53.

The book of Acts is an "origin story" of the early church, giving us unique insight into the challenges faced after the commissioning at Pentecost. As they sought to live this expanded aspect of their calling, the Apostles recruited new leaders to the Jesus Movement to carry out vital ministries and spread the Good News of the Gospel. One of those leaders with "great faith and filled with the Holy Spirit" was Stephen. Stephen's ministry involved distributing food and caring for the poor of the community, but false allegations of breaking commandments landed him in prison and he was later stoned to death.

In this passage, Stephen appeals to the Sanhedrin (a high-ranking court of Jewish officials) recalling part of their "origin story" as a people who wandered the wilderness seeking shelter, respite, and care from God in times of adversity. He urges them to reflect on the relationship between their faith and actions, and how pride often stands in the way. While Stephen's speech takes the tone of accountability as a form of justice-seeking love, it was ultimately seen as a slanderous threat by those in power...much like the prophecy surrounding Christ's birth was viewed as a threat to King Herod's rule.

In both cases, the violence which sought to extinguish God's love was unsuccessful.

Pray

Ever-present God, while it may feel risky to speak truth to power, let us be inspired by the saints and all those who've gone before who lived their faith out loud. Fill us with a spirit of love that creates hope for reconciliation in times of discord. For encouragement we pray, amen.

Rev. Erin Guzmán
Chaplain & UKirk Advisor,
UKirk Wooster (The College of Wooster - OH)

DECEMBER 4

Read Psalm 90.

Lord, you dwell in all
generations from
everlasting to everlasting turn us back
to You
we
flourish and
renew; fade and wither. we are
consumed by our anger; we are
overwhelmed. set our iniquities
in the light of all
our days
WE ARE STRONG. even
toil and trouble are soon gone
Who considers power
great
teach us that we may gain a wise
heart. O Lord! Have compassion on
us. with your
steadfast love, we rejoice
Make us as you
have seen. Let
our work manifest your
glorious power. Let the favor of
God prosper the work of
our hands—O prosper the work of our hands!

Ekklesia Campus Ministry (Springfield, MO)

DECEMBER 5

Read Philippians 1:12-17.

In Eastern Kentucky, when Advent comes, so do the short days, the cold, and the darkness. No one is shocked when it happens, it is simply a matter of the reality of late November and December. Many see it as an opportunity for hot chocolate, scarfs, and team branded hoodies.

St. Paul has a similar approach to persecution and the complex reality of human motivation in our scripture reading today. Rather than expending energy in rage and anger, Paul turns his focus to gospel witness. Paul rejoices in how his imprisonment is positioning the good news of Jesus to reach an audience of people that it had not reached before (the imperial guard). Granted, Paul is not happy for his suffering, but he finds great strength from God to fuel his resilience. He rejoices in knowing that Jesus is being made known to those who were once far off. Paul keeps his eyes on the ultimate goal, making the good news of Jesus known to the world. The great commission is the lens in which Paul interprets his life, and this approach to life supports him in the midst of his unjust suffering. Paul truly is a prisoner of hope who joyfully embraces darkness as a path toward shining for Christ. Let us invite the Holy Spirit to awaken a passion to live out the missional heart of God for the unreached.

Pray

Oh God as you sent your son into the world to save and redeem, please now give strength to us who you have sent to be the light of the world, and be near those who are persecuted for the faith around the world. Amen.

Rev. Rob Musick, DMin
Chaplain & Assistant Dean of Health and Wellness,
University of Pikeville

JANUARY 3

Read Luke 8:16-18.

Someone once told me that there are a lot of religious holidays during the late Fall and early Winter whose common symbol, across different traditions, is LIGHT. This makes sense, doesn't it? As the days grew shorter and the night longer, for those who had to wait out the darkness and endure the fears a potentially bad winter could bring, the warmth of a fire and the light of a candle symbolized so much more than being able to navigate the shadows. Light was a gift that held back the darkness both literal and metaphorical.

We have just celebrated that Jesus Christ, the light of the world, has emerged into our physical and metaphorical winters. The light of Christ's presence, peace, joy and love has been born again into our lives and the life of our world! As 2025 gets underway, one way the light of Christ emerges into this new year is through each of us who also bear the light of Christ to one another. But that can feel like a tall order when there seems to be so much darkness throughout our world.

Brother Roger of the Taizé community in France shared once that the only thing Christ ever asks of us is to take a little bit of the gospel in each day and then try to live that out. It's through our small gestures, words, and actions that the light gets brighter, within and around. This year, may we each pay attention to tending the light.

Pray

Holy Spirit, ignite light within us each day and help us embody that light to one another and, eventually, to our whole world. Amen.

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

JANUARY 2

Read Proverbs 1:1-7.

As we begin this new year, there are lots of lofty goals floating around in our heads. We want to do better in the new year, better ourselves, better our world, better life as we know it. And these goals often feel, in a way, unobtainable as the year goes on. So where are we to turn? Our scripture for today is the prologue to Proverbs. It lays out a roadmap of the book and tells us in verse 7 that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." As we go into this new year, seeking to be better, know that the LORD is the giver of knowledge and that we can turn to them.

Pray

Heavenly Lord, giver of knowledge and wisdom, bless us as we step into this new year. Hold us close as we seek your instruction and insight. Remind us of the wisdom of Proverbs as we strive to change our world and the world around us. Teach us to be wise and to follow you, and give us the strength we need this day to continue along your path. In your name we pray, amen.

Abbie Ryon
Alum, UKirk Macon

DECEMBER 6

Read Philippians 1:18b-30.

Paul never thought Jesus would take so long to return. To be fair, Paul was ready to be with Jesus. This isn't a giving up kind of wish. He wants to connect with Christ. He also named his connection with the Philippians. They have had their ups and downs and Paul is in a dreary season.

For many, this devotion is hitting about the time of finals. Is this a dreary season, or the brink of a break that brings you joy? In the ups and downs, we are in it together. Paul encouraged the Philippians that whether they are together or apart, they stand together.

At Montreat College Conference in 2024, we sang the song called "I Need You to Survive" by Hezekiah Walker and the Love Fellowship Choir.

"I need you, you need me. We're all a part of God's body. ... You are important to me, I need you to survive." When at the conference, the words hit me: I need YOU to survive. I need all these college students to know they are an important part of their communities. I need them to live. On the way home I was listening and I heard it this way: I need you to survive. I need you to keep me going. You are my reason. That is what Paul was saying to the Philippians. I need you! You need me! God needs you! God needs me! We are called to be here for each other.

Pray

Breath of life, you need me. You need me! I will say it as long as it takes me to believe it. What would you have me do today? Amen.

Kristi Button
Co-Campus Ministry Director,
United Campus Ministry (University of Arkansas)



Scan to listen to "I Need You to Survive."

DECEMBER 7

Read Luke 9:1-6.

Take Only The Clothes You Have On Your Back

Take only the clothes you have on your back
Town to town I'm traveling, soles worn thin
The Lord entrusted us twelve with his ministry
With a clear command, he said

Take only the clothes you have on your back
If we are turned away, dust the dirt off our soles
Let the soil fall from our feet as we walk
To the next place, empty handed again

Take only the clothes you have on your back
So maybe when the scratch of wood hits our knuckles
And they open the door, we stay, as long as we are needed
To fully immerse into the communities we find ourselves in

Take only the clothes you have on your back
You won't need anything else to do his will
Except to rely on the promise he has
The confidence he has in us to fulfill his ministry

Take only the clothes you have on your back
Stay focused on what you have been sent to do
Healing through words and with faith through Christ
On a pilgrimage, seeking every doorstep

Pray

Dear God, in this Advent season, please help us to remember that all we need are the clothes on our backs to help, heal, and love one another. Help us to stay focused on what truly matters in our communities. Amen.

Elizabeth King
Student, Celtic Cross (Presbyterian College)

JANUARY 1

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-13.

Throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, the author wrestles with big, existential questions like, "What is the meaning of life? What is the point of all that humans do and experience on earth?" And here, in our passage, "Is there any order to the passage of time?" The author is a poet, so every word of this passage is carefully selected and ordered to illustrate for us the answer to that question.

In verses 1-8 he describes 24 experiences familiar to us as humans, ones which we tend to place in a hierarchy, assigning some meaning or value, either positive or negative. The author merely observes them without judgment: "For everything there is a season." However, in the careful ordering of his words, the poet reveals the truth that there is, within God's creation, a careful ordering of the seasons: the human experience begins with birth and will end with peace. Their counterparts, death and war, will get neither the first nor the last word.

On this New Year's Day, as you reflect on the seasons of your life thus far and your hopes for 2025, see if you can look upon them with the eyes of the poet: cast no judgment upon yourself if your current season of life looks different from your peers'; if you are in a season of joy, delight in that good gift; if you are in a season of hardship, know that it is temporary; and find hope in the truth that in every season, throughout all time, God is at work bringing about the final word of peace on earth.

Pray

Eternal God, today as we mark the ending of one year and the beginning of a new one, remind us that you keep all our goings out and our comings in. Grant us rest in the hope that you have placed a sense of order into this world that at times feels random, and that all your works lead us further on the road toward peace. Amen.

Rev. Caitlyn Zold
Campus Minister, UKirk Davidson

DECEMBER 31

Read 1 Kings 3:5-14.

Our reading for today marks the beginning of Solomon's reign as king. His father, David, dies in the preceding chapter, and Solomon is now thrust into the role of leadership. The text describes Solomon as young and inexperienced. So, an implicit question arises over his ability to fill the big shoes left by his father before him.

Solomon seems aware that he may not be up to the task of becoming Israel's next king. He is humble enough to recognize his shortcomings. So, Solomon asks God to grant him the wisdom and discernment to take on the task before him. God grants it.

However, this divinely offered wisdom does not lead to perfection. We see Solomon fall on his face many times throughout his reign as king. Many of you reading this are straddling the edge between youth and young adulthood, and you may feel wholly unprepared for what is to come. That is ok. You do not need to have it all figured out. You can and will make mistakes. Again, that is ok, because God walks alongside us on this journey of faith — even when we feel ill-prepared for what will come next.

Pray

God, who stands with us at the edge of a new year, we come to you this day looking toward the unknown. We hold tightly to our hopes and dreams of what is on the horizon. Yet, we also carry the baggage of anxiety and fear that things may turn out as we hope. So, like Solomon, we ask that you offer us the wisdom to discern where we are being called in this new year. Help us to make hard decisions as they come. Remind us that even though our journey of faith will be filled with valleys, switchbacks, and false summits, you are walking alongside us. Amen.

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

DECEMBER 8

Read Luke 1:67-79.

Luke 1:67-79, known also as the Canticle of Zechariah, is very special to me. I read it often when I pray, and I always find myself drawn to that image of the dawn from on high, shining down upon us. It does sometimes feel as though the world is full of darkness — and maybe it is. But Zechariah's prophecy tells us that, though the world has been this way, it will not always be so.

A change is coming. That change started with Jesus, who changed the lives of those around him even before he was born, and that change is still working its way towards us today. The course of human history is fraught. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see there is conflict in our world. So, yes, there is darkness. But the promise of Advent is that there is a light which God has given to us — Jesus Christ, the light of the world, who shines in the darkness and leads us to peace.

If you're like me, that peaceful world might sound more like a dream than a reality. So, this Sunday, I challenge you to dream with me. Dream of the world of peace, and imagine what it will be like to feel the light of the dawn on our faces.

Pray

O Lord my God, I confess that a peaceful world often seems far away, and impossible. Help me to dream of a world without conflict, violence, or strife. Help me to see the coming of the dawn, even when darkness abounds, and fix my heart ever on the promise of your peace, so that one day we all may be one. Amen.

Will Clancy
Student, Pres House (University of Wisconsin, Madison)

DECEMBER 9

Read Isaiah 40:1-11.

All humanity shall see
The LORD's glory
Together.

The few that raise up their voices,
And the many that shout
Over them.

Those that cling to old White lies,
And those that cannot
Abide them.

O God, our God,
You say, "Call out!"
And we ask: "What is there to say?
To whom shall we say it?"

And you answer, O God: "Comfort!"
Everywhere and all over.
Yes, even there.
Yes, even to them."

"Yes, my people," You say to us.
"Yes! Yes! Yes!"

Pray

Almighty God. Your Love is our greatest comfort and our greatest challenge. As the powerful wage war on our planet and our most vulnerable peoples, do not let us make Your love into an empty platitude. Give us the words to say and the courage to say them. Fill us with Your comfort, so that we may pour out Your comfort onto others. Amen.

Feagin Hardy
Student, Union Presbyterian Seminary
Alum, UKirk Ole Miss

DECEMBER 30

Read Mark 13:32-37.

I Say to Everyone:

"Keep watch!"
How am I to keep watch when I am tired?
Might I rest my eyes for a moment?
If I rest, do I miss it?

"Keep watch!"
What exactly am I looking for?
Why be on guard?

"Keep watch!"
How long am I to be alert?
And what sign will lead the way to tell me it is time?
Is this all a guessing game?

"Keep watch!"
I get the plead to keep watch but am unsure.
God, help me in my watching and waiting.
Awaken me.
Give me the sign I need to stay alert.

"Keep watch!"

Pray

God of new life and hope, we often get weary and tired from all the pain and busyness of this world that we close our eyes and fall asleep. We miss the mark. Help us to keep awake. Give us the strength and energy to wait expectantly for you to bring peace and mercy to our world. Amen.

Rev. Maggie Alsup
Chaplain, Lyon College

DECEMBER 29

Read Colossians 3:12-17.

The Christmas season is a time for us to be focused on and filled with HOPE.

At first glance, our Colossians passage might sound like a long to-do list for us. But I like to notice that these characteristic traits of...

compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience,
forgiveness, love, peace

...have all been demonstrated to us by Jesus Christ. Additionally, they have been graciously extended to us by God, who is the lover of our souls. We are not being asked to do something that is foreign to us. This passage is reminder to extend to others what has already been given to us by our faithful God.

Hope is believing that something is yet to come or is about to arrive. As we read this Colossians passage through a lens of HOPE, we can believe and anticipate that we continually experience God's compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, love, and peace in fresh and new ways. And this hope can lead us to recognize that it is through these encounters with the living God that we are enabled to offer these same expressions to others in our midst.

So, in this season of HOPE, we can wait with expectant hope, and believe with great hope, that God will empower us to live out this calling which requires a generosity of heart toward our friends, our family, and our neighbors.

Pray

God, you are the lover of my soul. Help me to notice how you generously lavish me with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, love, and peace, that I might learn how to lavishly offer this to others. Amen.

Mary Scine

Director of College Ministry,

Memorial Presbyterian UKirk College Ministry

DECEMBER 10

Read Psalm 126.

I grew up in the Salinas Valley in central California – a verdant Eden that produces most of the vegetables on our tables. Part of the year, though, it takes on a resemblance to the “desert waste” in Psalm 126:4. Normally lush fields lie barren, tall green grasses wilt into mats of dry yellow brush, and gushing streams recede into beds of parched mud that spiderweb across the valley.

These *arroyos secos* are not only a reminder of the flourishing that has been, but also a promise that water will once again quench the thirst of the earth. Often, the streams are actually still flowing just beneath the surface.

How often does the peace of God look like this? There are times it gushes over the banks and splashes the surrounding country with lively green. So, too, are there times when God's peace feels muted, flowing below the surface. And sometimes the water of tranquility seems to have stopped entirely...and the dry bed that remains is a testament to both the peace of ages past, and a promise of its return in the future.

Whether serenity flows easily or seems to have dried up, may we continue to plant, trusting that the Lord's peace will never cease to flow.

Pray

God who is the source of all peace, bless us with the water that is a soothing balm to our hurts, that slakes our thirst, that brings forth abundance from the earth. When the streams that flow through our lives dry up, remind us who called water out of the rock, who strode the waves of Galilee, who established the very foundations of the sea. Amen.

Paul Burgess

Pastoral Resident,

Presbyterian Campus Ministry (UNC, Chapel Hill)

DECEMBER 11

Read Luke 7:18-30.

"Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard." Jesus invites John's disciples to bear witness. To look around them and see. To see the world both for how it truly is and for the miracle of how it can be. He invites the questioners to see the harsh realities around them, the suffering, the isolation, the pain, and the poverty. And yet he also invites them to bear witness to the fact that it need not remain this way. That there is hope, there is possibility, there is good news! Miracles are unfolding before their eyes and this is meant to serve as the answer that they and John are looking for.

As I think about the invitations of this passage, and the harsh realities that exist around us, each and every day, I am reminded of the following lines from a poem by the Rev. Jan Richardson:

"Blessed are you
who bear the light
in unbearable times,
who testify
to its endurance
amid the unendurable,
who bear witness
to its persistence
when everything seems
in shadow and grief."¹

May we, like the disciples of John, be able to see the everyday miracles unfolding all around us, even in what feels like unbearable times. May we be a people who bear the light of hope both this day and in the days and seasons to come.

Pray

Miracle Worker, open our eyes that we might see, so we may bear witness to your light in the world and our lives. Amen.

Rev. Alex Serna-Wallender
University Chaplain, Trinity University (San Antonio, TX)

DECEMBER 28

Read Revelation 21:1-7.

In a closer reading, Revelation is not a scary "doomsday" book. John is actually helping us — the reader — to envision what a life with God could (and at times does) look like. One filled with joy. With peace (for the world and within ourselves). With patience. And with understanding. And the most important — one where death's sting will be no more.

There is a composer named Timothy C. Takach who composed a choral piece called, "Neither Angels, Nor Demons, Nor Powers" based on Revelation 7, but fits the theme for this scripture as well.

This song came to me in a time in my life when I needed it. A friend invited me to be a part of a community chorus where we sang this song as part of a benefit concert. I was so glad he asked. My spirits were lifted.

In this time between Christmas and the beginning of a new year and new school semester, who could you ask? Reach out to? Bring a little joy into their lives. Maybe it is through sending them a song that reminds you of them, or maybe it is simply a catch up text or phone call.

No matter what you end up doing, I hope you will do so in the spirit of joy found in this text in Revelation.

Pray

God of revelation, thank you for the joy that has been revealed to me in my life. Illumine to me new visions of your kingdom every morning. Amen.

Rev. Russ Kerr
Student Development and Engagement Coordinator,
The Pace Center for Campus Ministry (Virginia Commonwealth University)



Scan to listen to "Neither Angels, Nor Demons, Nor Powers" on YouTube.

DECEMBER 27

Read Proverbs 8:32-36.

While we may think of wisdom as a quality like cleverness or intelligence, the figure of Wisdom we encounter in Proverbs is portrayed as divine. In the New Testament, Paul even refers to Jesus as wisdom, writing that Christ "became for us wisdom from God" (1 Cor 1:30). In today's passage, Wisdom invites people to open themselves to her, saying: "Happy are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorposts" (8:34). What does it mean to watch daily for God's wisdom? How do we wait at her doorpost?

Unfortunately, the concept of watching and waiting can feel difficult in our current society. When was the last time you actually paused and waited for something? Whenever I find myself waiting at a grocery store or bus stop, I am quick to pull out my phone to respond to a text or read the headlines. I am not waiting so much as I am distracting myself. But this text challenges us to wait as a preferred action, not reaction, and receive wisdom in the wake of Christ's birth. Wisdom tells us, "Those who find me find life; they gain favor from the Lord!" (8:35). As we seek God's wisdom in this season, let us watch and wait for the wisdom that leads to life in Christ.

Pray

Holy God, in this season of Christmas, teach us how to wait. Help us to put down our devices and to give our full attention to the miracle of the incarnate Christ in our midst. Instruct us in your wisdom, that we may walk in your ways forever. Amen.

Sarah Rutherford

Alum, United Campus Ministry in Aggieland (College Station, TX)

DECEMBER 12

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15.

Paul is encouraging the church in Corinth to finish the work. Finish the work? If only it were that easy! As the semester draws to a close, the pressure of finishing assignments is heavy. Reading Paul say, "Now finish the job as well so that you finish it with as much enthusiasm as you started!" may cause you to say profanities — a frequent problem for many reading Paul's letters!

But Paul encourages us to finish the work "as we can afford," which can also be translated as "according to your means" or even "what you have left." Seemingly mirroring themes from Mark 12:41-44 where Jesus praises a woman with only two coins to offer, Paul writes, "A gift is appreciated because of what a person can afford, not because of what that person can't afford, if it's apparent that it's done willingly." So do not be afraid! We can imagine Paul would affirm that students are at this point exhausted, and while not every essay or project or study session will live up to our ideal, our best effort is something worthy to offer. Wanting perfection is so often the biggest enemy to completion.

Pray

God of Vast Knowledge, help us to find the conditions to give our best effort: a quiet study space, a silenced phone, a Pomodoro timer, whatever will enable us to give what we have left. Guide us to remember finals are not a reflection of our inherent worth as people. Help us to find rest, outside time, and nourishment to empower us. Enable us to let go of perfection and lock in to give what we have. Amen.

Rosa Ross

Campus Ministry Fellow, UKirk Ewing
Alum, Marshall UKIRK

DECEMBER 13

Read Isaiah 12:2-6.

Among the Bible's supernatural miracles and mind-bending wisdom, Isaiah lays claim to one of the hardest-to-believe lines:

"I will trust and won't be afraid."

Huh?

I wish I could shake the prophet and ask him to take a proper look at the world. Does he not see the heartbreaking conflicts, catastrophic disasters, ever-eroding belief in truth?

In a time of such chaos, how can we even imagine not being afraid? Well, if this short life has taught me anything, it is that I will never not be afraid. Whenever I try to, my fear engulfs me even more. In this passage, God's word feels unimaginable and wholly impractical.

Yet, after delivering this line, Isaiah no longer fixates on the fear, instead praising God for all of his deeds and character. If the first verse felt ridiculous, watch out for the rest of the reading.

But, Isaiah gives us one reason for all of this praise: "the holy one of Israel is great among you." Isaiah's message reminds us we are not alone. The God of the universe promises to be among us. While all of the unrest will never go away, it will never stop the presence of God.

Pray

God of deliverance, enable us to trust again. Do not let the worries of this world restrict us from believing, remembering, and praising your presence. Help us to accept our fear in our journeys so that we might better place our trust in you and reflect your love. While you do not take away our fear, you promise to always be among us. Amen.

Nolan Ragland
Student, UKirk UTK

DECEMBER 26

Read Matthew 25:31-46.

Solus Christus

Today is the day after Christmas and we encounter a scripture lesson we last heard just before Advent, on Christ the King Sunday. Only yesterday, we marveled at the baby in the manger; today, we are reminded that this meek and mild infant is the same one who reigns over all creation.

One of the best insights I've heard about our celebration of Christ the King comes from preaching professor David Lose. He emphasizes that making Christ our King is not merely a regime change; we are not simply replacing our worldly leaders with Jesus. Lose explains, "The kingdom — or, perhaps better, the realm — of God that Jesus proclaims represents a whole new reality where nothing is the same — not our relationships or rules, not our view of self or others, not our priorities or principles — nothing. Everything we thought we knew about kings and kingdoms gets turned right on its head."⁶

If we bow to our King Jesus, we do so because he is with us and loves us. He is not in some distant royal palace, nor can we simply tuck him away in our back pocket. He is mighty and kind, merciful and just. All things were created through him, and he desires to know you personally. *Sola Christus* — Christ alone brings about the salvific relationship.

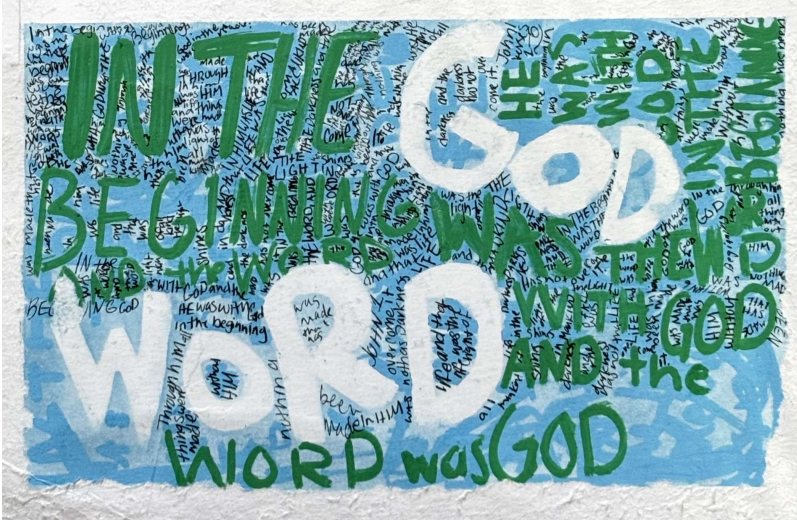
Pray

Loving God, Mighty Sovereign, Gentle Friend, as we continue into this joyous season of Christmas, help us to remember that Jesus is a leader like no other. May we celebrate the singular joy of the birth of our Savior and remember that his reign transforms us completely. Amen.

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

DECEMBER 25

Read John 1:1-14.



The word becoming flesh, the Divine enfleshed in humanity, is so often a reflection of the divinity of Jesus, an affirmation of his supernatural status among the rest of us. But what could stop a God of radical love from continuing that work in us? Jesus' birth invites us to continue to see and to be the word made flesh. Every hungry person fed: the divine enfleshed among us. Every stranger welcomed: the divine enfleshed among us. Every prisoner set free: the divine enfleshed among us. Every person loved without exception: the divine enfleshed among us.

Pray

God of hope, peace, love and joy, as we celebrate Jesus' entrance into our world, open us to all of the ways that you make these things real and tangible in our lives. Help us to receive your invitation to the radical work of your love in the world. Amen.

Art: Jeff McAllister, Student | Words: Rev. Jen Hibben, Director
The Vine @ Collegiate Presbyterian Church (Ames, IA)

DECEMBER 14

Read Luke 1:57-66.

"What then will this child become?" I think most parents ponder this question throughout their child's lifetime, if not multiple times. Sometimes it is a deep wonderment, imagining the amazing things this child will do. Other moments might include a headshaking frustration, wondering what will become of this child.

I appreciate in this scripture that it is not just the wonderment of the parents, but of the community. After a journey with infertility, Elizabeth became pregnant, leaving her husband, Zechariah, in disbelief. Zechariah would not be able to speak for the remainder of her pregnancy. Now, this child is born, and even though Zechariah cannot speak, he proudly names the infant.

The community has heard about the birth of this child. Fear came over them but, in scripture, fear can also be a word that indicates respect and reverence. It caused the people to pause. They wondered: what will this child become?

There is so much in this world that scares me as a parent — gun violence, the lack of understanding of diversity that seems rampant in our politics, and climate change. I want better for all future generations. So, to hear a community pause with reverence and respect and ask, "what then will this child become?" insists that there is a future for this child. To ask this question means a lovely wonderment in which the community can participate in caring for this child. This is my hope in Advent.

Pray

God-with-us, with fear we look to you this Advent season, asking that your Spirit transform us and our communities. May we embrace your children and delight in what they will become. Amen.

Rev. Katrina Pekich-Bundy
Interfaith Chaplain, Alma College

DECEMBER 15

Read Philippians 4:4-7.

Joy is tricky.
It feels elusive and yet consistent.
It is present and in the same breath.
Nowhere to be found.
But maybe that's why it's not just joy we find, but re-joy.
It is not once, but again and again.
It is a practice. It is potential. It is an invitation.

Like a child learning to walk,
You stand and fall
Move forward on shaky legs
And maybe lose balance and crash.
But again and again
You stand.
And eventually you can't help
But move into the world.

Maybe that's just like joy,
Consistently inviting us
To release the tension that clenches our jaws,
And instead to roll our heads back and see
The way the clouds move on a Wednesday
Or hear the satisfying crunch of leaves under foot.
Maybe joy is tricky
To keep us from being complacent
And instead give us practice
To find joy To re-joy To Rejoice
Again and again.

Pray

God, stay beside us filling our lungs so we can speak, scream,
sigh, and sing, knowing we are loved and not alone. Amen.

Rev. Rachel Penmore
Campus Minister, UKirk UTK

DECEMBER 24

Read Luke 2:1-20.

They were terrified.

The shepherds, that is. They were terrified. In this familiar story, we are introduced to the shepherds whose lives will be changed in just one short night. After the angel delivers the good news, I can't help but wonder what the journey to Bethlehem was like. Did they talk to each other in a hushed and nervous tone? What would they have talked about? What were those anticipatory moments like?

While we may never know for sure what they talked about on that fateful journey, we can certainly make guesses based on how we've lived in these anticipatory moments of the Advent season. I can imagine that these moments before meeting the Messiah were some of the most terrifying. Through this journey, we might have built up expectations and hopes for this next season in our lives. But will we meet these expectations? Will He?

As we live in this anticipation, remember to breathe. We know the end to this story. The newborn King is waiting for us in the manger, so let's live in this last terrifying, yet beautiful, moment before we step into the light.

Pray

Oh God of waiting, help us to be ready! Open our hearts and our minds so that we are truly ready to hear the good news. As we **breathe in**, remind us of our period of waiting. All of the terror, the anticipation, and the hope. As we **breathe out**, help us to be ready for what comes next. Guide us as we step into the Light that is to come. We are ready. In your son's name, amen.

Sydney Walker
Student, UKirk Williamsburg

DECEMBER 23

Read Colossians 1:15-20.

There is a famous painting by French surrealist René Magritte, which foregrounds a pipe, and captions below "this is not a pipe." The point is that you cannot place tobacco inside the canvas, light it on fire, and smoke it — at least not like you would an actual pipe; it is just an image. Magritte's idea — "this is just an image" — is entirely foreign to ancient Hebrew thinking. So, the image of God in which all humans are created (Gen 1:27), for instance, would have been understood by its authors as an extension of the actual presence of God. Being made "in God's image" is not about how we look, but about how God is present in creation through human life.⁶

The Christ hymn at the beginning of Colossians is an exercise in subversive superlatives. Thrones and powers, rulers and authorities may approximate divinity among their created peers, but peers among mortals they remain (v. 10).

Even at its most benevolent, Caesar's vast earthly power may only attain the status of servant to the superlative benevolence of Christ (v. 16).

So too, regardless of what the authors of Genesis intended, the way humans actually bear the image of God in the world might be captioned as Magritte's painting: 'this is not God.' But Christ, the superlative human, is a different kind of image of God — an ancient kind, which knows no distinction between The Being and its Representative. When we see him, we see The Divine in all Her Glory.

Pray

Christ, fill us with your Spirit that we may trace the lines of your life with the path of our own, until the image of God is visible to all creation. Amen.



Scan to see Magritte's painting.

Rev. Will Norman
Executive Campus Minister, The Table @ UGA

DECEMBER 16

Read Hebrews 13:7-17.

Our passage today starts off by asking us to "remember your leaders who spoke God's word to you." Who in your life has spoken God's word to you? No matter how many people have spoken God's word to you throughout your life, today I invite you to choose just one such person to reflect on. Perhaps you want to reflect on a pastor or campus minister, or maybe a mentor, parent, or friend. The person you choose does not have to be Presbyterian, or even Christian. People of all faiths are children of God, and they all have wisdom to offer us.

Whomever you choose, I invite you now to think about their faith (or lack thereof). If they have the same faith background as you, in what ways do you practice your faith similarly? In what ways do your faith practices differ? If they come from a different faith background, are there elements of their faith that intrigue you, or that you would like to learn more about? Do they have any practices within their faith that are shockingly similar to practices within your own faith? How does this person live out their faith through their actions, and in their everyday life? After reflecting on the faith of the person you chose, what are some ways that you can learn from and imitate their faith, as the Hebrews passage asks us to do?

Pray

God, thank you for placing people in our lives to speak your word to us. Help us to be ready to listen when you speak to us, and to learn from the people you choose to speak through. Amen.

Andrew Pinches
Jesuit Volunteer, Jesuit Volunteer Corps Northwest
Alum, UKirk at Michigan State

DECEMBER 17

Read Acts 28:23-31.

In this season of Advent, we actively wait in expectation for Christ's arrival in our world. In our passage today, we find Paul living in Rome. Despite the uncertainty of his future, Paul waits with faith and confidence, still finding ways to preach the Good News of the Gospel. Advent invites us into this same space: to wait with the same faith and confidence in the promise of what is to come.

Advent reminds us that waiting is not passive. Paul's story teaches us that even as he waited, he welcomed everyone into his home and shared the Good News with the people he met, even in the face of an uncertainty. We, too, are called to live with faith and confidence. As we wait in anticipation for Christ's arrival, we continue to share God's hope, peace, joy, and love with the world. In this season, we continue to share the Good News and God's grace with everyone we meet.

May we always remember that God is surely at work, even in the times of waiting.

Pray

Dear God, continue to be with us in the season of anticipation and waiting. Help us turn to you for faith and confidence. Be with us as we spread the Good News of your love. Remind us that even in this season of waiting, you are at work in our lives and in the world. Amen.

Caroline Eader
Student, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

DECEMBER 22

Read Luke 1:39-55.

No Love Without Justice

Feminist bell hooks writes, "There can be no love without justice — abuse and neglect negate love."⁵ Her work was focused on justice for the other. In Mary's Magnificat, these sentiments are echoed beautifully. Her cousin Elizabeth and Elizabeth's expected child John greeted a young Mary in exuberance. Mary could have responded to the greeting by focusing her hymn on the miraculous event God is doing in her life. Yet she sees God working in the broader world. Her hymn proclaims how she glorifies the Lord because they have brought down rulers from their thrones, lifted the humble, sent away the rich, and filled the hungry. God even encourages Israel to remember the generations coming ahead. In this season where we are indeed focused on love, let it be an *agape* love that propels our actions to transcend the boundaries of the conventional act of collection of goods and services, and to be inspired and moved by the spirit. Help us to consider what love rooted in just acts looks like, in the continual season of Advent — an advent that reminds us and encourages us to lead our lives in preparation for the fruition of a kin-dom that is yet to come on earth.

Pray

Expansive God, as Mary's prayer is modeled after Hannah's song of Praise, help us remember the goodness of our ancestors and how love grounded them in acts of justice. Let our past inform a prosperous and just future for all of creation. Amen.

Rev. Tamika Nelson
Executive Director, United Campus Ministry of Greater Houston

DECEMBER 21

Read Psalm 80:1-7.

Humans crave connection. We desperately need to know that, amid a precarious world, there are systems and people that respond to our needs. More than that, we desperately need to know and have faith that we belong to God and that we can rest within God's presence.

Edward Tronick is a developmental psychologist known for conducting "the Still Face Experiment." In this experiment, a mom was asked to sit down with her young baby. The mom engages the baby, plays with them, smiles at them, loves them as they normally would. Then, the parent is told to NOT respond to the baby, but instead take on a still face. No more playing. No more smiles. No more response. The baby quickly picks up on the drastic change in disposition and does everything in its power to elicit a loving response again. Eventually, the baby becomes distressed by this abandonment, this lack of connection.³

We see this with the psalmist and our own relationship with God. We know that God is enthroned and sovereign over the world. We know that we depend on God. Sometimes, we may fear that God is disconnected from our lives.

Throughout this psalm, we hear this powerful motif: "Restore us, O God of hosts; make your face shine so that we can be saved." God's face does shine upon us, and we shall be saved. And we know this throughout the Christmas season through God's incarnation and Christ's birth.

Pray

May the Lord bless and keep us. May the Lord's face shine upon us. May the Lord's countenance rest upon us and grant us peace.⁴

John Golden
Campus Minister, UKirk ETSU

DECEMBER 18

Read Isaiah 11:1-9.

From the stump springs forth a new sprig — a branch that beckons new life rising out of the remnant. The sprig — sturdy as it may be — doesn't do all the work alone. The scripture reminds us that the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon the shoulders of those who beckon the new sprig into the world.

This scripture goes on to discuss the importance of peace in the future world — in this new thing that God is doing. For Isaiah, peace will look like former rivals laying down beside one another. It will look like holy cooperation among creation and humankind. This peace is not one that merely comes along, but is rather a peace that must be ushered in by God's people. This is the moment where we grow alongside the new sprig into something that God is still creating.

As we await the birth of Jesus — the sprig or sprout God is bringing about — we are mindful that his teachings have roots in the traditions that guided his upbringing. Out of those roots, Christ reinterprets scripture, teaches new ways of doing things. He loves his neighbors and models what we are called to do as followers of Jesus. As God does a new thing through Christ, we are invited in on the action to speak peace into the places that need it most.

Pray

Gracious and loving God, may the new sprig you're growing become a strong branch that calls back to your roots, encourages growth, honors change, and brings peace. May we be and do the same. In the name of the coming Christ we pray, amen.

Ross Hartman
Student, UKirk Louisville

Rev. Nell Herring
Campus Minister, UKirk Louisville
Alum, UKirk Furman

DECEMBER 19

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Many of my conversations with students are about discernment: young adults listening for God's call and the voice that says "this is the way, walk ye in it" (or something like that). Seminary or medical school? A gap year or straight to the office or onto more academia? What will they do on a small scale or on a large scale that will allow the people around them know the love, generosity, and hope of God? My students want to discover the role they will play in the unfolding of the kingdom. Today's text suggests that there could be no need to teach about God, someday, because everyone will know God. The trick to this is that it's not so much about you and your decisions, but it is about the way you see others, or what you see in them. In the chapter "Infinite Respect" in *Tales of a Magic Monastery*, a monk shares a word from his guardian angel: "Whenever anyone comes into this room, my angel whispers 'Infinite Respect,' and my spirit prostrates before God in that person."² If each of us bowed to the Divine in every person we met, there would no longer be a need to teach each other to say "Know the Lord!" because we will all know God already. And we all have a role to play in that.

Pray

Gracious God, may everyone I meet see the Divine and me, and may I see the Divine in them. Help me to bow before You in every person, and be part of the inbreaking of your kingdom. Amen.

Rev. Beatrix Weil
Chaplain, Rhodes College

DECEMBER 20

Read Isaiah 42:10-18.



Pray

God of re-creation, the world is broken, the mountains are falling apart, the rivers overflowing with destruction. We ache. Your world aches. And yet, in distance, really far away so that we sometimes have to squint, we see a small light. It walks with us. It softens the harsh landscape and makes it...beautiful. Lord, your son is our light, our sun, our inbreaking in the hardship. Illuminate the world. Break through the darkness of the world, shine his light boldly, proudly, so all corners of the world are encased in warmth and love. Amen.

Rev. Julia Burkley
Pastor, Opequon Presbyterian Church
Alum, UKirk Davidson