



Words for Waiting

Daily Devotions for Advent & Christmas
2025

Words for Waiting

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We are so thankful for the contributors who make this devotional possible! Scan this QR code or visit ukirkadvent.org/about to see a map of where this year's writers and makers are from.

What are the threads that connect us as people of faith, across time and place? Where is the torn fabric that needs mending, in our own communities and beyond? How does the promise of God's presence guide the ways we live and learn and work and worship with one another?

We hope this year's theme, **Woven Together**, will be a chance to reflect on the messy and beautiful and heart-wrenching work of being a person in the world with other people, and a chance to consider where God shows up along the way.

Our contributors come from 42 different faith communities in 20 different states, including 34 campus ministries. They are current students, campus ministers and chaplains, alumni, and supporters. Whether or not you're currently connected to a UKirk-network ministry, we're glad you're here. May the scripture readings, reflections, and prayers on these pages bring meaning to the days and weeks ahead, as we wait for and celebrate the coming of Christ.

In hope,
Rev. Allison Wehrung
Editor

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

November 30

Isaiah 2:1-5

The word of Isaiah is a call to the people of Christendom to strive for something beyond what has become commonplace in this crazy world. History has endless accounts of Christianity being used to justify war and fuel hatred. Isaiah stands apart from this view, and pushes for a world of peace. There is a goal set forth that no nation will pick up a sword against another nation, and there will be nothing known except the art of peace. This verse embraces the first week of Advent, which preaches on hope.

Hope is what will fuel us to achieve this beautiful world. There are already groups in our nation that are pushing for universal peace under the doctrine of Christian nonviolence theory — like RawTools, an organization that is following the idea of beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. They, along with any who wish to join their cause, turn guns into art and preach on the ideals of hope for a beautiful new world.

We hope that you all take hope in the idea that people are taking steps to create this nonviolent world today. Take a breath and envision a beautiful future. A place where there is no longer pain where hope is not an uncommon thought or looked down upon.

God, bring us into this new era of peace, void of wars, and full of a deep and radical love for everyone. Bring us back to your vision of Earth, a perfect Garden where nature and humanity thrive together. Help us realize this brave new world, and love us while we stumble upon the pathway to you. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

UKirk Furman

January 6

Matthew 2:1-12

These privileged magi could travel long distances, finance their trips, and bring rare gifts. They traveled a long way, and made quite a commotion when they asked about the king of the Jews being born. Through their humility and through their desire to answer a calling, they brought King Herod fear. The earthly system of power, control, and wealth was already beginning its death spiral. Herod tried to outsmart the magi by secretly ascertaining where the baby was born, and he hoped to end this threat as our systems of power typically do — through violence. Too often throughout history, when people of faith came up against the powers that be, this was and is the response of the systems and institutions.

The Gospel of Jesus offers us a new way. A way that invites all of us to be woven together through mutual care, love and respect. To be a beloved community where all of us are worthy because we are made in the *Imago Dei*. These magi left home and security, and gave up time and resources, to honor a baby king who is the Prince of Peace. May we commit ourselves to serving, loving, and acting justly in our world so all might see the good news that Jesus brings.

Gracious God, we pray that we may humbly see how all of us are woven together. May we refuse to fall into the false narrative that rejects the Imago Dei and sacred worth of all people. Give us the strength to be like the magi and honor you each day. Amen.

Ministry Team Student Leaders
Arise (United College Ministry in Northern Virginia)

January 5

Joshua 1:1-9

Part of the weaving that happens on a college campus is when the mantle of leadership is passed from student to student, year after year. Some newly installed student organization presidents inherit binders of instructions with timelines, budgets, and contact lists. Other student leaders are asked to make something out of nothing. Moses left instructions that his successor, Joshua, could follow. Well done, Moses!

But the true constant in the shift of leadership was God. Joshua, like Moses, had a major task ahead — to lead people out of the desert and to the promised land. Luckily for Joshua, he had a constant companion. He was told, “Do not be alarmed or terrified, because the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” What a relief he must have felt to know that while he was picking up the mantle of leadership, he did not do so alone.

We are halfway through another academic year. Leadership roles will be passed along soon. What will your legacy be? What will be your part to weave into the tapestry of your context? Will you love God? Will you love your neighbor? Will you love yourself? Perhaps you can be braver and stronger in your work while knowing that God is with you, and that you do not do the works of love and justice alone.

Gracious God, help me rest in the assurance that you are with me. Magnify the gifts of bravery and strength within me, so that I can better love you, my neighbor, and myself. Amen.

Rev. Beatrix Weil
Chaplain, Rhodes College

December 1

Genesis 8:1-19

Our re-creation doesn't happen overnight. Genesis 8 narrates the re-creation of the world following its un-creation (the flood). The floodwaters are finally restrained. All of the destructive happenings from the previous chapters begin to move in reverse. The spirit/breath of God again blows over the waters, as She does at the first creation (Gen. 1:2). Hope for life to go on is clearly emerging...but the remnant of life that has survived this disaster is — quite literally — not out of the water yet.

Biblical scholar Kathleen O'Connor helpfully reads Genesis, through the lens of trauma studies, as a way that ancient Jewish people coped with the disaster of the Babylonian Exile.* Her insights speak to the universal human experience of losing hope, certainty, and security in the life that we know or expected for ourselves. In the flood, all is washed away, and we feel or fear that we are drowning. But God “remembers” Noah. The word does not mean that God had forgotten, but that God is now turning to act with salvation.

It takes the waters equally as long to recede as it took them to rise. As we wait, we notice that the ark stinks of life stuck in place. We send out birds, hoping that they will reveal signs of life, but they keep coming back, proclaiming that there is nothing out there for us. Until finally the dove stays gone.

Sometimes it is silence which finally reveals new life outside the ark — a bird gone missing; an empty tomb.

Come, Lord Jesus, and re-create us once again. Amen.

Rev. Will Norman
Campus Minister,
The Table at UGA

* Kathleen M. O'Connor, Genesis 1-25a (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2018).

December 2

Genesis 9:1-17

What kind of a covenant
Is this, my God?

Between the destruction of every people
And the curse of one more,

You promise a reckoning
For every drop of spilled blood.

And unashamed, I ask You:
What good are Your promises
To the already-gone?

Of what use is my hoping
In days soaked-through with blood?

O God, my God, tell me this:
What will be left of us
When Your reckoning comes?

Holy God, we hold the hope of this season alongside our lament at everything that remains to be done. We lift up the people of Palestine, Sudan, the Congo, and every other place whose people are treated as disposable in the face of empire's endless appetite. Grant us wisdom in these days, Loving God; grant us courage. Amen.

Feagin Hardy

Student, Union Presbyterian Seminary (Richmond, VA)
Alum, UKirk Ole Miss

January 4

Ephesians 1:3-14

Before you did anything, God chose you. This opening passage of Ephesians piles up blessings like a cascade: chosen, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, sealed. It's almost overwhelming. And it all happens "in Christ," that repeated phrase anchoring everything in God's action, not ours.

This is the deep thread that holds us together: we don't author our stories alone, and we're not even the first authors. God has been weaving the pattern of your life since before you took your first breath, and the thread that binds you to God also binds you to everyone else in Christ. We are coauthors with God and with each other, but the loom belongs to the One who is bringing all things together in Christ.

This is comforting, but also challenging to our modern thinking. You are not self-made. Your worth isn't determined by what you achieve or how well you perform the role you think you're supposed to play. You're woven into something much larger — chosen, destined, sealed with the Holy Spirit as God's "down payment" on a future that's already begun but not yet complete.

We live in this "already and not yet," catching a glimpse of the threads of a tapestry we won't fully see until God brings all things together. In the meantime, we're held together by grace.

God of all blessing, you wove us into your story before we knew our own names. Help us trust that we belong to you and to each other, even when the pattern is unclear. Give us glimpses of the tapestry you're creating, where all things find their place in Christ. Amen.

Michael Paul Cartledge

Director of College Ministry,
UKirk St. Augustine

January 3

Genesis 28:10-22

In general, we tend to think of heaven and earth as two separate places. Heaven is where God lives; earth is where humans live. Heaven is perfect; earth is fallen. In today's passage from Genesis, Jacob probably thought the same thing — that is, until he sees a dream of the Lord and the Lord's angels present with him. When Jacob wakes, he proclaims: "Surely the Lord is in this place — and I did not know it! How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. After seeing the Lord and his angels, Jacob realizes that heaven and earth are not so very separate after all. God does not just live in heaven, but here on earth, with us. The very ground we walk on is the house of God, and the air we breathe is the gate to heaven.

In the wake of the incarnation, we are struck by the same realization: this is none other than the house of God. With Jesus's birth, God has made God's home here — the earth itself has become God's cradle. Through Christ, our whole world is sanctified. As Christ's church, therefore, we are called to honor the world as God's home, believing that it is sacred and deserving of our care and respect.

Creator God, remind us that this earth is your home, made holy through your presence with us. Inspire us to care for your creation as we seek to share your great love for the world. Amen.

Rev. Sarah Rutherford
Resident Minister, UKirk at UMich
Alum, United Campus Ministry in Aggieland (College Station, TX)

December 3

Matthew 24:23-35

It's the start of Advent — the week of Hope. If you're in college, you're probably wrapping up the semester, juggling finals, papers, and projects. The world around us might feel just as chaotic as it did when I wrote this. So, what do we do in the middle of all that noise and pressure? Jesus has something to say about that.

Before this passage starts, Jesus is describing the devastation of the end times. But here, He shifts gears and talks about how to avoid deception and distraction when everything feels uncertain. Jesus gives three big reminders:

1. **Don't be deceived.** Don't get distracted.
2. **His real return will be unmistakable and global.** You'll know it when it happens — no doubt about it. (IYKYK.)
3. **Pay attention to the signs**, like how you notice a fig tree budding or a plant greening up when summer is near.

In all the chaos, Jesus calls us to stay faithful and clear-headed. The focus isn't on predicting what's next — it's on how we live now. Stay centered on what matters most. Watch for God's grace breaking through in small ways. Winter may be coming, but spring always follows — and with it, hope and new life.

God, in the midst of our busy lives and the chaos around us, help us stay focused on You. Help us watch for signs of Your grace. Amen.

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

December 4

Acts 1:12-17, 21-26

This story of the calling of Matthias as the 12th Apostle to replace Judas Iscariot is evidence that — even after the tragedy and trauma of Judas' betrayal — God continued to work among the apostles and within the early church. Their story wasn't over. That's the central message of Advent: the last good thing hasn't happened yet.

Romeo heard Juliet
Say, "The last good thing hasn't happened yet.
Get a baby carriage and a bassinet.
The last good thing hasn't happened yet.

We can do this; piece of cake, no sweat.
The last good thing still hasn't happened yet.

Early morning, grass is wet
The last good thing hasn't happened yet
After midnight, don't forget
That the last good thing still hasn't happened yet

Long black limo and a string quartet
The last good thing hasn't happened yet
Leave the graveyard, no regrets
The last good thing hasn't happened yet

Epic blessings from the day we met.
And the last good thing still hasn't happened yet."

Generous and Extravagant God, at our best and worst times, when we rejoice, worry, or lament, at the cradle and at the grave, remind us of the truth of Advent and Easter that the last good thing hasn't happened yet. Amen.

John Williams
Chaplain, Austin College

January 2

Hebrews 11:1-12

These verses from Hebrews remind us that when the world is uncertain, God is close and there is hope. Generations before us set forth on faith not knowing what would become of them. Abel made an offering. Enoch was taken up. Noah built an ark. Abraham went out. And Sarah had a baby. They tell us that God is always doing a new and unexpected thing, and that by faith, hope manifests.

My daughter recently took a trip to the food bank as a preschool field trip. I was a bit surprised that preschoolers were going to a food bank. Typically, a field trip is to a pumpkin patch or a zoo. While my daughter was most excited about riding the bus, she came home and eagerly told us about how much food was there and that it was all free! She said there was enough for everyone. At the time I am writing this, we are 34 days into a government shut down, and there is a very real reality that it may not be enough. I am struck by her faith though, "the reality of what we hope for" (v. 1). Perhaps this is her call, to hope for enough even though she is unaware of the fear behind those shelves.

I wonder in what other places of scarcity our faith may call us to see abundance. I wonder for what else God is inviting us to imagine a different future, as we are woven together in community with one another.

God, help us to imagine a world where there is enough. Give us the courage to share hope. Amen.

Rev. Annie Franklin Arvin
Director of Admissions,
Union Presbyterian Seminary (Richmond, VA)

January 1

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13



In double knitting, the knitter works two panels at the same time. Each stitch has an opposite-colored pair on the other panel. It is easy to switch colors, but the opposite-pairs always switch together. In knitting, there is usually a "right side," the intended front, and a "wrong side," the intended back. However, in a double knit piece, each side is right. There is constant symmetry, and every action creates its equal and opposite reaction.

God of stillness and movement, help us feel the earth turning and know a new season is coming. In the meantime, let us find, feel, and rejoice in the pleasure of all our toil. Amen.

Aven Roberts
Student, Austin College

December 5

Psalm 72

According to some biblical scholars, Psalm 72 was King David's prayer for his son, Solomon, who was preparing to take the throne. This perspective, of a parent praying for their child as they prepare to step into leadership, really helped these words come to life for me, particularly given David's own history as a king. He knew what it felt like to live and lead in alignment with God's presence and will, and what it was like to totally and royally go in the opposite direction (Bathsheba being only one example).

But this prayer was not like one parents might pray for their kids who are preparing to take finals – "please let them get all A's!" It was for God to place within this new leader God's very own sense of what is right and just. That leader's success – what would even make other nations come and bow down – was not about the way they yielded economic and military power, it was the way they cared for and protected the poor, vulnerable, and all who were in need throughout their land.

As the end of the semester approaches and we prepare to take finals or tackle all the other things on our to-do lists, may we remember that, as followers of Christ, we are the ones to whom the baton of leadership is being passed. It's ultimately not our grades or our accomplishments that will determine if we are successful, but the ways we embody God's justice, compassion, and care for the poor and vulnerable.

O God, help me to embody your justice and compassion, and remember all who are in need. Amen.

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

December 6

John 1:19-28

These days I feel like one voice crying out into the wilderness. In corners and shadows I hear people whisper "I hear you," and "I agree." In the past few weeks I've had many pastors tell me how hard it is to be preaching truth in places where some people quietly "agree," and others loudly disagree. Our faith spaces have become polarized, and the fabric of our community has been torn.

But, I think faith spaces have always been this way, maybe even frayed at the edges. As I read about John the Baptist and how he came out from the wilderness, rugged and counter-cultural with his eclectic palate and groovy threads, I think about how he spoke out against empire and pointed to Christ. I don't know what went through his head, or what doubts flew, but to me he seems secure and confident, because he knew who Jesus was and knew the world depended on him. Chaos on the outside, calm on the inside.

The fabric of our world may be ripped, but the John the Baptists of the world are the seamstresses, confidently patching us up by pointing to Christ.

Are you a John the Baptist? Be encouraged. Do you know a John the Baptist? Encourage them. And point to Christ.

God who shouts from the wilderness and whispers in the wind, our hearts and minds are full of division and confusion and chaos. We trust that you create out of chaos, calming the storms and loving us through the worst. Guide our hearts and minds and help us to speak truth, even when it is difficult. Amen.

Rev. Katrina Pekich-Bundy
Chaplain, Alma College

December 31

John 8:12-19

I have always been frustrated when others underestimate me! I have reasonable self-knowledge of what my skills and gifts are. When I decided to go to seminary and become a minister, I had to advocate for myself as a person called to preach and teach about God. Even my own family had their doubts. I am a woman. I was more interested in the music part of church than the preaching. I wasn't involved in campus ministries as a student. I bristled, perhaps like Jesus here when he hears that his testimony on his own behalf is invalid.

Yet, aside from God, we know ourselves best. Even when we don't show it to others, we have the best sense of where we come from, what our gifts are, and who we are called to be. The struggle is that – depending on circumstances – we can't always let our light shine. We can't always live into our fullest selves as children of God, because we cannot overstep our boundaries, because someone else is already doing the thing, or because we don't have the degrees or certificates to support our claims of self-knowledge.

Jesus, though frustrated with the words of the Pharisees, recognizes that he has come into this world to be the light of life. Jesus has come to be the hope for salvation for all who suffer or struggle. Jesus doesn't wait for permission or a "no-judgment zone." Jesus speaks for himself, knowing that he has already received the great recommendation from God.

Holy Spirit, empower us to shine our light for others. Embolden us when patience is not required. Encourage us when we need affirmation. Amen.

Rev. Doodle Harris
Chaplain, Hastings College

December 30

1 Kings 3:5-14

The irony of Solomon's desire to be "able to discern between good and evil" is that this same desire led to the first humans being expelled from the Garden of Eden. Why is this knowledge forbidden in Genesis 3, but God approves of it here?

Here's my guess: in Genesis, knowledge of good and evil was something that separated humanity from the divine. God had it; we didn't. Reaching for that knowledge was not only an act of disobedience, but also of arrogance — attempting to take God's place for ourselves.

Solomon's request, though, comes from a place of humility. The young king certainly has the same insecurities most twenty-year-olds would have in his position, but those insecurities don't dictate his response to God's offer. Instead of asking for "long life or riches or for the life of [his] enemies" — things that would help him consolidate and maintain power — he asks for wisdom.

In the moment when Solomon can obtain any desire of his heart, he thinks of his community. He is guided by his connection to the people around him. He does not ask for God's help to maintain power, but rather to exercise that power faithfully. He asks for something that will benefit not only himself, but his people.

God, it is easy to feel ourselves small and insignificant, to feel overwhelmed and echo Solomon's cry: "I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in...who can govern this great people?" In those moments, silence our insecurities and let our steps be guided by love for you and our neighbors. Amen.

Rev. Paul Burgess
Pastoral Resident,
Presbyterian Campus Ministry
(UNC - Chapel Hill)

December 7

Isaiah 11:1-10

This isn't going to happen the way you planned,
The way you have it scheduled. Mapped out in your calendar.
Sure that if we just know what is coming,
Then we will be prepared. Then we will be ready.

Because we are tired
Of being knocked off our feet.
We are worn down from feeling the air leave our lungs
In countless sighs that lack understanding.
Disbelief filling our every breath.
We feel anything but ready. We feel anything but prepared.

And yet, even amidst the mess of news cycles and media,
A branch reaches for the light.
Pushing against the growing bark, stretching the extent of hope.
And yet, emboldened by the roots it knows
It is ready. It is prepared.

For the unexpected, for uncommon friendships,
Bears and cows, wolves and lambs, calves and lions.
Holiness found in the unexpected community,
Keeping me company.
Inviting me to be ready, inviting me to prepare

For things to happen without a plan,
For God to break into the world
With wisdom, understanding, counsel, and knowledge.
Infusing the world with the peace that passes understanding
The peace that is ready. The peace that is all we need to prepare.

Loving God, may this moment soothe our anxious hearts and infuse the world with the unexpected: world changing peace. Amen.

Rev. Rachel Penmore
Campus Minister, UKirk UTK

December 8

Romans 15:4-13

While mired in conflicts over dietary law, Paul reminds the Romans of the expansive welcome of Jesus: "Welcome each other, in the same way that Christ also welcomed you" (v. 7). He writes that like Christ, the Romans ought to welcome the complexity (and conflict) stemming from their mixed fellowship of Jews and Gentiles. Why? So that they "can glorify...our Lord Jesus Christ together with one voice" (v. 6).

Advent is often a season of festive praise, where we offer our adoration to the incarnate Jesus. One of the best parts is the music of Advent, where we stretch *glorias* into eighteen syllables with brass and choir ("*glo-o-o-o-o-ria in excelsis deo*").

This uncomfortably-inclusive welcome of Jesus Christ goes far beyond internal divisions between us, but also centers the unwelcomed — the devotion of impoverished shepherds, the veneration of foreign astrologers, the disreputability of his mother, and later, the displacement of the Holy Family from Palestine.

To herald the nativity of Jesus Christ — to stretch our *glorias* into eighteen syllables — we might take a cue from Paul. To offer our thanks and praise, we must begin with the expansive welcome of Jesus, which calls us into relationships (real ones) with the unwelcomed, and the uncomfortable depths of conflict and community.

God of Jews and Gentiles, who willingly entered into the discord of humanity to transgress our divisions, be born anew within us and made incarnate through our community, that we might sing a hymn of praise to you by welcoming the unwelcomed, bravely plunging into the challenges of conflict, and assured that they can become a womb of new life. Amen.

Rev. Michael Cuppett

Pastor, First Presbyterian Church (Newton, NJ)
Alum, UKirk Nashville

December 29

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

It's difficult not to lose heart. The fabric of our world feels worn — political divisions, economic uncertainty, and social pressures pull at the threads of society. Yet Paul reminds us that even as what is seen unravels, God is quietly at work, renewing our inner nature stitch by stitch, day by day. As the hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" declares: "morning by morning new mercies I see."*

God's grace renews us daily, even when life feels like a marathon with no finish line, and the pressure to figure out your next step threatens to overwhelm us. Remember to look for signs of God's grace being woven into your life — perhaps in ways you've never noticed: an encouraging text from a friend, a good meal, a moment in nature, or simply a quiet pause to breathe.

Be on the lookout for glimpses of God's renewing work today. God is at work, weaving something beautiful out of your life — so do not lose heart.

Holy God, thank You for renewing us day by day, even when life feels overwhelming. Help us to notice Your grace woven into our lives — in small moments, in friendships, and in the quiet spaces of our hearts. Teach us to trust Your work, to find hope in the unseen, and to remember that You are creating something beautiful in and through us. Strengthen us to keep going, and remind us that because of You, we need not lose heart. Amen.

Rev. Julie Bailey

Director of Alumni & Church Relations,
Columbia Theological Seminary

*Original lyrics by Thomas O. Chisholm.

December 28

Hebrews 2:10-18

Growing up, one of my favorite church services of the year was Christmas Eve. It was such a special time, and one so full of joy and light. One Christmas Eve, one of the kids of our church, who was about four at the time, was walking around saying, "Jesus died. Did you know Jesus died?" It made you chuckle, because here we were celebrating Jesus' birth, and she was walking around proclaiming his death. It didn't seem like the message of Christmas. But maybe it's not *not* the message of Christmas, because the message of Christmas is that God has become human, born like us, and also dying with us. Without meaning to, she was proclaiming what it meant for God to take on human flesh and dwell among us.

This passage from Hebrews invites us to reflect on how the incarnation allows our lives to be woven into relationship with the divine in a way that we could never have imagined. Instead of believing in, worshipping, and following a God who is elsewhere, God became human, and experienced joy and sorrow and friendship and loss and delight and suffering, so that we might be able to be in better relationship with our creator. How amazing is that?

Incarnate One, in this season of Christmas, we give thanks for the gift of knowing that you have lived on this Earth. When we come to you in joy or despair, we know that you have experienced these things too. Thank you for being like us in every way and yet also being different than us, for being our savior, for being both knowable and an unknowable mystery. Amen.

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

December 9

Romans 15:14-21

At the end of a worship service, I heard the pastor's benediction say, "We move now from being a gathered church, to a scattered church." These words have stuck with me as I have walked out of every worship service since. I'm struck by how our faith communities gather, so that we may find the strength to bring Jesus with us, scattered in every corner of the world, until we gather again.

Whether we are heading home for a long break, or seeing people we haven't seen in a while, December is a scattering time. With that comes loaded feelings: joy, worry, dread, excitement. But our scripture today rests in a promise fulfilled by Jesus:

You are full of goodness.
You are filled with knowledge.
You are competent to help others.
You are not doing this work alone.

Paul is writing to a gathered people in a scattered diaspora. He is acknowledging throughout the book of Romans that the church is not a one-person show but an intentional community where each person's gifts make the whole stronger. So find confidence in the scattered moments, and hold true to these truths: You are full of goodness. You are filled with knowledge. You are competent to help others. You are not doing this work alone.

God, bless this scattering. Turn our minds outward as we continue to live out your mission. Help us to know that we are beloved, and that you brought peace into chaos. For it is only when we understand and know those truths, that we can tell others. We thank you that we are not in this alone. That even while scattered, we are surrounded by your Spirit. Amen.

Rev. Elizabeth Miller-Villegas
Pastor, Wingspan (Wilmington, NC)

December 10

Genesis 15:1-18

Our reading for today gives life to the anxiety that Abram feels. At this point in the story, God calls Abram to leave his homeland and gives him the vague promise that his name will transform into a great nation. The promise is far-reaching, but the immediate implication is that Abram and Sarai will have a child. However, the promise is taking longer than Abram would like, and he is becoming worried. God notices Abram's concern and offers a more detailed explanation of what is to come.

Pointing to the stars, God indicates to Abram the full spectrum of the promise that is made to him. Ultimately, the promise that God offers to Abram and Sarai will not be quickly resolved. Hope does not exclude the reality of hardship. In fact, the full manifestation of God's promise to them is not to be realized in their own lifetime.

We are not wrong to be anxious when the promise of our own calling is not immediately clear. Yet, we are still called and invited to walk alongside God. Clarity often comes as part of the journey.

God of promise and hope, we come to you with aspirations for the future, both near and far. And yet, we recognize the uncertainty that surrounds us. By your spirit, give us the strength to live into your promise of grace. Help us to work toward your call for reconciliation, and give us a vision that sees through the clouds of anxiety that can overwhelm us. Remind us of the reality that we may not see the outcome of our acts of faith, but give us the courage to make them. Amen.

Rev. Chris Bailey

Campus Minister, Marshall UKIRK
Alum, Spartanburg UKIRK (PSA)

December 27

Proverbs 8:22-31

Woman Wisdom, a remnant of the understanding of the feminine aspect of God, speaks in this text from Proverbs. She is there in the beginning, before anything is created. Watching and working alongside God, she has the time of her life!

Imagine: she was there when the new sunrise first colored the night sky. She was there when the primeval waters roared to life. She was there when the first human walked on two tentative legs. And in it all, she delighted. She threw back her head and laughed at the glory of it all, each thing of creation formed from and connected by the Creator's imagination and love. She became creation's playmate, the divine and the dependent enjoying one another and having fun!

While Proverbs' Jewish writer wasn't thinking of God's incarnation in Jesus, we Christians read these ancient words and can't help but hear in them a description of God delighting, loving and frolicking – Creator, Christ and Spirit – working harmoniously as One to bring from nothing everything that is.

On this second day after Christmas, what better way to envision the way God comes to us in Jesus – in love and delight. The One who created us cherishes us, unable to keep from grinning with glee when we're together. We are God's holy joy!

God, you delight in everything you have made, especially us. With the lights of Christmas still around us, we thank you for coming to us in Jesus whose holy smile for creation shines in each and on all of us. Amen.

Rev. Carol Waters

Pastor for Faith Formation,
First Presbyterian Church (Norman, OK)

December 26

Psalm 148

The day after Christmas can feel like it is all over. The presents are opened, the leftovers are tucked away, and the excitement has quieted. But truthfully, this is just the beginning. Jesus has only just been born. The same light that broke into the world yesterday still shines today, drawing our hearts to Him.

Psalm 148 reminds us that all creation joins in praise: angels and ocean depths, young and old, sun and moon, every living thing lifts its voice to the Lord. The miracle of Christmas isn't a one day event. Christ's birth wove Heaven and earth together, filling the ordinary with God's glory. From then on, love became the thread binding us to God and to one another.

When I think of being woven together, I think of how God meets us in everyday grace: children laughing, friends sharing a meal, or neighbors waving across the street. He turns these simple things into songs of praise.

The joy of Christmas is not meant to fade. It is meant to guide us, to shape how we love and live every day of the year. Yesterday we praised Him with carols and candles; today we praise Him by how we live. Each day brings another invitation to choose God, to love others well, and to keep the hallelujah going.

*Lord of light and love,
Help us choose You every day.
Teach us to see Your glory in ordinary moments
and to live as people woven together by Your grace.
Let every word and kindness sing Your hallelujah, today,
tomorrow, and always. Amen.*

M.C. Dailey
Student, Celtic Cross
(Presbyterian College)

December 11

Ruth 1:6-18



God who refuses to leave us, may we trust in the promise of your presence wherever we go and wherever we stay — in the quiet of deep grief, in the weary questions that wonder what's next, in the tentative hope of a whispered "you are not alone." Amen.

Rev. Allison Wehrung
Director for Programs,
Montreat Conference Center

December 12

Psalm 146:5-10

As I write this devotion and consider Psalm 146, our government is in the middle of a record-breaking shutdown, and I pray that by the time you read today's devotion, our leaders have found a way to come together to end it. While elected officials have been battling it out in Washington, our most vulnerable folks have been struggling to feed themselves and their families.

When those in power fail to care for the least of these, Psalm 146 reminds us that there is someone else ultimately in power who never will – God. In the musical *Hamilton*, King George III ironically sings, "Oceans rise, empires fall." But Psalm 146 affirms that because God was the one who actually created the oceans in the first place, the ebbing and flowing of their volume, the passage of time – none of this can affect God's commitment to creation.

During Advent, we remember that God's love for this world is so great that God took on human flesh to make sure that the actions in this psalm come to fruition: justice for the oppressed, feeding the hungry, setting the prisoner free. And, just as Jesus commanded his disciples to follow him, we are issued the same command to join him in justice work and feeding folks as we have already seen communities doing during this shutdown.

Oceans rise, empires fall. But God continues to be with us through it all.

Holy God, we thank you for your steadfast love for all creation and throughout all time. Remind us of your call to join you in the work of justice and reconciliation and give us the courage to follow. Amen.

Rev. Sarah Wolf
Pastor, Mt. Bethel Presbyterian Church
(Durham, NC)

December 25

John 1:1-14

For as long as I can remember, Christmas morning has been a time when the past and future converge in the present moment through stories. Stories of past Christmases are shared – the great gifts that were received, and the not-so-great gifts that led to funny stories. Stories about loved ones now in the Church Triumphant are recounted. And from time to time, the Christmas story is woven into the tapestry of the stories shared as we open presents, play games, eat together, and sit in each other's presence. This familial retune, practiced and enacted each year, reminds me how much of who I am is shaped by these stories – my own, my family's, and my faith's.

And on this Christmas morning, when we celebrate God breaking into human existence in Jesus, the Christ Child, Emmanuel, God with us, or the Light that shines in the darkness and that darkness will never overcome it, we see how God's story of redemption is being woven into the fabric of creation. We, like John the Baptizer, are invited to testify to this light through our lived stories of grace – lives that have been shaped by God's redemptive story. As you enjoy your Christmas Day, remembering the stories that have shaped you, may you be aware of the Divine story still shaping your life this Christmas.

Holy God, bless this Christmas Day. Bless it with laughter, joy, comfort, and love. Bless this day with reminders of the Light that shines in the darkness. And challenge us to be like John the Baptizer, who continually points back to this light, in all that we do. Amen.

Rev. Matt Frease
Campus Minister,
UKirk Tallahassee

December 24

Luke 2:1-20

In biblical times, shepherds were the “help,” not the owners of the sheep. They were the migrant workers and day laborers of their day, the “foreigners and aliens.” So poor were they that they left their families for long seasons, camping in the mountains, keeping someone else’s flocks safe through the coldest nights of the year. Shepherds worked in groups, taking turns “keeping watch” through the night, for they were held financially responsible if any sheep were lost to wild animals.

Yet it was to these poor shepherds that the angels first announced the birth of our Savior. The lowly were the first evangelists of the good news, the “joyous news for all people.” Heaven placed the joy of the world in the hands of those most despised by the world.

Ignoring the contempt of the powerful for the powerless, the scorn of the rich for the poor, and the judgment of the pious for the sinner, angels proclaimed the birth of Jesus through the humblest of society. The glory of heaven is never declared through the glory of this world, but always shines through the humility of the meek, the lowly, and the overlooked.

If Jesus were born today, to whom would the angels appear? What groups of people would God choose to be the first messengers of the good news? And do we treat these people with the honor and dignity that Jesus himself would show them?

Jesus, help us to see your glory in all people, especially those scorned, despised, and discarded by society. This Christmas, may the news of your coming truly be good news for all people. Amen.

McKenzie Maresh, Student Ministry Leader &
Rev. Dr. Sunny Kang, Pastor
Progressive Christians @ USC (Los Angeles, CA)

December 13

Luke 3:1-18

’Twas the fifteenth year of the emperor’s reign, and all through the land it was a deeply political time, with rulers much named and power shifting hands. Yet in the wilderness stood a strange but faithful man named John. His peculiarity was not in his diet or dress, but in his message – one fueled by the very Word of God. While others sought to build platforms and prestige, John was leveling mountains and smoothing rough places, calling all to make a way for the Lord – a way by which every person might see and know salvation.

For many, the wilderness is a place of isolation, but for John it was illumination. There he saw that divine love calls for repentance, pours out forgiveness, and offers salvation as the gift of rebirth – a washing of renewal. Yet he warned that salvation cannot be inherited by family lineage or claimed by earthly privilege; it can only be known through Christ, who empowers us to bear good fruit and turn from selfish paths.

Today, as the Spirit’s voice again cries out from the wilderness, we are reminded of our prophetic calling: to make salvation visible through radical generosity, fearless honesty, and countercultural contentment. These are the works that prepare the way for others to meet the One who comes at Christmas to baptize us with the boundless Spirit of God.

Spirit of Christ, transform our hearts to bear the fruits of repentance and share the freedom of forgiveness. Empower us with courage, truth, and inner peace. Help us build paths of salvation for those cut off by selfishness, deception, and dissatisfaction. Through Christ our Lord, amen.

Rob Musick
Chaplain, University of Pikeville

December 14

Luke 1:46b-55

Mary's Song...We've sung it, read it, heard it preached in candlelit sanctuaries. Its words have wrapped themselves around centuries of faithful resistance. It might be easy to gloss over it as something that's already given all it has to give. What if this year, the Magnificat is calling to us to hear God's promises afresh, to embrace Mary's hope, and to herald her daring vision of a world turned right-side up? Take some time today for hearing, hoping, and heralding through the practice of Lectio Divina.

First Reading: Hearing Read through the passage slowly and prayerfully to practice hearing.

- What word or image in Mary's song grabs your attention or lingers in your spirit?
- How do you sense God's favor upon you or those the world overlooks?

Second Reading: Hoping Read through the passage a second time, leaning in to the hope.

- What does Mary's song say about the nature of hope when things still look unfinished?
- What might it mean to trust that God's promises are already in motion?

Third Reading: Heralding A final reading invites us to proclaim what is good and true.

- What message of liberation or mercy might you be called to herald in this season?
- How can your voice and actions magnify love's presence in the world?

God of mercy and might, teach me to hear Your whisper anew in the cries of the world, to hope with Mary's audacity, and to herald good news with my life. Let my soul always magnify your love, in word and in action. Amen.

Ekklesia Campus Ministry (Springfield, MO)

December 23

Galatians 3:6-14

Blessed Reassurance

Is anyone else an Enneagram fan? I certainly am, and a tried and true Six at that. Sixes live for reassurance, as do many of us, and in this portion of Paul's letter to the Galatians, Paul seeks to reassure the Galatian community that their spiritual experiences are in alignment with Scripture. They are in line with Scripture because, as Paul puts it, God's original blessing of Abraham has always included Gentiles.

God's presence has always been with everyone. At The Table at UGA, we like to reassure each other that *everyone, everyone, everyone* is part of the tapestry of God's family – a reassurance that there is nothing that we can do to separate us from the love of God. We do not have to earn God's favor; if we make a mistake, God's desire for a relationship with us does not wane. Like our faithful ancestors Abraham and Sarah, we, too, are called and equipped to serve God in all times and places, doing so with the confidence that God is Immanuel – God is with us.

Reassuring God, You know our fears and anxieties deeper than anyone. When we need reminding, help us to know, fully and deeply, that we are Your beloved children. Give us the confidence to know that our identity is not in what we do, but who we are in You. Guide us in the knowledge that, like our ancestors, we are loved and called to serve You, Your children, and Your Creation. Amen.

Rev. Haley Lerner
Campus Minister,
The Table at UGA

December 22

John 3:31-36

"The one who comes from above is above all" yet, this heavenly One came down to enter fully into the fabrics of human life through a woman's body: into hunger, friendship, fear, joy, and ultimately death. We are reminded in this Advent season, just a few days before Christmas, that Jesus did not hover above the world, but wove himself into it. He became fully God and fully human to show us how to love ourselves and love and care for one another.

Now that He does not have an earthly body, where do we see God now? God's love is revealed to us in our shared humanity. In our fears and our tenderness, in our jubilation and our bliss. The same Spirit that once stirred over a manger in Bethlehem still gives "without measure" and flows through all creation, stitching us together in ways we may not even recognize.

*God of heaven and earth,
You have come near,
weaving your Spirit into the threads of our days.
When we feel frayed or scattered,
draw us again into your wholeness.
Teach us to speak your truth, to live your love,
and to mend the places where your people are torn apart.
By your boundless Spirit, make us one in Christ,
woven together in grace and life everlasting.
Amen.*

Katelyn Finch
Student, Union Presbyterian Seminary (Richmond, VA)
Alum, UKirk Auburn

December 15

Acts 5:12-16

As the semester draws to a close it can feel like the world narrows down to stress, deadlines, and caffeine. Paradoxically, Advent widens our vision to reveal that we all aren't all that far apart. In reading the texts of this liturgical season, we are reminded that far away and long ago, God's light already entered the world in the midst of exhaustion and uncertainty.

In Acts 5, we read about crowds gathering just to catch Peter's shadow. It's a striking image: even the shadow of someone who knew Christ could bring healing. I don't think this means that Peter had magic powers all on his own, but that the work he was doing reflected the nearness of the Holy Spirit. In all the talk of Christmas lights, scripture reminds us that shadows too can carry grace.

In the shadows of this season: in our tiredness, in our half-finished drafts, in our work turned in late, in exams that loom, in our hopes deferred...scripture reminds us that God moves in the shadows just like God is present in the light. People, even the first Christians, have been there before and are here now. In the midst of those big, anxious feelings we often try to hide away, God reminds us that we are not alone in the shadows.

Spirit, even through my shadow, let your presence be made known. May our rest, our work, our friendships, our futures, be a testament to God's healing presence in a world that too often feels upside down. Amen.

Rosa Ross
Campus Ministry Fellow, UKirk Ewing
Alum, Marshall UKIRK

December 16

Jude 1:17-25

Who has created these divisions? Who has sewn distrust deep into the soil of my homeland? Who has convinced me that we would not harvest together, laughing at failed attempts to identify familiar flowers, and patiently waiting for rain?

All shall be well.

Who has unraveled our community? Who has decided that your neighborhood is safer, cleaner, more stable than mine? Who has convinced you that we would not holler hellos from respective rocking chairs? That we would not patch each other's quilts and mend each other's fences?

Still. All shall be well.

To the one who is able to protect us from falling, we cannot help but rejoice. And, we cannot help but mourn. Give us the strength, Incarnate Word, to build, pray, keep, wait, save. Amen.

Cate Cunningham
Student, Duke Divinity School
Alum, UKirk Memphis

* Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*.

December 21

Isaiah 7:10-16

Our Weary World Needs Rejoicing

Weary.
Overstimulated. Overworked. On the verge of losing hope.
Violence and hate rule the day.
Experience tells us there is more to life.
Nothing is beyond the healing power of your love.

There have been times of peace among your children.
Often, we forget this in our weary moments.
Give us a sign of your presence among us!
Enliven us to your works of joy and life.
Tether us together by your Spirit.
Help us choose the good in life over evil.
Enter our hearts this season.
Remind us, once more, that you are Immanuel.

God of expectant waiting, we long for a world where your peace reigns. This Advent, remind us that our waiting is an active thing. We are to work alongside you in our hurting world, bringing signs of your love to our neighbors. And in doing so, we bring signs of your kingdom that is to come. Amen.

Rev. Maggie Alsup
Chaplain, Lyon College

December 20

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

*O God... Listen to us... Revive us... Restore us... Shine on us...
Save us...*

One of my seminary professors told us that, no matter what emotion you're feeling, you can find it somewhere in the book of psalms. No matter how much time has passed between their writing and their reading, the humanity and breadth of the prayerful emotions in the book of Psalms create the threads that weave all who read them together into the tapestry of our faith.

When reading Psalm 80, it feels as if it could have been written today. We hunger for justice as if our bread was only made from tears; we thirst for equality and inclusion as if all we have to drink is salty tears. We look at ourselves in the eyes of the world and think they must be laughing at our failures. We long for the day that we will feel God's love shining on us, on all creation.

Although tomorrow is the longest night of the year, I know that light is coming. Hope is coming. Joy is coming. Love is coming. In five short days we remind ourselves and the world that Joy was indeed born and lived among us. Trust that God has not forgotten you, the Light of God shines on us, shines through us, and will save us. Let us go and bring light to the darkness today.

*O God... Listen to us... Revive us... Restore us... Shine on us...
Save us... Amen.*

Rev. Julia Wright
Chaplain, Presbytery of Northern New York

December 17

Psalm 42

Psalm 42 is a beautiful thread in the tapestry of our shared faith. A cry of longing and hope that connects believers across time and place. The psalmist's deep thirst for God reminds us that no matter where or when we live, our souls are woven together by the same desire for God's presence. Like a deer panting for water, we are united in seeking refreshment, healing, and restoration.

In our communities, many threads are frayed, relationships strained, hearts burdened, and hope sometimes lost. This verse invites us to bring those broken strands to God, encouraging our souls to hope even in times when we struggle. This hope is not just for ourselves but for all of our communities. God's promise to be present with us weaves strength and peace into every connection, guiding how we live, work, and play. As people woven together by faith, we are called to mend what is broken, share our thirst for God with one another, and trust that His presence will restore and renew us all.

*Lord, when we feel distant and discouraged, help us to thirst for
You above all else. Renew our hope and remind us of Your
unfailing love. Restore our faith and guide us back to joy. Amen.*

Grayson Dillard
Student, Wingspan (Wilmington, NC)

December 18

Galatians 3:23-29



This season (and the few months before), I have been crocheting Christmas ornaments for family and friends (spoiler alert if you are a family member or friend reading this reflection). Yarn feels so fragile on its own. It can get very messy very easily. What creates its strength is the process of spinning the cotton or wool into one strand from many. Then, the yarn becomes even stronger as it is interlocked through the simple process of slip knotting to one another, to crochet or knit together the final product. It is a reminder this Advent and Christmas season of our reliance upon and call to uphold one another — even when we might not feel strong.

God, who interweaves and knits our lives together, hold us dearly and closely this season of Advent and Christmas. As exams end, as we travel from our campuses back to our hometowns, remind us. Remind us that when we don't feel strong or that when things feel messy, we're a part of something much greater. And thanks be to God for that. Amen.

Rev. Russ Kerr

Student Development & Engagement Coordinator,
The Pace Center for Campus Ministry
(Virginia Commonwealth University)

December 19

2 Samuel 7:18-22

What more can I say? What more can I do?
What more can I be, to compare to you?
What can I do when I feel small?
Or when I feel unworthy (of my call).

God says that WE do great things together.
Feel the fabric of people holding you near.
Know that "I" is a lonely place.
WE are not worthy of comparison.

We are generations of God's people.
Small and unworthy. Let us not forget
that God brought us this far as One.
Towards a small child worthy of great things.

Dear Gracious Lord, just as King David did, help us to sit in your presence with assurance that you will meet us there. Help us to understand our place in the wider story of your people. Both to celebrate our blessed community and to take seriously our responsibility to uphold it. Thank you for sending us your saints in every time and place so that we might hear your words to us. Drown out the words that bring us loneliness, comparisons, and unworthiness. Continue to use us in your story, so that we might share this Good News with all who uphold us. Amen.

Rev. Carter Grant

Campus Minister, UKirk Austin
Alum, UKirk SC (Columbia, SC)