Words for Waiting

Daily Devotions for Advent & Christmas
2026

This season marks a whole decade of *Words for Waiting*! What began in 2017 with a handful of campus ministers in Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee has grown to include students, groups, alumni and other neighbors from 35 states. Over the years, our contributors have offered a total of 362 reflections on 142 different Scripture readings, in paragraphs, poetry, image, and song. Their faithfulness, honesty, and creativity have been gifts to witness as we continue to navigate these hopeful, hard, and holy days together.

Wherever you're coming from, and whatever you're carrying, I hope that what follows on these pages will be meaningful to you too, as we wait and watch and work our way through the Advent and Christmas seasons ahead.

Rev. Allison Wehrung
Editor

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

Words for Waiting is provided by:

UKIRK
COLLEGIATE MINISTRIES

ukirk.org | @ukirknational

Office of Christian Formation

pcusa.org/formation

THANK YOU to our contributors, without whom this devotional wouldn't be possible. Scan this code or visit ukirkadvent.org/about to see a map of where this year's writers and makers are from.

Notes

December 3
1. Editor's Note: There's no direct evidence that St. Francis wrote or said these exact words, but they're definitely in the spirit of his teaching. One theory is that the quote was inspired by these words in the *Rule of 1221*, which Francis did write: "Let all the brothers...preach by their deeds."

December 7
2. Commentary from *NIV Quest Study Bible* (Zondervan, 2019), as included in study notes on biblegateway.com.

December 17
3. Editor's Note: The Confession of 1967 is part of the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s *Book of Confessions.* A free PDF of the whole book is available at pcusa.org/resource/book-confessions.

December 26
4. Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*, ed. Frances Lester Warner, (Ginn and Company, 1928), 19. https://www.loc.gov/item/28017387

The following abbreviations have been used for different versions of the Bible quoted in this devotional.
CEB: Common English Bible
ESV: English Standard Version
NIV: New International Version
NRSVue: New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

November 29

Mark 13:28-37

Outta bed you sleepy head,
You whisper into the dark.
Gently, welcoming,
encouraging.
Time to step into this world
and pay attention.

Wake up to this wide worried
world.
Where exhaustion and
overwhelm
Are mass produced,
And sold back to us as self
care.
Monetized illusion of freedom.

Outta bed you sleepy head
You say into the dark
As you pull back the shades to
let in the world
And a love and truth that won't
be silenced.

Wake up to this hopeful hurried
world
Where our disembodied spirits
are reaching
Back towards our weary bones
Because the source of the Holy
lives within us,
Making us Holy Ground.

Outta bed you sleepy head
You scream into the dark.
Because we can no longer be
quiet,
The very foundation of our
house is singing.

So Wake up to this faithful,
furious world.
Don't sleep through the
revolution.
Find your place in the Kin-dom.
Go wash some dishes.
Go hold a hand.
Go put some extra love into this
world.

The alarm is sounding!
And we can't snooze
any longer.
Wake up!
Wake up!
Beloved, it's time to wake up.

Wake us up to this world loving God. Let us remember who you are calling us to be, and that we already have everything we need within us. Amen.

Rev. Rachel Penmore
Campus Minister, UKirk UTK

November 30

Micah 4:1-5

During college, many students experience a great deal of uncertainty and fear of the unknown. Whether it's deciding a major, figuring out future career plans, finding your place on campus, or wondering what God has planned for you, these uncertainties can feel overwhelming. As a senior in my final year of college, believe me, I understand these feelings well and I promise you are not alone! But as we read Micah 4:1-5, we are reminded of something beautiful about having hope and faith in God's promises, because fear does not have the final word in this passage.

One theme that stood out to me in Micah was the promise of resting without fear. Micah describes a future where everyone will sit beneath their own vine and fig tree, with no one making them afraid. This image represents a future of peace and security with freedom from fear. As busy college students, we often become so focused on achieving the next big milestone that we forget to appreciate the little moments of peace along the way. During Advent, we are invited to find hope in God's promises even when our future may feel uncertain.

I invite you to take a moment to meditate, journal, or discuss this question: What would I change about how I live today if I chose to have hope in God's promises rather than fear what the future holds?

Loving God, in moments of uncertainty, remind us that our hope rests in your promises. Help us find peace in the present rather than fear what lies ahead. As we enter into this Advent season, guide us to trust in your faithfulness and remember that fear will not have the final word. Amen.

Kassidy McCullough
Student, Austin College ACtivators

January 6

Matthew 2:1-12

This story stood out to me as a metaphor for the Christian spiritual journey. Something like a star points us towards Jesus in whatever our own stories may be. We follow the star and tell others about it and, as shown in Herod's reaction, sometimes the enemy tries to knock us off our path, planting seeds of deception, fear, and a desire to control. The Magi continue anyway, eventually meeting Jesus with joy, and surrendering their most valuable possessions to him. By God's warning, they don't return to Herod, and go back to their country to share the news.

Think about how the enemy uses fear in your life. I'm sure you've felt fear of what people think of you, fear of the future, anxiety about how your body looks, fear of being alone, among an endless list of other worries. However, the Bible tells us here that we should do as the wise men did: keep our eyes fixed above, on heavenly things, the star that leads us closer to Jesus.

When fear tries to take our eyes off the star and lead us astray, as it did with Herod, we must keep walking with endurance. Through it all, the story shows God's protection, giving the Magi wisdom to continue walking, and the dream warning them to return home another way. Ultimately, we will meet Jesus with joy and with nothing to fear, for that's where we were created to be as God's beloved children.

Father God, we are sheep, and you are our good shepherd. Let us follow your example like the Magi following the star, staying focused on our journey so we can share in your joy and peace when we find you in the manger. Thank you for your protection as we walk with you. Amen.

Oliver Stephany
Student, PEACE Center (University of Delaware)

January 5

Luke 6:27-31



You may have seen shirts or stickers that say, "Radicalized by Compassion." When I read this passage in Luke, I imagined that phrase. Jesus is doing something so simple and loving, but also so radical because when we look around the world, so few people are offering their coats, turning the other cheek, loving others. I recently learned that the origin of the word radical is the Latin word *radix*, which simply means "root," related to "rooted." There are many people who would call Jesus's actions radical, and I think they'd be correct – they're rooted in love and compassion for others.

God of compassion, when we feel disconnected, may we remember to plant our feet firmly on the ground and root ourselves in your teachings. Let our actions be radically full of love and joy and empathy, always making more room at the table. When we feel alone, may our roots reach beneath the soil to find others who have grounded themselves in your generosity and peace. Amen.

Rev. Katrina Pekich-Bundy
Chaplain, Alma College

December 1

Micah 4:6-13

Our text begins in the midst of deep communal trauma. God responds by gathering the disabled and the outcast. We know that God frequently calls disabled people to leadership positions: Samson was born with mobility issues and Moses had a speech impediment. The persistent arc of scripture is one where God welcomes all people, not in spite of disability or difference, but often because of it.

In addition to gathering the disabled and the outcast, the author of Micah claims that God will welcome those whom God has harmed. Might this mean that God could be wrong, or change God's mind? Or that God is not always the good guy?

It is the first day of the final month of the year: a year that has been full of trauma and conflict both nationally and internationally. Like Micah, we know that endings often lead to new beginnings. And yet, there is a heaviness in the transitions that come as the year ends...as semesters, relationships, dorm rooms, and majors change.

We believe that God is willing to be a partner in every beginning and ending, and endure all the questions we have about God. That partnership may even extend to God being willing to admit God is wrong. At the end of seasons that have been particularly heavy, we can voice our own prophecies about God that bring up more questions than answers...and maybe that's okay.

God of the oppressed, you are with us as we tell stories about the harm that has been done to us, and the hopes we have for the future. We see you in all we do. We believe that you are capable of partnering with us in magnificent ways. We believe that you will gather all of those driven away. Amen.

Rosa Ross
Campus Minister, UKirk Ewing, NJ
Alum, Marshall UKIRK

Rev. Emily Knoth
Senior Pastor, First Presbyterian Church (Wichita, KS)

December 2

Psalm 85



Think about the emotional climax of a rom com where the protagonists prepare to kiss for the first time. Their yearning for one another's embrace is tangible as the music swells and their lips draw close until finally they kiss. That's what I pictured as verse ten described righteousness and peace kissing one another, a long-awaited embrace.

The psalmist prays for divine restoration — something the world has not yet experienced but the writer believes is possible. As our world oozes with violence and disconnection, it can be difficult to imagine what it will feel like when God's justice comes. We yearn for the anticipated connection. Yet, Advent can feel as if the movie stream starts buffering right before the good part.

When I created this collage, I wanted to capture that moment: eyes locked, hearts connected, anticipation building. I incorporated images of many different people (most of whom weren't posed together) staring into one another's eyes. I also included a few people looking outward as an invitation to recognize and connect with those on the margins.

God, may we invite your restoration by staring into the souls of our fellow human beings, beholding their humanity, and drawing near to each other. As we wait in hope, may we inch closer to one another until the day when righteousness and peace finally kiss. Amen.

Rev. Nell Herring
Campus Minister, Beloved Community WY (Laramie, WY)
Alum, Furman UKirk

January 4

James 4:11-17

The new year is upon us, and the air is saturated with resolutions. "I will eat healthier!" "I will run a 5k!" James' example is familiar: "I will make a profit!"

James reminds us how these statements tend to ignore our human transience. "You are a mist that appears for only a short while before it vanishes" (v. 14, CEB). James encourages us to treat the upcoming year not as a guarantee, but as a gift. The Greek word for mist is *atmis*, also translated as "vapor" or "steam." As we meditate on today's passage, what might it mean for us to live like mist in this new year?

Mist is a shape-shifter. Mist is shapeless and undefined. We can embrace mist's flexibility, seeking God's guidance to help us adapt to new ways of being in the world.

Mist exists in an in-between space. Neither simply liquid nor simply air, mist straddles two states. As followers of Christ, we live in the world even as we strive to live out the kin-dom of heaven on earth. This in-betweenness is integral to our call.

Mist is powerful. The invention of steam engine power revolutionized industry and travel as we know it. Steam can generate energy that creates electricity and moves us across oceans. We, too, have the power to influence lives and spark positive change in our communities.

Mist is life-giving water. Mist is H_2O! The water that nourishes plant life, satiates the thirsty, and baptizes us. We, too, are life-giving agents in the world, capable of bringing love and nourishment into places of need.

Life-giving God, help us to embrace the flexibility, in-betweenness, power, and vitality of mist this year. Remind us that though our lives are short, we can be your agents of love and renewal in the world. Amen.

Elizabeth Dillon
Campus Ministry Coordinator, UKirk @ UVA

January 3

Ephesians 1:3-14

For many, the new year brings incredible energy and bold excitement due to looking forward to new realities, yet nothing can compare with the praise that Saint Paul brings in verse 3. Paul's thoughts begin and end with praise of God for all that has been done for him and all believers in Christ: The good news is that you have been chosen by God. God has chosen you in love so that you are seen by God as blameless and holy. You are adopted and declared God's child! God has done this freely and graciously; God joyously pours this out on you. When you are in Christ, you have been redeemed and forgiven. This has been lavished on you!! Because you are in Christ, you know God's plan and will for creation. You have been given an inheritance of the reconciliation of all things in Christ; this includes things in heaven and on earth. The Holy Spirit has been given to you so that you can know that God has made all of these promises a reality for you. You have been given a guarantee...a done deal!

The question is why...why does God do this? God does this for you, through Christ, so that you can bring praise and magnify God's glory. God longs for praise, because it is good for you. Bringing praise is truly life changing. When you praise God, you are properly aligned to God and it leads to your flourishing. Today, praise God for all you have in Christ!

Praise you Lord! Thank you for choosing me and forgiving me. Thank you for including me in your glorious plan and giving me your Spirit. I am in awe to be your child. You have adopted me and now I am redeemed for your glory. Today, please fuel my heart so that I can give you more praise because you are truly worthy!

Rob Musick
Chaplain, University of Pikeville (Pikeville, KY)

December 3

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

Evangelism has been a growing area of focus relatively recently in the PC(USA). The word has been turned into a voting block description in recent years, and we are in an effort to reclaim its true meaning of sharing the new good news of God's love in Jesus Christ. I will admit that the word still carries some negative connotations for me. Growing up in the South I have been surrounded for so long by those who would claim that word, while rarely sharing the good news of God's love. They more often spoke of a God who was jealous and judgmental.

Then I came in contact with the quote often attributed to Francis of Assisi: "Preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary use words."[1] I thought that it would be much better to show others my faith through how I treated people and the world around me.

These days, I am more inclined to believe that words are necessary more often than I was previously comfortable with. But I still think walking the walk says more than talking the talk. In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he commends them for their faith and tells them that their example has become known in every place so that there is no need to speak of it. As we prepare for Christ's birth in this season of Advent, I wonder what it might look like to follow the example of the Thessalonians on our campuses and in our own communities. Would the news spread the same way?

Loving God, open our minds and hearts to your radical love, shown to us through your Son, Jesus. Help us to live lives that reveal that love to the world, so all might know the peace that comes from you. Amen.

Rev. Colin Pettigrew
Campus Minister, Presbyterian Student Association (Clemson, SC)

December 4

Jeremiah 1:4-10

When Jeremiah first hears God's call, he seems pretty unsure about it. He tells God he cannot follow God's instructions to speak because he is "only a boy." As usual, however, God does not take no for an answer. God urges Jeremiah to answer the call anyway because God has known Jeremiah since before his infancy. If there's anyone who understands what Jeremiah can do, it's God.

But Jeremiah has good reasons to be afraid of this call. If we keep reading in the book of Jeremiah, we see almost immediately that his prophetic journey is not an easy one. It's marked by grief, anguish, and loss. It seems natural for him to resist answering God's call so he can avoid the pain that seems likely to come with it.

In the midst of this daunting call to prophecy, what encouragement is there for Jeremiah? Only these words: "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you." God does not promise Jeremiah that his calling will be easy, but God promises to stay with him through it all. As it turns out, this is the only reassurance Jeremiah can count on: that even when he suffers, he does not suffer alone.

Our world may seem far removed from Jeremiah's, and our callings are likely very different than his, but in the end, we are left with the same promise: "I am with you."

Loving God, like Jeremiah, you have consecrated us before we were even born. Open our ears, eyes, hearts, and mouths to receive your calling and to respond to it. Give us encouragement to continue serving in seasons of difficulty, trusting that your presence goes with us always. Amen.

UKirk @ UMich
(Ann Arbor, MI)

January 2

James 3:13-18

Happy New Year, y'all!

It's day two of 2027. How are we doing? How are those pesky New Year's resolutions coming? Each new year, 85% of Americans will make resolutions – to earn more, to weigh less, to do more or less of...whatever...and yet, only 18% of those resolutions will be kept.*

I wonder what James would say if he were writing today, with all our big plans of resolutions each year. I wonder if he would ask us: are these plans, these goals, ones that will bring a harvest of righteousness? Are these goals things that will bring peace to an increasingly un-peaceful world?
What would a resolution like that look like?

The Roman god Janus, for whom the month January is named, is famous for having two faces. One that looks back and one that looks forward. It's certainly an apt name for this month as folks consider their resolutions – the bad habits they want to leave behind and the good ones they want to take on.

My challenge to us all is to become two-faced, like Janus, in a good way. Look back over 2026 – in what ways were the choices you made rooted in God's wisdom? What choices reflected Christ's topsy-turvy, justice-centered reign? And... were there times in which we let our selfish ambitions guide us instead? What was that harvest like?

Now, look forward – to 2027. How will your faithful analysis of the last year guide you toward yielding the good fruits of mercy and love in the next one?

May our resolutions this year bring us the kind of wisdom we so desperately need.

Holy God, author of all our days, forgive us for the ways in which we've mistaken ambition and ego for wisdom. In this new year, help us to instead choose your wisdom, one that is rooted in love and justice. Amen.

Rev. Sarah Wolf
Pastor, Mt. Bethel Presbyterian Church (Durham, NC)
* 97% of all statistics are made up.

January 1

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

Advent is about a God who interrupts, and Qoheleth (the main speaker in Ecclesiastes) is a tired preacher cataloguing everything that comes around on schedule: birth and death, planting and uprooting, weeping and dancing, tearing and mending. He is honest about what Advent people know: we live inside time we did not choose. We keep vigil beside hospital beds and birthing tubs. We plant in soil that has shown us nothing yet. Nobody gets to skip the weeping season because Christmas always comes.

God has made everything beautiful in its time and set eternity in our hearts. We were made with a longing for more than the clock can hold. The ache is not evidence that something is wrong with us. It is evidence of whose we are.

God is sovereign over the seasons, not merely subject to them. The Holy One steps into time, taking on a body with a gestation, a labor, a first breath. Mary did not pick her season, and neither do we. But the One growing in her was already Lord of every season we fear.

So we are not to rush toward joy or wallow in lament, but to be faithful through the season we're actually in.

God of every season, you who set the times and entered them, we come to you in the middle of our own.

For those who weep, give us permission to weep without apologizing. For those who plant, give us patience with soil that keeps its secrets.

Where we grieve, be near. Where we labor, bring us through.

Come, Emmanuel.
Come into our time as you came into Mary's.
Make beautiful what we cannot yet see,
and keep us faithful until we do.
In the name of the Christ born in due time, amen.

LaWonder McDowell
Campus Minister, Presbyterian Campus Ministry (NC Central University)

December 5

Mark 11:27-33

The rabbi kicks a chair. The wood splinters. He grabs a table by the legs and flips it. Coins clatter to the ground. Priests glare from the altar. Money changers swear under their breath. The rabbi catches his breath, chest heaving.

The Sanhedrin interrogate him like cowards. They question not to understand but to undermine: Who lets you act with authority other than ours? Why are you making a scene? Would you just turn a blind eye like everyone else? Can you just let us be comfortable?

I do not express this to further anti-Judaism rhetoric. It is short-sighted to revile Jesus' opponents yet turn a blind eye to those in our own time profiting from the vulnerable. The Sanhedrin act as any authorities confronted with changemakers. Their reaction is a pattern we have seen before, and we see it now.

The money changers were profiting from foreign travelers. Nobody cared enough to speak up, much less risk their reputation for someone from somewhere else. It's a courageous and radical thing to care about humans over profits. This is still true two-thousand-something years later.

Jesus teaches what it means to challenge, protest, and act from abounding love for humanity. He does not rely on a passive "hope" that someone else will speak up. This is our Messiah: the one who cared enough to stand up, even though he stood alone.

The powerful still punish those who challenge them. With Christ's example, what will you do? Will you outcast those who are ripe for chair-kicking? Will you silently thank God it's not your money they're taking? Will you take up your own table? Will you protect your reputation before human dignity? What would Jesus do?

God of freedom, when we witness injustice, empower us to flip the tables. Amen.

Jessica Joshi
Student, Princeton Theological Seminary

December 6

Mark 1:1-8

In Mark's Gospel, John the Baptist calls the people to "prepare the way of the Lord" (v. 3). As we enter Advent, we are invited to do the same — not by adding more to our already full lives, but by making room for God.

College life can feel like a constant balancing act. Between classes, exams, relationships, extracurriculars, work, and figuring out what comes next, it can be hard to find peace amid the noise. John's message invites us to pause and prepare our hearts to receive Christ, even in the middle of the chaos.

Pause and reflect.

Name what you are carrying. Take a few minutes to write down everything weighing on your heart, mind, and spirit. Think about academic pressure, friendships, family expectations, decisions about the future, or the feeling that you should be doing more.

Offer it to God. Look over your list without judgment. These things matter, but you do not have to navigate them alone. Offer each one to God, trusting that you are loved not because of what you accomplish, but simply because you are God's beloved.

Make room for peace. Take a deep breath. You do not have to have your future figured out, earn another achievement, or check every box on your to-do list to receive God's love. Set your list aside for a moment and rest in the promise that Christ meets you right where you are.

God of peace, you know all that I carry — the pressures I face, the questions I hold, and the things I struggle to release. Help me lay down what I cannot control and remember that my worth is not measured by what I do, but by whose I am. Prepare my heart to receive your love and recognize your presence, even in the busiest seasons of life. Amen.

Rev. Erin Farry
Director of Church Relations, Presbyterian College (Clinton, SC)

December 31

1 Kings 3:5-14

All eyes are on Solomon in this passage from 1 Kings. At this point in time, a young Solomon had just been anointed king of Israel after the passing of his father David. I urge you to put yourself in Solomon's shoes for a moment: a young man who has just lost his father, and who has a whole empire waiting to know his next move. While we may not all be running a nation, I think we can resonate with the stress that Solomon is feeling here. It is in this moment that Solomon expresses to God that he is young, inexperienced, and knows next to nothing; despite this though, he says, "but I am here" (v. 8, CEB).

Let that resonate with you for a moment. Amongst the pain and pressure that Solomon was feeling, he tells God that he's here and willing to listen. With a new year approaching, it's easy to find ourselves in Solomon's shoes, overwhelmed by the uncertainty, busyness, and anxiety of this new chapter. Solomon reminds us here to remain available for God amongst the chaos. His response to God is one I hope you take with you into the new year.

In those moments where you feel like young Solomon, I pray that you pause for just a moment to say "I am here," as a way of reminding yourself that you belong to the Lord and that you are ready and available to be God's hands and feet in the world.

Dear God, I am here. Please help me have a discerning mind that brings me closer to you. Let the words of 1 Kings resonate within my heart, so that I can remain available for you in the new year. In your name I pray, amen.

Sarah Clingman
Student, Austin College ACtivators

December 30

Proverbs 9:1-12

A new year is right around the corner, and so many of us tend to come up with a New Year's resolution that is lucky to make it past January. Go to the gym, read more books, go to church, drink less, save more money...the list goes on and on. Usually something good, but a bit superficial.

Today's passage invites us into wholistic transformation. Wisdom has invited us to know God more deeply, understand people more clearly, to live better through conversation and community, and to take care of our bodies.
But what happens when someone questions you or offers you a hard truth? Do you blow them off and react like a scoffer? Or do you embrace it and grow?

Other people may not always be right, but neither are we. Maybe a New Year's resolution can look like being more open, trying something new, learning more about a subject, letting someone else make the decisions, or so many other small changes. God sends us people to challenge us so that we can become better humans.

Lady Wisdom invites us into radical hospitality. To do the hard work. To evaluate ourselves. To be open to grow and stretch and learn from others. To not take shortcuts. And to join in the bountiful banquet that is life with God through Jesus Christ. Will you accept her invitation?

God of abundant hospitality, challenge us to grow in grace and walk righteously as we head into this New Year. May we gain an understanding heart, so we can love our neighbors as we love you. May we remember that we, and all the people around us, are made in the Image of God. Now and forever, amen.

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

December 7

Psalm 27

When I was little, I used to be scared of the dark. Maybe you were, too. It was easy to believe that something scary lived under my bed or in the closet years before *Monsters, Inc.* came out. I was amazed how much comfort came from the little nightlight my mother installed in the wall socket. It was just enough light to make me feel secure.

The psalmist begins Psalm 27 saying, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, Should I fear anyone?" (v. 1, CEB). Throughout the rest of the psalm, alongside their trust in God and affirmation of God's faithfulness, are references to the fear that lives within them because of the people and situations they are dealing with.

When I looked up this psalm online, a reference note about the word "stronghold" showed up. It said, "This is a military image — a tower, fortress, or fortified hilltop from which to resist an enemy."[2] I immediately imagined being hunkered down in a room after feeling under siege, feeling, for just a moment, safe and secure. Like you can breathe deeply because, even if just for a few moments, you don't have to worry. You can simply be in the presence of God which gives just a little space, a little light, to remind you that God's got you and will provide.

Light a candle, take a deep breath, and remember that God's love surrounds you.

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

December 8

Acts 11:1-18

In this passage, we catch a glimpse of the Bible's overarching narrative where God extends his focus from nations to include individuals. First, God promises the ancient Jewish people an inheritance of a land flowing with milk and honey. Then Christ promises all who are meek and persecuted the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven. Even in the Old Testament, God has always cared about individuals. When reading the first few books of the Bible, we are inundated with laws, and God can feel far away and strict. However, in the psalms, we see that people did have prayerful, individual relationships with a nurturing, protective, merciful God.

Jesus spoke from this Jewish tradition that teaches:
you are made in the image of God,
you were created to strive for holiness,
you are called to love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus keeps this personal relationship between humans and God, and expands it. He teaches us the Our Father prayer. He tells the parable of the shepherd seeking a single lost sheep. He heals unclean lepers. He eats with sinners. Speaking through Peter and Paul, he extends grace to all nations and individuals. Now, you and I can participate in a repentant life, in communion with the Lord, in hope of salvation. This Advent season, thank the Lord for that grace, embodied by the coming of the Child Jesus.

Loving God, send upon me the flames of your Holy Spirit just as you did on the day of Pentecost. Ignite in me repentance, love of my neighbor, and love for you. I thank you for extending the grace of your Word and your salvation to everybody on earth. I pray that all people will come to know you and love you. In the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, Amen.

Rachel Herway
Student, PEACE Center (University of Delaware)

December 29

Matthew 12:46-50

Sometimes family causes tension. You're likely reading today's devotion toward the tail end of your winter break, and being back home may feel at odds with the newfound freedom you have as a college student or young adult. My hope is that you all want the best for one another, but that doesn't change our tendency to slip back into familial roles that may no longer fit us.

Today's reading follows a series of disagreements with religious leaders over Jesus' failure to observe the Sabbath. Their argument comes to a head when Jesus heals a man whose hand is withered. After Jesus does this, the Pharisees conspire to destroy him. The text indicates that Jesus knows about their plot against him, and yet he continues to heal those who approach him.

All of this culminates in Jesus being called demonic by the Pharisees, and we see Jesus' attitude turn. Up to this point, Jesus responds to the challenges about the Sabbath law with theologically reasoned answers. When the critique shifts to the nature of his character, Jesus responds with a spark of anger. (This is the chapter in which Jesus calls the Pharisees a brood of vipers, after all.) Knowing this, I do not think we are wrong to assume that Jesus's family is trying to protect Jesus in our reading for today. Jesus is running headlong against those who are actively conspiring to undermine him. They likely fear for his safety. Yet, ultimately, they cannot keep Jesus from living into the fullness of his calling, however dangerous it may be.

Loving God, You call us into a family of faith. Remind us that family often takes many forms. Assure us that we are called to grow as part of this family. Amen.

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

December 28

Jeremiah 31:15-17

Today is one of the most difficult days in the entire church year, let alone the Christmas season. It is the Feast of the Holy Innocents, a day in the Christian calendar when some communities commemorate all the children in Bethlehem killed by the forces of King Herod out of fear of the rumored Messiah. It is a harrowing reminder of the cruelty of empire and the dangerous power of fear, even in the midst of the "happiest time of the year."

Although Rachel's grief in this passage from Jeremiah is for a wider group of descendants in exile, it captures the same deep pain over the loss of children to the violence of war and conflict. Through Jeremiah, the Holy Innocents, and our world today, we see the violence the world is always capable of. We don't have to look far to see examples of how the world's injustice still disproportionately harms children and youth. From Ukraine to the US Border to Gaza, we continue to hear the cries of parents, weeping and wailing unconsoled.

Scripture calls us to live in a different way – to care for those in need and work towards a world where no child will be caught as a victim of cruelty and injustice. A key lesson of the Christmas season is that in Christ, all children belong to God.

God of the vulnerable, we remember today that Jesus was born into a world where power is often cruel and the innocent suffer. Open our eyes to the hurting places on our campus and in our world. Give us the courage to stand with those who are vulnerable, the empathy to mourn with those who grieve, and the determination to speak truth to power. Protect all children, shelter the refugee, and let your kingdom of peace and justice break into our reality today. Amen.

Rev. Laurie Kenyon Woods
Campus Minister, United Campus Christian Fellowship (Grand Rapids, MI)

December 9

Luke 1:5-17

Is it too late Lord? Did I miss it?
My chance was coming, then it was gone.
I had a plan, everyone else was getting what they wanted,
I followed the steps, I missed the step, my foot fell from under me.

Why me? Why now? I've given up hope.
I'm not good enough... smart enough... talented enough...
I'm not old enough... young enough...
I'm not enough... enough.

You don't abandon your children.
You love all your children... "for the Bible tells me so."
And yet it can be so hard to believe that, remember that.

My life sometimes feels like Advent.
Waiting... waiting... hoping... waiting...
I light a candle in the dark, move towards the light.
You are the light, your promises are the light.

But sometimes that light feels far away.
I say this year will be different, this year will be better.
This year will be the year I let the light in.
This is the year the light will fill my heart, drive out the darkness.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were faithful and were blessed.
Elizabeth and Zechariah waited and their prayers were answered.
Alone together at first in their pain and then joy led them to others, community, and hope.

O Lord, grant me the patience of Elizabeth and the faith of Zechariah. May the darkness of my waiting be driven out by your light. Show me that I am worthy of receiving your love. May I believe it. Lead me from loneliness to community. Open my heart and mind to your many blessings that surround me today and everyday. Prepare me for the Lord. Amen.

Rev. Julia Wright
Pastor, Presbytery of Northern New York

December 10

Habakkuk 2:1-5

Watching and waiting and audacity, oh my!

From the waiting for Christmas of our childhood to the current day waiting for a grade or an answer to a tough question, we all know what it is like to wait.

In this passage there is commitment to the waiting, and a plan to wait it out at the look-out spot. Is it going to be easy? Probably not. Still, the passage suggests a determination to wait for God's answer. And God's answer confirms the unpredictability of the timeframe. Wanting an answer and having no timeframe other than "it will be at the right time" is not what we want to hear.

Once, when I was waiting on a diagnosis for a loved one, I was given a name for such a time – it is often called liminal space. It is the time and space between the known and the not yet known. You don't have much of a choice when you are there. A question looms and you cannot and do not have the answer.

The passage suggests the difference between those who wait for what is right and those who have the audacity to grapple for things with out-of-control arrogance. It is best to wait. And it is hard.

Our invitation is to find beauty and peace in the waiting. Try spiritual practices like breath prayer, a walk in nature, time with community, creation or enjoyment of art, and invite God's Spirit in.

God of spirit, life and hope, be with me in my questioning and help me wait. Help me see the space between here and the answer as sacred ground where we can dwell together. I breathe in your love and presence; I breathe out my anxiety and worry. Amen.

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

December 27

Luke 2:22-40

Why are Anna and Simeon able to recognize that there's something extraordinary about the baby Joseph and Mary bring to the Temple to dedicate? Maybe God is rewarding the faithfulness of two steadfast servants, or maybe this revelation is just arbitrary. My guess, though, is that Anna and Simeon's understanding comes not as a reward for their devotion, but rather as a result of it.

These two have devoted their lives wholly to worship and to prayer. Such obedience necessarily leaves a mark – regularly spending time in the presence of God's transformational love changes us, and we can't help but move through the world differently than before, as new creations. Like sheep who instinctively know the familiar voice of their shepherd, Anna and Simeon are able to see what those around them do not: this baby was the long-awaited Messiah, the one who would bring about the redemption of Israel.

To be clear, this scripture is not promising that if you live faithfully and pray every day, God will reward you with a sneak peek of the goodness God is working in the world. God's grace and favor aren't transactional, after all – thanks be to God, they are freely-given gifts that can't be earned. Rather than an empty promise, then, Anna and Simeon offer a simple observation: if we are regularly and faithfully spending time in the company of the divine, we are better able to recognize it working in us and in the world around us.

Holy One, in commending ourselves to your peace as we rejoice in the coming of Immanuel, let our ears be attuned to the familiar sound of your voice, let our eyes be opened to your goodness, and let our tongues and hands be the means by which that goodness is wrought. Amen.

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

December 26

Psalm 148

Merry Christmas, World

In the beginning of *Little Women*, the March sisters wake up to a snow-covered lawn on Christmas morning. They are excited to celebrate, but also mourning the fact that because of the war, they have no real presents to exchange. Despite the challenges, they play and chat, then gather at the table for a beautiful Christmas breakfast. Their mother walks in the front door to wish them Merry Christmas, then tells them there is a mother with six children sleeping in one bed, barely keeping warm and nearly starving. She asks her daughters, "Would you give them your breakfast as a Christmas present?" With deep faith and a sense of duty to their neighbor, they pack up breakfast to share with their neighbors.[4]

Today, we ride the high of Christmas. Our waiting is over! We finally celebrate that God is with us! Some call today Boxing Day. In the UK, Canada, and other commonwealth countries, today is a day when Christians give boxes (hence "boxing") of alms, money, and food to the poor. This tradition of sharing with others the day after Christmas reminds us that the love of God doesn't just fall on those who celebrate. Like snowfall that blankets the land and trees and everything else on Christmas morning at the March sisters' house, the love of God is for all of God's creation.

As the psalmist tells us, all the earth will praise the Lord. All the earth will know God's love, so it's up to us to listen for it and share it.

God, your love came down to be with us, to be one of us. Help us to be people who give generously, who trust in your abundance, and who hear the songs of praise from all of your creation. Amen.

Rev. Kelsey Cobbs
Pastor for Missions, First Presbyterian Church
& Second Wind Coffeehouse (Norman, OK)

December 11

Habakkuk 3:2-6

During Christmas, I remember waiting for a lot of things to come, like presents on Christmas Day, a piece of eggnog pie, and going to cut down the Christmas tree. And the amazing thing was, those things always came, making my heart joyful.

In today's Habakkuk passage there is movement as we read about God coming to the people. God comes from Teman and Paran with majesty, with rays of flashing light, with praise, and with radiance. Habakkuk's time was one of chaos and grief, but in chapter 3 we see God respond by reminding the ancient people of Israel to take heart, for God is coming.

This theme is also seen in the season of Advent, for we are reminded of Christ's coming. Yes, the world at the time was dark but Christ came. Yes, we were dead to our sins, but Christ came. Yes, we needed to be set free, but we were because Christ came. Verses 3 and 4 of this Habakkuk passage impress me as a precursor to the angels appearing to the shepherds with radiance like sunlight. For what was coming was here.

But that is not the end of the story. The story continues as Christ will come again one day. Yes, the radiance, the majesty, and praise. Does the world seem dark to you? Hope, for Christ is coming. Does pain seem constant? Hope, for Christ is coming. Does life seem hopeless? Hope, for Christ is coming. May you have a blessed Christmas.

Gracious Lord, we thank you for coming to earth. You came to Habakkuk, you came as a baby, and you will come to us again. May we remember that as a ray of light in a world that at times seems dark. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Andrew Hart
College Chaplain, Wilson College (Chambersburg, PA)

December 12

Matthew 21:28-32

These five verses appear at an interesting place in Matthew. Jesus enters Jerusalem. He overturns the tables in the temple. He sets up to teach, and the religious leaders question his authority. When I read the passage out of context, I thought it was a parable about how deeds are more important than words. With the context of the whole chapter in Matthew, however, I think this passage asks the question: What changes in your life if the Good News is real?

Tax collectors and prostitutes believed John, and the Good News became real for them. They changed their hearts and minds. Zacchaeus, the tax collector, declared, "Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (Luke 19:8, NIV). The Bible leaves to our imagination what changes in the prostitute's life when the Good News becomes real. That invitation is left open to modern readers, too.

What changes in your life if you really believe that grace abounds? What changes in your life if you really believe that every person you interact with is made in the image of God? If you really believe that you are made in the image of God? If you believe that the last good thing hasn't happened yet?

This Advent season, may the Good News of hope, peace, joy, and love be made real to you, and may it change your life.

Gracious God, grant us the creativity to imagine what changes for us when the Good News becomes real. Make this imagination into reality, and grant us hope, peace, joy, and love. Amen.

Rev. Beatrix Weil
Chaplain, Rhodes College

December 25

Luke 2:1-20

When we think about royalty, we envision grand entrances, pristine announcements, and being in the center of attention and power. But the Christmas story opens with a masterclass in divine subversion. It starts not with a whisper of angels in a royal court, but with the heavy bureaucratic stroke of a pen by Caesar Augustus, an emperor who believed he controlled the world. Yet, Caesar was merely a pawn in a much larger story, moving a weary, displaced carpenter and a young mother to the crowded little town of Bethlehem.

When God entered human history, it didn't happen in halls of power. It happened in a makeshift shelter, wrapped in cloth and laid in a feeding trough.

On this Christmas Day, as we celebrate the reality of Emmanuel — God with us — Luke 2 reminds us that God rarely shows up where the world tells us to look. He meets us in our desperation, displacement, exhaustion, and our ordinary, unpolished routines. He is a king who stepped down into the dust of our world, bringing light into our darkest nights.

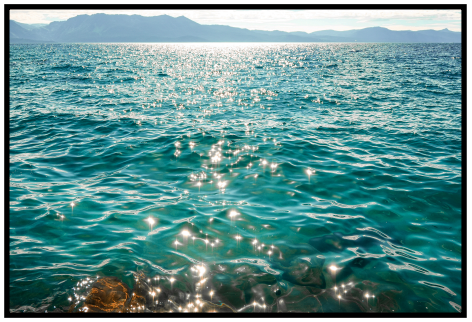
Where are the shepherds in your own community or life today? Who are the easily overlooked people who might carry a profound reminder of grace this Christmas? How does the manager's humility challenge your definitions of success, power, or importance as you celebrate today? In the midst of the holiday rush or quiet moments today, how can you pause to "treasure up and ponder" God's quiet presence in your own life?

Lord, thank you for breaking into our world not with a show of human might, but in the fragile, humble form of a child. Forgive us for the times we looked for you only in places of comfort, status, and power. Open our eyes to see your grace in the unexpected corners of our lives today, and give us a heart for the overlooked. As we celebrate the birth of your son, fill our homes with your peace and remind us that your love belongs to everyone. Amen.

Nagwa Fokunang
Student, First Presbyterian Church (Logan, UT)

December 24

John 1:1-14



John's Gospel begins with a mystery. Before the world as we know it, there was the Word. A few verses later, we are told that this Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Somehow, the God who exceeds our understanding also becomes present within the world we inhabit. Between these declarations, we encounter John the Baptist, who "was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light." (v. 8, ESV) There is something beautiful about this distinction. John was not called to be the light, to possess it, or to fully comprehend it. He was called simply to bear witness.

In the accompanying photograph, sunlight reflects across the surface of the water, captured through a camera lens. Neither the water nor the camera creates the light. Neither can capture the fullness of the sun. Yet through both, something immense and otherwise beyond our reach becomes visible. Perhaps our encounters with God are something like this. We cannot always contain the fullness of God within our understanding, yet we can still recognize glimpses of God's presence in the world around us. And like John, we are invited to bear witness to that presence, reflecting God's light through the ways we live and love others. On Christmas Eve, we celebrate the Word becoming flesh: not the disappearance of mystery, but the promise that mystery can dwell among us.

God of light and mystery, open our eyes to your presence in the world around us. Help us embrace what we cannot fully understand, and teach us to reflect your love in ways that allow others to encounter your light. Amen.

McKinley Church & Foundation
University of Illinois (Champaign-Urbana, IL)

December 13

Luke 1:39-56

I would like to go into my reflection with a brief bit of context about me. I'm a college student, not the best writer, hoping to be a future pastor, and someone with a massive case of depression. Writing about joy was not on my radar and I find it comedic that God decided that I would be scheduled for this one. What is also comedic to me is how the piece of scripture for today is actually the one that helped me reconnect with God.

I come from a background where joy and happiness are two separate things. Happiness is usually looked down upon, as it is fleeting and temporary, while joy is supposed to be everlasting. To me, though, happiness is the moments that make up joy. It's the little moments like Mary visiting Elizabeth "with haste" (v. 39). It's feeling your child leap in your womb with recognition of you or someone else. (I think that's how that would feel anyways, I'm childless and a parent of two literal rats.)

When reading through this passage, there are no big glowing signs telling us, "be joyful!" But there is a reminder for us. It's a reminder that God has torn down enemies, raised the lowly, and filled the hungry. It may not be literal hunger in many cases, but it is spiritual hunger. It could also be a hunger for justice, community, or to just feel okay for once.

Many of us hunger for happiness or joy, but it is important that we take the time to look back and count those happy moments, and multiply them more in our daily lives. We are called to live with joy, but what steps are we taking in our lives to do so?

Pray a breath prayer, repeating these phrases with each inhale and exhale: God of joy...illuminate my life.

Grey Hoffman
Student, UKirk UofL (Louisville, KY)

December 14

Ephesians 6:10-17

Remember last Christmas? We welcomed the baby Jesus, the Christ Child, into our lives once again, remembering the gift of incarnation. God came to us in the most fragile, vulnerable way possible. We celebrated hope, peace, joy, and love, and felt it in all of our soft places as we sang Silent Night in hopeful darkness.

But for many of us, that hope has leaked out of the darkness and left it feeling cold and threatening. We began collecting bits of armor that we hoped would protect us: cynicism, busyness, and the illusion of being "fine." Perhaps we've even collected some physical armor, like higher fences and stronger locks. We want to keep ourselves and the ones we love safe and that feels increasingly hard. So, when the writer of Ephesians tells us to put on our armor, we might begin to prepare for battle, thinking "I've got this!" Then we are reminded that the battle is not against the people. Not the people with whom we disagree on everything, or people whose words make us bristle and whose actions leave us afraid. Our struggle (and theirs) is with the powers that teach us to fear one another and treat some lives as disposable.

And the armor we are offered? Truth. Righteousness. Faith. Peace. Each one a gift from God, gifts that help us stand firm while keeping our hearts open. Advent draws us toward a God who comes with tender skin and tiny, unclenched hands. Perhaps we can loosen our grip, too.

Holy One, loosen our grip on the armor we thought we needed, and dress us instead in the armor you choose. Clothe us in courage, ground us in peace, and keep our soft places open to your love. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Michelle Scott-Huffman
Campus Minister, Ekklesia (Springfield, MO)

December 23

Mark 11:1-11

To be honest, I find the daily lectionary assigning this Palm Sunday text to December 23 irksome. We haven't even reached the birth, and we are basically jumping over Jesus' whole life to the week that leads to his death?

I don't need to be reminded right now that Jesus is with us in life's hard times, in the pain and grief and mess. I pray for God to be with people in the midst of tough circumstances every single day. The hard stuff is everywhere these days, and I do trust that God is present with us in it. Somedays it's just overwhelming though, and what I actually need is a reminder that we were also created for joy, that joy and wonder are forms of resistance to the oppressive forces that seem to surround us. Ash Wednesday is only seven weeks away and we'll get to Jerusalem soon enough.

What I need two days before Christmas is to be reminded to make space for the joy of the incarnation, not pushed towards the valley of death. Yes, it matters that we know where this whole story is headed, that we know that who Jesus is as the Messiah matches the humble origins of his birth. It matters that this gift of love coming into the world is a love that is willing to love us even unto death. But what if we just got to stay with those who came to marvel at the baby Jesus, with the angels and shepherds and magi, filled with a sense of wonder, even if just for a few minutes? Today I need good tidings of great joy, so come with me, and let's go witness this gift of love together.

God of love and joy, as we approach Christmas Day, allow us to feel the amazement, wonder, and great joy of the birth of Jesus. Remind us to make space for joy in our lives, even when things seem so very hard. Amen.

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

December 22

1 Samuel 2:1-10

I'm convinced the universal language of the world is music. As a woman, nothing gets me in my feels more than an empowerment anthem, especially one that somehow seems to capture the vastness, depth, and muti-faceted nature of the feminine experience: "RESPECT" by Aretha Franklin, "I'm Every Woman" by Whitney Houston, "Run the World (Girls)" by Beyonce, "Good As Hell" by Lizzo, to name a few.

In Scripture, we've got empowerment anthems women have proclaimed as well: Miriam (Exodus), Deborah (Judges), Hannah (our passage from 1 Samuel), and Mary (Gospel of Luke). Their songs are testimonies to the prophetic working of God — a God of vastness and depth — and multifaceted in nature, mirroring their own understanding of what it means to strive to love God, others, and themselves.

The power of music is in its inherently invitational nature, and how it gives voice and witness to the real, lived experiences of people. Yet how often do we venture outside "mainstream" musicians in our own lives, or seek to expand ourselves beyond music that prioritizes our own comforts and preferences? Are we varying our listening experiences to hear the prophetic voice of God at work through the music of LGBTQIA+ siblings or BIPOC communities?

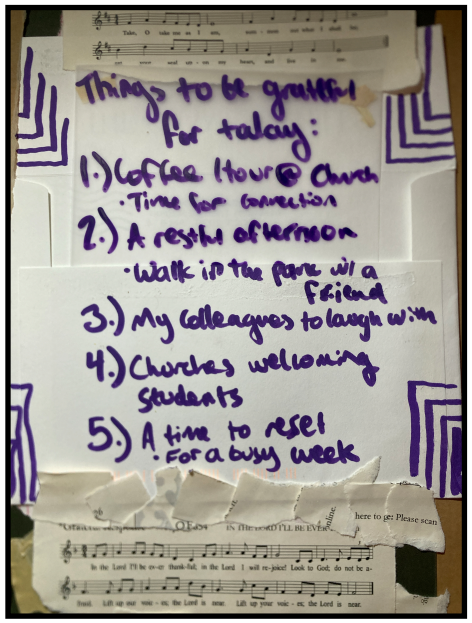
During this Advent season, who is the contemporary Hannah in our midst today, singing a song of divine witness to which we need to attune not simply our ears, but our hearts?

God of Music, transform our thinking and expand our awareness through the invitational nature of music this Advent season. Empower us to seek out new musicians and artists who push us outside our comfort zone through their words, harmonies, and craft, so that through music, we might hear and learn something new about You in Your multifaceted nature. Amen.

Rev. Rachel Hébert
Campus Minister, PEACE Center (University of Delaware)

December 15

Acts 3:17-4:4



Anytime a passage has the words, "turn to God," I take a moment to think about how I am, and how I might reset in turning to God. This week of Advent our theme is Joy! You may (or may not) be feeling joyful about the exams you just took. I spent time in this reflection thinking of something that has recently helped me to turn to God and has brought me joy — junk journaling!

The simple act of collecting receipts throughout the day, items with fun textures, and paint pens, can then turn into a way at the end of the day (or in the morning) to reflect on the five things that let joy and gratitude into my life. I lift the practice up to you as part of your disciplined and devoted spiritual life.

God who takes the junk and makes it into something new, something joyful, we say thank you. In moments of doubt or in moments of pain, may your words, "turn to God," help to guide us. As we leave school, work, and travel before Christmas and the new year, may the joy of each morning be your joy. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Rev. Russ Kerr
Student Development & Engagement Coordinator,
The Pace Center for Campus Ministry at VCU (Richmond, VA)

December 16

Psalm 126

Joy can be a loaded emotion. During Advent, joy can often be happening alongside a deep sense of anticipation for Christmas and the celebration of the birth of Christ. Christmas comes at a time when it is often cold, and gets dark way too early. Similarly, our day to day lives are often all too full of the darkness within the world, which can make joy feel far away. But to hold onto that joy is to hold onto a deep-seated hope and know that good things are coming, the light is soon returning, and at the end of this anticipatory period it will once again be Christmas.

In the scripture for this reflection, the Israelites are remembering God's past actions of love and care, and are using those memories to fuel their joy. Verse 5 says, "Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy" (NIV). Real life involves tears and struggle. Advent joy does not ignore those struggles, instead it reminds us that true joy often comes when we recognize the potential for loss. To be joyful, even when it is hard, is a sign of true resilience. Like the Israelites in the passage, even when the world feels lacking in light, finding pockets of joy in the day-to-day struggle is resistance, resilience, and community care.

Today, I invite you to look for one such pocket of joy in your own life, and allow it to live in tandem with the other messy emotions that may come up this season.

Heavenly Father,
As we move throughout this messy world,
Let us find pockets of your love in unexpected places.
Surprise us with joy in the mundane.
Let our hearts prepare room for you,
as heaven and nature sing.
Amen.

Grace Holland-Miller
Student, UKirk MTSU (Murfreesboro, TN)

December 21

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Oh, to want a ruler to "endure as long as the sun…" Oh, to have such hope in humanity as to believe that God's reign might come through the vehicle of a human.

Today's psalm was likely composed for the inauguration of a new king in Jerusalem, and is a prayer for just that — for the reign of God to be realized through the reign of this king.

With good reason, modern Christian faith has dispensed with the idea that human rulers can be trusted to bring about God's Reign "on earth as it is in heaven." What Jesus calls "the renewal of all things" (Matt. 19:28, NRSVue) is understood by most Christians to be a divine activity in which humans may participate, and from which we benefit. But we don't pray for our presidents to "endure as long as the sun;" quite the contrary, we enact and enforce term limits!

The ancient Hebrews had evidence of their own that earthly kings are a mix of more or less good stuff, with less or more bad stuff, and at the end of the day…death and taxes! The psalmist's hope, therefore, is not in the king himself, but in God, who moves through us and in spite of us — king and commoner alike — to accomplish God's own ends.

It is unfair to expect human rulers to achieve ends that belong to God alone. And yet, the Christian conviction is that God's Reign does finally come through a human life. Christ's kingdom is not like any other earthly kingdom (John 18:36), but neither is it so foreign that we cannot pray — with our lips and our lives — for its realization among us.

Endow us all, O God, with Your Heavenly Justice, most especially those who wield its instruments on earth. Amen.

Rev. Will Norman
Campus Minister, The Table UGA (Athens, GA)

December 20

Luke 1:26-38

Send Your Love to Us

Lord, I know you are with me…
Or at least I hope you are.
Vexed with you, O Lord!
Emotions I can not contain or hide.

Can this news of a child be real!?!
Angels speak of this good news for the world.
Might this word be true?
Eagerly I wait and wonder why I am the one

To be trusted with such a gift of love.
Oh, to be honored with such a task!

Ultimately, it is your will for me and I accept.
Send your love to live among us and
reshape your world this day.

God of expectant waiting, we anxiously await your love to enter our world. We are in need of such a miracle this day. Enter into our chaos, bring your love and mercy to calm our anxieties, and inspire us to work for the betterment of your kingdom. Amen.

Rev. Maggie Alsup
Chaplain, Lyon College

December 17

Hebrews 1:1-4

In what biblical scholars say are the oldest words in the whole Bible, God self-introduces in Exodus 34:6 as "a God who is compassionate and merciful, very patient, full of great loyalty and faithfulness." (CEB) That's who we've always known God to be, and that phrase describing God appears six more times in the Hebrew Scriptures.

In 1967, a bunch of Presbyterians said: "The members of the church are emissaries of peace and seek the good of humanity in cooperation with powers and authorities in politics, culture, and economics." That would be problematic if they had stopped there, because "powers and authorities in politics, culture, and economics" are often not trustworthy.

But they went on: "But [the members of the church] have to fight against pretensions and injustices when these same powers endanger human welfare. *Their strength is in their confidence that God's purpose rather than humanity's schemes will finally prevail.*" (C67 9.25)[3]

That's the thing about Advent. We know what's gonna happen. It happens every year. We know how the story ends. That baby's gonna come. And yet we wait. We don't just jump straight to the manger. We wait and we remember. We get ourselves ready. We remember promises uttered long before the birth of the Christ child. We wait. We remember. And we know the world will never be the same.

Gracious, merciful, patient, and abundantly loving God, in this Advent season of waiting and remembering, we give you thanks for your faithfulness, and for the constancy of your care for us and our world. We are grateful for all who have given words to our common and consistent experience of being loved, accompanied, comforted, equipped, and surprised. As we await the birth of the Christ child, remind us again who you are and whose we are.

John Williams
Chaplain, Austin College

December 18

Hebrews 1:5-14

Questions to Ponder

WHEN did God speak?

WHAT did God say?

WHO did God say it to?

and furthermore...

WHO has God called? Maybe you?

WHAT has God continued to love? To hate?

WHEN will God's servants claim and fulfill their purpose?

God, we have lots of questions! Sometimes we are weighed down by them, other times we gladly leave them at your feet. Holy Spirit, keep us aware that no matter how many questions we have, no matter how patiently or impatiently we wait for answers, your steadfast love for us remains forever. Help us to hear you clearly, love what you love, and continue to seek the path you have for us. Through your Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Rev. British Hyrams
Associate Chaplain, Presbyterian College (Clinton, SC)

December 19

John 7:40-52

Sometimes my most compelling experiences of God look very little like "traditional" church gatherings. I have met God powerfully while singing at a protest, laughing over a shared meal with friends, and sitting alone in nature, marveling at God's creation. In different seasons, those things have often felt much more meaningful than the elements I was once taught were hallmarks of a Christian gathering: hymns, a sermon, and a room full of pews.

In today's passage, the crowd is puzzled by Jesus. He doesn't fit what they expected. He comes from Galilee of all places, speaks in surprising ways, and doesn't match their idea of a prophet, let alone the Messiah. Throughout his ministry, Jesus disrupts expectations and shows that God's way rarely follows the rules of polite society.

One of my favorite things about campus ministry is the freedom to be creative in how we gather and learn about God. College campuses, and campus ministries, are often a delightful hub for welcoming curiosity, questions, doubt, and new ways of exploring faith. But you may feel pressure from others' expectations: family who wish you attended a church like their own, friends who don't understand why faith matters to you, or alumni who remember how campus ministry "used to be."

Doing things differently can feel threatening. In this passage, some wanted to arrest Jesus for the disruption he caused. Still, his example invites us to take risks for the sake of love as we gather, study, and worship. This Advent, take a faithful risk, and know that you are in good company.

Loving God, help us notice you in surprising places and make room for your movement where we least expect it. As we wait for your coming at Christmas, keep us open to wonder and creativity.

Rev. Hannah Lundberg
Pastor, Westminster Presbyterian Church (Ann Arbor, MI)