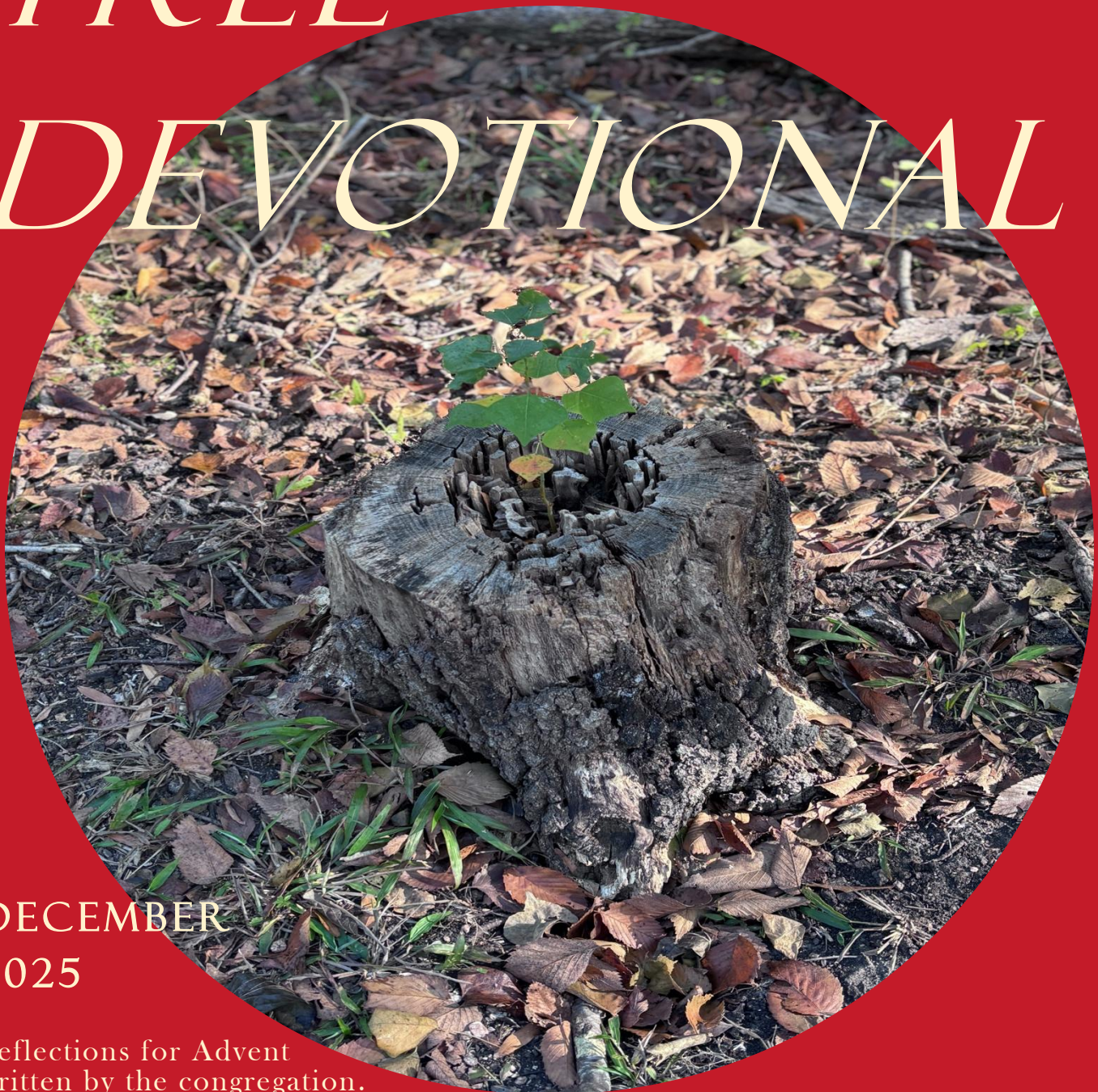


*JESSE
TREE
DEVOTIONAL*



DECEMBER
2025

Reflections for Advent
written by the congregation.

**“I KNOW NOTHING OF TOMORROW, EXCEPT THE LOVE OF GOD
WILL RISE BEFORE THE SUN. THE LOVE OF GOD WILL RISE
BEFORE THE SUN.”***

Happy Advent Everyone,

A Jesse Tree Devotional is an ancient tradition to prepare one’s heart for Christmas. A series of Bible stories are selected from creation to Jesus’ birth to showcase God’s great plan to save His people. By reflecting on these stories one can see a faithful God who is always working for the good of the people He loves so dearly.

Each year Asbury puts together its own Jesse Tree Devotional. And I am so excited for this year’s Jesse Tree. With Pastor Gregg’s arrival, it seemed change would be an appropriate theme for our devotional. And since the theme is change, I decided to make a change to the devotional itself. This year people have shared stories of times when they have experienced God. And more often than not, the experience involved a change in their lives.

You will find a reflection for each beginning with the first Sunday of Advent through Christmas Day. In addition to the writings by the members of Asbury there are a number of devotionals that include a song to reflect upon. There are also ornaments for each day. May this collection bring more meaning to the season of waiting for a Savior.

Merry Christmas,

Jaye Lynne

November 30 – The First Sunday of Advent

But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

Mark 13:24-27

For many years, people have been talking about the end times. The disciples thought Jesus would return in their lifetime, and when it didn't happen, then the followers of Jesus had to adjust their faith to the waiting. We are still waiting. Signs are everywhere, some say.

The signs I see are of a broken world that needs healing, of hurting people that need love and compassion. We have the power, given to us by God, to make our little part of the world a better place. Whether these are indeed the end times, or there are millennia to go, loving God and our neighbor is our privilege and responsibility.

-Rev. Tiffany McDonald, UMC Advent Devotional*

Dear God, give me a heart full of love for all your children. Amen.

December 1st – Jesse Tree Origin

A shoot will grow up from the stump of Jesse; a branch will sprout from his roots. On that day, the root of Jesse will stand as a signal to the peoples. The nations will seek him out, and his dwelling will be glorious. Isaiah 11:1&10

“Lo How A Rose E'er Blooming” from the 15th century German, translated by Theodore Baker¹
youtu.be/ZD2yjo9DM3g?si=bx9Wc6wsk9sbXhGe

Isaiah's prophesy concerning the “rose” from the “stem of Jesse” later in Isaiah chapters 11 and 35, [begins in] Isaiah 7 with the incarnation prophecy. Using the blooming of a rose to represent the coming of Christ, the imagery is stunningly profound.

For centuries before [this] song appeared the rose had been used as a symbol for Christ, and sometimes for Mary ... Emphasizing the humanity of Christ through His mother, Mary, is contrasted with His deity, as Savior and King of Glory.

We all love the extraordinary beauty of the rose and the lovely fragrance it offers as well. It cheers even a winter table. The flower is therefore a fitting picture of the multiple levels of magnificent beauty revealed in our Savior. This Christmas allow His ever-blooming beauty and bouquet to fill your home, for His glory.

-Professor Lynne Marie Kohm

Dear God, you have such great plans for us. Please help us to wait patiently, trusting in your timing. Amen.

December 2nd - Creation

*Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him."
He formed a woman out of the rib and brought her to him.
Genesis 2:18&22*

During a Big House mission trip, I was witness to an example of God-driven change. My work group was assigned to work at an organization called Sleep in Heavenly Peace. Sleep in Heavenly Peace is a partly international (Canada and the United States of America) organization that builds beds for kids that do not have them. In fact, there is even a Sleep in Heavenly Peace in Houston, TX. The organization is very efficient and enlists volunteers from a variety of sources. The volunteers don't have to bring any tools and there are clear jobs for them to do. Also, all the drilling required has guides. The beds are also efficient, only needing one tool, four screws, a sheet set, and a vacuum sealed mattress.

Anyway, while I was helping at Sleep in Heavenly Peace, I was sent to help assemble a bed in a house. It was very obvious that this was an un-air-conditioned house. Furthermore, there were flies in a window and no bed at all. After we put the bed together and put on the sheets, I could tell the kids were super excited because the first kid leaped onto his bed. Moreover, the second kid covered her eyes, grabbed her mother's hand and had her mother lead her to the second bed for a full reveal. I could tell that this change was incredibly positive to these children. Those beds were probably the first time in a long time those children had beds.

Additionally, since there was so much rain in Beaumont, TX while Big House was happening, the work groups prioritized indoor projects. We still got everything done, but for the first two days Big House focused on Sleep in Heavenly Peace and another project. This meant that Big House made at least 100 beds for Sleep in Heavenly Peace, bringing even more change to the Beaumont community.

-Alan Rooney

Dear God, often we don't even realize how much joy the help of others can bring us. Thank you for opportunities to lend a hand and to accept the kindness of others. Amen.

December 3rd – Adam & Eve

*"God knows that when you eat fruit from that tree, you will know things you have never known before. Like God, you will be able to tell the difference between good and evil."
Genesis 3:5*

"O Holy Night" by Placide Cappeau, translated by John Sullivan Dwight¹

www.youtube.com/watch?v=NU2TlwcH3h4&list=RDNU2TlwcH3h4&start_radio=1

On Christmas Eve of 1871, in the midst of the Franco-Prussian war, an unarmed French soldier stood up from his tawdry trench and began to sing the lines of a popular hymn. And so a Christmas ceasefire began, the horrors of war stilled at least for a moment, by soldiers' attention turned to Christ and a holy night warmed by worship.

From its unlikely composition by a Jesuit-educated leftist, French wine merchant to its use as an abolitionist anthem, Midnight Christians or O Holy Night, tells the story of Christ the Redeemer. Born to rescue all humankind

from the penalty and power of sin, Christ the Savior comes to a world mired in sin, brokenness and betrayal.

Are you yearning for a Savior? Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, the guarantee that ransoms us from death and sets the captive free. His coming calls forth the “thrill of hope” and glorious rejoicing. Jesus brings the end of oppression, an “eternal inheritance”, and the tangible experience of God’s love and peace.

-Dave Chaves, CS Lewis Institute

Dear God, forgive us for the times we think we know what’s best. May we always lean on your wisdom instead of our own. Amen.

December 4th – God Speaks to Noah

Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.
Genesis 6:14&22

Noah was living an ordinary life, until God told him to build a boat...a big boat...an ARK to hold two of every creature on earth. Life can be very ordinary one day and then everything can change.

One day I felt great, the next day, everything turned upside down. A pain in the stomach led to a hospital visit and a doctor telling us that I had a large tumor in my stomach. After more tests, it was confirmed that the tumor was gastric cancer. When I first heard the word tumor, I turned to God and told Him He was in control of this and asked Him for courage, guidance and strength. I felt His peace fill me and I knew He would lead me down the right path. Within a week, I had several appointments at M D Anderson. Chemotherapy was started less than two weeks after my diagnosis. In conversations with my oncologist, chemo was our only option. After 12 rounds of chemo and immunotherapy, two hospital stays due to adverse reactions to one of the chemos, four changes in the type of chemo I was given, finding out I was allergic to the contrast given during my CT scans, I still felt that peace from God. I wasn’t scared or afraid. I know God was taking care of me.

A recent visit to the oncologist after a CT scan showed that the tumor had grown more and that another, more aggressive chemo would start immediately. The Physician Assistant went over the side effects, and I signed consent for the new medication. Our oncologist came in next and turned things upside down again...surgery would now be possible, and she had been talking with the surgeon. An appointment was set, and we met the chief gastric intestinal oncology surgeon at MD Anderson. This man knew my case and spoke with us like we had known him for years! I felt God’s peace and I know he led us to this surgeon. I know the surgery is a big surgery, but I know that God is bigger and will hold me in His arms.

-Susan Palmer

Dear God, so often the changes come when we least expect it. Thank you for being with us through all we face in this life. Amen.

December 5th – Covenant with Abram (later Abraham)

The Lord said to Abram, “Leave your land, your family, and your father’s household for the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation and will bless you. I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing.”
Genesis 12:1&2

“Away In a Manger” by William Kirkpatrick¹

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ur23HOjzfRg&list=RDUr23HOjzfRg&start_radio=1

Perhaps the most astonishing aspect of the Christmas story is the juxtaposition of the supernatural and the mundane. The One who crafted the stars with His fingers [“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers” - Psalm 8:3] has His tiny hand wrapped around His mother’s finger. The Almighty became an infant. The God wrapped in splendor needs to be wrapped in swaddling cloths. It’s unfathomable.

We are called to notice the divine humility so that we might humble ourselves [“And being found in appearance as a man, Christ humbled himself” - Phil. 2:8a]. Thus, His humbling of Himself makes it possible for Him to exalt us! No wonder He called us to become like little children and follow Him.

-Randy Newman, CS Lewis Institute

Dear God, your plans are beyond our imagining. Thank you for your greatness that arrives in such simple ways. Amen.

December 6th – Abraham & The Promised Land

Abraham and Abimelech drew up a treaty. Therefore, the name of that place is Beer-sheba [well of giving one’s word] because there they gave each other their word.
Genesis 21:27b&31

I came across this story for the first time as I prepared for this year’s devotional King Abimelech and Abraham had both wronged each other in the past. This treaty was both a land agreement and an agreement to treat each other fairly going forward. The signing of the treaty allowed for the first step of God’s people into the Promised Land. However, this couldn’t happen, unless Abraham chose to trust the king.

The story made me realize that in our lives we can’t move forward unless we, too, trust an unknown future as Abraham did. As many of you know, this year my daughter left for college in Maryland. In order for me to have peace with this change I needed to trust. I must trust that Sylvia is prepared to care for herself. I must trust she’ll make good friends who will support her. And most importantly, I must trust that God is more capable than me in taking care of her.

-Jaye Lynne Rooney

Dear God, trusting in an unknown future is so very difficult. Help us to keep our eyes on you so we can let go of fear. Amen.

December 7th – Second Sunday of Advent – Jacob’s Dream

Jacob dreamed that there was a ladder resting on the earth and reaching up into heaven. And then Jacob saw the Lord standing above the ladder. The Lord said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham ... I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are now sleeping. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants.

Genesis 28:12a,13&14b

Rejoice! Christmas, Easter and Pentecost are the times we focus on rejoicing as a people of faith. However, this text reminds us to rejoice always. When we place our hope in God, we will receive the peace of God that passes all understanding.

If worrying were an Olympic sport, I would be a gold medalist. Give me a topic, and I can spend days worrying. It is not my best quality. My primary spiritual gift is intercessory prayer. Give me a topic, and I can spend days praying about it. These two contradictory parts of me actually work well together. I turn my worries into my prayers. Every time I don’t let go and give my worries to God and find myself ruminating on my worries, I go back to prayer. Thankfully, God is always ready and available to listen.

Rejoicing is easier for me when I know I have spent time with God in prayer, in quiet and stillness. Reading Scripture and other’s writings on faith, and journaling, have the same effect for me. I long for peace, and I know that for me, it only comes from God. That peace enables me to rejoice wholeheartedly, knowing that God is the same yesterday and today, and will be tomorrow.

-Rev. Tiffany McDonald, UMC Advent Devotional*

Dear God, you are unchanging God, give me a joyful mouth to sing your praise. Amen.

December 8th – Joseph & His Brothers

Now as it happened, Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other children, because Joseph was born to him in his old age. So, one day Jacob gave him a special gift – a brightly colored coat. His brothers of course noticed their father’s partiality and consequently hated Joseph; they couldn’t say a kind word to him.

Genesis 37:3&4

“The 12 Days of Christmas” first included in the children’s book “Mirth With-out Mischief”¹

www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMV04cziBh8&list=RDyMV04cziBh8&start_radio=1

The exact origins of this song are unknown, but it materialized out of England in the late 1700’s. The twelve days of Christmas is the period of time from Christmas day to January 5, otherwise known as Christmastide, or Twelvetide. There is a tradition that the carol was used as a secret code to help believers remember key tenets of the faith during days of persecution in England. Whether this is true or not, the song can be a way to remember key truths:

My true love: God Me: Christian
A partridge in a pear tree: Jesus Christ, God's Son
Two turtle doves: the Old and New Testaments
Three French hens: Faith, Hope and Love
Four calling birds: the four Gospels
Five golden rings: the first five books of the Old Testament
Six geese a-laying: the six days of creation
Seven swans a-swimming: the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:6-8)

Eight maids a-milking: the eight beatitudes
Nine ladies dancing: the nine Fruits of the Holy Spirit.
Ten lords a-leaping: the Ten Commandments
Eleven pipers piping: the eleven apostles who remain faithful
Twelve drummers drumming: the Apostle's Creed (12 points of doctrine).

- Joseph A. Kohm, CS Lewis Institute

Dear God, the attitudes and actions of other can change our lives and leave us feeling out of control. Please help us to trust that you continue to work for our good as you did for Joseph. Amen.

December 9th – Moses & The Commandments

Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel ... Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.
Exodus 19:3,5a

When Pastor Gregg asked me to lead the Shepherd Group, I was hesitant to take on the responsibility. Thinking of the talent and commitment needed, I was not sure I was capable of the responsibility. Then I read this verse in my devotion:

"We are not saying that we can do this work ourselves. It is God who makes us able to do all that we do." (1Cor. 3:5)

I felt God led me to these verses to give me the assurance that He will be with me. With His guidance is help. He has equipped me with what I need.

Sometimes God leads us to the answer we need - we just need to be open to His word. During this Advent season may we take time to listen for God's words and respond to His "nudges".

-Linda Alsobrook

Dear God, help us to let go of what is comfortable to embrace the plans you have for us. Amen.

December 10th – The Promised Land

When Moses sent them out to explore the land of Canaan, he said to them, "Go up there into the arid southern

*plain and into the mountains. You must inspect the land. What is it like? Are the people who live in it strong or weak, few or many?
Numbers 13:17&18*

“Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus” by John Wesley²

www.youtube.com/watch?v=5lwtbnU-1Tw&list=RD5lwtbnU-1Tw&start_radio=1

As we sing Wesley’s words, we enter into an ancient prayer. For hundreds of years, our ancestors in the faith prayed for the Messiah to come. God had blessed them to be a blessing to all the nations (Genesis 12:1-3), but it was difficult to feel blessed in the pain of defeat, exile, and occupation. They longed for the Messiah to come and reestablish the kingdom.

We understand those feelings of distance from God. While we have experienced times when God feels near, there are others seasons of struggle and doubt. Some of us have spent time wondering if God is still with us. So, we join this prayer today, “Come, thou long-expected Jesus.”

We also know this on a much larger scale. We see the brokenness of our world and its systems. We long for justice for all people regardless of race, color, national origin, ethnicity, age, gender, disability, status, economic condition, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religious affiliation. We await the day when Jesus will return to usher in the new creation and heal our broken world. We join this prayer for our future also, “Come, thou long-expected Jesus.”

-Joe Iovino, UM Communications

Dear God, sometimes we get a glimpse of what you have in store, but we must wait on your timing. You know how difficult that is for us, so please help us as we struggle to be patient. Amen.

December 11th – The Fall of Jericho

*The Lord said to Joshua, “Look. I have given Jericho and its king into your power, along with its mighty warriors. Have seven priests carry seven trumpets made from rams’ horns in front of the chest. On the seventh day, circle the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets.
Joshua 6:2&4*

Going through my Gallbladder removal surgery was a reminder of how widespread God’s plans are for us. Working at the hospital, I get to know how many people are involved in making it possible. From the people who designed the building, to the people who test the medicine, to the people who clean up the rooms after they are done. There is a never-ending list of people that God created and made sure were in the right place at the right time to play their part. This happens over and over again throughout history and across the globe.

God made sure that there were people to help us with kids, to help us with meals, and to give us the mental support we needed. It is a reminder to me that trusting in God means trusting the people that God is sending to help us as well. These blessings are woven together so intricately, yet feel so natural that we become accustomed to them if we zone out. I find it important to take the time to step back and witness all the blessings and people that

make it possible for us.

-David Lieberman

Dear God, may we trust that you go before us to show us the way. Amen.

December 12th – Gideon Leads an Army

Then the Lord said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men who lapped I will rescue you and hand over the Midianites to you. Let everyone else go home." So, the three units blew their trumpets and broke their jars, holding the torches with their left hands and blowing the trumpets in their right hands. And they called out, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!"
Judges 7:7&20

"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" by John Wesley, edited by George Whitefield²
www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIKBtE-vQg4&list=RDYIKBtE-vQg4&start_radio=1

When Wesley originally published "Hymn for Christmas Day" in 1739 as part of a collection called Hymns and Sacred Poems, the opening lines were different.

Hark how all the welkin rings, "Glory to the King of kings."

This may have you wondering, what in the world is a welkin? Welkin is an archaic word used to describe the dome people believed separated heaven and earth.

Charles was trying to convey something theological with his word choice. The announcement of the birth of Jesus, God-in-the-flesh, is an event worthy of welkin ringing.

United Methodist Wesley Scholar the Rev. Paul Chilcote explains, "The birth of Jesus in human history ... leads all of heaven to celebrate in song."

In addition to celebrating with those closest to us at this time of year, we should also pause to remember how this blessed event is for the benefit of the whole world. We are called to share the good news with everyone.

-Joe Iovino, UM Communications

Dear God, to you we praise and say, "Glory," now and forevermore. You are a mighty God working miracles. Amen.

December 13th – Ruth & Naomi

Boaz responded to Ruth, "Everything that you did for your mother-in-law after your husband's death has been reported fully to me: how you left behind your father, your mother, and the land of your birth, and came to a people you hadn't known beforehand. May the Lord reward you for your deed. May you receive a rich reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you've come to seek refuge."
Ruth 2:11&12

I must admit I have never moved across the world to live in a new country or a new land, as Ruth did. But, in the summer of 1998 I moved across the country to a new state. I packed all of my belongings and departed on a new adventure that landed me in Houston, TX. I left Boone, Iowa, where my mom lived, to move to Houston, TX. I originally grew up in a small town in Iowa called Clear Lake. I did my student teaching in San Antonio and decided to make Texas my home. The plan at the time was to work here a few years and then decide if I wanted to go back to Iowa, stay here or move somewhere else. So 27 years later I am still here and I call Texas home and I absolutely love it here. I would not trade it for the world. I remember talking to my aunt one day and she said, “I do not know how you did it, I don’t think I could ever leave Texas and move somewhere else you are so brave.”

Looking back at my first few years here I would not have survived without my faith in God and friends that I met my first month moving here. On my first day at my new school, I ran into a young lady named Stephanie who would become an important part of my life. Her friendship, her family and her faith in God would become a cornerstone for me. Our lives have been intertwined since the day we met. We have celebrated marriages, graduations, births of babies, were in service to God together, attended the same church, and overcame cancer together - my cancer and her mom’s cancer. We have done it all but at the heart of our friendship is God. I believe my story is similar to Ruth’s and Naomi’s. They had a relationship that was driven by faith and trust in God. God was leading Ruth and Naomi by the hand and they were following God’s plan. I believe to this day that God handpicked Stephanie and her family to be there for me when I needed a friend and a family to be part of. Also, Stephanie introduced me to my husband and my Texas family.

I hope that during this holiday season you will find the time to spend with your friends and family and rejoice in the faith and love that only God our father can provide.

-Suzanne Morgan

Lord, thank you for the gift of friendship. I am thankful for the people you have placed in my life who have encouraged me and walked alongside me over the years. May I cherish these friendships and praise you for the blessings each of them are in my life. Amen.

December 14th – 3rd Sunday of Advent - Hannah’s Prayer

Peninnah would upset Hannah and make her feel bad. She did this because the Lord had made Hannah unable to have children. This happened every year when they went up to the Tent of the Lord at Shiloh. Hannah was very sad. She cried much and prayed to the Lord. She made a promise. She said, “Lord of heaven’s armies, see how bad I feel. Remember me! Don’t forget me. If you will give me a son, I will give him back to you all his life [as a Nazarite].

1 Samuel 1:6,7a&10-11

In 1 Samuel 1:7-10, Hannah stands at the threshold of change. Year after year Peninnah (Elkanah’s other wife) teased and tormented Hannah about her inability to bear children, and this caused Hannah great emotional distress. Year after year she wept and prayed, longing for what seemed impossible. In her sorrow, God was quietly working transformation, preparing her to receive new life in a way she could never have imagined. In her suffering and crying out to God in prayer, something holy began to stir. And if we continue to read 1 Samuel 1 & 2, we see that God

answered Hannah's prayer with the birth of Samuel, and Hannah followed through on returning Samuel to the Lord.

This Advent, I find myself walking a path of change. My grandmother, who lived 102 remarkable years and raised me with love and grace, has gone home to God. The last 10 years especially shaped the rhythm of my days as I cared for her. Her passing has created sadness, emptiness, as well as gratitude in my heart. I meet God in prayer with empty hands, trusting he will fill them again. Like Hannah, my grief is not wasted. It is a space where prayer meets surrender, and where God's love and promises continue to grow and transform.

Because at the same time, God is whispering renewal. Life and loss now coexist in sacred tension as one chapter closes and another begins as I await the birth of my first grandchild in January. Life rises where tears have fallen. My grandmother's passing reminds me that love never truly departs, it just changes form. My grief has led me to a deeper trust and a reverence for the mystery of God's timing.

As I look back at different seasons in my life, I can't help but notice movements of emptiness to expectancy, from mourning to wonderful hope, and vice versa. And like Hannah, I'm continuing to learn that God's promises often take root in these seasons. Advent reminds me that waiting is holy, and transformation is born through both tears and trust. Out of barrenness, God brings life. Out of grief, He brings grace anew.

Advent invites us to wait, not for what was, but for what is coming, and to believe that God is still creating even in the midst of grief and joy. Just as Hannah's mourning turned into beautiful song, I have to trust that this season of grief will give birth to gratitude, hope, and an even deeper faith. Where is God inviting you to find hope in the midst of change this Advent season?

-Paula Zikogiannis

Dear Heavenly Father, you are the God of new beginnings. Thank you for meeting us where we are in our waiting. Transform our tears into trust and our grief into hope. Just as you brought life from Hannah's longing, bring new life and hopeful transformation into the places where we wait for You. Amen.

December 15th – David Learns of Goliath

Jesse said to his son David, "Please take your brothers an epha of this roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread. Deliver them quickly to your brothers in the camp. David left his things with an attendant and ran to the front line. When he arrived, he asked how his brothers were doing.
1 Samuel 17:17&22

"I Wonder as I Wander" by John Jacob Niles¹
www.youtube.com/watch?v=CFv-QITCQ3Y

God did not send Jesus into the world primarily to be a great teacher, a great prophet, or a great religious leader. He sent Jesus to fulfill the greatest mission in all of history to rescue His people from their sins by paying their debt for sin, reconciling them to Himself, giving them new birth and the power to live a new life. What a mystery it is.

Through Jesus there is a way out of our hopeless enslavement to sin ... This is the gospel, the best news any human being could ever hear. And it is too good to keep to ourselves. As we think about the coming of Jesus, let us rejoice and thank God for His grace and love and be faithful stewards of the gospel message!

-Thomas A. Tarrants, author

Dear God, some days will begin in such an ordinary fashion but bring about great changes in our lives. We truly don't know what each day will bring. Please help us to be faithful on ordinary days and extraordinary days. Amen.

December 16th – Prince of Peace Prophecy

The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; the calf and the young lion will feed together, and a little child will lead them.
Isaiah 11:6

As a very young child, and all the way to my late teens, I saw God often, or more accurately I felt Him and believed in Him. It wasn't through bible stories, church services or family prayers. I had none of those. It happened as I entered mostly empty chapels and churches, saw people light candles, kneel down and pour their hearts into silent faith filled petitions. I felt Him and believed in Him every time a family member would say "God be with you" as a blessing before leaving the house. I remembered Him, saw Him, in the people around me wearing crosses around their necks. I saw Him by believing in Him. It was grace, still is, amen.

-Rose Huss

Thank you, LORD for the priceless gift of believing in You, amen.

December 17th – King Josiah

Then the king went up to the Lord's temple, together with all the people of Judah and all the citizens of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets, and all the people, young and old alike. There the king read out loud all the words of the covenant scroll that had been found in the Lord's temple. The king stood beside the pillar and made a covenant with the Lord that he would follow the Lord by keeping his commandments...
2 Kings 23:2,3a

"I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow¹

www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJQ2ajszyhU&list=RDXJQ2ajszyhU&start_radio=1

The American Civil War was raging, a war in which more Americans would die than all other American wars combined. As well, Longfellow himself mourned the tragic death of his wife two years earlier in a house fire and the fact that his son had recently been severely wounded in battle. Where was the "peace" proclaimed by the angels of Bethlehem?

But God entered into Longfellow's despair as he heard the ringing of the church bells on Christmas Day and was reminded of the message of hope that comes from the Prince of Peace. It was Jesus Christ the realist who stated,

“In this world you will have trouble,” yet who also proclaimed, “But take heart; I have overcome the world!” and “in Me you will have peace.” (John 16:33).

-Joel Woodruff, CS Lewis Institute

Dear God, thank you for helping us to always find our way back to you. Sometimes the circumstances of life leave us feeling so lost. Please provide comfort for our souls until we can again find rest in you. Amen.

December 18th – Mighty God Prophecy

As for you, Bethlehem of Ephrathah, though you are the least significant of Judah's forces, one who is to be a ruler in Israel on my behalf will come out from you. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
Micah 5:2a&4a

To many of us, miracles are answers to prayers or interventions to solve or correct dire situations in our lives. I agree that most miracles we hear about are God's answer to dire situations. However, I believe that miracles happen often in many people's lives. I have experienced miracles in my life that were unexpected messages from God during a time of stress and while I wondered if God was still caring for me and hearing my prayers.

The first miracle I experienced and recognized happened after my brother passed away at the age of 21. I prayed that God would send a miracle and allow him to live. I will admit that I was angry and disappointed when this miracle didn't happen. However, as a year or two passed, I realized that many miracles occurred after his death. Frank was given many new and experimental treatments and the results from these helped cure patients over the years. I believe this was a quiet miracle.

As the years have passed, I have come to realize that if we go to God in prayer and listen to his response to these prayers, we will find small miracles in our lives. They may not happen every day. But they will happen when we need them and the answer in the miracle is what we need to listen to this message from God.

-Jewel Morgan

Dear God, thank you for always listening to our prayers. You are a God of miracles even when we don't recognize it at first.

December 19th – Good Shepherd Prophecy

The Lord God proclaims: I myself will search for my flock and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out the flock when some in the flock have been scattered, so will I seek out my flock. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered during the time of clouds and thick darkness.
Ezekiel 34:11&12

The proof is in the pudding. Meaning that just looking at nature. The beauty of the creation is evident in a garden. Recognizing Jesus Christ in the garden can be challenged because of the way that the Bible is written from the Old Testament to the New Testament. However, the way you can recognize Jesus Christ in the garden, can be

thinking about and connecting these thoughts. Remember the cross and the sacrifice given. Now, as Christians living in 2025 we can remember the redemption. How beautiful is redemption? Like a garden we remember the beauty of redemption. That's an example of God's love in every-day life.

-Alyson Casto

Dear God, you are real and visible throughout your creation if we only take time to look. Thank you for your beauty in this world. Amen.

December 20th – Birth of John the Baptist

The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah. Your prayers have been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will give birth to your son and you must name him John. Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure of this? My wife and I are very old." The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in God's presence. I was sent to speak to you and to bring this good news to you."

Luke 1:13&18-19

Wisteria is a plant that takes its time to bloom. It stretches, waits, clings, and grows slowly—yet when the blossoms finally open, they spill beauty everywhere. Wisteria also needs support; it cannot flourish alone. It is a vine designed for connection.

I often think about this when I look at the nonprofit I founded, *The Wisteria Project*, a community for young adults with disabilities. After twenty-five years as a speech pathologist, I've had the privilege of walking alongside many incredible families. But I also came to see a painful truth: as children with disabilities grow older, the resources available to them shrink. Opportunities become fewer. Their world, in many ways, becomes smaller.

So, God put it on my heart to create a place where their world could expand again—a place of belonging, safety, and acceptance. I wanted to build a community where young adults could take the time they needed to bloom into the beautiful creations God already knew they were. My hope was to cultivate meaningful work, raise awareness, and nurture purpose.

Yet as often happens with God, His assignment for me became His provision for me. In serving others, He quietly began shaping my own heart. Through The Wisteria Project, I get to witness God's grace in motion: I see young adults living fully in the moment, noticing the small joys many of us rush past. I watch them show up with determination, tackling every task with dignity and pride. I see a young man with no words offer a hand of kindness that speaks louder than a sermon. I hear the music of a soft-spoken young woman whose talent pours out like worship. I celebrate the pure delight found in something as simple as a birthday. I stand beside parents who watch their child make a friend—sometimes for the very first time.

These moments whisper what Scripture tells us again and again: God often shows up in the small things. He is present in community. He is alive in purpose. He dwells in togetherness. When we step out in faith to help others, we learn to trust God with everything we have—and often He uses the very people we hope to bless to teach us what truly matters.

These young adults have become mirrors reflecting divine love back to me. They teach resilience, joy, faith, and the beauty of spiritual growth lived out in real time.

My prayer each day is simple: that I might show up for them with the same wholehearted grace that they show me. Because community ... purpose ... working together ... Maybe that's what it's all about.

-Michelle White

Dear God, we pray as the Scripture says "... let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds...encouraging one another." Amen. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

December 21st – 4th Sunday of Advent - Zechariah's Prophecy (The Benedictus)

*John's father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, "Bless the Lord God of Israel because he has come to help and has delivered his people. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in his servant David's house, You, John, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way."
Luke 1:67-69&76*

The Song of Zechariah is called "The Benedictus" because in Latin it means blessed, and the song begins "Blessed be the Lord God." The Angel Gabriel visits the priest Zechariah to tell him about his son, who will be John the Baptist. Because Zechariah questions how it could be, given his and Elizabeth's age, the angel makes him mute. When John is circumcised and Elizabeth names him John, Zechariah concurs by writing on a tablet. Immediately, his voice is restored, and he gives these words of praise, thanksgiving, and prophecy.

Have you ever lost your voice? Either due to a physical ailment like a cold or laryngitis? Or maybe you lost your voice due to oppression. Maybe you were silenced because of a "non-disclosure agreement." When your voice was restored, did you immediately praise God and give thanks?

I have rarely physically lost my voice, but I have felt silenced and turned to God for help. I hope that when voices are restored, they are used to praise God and give thanks. It would be tempting to use restored voices to "set the record straight" or condemn those who silenced us instead.

Peace comes from knowing that you are doing what God has called you to do. Being who God has called you to be, despite what is going on around you. You may feel wronged, but with God's help you can focus on what is right and good and not on all the hurt.

-Rev. Tiffany McDonald, UMC Advent Devotional*

Dear God, give me a heart full of love for all your children. Amen.

December 22nd – An Angel Appears to Mary

*[The Angel Said,] "Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you! Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father."
Luke 1:28, 31&32*

“Go Tell It On The Mountain” by John Wesley Work Jr.¹

www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8ntOhjiPaw&list=RDp8ntOhjiPaw&start_radio=1

A great gulf exists between the wonder of hearing the Christmas story and the challenge of proclaiming it. On one level our hesitancy makes no sense. God has come to earth – not only to reveal Himself clearly to us but to powerfully save us from our sins! Joy to the world! So, what stops us for telling it on the mountain and everywhere?

On another level it makes perfect sense for us to expect resistance, rejection, and outright hatred. Jesus promised that we’d face these kinds of responses – and worse!

That’s because the gospel message is both good news and bad news. While the message about Jesus promises forgiveness, grace, and eternal life, it also requires repentance, humility, and “dying to self.”

So, yes, go tell it on the mountains, over the hills and everywhere. Because, for some people—perhaps many—the response will be “When I was a sinner, I prayed both night and day, I asked the Lord to help me and He showed me the way.”

-Randy Newman, CS Lewis Institute

Dear God, may we boldly share the Good New of your son, Jesus, not just at Christmas but every day of the year. Amen.

December 23rd – An Angel Appears to Joseph

As Joseph was thinking about [divorcing Mary], an angel from the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

Matthew 1:20&21

A couple of years ago Pastor Lindsay asked a few of the members to form the Land Use Team. This team was to be a think tank to develop the property that our church sits on, to become a building or a group of buildings that would serve our community. The buildings could house medical assistance, legal teams, a food pantry, foster care assistance, and everything else that would benefit the people in our community.

Our next hurdle was coming up with financing for this project! Well, we didn't have to wait too long because God had a different plan. Our conference called and asked if we wanted another church with five acres!! What a blessing!

As the Land Use Team started working on what we could do with this property, God brought us the perfect partners that wanted to move into this facility and help us bring our dream to reality.

Oasis Community Network was born from a group that had a desire to serve our community. God continues to bless us and those that we get to serve.

-Chess Miles, OCN Board of Directors

Dear God, we know change is a part of your plans. And sometimes it takes us completely by surprise. Please help us to be listening for you every day. Amen.

December 24th – Mary's Song (The Magnificat)

*And Mary said, "He embraced his chosen child, Israel; he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high. It's exactly what he promised, beginning with Abraham and right up to now."
Luke 1:54&55*

For those of you who don't know me, I adopted my son Juan and daughter Jamie 21 years ago. This was essentially their first Christmas as they came from an abusive, neglectful home in a 3rd world country. They had never had toys, a Christmas tree or all the foods that accompany a holiday season.

The first Christmas, the rest of my family was preparing to go to Santa Fe to start the celebration, except for us, as I insisted we were going to Christmas Eve service first. Juan complained nonstop about his cousin, aunts/uncles and grandparents getting to go start the celebrations, but "we have to go to church".

As we walked into the church, Susan Palmer came over and said, "Oh, I am so glad you are here, we need Juan to play one of the kings and Jamie for an angel." I had to interpret to Juan, who shyly hid behind me and stated, "But I don't speak English." Susan quickly said he didn't need to speak, only dress in costume, come in and present the gift to baby Jesus.

The Christmas program went as planned, with Jamie as an angel and Juan as a king. Someone in the congregation recorded it and afterwards, at our family's house, Juan went around showing the video stating how he was a king and then trying to share the Christmas story/nativity with his cousins. And afterwards he never complained about coming to church again.

-Glenna Tolley

Dear God, our hearts are filled with joy as we prepare to celebrate the birth of your son. Amen.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem; the star stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:1&10-11

Unknown Roads

A friend recently shared a line from *The Soul of a Pilgrim* that's been resonating in me: "To get to an unknown land by unknown roads, a traveler cannot allow herself to be guided by old experience. She has to doubt and seek the guidance of others. There is no way she can reach the new territory and know it truly unless she abandons familiar roads."

In other words, when life shifts, we do too. We learn to trust in new ways.

This year has been one of those seasons for Asbury – and for me. A long-time pastor stepped into a new chapter, and you welcomed a new one ... who, by the way, showed up in an RV.

And right in the middle of it, I've experienced God through you. Your kindness, generosity, and steady encouragement have been soaked with love. I suppose it's always been true for me – God's grace seems to rub off on me through the people who live it. If you've ever wondered how God shows up in times of change – look around. Look at the community that keeps showing up for each other. There's your evidence.

And all that brings me right to Christmas.

Because if the birth of Jesus is anything, it's holy disruption. And that means change. God arrives in an unexpected place, at an unexpected time, through unexpected people. A young couple far from home. Shepherds rubbing sleep from their eyes. A tiny heartbeat in a manger. Every one of them stepping into new territory, abandoning familiar roads.

Maybe the invitation of Christmas is simply this: to trust that God meets us in every change—not after things settle down, but right in the middle of it. And often—maybe even especially—through one another.

Much love and Merry Christmas, my friends,

Pastor Gregg

Footnotes:

- * United Methodist Church "Daily Advent devotions: Hope, Peace, Joy and Love", by the Rev. Tiffany McDonald, <https://www.umc.org/en/content/daily-advent-devotions-hope-peace-joy-and-love>
- 1. "Christmas Carols - A Digital Advent Calendar" from the C.S. Lewis Institute - To read the devotions in full visit www.cslewisinstitute.org/christmas-carols/. Each devotion also has a piece of art to accompany it.
- 2. "Wesley Hymn Devotions for Advent & Christmas - 'Glory to the newborn King!' and 'Born to set thy people free'" by Joe Iovino, UM Communications - To read the devotions in full visit www.umc.org/en/content/wesley-hymn-devotions-for-advent-and-christmas. The devotions feature an instrumental version of the hymn to download for free.