



JESUS

Son of David

*Son of Abraham*

*The Word* GOD WITH US

*God's Beloved* Son of Man

Emmanuel Savior Horn of Salvation

*The Word* Lamb of God

True Vine REDEEMER *All in All*

**Keeper** Holy One Lord of All

RESURRECTION & LIFE Deliverer

Mediator *Righteous Judge*

*Messiah* Bread of Life GOOD SHEPHERD

**Bright Morning Star** *Alpha & Omega*

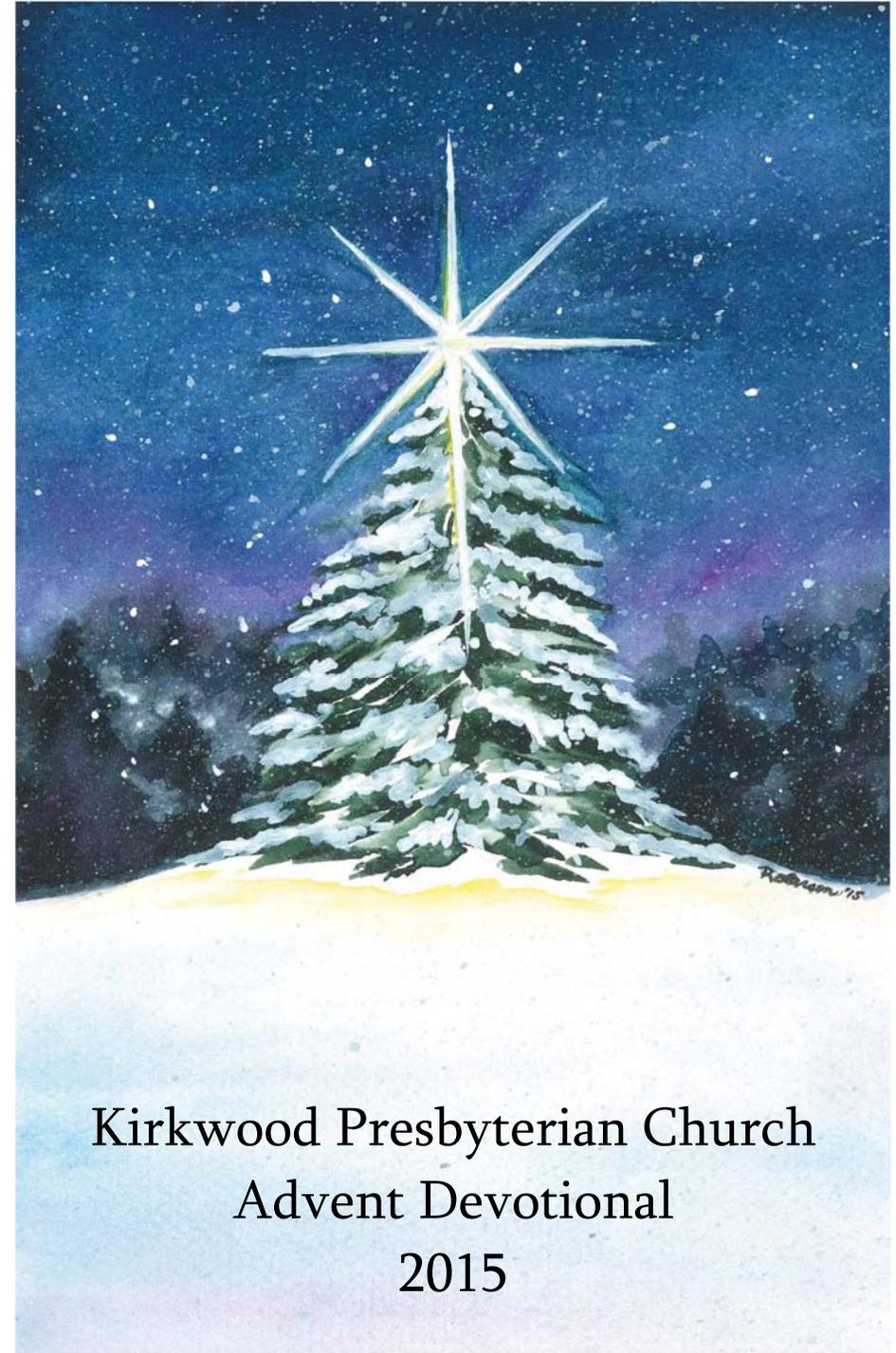
GREAT HIGH PRIEST Author & Finisher of Our Faith

**First & Last** BEGINNING & END **Faithful & True**

Soon

Coming

King



Kirkwood Presbyterian Church  
Advent Devotional  
2015



*(Continued from page 37)*

All these years later, before I finally lay my head down on Christmas Eve, I go outside and gaze at the heavens for “that Star,” and every year I see it. It rests above my children sleeping, the weary world yearning, the potentates and the poor, the hamlets and the Harlems of silly people wise enough to know a new King has been born and that but a few hours remain this Twelfth Night to fall down and worship him. Of, course I’ve got it all wrong, you know. One should never look for “that Star” on Christmas Eve. Silly me!

**PRAYER**

Give us the wisdom, Good Lord, to be foolish enough this last night of Christmastide to come adore on bended knee, Christ the Lord the new born King. Amen.

Pastor Larry Lees (2008)



**The cover art was created for the Advent Devotional by Kirkwood’s very own Rebecca Larson.**



Tuesday, January 5, 2016

**Twelfth Night (Eve of the Feast of Epiphany)**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

Matthew 2:10

*“When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him.”*

### **MEDITATION**

As you read this it is the last day of the twelve days of Christmas. This devotional is written for “Twelfth Night.” It is the Eve of the Feast of Epiphany, the day on which the church celebrates the arrival of the Magi to worship the new born King. In many of our crèches, these traditional “Three Kings” have been there since Christmas Eve, a bit early according to the earliest Christian tradition; so, true with the Star of Bethlehem.

Ever since I can remember, I have always looked for “that star” at Christmastime. While many of my childhood friends were putting out cookies and milk for Santa on Christmas Eve, I would be a “stargazer” searching the heavens for “that star.” My friends thought I was silly. But for me, the belief in Santa was fading. I needed some reassurance that Christmas was real, that this Jesus who had been born was real.

These Magi, who were supposed to be “wise,” seem rather silly—foolish too. Who in their right mind would leave everything behind and face the hardship of the desert to follow some star with only some faint portent that a new King was worthy of that long, arduous journey, and their worship. That Star finally rested over Bethlehem, we are told by Matthew; the Magi rejoiced exceedingly with great joy! The King was real! Gifts were given, worship was offered. The Wise were overcome with a silly giddiness. Perhaps when they returned home, no one would believe them. Perhaps it didn’t matter.

*(Continued on page 38)*



**Friday, December 25, 2015**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

Isaiah 9:6

*“For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

## MEDITATION

### **An Idea Wrapped Up in a Person**

In 1971, I met Bruno Zaharean, a graphic artist who had immigrated to the U.S from Romania. He did design work for some publications I was doing at the time. I didn't know him well, but the Christmas card he sent to me that year is one that Ardyss and I have kept and treasured ever since. Each Advent season we take it out and read it again. Bruno didn't send a card with a preprinted verse; instead he wrote these profound words of his own:

“A scientist said, making a plea for exchange scholarship between nations, ‘The best way to send an idea is to wrap it up in a person.’ That was what happened at Christmas. The idea of Divine Love was wrapped up in a person. Christmas is good news in a world of bad news. Wishing you the happiest of holidays!”

-Bruno Zaharean

## PRAYER

O Lord, thank You for the gift of Divine Love that You sent to us at Christmas, wrapped up in the person of Jesus. Help us to appreciate His love and find ways to use it throughout the year to bring His peace and goodwill to all mankind.

John Wherry (2007)

## Between Memory and Hope

An excerpt from the *Companion to the Book of Common Worship* (Geneva Press, 2003, 96)

*In Advent we expectantly wait for the One who has already come. We anticipate the promised justice of God's new world, yet we praise God who raised the “righteous branch” to rule with justice and righteousness. We hope for the restoration of the afflicted, the tormented, and the grieving, yet we delight that healing has come in Christ. We long for the beating of swords into plowshares, yet we rejoice that the Prince of Peace has appeared. We yearn for the barren deserts of our inner cities to flourish, yet we laud the desert Rose that has bloomed. We dream of the land where lions and lambs live in harmony, yet we acclaim the Child born to lead us into the promised land.*

Christ has come! Christ is risen! Christ will come again! In Advent, we are living between the first and the second coming of the Lord. The dialectical tension of *maranatha* [alternately translated “Come, our Lord!” or “Our Lord has come”] — placing us between memory and hope, past and future — may strengthen our Advent liturgies. Perhaps we need to cling to the ancient cry of *maranatha!* and its paradoxical meanings so we may freely embrace “the new thing” prophesied by Isaiah (Isaiah 43:19), that God is doing among us right now. The tension and paradox we find in Advent shapes our celebrations during the season.





**1st Sunday of Advent: November 29, 2015**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

Psalm 25:1-10, Luke 21:25-36,  
1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, Jeremiah 33:1-16

**MEDITATION**

Ebenezer Scrooge, Dickens' most well known character personifies the very definition of grumpiness. He is crabby, cranky, cross, crotchety, irritable, petulant, short-tempered, snarky, stuffy, and testy! His bad attitude separates him not only from people, but it also keeps him from God. "Bah Humbug!" is an easy sentiment to feel during the Christmas season. It is how we all can relate to Scrooge.

During the time of Advent, we often feel rushed with too much to do and too little time to do it. We easily become irritable and join the chorus of complainers because the blessings of life can be hard to find when we don't make good use of this time. In Philippians 2:14-15 Paul reminds us to "do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation." God chose just the right time to join with us in "our time," as one of us in Christ. We can choose how to use our time in Advent well, to prepare ourselves keeping Christmas and for celebrating God's gift of Jesus' redeeming love. Let's make good use of this time to gift others with generous and kind ways, gentle conversations, and uplifting spirits. Paul tells us in Ephesians to "redeem the time." And Advent is just the right time to let God redeem us, as he did Old Ebenezer, of who, it was said, "*knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge.*"

**PRAYER**

During this Advent Season, help me to be wise and to use this special time well to show your kindness and patience to those who cross my path on the journey to Christ's birth.

Advent Blessings, Pastor Larry Lees



**Thursday, December 24, 2015**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

Matthew 2:1-2, 9-10

*"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King, behold, Magi came from the East, arrived from Jerusalem, and said: 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship Him.'"*

*"And having heard the king, they went on their way; and, lo, the star which they had seen in the East, went on before them, until it came and stood where the Child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy."*

**MEDITATION**

*"Twinkle, twinkle, little star;  
How I wonder what you are!"*

Out on the prairies of my Illinois childhood, there were only limited forms of entertainment: watching corn grow was tedious at best, but lying on my back, watching the stars was a mysterious wonder every night, new and curious to a child's imagination. How brilliant was God to choose as a road marker one of these unfathomable symbols to lead the Magi—and us—to His Supreme Gift, His Son, Jesus Christ. The star focused the wise men on the way, an ever-shining beacon of hope and promise and direction.

In answer to Kermit the frog's question in *The Muppet Movie*, **that's** "what's so amazing, (it) keeps us stargazing."

**PRAYER**

Father, thank You for the greatest Gift, Your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Help us shine as Christmas stars, this holiday season, in celebrating His birth and in spreading His Word. Amen.

Joan Reynolds (2007)



Wednesday, December 23, 2015

**READING FOR THE DAY**

John 3:16

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

**MEDITATION**

This powerful message of love, promise and hope was in my thoughts during my youth. Who is the One willing to sacrifice His One and only Son in order to save us? I was born and raised in Taipei, Taiwan. I grew up the youngest of eight, living in a household with my grandmother, parents, three brothers and four sisters. I came to the US in the year of 1966.

In my teen years, I had many opportunities to attend different revivals. I was especially impressed with the Reverend Billy Graham and his message. I attended the Presbyterian church almost every Sunday. It was through listening to the sermons and being involved in singing in the choir that Christ touched my heart. The messages of peace, joy, and love were present and many people in that congregation were a living example of Christ to me.

After some time, I decided to join the combination adult/youth choir. The more I heard the good news of the Gospel, the more I was led to commit myself to Christ. I was then baptized when I was eighteen years old. Being the first one to become a Christian in a non-Christian home was not easy. There was a mix of emotional feelings from my family. I was constantly reminded that, with God, all things are possible. As time has gone by, my parents and most of my brothers, sisters and their families have been drawn to Christ. I thank God for His ability to work in ways that I might not expect.

**PRAYER**

Father in heaven, thank you for answering many prayers. I am grateful for your healing over sickness and the ways that You have led my family through hard times. Thank You for constantly being with us through all circumstances. Guide us and teach us to love You as You love us and to be Your faithful disciples. May our lives be an instrument of Your peace in this world and may we honor You in all that we do.

Cecilia Wu (2007)



Monday, November 30, 2015

**READING FOR THE DAY**

John 3:16

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

**MEDITATION**

Christmas time comes with the wonderful smells of cookies, pies and cakes baking in the oven, candy making, and of course, sugar plum fairies dancing in our heads. As a Sunday school teacher many years ago, I always told the children the story of how the beloved candy cane became a meaningful part of our Christmas tradition. It is a wonderful symbol of the birth, ministry and death of Jesus Christ. Long ago, the candy maker started with a stick of pure white candy to symbolize the Virgin birth and the sinless nature of Jesus. Thinking it was rather plain, the candy maker then added red stripes to remind us that Jesus shed his blood for our sins so we can have the promise of eternal life. And, the “J” shape is like that of a shepherd’s crook and represents the name of Jesus.

**PRAYER**

Dear Lord, we pray that this simple candy cane can be used to proclaim the wonder of Jesus’ birth and His great love for us.

Sandy Webster





**Tuesday, December 1, 2015**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

Mark 10: 42-45

*“Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be servant of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*”

**MEDITATION**

Servant leadership is a term that is popular in leadership discussion's today. Though an ancient principle, it seems to be enjoying a certain renaissance. The fount of all knowledge, Wikipedia, defines servant leadership as, “both a leadership philosophy and set of leadership practices. Traditional leadership generally involves the accumulation and exercise of power by one at the top of the pyramid. By comparison, the servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible.” Contemporary thinking about servant leadership began with an essay, “The Servant as Leader,” published by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970. As he described the process, “It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.”

What does servant leadership have to do with Advent? Jesus emptied himself of his divinity in order to come to us in humble human form as a baby born in a stable. What better example is there of servant leadership? Jesus set the example that we need to learn how to be servants, rather than the ones seeking to be served, and that we need to learn to love each other, hour by hour, and day by day. As we prepare our hearts during Advent for the coming of the Christ child, let us be mindful of the servant leadership He expects from all of us.



**Tuesday, December 22, 2015**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

Luke 1:30 -33, 2:11, 2:19

1:30 *“But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”*2:11 *“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”*2:19 *“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”*

**MEDITATION**

I remember the expectant waiting for our oldest daughter, Annalise, to be born and, what seemed like the endless, waiting to bring our youngest daughter, Camille, home from Vietnam. There are so many hopes and dreams parents have for their children, which start before the very first time they lay eyes on their new baby. Yet, there is no way to see the future and all it holds. As author Elizabeth Stone once said: “Making the decision to have a child - it is momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body.”

I try to imagine what Mary, even as such a young woman, must have felt with the birth of her son, Jesus. She was promised her son would be the Messiah, but to her, he was her little baby for whom she probably had the same hopes and dreams as any other new mother. She most likely wished a long, healthy, and happy life for her Baby Jesus. Yet there were strings attached to His birth that Mary could never have anticipated. In the end, while Jesus was our Savior, to his mother Mary, he would always be her beloved baby boy.

**PRAYER**

Dear Lord, thank you for coming to us in the form of a baby, a form for which we can understand and relate. We look forward to your birth knowing that the Easter story will follow – and that it brings everlasting life for all. Amen.

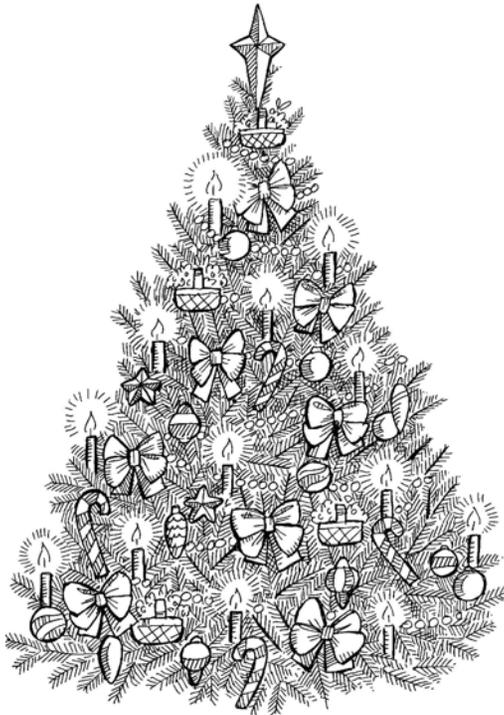
Martha Schoonmaker

*(Continued from page 31)*

**PRAYER**

Our heavenly Father, we thank You for the blessings we have received and the opportunities for service that surround us. Open our eyes to the needs of others and the ways we can be of service. Give us courage to step up to challenges and do our best whenever needed. Let us be grateful when we receive help and to always remember to pass on the blessing we have received to others. Forgive us when we fall short and guide us as we strive to follow in the path of Christ. This we ask in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Jack Downing (2007)



**REFLECTION**

“Service which is rendered without joy helps neither the servant nor the served. But all other pleasures and possessions pale into nothingness before service which is rendered in a spirit of joy.”

-Mahatma Gandhi

**PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, grant me a humble spirit and a willing heart.  
Amen.

Bob Snyder



**Wednesday, December 2, 2015**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

Luke 2:30-31



*“For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people.”*

**MEDITATION**

These words, spoken by Simeon as he held the baby Jesus, remind us that this season is a time for all people to recognize the salvation of Jesus Christ as a gift from God.

**PRAYER**

Dear Heavenly Father, Let us rejoice in fellowship as we celebrate this joyous holiday season. Let us recognize that you have prepared a gift for all people. This gift is not to be opened during the holiday season and soon forgotten, but seen everyday and embraced as the salvation that you have prepared for all people willing to accept it. The salvation of Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Kris Arnold (2003)



**Thursday, December 3, 2015**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

I Corinthians 12: 1-11

*“Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.*

*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone, it is the same God at work. Now, to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.”*

**MEDITATION**

In the early nineteenth century, British poet William Wordsworth wrote: “The word is too much with us: late and soon, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.”

During the Advent season, these lines, coupled with our Scripture reading, seem particularly appropriate. Certainly we can look at Christmas and see how “the world is too much with us.” “The world” would have us close our eyes to (or hide) the reason for the celebration while we open wide our pocket books. The commercialism and the stress on material gifts superseded the spiritual in many lives. Sometimes it is so difficult to find time for



**Monday, December 21, 2015**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

Matthew 20:26b-28 (NASB)

*“But whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*

**MEDITATION**

Serving others is to follow in the footsteps of Christ. It raises both the giver and recipient. After worshipping God, it should be foremost in our hearts and minds. Be on the lookout for opportunities and be generous with your time, talents, and resources.

True self fulfillment is found in serving others. Service should be given freely, without expectation of reward or praise. Your effort may not always be openly appreciated, but satisfaction in following God’s direction is always the reward for unselfish service.

Give of your talents to their fullest when called on or an opportunity presents. Every project deserves your best effort. When I was teaching college management courses, I quickly found that a majority of students were woefully deficient in writing skills. I knew that I could do little to correct this in the short time I had with the students, but I accepted the challenge by carefully and extensively editing the papers they submitted. In both my jobs and my education, I had gained some ability to write serious papers and I did my best to pass this on to the students. It was very time consuming and I doubt that many took the time to scrutinize the results. But some did.

This leads me to the other side of service. That is, being a good recipient of the service of others. If you need help and others want to serve you, be grateful and allow them to be good providers. Remember that they, too, are receiving a blessing in return. Just remember that you incur an obligation, then, to “Pass it on!”

*(Continued on page 32)*



## 4th Sunday in Advent, December 20, 2015

### READING FOR THE DAY

Psalm 46:10

*"Be still, and know that I am God!"*

### MEDITATION

In February, 2002 I was having difficulty walking, seeing a neurosurgeon because of two herniated discs, in considerable pain, and anxious about my future mobility. My days and nights were the same: sleepless and pain-filled. Sometime when it was dark outside, my mind was churning with the what-ifs of continuing this existence of being totally dependent on my husband, Lee, for whatever I needed to do. I "felt" a voice. In the stillness, I clearly heard "Be still, and know that I am God." In that nanosecond, before I began analyzing what the meaning was for me, I was enveloped and permeated in peacefulness, in calmness. My total body relaxed and I felt comforted.

As my mind kicked in and I realized I was made no promise of recovery. What I did know was that no matter what happened, even if I never walked again that was of no consequence.

What had made the difference? I was reminded of God's promise to be with me in all of life and that absolutely nothing will separate me from the love and the companionship of God. I was cradled in God's love and assured that all is well and all will be well.

### PRAYER

Lover God, thank You for the gift of life and renewal that is always available to me and within me. Sometimes my mind is so turbulent that I forget about the silent place of healing within. Please help me remember to keep letting go of mental turmoil so that I may enter the inner sanctuary, where your healing presence dwells.

Linda Pierce Knutson (2007)

thoughts of Jesus amidst the bustle. The words "getting and spending" become an apt summary of our Christmas activities.

The last phrase of the lines above, however, shows the danger of this emphasis on "getting and spending." We lay waste our powers. Our powers are our gifts from God – the true gifts; Paul tells us they are from the Holy Spirit, thus reminding us of another gift, the Holy Spirit itself.

These are the gifts we should unwrap. Through prayer and Scripture reading, we should seek to discover God's gifts to us and ask his help in using them, rather than laying waste our gifts. Perhaps your gift is to witness about Christ's birth. Perhaps it is to help nourish the hungry. Perhaps it is to serve Kirkwood in a certain capacity. These are truly the "gifts that keep on giving." Let us give thanks to God for His greatest gift, Jesus, and for all his other gifts to us.

### PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, how grateful we are for your love and the gift of your son! Help us, Lord, to unwrap your gifts to us, and show us how to use them. Give us joy and peace amidst the rush of the season, Lord, and the strength to do your will. In Jesus' name. Amen

Clydette, Tom, Andrew and Peter Lobred (1987)





**Friday, December 4, 2015**  
**READING FOR THE DAY**

Luke 11: 9-10

*“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

**MEDITATION**

We had recently moved to Long Island and our oldest son was close to three years old. We took him to a very crowded Christmas Eve service and felt fortunate to find seats about in the middle of the church. They had the lights somewhat dimmed, but the lights on the alter were bright and showed a beautiful display of poinsettias. In fact, the whole front of the church was filled with red poinsettias, probably over 100 of them. In the middle, they had white poinsettias in the shape of a cross. It was lovely. We had told Erik that we had to go to church in the evening because it was the night Jesus was born. It was Jesus’ birthday. It was a very traditional service with hymns and Bible readings. Erik watched and was looking around. Finally, he said to me, “Where is he?” I wasn’t sure what he meant and I said “Who?” He said in a rather loud (to me) voice, “Jesus. You said it was his birthday. Where is he? Is he in the flowers?” At the time, I just wanted him to be quiet but now, I realize it is a question we all take for granted. We don’t even think about him not being with us. We know He is there. Jesus is always with us; whether it is his birthday or not.

**PRAYER**

Dear Lord, During this time of Advent, let us always be thankful for the gift of Your Son who answers our every knock and opens the door wide to help us in our every need. May we continue to grow in grace, respond in love, and increase in service to your kingdom. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Jean Larson



**Saturday, December 19, 2015**  
**READING FOR THE DAY**

Luke 2:11

*“To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”*

**MEDITATION**

I am on the periphery of seeing the Gospel opened up to those in foreign lands, particularly some years at Christmas-time. That’s because I have a missionary daughter. Working with international students at George Mason University, she has brought a number of them into my home for food, fun, and other festivities... and the Gospel. These students from such diverse places as Asia, Russia, the Middle East, and Africa have enjoyed taking my Christmas tree down from the attic, assembling it, and bestowing on it the electric lights and ornaments accumulated over many years.

After joining in the festivities with these young people, the best part of the evening comes when my daughter gathers them into our living room and tells them the Christmas story. I never tire of her explaining to them who this babe born in Bethlehem was and is, and how anyone will find him friend and Savior if they will welcome Him into their hearts. I certainly hope that some of them, when they leave, will carry some idea of the true spirit and meaning of Christmas for us in America and elsewhere, as they eventually return to their home countries.

**PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, I am so thankful that You have given me just a little insight of how the gift of Your Son can be spread throughout the world. Help me to be a good representative of You to those who may not know You. And, oh yes, I hope that, through my daughter, more opportunities will come to share my home with those who need to know of Your great gift.

Wally Benham (2007)



**Friday, December 18, 2015**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

Psalm 33:20-22

*“Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and shield. Yea, our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let thy steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in thee.”*

**MEDITATION**

As a young girl in a pastor’s family, I typically spent Christmas with my family at home. When I was five years old, I was excited we were going to Grandmother and Grandfather’s home for Christmas. Mom, brother Garland, sister Sallie, and I took a train to a nearby town. Dad would drive to meet us after the Christmas Eve service. I wondered, “What was it like to ride a train?” “How long is the ride?” But most of all, I could not wait to see my grandparents!

Advent is like this; it is a time of expectant waiting. We are eager to celebrate Jesus’ birth in church and home. We remember that Jesus is the reason for the season. Let us be like a little girl, eagerly waiting to see her grandparents as we wait for Jesus’ birth.

**PRAYER**

Dear God, as we wait for the birth of Jesus, grant us patience that we may prepare our hearts and help others prepare their hearts to receive your son, Jesus. Amen.

Ann Gisch (2007)



**Saturday, December 5, 2015**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

Luke 2: 10b

*“...Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”*

**MEDITATION**

Is there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?” When Charlie Brown was organizing the “best Christmas celebration,” things did not go the way that he expected, and he expressed his frustration asking: “What is Christmas all about?”

His best friend, Linus, answered to Charlie Brown quoting Luke 2:8-14. In his answer he did not mention shopping malls, decorations, parties or high credit card bills.

Linus talked about shepherds, good news, great joy, our Savior as a child lying in a manger and angels praising God.

“And that is what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.”

**PRAYER**

Heavenly Father: Thank you for the great joy of the birth of Jesus. Help us to remember, everyday, what is Christmas all about and to share the good news with all people.

Aida Cardona





## 2nd Sunday in Advent, December 6, 2015

### READING FOR THE DAY

Isaiah 11

*“But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”*

### MEDITATION

Growing up in the English Church, one of my favourite Advent traditions was the yearly celebration of Nine Lessons and Carols. Originating at Truro, but made famous at King’s College, it generally takes place on Christmas Eve. The service is a series of nine readings spanning the story of salvation history from the transgression in the Garden as recorded in Genesis, to the mystery of the incarnation as recorded in the first chapter of John’s gospel. After each reading, a carol can be sung, an anthem performed, or both.

At the age of nine or so, I moved from home to school to be a chorister and, therefore, my experience of the service was greatly changed. As a choirboy, I experienced this as a particularly long service for which I was expected not only to have combed my hair but also to be upon my best behaviour.

Whilst most boys are not too keen on sitting through nine readings (and I was no different), I was, however, always struck by the imagery in the fourth reading containing the prophecies of Isaiah. What caught my ears and eyes was the imagery of a large number of animals that ought not to be getting on very well. A wolf was to dwell with a lamb? A leopard was to lie with a kid and a calf and a young lion? My experience of agrarian issues was somewhat limited, but I did know that one animal was stronger, the other weaker and therefore one was likely to be dinner for the other! Coming at



## Thursday, December 17, 2015

### READING FOR THE DAY

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.”*  
- John 14:1 (NIV)

*“So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?”*

- Luke 16:11 (NIV)

*“You can fool all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time. And that’s sufficient.”*  
- Ascribed to the actress Rose King, among others

### MEDITATION

Trust is an essential element of faith. It is also essential in daily life. There is, however, a profound distinction.

Economic activity and personal relationships cannot operate without trust. Yet, we must be aware of the possibility that an undertaking made to us has been made lightly or with the intent to deceive. Failure to be alert to that possibility makes us vulnerable to material or psychological damage. Scams abound; because too many people are overly trusting.

In contrast, trust in the Lord must be unreserved, if real faith is to exist. We are also urged to be trustworthy in our daily lives as a necessary, but not sufficient, road to eternal life.

Jim and Susan Lister (2007)



**Wednesday, December 16, 2015**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

Matthew 2: 1, 11

*“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem....And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.”*

### **MEDITATION**

The visit of the Wise Men—When I was growing up in Puerto Rico the celebration of the “Three Kings Day” (Epiphany) was the most anticipated day of the Christmas season. We received our presents on the night of January 5<sup>th</sup>.

To prepare for the visit of the Wise Men, we collected green grass and fresh water for the camels, because they were “coming from far, far away.”

We were not the Messiah that was born in Bethlehem, but God the Father sent his only Son Jesus to die for us, so that we can become children of God.

As children of God we received our presents as gifts from heaven.

### **PRAYER**

Dear God: Thank you for the great memories of childhood. Help us to remember that You gave Your only Son as the greatest give for humanity.

Aida Cardona

the mid point of the service, these images from the animal world captivated me and their oddity extended my imagination to its borders! I did not know much, but the reading was certainly telling me that some sort of a large change in the order of things was to occur. Perhaps it was because I was often the victim of the older boys, but I liked very much the imagery of enemies at peace.

Advent or *Adventus* means a coming or an arrival. According to Isaiah, this arrival was going to be that of a small child who would lead us all. Just what did this arrival of Jesus have to do with wolves and lambs living together?

As I became older and more studied, I realized that this was metaphorical imagery, that connected with the third reading of the service, also from Isaiah, in which it is proclaimed that the coming Messiah would usher in a kingdom with justice forever.

In advent we await this Jesus, who ushers in the kingdom of God full of justice for which we should work. It is a time of peace and equality.

As a chorister, I began the Lessons and Carols service singing the carol “Once in Royal David’s City.” When I ceased to be a chorister and some years later ended up as the choirmaster myself, it was now my turn to determine the carols and hymns to be sung following each of the readings. Isaiah's imagery of a peaceable kingdom has never left me, and, more years than not, I have placed a hymn, following the Isaiah reading, which speaks of another city seen by John. It is not specifically an Advent or Christmas hymn, but it speaks quite eloquently to the achievement of Christ’s Kingdom:

*O Holy City, seen of John, where Christ the Lamb doth reign, Within whose four square walls shall come No night, nor need, nor pain. And where the tears are wiped from eyes that shall not weep again!*

*Already in the mind of God That City riseth fair. Lo, how its splendor challenges The souls that greatly dare-- Yea bids us seize the whole of life and build its glory there.*

Within me, these words revive the hope that is had in the Saviour, the Prince of Peace, whose arrival we await. My earnest prayer is that in this current age (especially) we welcome His advent by seizing the whole of life and building its glory here. Given the current age, we do well to further consider the words of Paul VI, the 20th century pope who stated that if you want peace, work for justice. When there is justice, the wolf and the lamb will dwell together, for both will have their needs met.

Christopher Smith (2007)



**Monday, December 7, 2015**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

Philippians 4:13

*"I can do everything through Him  
who gives me strength."*

**MEDITATION**

I really like Paul's letter to the church at Philippi. It reminds me of guidance a wise teacher would send to a group of former students. It also reminds me of the power of prayer, and the peace that comes with believing.

When difficult challenges come along in life, it is easy for me to say "I can't deal with that," or "it's impossible." I think groups of people, as well as individuals, can fall into the same trap. Because of this, it is important for me to remember I always have - as a follower of Jesus Christ - a Helper standing besides me. I just have to ask for the help. As our Lord told the rich young ruler in the 18th chapter of Luke, "with God all things are possible."

**PRAYER**

Dear Lord, Thank You for Your Word and for Your strength, and for the promise of what we can do through You.

Joe Ross (2007)



**Tuesday, December 8, 2015**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

1 Peter 5:7

*"Cast all your anxiety on Him, because he cares for you."*

**MEDITATION**

Do you find yourself anxious about things? The Advent season seems to be an especially susceptible time to feel anxious. There seems to be so much to do, such as completing all those activities due at the end of the year in personal and work life, in addition to all of the expected Christmas activities.

the world, of your only begotten Son. The opportunity to believe in Him and to have eternal life through Him is truly the greatest gift and the greatest joy of this Christmas season and for eternity. It is in Jesus' name that I pray.

Joe Ross



**Tuesday, December 15, 2015**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

Ps. 130:5-6 TEV

*"I wait eagerly for the Lord's help, and in his word I trust. I wait for the Lord more eagerly than watchmen wait for the dawn . . ."*

**MEDITATION**

Have you ever waited for something and had no idea when it would happen? We often wait for a job, a new baby, or answers to our prayers. Sometimes we lose hope, while waiting, and become discouraged.

In June 2012 during the derecho, our electricity went out. We struggled to keep a full freezer of food from spoiling. After two nights without electricity, we went to a nearby grocery store in search of ice to save our food. Just as we entered the store, we found a shipment of ice had just arrived. We received the one free bag of ice the store was rationing out to each customer and were delighted. Upon exiting the store, a kind woman offered us her bag of ice. We were grateful to have two bags to put in our freezer to keep us going another day in the heat, with the hope the electricity soon would be restored. One day later the electricity was restored. God provided for even our smallest need!

God's people wait for the Lord and He responds. If God can provide something as simple as ice, how much more can He provide for more pressing matters? As we read God's Word, let us hear his guidance for us, have hope, and wait for the Lord.

**PRAYER**

Dear God, as we wait for you, grant us hope that we may anticipate with joy Your blessings and mercy for us. Amen.

Ann Gisch



**Monday, December 14, 2015**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

John 3:16

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”*

**MEDITATION**

My first memories of Christmas was about the joy of receiving gifts – toys, games (not so much clothes) – as long as I met the rather low standards of someone named Santa. Next, I learned the story of the baby Jesus, but the excitement and the buildup of getting gifts, when it wasn’t even my birthday, still remained. The anticipation and the wonder of a commercial Christmas made this, like it did for the character of Ralphie in the movie “Christmas Story,” a magical time of the year. It was all about the “get.”

As I grew into young adulthood, I learned, through faith, about the real importance of the Christmas story, along with the concept of incarnation and God being with us. It still was pleasant to receive gifts (clothes were now acceptable), but the real joy of the season centered on the celebration of the birth of Christ, and what that meant for the world, and for me. The joy regarding gifts faded into the background. I set out on my adult journey with my wife and partner, and we were blessed with children. As our children grew, the joy of gifts returned, but now it was the joy of sharing gifts in our young family. What would be the perfect gift for my wife? What could we get each of our children to increase their joy and wonder during the celebration of the birth of Jesus? I soon came to realize that the joy of “getting” had been replaced with the joy of “giving.”

Thinking about the joy I felt for giving to the people I loved helped me reflect on the above verse from the Gospel of John. The gifts I give are worldly, with a limited warranty period. The gift the world received from God is eternal and has no limits. I love my family, but I am awed by how much more God loves the world and God loves me, by giving the greatest gift of all – eternal life through Jesus Christ. Christmas is about this gift.

**PRAYER**

God in heaven, thank you for your love. Thank you for teaching me about the power of gifts. Most of all, thank you for the gift you gave to me, and to

It should bring peace to know that we can cast our anxiety to God because he cares for us, but yet I find myself almost always anxious about something. Why am I so reluctant to cast my anxiety over to God? Am I the only person who has this problem? As John Piper states in his devotional, *“It does not say, you will never feel any anxieties. It says, when you have them, cast them on God. When the mud splatters your windshield and you temporarily lose sight of the road and start to swerve in anxiety, turn on your wipers and squirt your windshield washer.”*

So how do you cast your anxiety to God? In Whitney Hooper’s report on the practical applications of Bob Phillips’s book, *Overcoming Anxiety and Depression: Practical Tools to Help You Deal with Negative Emotions*, (2007) she states the following:

*“Give up the illusion of control. Understand that both anxiety and depression stem from attempts to control either the future (through worrying) or the past (by trying to change what has already happened). Realize that all such attempts are futile and a complete waste of your time and energy. Acknowledge that only God has the power to control the future and bring transformation out of what happened in the past.”*

*Let your emotions lead you to ask questions. Realize that negative emotions are meant to alert you to danger. Rather than ignoring the anxiety and depression you feel, face your feelings and ask: ‘What’s going on?’, ‘How do I feel about it?’ and ‘Do I want to change?’*

*Turn worries into prayers. Whenever an anxious thought enters your mind, decide that instead of worrying about it, you’ll pray about it. Pray as often as you think about whatever is troubling you. Know that, unlike worry, prayer actually accomplishes something positive.”*

During this Advent Season take the time to think and pray about the joy of God’s incarnation, in which He came to reveal Himself to us and save us, rather than getting caught up in the anxiety of getting everything done by December 25.

Doug Amon



**Wednesday, December 9, 2015**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

*“Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”*

**MEDITATION**

When Paul wrote to the young church he founded in Thessalonica, he acknowledged that their faith was still being formed, yet he gave thanks for everything they had done, and for all they meant to him. Then, barely pausing for breath, he prayed they would increase and abound in love, strengthen in holiness, and, ultimately, be found blameless at the second coming. The Thessalonians, like Paul, had every reason to believe they would not be waiting too long; yet, this dualistic state—of thanksgiving for the work done so far paired with a focus on being prepared for the end of time—is where we find ourselves nearly two millennia later. Still waiting...

Waiting is not easy... it feels ever-so-much like wasting... wasting that most precious of all commodities: time. But what if we used our waiting time this Advent—those minutes and hours we spend standing in line waiting to check out, stuck at red lights waiting for traffic to clear, or sitting in the tension of a decorated home and a freshly prepared meal, just before the guests arrive—as opportunities to remember what Advent is all about—to ponder not only what it meant for Jesus to put on flesh once, over two thousand years ago, but in active remembrance of the charge He has placed on our lives, to anticipate the gathering of all His saints at the heavenly banquet—prepared, laid out, fragrant and fulfilling.

**PRAYER**

Lord, during this Advent, help me to be faithful in my waiting... and in my watching... for the Lord who will return, when we least expect him, like a thief in the night, according to his own time and season. Amen..

Pat Futato

that practically the entire congregation would be standing. One couple in our church has provided communion for over eighteen years. Not only did they order and prepare the elements but also picked them up, cleaned and put everything away – including all those Christmas midnight eves. They retired from that service last January but he still folds the bulletins every Saturday night and comes over very early on Sunday mornings to open up and turn on the system. And that has been for longer than eighteen years. Admired too are all those property people over the years doing endless, thankless tasks in, around and about. And I don’t think our church would exist if it weren’t for the women of the church – all silent saints – taken for granted – we hardly ever remember to say thank you, but without them, our church would not be alive.

**PRAYER**

Lord, strengthen our faith so that we might have the courage to step forward, to be there when we are needed, and to trusting You to be there when we need You.

Claire Runger (1987)





**3rd Sunday in Advent, December 13, 2015**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

Acts 20: 32-35 32

*“And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.*

*I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel.*

*Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.*

*I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”*

Micah 6:6-8

*“With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?*

*Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”*

*He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”*

**MEDITATION**

The Silent Saints—Watching the efforts of so many people to save baby Jessica who was trapped in a well shaft several Octobers ago brings to mind the silent saints that no one will remember, but without those courageous workers, Jessica would not be alive. These people are there when needed and probably do not consider themselves heroes. We have, in our midst, our own silent saints. Someone wanted to recognize on a Sunday in the sanctuary all the people who have taught Sunday School and the remark was made



**Thursday, December 10, 2015**

**READING FOR THE DAY**

*“Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. ”*

**MEDITATION**

In Chicago's magnificent Millennium Park is a curved granite wall naming the hundreds of donors giving a million dollars (or more) and the first donor is: ANONYMOUS. That is intriguing for me. Imagine parting with that amount of money without recognition. And I began to notice how many other lists have anonymous as the first word. Then there are the gifts given to our church anonymously, quietly and with dignity and the many deeds that are just accomplished without fanfare.

**PRAYER**

Precious Lord, we ask that our deeds all be God-centered and done quietly, with humility, and sincerity.

Claire Runger (2007)





Friday, December 11, 2015

READING FOR THE DAY

Psalm 46:10a

*“Be still, and know that I am God.”*

**MEDITATION**

Growing up in Hong Kong, Christmas was a very different experience. We did not receive gifts on Christmas Day, my church did not observe Advent, and live trees were rare, expensive, and could not fit into most apartments. Christians would go to Christmas Eve service, and that might be the only religious activity amidst all the secular and commercialized decorations, music, and festivities.

When I came to the United States, I was glad to see that most people spent Christmas with families, with lots of gifts put under a live tree decorated with old and new ornaments. This was such a contrast to the commercial-driven holiday atmosphere in Hong Kong.

But soon I discovered how much stress this joyous season could bring. For the financially comfortable, adults are overwhelmed with the buying/wrapping/ mailing of gifts, preparation of meals or organizing travel plans, and children are looking forward to the many gifts they would receive. A lot of people are exhausted, and become impatient and easily irritated. Isn't Advent a season of expectation, anticipation, preparation, and longing for the coming of Christ? The way things are, who has time for that?

When Jesus was born, I doubt that there was a big feast for the family or those who came to see him. The Magi brought gold, frankincense and myrrh – no toys for a toddler. We all have our own traditions and expectations for the season of Advent and Christmas. Let us not be overtaken by the hustle and bustle of life. Let us learn to be still, and be aware of God's presence.

**PRAYER**

Dear Lord, thank you for your wonderful gift of redemption. In this Advent season, help us to find time to reflect on our need of salvation and prepare us for the coming of Christ. Help us to be mindful of Your presence in our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Yvonne Taylor



Saturday, December 12, 2015

READING FOR THE DAY

John 14:27

New Living Translation: *“I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.”*

**MEDITATION**

I'm pretty informal with God – after all, we are on a first name basis. I feel like I can be pretty open and honest with him – as He with me! On more than one occasion, I have been known to say, “You know God, that wasn't quite the answer I was looking for. Can we have a do over?”

I'm sure there were many who probably asked for a “do over,” when they heard their King was just born – in a stable and a carpenter's son to boot. As time went by, they just weren't getting it that the King, who was our Lord Jesus, was not taking on an earthly palace, complete with armies to defeat their foes. That was not what the Jews had been waiting for, for thousands of years. However, it was not an earthly kingdom Jesus was fighting for, anyway. As a matter of fact, He was not “fighting” at all. He was busy loving imperfect humans, disenfranchised people, and the least among us. When God's people were seeking peace, was Jesus not showing the real way to peace was through love, not war?

Growing up, our family went to the midnight service every Christmas Eve. The Sanctuary was dark, except for candles. We spoke (and giggled) in hushed tones, sang Christmas hymns, and listened to our minister, Dr. McCain, give his Christmas Eve message. The service ended with everyone moving row by row down to the front pew for Dr. McCain to serve us communion, then move back to our seats. It took a long time for everyone to walk down and back, so we sat in meditative silence for what seemed like hours. At the stroke of midnight, the bells rang announcing Christmas, with Dr. McCain's final words “Everywhere, everywhere, Christmas tonight.” We quietly filed out of the Sanctuary, with peaceful and love-filled hearts. I don't know of any earthly kings who could ever invoke those feelings, do you?

**PRAYER**

Dear Lord, give us the power to make a choice for peace when the alternative may be more appealing. Thank you for your gift of perfect peace as we anticipate the coming of Christmas.