

Tidings

Devotions for the
Advent and Christmas
Season



**Eastern Missouri ELCA
Ministries**

“Tidings: Devotions for Advent and Christmas”

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When are those times when you cannot help but share a story? There are moments in our lives where we have to share what has happened or what could happen, moments we cannot contain ourselves. We need others to know; we need others to share our laments and our joys. We spread the word.

Each year as we enter Advent we are encouraged to both listen to and share “tidings of comfort and joy.” In the year of Mark, we hear from a gospel that was meant to be shared in one sitting. Mark is the story-telling gospel, short and easy to hear. In our Advent and Christmas season (year B of the Revised Common Lectionary) we may only read from Mark twice, but the urgency is felt in the two readings: Hear the story! Enter the story! Share the story!

We are drawn-in further as John’s gospel speaks of the beginning and the WORD. Then we find ourselves listening to messengers from God, who bring us tidings of great joy, first through the love of Mary who tells us of the one who turns the world upside-down, and then to the shepherds who bear witness and tell the story to all who will listen of a babe in a manger in Bethlehem.

From stories that are cosmic to stories that give us glimpses of a faithful family, these tidings we are called to share become part of our story. Our voices join the voices of the season to bring tidings of hope, peace, joy, and love to a world in need of such a resounding story.

—The Rev. Dr. Jill V. Seagle, pastor, St. Thomas/Holy Spirit
Jane Brda, SAM/PMA, Family of Christ
The Rev. Meagan McGlaughlin, pastor, Christ
The Rev. Kristen Koch, pastor, Shepherd of the Hills

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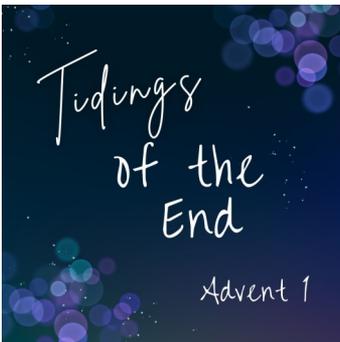
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ADVENT 1

Advent is a season of waiting. It is also, I believe, a season of endings.

Semisonic used a popular aphorism in *Closing Time*: every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end.

And endings can be painful. Waiting for renewed hope can be painful. Asaph in Psalm 80 cries out to God: "How long, Lord God Almighty, will your anger smolder against the prayers of your people? You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have made them drink tears by the bowlful."



Isaiah speaks volumes when he asks, "Oh, that you would burst from the heavens and come down!"

As always, we turn our faces and our questions to God, just as the psalmists did. Where are you? Why do you not show up like we desire? Why do you leave us with our burdens?

Sometimes even Jesus does not seem to provide the comfort and the easy answers we seek. Christ speaks about a time of transition between his death and second coming and uses dark imagery in Mark 13 - war, earthquakes, famine are all signs Christ points towards as signs of his second coming. He isn't shying away from the pain of the world, he's leaning into it.

In Advent, we lean into this time of endings in hope of and in faith of a new beginning. Our story doesn't end at the cross; it emerges from the tomb into new life. We aren't promised a path around pain, but we are promised a desti-

nation through pain.

Jesus's last example to his disciples is of a fig tree, unfurling into new life. "When its branches bud and leaves sprout" Christ says, "you know summer is near." Amongst all of the devastating imagery, he returns to nature, to the small miracles that surround us. As we look forward to spring's new beginning as we head into winter, remember that just as the plants are promised a new chance to grow, so are we, in the hands of a God who loves us and the world He created. Christ is coming, our liturgy tells us, and after this period of waiting He will change the whole world.

—Alex Pennock
Peace, Washington

MONDAY

Well, here we are, the beginning of Advent, preparing for our journey toward the manger, filled with glad-tidings of joy, starry nights, the anticipation of the birth of the Christ-child, and the words of ... wait, what? Revelation chapter 15... John's vision of the seven angels with seven plagues?!? If you did not quite see that one coming, rest assured that neither did I. In this vision, John sees seven angels carrying seven bowls filled with God's justice. The number 7 is often synonymous with "complete" or "total" so we see in this vision the totality of God's justice. The scene is one of celebration, with harps and singing, as the redeemed sing the song of Moses, an echo of the songs offered by Israel after their deliverance from Egypt. A slightly different scene from the one we probably imagine while singing "Silent Night."

Let's pause for a second (maybe catch our breath) and flip to the passage from Micah 4, especially verse 3:

"They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take sword against nation, and nor will they train for war anymore." This too, is what God's justice looks like. Swords and spears are weapons, tools that threaten life. But in this verse, we hear Micah's prophetic words, imagining a future where tools that take or harm life are turned into plowshares and pruning hooks, in essence, turned into farming tools, tools that sustain and give life. God's justice is not about people getting what they deserve, it is about people getting what they need to flourish and live full and abundant lives.

As we look toward Christmas, we can remember how God's love broke into the world through the birth of Jesus - for the sake of beginning the work of redemption, of establishing justice, of setting us free. And we can ask ourselves today, how are we continuing to participate in that work? How are we sustained by the life and love of Jesus? How is God calling us to turn those things in our world that threaten life into things that give life? And can we imagine the day when all is restored and redeemed, and we will sing together Moses' song of deliverance.

—*Rachel Helton*
Christ, Webster Groves

TUESDAY

Advent: a time of waiting, a time of preparation. God had promised a Savior and has delivered on that promise. We must now make good on our part of this transaction. It is a simple task; follow God's commandments.

Advent is a time to renew our relationship with God. God does not make us do anything. It is up to us to follow

Read Micah 5:1-5 and Luke 21:34-38

The prophet Micah speaks of a hopeless situation: Jerusalem is under siege by the Assyrian king, "walled in" on every side and it is clear that disaster is coming. In Luke, Jesus is in the Temple teaching just days before his arrest and warns his followers to not be "weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness, and worries." That word "dissipation" has a meaning akin to "world sapping energy-frustration." Can you relate to these situations?

But what does Micah prophesy? From an obscure, humble little place

(Bethlehem)

God will act

through one

born who will in

time save God's

people, "feed them in the strength of the Lord" and bring security and peace. Two thousand years ago Jesus was born

in Bethlehem, and not so many years ago the Crucified and Risen Jesus was born anew in you and me in our Baptism.

During this Advent, let us pray and be alert to his coming,

his presence in possibly the most obscure, humble little

places in our lives and in our world. As he works in us, may we bring peace and security to others as well in his name.

Come, Lord Jesus!



—photograph by Michael Prange, Holy Cross,

—*Rev. Karen Scherer (retired)*
Shepherd of the Hills, St. Ann

THURSDAY

Read Hosea 6:1-6

Ephraim and Judah were warned about turning away from God and worshipping idols. Their faith was fleeting. When times were difficult, they turned away from God. God didn't want their sacrifices and offerings but instead wanted their love and devotion. The divine wanted them to be in relationship with God and to know God.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

Their top priority was to faithfully love God and turn away from idols. Living a life of faith and following Jesus' teachings will save us from the wrath when Jesus comes again. The Thessalonians were living examples of the Gospel and spread it to others. They received the Gospel with joy even in times of adversity.

In today's world, the lifestyles of Ephraim and Judah appear to be more common than the lifestyles of the Thessalonians. Today people are searching for explanations and relief from the chaos. They turn to pop culture and wealth instead of love and relationship with God and others around them. We need to be like the Thessalonians who were living examples of the Gospel, trusting that God would provide a way. Through our example, we can provide hope, peace, and joy to those who are still searching for answers.

—*Linda and Tim Tyahla*
Holy Cross, Creve Coeur

FRIDAY

Read Acts 11:19-26

The persecution of Jewish believers resulted in the dispersion of Jewish Christians to distant cities. As a result,

the Good News of Jesus's death and resurrection was spread, and many believers were added to the church. The Word of God resonated among the people, and churches grew larger. With the Advent season, we return to a joyful anticipation of the birth of our Savior. We are hopeful that the people we meet will be filled with the joy and hope of the season. We are secure in the knowledge that as "Christians", the name that first was given to the believers in Antioch, we have the gift of eternal life.

Verse 24 mentions Barnabas, a "good man" sent to the church in Antioch. Many believers were added to the church. What does it mean to be a "good" person? Do you think the testimony of a "good" person is more believable than the testimony of a "bad" person? Undoubtedly, Barnabas was a convincing witness for Christ and set an example for Christian behavior. As we prepare for the Christmas seasons, let us pray that hope and good will enter our hearts and the hearts of others.

—*Women's Bible Study,
St Mark, Cape Girardeau*

SATURDAY

The Coming of God to Us

As we enter into this Advent Season, do you find yourself physically weak and weary? Do you find yourself aimlessly wandering from one task or event to another? Do you find yourself distracted by modern day life? We try our best to be self sustaining, thinking we can do all the things on our own. We slowly feel ourselves getting lost in the darkness.

The prophet Micah takes us back some 700 years be-

fore the first Christmas. During that time he described turmoil, and so much trial and tribulation. Micah's days were dark and fearful. One might say the world today sounds similar. God is not impressed with big government or human powers. Micah was a spokesperson for God. He kept



—drawing, Sandy Bodendieck

STHS

trying to tell his people not to believe in power and wealth. He promised the people real security, peace, and hope is believing in the coming of a Savior. He explained the Savior would be a King, Jesus the Messiah would be born not in a mansion or some palace, but inside a messy cattle shed, located in an insignificant little town called Bethlehem. When we wander in

a world that is dark, it's easy to lose hope. Take heart, Luke 21 34-38 reminds us "Don't spend your time thinking eating or drinking or worrying about life"

The Season of Advent reminds us about the coming of God to us. Let us trust in God's promises, for God brought us a loving Shepherd that will never leave us. "I am with you always, to the end of age" (Mathew 28:20). God is the only one who can truly sustain us and provide for our every need. God has come in the past,, comes in the present, and will come again in the future.

How will you use your hands and feet to love and serve you neighbors? How will you let go of your fears and spread Advent Hope?

—Julie Hutson
Shepherd of the Hills, St. Ann

ADVENT 2



A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" (Isaiah 40:5)

Today's world engulfs us in news of wars, political turmoil, world hunger, natural disasters, and gun violence. The future looks bleak. And yet, Isaiah also prophesies, "Comfort, O comfort my people, says your

God." (Isaiah 40:1) How? What shall we cry? Are these ancient words even meaningful for us today?

In other ancient words, Mark's gospel leads with, "The *beginning* of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God . . ." (Mark 1:1) We know, of course, that there is more to come. We know the story continued as John the baptizer proclaimed a baptism of repentance, as the twelve disciples met Jesus Christ and proclaimed Him as Lord, and as the early Christian church continued to proclaim God's love. It was a risky proposition. As is true today, their world looked bleak. Their message wasn't always well-received. Still, they continued to proclaim God's gentle, comforting, strengthening love to those around them.

The story continues with us. What shall we cry to a world that needs a word of renewal and peace? That God's gentle, comforting, strengthening love for us will never end.

—Cathy Hohl

Lutheran Church of the Atonement, Florissant

MONDAY

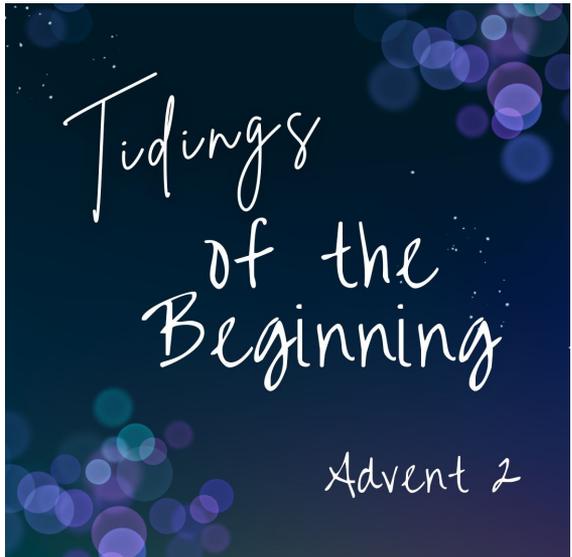
Our devotional text for today is from Acts 2:37-42.

The passage from Acts 2 is a powerful reminder of the grace of God and the gift of salvation that we have received through Jesus Christ. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached a sermon to the crowd that had gathered in Jerusalem. He told them about Jesus and his death and resurrection, and he urged them to repent of their sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus.

The people were “cut to the heart” by Peter’s message, and they asked him what they should do. Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Repentance is a turning away from sin and a turning towards God. It is a recognition that we are sinners and that we need God’s forgiveness. Baptism is a washing away of our sins and a new birth into the family of God. It is a sign of our faith in Jesus Christ and our commitment to follow him.

The people who accepted Peter’s message were baptized, and they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. They then devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.





—drawing by Sandy Bodendieck, STHS

This passage teaches us several important things about our faith. First, we believe that salvation is a gift from God. We cannot earn it by our own good works. It is received through faith in Jesus Christ. Second, we believe that baptism is a

means of grace through which we receive the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Third, we believe that the Word of God and the sacraments are essential for our spiritual growth and development.

Prayer

Come near to us, O God, as we await your coming bless us with the presence of your peace. We thank you for your gift of salvation. Thank you for the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Help us to be faithful to your Word and to grow in our love for you and for our neighbors. In Jesus' name. Amen.

—*Pastor Steve Cauley*
Living Lord, Lake St. Louis

Prayer concerns: Pray for those who are exploring the Christian faith. For the newly baptized and for those who have found God's grace and salvation through the power of the Holy Spirit.

TUESDAY



Watercolor by Jan Dillon, St. Thomas/Holy Spirit *Jan 23*

Take a deep breath. Center yourself and study this picture. What jumps-out at you? What connection do you see with beginnings?

WEDNESDAY

Hopeful Resonance

Read Malachi 2:10-3:1 & Luke 1:5-17

Four years ago, I began serving campus ministry in St. Louis. It wasn't what I had expected or hoped for as a global pandemic was raging. COVID protocols changed and excluded many of the 'normal' activities one expects. My colleagues and I resigned ourselves to this new reality and wistfully hoped things would change for the better sooner rather than later. In the meantime, we moved on and tried to live ours calls as best we could.

I didn't have to wait a lifetime for the one thing I'd always wanted. And I still found resonance with the text from Luke today – hope to resignation to fear and finally the unexpected. This faithful couple has hoped, and resigned themselves to being childless. The message from the angel, the fear Zechariah & Elizabeth had, was so unexpected. So was their child's name and destiny.

All of the things that this couple did – hope, resign, mourn, & fear are healthy human emotions. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives – as an angel or moment – that surprises us. A gift beyond understanding and measure. A hope realized when it didn't seem possible.

Gracious God, we pray for our ability to be surprised at your presence in this world. As John was a surprise and a gift to Elizabeth and Zechariah, we pray for your Spirit to surprise us in our hopes and despairs. Amen.

—Pr. Tina Reyes
LuMin, St. Louis

THURSDAY

Read Habakkuk 3:2-6 and Philippians 3:12-16

It seems like so much of life is waiting. We wait for dreams to be fulfilled and for nightmares to end. We wait for news from tests and for healing from injury and illness. We wait for peace on earth and for peace in our hearts and homes. We wait all year for the hope only Jesus can give, but in this brief season of Advent our waiting takes center stage.

So how do you live with all that waiting? We read in Habakkuk (as Luther did) that “the righteous live by their faith” in God who not only promises a vision of the future but has shown us that vision in Christ Jesus. And Paul insists that everything else we might trust in, from our gifts and virtues to the appearance of success, is “rubbish” compared to that. For in Jesus our salvation has come from a poor, lowly baby; our resurrection has come from a crucified body. This is what God has already done! So as we wait for what God is still bringing about, take heart: “It will surely come, it will not delay.”

—Pr. Scott Benolkin
Bethel, University City

FRIDAY

Read Habakkuk 3:2-6

Prophets are amazing people. The prophet Habakkuk waits on God to answer a key question for G-D’s people: Where is justice? Around him discord rages. The people are overtaken by the Babylonians. The unjust seem to be winning. Habakkuk doesn’t understand: if G-D is holy, what are

we missing?

G-D appears and reveals the holy presence active and working in the world. Habakkuk's patience is rewarded with a reminder of G-D's promises: I AM has always been faithful.



—by Michael Prange, Holy Cross

We often ask the same question the prophet asked as we look around the world today: where is justice? Too often we do not have the patience of the prophet to watch and see how G-D is active in the world. We don't have the courage to remember how G-D has been from the beginning of time. The savior, our savior, has always been at work in our world. We have heard the stories time and again—led from captivity to freedom; returned from exile; sent G-D incarnate to bring new life to birth; taught how to walk in the way of salvation. We have heard the stories. Now we are called, with the prophet to share the stories we know and actively live the justice that G-D proclaims is always the way of salvation.

What would happen if we actually lived as G-D's people? Would the mountains crumble as we actually live a way of justice? Would the earth quake with this return to the beginning of G-D's way of salvation? Perhaps that is one of the calls this Advent season: to live in a way that we no longer have to ask, "Where is justice?" because we, the people of G-D, are actually a repentant, changed people who not only share the story of what G-D can do, but live the story as G-D's hands and feet. We can show what G-D is doing today. We, too, can be amazing people.

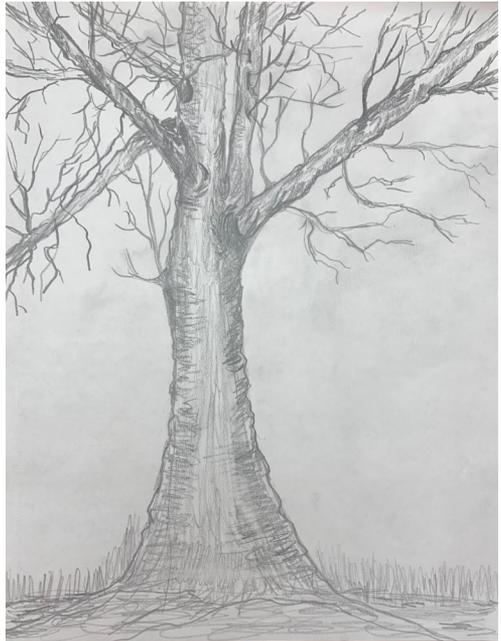
—Pr. Jill Seagle
St. Thomas/Holy Spirit, Sunset Hills

SATURDAY

"It's the most wonderful time of the year..." I hear the song, and it sometimes drags at my heart more than uplifts it. I find it difficult to live up to the joy and anticipation of the season too often. I wrestle with pressure and expectation of making things "wonderful" for those around me. I sit with the bleakness of the news, the cold and barrenness of the season, and hope seems far off.

But then I hear the words of the prophets. These messengers of God who lived through horrible things: the loss of homes and lives, pain of war, fear of abandonment. They who bring words of judgment and pain to Israel and Judah, they also speak of hope and new life.

"Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation."
Habakkuk 3:17-18



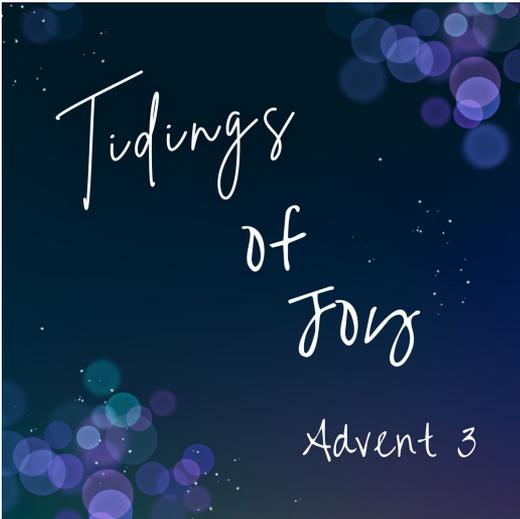
—drawing by Sandy Bodendieck, STHS

Therefore, I start again. I don't ignore the hurt or loss, and I don't gloss over the reality of what is going on with our world. But I will continue to have trust in

God. I will rejoice and sing believing that God recalls the promises and will lead us all forth in joy. And even when I am not ready to sing that “It’s the most wonderful time of the year...” I will praise the God who is my strength and hope.

—Pr. Carrie McElfresh
Trinity, Kirkwood

ADVENT 3



Read John 1:6-8.

My dad built the back half of my childhood home without windows. Those two rooms were pitch black regardless of the time of day or season of year. Walking down the hallway could be both disorienting and disconcerting; more than once I stumbled

into the wall or kicked my foot on the door jamb. After a year or so, I convinced him that we needed a nightlight at the end of the hall. Instead of just plugging a light into an outlet, he built an aquarium and put what would now be described as “fairy lights” behind it. It was beautiful - a soft light that seemed to dance with the movement of the water in a rhythmic pattern on the wall which shone directly onto the light switch.

In today’s Bible verse from the Gospel of John, we learn that John (the Baptist) was sent by God to be a wit-

ness to the light of Christ. John's role as a witness was no small task – his job was to help people understand who Jesus was before Jesus started his teachings. In a way, John was a lot like the fairy lights at the end of my hallway pointing me toward the light switch as if to say "Here it is! THIS is the light you need!"

As we continue to wait for the birth of Jesus this Advent season, my challenge for you is to think about how you can be a witness or a fairy light to help someone around you see the light of God.

Amen

—Christina Kling-Garrett
Good Shepherd, Manchester

MONDAY

Of The Father's Love Begotten

Of the Father's love begotten
Ere the worlds' began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending he.
Of the things that are, that have been
And the future years shall see,
Evermore and evermore.

Oh, that birth forever blessed,
When the virgin, full of grace,
By the Holy Ghost conceiving,
Bore the Savior of our race.
And the babe the world's redeemer,
First revealed his sacred face
Evermore and evermore.

This Advent/Christmas hymn has been growing on me through the years, slowly but surely becoming one of my favorites...the words, the powerful imagery, the beautiful plainsong melody. During these troubled times, with our present health, economic and political concerns, the words of this hymn reassure me that even before the beginning of time, "ere the worlds began to be," the God who loves all humankind has been in control and has been planning for our salvation. Despite our present-day concerns we can rest in the assurance of God's love and can once again look forward with anticipation to the birth of the "Savior of our race."

—*Richard Schademann*
Zion, Ferguson

TUESDAY

It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed to destruction and loss—
This is true: For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life;

It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction—This is true: I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.

It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction rule forever—
This is true: Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, his name shall be called wonderful councilor, mighty God, the Ever-

lasting, the Prince of peace.

It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world—

This is true: To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and lo I am with you, even until the end of the world.

It is not true that we have to wait

for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the Church before we can be peacemakers—

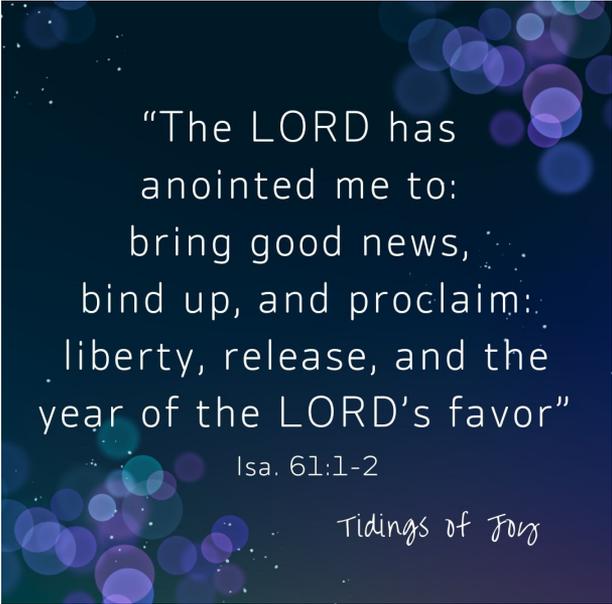
This is true: I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions and your old men shall have dreams.

It is not true that our hopes for liberation of humankind, of justice, of human dignity of peace are not meant for this earth and for this history—

This is true: The hour comes, and it is now, that the true worshipers shall worship God in spirit and in truth.

So let us enter Advent in hope, even hope against hope. Let us see visions of love and peace and justice. Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage: Jesus Christ—the life of the world.

From Testimony: The Word Made Flesh, by Daniel Berrigan, S.J. Orbis Books, 2004.

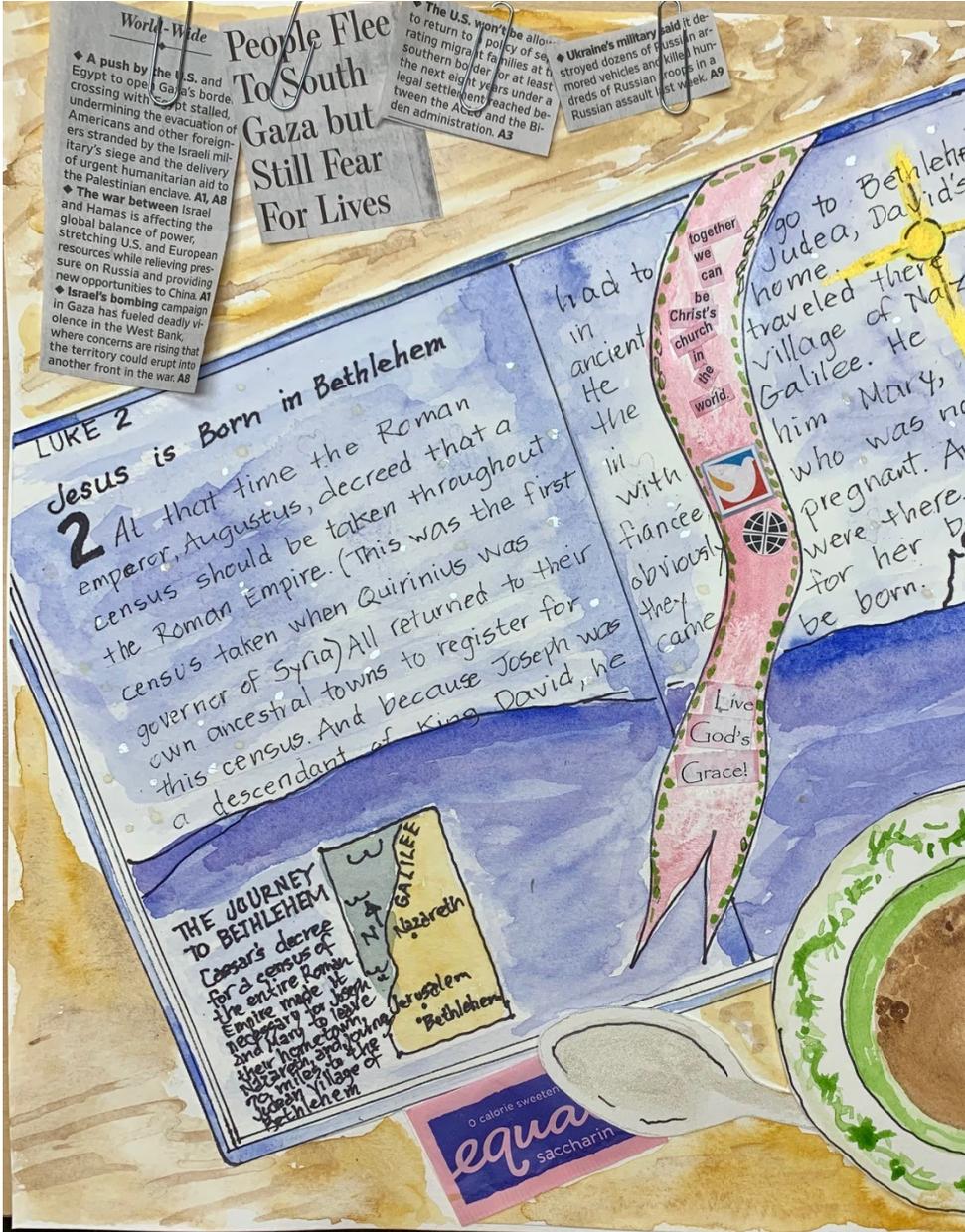


“The LORD has
anointed me to:
bring good news,
bind up, and proclaim:
liberty, release, and the
year of the LORD’s favor”

Isa. 61:1-2

Tidings of Joy

—submitted by Pr. Rich Wolf
Unity, Bel Nor



THE JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM
 Caesar's decree for a census of the entire Roman Empire made it necessary for Joseph and Mary to leave their home town of Nazareth and travel 70 miles to the tiny village of Bethlehem.

GAZELLE
 Nazareth
 Jerusalem
 Bethlehem

0 calorie sweetener
equa
 saccharin



—Mixed media by Jan



Dillon, St. Thomas/Holy Spirit

The call of Advent is the call to look for sign's of the one who is to come, to prepare for God's promise to be fulfilled. The story from scripture is well-known. As we wait in joy, as we watch for the year of the Lord's favor, we are still bombarded with our daily news. How do we bring tidings of joy in the midst of war?

We remember that the news stories are always changing, clipped and unclipped in our lives. We lean in to coffee with friends, our community of faith, our daily discipline of devotions. We wait for the Lord, and we take action to comfort the afflicted as we wait.

How are you actively waiting this Advent season? What headlines do you wish to see today? How can you work to make those headlines a reality for our world?

THURSDAY

Read Hebrews 1:1-4



Photo by Michael Prange, Holy Cross

A Son who is the reflection of G-D's glory, the exact imprint of G-D's very being: this is why the world is disrupted by Christ's coming. There are many people content to believe in a far-off removed God who has no real or lasting impact on their days. They are content with the status quo.

Yet, in sending a Son, a Son who is incarnate from Mary, G-D reminds us that we are not left alone, unguided, unloved. We are given sustenance in the one who came as one of us and yet is indeed divine. We cannot help but be overjoyed. We cannot help but be changed forever.

So we fall down to worship and praise this more excellent one. We work to bring the joy of the Son to the world in how we live and what we say.

FRIDAY

Joy in God's Enduring Presence

David returns the Ark of the Covenant to the people. It had been gone for years—sometimes stolen by enemies, sometimes hidden in fear—but now the presence of God was with them again! What joy! God's own words, literally written on two tablets and given to Moses, were inside the Ark. Now the High Priest could again place drops of blood on the Mercy seat, atoning for the sins of the people. No wonder David danced and celebrated with food for all the people.

On Christmas Day, we will celebrate God's presence with us. Jesus is the covenant made between God and all people. Instead of words written on stone or paper, God sent his very words in Jesus. Instead of the atoning blood of an animal given in sacrifice, Jesus shed his own blood to purchase us as his own. And instead of misplacement or loss, Jesus is with us always, even to the ends of the earth.

"In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands;
they will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like clothing;
like a cloak you will roll them up,
and like clothing they will be changed.
But you are the same,
and your years will never end."

Hebrews 1: 10-12

—Susan McKee,
Peace, Washington

SATURDAY



Watercolor by Vickie Minter, Atonement

The wait is coming to a close. Instead of doing nothing but rushing through today to get to Christmas, take time to breathe.

Today, sit with a cup of coffee or tea (or some other comforting beverage) and feed your soul. After all, in this season of Advent we remember that we all, in various ways, bear Christ to the world. It is difficult work, these tidings we bring. So make sure you are caring for yourself.

Do something today that brings you joy.

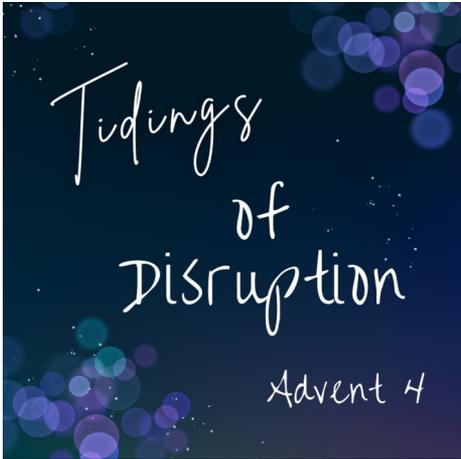
Do something today that brings someone else joy.

Do something today that allows you to rest and relax.

Do something today that slows you down to appreciate the people and the world around you.

Christmas can wait as Advent finds fulfillment.

ADVENT 4



"We interrupt this broadcast..."

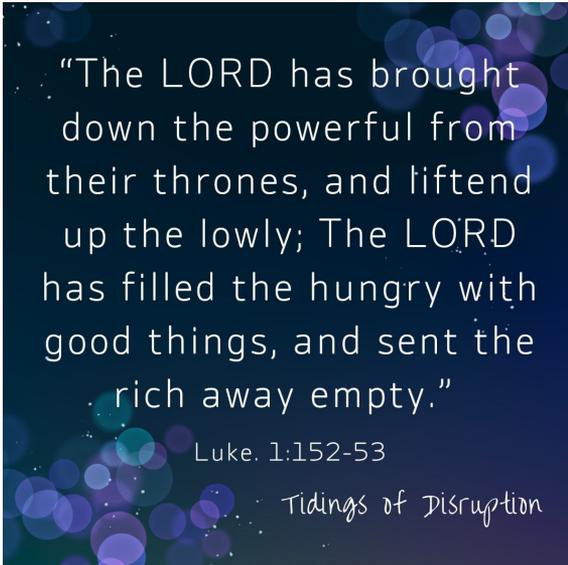
When we heard these words on radio or TV we knew we were probably getting bad news, but news we could believe. On CBS, Walter Cronkite ended his nightly broadcasts by saying "...and that's the way it is." We believed him.

I could relate to Zechariah's questioning words in Luke 1: How will I know that this is so, he asked. The reply: "I am Gabriel, I stand in the presence of God." Gabriel was the angelic equivalent of Walter Cronkite. Gabriel brought news that would change lives. News that was hard to accept but that's the way it would be for them. These Advent stories are so familiar to us now but think about Elizabeth. Her sadness and cultural isolation at being childless was finally over. Good news. Imagine when Mary heard that the Holy Spirit "will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." Good news for a young girl in Nazareth? Certainly not. Whenever God announced God's plan people's lives were turned upside down.

When I read the phrase "Tidings of Disruption" I thought of war, particularly Christmastime in 1972. Our armed forces conducted massive bombing raids in Vietnam with the goal of bringing the parties back to peace negotiations. "We regret to inform you..." began the many telegrams to the families of those lost. Tidings of disruption. To

this day, incongruously, they are called the Christmas bombings. Bad tidings of disruption, no joy, as the poet Rev. Toddy Hoare called that kind of news at Christmas, and urged his readers to let Jesus lead the way.

Gabriel announced that God's plan was good news. Tough for people to accept, though. Zechariah doubted and was struck speechless. Mary was taken aback before hearing "Don't be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." Mary accepted her tidings with humility. "Let it be to me according to your word."



The gospel of Jesus disrupts our lives, too, and the lives of those around us. We pray that our faith response is good news for everyone we touch with help, healing, and service. Let it be to us as it was to Mary. Disruption and then joy in the birth of the Christ Child.

—Jonathan Heerboth
Christ, Webster Groves

CHRISTMAS EVE

Read Isaiah 9:2-7 and Luke 2:1-20

Both the first reading and the Gospel are reminders of the never-ending need for good news. Isaiah prophesies the coming of the messiah. This is not only good news for southern kingdom Judeans it is good news northern kingdom Israelites. It is good news for all who are oppressed, depressed, or repressed regardless of national origin. The good news is that God does not abandon God's creation regardless of our human failing. God does not ignore human need regardless of our sin. Despite the sin of both kingdoms, despite the fall of the southern kingdom and the impending doom of the northern kingdom, there is hope. This is refreshing: there is good news.

In the Gospel we are reminded that God has good news in the midst of foreign occupation. The promised Messiah has arrived. Unexpectedly the messiah has arrived. In the midst of crushing poverty, the savior of the world is in the world. News of the messiah is a drink of cool water to a parched people. God's announcement of a messiah whose governance is peace stands in stark contrast to the oppression of Rome, the recession of Herod and depression of Israel.

We live in a world that is drenched in the blood of innocents: victims of gun violence, terrorism, war, and famine. In spite of this gloom there is good news, there is hope. The good news for us that the Messiah who was prophesied did arrive on God's schedule. The Palestinian Messiah became the savior of the world. This savior inaugurated a reign which seeks to bring peace, Joy, and hope to this gloomy world. This savior is a light for those who live in darkness. The messiah was prophesied to those who were

under siege; the messiah was born amongst the poor and Downtrodden; our messiah opened his reign to all regardless of race, ethnicity, pedigree, or economic status. The savior lives among us!

—Pr. Richard Ashley
St. Philip, St. Louis.



—watercolor by Lynnda Light, St. Thomas/Holy Spirit

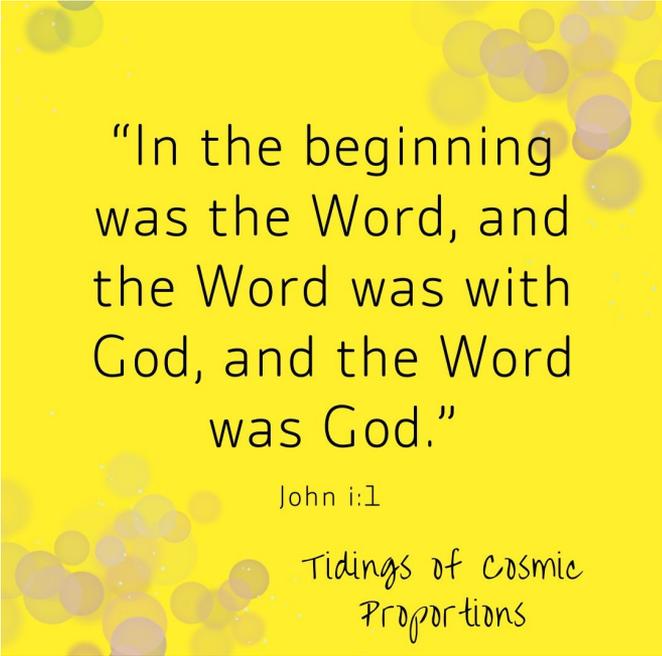
CHRISTMAS DAY

Christmas Joy

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

When I was a child, Christmas was the highlight of my year! We lived in the Chicago area, so by the time December rolled around it was very cold, it would get dark early, and by mid-December it seemed like every house in the neighborhood had decorated for Christmas. Even though it was dark and dreary outside, the entire neighborhood was filled with light each night. As the days grew closer to Christmas, I got more and more excited. I remember just sitting in the living room as a little kid looking at the lights on the tree and wondering what Christmas morning would be like. Every Christmas Eve, we would go to church, which built my excitement even more. And then when Christmas morning came, I don't think I was ever disappointed. There were always presents under the tree, coffee brewing for mom and dad, great food, and family gatherings. Christmas was always the highlight of my year and the presents, no matter how big or small, brought me joy and brightened my day.

As I grew older, a lot of the magic of Christmas changed for me. It no longer was about the presents under the tree. Today, I still love Christmas morning and I get great joy from seeing presents under the tree and the joy on my families' faces as they open them, but my real joy today comes in knowing the presence of Christ in my life. I am always amazed every time I hear or read those words from scripture on Christmas morning "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory,



“In the beginning
was the Word, and
the Word was with
God, and the Word
was God.”

John 1:1

*Tidings of Cosmic
Proportions*

the glory as
of a father's
only son, full
of grace and
truth.”
(1:14)

As we
celebrate the
gift of Em-
manuel (God
with us) on
this holy day,
may we
know that
the greatest
gift is God's

presence in this world. In this world that is filled with war, hatred, and so many things that try to separate us from God's love and presence in our lives, may we remember that God is always with us and God's "light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:5).

Christmas Prayer:

All-powerful and unseen God, the coming of your light into our world has brightened weary hearts with peace. Call us out of darkness and empower us to proclaim the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Sunday's and Seasons, Christmas Prayer of the Day)

—Pr. Dave Whetter
Bishop's Associate, CSS-ELCA

TUESDAY

Read Jeremiah 26:1-9, 12-15 and Acts 6:8-15; 7:51-60

Today's Scriptures do not seem to fit under the heading of 'Hopeful Resonance'! They discuss God's people NOT listening to the warnings the Prophets bring. And YES, they even discredit the messengers to prove them NOT trustworthy.

It seems that nothing has changed!

We STILL DO NOT heed the warnings of Global Warming, Social Injustice, and Divisions that make us stray even further from God's purpose for us. We discredit in order to be right and even justify violence to support our cause. Yet, the difference is that we can look to JESUS. We can bring our concerns and sorrows to God, the Omnipotent One! We can boldly ask God to boldly intervene. Then we can turn to HOPE, because we know the promises of God!



—photo by Michael Prange,
Holy Cross

We just witnessed his promise to become Flesh and Dwell among us! We know that our future is secured through the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ! Because of him, there will come a time where there will be NO MORE reason for lament. It is up to us to bridge that time and ask him boldly for STRENGTH and FAITH in our HOPE JESUS CHRIST!

—*Renate Hawn*
Holy Cross, Creve Coeur

WEDNESDAY

Read Exodus 33:18-23 and 1 John 1:1-9

Who has seen the wind?

By Christina Rossetti

Who has seen the wind?

Neither I nor you:

But when the leaves hang trembling,

The wind is passing through.

Who has seen the wind?

Neither you nor I:

But when the trees bow down their heads,

The wind is passing by.

I learned this poem as a child, and it has stuck with me. Wind. Air currents in motion, blowing from a high-pressure zone to a low-pressure area. You can't go into your yard and see air in motion. What you DO see is the wind's effects on everything around it. The trees, the dust, flags, turbines. We see the wind as it changes our world.

We don't see God in our world the way the Israelites saw God in a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud. Or the way first-century Christians saw Jesus or were stirred by the Holy Spirit manifesting on Pentecost.

But we see God in this world through the currents of love that God's power creates: People being fed, marching for justice, welcomed at bus stations and at our front doors. We experience the intangible in the tangible.

In Exodus 33, Moses asks to see God's face. And God tells him that no one can see God's face and live. Moses gets a glimpse of God, passing by, as he hides in a cleft in the rock.

In 1 John 1, God's face is revealed to the early Christians by the light coming into the world – that is, Jesus. Without Jesus, we still would not know God. We would be “in the dark,” as the metaphor goes. Sometimes people use the phrases carelessly, and people



—watercolor by Jan Dillon, STHS

miss the point. Light isn't always good and darkness isn't always bad. Jesus, described as light, comes into the world to reveal God to us. Because of Jesus, we experience God in this world. And we, too, can share God's love in our actions so others can experience the intangible in the tangible.

—*Vicar Gail Kenny*
Trinity, Chesterfield

THURSDAY

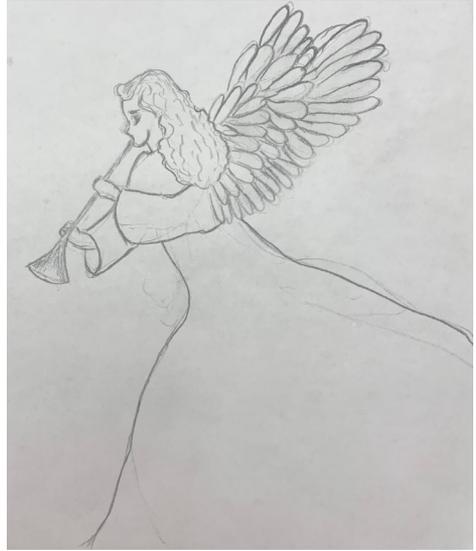
Paging through a photo album recently – the old kind, printed photos inside plastic sleeves - I came across a photo that made me smile: my mother and my two daughters. My mom, wearing her Christmas red wool blazer, reaches out to adjust the halo on my three-year-old “angel” daughter's head. My older daughter, already a veteran of three Sunday School Christmas programs, places one hand on her little sister's shoulder. Now my mother sings, off-key, with all the Saints in heaven; my daughters' children

now prepare for their own Sunday School Christmas programs, ready to share the “tidings of comfort and joy.”

Looking at the photo again, I see how the Good News of Jesus birth, life, death, and resurrection has been shared in my family. My parents, as messengers of the Word, shared with me the tidings of comfort and joy; I

shared the wonderful news of God’s grace with my daughters, and now my daughters share that same message of God’s love with their children, who are ready to proclaim in loud voices, “Rejoice! The Word is made Flesh!” Another look at the photo draws me beyond my family to my church family, my faith community. Looking at my younger daughter, I see excitement in her face but also some trepidation in the way she holds her hands. And then big sister’s reassuring hand on little sister’s shoulder.

We may feel unsure about how to share the Good News of God’s grace with the bigger world so desperately in need of hope, and yet we are not alone. Our siblings in Christ rest a reassuring hand on our shoulder, straighten our halo, and we join with all the saints in heaven and on earth, proclaiming, maybe off key, maybe in perfect harmony, “The Light has come into the world! Rejoice!”



—drawing by Sandy Bodendieck, STHS

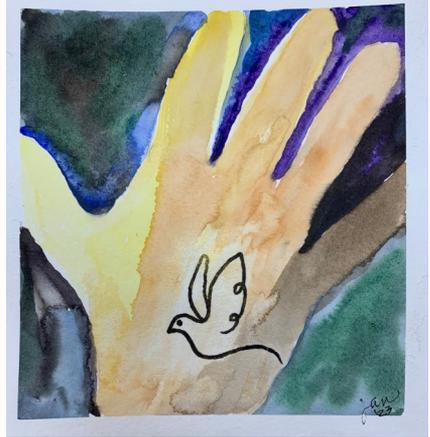
—Linda Meierhoff

St. Thomas/Holy Spirit, Sunset Hills

FRIDAY

Read Matthew 12:46-50

Isn't Christmas supposed to be about family and friends? Didn't we just hear all of Bedford Falls sing *Auld Lang Syne* to a revived and restored George Bailey? Isn't this the time of year we are called to draw together and embrace each other? What gives?



—watercolor by Jan Dillon, STHS

Too often we can be drawn into the sentimentality of the Christmas season. We can be blinded by the trappings of boxes and ribbons and bows. We can slip into the world's marketing and miss the cosmic reality that Immanuel, G-D with us truly heralds,

How we define our belonging has shifted forever. Our faith defines who we are, not our family of origin or even our friend groups we have gathered over the years. How we live as beloved of G-D connects us in ways that go beyond blood. Our kinship is with those who share the good news.

Yes, sometimes our belonging does still include our family. But for many who have been shunned by their family because of what they believe or who they love or whatever else has cast them out, the idea that our kinship group is defined by the love of G-D with us turns the cosmos upside down. In these communities, defined by Christ, we gather and we find meaning. We find love, We find the heart of Christmas.

—Pr. Jill Seagle
St. Thomas/Holy Spirit, Sunset Hills

SATURDAY

Read 2 Peter 3:9.

Imagine being at the dinner table with a beloved child. Imagine telling your child, who you treasure with all your heart, “I made a wonderful, yummy dessert! But your body also needs vegetables in order to be healthy. So you can have dessert once you have eaten all of your vegetables.”

Imagine the child gets very excited, imagining how great the dessert will be. So excited, that they do not even think about eating the green stuff on their plate. You remind them, and tell them again why they need to eat the veggies. They take a tiny bite, but then they get distracted again, only thinking of the dessert at the end.

Will you wait? Will you grow impatient? Will you eventually say, “Ok, you have two minutes to finish your veggies, or no dessert?”

Admittedly, I am not proud to say I have resorted to those sorts of ultimatums in moments of parental desperation with my own toddlers. Maybe the hardest part of this process, for me, is the fact that I really do want them to have dessert! I want to make them happy! Yet I know that their overall health, wellbeing, wholeness, and learning the important lessons of life is even more important than their momentary happiness.

So the best thing I can usually do is act with patience.

God is not holding out on us, my friends. God is being patient and compassionate. God is waiting for the least of us and remaining by our sides as we journey closer and farther, along winding roads and through valleys, in our life journeys. God desires all people to repent—to have a posi-

tive change of mind—toward God and their relationship to God. God wants the Kingdom for all of us. God loves us so much.

Peace of Christ be with you.

—Pr. Beverly Struckman
Living Lord, Lake St. Louis

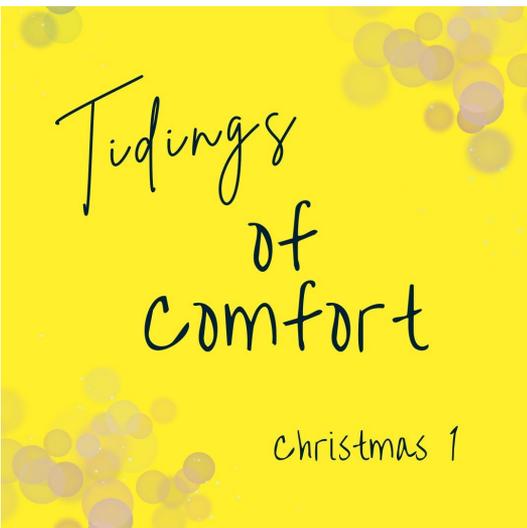
CHRISTMAS 1

Christmas is often thought of as a family affair. We gather with those closest to us. We worship together with the congregations we know best. We hear again the story of a small, unlikely family, of Mary, Joseph, and her firstborn son Jesus, together in a humble stable.

That's where the story starts, but we soon find that Christmas is cause for universal rejoicing. The angels promised peace on earth, and now Simeon, echoing Isaiah, promises the Christ child will be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles/and for glory to your people Israel." And today's psalm is a song of unrestrained joy for all living and non-

living creatures, from the heavens above to the depths of the sea.

The breadth of this joy tells us the good news. As much as we've enjoyed celebrating Christmas from our homes and churches, as much as we've enjoyed the intimacy of the scene at



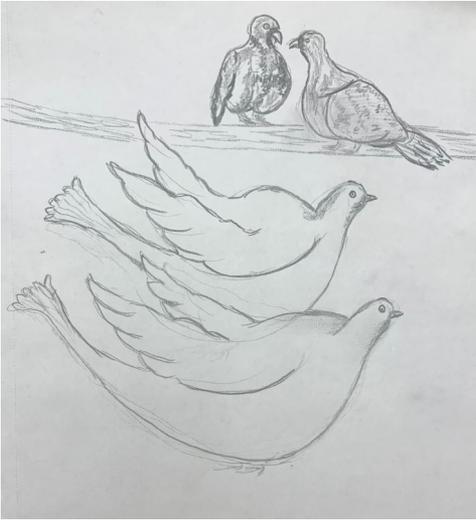
Tidings
of
comfort

Christmas 1

the manger, now we are reminded that Jesus joined not only a family, not only a people, but all peoples and all creation! Once and for all, God and creation are united in Jesus, and all of us, from humanity "born under the law" to the earth and stars themselves, are included in the praiseworthy news of salvation through him. May our celebration reflect this joy for all people, this joy to the world!

—Pr. Scott Benolkin
Bethel, University City

MONDAY



—drawing by Sandy Bodendieck, STHS

"Lord, let your servant go
in peace;
Your Word has been fulfilled."
fulfilled."

Because we've seen your
saving grace
We know that all is well.

Through all the sorrow,
pain and death,
We dare, O God, to sing.

For you once sent your
Son to earth —

And that changed every-
thing.

There's much we cannot understand,
Nor order, nor control;
We place our lives into your hands
And trust you'll make us whole.

Lord, let your servants daily know
That we are not alone;
And may we find, where'er we go,
You'll lead us safely home.

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*—submitted by Pr. Rich Wolf
Unity, Bel Nor*

TUESDAY

Shine God's Light

Taking down the Christmas tree is never as fun as putting it up. Putting away ornaments, wreaths, and decorative stockings is almost a somber occasion for most. Christmas brings so much joy, excitement, and memories, and sometimes it can be hard to say goodbye to it all until next year. Our Christmas lights come down outside our homes and those dark winter nights seem even darker now.

The decorations may come down, but don't put out the light of Christ within you. Christmas is a fun and festive time of year full of gifts and family, but Christians know the real reason for the season. I encourage you to think of Jesus not just as the reason for the season, but as the reason for life.

Jesus is not a fad. He is not a passing trend we put in a box and store in our basement when Christmas is over. He lives in us throughout the year, his light shining through us, so others may see the glory of our Father in heaven. For many people, life is like a cold, dark winter's night: no hope and no direction. We as Christians are called to shine the light of Christ to them so they may find the love and faith in Jesus. God wants everyone to know what he's done through

Jesus and invites all of us into his family and the kingdom of heaven. This is not a gift we should keep to ourselves; everyone needs to know!

Isaiah 60:3 reads: "Nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn."

As we prepare to celebrate Epiphany, we remember the kings who sought out Jesus, bringing him the best of gifts. Just like them, we need to seek the face of God, offering him our gifts and talents, no matter what they may be. God loves everyone, so we must reach to the corners of the earth to let the good news be heard! There are so many ways to touch people across the planet and within your own community to tell the message of Christ. How can you give, volunteer, or use your talents to further God's kingdom?

The Christmas tree may be taken down, the twinkling lights put away, but never extinguish the light of Christ within you. You are an ambassador of God everywhere you go, and every person you come in contact with needs the love of God and the message of his good news.

—*Brianna Dehn*
Good Shepherd, Manchester

WEDNESDAY

Warnings & Consequences

Read: Proverbs 1:20-33 & James 4:1-10

The readings for today highlight the consequences to those who are unfaithful to God' law. Unfaithfulness leads to conflict, which then leads to war, disaster, and death. Wisdom, in the Proverbs reading, points out that God has been with them and their rejection very simply leads to adverse consequences.

Today is the 10th day of Christmas and the 3rd day of the New Year. These readings remind us that as our celebrations wane, and decorations are put away, and card & wrapping are recycled, there is more to be aware of and following in our world. It is easy to get caught up in the highs and brights of the Christmas season and new year. It's easy to forge from whom all of our gifts in this world come from.

And right on time, we have Wisdom and James to reorient us. Daily, we are called to remember whose we are. Daily, we are called to turn back to God and God's love. Daily, we are called to pray, praise, and give thanks.

Loving God, your mercy is new every morning and your loving-kindness always remains. Empower us through your Spirit to remain steadfast in our faith, that you are our God and we are your people. Amen.

—Pr. Tina Reyes
LuMin, St. Louis

THURSDAY

In a time when the Israelites are bound and weeping on a road that passes the place where Jacob's wife Rachel is buried on their way to Babylon. God sends hope and a promise. Your children will return, through the Prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 31:16 Thus said the Lord, Refrain from your weeping and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, sayeth the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy.

Jeremiah 31:17 there is hope in thine end, sayeth the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border.

Our help comes from the Lord the maker of heaven and earth, that same God of help and hope made provision for his son. So that what was prophesized about Jesus's coming, even during great tribulation brought on by an angry King, would be fulfilled. Then what was said by Zechariah 9:9-10, "Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!

Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and victorious,

lowly and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.... He shall speak peace to the nations and his dominion will be from sea to sea. and from the river to the ends of the earth" was a promise kept.

Father God, in our darkest seasons you bring light.

May we remember that our help comes from you, who made the heavens and the earth. We can trust our everlasting future in you. You are a promise keeper. Your son came, died and was raised again for our salvation. Thank you. You are good and your mercy endures forever. Forgive us and bless us, In Jesus name, Amen.

—*Vickie Minter*
Atonement, Florissant

FRIDAY

So much of the Christmas season, as presented by our culture, seems to focus through the eyes of a child: the awe and wonder of the bright lights in the dark sky, the mystery and joy of brightly wrapped presents under a tree, the taste and smell of delicious treats. The story of God's son coming to us as a baby, innocent and sweet, needy and helpless, sparks in us the desire to help our own children



—watercolor by Vickie Minter, Atonement

know how special they are and how much they are loved.

As this season comes to a close for this year, it is important to remember that the lessons of peace, joy, hope and love that we have heard don't end after the 12 days of Christmas. What we instill in the youngest generations should not be a desire for the material things that we are so caught up in at Christmas, but the generosity of spirit and life of mercy that Jesus calls his followers into. That golden rule we may have heard so often as children ourselves would become the bedrock of lives that seek to embody the message of love we find in the Christmas story. "Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Luke 6:31) Love others so much, with what you have and who you are, that they know how special they are to God and how much they are loved.

If there is one thing I hope my own children take away from the celebration of Christmas it is that God's

“I will greatly rejoice
in the LORD, my whole
being shall exult
in my God: for he has
clothed me with the
garments of salvation”

Isa 61:10

Tidings of Comfort

love is so great it overshadows all the other concerns and fears of the world. I pray the awe and wonder they feel when they see the lights would echo the comfort and joy of God's love even on the darkest of nights. I pray we all cling so dearly to hope in our very be-

ings that we reflect the light of God to the rest of the world. May you be filled with the love and joy of God, and through you may it scatter out to all those you meet.

—*Pr. Carrie McElfresh*
Tinity, Kirkwood

EPIPHANY

Read Matthew 2:1-2. 9-10

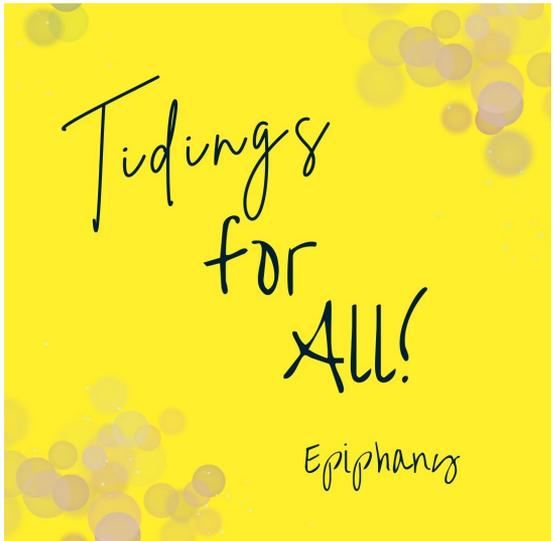
If the magi followed the star to the place where the child was, it meant they had to travel at night when it was dark. We often understand Epiphany as a season of “light” when we are able to see the identity of the Christ child, contrasting light with darkness. Light is associated with hope and life. We want to walk as children of the light, as we sing in church, and not in darkness which is fearful and therefore bad.

But think about the Christmas story. It was in the dark, while the shepherds were tending their flocks at night, that the angels announced the birth of the Christ child. It

was in the dark that the magi followed the star, which could only be visible at night. It was in the dark while Joseph was sleeping that he was warned in a dream to flee to Egypt to protect the child from king Herod. So, what if the dark is not a bad thing, contrasted to the light, but a gift that enables us to experience God in ways we cannot in the light?

Barbara Brown Taylor has written a book entitled, "Learning to Walk in the Dark" in which she says, "I have learned things in the dark that I could never learn in the light, things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there is only one logical conclusion. I need the darkness as much as I need the light." I have certainly found that true in my life. Walking in the mornings, in the dark before the sun comes up gives me a peace and sense of God's presence that is hard to maintain in the busyness of the daylight. God is in the darkness. I know this not because I can clearly see, but precisely because I cannot. And isn't that what faith invites us into – the cloud of unknowing where we can't clearly see this mystery that is God?

As we enter into another Epiphany season (and a new year) my prayer is that we learn to walk in the dark, with openness and wonder, with compassion and trust, knowing that the light and the dark are all part of God's glorious creation. May we not divide the world into



light and dark, good and bad, but trust God to hold all things, all people together so that we can experience the depth and reality of life and be overwhelmed with joy. Amen.

—*Bishop Susan Candea*
Central States Synod, ELCA

“On entering the house,
the magi saw the child
with Mary his mother;
and they knelt down
and paid him homage.”

Matt 2:11

Tidings for Allt

My Notes:

My Notes:

Many thanks to our contributing congregations:

Peace Lutheran, Washington, MO
Christ Lutheran, Webster Groves, MO
St. Thomas/Holy Spirit Lutheran, Sunset Hills, MO
Holy Cross Lutheran, Creve Coeur, MO
St. Mark's Lutheran, Cape Girardeau, MO
Shepherd of the Hills, St. Ann, MO
St. Philip, St. Louis, MO
Lutheran Church of the Atonement, Florissant, MO
Living Lord Lutheran, Lake St. Louis, MO
LuMin St. Louis Ecumenical Campus Ministry
Bethel Lutheran, University City, MO
Trinity Lutheran, Kirkwood, MO
Good Shepherd Lutheran, Manchester, MO
Zion Lutheran, Ferguson, MO
Unity Lutheran, Bel Nor, MO
Trinity Lutheran, Chesterfield, MO

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***Tidings* Theme Designs:**

The Rev. Kristen Koch, Shepherd of the Hills

Watercolors:

Lynnda Light; Janis Dillon, St. Thomas/Holy Spirit
Vickie Minter, Atonement

Graphite Illustrations:

Sandy Bodendieck, St. Thomas/Holy Spirit

Photography:

Michael Prange, Holy Cross

The background is a vibrant yellow with a bokeh effect of overlapping circles in shades of blue, purple, green, and orange. The text is written in a white, elegant cursive font. The word "Tidings" is the largest and most prominent, followed by the subtitle "A season of hopeful resonance" in a smaller size.

Tidings

A season of
hopeful
resonance