

ADVENT 2025



Monte Vista Baptist Church
Maryville, Tennessee

ADVENT

The Apostle Paul urged his readers to be “imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, . . .” (Ephesians 5:1-2)

Out of divine love we experience hope, peace and joy.

In the season of Advent (from Latin *adventum*, “to come to”), we take part in the Christian tradition of awaiting his coming, that is, the birth of Jesus, the Christ. The Christian experience of expectation and waiting resembles that of the Jews in periods of exile from their country and foreign occupation of it. This means that the Jews yearned for mercy, hope, joy, and love in life-changing events.

“Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. . . . God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.” I John 4:11

A most familiar Christmas song reads in its final verse,

*Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay
Close by me forever and love me, I pray;
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care,
And fit us for heaven to live with Thee there.*

In the Advent season, we hope that these devotionals on the themes of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love will encourage you to watch for, receive, and practice the love of Christ Jesus.

The Engage Team



HOPE

Sunday, November 30

by Ken Brown

Advent is the season of preparation for the coming of the Promised Messiah. It is a season filled with Hope. Hope for a restored relationship. Hope for a new and better world. Hope for a Savior who would take away the many sins and failures of a world struggling on its own. Hope for an end to suffering and a beginning of life lived to its fullness.

Since the fall of man in the garden, it is hope that has kept our hearts alive. This hope is more than wishful thinking. It is an understanding that our circumstances don't determine our value. It is an acknowledgement that what is observable now is not what is promised to be. There is more, and this is the essence of hope.

It is hope that shapes faith (Hebrews 11:1) from the unknown to the known. It is hope that empowers us to fight battles raging within and without (Psalm 31).

Hope is that part of the Advent season that connects us back to the prophets and the faithful ones in the Old Testament who were yearning for the Messiah, for salvation. Hope gave them the strength that they would see God work his glory in the world. Like Anna and Simeon in the Temple, it was hope that drew them to worship God expectantly, not seeing fully where he was at work or how he would accomplish his will. Hope did all this.

For this first week of Advent, several Monte Vista Baptist Church partners have shared their reflections on hope. They are in different stations in life: newly baptized, newly married, different generations of the same family, those touched by suffering and pain. But they, like us, live lives of hope for God to do in their lives, in our midst, all that he has promised in His Word. Let us approach this season of preparation aware of the need for His Hope in our world.

HOPE – Monday, December 1

by Reg and Joyce Garmeson

HOPE, what is it? Here is an acrostic of HOPE:

H - Having

O - Optimistic

P - Perspective

E - Everyday

But what is HOPE? **Hope** is an optimistic state of mind based on an expectation of positive outcomes with respect to events and circumstances in one's own life, or the world at large. As a verb, Merriam-Webster defines *hope* as "to expect with confidence" or "to cherish a desire with anticipation".

There are two kinds of hope—worldly or temporal hope and the hope of believers. Worldly or secular hope is a subjective expectation; it may be solidly based or misguided, as it does not consider God's will. But worldly hope is not a virtue, as it usually holds some degree of uncertainty, doubt, and personal bias and can often be misdirected and selfishly motivated.

Believer's hope is one of the three theological virtues of the Christian-faith, hope, and love. Hope in the Bible means "***a strong and confident expectation***" of future reward. (Titus 1:2)

In modern terms, hope is akin to trust and a confident expectation. Paul argued that Christ was a source of our hope: "***For in this hope we have been saved***" Romans 8:24.

According to the *Holman Bible Dictionary*, believer's hope is a "trustful expectation . . . the anticipation of a favorable outcome under God's guidance."

At this time of year, we reflect on the hope that Israelites had had for centuries that God would provide a Messiah to deliver them from oppression. God did provide that hope in the form of a baby born in a stable to a carpenter and his young virgin bride. Lowly shepherds and stately wise men worshipped him. When the babe grew into a man, he was misunderstood even by his disciples. The Jewish leaders had him put to death. Jesus, that lowly babe rose, from the dead three days later and became the HOPE of the WORLD that GOD had promised years ago.

HOPE
Tuesday, December 2
by Kelly Garmeson Whedbee

A Parent's Hope

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” - Jeremiah 29:11

A parent's hope for their child begins before the first time they hold that child in their arms. It's a special kind of hope that never fades no matter what may come their way. It's a hope that believes in tomorrow even if today is uncertain. A hope that starts with a prayer and the knowledge that our God is in control and has a plan even though we may not see it at the time.

As parents we also know that we have no control over our child's path. We can only guide, teach, love and protect, but ultimately, we must place our hope and faith in the One that shaped our child before they were formed. Our true peace comes from not knowing what will happen, but in knowing Who holds their future.

When we watch our child struggle, we may feel the ache of helplessness. But hope reminds us that God's promises are bigger than our fears. Just as Mary pondered all these things in her heart, we cling to the same faith - that God's hand is upon our children, leading them, redeeming them, and fulfilling His purpose in their lives.

HOPE
Wednesday, December 3
by Houston Whedbee

In 1 Peter 3:15, we are called to ***“be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”***

It is because of Christ that we have hope for another day. When all else is lost, and it seems that things cannot get any worse, **hope** is the one thing that can keep us going, and we would not have that **hope** if not for all that Christ has done for us.

Knowing that Jesus is always here is super comforting and has played a large part in the development of my faith.

Hope is a unique feeling, in that it is often felt alongside negative emotions, such as sadness and loneliness, and this is why it’s so important for us, because we can feel the presence and love of Christ even in times of trouble.

HOPE
Thursday, December 4
by Kambrielle Headrick (Bri)

Hope in Grief

We all face seasons when life feels heavy, when plans fall apart, prayers seem unanswered, or when we lose someone, we love and struggle to understand how to move forward. God does not ask us to pretend the pain is not real. He meets us in it. Jesus wept at the tomb of His friend, and He weeps with us too.

Because of His resurrection, death is not the end. It's a doorway. Our loved ones who believed in Him are not lost; they are home, whole, and waiting. Hope in Christ reminds us that our story is not over.

“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.” Hebrews 6:19

Hope does not mean pretending everything is fine. It means trusting that even when we cannot see the outcome, God is still working. He is not distant. He is right there in the middle of the chaos, steadying us when we start to drift. Hope does not erase the grief, but it gives it purpose. It reminds us that love never dies, and that one day, every tear will be wiped away.

HOPE
Friday, December 5
by Carter Harris

Romans 15:13 - ***“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe in Him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”***

Think about all the parts of life that you hope are going to happen one day. Perhaps it has to do with a career, children, grandchildren, marriage, money, or any of the things that we hope will fulfill us. We see it in ourselves and those that we interact with.

As believers, hope isn't just optimism. It is so much deeper than a “cup half full” kind of person. It's a “my cup is overflowing no matter what” kind of person, because we have a profound trust in a God that is an ever-present help in time of need (Psalm 46). When we focus on His steadfast and unchanging love, we can find a source of strength and confidence that far outweighs anything this world can offer.

Allow God to fill you with joy and peace as you believe in Him despite the adversities of life. Remember the miracles and wonders of His love shown in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ! ***“In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a Living Hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”*** – 1 Peter 1:3.

As a living hope, He is not stagnant. He is moving, listening, working, and responding. Think about how your hope in God can be an example to family and friends this season. As King David puts it in Psalm 31, ***“Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.”***

HOPE
Saturday, December 6
by Arlene Fish

Many of our hopes are really wishes: a boy hopes for a bike for Christmas; a young woman hopes that this young man is the right one to spend the rest of her life with; a mom hopes that her sick child recovers from an illness; parents hope for grandchildren someday; someone hopes that their cancer can be eradicated.

These are all examples of situational hope, focusing on a specific future outcome. Transcendental hope refers to the hope beyond current circumstances or the physical world, such as eternal hope rooted in faith.

In Jeremiah 29:11, he states that ***“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”***

Romans 15:13 states ***“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*** This means that believers can have a confident hope as they trust in God. Think of examples of hope in the Bible: Noah’s ark and the rainbow promise; the story of Hannah’s prayer and the birth of Samuel; Joseph’s journey from betrayal to his family’s salvation.

Hebrews 11:1 says ***“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see.”***

Hope is not just wishful thinking, but in a confident expectation of good as promised by Jesus.



PEACE

Sunday, December 7

by Mike Wilkins

Think of a time when you experienced the peace of God. Where were you? What was going on in your life at the time? How did God share his peace with you?

Sometimes we think of God's peace as coming to us primarily in moments of crisis when we find ourselves particularly anxious and troubled. And it's true that many of us could tell of times when in our deepest moment of need that we suddenly experienced God's peace that *"passes all understanding."* (Philippians 4:7)

But the truth is that God can surprise us with the experience of his peace even in the midst of the common, everyday moments of life. I personally have experienced God's gift of peace filling my heart and mind while lying in a hammock, paddling a kayak on a lake, while hearing a song on the radio, cutting the grass, when viewing a beautiful sight in nature, and while sitting around a fire with friends and family, just to name a few of my encounters with God's peace.

The Bible tells us that ***"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father..."*** (James 1:17) and certainly peace is one of God's best gifts to us.

During this time of Advent, when we remember God's gift of peace, pay attention to those moments when you find yourself with a lump in your throat, a tear in your eye, or a smile on your face, for in those moments God just may be offering you his wondrous gift of peace once again.

PEACE – Monday, December 8

by Bill Willhite

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6 ASV

As we live another Advent Season, we are excited to hear these words coming to us from a variety of sources. The words from the seasonal songs allow us the opportunity to reflect on the birth of Jesus Christ. Many people see these words from the Old Testament written thousands of years before Christ’s birth, as a message from God promising Jesus’ arrival.

We hear other cherished words sung to the lowly shepherds on the night of Jesus’ birth, ***“Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among people with whom He is pleased.”*** Luke 2:14 NASV

As we hear songs with the promise of joy, hope, peace, and love, this allows us time to reflect on why God would care enough about us to offer us life in Him that exceeds all expectations. ***“And God’s peace, which is so great we cannot understand it, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”*** Philippians 4:7 NCV

Maybe this is the kind of peace and knowledge of God that brought Nicodemus to Jesus in the 3rd chapter of John. Nicodemus knew Jesus had to be sent from God because of His teachings and the miracles He performed. Their conversation continues until Jesus gives Nicodemus the reason for our Advent Season, songs, peace, love, joy and hope. ***“God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost but have eternal life.”*** John 3:16 NCV

Thank you, Father God, for your Son as we celebrate Jesus’ birth.

PEACE – Tuesday, December 9
by Judith M. Humphreys

Sometime ago, I had an experience that had a great impact on my life. My husband and I, with our two sons, had been transferred to Michigan. We had been there almost a year when suddenly my Dad, who was only 54 years old, fell over dead. He and Mom lived here in Maryville where I was raised. It happened on a Saturday morning while we were outside playing with our neighbors. I had spoken with my Dad every day that week and had given him the neighbor's telephone number. The call was made to them. Never in my life will I forget that call.

I was nine months pregnant with our third child and, needless to say, I was extremely upset. There was one flight out of Kalamazoo to Chicago, but would they allow me on it? The company that he worked for made the arrangements and we did get to Chicago. Would I be able to board a plane there? Thankfully, we did get on that plane also.

As I tried to settle in, I reached overhead and felt a book. It was a Bible and as I laid it in my lap, it fell open to John 14 “...***Let not your heart be troubled...***” John 14:1.

I have flown many times since that day. I haven't seen a Bible on a plane since. Peace flowed all over me and I was able to face the following days reasonably well. My daughter was born the day following the funeral.

Thank you, Jesus for Your perfect timing.

“Let not your hearts be troubled; Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions....”

John 14: 1-2

PEACE – Wednesday, December 10

by Marlene Willhite

Seeking peace, especially during the busy Christmas season may seem like an exercise in futility, yet:

Looking to Scripture we can find Jesus' offer of peace: ***"I told you these things so that you can have peace in me. In this world you will have trouble, but be brave! I have defeated the world."*** John 16:33 (NCV) After Jesus's death and resurrection, each time He appeared to the believers locked away and scared, His words were ***"Peace be with you."*** John 20:19, 20:21, 20:26

Participating in Christmas worship offers peace to our too-busy lives. Comforting words in many songs can offer peace. One example: From the first verse of "In Christ Alone" by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend

*"In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My comforter, my all in all
Here, in the love of Christ, I stand"*

Each of us can share Christ's peace. In some churches, "passing the peace" (some folk call our church's greeting time "Holy Chaos"☺) is practiced as a way to symbolize reconciliation and unity among the people in that church family. In between our church services let's think of ways to "pass the peace" of Christ each day: a smiling face, visit, phone call, text, card in the mail, invite to lunch or any multitude of ways to "pass the peace" of Christ to another person we know.

Merry Christmas and Christ's peace to each of you, my precious Monte Vista family. Thank you for the many ways you have "passed the peace" of Christ to me.

PEACE – Thursday, December 11
by Richard Talley

One Christmas Eve, December 24, 1966, to be exact, I was a twenty-one- year-old E-5 in the United States Army deployed to the other side of the world. I was there with twelve other men from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and religions. Our common bond was the desire “to go home.” We had no celebrations planned for the season. Just a stand down and then back to work. As you may imagine, depression and homesickness and general unhappiness were overflowing. As I recall, there was very little talk among us; nothing for us except to feel very sorry for ourselves. As we proceeded into the depths of despair, a large box was delivered with my name on it. This box got everyone’s attention. When it was opened, the first thing that caught the eye was a small, decorated Christmas tree. The tree went immediately to the middle of the room. In the box with the tree were brownies, cookies, olives, and yes, Rice Krispie treats. I didn’t know it, but thirty days earlier, my wife, Carlene, had put this collection of cheer together and shipped it to the other side of the world. That gift brought those men back from the “depths of despair” to hearts filled with cheer. We sang hymns and carols and talked about Christmases back home.

We talked about the “baby” that brought this season to us and the peace that came with Him. Sometime later, I discovered the Bible verse, one of my favorites: John 16:33.

“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace in the world. Ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.”

I sometimes wonder if she put that verse in that box just for me.

PEACE – Friday, December 12

by Ruth Harris

On the night Jesus was born the angels announced his birth saying, ***“On earth peace among men with whom He is pleased”*** (Luke 2:14). Today peace is often understood and experienced as a “pleasant feeling that all is well”. The Bible teaches us that peace is not just a feeling or emotion, but a person, Jesus, who is “God with us” in both the storms and pleasures of life to reassure us that He is in control. HE is our Peace, regardless of circumstances.

On a beautiful, hot Saturday while living in the desert of Peru my husband and I took two friends for a picnic at a shady spot by a river. Just as we got settled four young men burst from the nearby bushes and put a knife at each of our throats as they ordered us to lie on the ground. They were angry that we had no money but gathered almost everything we had brought with us to carry away. Fortunately, they were unable to drive our car. Although it was frightening to feel the cold metal of the knives at our throats as we lay on the ground praying for protection, even greater was the almost tangible “umbrella of peace” that fell over us, enveloping us. My beating heart was reassured and calmed by the knowledge that God was in control, protecting us to remain unharmed and to BE our peace amid the attack.

As we experience life’s uncertainties we can remember, as we heard in a recent sermon, that Jesus is “in the boat” with us to be our Peace and to give calm in life’s storms just as He gave to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee.

God’s peace is always available to His children whether in calm moments or turbulent ones.

In John 14:27 Jesus reminds us that ***“My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful”***. HE is our “Prince of Peace.”

PEACE – Saturday, December 13

by Connie Sullivan

“Even when I am old and grey – do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation and Your might to all who are to come.” Psalm 71

There are so many things that make me aware of the peace that Christ gives us. My thoughts turn to growing up in Monte Vista every time I hear George Jones recording of “Who’s Going to Fill Their Shoes.” Many people in our church have made an impact on my life. At a young age, I waited on my Dad on Wednesday nights to spend time with him on the ride home after his choir practice. Della Pollard, a sweet adult choir member, had me sit by her in choir and taught me how to sing alto. Evelyn Land taught us to compete in Bible Drills. Fred Lawson hired me at Blount National Bank and introduced me to my husband, Bob. When my Dad died at age 50, friends at Monte Vista provided tremendous strength during those tough times.

Some of my youth friends are still a part of Monte Vista: Lee Ann Eaves Bland, Patti Wheeler, Linda Shope Webb, Marsha Poole Pence, Richard and Carlene Talley, David Clark and Becky Mize Dunlap. As adults they began to fill the shoes of those who came before them. Will our young adults, youth and kids say that some of us are making a difference in their lives?

As we pray for who God wants to come as our pastor, they will have big shoes to fill following our last two wonderful pastors and awesome “Mikes.” I am glad to be a part of a wonderful caring Monte Vista family and look forward to its future through the peace that Christ gives.

The only thing you truly have is what you give away.



JOY

Sunday, December 14
by Jane Southwood

The candle of JOY, lit on the third Sunday of advent, symbolizes the joy and anticipation of Christ's birth, the joy that comes from Jesus' arrival, and ultimately the gift of salvation through him. We turn from the preparation of previous weeks to celebration.

This candle is also called the Shepherd's candle, reminding us of the words the angel spoke to the shepherds one dark night ***"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people. Today in the town of David a savior has been born: he is the Messiah, the Lord."*** Luke 2:10-11 NIV.

The Jewish people had been waiting for this day, for the fulfillment of God's promise. The shepherds had been waiting. Just as they waited, we too often find ourselves in seasons of waiting:

We wait:

All day for 5 p.m.

All week for Friday.

All summer for winter.

All winter for summer.....

But waiting doesn't have to be passive. It can be active. It is readying ourselves for something more. Psalm 37: 7 admonishes us to ***"Be still before the Lord and wait patiently."*** Find Joy in the waiting, in the silence. It is in the margins of the quiet that we rest in God's presence. Be still and know that He is God.

Don't let the pursuit of tomorrow diminish the Joy of today. As Christians we live on the other side of the Resurrection and can claim with joy and celebration the fulfillment of God's promises through his gift of Jesus.

Embrace God's gift with joy and eager anticipation of things to come, even in the quiet. Paul tells us to "Rejoice in the Lord always" Philippians 4:4.

The angel promised "great joy for all people." Where will you find God this week? Where will you find joy?

JOY
Monday, December 15
By DeeDee Turaski

When Lily was four years old, I made her a felt Bible with felt figures of Queen Esther, Daniel and the lions, Joseph with his colorful coat, Moses, etc. I loved hearing her re-create the Bible stories in her own joy-filled interpretation. My favorite was her happy account of Jesus' resurrection. "'Wheeeeeeeee!' said Jesus, as he flapped up to heaven."

At Christmastime we are blessed with many opportunities to find joy: angels singing about peace on earth, a baby sent to save the world, the smell of cedar boughs and peppermint, laughter and hugs from friends and neighbors gathering to share a meal, secret gifts to anticipate, and all around the joyful sound of jingle bells.

But true joy comes from our connection with God, not from life's circumstances. In Psalm 118: 24, the Bible exhorts, ***"This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."*** That verse tells me that I can find joy in each day that is made by God. All year long. Even the bad days. Even the sad days.

So the next time you are having a bad day or a sad day, I encourage you to look for a fresh perspective. You are a child of God, so look at the situation with child-like trust that your Father has you safely in his hand. If you look closely, you will notice Jesus "flapping" nearby.

Are you ready for today's adventure with Jesus? Wheeeeeeeee!!!

GREAT JOY
Tuesday, December 16
by Anna Young

When Jesus comes to us, when we seek and find Him, when He blesses us, when we rely on Him, when we thank Him for His abundant gifts, when we worship Him, we can experience *great joy!*

“I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior has been born today in Bethlehem!” Luke 2:10b-11 (NLT)

“When they saw the star, they were thrilled with ecstatic joy.” Matthew 2:10 (AMP)

“While He was blessing them, He left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.” Luke 24:51– 52 (NIV)

One of the things I find amazing about the Christian life is that because of our relationship with Jesus, even in the midst of very hard things when we rely on Him. We can experience *exquisite joy!*

I’ve also discovered that thanking Him daily for His gifts large or small brings *joy* in His presence.

Worshipping the *JOY-Giver* brings me *JOY!* Many of these songs make me want to dance for *JOY!*

“Joy to the World” Rev. Isaac Watts
“How Great Our Joy” Traditional German Carol
“Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee” Henry Van Dyke
“Count it All Joy” Bebe and Cece Winans
“The Joy of the Lord is My Strength” Rend Collective
“joy.” For King and Country
“Joy of the Lord” Maverick City Music
“Joy in the Morning” Tauren Wells
“The Joy” The Belonging Co.
“Can’t Steal My Joy” Josiah Queen and Brandon Lake

JOY
Wednesday, December 17
by Ann Shiver

JOY IN A CHURCH COMMUNITY

Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity. Psalm 133:1

The JOY of attending church is the gladness of stepping into God's house. It is an encounter with the living God as we gather together with His people, to be rooted not in sameness but in shared faith and purpose. The JOY of belonging to a church is the blessing of finding a spiritual home.

As we worship together, we hear the pastoral message spoken in love and truth. We minister to people with a willing heart, working together for God with gladness. The JOY of singing in church is a gift of lifting our voices together in praise to our Lord. Watching children grow in church is a quiet JOY, seeing young hearts discover the love of God. In Bible study our faith is nurtured, our understanding grows deeper. In hard times strength is renewed, peace is shared, and weary hearts are lifted.

In 1987 Keith and I moved to Maryville, Tennessee. We were introduced to Monte Vista Baptist Church by our extended family. Our daughter, Jennifer, was 5 weeks old at the time and Stephen was born here in Tennessee. We raised both of our children in Monte Vista. It has been our JOY and pleasure to serve and be a part of such a loving and caring church community. May God continue to bless MVBC.

JOY
Thursday, December 18
by Sue Ann Barker

It was Christmas, 1956, and I had just received a Betsy-Wetsy doll, which was every little girl's dream. I was one very happy and enthusiastic little girl! I spent the day feeding her from the small bottle that was included in her diaper bag. I fed her so well that she began to leak from every joint of her body. By the end of Christmas Day, she was placed in our bathtub "to dry out," where she remained for several days! My happiness waned.

A few months later, I sat with my mom on the side of the bed in the small bedroom I shared with my two younger brothers and told her I wanted "to ask Jesus into my heart." She and I prayed together, she cried tears of joy, and that moment was the beginning of my journey with God.

Happiness is a fleeting emotion, temporary, dependent upon circumstances, just like my doll. But, joy is a more profound sense of purpose that only God can give. Joy can exist even through life's harshest difficulties. Today I pray that you will have God's joy regardless of what life is bringing you at this point of time in your life. May you overflow with God's joy today and forever!

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." --Romans 15:13 NIV

JOY
Friday, December 19
by Rosalie Spice

GOD’S JOY

A sermon a couple of months ago reminded me of the fact that Joy is not the same as happiness or dependent on our circumstances. It is connected to our abundant relationship to God and our relationship to other people. Joy resides in our Jesus-hearts always. I have experienced it even when there are trials in my life. Joy is a gift and a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Because of the Holy Spirit’s urging, I experience Joy.

Recently, for instance, I was urged by the Holy Spirit to minister to someone, not because it was expected of me. However, as I proceeded to act, I was filled, and filled, and filled with overwhelming joy. This was not the first time I had experienced God’s Joy in this way. It won’t be the last.

I believe that sometimes we are the ones being gifted with Joy by another person’s act of kindness. It could be a smile, any courtesy or remembrance large or small, yet it brings Joy no matter our circumstances or their circumstances.

Romans 15:13 (NIV)

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Romans 15:13 NIV

JOY
Saturday, December 20
By Brittany Willis

Joy is both ever-present and elusive. You can't earn it, buy it, or store it up for later. Like air, joy fills every space where we've cleared the clutter and opened ourselves to breathe in God's presence. It comes not through striving, but through stillness and preparing our hearts to welcome the One who brings it.

“In Your presence there is fullness of joy,” David wrote in Psalm 16:11. Advent teaches us that joy isn't found in what we possess or accomplish, but in the nearness of Christ. That presence began in a manger and continues in every moment we make room for Him. Just as clean air requires removing pollutants, joy requires us to clear away what clouds our hearts like fear, resentment, hurry, or distraction. When we prepare a place for God to dwell, joy comes naturally, filling even the quiet spaces of waiting.

I've learned to use joy as a compass. When I sense it missing, I pause to ask, “Lord, where have I drifted?” Every time I turn back toward Him, joy returns. Not because everything changes but because I remember who walks beside me.

In Advent, we wait not with worry but with wonder, knowing that the joy of the world has come and comes again to fill our hearts until our cups run over.



LOVE

Sunday, December 21

by Jerry Summers

Love and Sacrifice

Advent (The Coming) reminds us that Israel wanted a conquering messiah but they had trouble accepting the one sent. The scriptures refer to Jesus (as he did to himself) as a Son of Man (Dan. 7:13-14, or Ps. 8:4-5).

Conceived of the Holy Spirit, then Newborn, he was God revealed in a human person. Baptized, he was affirmed as the *Messiah* or *Christ*, God's unique Son. Crucified, entombed, and resurrected on the third day, he was shown to be as much God as a human could be.

Advent reminds us of Christ's *first* Coming and of his *second* coming in the Church. The Christian creeds and confessions affirm this mystery, don't they? When we share the Lord's Supper, we testify that we are his body in life and the world.

Consider a picture of Christ's coming again and again in love; it's part of life! For example, like the Church, families and children require sacrificial commitment: a new husband "dies to himself" so that a marriage can happen and his wife and children can thrive. No self-denial—no thriving.

Jesus called up a faith family not an authoritarian military regime. He said, "***My kingdom is not of this world.***" John 18:36

He prayed, "***I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.***" John 17:26

In John 21:15-19 the resurrected Jesus asked Simon Peter three times, *Simon, do you love me?* Each time Peter answered that he did. Jesus told him "***feed my lambs***", "***tend my sheep***", and "***feed my sheep***". Care for them, love them. And Peter did that.

John records predictions, one about Jesus' death (18:31-32), another about Peter's death (21:18-19). Both were sacrificial. I John 3:16 reads, ***We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.***

Love is as strong as death. We live sacrificially when we imitate Christ in loving service.

Are you living in loving service?

LOVE
Monday, December 22
By Andy Welshan

“Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” 1 Corinthians 13:7

My mother sacrificed a lot for us. She knew what it was like to struggle. One Christmas in particular stands out. My father passed away while I was quite young, leaving my mother to raise 4 boys aged 6 to 16. Love bears.

We had very little for necessities and nothing for extras, but Mom was determined to provide us with Christmas gifts. She was a marvelous seamstress, and as it so happened, some of our church members needed some Christmas dresses made and came to her for help. She made enough money for our Christmas gifts. Love believes.

I don't remember what my oldest brother Terry received, but I received one of the best gifts ever that year. She found a piece of plywood and on it she painted an entire town including roads, houses, stores and even our church. She added nine toy cars, and this gift was shared by my older brother Sam, myself and my younger brother Brian. We played with that town until the paint wore off. I still have one of the original cars. Love hopes.

Many people would feel sadness and pity for a mother struggling to keep her family afloat, but she had a family who loved her intensely and her gifts to us were pure love just like God's gifts to us, no matter how small, are pure love. Love endures.

Merry Christmas!

LOVE
Tuesday, December 23
by Lindsey Hurst

GOD'S GIFTS

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. James 1:17

This time of year, we are surrounded by people whose love language is gift giving. At Christmas time, many families show love through getting each other gifts. I've been taught that giving gifts represents how we can show love to each other in a fraction of the way that God loves us.

What I find so incredible is that our Father is the number one gift giver. James 1:17 says that every good and perfect gift is from above. The best part is He gives us gifts that allow us to show His love to others. I can think of several examples of people in the church that God has given the gift of encouragement, others music, others speaking, and yet others bake some really great desserts.

I always remember as a child being encouraged by my parents to use my talents and abilities for the glory of God and now being an adult I realize how that can be so impactful.

We were given the ultimate gift of love through Jesus coming as an infant for our salvation. The spiritual gifts that God has given us allows me to be reminded of that love. Isn't it amazing that we have a Father who demonstrates His love for us daily, even through others?

This advent season, I encourage you to be reminded of the ways that God demonstrates His love for us through giving us gifts and how we can use those gifts to show His love to others.

LOVE
Wednesday, December 24
By Betty McBrayer

“God loved us and sent His son...” John 4:10

“And she brought forth her firstborn child, wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.” Luke 2:7

Why the stable?
Why the eating trough of animals
In a barn?
What a place to lay a baby newly born.

Why the stable?
Why the manger not a mansion
For the King?
What a place of disappointment, fear,
and pain.

Why the stable?
Why the shepherds, the lowliest
of men,
Told they would find Him in a manger,
they ran.....

God placed Him in the stable, and does it
still today.
In life I find the Christchild in
unexpected ways.

In pain and disappointment,
broken hearts and broken plans.
When you're hurting, its a stable
from the Christchild's Father's hand.

So kneel and worship in the stable
God has brought you to today,
for in the manger lies your Savior,
Love, to guide you on life's way.
BSM

***“But now abideth faith, hope, love. But the greatest of these is
LOVE”***

LOVE
Thursday, December 25
by Steve Rutherford

MERRY CHRISTMAS
BUT, WHATEVER CAN THIS MEAN?

Understand who you are....

You are created in the image and likeness of God,

So says Genesis about our beginning.

BUT, WHATEVER CAN THIS MEAN?

Without God, we are incomplete.

The great 19th century Scottish thinker, Alexander John Scott said:

The more human we are, the more Divine we are,

And, the more divine we are, the more truly human we are.

Matter and eternity are intertwined by sacred imagination and design.

BUT, WHATEVER CAN THIS MEAN?

When God's chosen people had turned their backs on God,

The prophet of yore, Ezekiel, wrote that God would forsake them.

But, no sooner spoken was this than God said "I cannot forsake you".

You are my people, my joy, and I love you.

I shall be your guide "in deep tenderness".

BUT, WHATEVER CAN THIS MEAN?

Our gospels tell us that Jesus—Son of Man; Son of David; Son of
God;

Christ, the Messiah; Emmanuel—proclaimed that the Kingdom of
God

Is in our midst.

In Jesus, we experience true love, and we are invited to follow Him.

BUT, WHATEVER CAN THIS MEAN?

This story of Divine love is unsurpassed.

We are valued, created uniquely out of God's imagination

Just as the great galaxies are created out of God's intentionality.

We are God's children, not by adoption, but through parentage.

Even when we, individually or collectively, fail, God's love is
unfailing.

AND, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE LOVED?

Everything.

All our self-made barriers are dissolved.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Hope and Peace.

LOVE
Friday, December 26
by Dan Barker

John Piper wrote: “Love is doing what is best for someone. ...We were made to see and savor God.” In Romans 5:5 Paul writes “...*God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*”

As an admitted packrat, many of the things that I keep remind me of acts of love that have been “poured into me” over the years from family and friends. We have a quilt that my granny made for me. Some of the pieces were from the cowboy shirts that I wore when I was little. I used to sit and watch her put so many tiny loving stitches into those quilts. I have grandfather clocks made by my dad, paintings done by my mother, a crocheted scarf from my wife, boxes filled with cards and notes. All of these remind me of the love and sacrifices of those dear loved ones. They “poured” God’s love into me.

When God stopped the flow of the Jordan River so Joshua and the children of Israel could cross, God commanded them to take 12 stones from the river bottom as a reminder of God’s miracle, love, and power to both them and their descendants. I see rainbows, flowers, mountains, and the Bible, as tangible reminders of God’s love for us. His love is all around us if we just remember. At Christmas we are reminded of God’s love in every nativity scene, star, and cross. Take some time this season to reflect on the things around you that remind you of His many gifts of love “poured into your heart.”

The Twelve Days of Christmas 2025-2026

by Jerry Summers

In church traditions the Advent season ends by December 25, and the Christmas season continues from December 26 to Epiphany on January 6. Epiphany completes the Christmas holy days. Epiphany recollects and teaches the *revelation* of Jesus Christ as Messiah and king; for example, the “magi from the East” saw the One *manifested* or *shown* to them and therefore to the non-Jewish world.

The following readings from the Scriptures narrate the revelation of Jesus Christ to the world. The biblical witnesses anticipating the Messiah or Christ-king’s include prophetic statements that are interpreted as relevant interpretations. Also there are explicit declarations or testimonies of witnesses in the Gospels.

Think of these scriptures as a way to complete a journey through Advent to Christmas, and to carry it onward as we cross the boundary between the old year and the new.

Feel free to read the passages around the selections presented here. Share your insights with others each day of the Christmas season, including the Sixth Day of Christmas at the new year.

READINGS

Thursday
December **25**

God’s love revealed among us.
I John 4:7-16; John 3:31-36

Friday
December **26**

“I will give thanks”
Isaiah 12:1-6; Matthew 1:18-25

Saturday
December **27**

Rejected revelation, but the evil spirits!
Mark 6:1-6a; 1:21-34

Sunday December 28	“He has sent me” Isaiah 61; Luke 4:16-30
Monday December 29	The king, the Lord in your midst Zephaniah 3:8-20
Tuesday December 30	Shepherds & Simeon & Anna Luke 2:8-40
Wednesday December 31	A son of God Mark 14:60-64, 15:38-39, 16:1-8
Thursday January 1	Is being, was being, and is to come Revelation 1:4-8, 12-18; 5:6-13
Friday January 2	“We had been eyewitnesses” Romans 1:1-6; 2 Peter 1:3-4, 16-18
Saturday January 3	The mercy of the Lord Jesus Jude 14-23; 2 John 7-11
Sunday January 4	Christ the High Priest & Hope Hebrews 1:1-8, 4:14-5:10, 6:13-20
Monday January 5	How beautiful are the feet Isaiah 52:7-10; Revelation 21:22-27
Tuesday January 6	Epiphany

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