

Open Table United Church of Christ (UCC)
2025 Advent Daily Devotional



Sunday Worship Gatherings at 10:00am:
Studio Space at the YMCA
724 N Adams St
Pottstown, PA 19464
(enter in back YMCA Entrance on Grant Street)

Mailing Address:
PO Box 1034
Pottstown, PA 19464

2025 Advent Daily Devotional

November 30th - December 25th

We have created this daily devotional to help you to engage with the Advent season every day in a special way. On the pages of this devotional booklet, you'll find an entry for each day of the season, including a scripture reading, reflection, and prayer. This is meant to be used as a daily devotional, but we are grateful for whatever way these devotionals enhance your Advent experience.

These devotionals will also be posted on the Open Table United Church of Christ Facebook Page every day throughout the season. We have also included a candle for you to use at home while you engage with the devotional, day by day. Use them as you find them most helpful.

May this be a special season for you, as you prepare your hearts to welcome the Christ child.

In Christ's Love,

2025 Devotional Writers:

Rev. Kimberly Berenotto, Longswamp United Church of Christ - Mertztown, PA

Rev. Selina Hamilton, Rosedale United Church of Christ - Laureldale, PA

Rev. Matthew Hoover, Salem United Church of Christ, Campbelltown, PA

Rev. Becky Hoover, God's Free Agent, Reading, PA

Rev. Nichole Jackson, Open Table United Church of Christ - Pottstown, PA

Rev. Zack Jackson, Open Table United Church of Christ - Pottstown, PA

Rev. Linda Kozlowski, Good Shepherd United Church of Christ - Tuckerton, PA

Rev. Alan T. Miles, Zwingli United Church of Christ - Souderton, PA

Rev. Joseph A. Motz, Bausman Memorial United Church - Wyomissing, PA

Rev. Deb Parker-Hill, St. Paul's UCC – Birdsboro, PA

Rev. Nicholas L. Pence, Jr., Palm Schwenkfelder Church - Palm, PA

Rev. Becky Sausser, St. John's United Church of Christ - Allentown, PA

Rev. Dr. Kimberly Stryjak, St. Peter's United Church of Christ - West Lawn, PA

Rev. Tammie Wisniewski, One UCC – Kenhorst, PA

Scripture quotations from:

*The Common English Bible, © Copyright 2011 Common English Bible. All rights reserved. Used by permission. (www.CommonEnglishBible.com).

* The Message, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress, represented by Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

*The New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

*The New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition, Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Week 1: Hope

Sunday, November 30, 2025

Rev. Matthew Hoover

Isaiah 2:2-3 (NRSVUE)

“In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Reflection: Do you have hope?

Perhaps given the state of the world today, it might seem like a fool’s errand to have hope that things will ever get better. It would indeed be foolish to place our hope in humanity to make things better. What if instead we placed our hope in God?

In ancient Israel, as Isaiah begins his ministry, the situation seemed hopeless. Ancient Assyria was a threat who used not just physical violence, but psychological violence to conquer and rule their section of the world. From a human perspective, it was foolish to hope for a better day, but none the less, Isaiah put his hope in God for a better day to come. In its own timeline that day arrived, a day when the threat of Assyria was gone, a day when the people could once again dwell in peace.

Do not lose hope this Advent. The promise of Advent is the promise that a better day is coming for us and for our world.

Prayer: Holy One, help us to never lose hope. The promise of Advent is the promise of your intervention into our world. May we trust in that promise and look forward to the day of its arrival. Amen.

Monday, December 1, 2025

Rev. Tammie Wisniewski

Genesis 8:1 (NRSV)

But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided;

Reflection: Advent begins in the shadows, not in the spotlight. It starts with longing, with weariness, with the quiet hope that God has not forgotten us. In Genesis 8:1, we hear a simple, world-changing declaration: “But God remembered Noah.” It is not that God had ever lost track of Noah or the blessed community huddled inside the ark. Rather, this “remembering” is the biblical way of saying that God moves toward creation with mercy, presence, and renewal. God’s remembering sets restoration in motion. The wind blows, the waters recede, and new beginnings become possible.

Advent invites us to trust that God is already stirring the winds of liberation: softening hardened hearts, planting courage in communities working for justice, awakening solidarity among neighbors, and nurturing resilience in those who feel forgotten. To say “God remembers” is to say that despair and fear does not get the last word. Advent dawns with a promise: the God who remembers also restores to wholeness. And we, who are humbled and grateful, prepare room for hope to take root once more. What new beginning are you praying for?

Prayer: Holy One who remembers, as we begin this Advent season, breathe Your renewing wind over our weary hearts. When the waters of fear or injustice rise around us, remind us that we are held, we are seen, and we are cherished. Stir in us the courage to join in the work of healing, that hope may take root in our lives and in our world. Remember us, O God—and teach us to remember one another with compassion and love and grace. Amen.

Tuesday December 2, 2025

Rev. Dr. Kimberly Stryjak

Psalm 124 (CEB)

*If the Lord hadn't been for us—let Israel now repeat!— if the Lord hadn't been for us,
when those people attacked us then they would have swallowed us up whole
with their rage burning against us! Then the waters would have drowned us;
the torrent would have come over our necks; then the raging waters would have come over our
necks! Bless the Lord because he didn't hand us over like food for our enemies' teeth!
We escaped like a bird from the hunters' trap; the trap was broken so we escaped!
Our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.*

Reflection: The Psalm begins today by inviting us to envision what life would be like in God's absence. The repeated refrain, "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side," encourages reflection on God's past faithfulness and helps us build hope for God's future provision in the coming of Jesus.

This hope is seen in the shift in verse 6 when the psalmist turns to praise, highlighting that our hope is not in ourselves, but in God. Advent is a season of anticipation, reflection, and hope. In this season we live into the anticipation of the miracle of Christmas is that God, the Creator, came to us in Jesus. It is also the anticipation of the coming kingdom of God, the second coming of Christ. Without this ability to look forward to the fulfillment of this promise, we lose our grip on faith and our purpose as children of God. This Advent, let us remember God's past help, which fuels our hope and directs our gaze to Emmanuel, God is with us.

Prayer: God, in this Advent season, remind me of your power and faithfulness. Help me to live in the hope you provide and to trust in you. Amen

Wednesday, December 3, 2025

Rev. Alan T. Miles

Psalm 124:6-7 (NRSV)

Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the hunters; the snare is broken, and we have escaped.

Reflection: Blessed be the Lord, indeed — because Advent always begins in the dark, but it never leaves us there. The psalmist sings of snares and teeth, of dangers real enough to rattle the bones. And yet... a bird rises. A trap breaks. What held us does not have the final word. We know something about snares, don't we? The nets of fear, the traps of despair, the quiet little lies that whisper, "This is all there is." But the stories of Advent interrupts our lives. Advent says, "Don't despair in the dark. Look again. Light is on the way."

What if this season is less about surviving the dark and more about noticing the places where God is already cracking open the cage? Already loosening the cords? Already lifting us into freedom we barely dared imagine?

We are not prey. We are not trapped. We are held — and we are being set free. May it be so.

Prayer: Holy One, help us to see that the light is breaking in. Help us to see and recognize that you are freeing us from the snares of this life. Set us free. Set us free indeed. Amen.

Thursday, December 04, 2025

Rev. Becky Grace Sausser

Isaiah 4:2-6 (The Message)

And that's when GOD's Branch will sprout green and lush. The produce of the country will give Israel's survivors something to be proud of again. Oh, they'll hold their heads high! Everyone left behind in Zion, all the discards and rejects in Jerusalem, will be reclassified as "holy"—alive and therefore precious. GOD will give Zion's women a good bath. He'll scrub the bloodstained city of its violence and brutality, purge the place with a firestorm of judgment. Then GOD will bring back the ancient pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night and mark Mount Zion and everyone in it with his glorious presence, his immense, protective presence, shade from the burning sun and shelter from the driving rain.

Reflection: Every week in church I start with a joke before the sermon, because I truly believe that God loves to laugh as much as we do. Whenever I read this passage it reminds me of an old joke from my days as a camp counselor, "Jesus is Divine... and we are De-branches". Check out how the word 'Branch' is capitalized in this translation from The Message, in the original Hebrew that word is *še-maḥ*. This word appears in our Bible 6 times and even though when we think of branches, we are usually thinking of growing things in nature, this specific word was understood to be talking about the Messiah, the Savior who would come in the name of God. This righteous Branch shows up in Jeremiah and Zechariah as well.

Here in the first few days of Advent we bustle around our homes and churches setting up decorations and planning ahead for Christmas day, feeling as though we don't have enough time to get it all done. Isaiah was writing approximately 700 years before the birth of Jesus, but I would imagine that even with all that time to plan, the unexpected gift of Christ's birth still caught the world by surprise! Right now, things in my garden outside look pretty dead, but in the spring, they will sprout again and catch me by surprise! Advent is a time to remember Christ's birth, and a time to remember that new life come from the hope we find in Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

Prayer: Precious Lord Jesus, be with me as I prepare my home and heart to welcome you anew. Bless us this Advent season and help us to carry the hope of your unexpected love, joy, and peace with us always. Amen.

Friday December 5, 2025

Rev. Kimberly Berenotto

Acts 13:16-25 (NRSVUE)

So Paul stood up and with a gesture began to speak: "Fellow Israelites and others who fear God, listen. The God of this people Israel chose our ancestors and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. For about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. After he had destroyed seven peoples in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance for about four hundred fifty years. After that he gave them judges until the time of the prophet Samuel. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, who reigned for forty years. When he had removed him, he made David their king. In his testimony about him he said, 'I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my heart, who will carry out all my wishes.' Of this man's posterity God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised; before his coming John had already proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his work, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but one is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the strap of the sandals on his feet.'

Reflection: Well, Paul never passes on an opportunity to preach to a crowd, and as he enters the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, Paul is invited by the leaders to speak. He begins with the Hebrew Scriptures, sharing a very broad overview of God's work among the Israelites through the time of Moses, the prophets, and the Kings. Paul makes clear God's presence and promise through this history; which would have been a treasured story to the Jewish community in the synagogue listening to him preach. The story continues in a new way, perhaps a surprising way, to those listening to Paul. He shares the Good News of God sending Jesus as the Savior, even pulling John the Baptist into the story.

The important thing to remember is the story doesn't end there. Paul may give the Reader's Digest version of God's presence and promise throughout history, but we are still part of God's story. God's presence is with us today; God's promise is for us too.

Prayer: God of the Past may we always cherish the story of you working your purpose out throughout history. God of the Present, may we remember that the story of your promise includes us. God of the Future, help us to continue the story of your presence for generations to come. Amen.

Saturday, December 6, 2025

Rev. Nichole Jackson

John 1:19-23 (NRSVUE)

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed and did not deny it, but he confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ ” as the prophet Isaiah said.

Reflection: John the Baptist, or “Crazy Cousin John” as I refer to him, is one of the major players in the story we revisit year after year during the season of Advent. His mom, Elizabeth, and Jesus’ mother, Mary, were pregnant at the same time, and they spent some of that time together, dreaming about these precious boys who they were birthing into the world. Mary’s pregnancy story was anything but ordinary, but neither was Elizabeth’s. She and her husband, Zechariah, we are told in the gospel of Luke, were “getting on in years,” and childbearing was a long-gone hope – a painful and disappointing part of their lives that they had had to make peace with. And yet, even after they had given up hope, God surprised them and blessed them with this child. When I think about this in the abstract, it sounds like a nice story, but then when I imagine my grandmother giving birth *now*, well, the absurdity of the story becomes a little more real!

“Crazy Cousin John” and Jesus likely grew up hearing their moms tell their birth stories over and over again – special angelic visits proclaiming the impossible was possible, how they spent those 3 months together preparing to be mothers for the first time, praying for those babies and for each other. They probably heard about how special they both were – gifts from God like no other. And then when they got much older, they both followed God’s call – John to prepare the way for the long-awaited Messiah, and Jesus being, well, the Messiah!

The theme for this first week of Advent is “hope,” and John’s and Jesus’ impossible origin stories remind me of how extraordinarily God met the hopes of their mothers – both the shared hope of their people for the long-awaited Messiah to arrive, but also Elizabeth’s hope for a child she had already surrendered, and Mary’s hope for a bright and blessed future that far exceeded anything she could ever imagine. That’s *the kind* of hope we hold onto as we prepare to meet the Christ child at Christmas – extraordinary hope that allows space for our minds to be blown and our lives to be changed. Let us pray that we can allow ourselves to hope that our longings might be met, and maybe even met in a way we would never imagine.

Prayer: God who knows us - our deepest longings, desires, and all of the reasons we might not allow ourselves to hope – meet us in this season of light. Soften our hearts just enough to allow hope to have its way. Draw us into your love and walk closely with us. Amen.

Week 2: Peace

Sunday, December 7, 2025

Rev. Joseph A. Motz

Psalm 72:1-14 (NRSVUE)

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son.

May he judge your people with righteousness and your poor with justice.

May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness.

May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.

May he live while the sun endures and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.

May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth.

In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper.

He has pity on the weak and the needy and saves the lives of the needy.

From oppression and violence he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight.

Reflection: On this day I am often brought to remember one of my parishioners who saw the bombs fall in Honolulu. In that memory, my thoughts often ripple to others who fought in WWII and, beyond that, to the various men and women who have served across the generations. Very few people enlist because they want the opportunity to go to war. Instead, the hope is that their lives might be used for the sake of justice, peace, freedom, and deliverance. For this hope they risk the entirety of their lives, praying that those who send them into harms way desire the same hope to come through their lives. May we never cease to pray that the God of peace be with those who serve and those who send them into harm's way.

Prayer: Gracious God, we pray for our service members and the leaders who direct their actions. Guide them in the way of righteousness, justice, and peace. Let them serve your purposes of having pity on the weak, saving the needy, redeeming the oppressed, as you deliver all who call upon you. Bless and keep, protect and guide, as you inspire us to give so fully of ourselves for the sake of your reign. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Monday, December 8, 2025

Rev. Becky Hoover

Isaiah 24:4-6 (CEB)

The earth dries up and wilts; the world withers and wilts; the heavens wither away with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have disobeyed instruction, swept aside law, and broken the ancient covenant. Therefore, a curse devours the earth; its inhabitants suffer for their guilt. Therefore, the earth's inhabitants dwindle; very few are left.

Reflection: Like the shock of a bare, winter floor on bed-warmed, first-step-of-the-morning-feet, these words from Isaiah hit us during “the most wonderful time of the year.” The word of the prophet is a word warning the LORD will bring utter devastation to the earth for the disobedience of humanity.

In this season of greenery and brightness, we'd rather contemplate Christmas trees than the destruction of forests. We'd rather finish our shopping than question business practices that could be finishing people and communities far away. The voice of this season is a voice of joy, generosity, and merriment, not chaos and destruction. Yet Advent is a time of destruction. This liturgical season calls us to remember God's promise to destroy and to save. To build a more perfect world, the Holy One must undo what currently isn't healthy, isn't holy. Rather than resting in shallow Christmas comfort, God invites us to join in the sacred work of destroying harmful patterns and replacing them with the outlines of salvation.

Prayer: God of tearing down and building up, help us not to fear change that ultimately leads us closer to you. In this season, may we hear what you call us to undo so that we have more room to accept the fullness of your grace. Amen.

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

Rev. Linda Kozlowski

Isaiah 41:17-20 (NRSVUE)

When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the LORD will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land springs of water. I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive; I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together, so that all may see and know, all may consider and understand, that the hand of the LORD has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it.

Reflection: We have a God of abundance. We have a God who knows all of our needs. We have a God who is gracious and generous. There is enough in God's beautiful, bountiful creation for all to be fed, for all to have their thirst quenched, for all to have enough not only to live but to flourish and thrive. Still, there are beloveds of God who live with food insecurity.

There are children of God who do not have access to clean water. There are neighbors of you and me whose basic needs remain unfulfilled.

In this season of waiting for the coming of the Christ Child, may we, who follow Jesus, rise up and show up. May we, who profess to be Jesus' disciples, respond to the needs of God's people. May we feed our neighbors. May we offer a cup of water to those who thirst. May we do all we can to share the resources God so generously provides so all have access to life sustaining gifts and blessings. May we do all we can to reveal to the world all that the hand of the LORD has done; all that the Holy One has created.

Prayer: Good and gracious God, remind us that you call us to care for your people; to feed your sheep. Help us respond to the needs of our neighbors so all have enough to eat, so all have access to fresh water, so all have a warm space to rest at night, so all have access to what they need to live, to blossom, to flourish. Amen.

Wednesday, December 10, 2025

Rev. Zack Jackson

Matthew 12:33 (NRSVUE)

Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit.

Reflection: Most of our churches have some variation of “come as you are” or “all are welcome” plastered on our signs and websites, but let's be honest; we don't really mean that. Or, rather, we don't really believe that applies to us. Maybe someone else can come as they are, but we need to show up to impress. We need to cover up our imperfections, plaster on our church face, and be super Jesus-y for 60-90 minutes every Sunday, lest everyone realize that we are not as holy as they think. Truth be told, there is only one place where I truly feel unashamed to show up as I am: my psychiatrist's waiting room. If you are sitting in the waiting room at a mental health facility, there's no point pretending that you have it all figured out because no one there does! There's something so liberating about that. I learned recently that my therapist has a therapist, and I can't help but imagine him sitting in someone else's waiting room just like the rest of us, waiting his turn to pop the hood of his brain and ask for help.

The health of a tree is known by its fruit, but the fruit is made good by the health of the tree. If the fruit starts growing smaller or rotting on the branch, then that is a sign to take care of the tree. If a self-conscious apple farmer just goes out and paints the rotten apples red to convince everyone that his trees are fine, he is wasting his time. He needs to check the soil, look for insects, and trim the dead branches. Focusing on the tree leads to good fruit. Focusing on the fruit leads to dead trees. Let us likewise allow ourselves to be exactly who we are in our churches. May they become more like psychiatric waiting rooms than museums of perfect people. May they be halls of healing, and may we bear good fruit.

Prayer: Living God, we pray for peace. Still our souls and ease our anxieties that we might know that are safe, saved, and free to be ourselves in your presence. May we let down our masks, and allow you to tend our roots. Amen.

Thursday, December 11, 2025

Rev. Selina Hamilton

Psalm 146:5-9 (NRSVUE)

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

Reflection: The Psalmist reminds us, those who find their help and hope in God are happy and are blessed. Great news, faithful friends, that is us! We have found help and hope in God. We have found joy and blessing in God. So we remember what God has done, and we give thanks. We remember God's great act of Creation, and we give thanks.

We remember God's great act of justice in feeding the hungry and setting the prisoner free and healing the sick, and we give thanks! And in our happiness, in our blessing, we remember that we are called to work with our God, who is our help and our hope. We remember that in the great act of Creation, God made humankind as co-creators and co-carers for all that there is. We are blessed with the ability to create and care alongside God. And we remember that through the witness of Scripture and through Jesus himself, God gave us a clear call and command to join in God's work of justice, feeding the hungry and caring for the weak, the prisoner, the sick, and all who are in need. Happy, indeed, are we who know God's goodness and who answer the call to join in God's work.

Prayer: Oh Lord, our God, our help and our hope is in you, our joy and our blessing are from you, and we give you thanks. In this season of waiting and preparation, show us new ways to join in your great act of creation and your great act of justice. Show us how to work together to your purpose, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, December 12, 2025

Rev. Nicholas L. Pence, Jr.

2 Peter 3:11-18 (NRSVUE)

Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and destroyed and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.

You therefore, beloved, since you are forewarned, beware that you are not carried away with the error of the lawless and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Reflection: In a Simpsons episode I watched many moons ago, the local tavern owner, Moe, has purchased a super industrial deep fryer. He then tells Homer that it can “Deep fry a whole buffalo in 15 seconds.” Homer’s response, which a part of me really gets, is: “Fifteen seconds? But I want it now!”

Advent, in its simplest essence, reminds us of the importance of waiting; but more importantly teaches us to wait in hope. In 2 Peter 3, the early church, like Homer Simpson, was struggling with delay leading to despair. Christ had promised to return, to restore creation, to make right what has gone so terribly wrong. But the days stretched on, and God seemed slow (Maybe you too know this feeling). The author responds not with timelines or reprimands, but with faithful truth.

We are reminded that God’s sense of time is not ours.

What we interpret as delay is actually mercy—God giving more room for repentance, more time for hearts to be turned toward new life. Our attention is then directed in verse 13 to God’s eternal promise of the time, of the moment, of that sacred now “where righteousness is at home.”

That phrase in my mind catches the spirit of Advent. A world where righteousness is at home—not pushed to the margins, not smothered by injustice, not choked by greed or fear, but at home. Imagine with me a world in which what is good is no longer fragile, threatened, or mocked. Imagine a creation healed, relationships restored, neighbors reconciled, the vulnerable uplifted, and shalom not a dream but our greatest reality.

Advent invites us to live as if that world, that reality, is already dawning—because in Christ, it is, and it has.

So yes, we wait... but with courage.

We wait... but with hope and endurance.

We wait... but we also live as citizens of the world that is coming, even while surrounded by the one that is passing away.

We wait.

Prayer: Holy and Faithful God, In this Advent season, teach us how to wait with hope.

Fix our eyes on your promise of new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home and your peace fills all things. As we prepare our hearts to receive our Savior this Advent, renew our spirits, redefine our priorities, and help us to reflect the light of your kingdom. Come, Lord Jesus. Make us, and all things, new. Amen.

Saturday, December 13, 2025

Rev. Deb Parker-Hill

Luke 3:10 (NRSVUE)

“And the crowds asked him, ‘What, then, should we do?’”

Reflection: As the crowds gathered around John, their question was simple and urgent, “What should we do?” When we face the unknowns in life, when we’re at the margins of our existence, that is often the question, “What should we do?” The beauty of prophet’s response to those seeking God in the wilderness is the affirmation that each one holds the capacity for faithful action. His answer was practical – share what you have, act with integrity, refuse to exploit others.

Advent acknowledges this liminal space between the known and unknown, as we long for clarity, and invites us into holy questioning. We wait for Christ’s coming, but our waiting is not passive. It stirs us to examine our lives, our choices, and our priorities. Advent preparation isn’t about grand gestures. It’s about small, faithful acts that make room for and embody Christ’s light.

Today, let this question guide you. What should I do? What should I do to embody God’s hope, peace, joy and love in the particulars of my life?

Prayer: Holy One, guide our hearts as we prepare the way for Christ. Help us act with compassion and choose justice in the ordinary moments of this day. Make our waiting active and our hope bold, that we may reflect your coming light. Amen.

Week 3: Joy

Sunday, December 14, 2025

Rev. Matthew Hoover

Matthew 11:2-6 (NRSV)

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

Reflection: What signs of imminent Good News do you see?

As we continue in this season of preparation for the Good News of Christmas, the signs of its upcoming arrival are all around us even now. When John the Baptist inquired if Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus’ answer was not given in words, but in deeds and testimony; the blind seeing, the lame walking, the diseased being cleansed were offered forth as signs of the Messiah’s arrival into the world.

If we take a moment to pause and notice, the signs of Christ's imminent arrival are all around us this Advent.

What do you see and hear? Amidst the chaos and noise of our world, there is also something divine happening. It's there, if we take time to notice it. Do you see the small kindnesses being offered? Do you hear the stories of faith being told by our fellow parishioners?

What stories are we telling this season? The same story of death and destruction as told by so many these days or a different story. Tell a different story this season. Don't use just words to lament what's wrong in the world but testify with our whole beings to that which is right. Tell others about the signs of God's realm that you see and hear every day. Pause, breath, notice the Good News breaking in once again.

Prayer: Holy God, help us to notice all the good work that you are doing once again this season. Embolden us to testify to your Good News for the world once again. Amen.

Monday, December 15, 2025

Rev. Tammie Wisniewski

Isaiah 29:17-21 (NRSV)

Shall not Lebanon in a very little while become a fruitful field and the fruitful field be regarded as a forest? On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a scroll, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the neediest people shall exult in the Holy One of Israel. For the tyrant shall be no more, and the scoffer shall cease to be; all those alert to do evil shall be cut off—those who cause a person to lose a lawsuit, who set a trap for the arbiter in the gate, and without grounds deny justice to the one in the right.

Reflection: Isaiah's vision imagines a world where the deaf can hear, the blind can see, and justice rises for those forever pushed to the margins. During Advent, we wait for this kind of transformation—not as private comfort but as a communal awakening.

God's coming light exposes systems that silence, diminish, or distort human dignity. It invites us to imagine a society where truth is not manipulated, where the vulnerable are no longer exploited, and where humility—not arrogance—guides our common and public life.

In this season of holy anticipation, we are called to practice the justice Isaiah foretells: opening our ears to unheard stories, clearing our vision to see inequity, and resisting the forces that twist what is right. Advent invites us not only to hope for change, but to become agents of change. May it be so for each one reading this devotion.

Prayer: God of unfolding light, open our ears, clear our sight, and strengthen our courage to seek justice as we prepare the way for your healing presence. Amen.

Tuesday December 16, 2025

Rev. Dr. Kimberly Stryjak

Jude 1:17-21 (NRSVUE)

But you, beloved, must remember the words previously spoken by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, for they said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, indulging their own ungodly lusts.” It is these worldly people, devoid of the Spirit, who are causing divisions. But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

Reflection: Jude begins with a call to memory: “But you, beloved, must remember the words previously spoken by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 17). Advent is a season of remembering. During our advent journeys we look back at the prophecies of old and the miracle of Christ's first coming. We remember that the world was dark, filled with cynics and those who "cause divisions" (v. 19). This remembrance helps us appreciate the magnitude of the Incarnation. God did not abandon us to the turmoil, chaos and suffering; God entered it. When we feel overwhelmed by the divisions in our own world, we can remember the promise of a Savior who brings peace and will come again.

This Advent season, our waiting is filled with hope because we know the destination. The same mercy that brought Christ to a manger will bring us eternal life.

Prayer :Eternal God, as we continue our journey through Advent, help us to remember your promises and the hope we have in Jesus. Empower us to build up our faith and pray in the Spirit. Give us eyes to see those around us who are doubting and hearts to show them your mercy.

Wednesday, December 17, 2025

Rev. Alan T. Miles

Zechariah 8:14–17 (NRSV)

“Just as I had determined to bring disaster on you... so now I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid. These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other; render true and sound judgment; do not plot evil; do not love to swear falsely.”

Reflection: Advent is God's holy reset — a season when divine determination meets human participation. God says, I am determined to do good again. Not begrudgingly. Not halfway. Determined. And then God turns to us and essentially says, Now you — live like you believe it. Speak the truth. Judge with justice. Reject the small, corrosive evils that unravel community from the inside out.

Advent hope isn't passive waiting. It's courageous living. It's trusting that God's goodness is already leaning toward us — and choosing to lean our lives toward that goodness in return. Do not be afraid. Do good again. May it be so.

Prayer: Holy One, help us to live like we believe you. Help us to live lives that show God's goodness to others and the community around us. Amen

Thursday, December 18, 2025

Rev. Becky Grace Sausser

2 Samuel 7:1-17 (NRSVUE)

Now when the king was settled in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind, for the LORD is with you."

But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?' Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel, and I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place and be disturbed no more, and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel, and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings.

But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever." In accordance with all these words and with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

Reflection: Here we see David longing to build God a temple, so he asks Nathan (the prophet) to do what he needs to do to make this happen. God surprises David though, because David is not called to build God a temple, it will be done through his descendants. In fact, as this passage goes on, it seems to be speaking less about the physical temple that Solomon will build, and more about the spiritual temple that will be made possible through David's descendants. We all remember what Isaiah 11:1 says, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit." Jesse was David's dad. And remember way back on December 4 when I was talking about that Branch? We know that the Branch is the Messiah!

And how cool is it that David wanted to honor God, and ended up being blessed by God! That is sooo like God! We are blessed when we honor and praise God, especially the unexplainable peace that we feel when we take a few moments to be in God's presence. So, if you have a moment, plant your feet on the ground, close your eyes, and breath in God's presence. The word for Spirit, Ru'ah, means *breath*, which means that every single breath we breath is like a little prayer to God. So, breath in, breath out, and be blessed!

Prayer: Triune God, Creator, Son, and Spirit One, thank you for every breath that fills my lungs. Thank you for every second of my day which is filled with your presence. Tune my heart and mind to be more aware of your blessings. Amen.

Friday December 19, 2025

Rev. Kimberly Berenotto

2 Samuel 7:18-22 (NRSVUE)

Then King David went in and sat before the Lord and said, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord God; you have spoken also of your servant's house into the distant future. May this be instruction for the people, O Lord God! And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord God! Because of your promise and according to your own heart, you have wrought all this greatness so that your servant may know it. Therefore you are great, O Lord God, for there is no one like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears."

Reflection: King David is having a pretty intense conversation with God here and it may take a few readings to fully digest all David reveals and shares in this moment of prayer. David humbles himself before God, showing awe for God choosing him and his descendants to lead God's people. David thanks God for where God has led him to this point; and marvels at God's greatness and the plans God has for God's people.

Whether King David knows it or not, he is also giving us guidance on how to pray; how to have open and earnest conversation with God. David shows us to approach God with humility, without pride or arrogance. In prayer we should not only be asking God for what we need or desire, but also giving God thankfulness and praise. And perhaps, most importantly, even when we don't have the words, when we don't know what to pray for, we can come to God and ask for God's plans and God's promise to be fulfilled in us. So, let's try it:

Prayer: O Lord God, you have carried me through life's ups and downs, even when I haven't been the best at following you.

Thank you for your constant presence in my life. Holy One, guide me; may your plans be fulfilled in the ways I live out your calling each and every day. Amen.

John 3:34-35 (NRSVUE)

He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands.

Reflection: Advent/Christmas is my favorite time of the Church year because I think it's when we do our best theology, particularly the whole Incarnation thing – i.e. God becoming human and walking with us, as us. But just because he took on human form, he was also no less divine – he spoke the words of God, the Spirit was in him, and he showed us how to live Spirit-guided *human* lives. God came to us, not as some mighty, fully grown warrior to wield power over us, but started as we all do – as a baby. He toddled around and grew into a young boy. He navigated the teenage years (God bless Mary and Joseph!), and he lived and worked in a human body equipped with strength and endurance, but that was also limited by things like exhaustion, thirst, and hunger. And during his three years of public ministry, he took us along with him and empowered us to be a part of all of it. He did none of this alone but called us to join the work, and even to continue the work – to pass the baton – when he was no longer present to lead us. And this tradition has continued throughout the generations, so much so that we are still doing our best to follow him faithfully today, more than 2,000 years later.

In a couple of days, we will celebrate his birth – the one whom know and recognize as Emmanuel, or “God with us.” We will celebrate in all kinds of ways - gathering to sing, light candles, and tell the same story we have told, year after year. Somehow, the story never fails to touch us. Let us pray that God will continue to capture our spiritual imagination and meet us afresh, reminding us that God really is with us.

Prayer: Just a few days more, God, and we get to witness Jesus' entrance into our world once again! Prepare our hearts to welcome him in, and to treasure these things in our heart. Amen.

Week 4: Love

Sunday, December 21, 2025

Rev. Joseph A. Motz

Psalms 80:1-7 (NRSVUE)

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.

Stir up your might, and come to save us!

Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure.

You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves. Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Reflection: Most people don't easily admit to having messed up. Maybe you've seen the partner in yourself or someone you love. First comes pleading ignorance, "I don't know what you are talking about." Then denial, "I didn't do that." Followed by deflection, "It wasn't my fault. How was I supposed to know?" And only after a bit of work (and the insistence of honest truth-telling by a friend or confidant) finally getting to the point of responsibility, "I am sorry that I messed up." We can easily find ourselves doing the same thing with God. Yet, it's when we own our culpability that we come to receive God's healing and grace. None of us like to admit that we have messed up, sinned, failed, fallen short, or have done what is evil. Yet when we allow ourselves to speak truth, we open ourselves to God's restoration.

Prayer: Lord God, have mercy upon me, a sinner. Lord God, have mercy upon me, a sinner. Lord God, have mercy upon me - let your face shine, that I may be saved. Amen.

Monday, December 22, 2025

Rev. Becky Hoover

Revelation 22:6-7 (CEB)

Then he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place. "Look! I'm coming soon. Favored is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy contained in this scroll."

Reflection: My favorite magnet on my refrigerator shows a lovely picture of Jesus knocking at a door with the caption, "Jesus is coming! Look busy!" Three days before Christmas, we don't have to look busy, we are busy getting ready for Jesus. We're excited to celebrate his incarnation, to gather with families of faith, light candles, and sing joy against the bitterness of these darkening days. If Jesus were to show up at our homes or churches and knock on the door, and if we were to open that door, what would he step in to find? Would we be running around, busy with many things, trying to make him comfortable, trying to make everything perfect for his stay? Would we stop our preparations to spend time with him, letting be what has not been done, and just enjoying his presence? On December 22nd, with so much still to do before Christmas, let us choose the better part.

Prayer: Holy Jesus, as we get ready to celebrate you, may we remember what the better part of our celebrations is. Give us grace to lay aside what we need to, and give us energy to finish what is most essential. (And after everything is in readiness, give us a nap, we pray.) Amen.

Luke 1:46b-55 (NRSVUE)

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me and holy is his name; indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has come to the aid of his child Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Reflection: As we move through this season of waiting, watching, wondering, and wandering, how does your soul magnify the Lord? How does your spirit rejoice? How have you seen and felt the Spirit of God moving in the communities where you live and work, play and worship?

Earlier this year my son got married and I was blessed to be able to officiate the wedding ceremony. Lots of memories filled my heart that day: his birth, his growing up years, his high school and college graduations, the day he told me he was moving to Brooklyn, the wonder of watching him flourish in life, the joy of seeing him with the love of his life.

Mary says yes to God. Mary anticipates how her life will be transformed. Mary rejoices for God has blessed her, for God will use her, for she will bear the One who is love. As Mary sings and pauses, as she reflects and ponders, she shares how God is forever a keeper of promises; how God is filled with mercy; how God feeds the hungry, offers aid, and scatters the proud.

What is God calling you toward in this season? Will you say yes? Will your soul magnify the Lord? Will you rejoice in God's blessings and gifts and challenges? Will you go where God sends you? Will you be God's love in the world?

Prayer: Divine Presence, our souls cry out to you. You have blessed us with life, with the gift of breath, with grace for our shortcomings, with love to sustain us on this journey through life. Thank you, God. Our hearts overflow with gratitude and thanksgiving. Continue to guide us, to hold us, to fill us, to love us. Amen.

Christmas Eve

Wednesday, December 24, 2025

Rev. Zack Jackson

Luke 2:10 (NRSVUE)

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people”

Reflection: “Do not be afraid” is such a silly thing to say. Come on angel. These guys were just chilling in the fields with their sheep, and then you and your heavenly choir showed up in shining glory with your 15-part harmonies all that. Did you really think that they would stop being afraid if you told them to? I wasn’t there, but I would imagine that there was about a 15 minute gap between “do not be afraid” and the rest of their message as they waited around for the shepherds to stop screaming.

Fear is a funny thing, isn’t it? Proverbs tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but angels are always telling people not to be afraid of God. Many of us have been made to be afraid of God’s judgement and anger, and bear the scars of that on our souls. I know I do. So which is it? Fear God? Don’t fear God? Let’s say that you are on a small ocean kayak, far from land. You’re all alone, surrounded by water in all directions, feeling your smallness and vulnerability. Now, imagine that you see a fin appear above the waves and it is coming closer to you. Surely, in the uncertainty, you would be afraid. In the unknown mystery, you would assume it’s a shark, and that you are in danger. But how would your fear transform if you realized it was an orca? Something powerful and massive but that means you no harm? In the presence of that beautiful bigness, you’d experience a different kind of fear. A sort of self-forgetting fear. A fear that verges on awe. That might be closer to what we need now.

The angels tells the shepherds not to be afraid for their safety, but to be filled with awe in the presence of God’s glory. To know that they are, at once, insignificant and also part of everything. No one will remember their names, but billions of people will tell their story. The savior is born, but his parents are unwed teenagers in a barn. Nothing makes sense and everything is beautiful. So lose yourself in the mystery and embrace that kind of fear, knowing that you are wrapped in love.

Prayer: Humble savior, born to us, be with us. Calm our anxieties and give us perspective. Let us not be afraid, but to stand in awe of the love that surrounds us all.

Christmas Day

Thursday, December 25, 2025

Rev. Selina Hamilton

Luke 2:15-16 (NRSVUE)

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger.

Reflection: Merry Christmas! For many of us, this is a day of going with haste to celebrate with families, a day of keeping track of who is serving dinner when and how long we need to build into our day to get from our own couch and tree, to one set of grandparents to another, and then back home before we’re all overly tired and melting down.

And, the story we read every Christmas in the Gospel of Luke shows us that the Good News of the birth of Jesus should, indeed, inspire us to get up and go with haste. The Gospel invites us to move toward Jesus where we can find him in our midst. The Gospel invites us to move toward God as we recognize once again what it means to celebrate the long-awaited birth of Emmanuel, God with Us. The Gospel invites us to move toward one another as we see how much our neighbors need our love and care, and the Good News that God is with us here and now.

Today, may we move closer to God and to one another, loving God and each other well. Today, may we take time to pray for a vision of who God will have us move with haste toward, who will be Jesus for us and who God is calling us to love and care for. Today, may we experience the love, the warmth, and the Good News that will sustain us through many tomorrows as we join in the movement of bringing the Good News of great joy to all people.

Prayer: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom you favor. We celebrate the good news of great joy for all the people, and we give you thanks that we can share that great good news with the world. Guide us to see Jesus, even as you guide us to serve alongside Jesus, wherever we find our feet in the days ahead. Amen.