



An Advent devotional by members of Trinity Lutheran Church



## Hands of Advent





# Forward

*Tom Perry*

The following Advent devotional booklet, *Hands of Advent*, is written by members of Trinity Lutheran Church in Mission and Shawnee, Kansas. The booklet follows the themes of Advent as practiced in our congregation. Each week will start with a painting symbolic of the week's theme. We journey from **Hope** to **Peace, Joy**, and then celebrate God's **Love** to us through His gift of the Christ child.

Each day of the week will have an offered piece, either in prose or poetry. Each author has a unique style of writing that speaks to his or her individual view of the Advent emotions. We received contributions from both lay and clergy members of Trinity in order to present a variety of perspectives.

The paintings are artistic creations by Mariana Csaszar from Washington D.C. She was given the four themes and created the hands. We thank her and all our contributors for donating their time and talents to this project. We pray that this devotional booklet adds to the meaning and celebration of this Advent season.

# Hope

Through simple, prayerful hands we find the glow of hope—hope for ourselves, for our family, for our world. It is the certain hope and trust that God is ever with us and showers us with His love. It is the certain hope that we are His forever. It is the certain hope of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. – Romans 15:13 (ESV)



# Hope

*Pastor Mark Schulz*

# Hope

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. – Romans 15:13 (ESV)

The weeks leading up to Christmas are filled with the world's version of "hope:" I hope I get what's on my Christmas list; I hope we'll be able to get together for Christmas; I hope for "peace on earth." But Paul offers us something much more meaningful when he writes about the "God of hope."

That's because biblical hope is not just a desired outcome, it is a preferred future based on the faithful promises of God. God is a God of hope because He is faithful to His Word and to His promises. He promised to send a Savior to redeem us, and He fulfilled that promise. He promised to hear our prayers, and He does.

Think of how the characters of the Christmas story "abounded in hope." Mary and Joseph trusted in the promises of God. The shepherds believed the words of the angel and went in hope to worship the Christ Child. The magi traveled many miles following a special star, "abounding in hope," trusting that God would use that star to lead them to the Savior.

It is because of the absolute faithfulness of God that we can "abound in hope." We can face the challenges and disappointments of life hopefully because we know that God is with us as He promised. We can live each day in the certain hope that because God fulfilled His promise to send a Savior, we and all who believe in Jesus will live forever with Him. We don't just "hope" to live with Jesus someday, we KNOW we will live with Jesus someday because God has promised.

May you and yours "abound in hope" this Advent season. God is always faithful!

*Prayer: Dear God of hope, fill my heart and life with Your hope. Help me to trust in You and in each of Your promises. Amen.*

# The Advent of Hope

*Don Zoller*

# Hope

Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-25

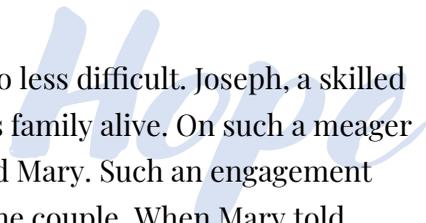
Each year about this time God's children are invited to go on a journey. It has been so for hundreds of years. It is called the Advent journey. Going from where we are to the place where Christ entered our world—and our life. As the name suggests, it is the journey of “the coming.”

It is a time of preparation, reflection, repentance, and rededication. It is a time to rejoin Mary and Joseph on their journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. It is a time to wrap ourselves around God's blessings of hope, peace, joy, and love as He presents to us His Son.

This journey is marked by four candles representing God's blessings of hope, peace, joy, and love. Arranged in a circle, one candle is lit each week until we arrive at Christmas. A fifth candle, in the center of the circle, called the Christ Candle, is also lit on Christmas. The circular wreath at the base of the candles is to remind us of God's eternal and unbroken life given to us in Christ.

Even though most of us have made this journey several times in the past, my desire is that this journey will be unlike the others. My prayer is that when we arrive at the end of our journey, we will be pleased that we took the time to be with God as He leads us to the wonders and beauty of Jesus, once again. Come now, as we join Mary and Joseph, prepared by God, to make this journey . . .

Times were tough. Life was hard. God's people were in bondage under the heavy hand of Rome. Guards were everywhere. And, taxes by the Romans seem to know no limit. But the worst of it: the voice of God was silent. There was no prophet to give the people encouragement, direction, or hope for over 400 years. It all seemed pretty hopeless.



In the little remote town of Nazareth, life was no less difficult. Joseph, a skilled carpenter, barely made enough to keep himself and his family alive. On such a meager income he was engaged to a beautiful young girl named Mary. Such an engagement usually lasted a year, with very little contact between the couple. When Mary told Joseph she was pregnant, he was devastated. Having thought and prayed, he decided to dissolve the engagement in a way that would bring to Mary no public shame. Just another instance where hope evaporated!

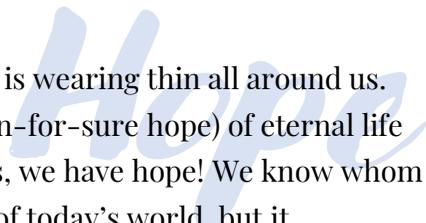
But Mary, this young girl that had been closely protected by her family, was given hope. Not just any “hope so, maybe” kind of hope, but given a hope that is “certain to be” by a heavenly visit from the angel of God . . . “Mary, you have found favor with God and you will now carry the hope of eternal life to Israel and to the whole world. You will name Him Yeshua—Jesus—savior, deliverer, and . . . “

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

– Luke 1:32-33 (ESV)

What a word of a certain-for-sure kind of hope when all around hopelessness seemed to fill the hearts of the people! Yes, Joseph also got the message of divine hope—a hope that all Israel desperately needed for such a time as this—and, that all the world in our day still urgently needs.

At a time when a global pandemic overwhelms people with hopelessness, the first Advent Candle of Hope is needed more than ever. As God’s children, we need a refreshing of that hope for ourselves so we can share it with those around us that have no hope. We are told that such a hope is a sure and steadfast anchor for the soul that carries us into the very presence of Christ as our great high priest, thus we are assured of help in time of need (Hebrew 6:19, 4:16).



As in the days of Mary and Joseph, human hope is wearing thin all around us. But we carry with us, wherever we go, the hope (certain-for-sure hope) of eternal life in Christ to be shared with others. Brothers and sisters, we have hope! We know whom we have believed. Hope, not only for the hopelessness of today's world, but it is a blessed hope for the "for-sure" second Advent (coming) of Christ.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

– Titus 2:11–14 (ESV)

Begin now your Advent journey of hope. Be thankful for hope. Live in hope. And share hope with others who have no hope. Christ alone is our Hope! Be an Advent child of God!

Next week, we will look at the second candle—the Advent Candle of Peace.

# Advent Hope

*Eldor Kaiser*

# Hope

For many, Advent is only a season,  
but the word itself gives us a reason,  
to listen, look up and also ahead,  
and take note of what is said.

The word Advent means “a beginning,  
a start, with a glor'ous glimmering.  
It's something like the special drumming  
announcing a celebrity's coming.

Someone is coming, someone will come.  
So whether you live in palace or slum,  
look to the future, it's not far away;  
it's coming soon, it will not delay.

The words of Advent tell of the past,  
as if it's still coming, will happen quite fast.  
This strange mix of “back then” and “not yet,”  
need not upset us, no reason to fret.

Though the birth of the Savior occurred long ago,  
his coming to us is going on now.  
And soon, at Christmas, we can celebrate;  
it's all so exciting, I hardly can wait.

Each week of Advent has its own theme  
This week tells us that Hope is no dream.  
Lift up your head; do not be forlorn –  
for soon, very soon, our Savior is born.

# Hope

No, we can't go to the manger to praise,  
But right here at home our heads we can raise.  
With sickness and strife, we're able to cope;  
our Savior is here; and he is our Hope.

*Prayer: Lord God of Hopefulness, assure us that we can have hope even in dark days, for you are with us. Brighten our world with rays of your light. We pray that you would look with mercy on people all over the world who see no reason to hope, like the people of Gaza who have lost income because of the lack of tourism. Bless the work of Christmas Lutheran Church of Bethlehem and its program of education and efforts to help children and young people to find hope, in the land where Jesus was born as well as in our neighborhood, may people find hope in Christ, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

# Hope

*Eric Justin*

# Hope

But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one." – Revelation 1:17 (ESV)

For several days I had flown via Anchorage, Alaska, to the far eastern part of Russia. The last leg from the southern part of the Kamchatka Peninsula to our fishing camp required an 800-kilometer helicopter ride with all our gear and several weeks' worth of food for the camp cook to use. The flight over mountain ranges in fog and light rain was frightening. But we were all on 'the fly-fishing trip of our lives!' We set aside concerns and readied ourselves for a long-anticipated week of fishing and camp life.

Why the Kamchatka Peninsula for fly fishing? Rainbow trout, the 'king' of trout species. They were known to be in abundance in the early fall in huge numbers. Other large sport fish were also to be found. Our arrival to camp went well. That evening we all had a chance to get to know each other a bit. Most of us had never met. We also met our Russian guides. They were former Soviet military officers, for the most part. Amongst the Russians was a young woman who spoke perfect English. She was from the regional fisheries department and was there to make sure we all followed the rules.

Our first day of fishing dawned bright and with great expectations. After breakfast and preparing for the day away from camp we all milled about the river's shoreline. Our chattering was easily drowned out by the loud noises from the large river. We anticipated the head guide to assign us our jet boats and our respective guides.

Something was delaying the assignment. Several of the more senior guides were talking earnestly but unto themselves several yards away from all of us.

Finally, the Russian woman waved us together away from the river and started speaking. Overnight one of the guides had heard on his shortwave radio that the Twin Towers in Manhattan had been attacked and had collapsed. Radio Moscow had also announced that gasoline prices had spiked to \$10 a gallon in the US and that martial law had been declared throughout the United States. We were all stunned! Fishing was delayed several hours. We asked a few questions and then each of us wandered to a quiet place to reflect. Some of us prayed. Darkness filled our hearts and souls.

The next morning, we used the few minutes remaining on the camp's one satellite phone to call the wife of one of our fishermen. We had gathered names of all our wives and phone numbers for her to call and let them know we were safe. We had limited contact in the eight days and got almost no 'news' or information about home.

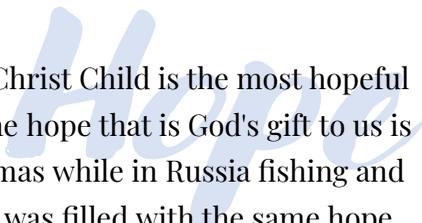
We marched on, fishing each day, telling fish stories in the late afternoon and then over our evening meals. There were few moments when our families and our country men and women weren't on our minds or a part of our discussions. Notably we had found out air travel had almost ceased. How would we get home?

I had my own tent. Each night after parting with the group I pondered the situation. Based on the little information I could get from the Russians I plotted a few routes that might still be available when we returned to civilization for my return home. Fairly early each night the camp generator would be shut off. Then I was in darkness for the rest of the night save for use of my flashlight. I would sit and pray. Just as I had prayed much of each day fishing as our jet boats sped along to our fishing sites.

Each night in my tent I knew that I was not alone. God was with me. A few of us were openly Christian and were able to gather and share God's Word. It comforted me greatly. I still worried about my family and friends. And my country. But I also knew that God's will would be done. That He would watch over my family and country.

Due to weather, we were trapped in the wilderness for several extra days. Once the helicopter was able to pick us up it was such a gift. Such a relief. We were going home. We all made it home safely and started adjusting to our new post-9/11 reality.

We had so much to learn.



Christmas is a season of hope! The birth of the Christ Child is the most hopeful thing we know. And part of the Gift of all Gifts is that the hope that is God's gift to us is always available. Always. Not once did I think of Christmas while in Russia fishing and wondering what would happen. Yet each day and night was filled with the same hope that we awaken to on Christmas morning. Each day was filled with God's gift in full measure.

# Christmas Hope

*Al von der Linden*

# Hope

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.  
– Romans 12:12 (ESV)

When it comes to Christmas presents, kids do a lot of hoping. They may want a certain toy so bad that they'd do almost anything to make sure they'll get it. Some parents tell their kids the only way to guarantee they'll get a certain toy for Christmas is to either be good all year long, or to buy a toy store. Well, my parents owned a toy store when I was young, and I can tell you from experience that owning a toy store doesn't guarantee anything. My parents didn't give me everything I wanted for Christmas. I suppose that's because they loved me.

Christmas hope is not about hoping to get what we want or hoping our celebration goes well. It's not wishing for something to happen and anxiously wondering if it will. Christmas hope doesn't doubt or wonder – it's a sure thing. When the Apostle Paul encouraged the church in Rome to "rejoice in hope," he was speaking of a hope that is sure of eternal life with God. The church in Rome already knew that Jesus came to this earth as a baby and that He sacrificed His perfect life for them so they could live with God forever. The only reason Paul called it hope is that their earthly life hadn't ended yet, so Paul was reminding them of God's promise.

During this Advent season, Paul reminds each of us to "rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer." We can have joy in our heart knowing that, through the sacrifice of His Son and faith in His promises, God is with us now and He will be with us forever. Being sure of this truth helps us be patient when troubles arise because we know God is with us through them. We can talk with God often in prayer as we share our life with Him and learn His will for our lives. With Christmas hope, we can boldly live our lives with God and for God. As followers of Jesus, we rejoice in Christmas hope, because Christmas hope is a sure thing.

# Hope

*Pastor Ron Flentgen*

# Hope

Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. – Romans 15:4 (ESV)

In reference to this particular passage from Paul's letter to the Romans, one of the Lutheran confessional writings has this to say: "It is certain that any interpretation of the Scriptures which weakens or even removes this comfort and hope is contrary to the Holy Spirit's will and intent." In other words, if you aren't receiving hope from what you read in the Sacred Writings, you are not receiving what the Holy Spirit intends for you. If we scan the writings of what we call The Old Testament (the "Scriptures" to which Paul was referring) we see the word "hope" scattered throughout. With the promises of God, God's people live in hope. The Advent season is a season of hope. The color blue, seen upon our altars and in clergy vestments, is, indeed, the color of hope, inviting us to look upward and forward to God's fulfilled promises. The coming of Jesus into the world is, indeed, God's eternal and unequivocal "yes" to all his promises. For centuries, faithful Israel looked forward to the coming of Messiah, the anointed Deliverer of God's people from bondage to eternal freedom. Though this longing and anticipation became somewhat warped and distorted by many of them into an exclusive event for Jewish liberation; God had something far greater in mind and in purpose, the liberation of the world from the bondage of sin and death. In the coming of Jesus, God has come down to us, lost and hopeless as we are without Him, to bring us to Himself. He would lead the holy life in fulfillment of God's perfect Law that we cannot and do not live. He would offer His life on the cross in atonement for every sin and all sinfulness of every person and all

# Hope

persons, confirmed and ratified by His rising again from the dead to die no more. Because of all this, “Christ is our hope” (1 Timothy 1:1).

For the world, hope is an elusive thing, sought after in vain. It’s little more than wishing for something better, wondering if there really is anything for which to hope at all. But with God in the flesh, Jesus the Messiah, the Ground and Source of our being, we have hope, the promised assurance of God’s glory and our good. Life, tainted as it is by sin, is full of disappointments and unfulfilled expectations. Each of us could provide our own list of such disappointments. We may often be confused, befuddled, dismayed, and disillusioned. We may grow impatient and frustrated, sometimes even with God. But the inspired apostle asserts: “Hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5:5 NRSV). This is why Paul can also pronounce this prayerful blessing following a series of passages from “the Scriptures” which assert God’s all-inclusive love in Christ, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13). So I say to you as we enter this Advent season when there may seem little for which to hope in the world, let the Spirit of God cause you not just to have “some” hope, a “little” hope, a “possibility” of hope, but to “abound,” that is to “overflow...be totally immersed...” in your hope in Christ, so much so that it will be contagious to others around you. “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God” (Psalm 42:5 ESV).

*Prayer: O Lord of all hopefulness, amidst the disappointments, unfulfilled expectations, false ambitions of this world, give me hope—eternal hope in Christ that will work its way into every corner of my life, in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

# The Gift of Hope

*Roselea Nellis*

# Hope

Often when hopeful we tend to find  
A big "maybe" lurking in our mind.  
But the hope we have in Jesus  
Is of a vastly different kind.

This hope is not mere wishful thinking,  
There's confidence... anticipation.  
Christ's coming, death, and resurrection  
Assures the hope of our salvation.

Even in our darkest hours,  
This is the hope to which we cling,  
Because we trust the promises  
Of Jesus Christ, our Lord and King.

Satan wants to create doubt,  
Steal this hope and create fear.  
We pray his whispers be for naught  
In the believer's ear.

As we focus on Christ's birth,  
And wait for his returning,  
We pray for that abiding hope,  
For which our hearts are yearning.

From those who have no hope,  
God's grace sets us apart.  
Let us pray for our Lord's coming  
Into every waiting heart.

# Hope

Suggested readings: Ephesians 1:18, 1 Timothy 4:10, and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

# Peace

Prayerful, hopeful hands now mold themselves into a cradle of peace. This cradle of peace came to us in a Bethlehem stable.

And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:7 (KJV)



# Hands of Peace

*Pastor Phil Cook*

# Peace

Make a fist. Squeeze it tight. Imagine the anger and aggression on the face of someone who is approaching you with a fist like this. What do you feel?

Imagine now that your hand is holding a shovel or a hoe. Imagine that you have been working hard all day. Your hand is aching, sore, blistered. The project seems hopeless, and yet you know you must finish. What thoughts run through your head?

Now, imagine that you are about to welcome a young child. What do your hands look like? How will you extend them towards this child?

For seventy years, the Israelites suffered in forced labor in Babylon. They had ignored and rebelled against God, and in response, God had allowed them to be conquered by Babylon and carried away into slavery in exile. The hands of their captors were often raised in anger. Their hands were often worn out with toil.

Now, in chapter forty, Isaiah comes to God's people with a new message. Comfort, Comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Her sins have been pardoned. God will now shepherd his people tenderly, bringing them back to Israel, restoring their fortunes. God has forgiven them, and he comes with hands of peace.

Pause for a moment and listen to your body. Where do you carry your stress? In your jaw? Your shoulders or neck? Your stomach? What causes you that stress? Is it the demands of work? The difficulty of virtual school? A broken relationship? Guilt from some past wrong?

Hear the word of God spoken to you today: "Comfort, Comfort my people," says your God." Your hard service is completed. God has pardoned you. He comes to shepherd you and guide you in this season. He comes to you with hands of peace.

Rest in that peace today, and throughout this season.

# The Advent of Peace

*Don Zoller*

# Peace

Luke 2:1–7

This week, we come to our second candle—the Advent Candle of Peace. Peace is certainly at the top of most people’s desired list. Not long ago we had a global social movement around this theme called the Peace Movement. Yet, peace remains elusive—at least the kind of peace that most are seeking. Let’s rejoin the story of Mary and Joseph to discover a different kind of peace—a lasting, more durable kind of peace. The peace that this Advent candle is all about . . .

Mary was in her ninth month of pregnancy. As most women will attest, this is the most uncomfortable period of pregnancy. Her condition, no matter how unpleasant, was to be made worse. Caesar Augustus just mandated that all family members had to be registered at the place of their birth—a census. For Joseph and Mary that meant a trip to Bethlehem, a distance of 90 miles over a rough and perilous road. There was no public transportation, only a donkey for Mary to ride while Joseph walked leading the donkey. In view of Mary’s impending delivery, this trip probably took about nine torturous days.

With Mary on the donkey, she and Joseph descended the northern highlands of Galilee down into the tree covered Jordan Valley. Every bump, every jerking step of the donkey, every twist and turn of the uneven road were only amplified throughout Mary’s body. It must have been a journey of agony from the very start.

If the difficulties of the road were not enough, marauding lions, bears, and wild boars inhabited the forested areas along their route. This only added to the challenge of the trip. Traveling, not in caravan, but alone, made them prime targets for bandits, pirates of the desert and robbers—a common reality along the trade routes they were traveling.

Accommodations were sparse, and in most cases, unaffordable. This meant sleeping out in the open, possibly in the rain and freezing night temperatures. Carrying enough to eat, such as dry bread, herbs, and oil, only added to the burden of the journey. Whatever food there was had to last until they got to Bethlehem.

Hardships of the journey did not end with their arrival in Bethlehem. There was no room anywhere! Mary was ready to deliver, and she needed a place to give birth, soon! But there was no room . . . except for a shepherds' shelter with a manger. A place where animals fed and were protected. A smelly place. But the place God had planned all along for His Son to be born.

Best records of the time accurately describe the conditions Mary and Joseph endured on their journey to Bethlehem. By any one's imagination these conditions did not encourage peace. Stress, anxiety, fear, worry, and uncertainty would be the normal responses for a journey like this. There would be neither peace of mind, body, or soul. Far from it! If we were on this journey, we would have arrived in Bethlehem as a stressed-out "basket case." No peace!

But, I am convinced they both were wrapped in God's peace. This is a different kind of peace than what we are used to experiencing. We commonly define peace as an absence of stress, conflict, unwanted noise, dangers, and uncertainties.

What God gives is a different kind of peace. He calls it, Shalom. Shalom is a peace that God gives in the midst of stress, conflict, noise, or whatever else is disturbing our personal world. It is an overwhelming, quieting, and enduring sense of the Presence of Christ in us when everything around us is not at peace. Hear what Jesus says about the peace that He gives:

Peace [Shalom] I leave with you; my peace [Shalom] I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. – John 14:27 (ESV)

In 2 Thessalonians 3:16, Christ is called the Lord of Peace (Shalom) who freely gives us His peace (Shalom) at all times in every way! And, in another place He says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you,” only reinforcing the abiding grace of His Presence and Shalom.

To better see how this Shalom works, we look at how the Advent candles are lit in succession. Each Sunday, we see how the first candle remains lit while the second one is lit, and so forth. At the end of our Advent journey we see how they all burn together to signify “out of one the others come.”

Without embracing God’s Advent of Hope—even Christ, a for-sure kind of hope—there can be no peace, no Shalom! The Advent candles do not burn independent of each other, but rather can be seen as one giving fuel to the next. Mary and Joseph had Shalom (peace) because they had the certainty of hope—the arrival of a Savior, the Son of God.

The lessons of the Advent of Peace are obvious. How do you want to make the journey for the rest of your life? We can seek the peace of this world, which is like a mirage on the desert sands, or receive the Shalom Christ gives to be our lasting peace when we invite His Presence into our lives.

Now, as an Advent child of God, take this Shalom to the world that is without peace. Be the bearer of Christ’s Shalom every day, in every way, to everyone.

This will take us to our next candle—The Advent of Joy.

## Advent Peace

*Eldor Kaiser*

# Peace

We're waiting for the Prince of Peace;  
May Hope and Love and Joy increase  
But just what is this Peace he brings;  
that promise borne on angel wings?  
Of course, true Peace is much more  
than the mere absence of a war;  
more than lying on the shore  
of a Caribbean isle  
or some other place as grand.  
More than breathing slow and deep;  
more than a long, restful sleep.  
Such things may help us to relax  
but are yet far from gaining PAX,  
To gain real Peace, God must be there,  
and is achieved through trust and prayer.  
I trust my sins have been forgiven;  
With guilt I am no longer stricken.  
Since I believe that God is here,  
to live in Peace and need not fear.

*Prayer: For your Peace, O Lord, we pray, not just some quiet, restful time. Forgive our sins, Lord, so that we are at peace with you and free from the strife of guilt. As the Prince of Peace is born on earth, something new happened. A new kind of peace came into our hearts – Peace that could be known and felt in the midst of war and strife. Give us that peace anew, O Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

# Peace

*Eric Justin*

# Peace

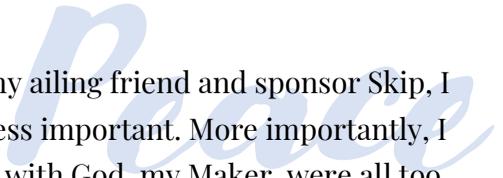
Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. – John 14:27 (ESV)

Skip seemed at peace with the world and with God. He was an older, affable member of our LCMS congregation during the time I officially became a Christian and a Lutheran and was baptized as an adult. He became my sponsor. My wife had known Skip and his wife for a long time before we married. They were so welcoming. I loved being with them whether at church services, a church retreat, or elsewhere.

During the time I knew Skip he developed Lou Gehrig's disease, or ALS. To this day that disease is ultimately fatal. Unfortunately, along the way to that demise a person with the disease increasingly suffers. For their last months or even years they are face with marked disabilities including essentials such as swallowing correctly and even breathing and simple movement. Wheelchairs are inevitable. Their lives become somewhat like the endless suffering of Job. Sadly, this was true for Skip, too.

It would seem the blessings Skip and his family had known were over, or at least threatened and diminished. That was not the case! Courage, patience, and kindness, among other wonderful attributes, remained a major part of Skip's being. Even when speaking was difficult and labored, the spark of love and kindness inside Skip was evident. Surely, he among all of us would be angry with God? He had so many reasons to be furious.

Not so! Long ago Skip had submitted to his God. He loved Christ and labored for God all the time. But his labors were not to gain God's favor. No, Skip had come to peace with his Lord and Maker long, long before he knew what would ultimately end his life. Long ago God had given Skip His peace. God knew Skip and Skip had come to know God in a way that was aside from himself and his own worldly concerns.



As I watched, listened, and learned from my ailing friend and sponsor Skip, I felt lifted up. My own struggles became less and less important. More importantly, I was able to more openly realize that my struggles with God, my Maker, were all too often arising within my heart or my mind. In essence I was ignoring God. As I learned how to change, I eventually felt the peace of my Lord and Savior, too, a peace that only God may give us.

This is a gift that was given all of us at the birth of Jesus Christ. This peace is yours...a Christmas gift among the others that God bestows on us. Difficult to understand, it comes as one sets aside the quarrels of one's life and discerns God's will.

## True Peace

*Julie von der Linden*

# Peace

For unto us a Child is born,  
Unto us a Son is given;  
And the government will be upon His shoulder.  
And His name will be called  
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. – Isaiah 9:6 (NKJV)

In my younger days I have a memory of watching beauty pageants and listening to the contestants answer a final question regarding the one thing they'd like to see or one wish they had for the world. The answers given often centered around world peace. It didn't take me too long to realize that was not attainable.

The realistic truth we face this side of heaven is that total perfect peace will not happen here on this earth. The world in which we live is in many ways the opposite of peace because of sin.

Does that mean we should dread every day or be fearful and dejected? Absolutely not! We have the power and presence of Jesus with us, which allows us to draw on the only source of true peace.

No matter what we find ourselves dealing with in this life, it is reassuring to know His peace is more powerful than anything we face. I recently read this peace described as a state of tranquility or quietness of spirit that transcends circumstances. There is also this reminder from a Jesus Calling devotion: "Remember that circumstances cannot touch His peace."

What an awesome gift He gives us!

During this Advent season, I would encourage you to reflect on the Prince of Peace who came to you on Christmas and allow His peace to surround you each and every day.

# Peace

*Pastor Ron Flentgen*

# Peace

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,  
for he will speak peace to his people. . . – Psalm 85:8a (ESV)

Who does not long for peace in his or her life? Certainly, the ancient people of God longed for peace. The Psalmist strongly urged, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!” (Psalm 122:6). They had known and seen so much turmoil in their history. In so many ways, the world is not a peaceful place, disrupted from God’s plan as it is in its sinful state. No doubt, each of us could recount many experiences of restlessness, turmoil, anxiety, confusion, and disruption in our personal lives. Much of it can seem absurd, pointless, without meaning, even disastrous.

But Advent says, “...he will speak peace to his people.” One of the titles of the Coming One, Messiah, would be “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). The holy angel would announce on the night of His birth, “Peace on earth. . .” (Luke 2:14). But there is not just one kind of peace. There is the peace sought after in the world consisting of harmony among nations, freedom from all forms of conflict between people, a laying down of arms, such things as non-aggression pacts and treaties. Certainly, we should long for that kind of peace and work for it. But it is elusive and always imperfect in our world of deeply imperfect and sinful people. On a higher plain, there is peace, or reconciliation with God for you and me whose sin has made a barrier between us and Him, between us and life with God. The Prince of Peace comes not merely to seek that, talk about it, or wish for it; but to establish it as real and eternal. The apostle Paul says it this way: “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). That is a real peace between us and God, a total ceasing of all hostility, a complete reconciliation, an established fact of eternal life with Him. It’s real because it has nothing whatever to do with anything done by us. It is “through [by

means of] our Lord Jesus Christ,” His holy life, lived perfectly under the Law for us and His sacrificial death in atonement once and for all for our sins and for the sins of the whole world, confirmed forever by His resurrection. That full and perfect peace comes to us “by faith,” through trust in Him and in Him alone.

The result of that objective and certain “peace with God” is something else, vital and essential to a full and rich life: peace with ourselves. It’s obvious to one and all that we are not perfect. I am not perfect. You are not perfect. Advent says God is coming to us in the person of Jesus just as we are, to reconcile us to Himself. We are forgiven. We are at peace with God. We are at peace with ourselves, for eternal life is ours. We are going to make it through the unrest and turmoil of this life with the promise of Jesus always ringing in our ears: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27).

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, we thank You that You have come to us as the Prince of Peace. Speak peace now and always to my troubled heart. Amen.*

# The Gift of Peace

*Roselea Nellis*

# Peace

Life in today's world tends to hand us  
Chaos and conflict, disorder, confusion,  
All leading to much stress in our lives.  
Is knowing peace just a lofty illusion?

An illusion it is not.  
It is prophecy fulfilled.  
It is a promise kept.  
It is what God has willed.

Now, amid unrest and turmoil  
It would be well that each recall  
The coming of the Prince of Peace,  
God's promised gift to all.

Just as prophets had foretold it,  
A child was born, and God did send  
His one and only son that we  
Might know a peace that has no end.

We find our peace in Jesus,  
We can live with certainty,  
He was, He is, and is to come  
The Lord for all eternity.

# Peace

As we await His coming...

Let us follow in His footsteps.

Let our wandering ever cease.

May His light shine on our footsteps,

As we embrace the path of peace.

Be it in our daily living,

When Christ returns, or calls us home,

May the peace that only God can give,

Reign in our hearts. Shalom!

Suggested readings: Isaiah 9:6-7

# Joy

The hands that were the cradle of peace, now become the hands of the giver. God gives us joy through the gift of His Son. May we have giving hands that share the gift of Jesus.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.  
– Psalm 51:12



# Hands of Joy

*Pastor Phil Cook*

Joy

What are the pieces of the Christmas season that bring you joy? Christmas decorations, presents, a certain Christmas cookie? A chance to gather the scattered family all in one place? How many of those traditions have been altered this year due to the pandemic? How many will you have to forgo altogether? Does that impact your joy around Christmas?

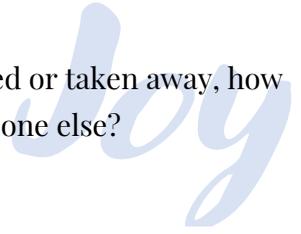
In Isaiah 61, Isaiah is sent to announce “the year of the Lord’s favor.” It probably did not feel like the year of the Lord’s favor. The Israelites were in slavery, far from home, cut off from family, unable to enjoy their traditions. And yet, in the midst of that hardship, Isaiah proclaims joy: God will come to bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, open the prisons of those who are bound, and to comfort those who mourn.

Many years later, Jesus began His ministry by reading these words. Again, it does not feel like the year of the Lord’s favor. The Jews are under the thumb of the Roman Empire, and their religious leaders have bound them in crushing legalism. And yet, Jesus proclaims joy.

It will come in the strangest of ways. Hands open, stretched out, pierced by nails. A dying gesture of a dying man. And yet Jesus, by His captivity, slavery, and death, brings us life and joy and peace.

This year does not feel like “the year of the Lord’s favor.” Many of our favorite Christmas traditions will be altered this year. However, those traditions, as good as they may be, are not the source of our joy. The source of our joy is Jesus—born at Christmas, crucified on Good Friday, risen on Easter Sunday, coming back again in glory someday. We find joy in Jesus because in all situations, He is working for our good.

In this unexpected year, when your traditions are changed or taken away, how can you use your hands in unexpected ways to bring joy to someone else?



# The Advent of Joy

*Don Zoller*

Joy

Luke 2:8–20

Arriving at the third candle, the Candle of Joy, its flame is derived from the first two, hope and peace. This candle brings us even closer to the Christ we are all waiting for.

The focus of this week is joy. One of the missing ingredients in many lives today is joy. Often, we confuse joy with happiness. It's not the same. Happiness comes to us as external pleasures touch our lives, after the winds of adversity have moved on. Happiness is often dependent on our situation at any given time.

Joy, true joy, on the other hand comes to us from God. It is dependent upon who He is, all the time. In fact, we may experience joy during times when we think our outward situation is least favorable. We may be in pain, under stress, and even when we are seriously ill with a life-threatening sickness. Remember, it's not how we feel or what we may be experiencing, but it is all about the Christ who is present with us and in us—He alone is Hope, Peace, Joy, and, as we will see in the fourth candle, Love. Come, let's visit Mary and Joseph as they experience joy under the stress of the moment—the uncommon birth of Jesus in a smelly manger for sheep.

Like many moonless nights in Palestine at this time of year, shepherds often were in the field caring for their flock. Some would sleep while others stayed awake to guard the flock from night-time predators. The stars, in all their brilliance, filled the night sky. With the coolness of the night, the shepherds settled in for what was to be another quiet uneventful night.

Have you ever been aroused in the middle of the night by a telephone call, a ringing doorbell, or someone loudly knocking on your door? The sensation is jarring, one commanding all your senses to engage this sudden disturbance. I'm sure the

shepherds' experience was similar. Startled and overwhelmed with fear, their star-studded night was now the stage upon which an angel in all its glory announced the greatest news ever delivered upon the face of the earth: good news of great joy for all people! The angel of the Lord was inviting these lowly shepherds to a baby shower. A very special baby shower—the One who is the Savior, Christ the Lord.

If the appearance of the angel were not enough, it seemed as though heaven itself couldn't contain the joy and excitement of this birth. Suddenly they saw with the angel a multitude of heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased."

With no time to clean up or change their clothes, the shepherds ran with joy toward Bethlehem. Just as the angel had said, they found Mary and Joseph and the baby in a shelter that was familiar to them. They were beside themselves with excitement and joy as they shared their heavenly experience with Mary and Joseph.

The shepherds' joy was contagious. Mary and Joseph couldn't contain themselves. They, too, filled with the joy and excitement of the shepherds, praised and worshipped God. The whole evening was impacting and filled with joy. Mary treasured the events of this glorious evening and continued to ponder them in her heart. The word of the shepherds got around and soon many came to see Jesus and share in that joy.

There was joy and excitement over the arrival of Jesus that night. That joy and excitement, however, first came from God Himself, brought to a joyless world by angelic hosts. It also comes to us this Advent season. This candle invites us to share that joy with God for His Son. The crescendo of joy echoes throughout heaven itself and prepares us to light the fourth candle with great joy!

The LORD your God is in your midst,  
a mighty one who will save;  
he will rejoice over you with gladness;

he will quiet you by his love;  
he will exult over you with loud singing. – Zephaniah 3:17 (ESV)

Joy

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. – Jude 24–25 (ESV)

Go! Be a contagious Advent of Joy to those around us—God’s joy for His Son, Jesus.

# Joy in Advent

*Eldor Kaiser*

Joy

Something big is happening;  
it will happen soon.  
Bright as the light of sun;  
will outshine the moon.

We know someone's coming,  
and now is very near.  
He is our Lord and Savior.  
Let's joyfully prepare.

Let's get out the best dishes;  
stir up something good.  
We'll celebrate with gladness;  
share some of our good food.

So decorate the mantle;  
put lights on the tree.  
Someone is coming –  
He's our celebrity.

Let's read the Holy Bible,  
the whole story is there;  
Let's cleanse both house and heart,  
know why we prepare.

This is a time for deep-down JOY,  
not just a happy day.  
We know someone is coming;  
God's LOVE is on his way.

Joy

*Prayer: Dear Father, we celebrate the birth of Your Son with great joy. Let all the decorations, music, and special food be an expression of the joy we feel because a Savior is born. Gladden our hearts in such a way that the joy goes on throughout the days and weeks ahead. Teach us to live as Your joyful people, in the joyful name of Jesus. Amen.*

# Joy

*Eric Justin*

# Joy

This is the day that the Lord has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it. – Psalm 118:24 (ESV)

We can all remember specific days after which our lives were never the same. Some are tragic or sad. Some are joyous and filled with gladness. The latter was the day I first truly listened to the above Psalm. It was read at our wedding. The twenty-fourth verse has been with me every day since. So has joy. Even on the saddest of days.

Each day I begin with a prayer of thanks for life and for creation. Then I give thanks for my wife, our children, and both our families. Often my prayer goes on to reflect other blessings or concerns in our life. Each one of those prayers includes the words and the meaning of the above psalm. Yes, it is about joy and gladness in our lives and knowing that no matter what happens they will always be with us.

I think there is more.

Part of the psalmist's intent, I believe, was not just to remind us of our God's incredible power, but also of His love for us. That includes a most powerful gift: the risen Christ who died on the cross for our sins. Each time I recite Psalm 118:24 I am reminded, no matter how bad the day, of a collection of wonderful gifts I have received in my life. Included are my wonderful marriage, our two children, and our families. Most influential and most important of all such gifts are life, salvation, and the birth of Jesus.

Through that birth we have so much for which to be thankful. Even in the hardest of times, we know we are not alone. God is with us. Always. That alone is a cause for great joy.

# Lasting Joy

*Julie von der Linden*

# Joy

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” – Luke 2:8-11 (NKJV)

Back in the days of cassette tapes we had several with songs starring Psalty the Singing Songbook. Our kids were entertained while learning music about Jesus. Psalty and his friends sang beautifully (albeit dressed a little unusually). I think of those tapes when I hear the song “I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy Down in My Heart.” It’s a favorite of kids and adults alike with its upbeat tune. The next line of the song asks “Where?” and we happily sing “down in my heart” many more times until finally at the end we add “to stay.”

How can this be? How do we get joy in our hearts *to stay*? The phrase ‘to stay’ caught my attention—it’s not what I ever focused on before when singing this song. ‘Stay’ implies this is a lasting joy, it never leaves. This kind of joy is different than a happy, fleeting moment we might experience during the course of our day or the joy we experience from daily blessings, which bring a smile to our face. Lasting joy is from God Himself; it is one of the Fruits of the Spirit and it is one that focuses on God’s character and rises above circumstances. He is the source of true, lasting joy.

The Christmas season (my favorite time of year) encompasses every kind of joy. The list of things that bring me joy is endless—everything from Christmas carols, scents of candles, decorations, lights (especially the annual lighting of the 20-foot blue

spruce in our yard), to special family time. But most of all, I have the same joy as the shepherds, the lasting joy we have been given through the baby born in Bethlehem.

May you find this lasting joy and may it find a place in your heart to stay.

# Joy

*Pastor Ron Flentgen*

# Joy

The joy of the Lord is your strength. – Nehemiah 8:10c (ESV)

A good many years ago there was a performer who would punctuate his act from time to time with the question, “Is everybody happy?” In all truthfulness, we would have to answer, “No, not always.” Obviously, we are not always happy and there is never a time when “everybody” is happy. God never promised unending happiness and pleasure in this life. In fact, Jesus said, “Blessed are those who mourn. . .” (Matthew 5:4). The coming of the Lord into our midst, taking on our flesh and living our life, was not for the purpose of giving us a life of carefree happiness. But it was and is most certainly to give us joy. There is a difference. Happiness can be fleeting. It can ignore the plight of so many who suffer, who are in dire need, who linger on the fringes of an uncaring multitude. It can be little more than indulgence in momentary and selfish pleasure, often failing to “mourn” the griefs and sorrows of others around us. But joy is a deep-down state of being, a confident assurance of God's eternal presence, love, peace, and good intention for and with us. Joy can exist even in the midst of the greatest sorrow for, as the Psalmist says it, “In your presence is the fullness of joy” (Psalm 16:11). Joy is even listed by the Apostle Paul as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22), and Jesus promises a joy that “no one can take from you” (John 16:22). Joy has its roots in the promise of everlasting life in the blood-bought redemption that is ours in Christ.

The Third Sunday in Advent is often described as the “Joyful Sunday” in Advent, represented by the lighter colored candle on the Advent wreath. In the traditional liturgy of the church, the Introit (entrance song) for Advent 3 intoned the words of St. Paul to the Philippians, “Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.” The promise of our Lord's coming to us, in fulfillment of ancient prophecy, in the

regenerating waters of our baptism, in His sacred and inspired Word, in the Holy Supper of His body and blood, and at the end of time to restore all things to His glory—all of that is the fullness of joy to the people of God.

Right now, you may not be going through an especially happy time in your life. Certainly, to say the least, we would have to say that 2020 has not been a year filled with untainted pleasure and happiness. But right now can always be a time of joy. “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10c ESV). We're not talking about some joyful feelings that you work hard to conjure up in yourself. We're not talking about ignoring all the pains and problems of living in the midst of so much that plagues us, that disturb and annoy, that weigh us down with grief and loss. But we are talking about “the joy of the Lord,” the joy that the Lord Himself gives to us in the power of His Holy Spirit, the “joy of your salvation” (Psalm 51:12) that sustains, comforts, encourages, strengthens and keeps us in the promise of forgiveness and peace with God, His eternal and guiding presence, and this blessed assurance: “We know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1 ESV). God comes in Jesus to give you joy and no matter what may rob you of happiness, His joy is your strength.

*Prayer: Lord, increase my joy in You. Help me to make this joy known and shared with all who are around me, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

# The Gift of Joy

*Roselea Nellis*

Joy

There's a joy beyond mere happiness,  
A joy beyond one's being content,  
A joy that transcends sorrow,  
It's the joy that's heaven sent.

This joy of which the Bible speaks,  
Full of hope and expectation,  
Fills our hearts because we know  
God's plan for our salvation.

It is the joy for which we long,  
A joy beyond all measure,  
It truly is a priceless joy,  
An everlasting treasure.

It seems clear that it is God's intent  
Our joy in the Lord be revealed.  
It is to be shared, to be made known,  
Not hidden away or concealed.

By nature we respond to joy,  
It is cause for celebration.  
We feel the need to "let it out,"  
And shows signs of our elation.

# Joy

Reference is made to shouts of joy.  
To sing or dance are expressions  
Revealing the joy made known to us  
Of forgiveness for our transgressions.

There are many things in life  
From which joy can be derived,  
But no joy can be complete  
Unless God is glorified.

We pray the Lord will fill our hearts  
With a desire to make known  
This joy above all joys,  
Our joy in Christ alone!

**Suggested readings: 1 Corinthians 12:26**

# Love

The hands of the Giver now reach out to us in love. Love came to earth that Christmas, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. – John 3:16 (ESV)



# Love

# Love

*Pastor Mark Schulz*

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. – 1 John 4:10 (ESV)

Many people (perhaps you!) state that they absolutely LOVE Christmas! This is for good reason, because the celebration of the birth of Christ is based in love. It was the love of the Father that led Him to send His Son to be our Savior. It can be said that Jesus is the embodiment of the Father's love. The words of the Christmas carol "Love Came Down at Christmas" by Christina Rossetti state this so beautifully: "Love came down at Christmas, love all lovely, Love divine; Love was born at Christmas; star and angels gave the sign."

We know what love truly is because we have experienced the love of God for us in Jesus Christ. As we gather with our loved ones to worship baby Jesus, the Father's gift of love, and as we remember why Jesus came, to pay the price for our sins, God's love for us leads us in return to love God and to love others.

As you celebrate Christmas with your loved ones, as you engage in much loved holiday traditions, may you focus on God's gift of love—a Savior, Christ, the Lord.

*Prayer: Thank You, Father, for Your amazing gift of love in sending Your Son to be our Savior. May Your love move us to abound in love for You and for others. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.*

# The Advent of Love

*Don Zoller*

# Love

l John 3:1, 4:7–12

As we progress around the circle, we have completed our Advent journey.

In our journey, we have paused and pondered before each of the themes of Advent—Hope, Peace, Joy and now, Love. The journey of Advent is to lead us to the Presence of Christ—the Christ Candle. Although we have lit the candles individually, the gifts are inseparable because they all find their ultimate expression in Christ as the embodiment of all four themes. God wants us to be excited about the arrival of His Son. In Him is hope, peace, joy, and love because that’s who He is.

We receive God’s gift of love, as expressed by the fourth candle, with deepest gratitude and thanksgiving. That’s why the Advent journey is truly a journey of worship, not just lighting candles each week until we arrive at Christmas. With Christ as the central focus of Advent, worshipping Him in love is all we can do.

When we speak of love, it’s hard to keep focused. We say, “I love you,” when we express ourselves to someone who is special to us. But we also say, “I love apples,” or “I love ice cream.” Not quite the same. Without requiring a distinction in the meaning, we usually accept the dichotomy with a degree of unspoken understanding, and then go on.

But God is far more precise and deliberate when He uses the word ‘love,’ particularly when it is used in the Advent message. Love, like the other three themes of Advent, is God’s gift to us. My love for God, although commanded by Him, and be it ever so sincere and deep, pales when we understand God’s love for us. Come, let’s visit Mary and Joseph one last time before we leave them. Let’s see how Mary and Joseph can help us understand our fourth candle—the Advent of Love . . .

Without doubt Joseph loved Mary. This was obvious from the very beginning of their relationship. Aware of Mary's pregnancy, Joseph would do anything to save Mary from public embarrassment. Informed by God, Joseph realized that Mary's pregnancy was absolutely unique—conceived by the Holy Spirit. His love for Mary was pushed to the next step. He would marry a pregnant young woman. During the passing months of pregnancy, that love would share her questionable shame among members of their family and closest friends. It was probably useless to try to explain what happened.

Joseph's love for Mary was expressed in very practical ways along the journey to Bethlehem. Unselfishly, he looked after her needs. He was committed to her comfort as they traveled the grueling road, caring for her lodging at night, preparing meals, keeping her safe, and so much more.

When they arrived in Bethlehem, Joseph's love for Mary would be tested again. He faced the reality that there was no room anywhere in this small, overcrowded town—no room for Mary to give birth. Undaunted, after a deep search, he found a place that shepherds used for sheltering their stray animals. There may have been a few sheep, a cow and now, the donkey Mary rode. It had plenty of straw and a feeding trough—a manger.

Mary's labor pains were increasing as the time of Jesus' birth was coming closer. Joseph knew he had to act quickly to clean and prepare the shelter for Mary and the new arrival. Joseph now assumed the role of "midwife" for Mary—and all that that entailed. From the early beginnings in Nazareth to Bethlehem, Joseph's love for Mary and now, for their newborn son, was defined for all eternity by one word: giving. He gave himself unselfishly and without reservation in love for Mary. Here, Joseph helps us understand the essential ingredient of love, true love: giving. God's love!

There is more to the Advent story. As Mary and Joseph looked into that manger and saw baby Jesus, they realize they were not only looking upon the Hope, Peace, and Joy of Israel, but they were also looking at the love of God for the world. A love far greater than words can tell. A love that was all about giving, and giving without

reservation. A love that is infinite! From the manger to the cross it was God's love given to us, and continues to be given to us today.

There have been those special times when alone, perhaps in prayer, when we have suddenly been overwhelmed with a deep sense of God's enveloping love being poured out upon our soul. Our only response, through our tears of thankfulness, is to say, "Thank you, O my God, for giving Your Son without limit" . . . and then, worship Him.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. – John 3:16 (ESV)

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. – 1 John 3:1a (ESV)

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. – 1 John 4:10 (ESV)

The love of God is greater far  
Than tongue or pen can ever tell;  
It goes beyond the highest star,  
And reaches to the lowest hell;  
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,  
God gave His Son to win;  
His erring child He reconciled,  
And pardoned from his sin.

Could we with ink the ocean fill,  
And were the skies of parchment made;  
Were ev'ry stalk on earth a quill,  
And ev'ry man a scribe by trade;

# Love

To write the love of God above  
Would drain the ocean dry;  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole  
Tho' stretched from sky to sky.

Oh, love of God, how rich and pure!  
How measureless and strong!  
It shall forevermore endure  
The saints' and angels' song.

– Frederick M. Lehman (1917)  
Public Domain, Hymnary.org

With hope, peace, joy and now, with love we light the Christ Candle. Hopefully, we do it with greater understanding and appreciation of all that God has done to bring us to this moment. Let us worship Him anew, thanking Him for a deeper meaning of Advent as seen in Christ, our Lord.

“O how He loves you and me.” But as the Advent child of God we are to do something with His love:

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.  
– 1 John 4:11 (ESV)

Go forth and shine as His Advent Candle of Love.

# Waiting

*Eldor Kaiser*

# Love

God has not hid his love from me;  
IF I look around I see.  
I see God's love in every flower;  
I see it in a gentle shower.  
But,  
I wait for LOVE to soon be born,  
in human form.

I see God's love in simple pleasure;  
and in lives of those I treasure;  
in moon and stars high in the sky,  
and also in great planes that fly.  
But,  
I wait for LOVE to soon be born  
in human form.

I taste God's love in sweet and sour;  
see it in man's healing power.  
See how the planets are arranged.  
and feel it as the seasons change  
But,  
I wait for LOVE to soon be born,  
in human form.

# Love

Hope is a gift that God's love brings  
along with Joy and other things.  
God loves the whole world and therefore,  
LOVE has opened heaven's door.  
But in Advent  
I still wait for LOVE to be born  
in human form.

*Prayer: The song is right: "What the world needs now is love, sweet love." O Lord Jesus, our world is filled with hate and violence. Come and bring love, Your Love, into the world. Your love is so great that you came into our world to suffer, die, and rise again so that we can be forgiven and saved. How can we not love You? How can we not love our neighbors for whom You also died? Let love sweep across the earth like a mighty flood. Jesus, You are God's word of Love. Amen.*

# Love

*Eric Justin*

# Love

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. – I Corinthians 13:2 (ESV)

The day of Christ's birth and the joy of Christmas are almost here. We think about presents to give to loved ones and friends. Messages to be included in greeting cards and newsletters clutter our minds. The right photos need to be included, too.

We are prepared. Our faith is stronger than ever. Our efforts for assisting others have been persistent this past year. When needed, our knowledge and experience has been used to sway things for the good. Yet something is unclear. Have we loved? Along with all that we claim to have done, have we loved our neighbors?

Did we show our neighbors the love we have been given by our Lord Jesus? Has our behavior to others been guided by the love inspired by God? Or have we tried to place ourselves above God and thus ignore His love? How can we be of any good to others then? If we do not cherish them as if with the heart of our Lord, how may we claim to have helped them?

Simply put, we cannot make that claim. Without love “I am nothing.” To celebrate Christmas and our Savior's birth is to acknowledge and celebrate God's love. Our Father's profound command is to love our neighbors, not just to help them. As we come together to celebrate Christmas, open one's heart to loving others. Acknowledge the deep meaning of Christ's birth and that without His Love we are truly nothing.

# Loved by God

# Love

*Al von der Linden*

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. – 1 John 4:10 (NIV)

It's the most wonderful time of the year! Christmas is such a special season because it feels like there is love in the air. People are nicer, they do special things for others, and they give more. But not everyone shares that loving spirit around Christmas. There are many among us who are lonely, hurting, or suffering. Perhaps they did not feel loved by a parent, spouse, or friend, or maybe they don't feel loved by anyone these days. It's a basic human need to be loved by others, and when we're not, we find it very hard to love other people.

The Gospel writer, John, referred to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved several times in his Gospel, because Jesus' love meant so much to him. He realized that God loved us first, while we were still sinners, and that He sent His Son to this earth to be born in a lowly stable that first Christmas. John was amazed that this little baby grew to be his teacher, friend, and Savior. Being loved by God changed John's life. Not only was it reassuring to be loved by the creator of the universe, God's love actually flowed through John to other people.

Being loved by a parent, a spouse, your children, or even a close friend, can have a big impact on a person's life. It can help us face life differently and make it easier to love other people. However, the Kingdom of God brings to this earth a higher level of love – one that is unconditional, sacrificial, and pure. No matter how sentimental we feel during the Christmas season, we can't generate this kind of love on our own. True love only comes from being loved by God. God's love for us changes our heart and moves us to love Him back. God's love for us flows through us naturally, turning compassion into kindness and wanting the best for others into generosity.

Being made in God's image and receiving His love, our main purpose in life is to embody God's nature—to embody love. Sharing His love with other people is one of the ways God draws them into His Kingdom. You are loved by God. During this Advent season, and throughout the year, take in God's love each day and let it flow through you to others.

# Love

# Love

*Pastor Ron Flentgen*

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. – 1 John 4:9 (NIV)

Helen Keller dedicated her first book to her teacher, Ann Sullivan, with these words: “To my teacher, Ann Sullivan, whose love is the story of my life.” We could add, on this joyful day of days, this Christmas Day, 2020, that God’s love in Christ is not only the “story of our lives” but our lives themselves. God has, indeed, wrapped up everything of Himself, every truth He wants us to know, everything about our relationship with Him and with one another, every issue of life and death in the person of His “one and only Son,” Jesus, the child of Mary. He is God’s living Word to the world. He is the love of God in the flesh of a fully human yet fully divine child.

This incredible, life-giving love of God is not merely something He feels for us, wants for us, speaks for us; but He has shown it. “He sent his one and only Son. . .” God’s gift to us is the gift of Himself. In the person of Jesus, God has wrapped up all the needs of humanity, all of your needs. He came to tell you who you are, a fallen man or woman whom God wants to reclaim as His own. He comes to declare you forgiven and at peace by the giving of His life for you, ultimately pouring out His lifeblood on the cross and then re-claiming that life in His resurrection. But it doesn’t stop there. He came “that we might live through Him.” He gives us a new life here that is patterned after His life, a life that receives His gracious love not merely to bask in it for ourselves, but to demonstrate and share it with the world. Just as God’s love was and is “shown” or “manifested” among us by sending and giving His Son, so that same love is “shown” or “manifested” in and through us. Here is how it looks, how it is shown:

Love sincerely. Hate evil. Hold on to what is good. Be devoted to each other like a loving family. Excel in showing respect for each other. Don't be lazy in showing your devotion. Use your energy to serve the Lord. Be happy in your confidence, be patient in trouble, and pray continually. Share what you have with God's people who are in need. Be hospitable.

Bless those who persecute you. Bless them, and don't curse them. Be happy with those who are happy. Be sad with those who are sad. Live in harmony with each other. Don't be arrogant but be friendly to humble people. Don't think that you are smarter than you really are.

Don't pay back with evil for the evil they do to you. Focus your thoughts on those things that are considered noble. As much as it is possible, live in peace with everyone. . . Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil with good.

– Romans 12:9-18, 21 (GW)

In God's "one and only Son," Jesus, you are loved—now, always, and forever! Rejoice in that love today and every day. As you do so, the Holy Spirit of God is at work in you to be a living letter of God to the world saying with the Hymnist: "Sacred Infant, all divine, what a tender love was Thine, thus to come from highest bliss down to such a world as this!" (Hymn 373, St. 3. LSB)

*Prayer: I praise and thank You, gracious God, that You have shown your love to me and to the world in sending Your one and only Son, Jesus, that we might live through Him. Make me a vessel of that love in all I say and do this day and every day, through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

# The Gift of Love

*Roselea Nellis*

# Love

It has been said that "Love came down"  
When referring to Jesus' birth.  
It is one way of expressing  
How God made His love known on earth.

This divine love is so amazing!  
We can sense it and proclaim it.  
Yet, not fully comprehending it,  
There's no way we can explain it.

This is a love that knows no limits,  
It never withers away or dies.  
Nothing can take it from us,  
Though the prince of darkness tries.

It is a love that will forgive  
Time and time again.  
It is a sacrificial love  
That covers all our sin.

We love because He first loved us.  
We know our salvation began  
That night in a humble stable when  
Born of a woman, God was made man.

# Love

Lord, we pray...

May our lives reveal your love,  
Living as you would have us do  
Until that day when you return,  
Or when we are called to you.

Suggested readings: John 3:16, and Romans 8

# Contributors

## Rev. Philip Cook

Pastor Phil is Associate Pastor at Trinity and the lead pastor at the Shawnee campus. Pastor Phil joined Trinity's staff in 2015 after serving nine years in the Dallas area. Pastor Cook's wife, Rebeka, is his partner in ministry as they raise three young children. Thank you, Pastor Phil, for your contributions.

## Marianna Csaszar

Marianna is an artist living in Washington D.C. She and her husband Alex Perry have ties to Trinity through Eileen and Tom Perry. She received her degree from DePaul University in set design and worked in the Chicago area, where she created sets for many productions. Marianna created the beautiful and expressive hands shown in this devotional. You may view her work at her website [feathersinarow.pixels.com](http://feathersinarow.pixels.com).

## Rev. Ron Flentgen

Pastor Ron is a part-time Associate Pastor at Trinity. His ministry at Trinity is well into his second decade. He assists with preaching, leading worship, and Bible class teaching. Pastor's knowledge of the scriptures and the history of the church is a blessing to Trinity. We are honored to have him write devotions for this booklet.

## Gretchen Hollman

One of the big reasons Trinity is able to assemble this group and have confidence in making this devotional, is that we are blessed to use some of the many gifts and talents of Gretchen. She is, of course, Trinity's Office Supervisor. Gretchen used her skills in the editing, formatting, and publishing of the Advent devotional. Gretchen has a degree in English and previously worked as a marketing manager for architectural firms.

## Dr. Eric P. Justin

Eric and his wife Deb are members of Trinity and often attend the Saturday 5:30 p.m. service. Eric is a medical doctor who enjoys exploring many different facets of life. He has shared his expertise of health and wellness through "speaker series" talks and most recently with an ongoing series of articles about our health in these turbulent times. Eric is sharing his unique style and perspective in this Advent devotional.

## Eldor Kaiser

Eldor and his wife Delores have been Trinity members for many years. They are active in Trinity's 50+ Bible study as well as many other things. Eldor is a retired Lutheran educator whose work has been published in many booklets. He has shared much of his poetry with our congregation and is sharing this gift in our devotional.

### Roselea Nellis

Roselea is a woman who possesses many gifts. She and her husband Howard have been Trinity members for over ten years, both being very active in Senior ministry. On numerous occasions Roselea has shared her gift of poetry with the Trinity family. Her poems always give a calming and uplifting message set in near musical verse. She is sharing this gift in the Advent devotional.

### Eileen and Tom Perry

The Perrys have been members of Trinity for over 46 years. As a retired schoolteacher, Eileen has shared her gifts of text editing. Tom has been instrumental in recruiting contributors and the organization of the devotional. Tom works part time at Trinity as the Senior Ministry Leader.

### Rev. Dr. Mark Schulz

Pastor Mark is the Senior Pastor at Trinity and the lead pastor at the Mission campus. Pastor Schulz has been with Trinity since 2013 and has been in pastoral ministry for over thirty years. Pastor Mark also serves the Kansas District as a vice president. We thank Pastor Mark for his steady, patient, and inspiring leadership, and for his work on this devotional.

### Al and Julie von der Linden

Al and Julie are long-time members of Trinity. When Trinity first made the decision to start a new campus in Shawnee, they answered God's call to be heavily involved with its initiation and have been integral parts of that ministry ever since. Al and Julie both are graduates of the Kansas District's Lay Leader Institute. Al has been a deacon for over a decade and Julie has used her special gifts in leading Bible study and caring ministry. Their contributions are welcome.

## Don Zoller

Don joined Trinity in 2019 and from the outset has shared with us his gift of writing. He has published several writings including *This Ugly Disease* and *Living Life in the 4th Quarter*. Don has recently shared a series of articles about how we can write our personal stories. He is currently working on a series of fictional stories: *Walking with Jesus*. His partnership in this Advent devotional is appreciated.







# Trinity Lutheran Church

*A Community Following Jesus*

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