

Calm & Bright:
200 Years of Silent Night



Devotions for your
Advent Journey
2018

Calm and Bright

Soon Christmas Eve will arrive, and once again we will light candles and the words of “Silent Night” will fill our sanctuary. We will join communities around the world and through time and sing, “Silent night, holy night/All is calm, all is bright.”

This year we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the first performance of this timeless carol. The lyrics were composed by Joseph Mohr, a priest at St. Nikola Church in Obendorf, Austria and set to music by Franz Gruber. It was first performed on Christmas Eve, 1818. Tradition tells us that the organ at the church was not working. Some versions recount that mice had chewed through the bellows; others blame age and rust. Mohr wanted to provide special music for his congregation and took the words of a poem he had written several years earlier to his friend Franz Gruber. Gruber set the words to music written for the guitar, and “Silent Night” was born.

As you experience this Advent season, meditate on the words, “Calm and Bright,” and allow the words of this beloved carol to bring you peace, joy, love and hope.

Week One

Sleep in Heavenly Peace

Isaiah 2: 1-4, 9: 2, 6-7

Scripture: The word that Isaiah son of Amos saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 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. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. - *Isaiah 2:1-4*

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined... For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. - *Isaiah 9:2,6-7*

Silent Night Verse: *Silent night, holy night, All is calm, all is bright, Round yon Virgin Mother and Child, Holy Infant so tender and mild, Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace - vs. 1*

December 2

Slowing Down

As we begin our Advent journey this year, many of us might feel as if we are wandering in the dark. We cry out “How long, O Lord?” and long to bear witness to our prayers being answered. We ache for a new beginning, but we struggle to see a glimmer of hope in the midst of sadness. We hear the promise of the child to be born and long to bear witness to the Mighty Counselor and Prince of Peace. We look around and call for others to join us as we climb the mountain, even though we might stumble and fall along the way as we might learn to walk in the paths of our Lord. We seek to move forward and we cannot stop.

The nights grow long and cold and together we seek the Hope and Light of our Lord. We reflect on our time spent together as we listened to the stories about the magic of Christmas and then decorated the Kirk for the season. We lift our voices in prayer for those who will receive the meals which have been packed through “Rise Against Hunger.” We will celebrate and prepare those whose labor will move us into our new home for ministry. We will take our place beside those who feel alone in the midst of the holiday hustle.

As we embark on this Advent journey together, take a moment to stop along the mountain path – take a moment to slow down in the midst of planning for the Child to be born...

Listen and embrace the peace which our Lord has shared with us.

Look to the evening sky and soak in the calm of the star-lit heavens.

Sit with the expectant mother who prays for the world which her son will change.

Stand with the father who marvels at the peace the baby brings.

The climb up the mountain is difficult, but the child we have waited for is coming.

Embrace the moment. Share the moment.

Seek the calm. Sit in the wait.

Rest in that beautiful, heavenly peace.

December 3

Peace in the Chaos

As a child, my understanding of Christmas came from the annual Christmas play that the children of our church performed. If my memory serves me correctly, I was always an angel. I wore a white choir robe and a pair of wings that had gold tinsel around the edges. It was an easy part, you just sang when the other angels sang. On the night of the performance, you could always count on the darkness in the sanctuary being lit with candles at the end of each pew, Mary and Joseph would remember their lines and baby Jesus would remain fairly quiet for those 30 minutes. All this made it easy for a child to assume that it was a very peaceful night.

What I didn't know was that the world was anything but peaceful at the time of Jesus' birth. Jesus was a child of a Jewish family living under a foreign regime. He was born into a family living far from home and fleeing from a king who sought to kill him because he posed a political threat. When we acknowledge the turmoil of Jesus' world, we can fully realize what He came to bring us. Jesus' birth can motivate us to live in peace with one another. We can't wish away the chaos and turmoil that exists in our world, but we can choose the peace that Jesus offers.

Kim Allen

December 4

Sleep Peacefully Tonight and Walk in the Light of the Lord Tomorrow!

As colorful leaves fall from the trees in November and December and winter season cold surrounds us, we live in a land of deep darkness. Peaceful sleep comes more easily to many, but for some winter darkness brings a very troubling time.

Over seven centuries before the birth of Christ, the great Old Testament prophet Isaiah proclaimed the coming of the Messiah. The Prince of Peace would come as a child born to us, to shine the Light of the World on all who follow him. Isaiah predicted what the child Jesus would bring on that Silent, Holy Night. All will be calm, and all will be bright!

But 700 years is a long wait for deep darkness to turn to bright light. For troubled people in our time, seven hours in darkness is an eternity! Those of us so blessed to live in great prosperity in our beautiful land of many oak trees can easily forget another's challenge to understand God's time line for night's darkness to dawn with His light. We can miss opportunities to reach out and comfort troubled people around us, to help them affirm that the Light of Jesus will indeed come.

Remember the 50-year-old TV show theme? "No phone, no lights, no motor car, not a single luxury!" Isaiah references oak trees, which throughout history have symbolized strength. But in Ezekiel (6:13), oak groves were also places for idol worship.

In Advent's early darkness, when we lay down to seek peaceful sleep amongst our strong oaks, let us reflect. Are you devoted to material symbols of strength, power and luxury? Does an iPhone, Audi or Cadillac hold a more important place in your life than worshiping God and giving resources generously to help others less fortunate? Isaiah's words warn us to make God our first priority. All false loyalties will fade and burn away under our Mighty God's light!

We pray now for those out west in California whose lives are ravaged by wild fires. Isaiah says a spark set to tinder quickly ignites a blaze that can devour all. God compares strong men whose immoral deeds devour them to burning tinder. Isaiah's words remind us that our comfortable lives can be destroyed in an instant by a small but deadly spark of evil. This Advent week, let us consider what potential "fire hazards" we need to remove from our lives!

Finally, as we stand and gaze at bright new light streaming from our beautiful new Kirk classroom building, let us offer God profound THANKS for so many blessings the Prince of Peace gives to our Kirk of Kildaire congregation. Let that new light drive us forward with the zeal of the Lord of Hosts to strive for endless peace. On this silent, holy night, let us commit to upholding His kingdom of justice and righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. AMEN!

John Leonard

December 5

The Edge of the Abyss

I have enjoyed reading *Learning to Walk in the Dark* by Barbara Brown Taylor. One thought that has stayed with me is:

“What if I could learn to trust my feelings instead of asking to be delivered from them? What if I could follow one of my great fears all the way to the edge of the abyss, take a breath, and keep going? Isn’t there a chance of being surprised by what happens next? Better than that, what if I could learn how to stay in the present instead of letting my anxieties run on fast-forward?” (pg. 75)

It is often the middle of the night when those anxieties start sprinting toward the abyss. This usually interferes with my “Sleep in heavenly peace.” It really doesn’t matter how significant (breast cancer), mundane (did I close the garage door?) or irrational (I haven’t talked to my son lately – did he get hit by a car and I don’t know?) the fear might be. Each one can disrupt my sleep and my peace. In thinking about them – most of these fears have one thing in common – the realization I am not in charge of everything and everyone I hold dear. The words “Let go- Let God” come much easier in the light of day.

I do love winter, the shorter days, the cooler temperatures, the time to wrap in a quilt and light a candle and enjoy the cozy feeling. I like the dark and I like to sleep – that is why when those middle-of-the-night fears interfere with my normal routine I come back to this passage. It is a good reminder that I am not in charge. I use the Advent season to ponder and reflect and acknowledge the mysteries I don’t understand.

Carol Hamilton

December 6

The Hope of Peace

In the world today, there seem to be many reasons to be anxious and fearful. We see on television the war and famine that afflict some parts of the world. Other regions have experienced natural disasters that plague humanity, destroying what we have built and taking many lives. In our country we constantly hear about injustice, political division, distrust and violence. There seems to be no way out of war, destruction, division and violence. The world seems to be spinning out of control and there is nothing we can do about it. Many people might conclude that there is no way peace can be restored and there is little or no reason for hope.

However, we, as Christians should not fall into the trap of being anxious or fearful. We should never lose hope. Isaiah's prophecy gives us reason to have the peace that passes all understanding. We know what will eventually happen and how it will happen.

We know that God's kingdom will be established; violence, injustice and war will end. God will provide the peace and justice that human governments cannot. God will "...teach us His ways..." and we will "...walk in His paths..." There is no reason for believers to fret, worry and be anxious. We know the end of the story.

In addition to knowing the end of the story, we know how God will accomplish his will. A child will be born to us: there will be endless peace. Christ was the child: Christ will establish his kingdom of peace. Justice and righteousness will be the order of the day forevermore.

In this troubled world and in this hectic season, Christians have tremendous reason to be at peace – to be calm – to hope. We know the kingdom of God is coming.

Jim Pinson

December 7

My Middle Name Should Be Linus

As a child I always knew why baby Jesus slept in heavenly peace. I never doubted. Every time I saw the nativity depicted there he was in or on his blanket. That represented comfort before I ever knew much about imagery and scripture.

God's word in Isaiah represented comfort and peace. It would blanket the world with hope and guidance for all to learn to walk in the Lord's path. As a promise fulfilled, the birth of Christ in humble surroundings brought so much more than could be hoped for. God sent his son to truly be with us, among us. Fancy titles like "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" did not separate him from us but brought comfort. I can only imagine the love and peace felt by Christ as He lay in a manger with his blanket, feeling Mary and Joseph's love and the power of our heavenly father's love.

When I recently found my favorite childhood blanket at my parents' home there may or may not have been a scene. It is a simple square of solid material with a wide band of satin sewn around the edge by some great-aunt. It is thinner than it once was and shows lots of signs of love. I hugged it, smelled it and held it to my face seeking the nostalgia of an innocent childhood. My parents saw me as a two-year-old again and my husband probably thought I had lost my mind. I only felt a swell of love and comfort. Mary knew what she was doing when she wrapped her son to bring him comfort in the manger. Most importantly, God knew then and knows now how to blanket us in peace and to teach us our role in spreading love. I pray we all continue to hear Him.

Stacy Taylor

Prayer: *Lord, I pray we continue to feel the amazing gift of your heavenly peace. Help us always to see opportunities to share your gift of comfort in all aspects of our lives, to all people, and in ways that use our talents and gifts. Thank you for showing us how to blanket all of your children with love. Amen.*

December 8

Turn on the Light

What is the first thing you do when you wake up after having a nightmare? Me? I turn on the light. The light chases away the darkness along with the dark images from the disturbing dream. Oftentimes I will leave the light on for several minutes until my heart stops racing and all becomes calm again. As a mother, I have come to learn that a nightlight is essential for a good night's sleep for our daughter, as well. Nothing says scary to a seven year old like being alone in a dark room at night. Why? What is it about the light that erases the fear? The light gives you the ability to see everything clearly. Once it becomes obvious that there is no sinister creature lurking in a corner of the room ready to pounce, you take a deep breath, relax, and return to your peaceful slumber.

Jesus, the light of the world, takes away the darkness and fear in our hearts and in our lives just like turning that light on after a bad dream. Knowing that Jesus has gone before me, endured the cross, and conquered death even though I did nothing to deserve it, provides a glimmer of hope even in the darkest hour and brings me great peace. Jesus calls us to be that light of hope and peace to our neighbors near and far. The hug you offered a grieving friend, the smile you gave as you were serving meals at a soup kitchen, the prayer you lifted up in response to the day's news are all sources of light, Jesus' light, in the darkness. If you find yourself alone and afraid in the dark, look for the light in the words of your favorite hymn, in the smile from a stranger, in the call from a friend, even in the face of a babe lying in a manger.

Prayer: *Lord of all Light, help me to find peace in your light this season and in every season. Help me to remember to turn on my light so that others may experience the hope and peace that only you can give.*
Amen.

Mandy Ritter

Week Two

Glories Stream - Joy

Psalm 86: 9-11, Luke 2: 8-20

Scripture: All the nations that you've made will come and bow down before you, Lord; they will glorify your name, because you are awesome and a wonder-worker. You are God. Just you. Teach me your way, Lord, so that I can walk in your truth. Make my heart focused only on honoring your name. - *Psalm 86:9-11*

Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone around them, and they were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors." - *Luke 2:8-20*

Silent Night Verse: *Silent night, holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight, Glories stream from heaven afar, Heavenly hosts sing "Alleluia"! Christ, the Savior is born, Christ, the Savior is born - vs. 2*

December 9

Quaking in Joy?!

We're thematically in the week of Joy—typically an emotion of exuberance and happiness—not fear. I remember singing this song in Sunday School:

“I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy
down in my heart! Where?
Down in my heart! Where?
Down in my heart.....”

Did you catch yourself tapping your toes if you remembered the tune? In the weeks that lead up to Christmas we were somehow, by someone, told to celebrate Christmas in all the happiness we can muster. “Ahh, feel the joy of Christmas!” Maybe they mean, “Feel happy that the Christmas season is here.” Not so fast say our scripture text and verse of “Silent Night.” The shepherds were flat out scared of what they were witnessing—what, angels in the countryside?! I would do more than quake!

What was true for the shepherds can be true for us. Theirs was a harsh life—most likely very frightening as well as oppressive. It was a pretty good chance that they had gotten so used to experiencing all that bad stuff that seeing something as glorious as angels was so unusual that it was—well—frightening. We, even with all the happy thoughts we may feel at this time of year, are surrounded by so much that can be oppressive to us—rancorous civil discourse, mass violence, and natural disasters that seem to come one right after the other. It really can be too much. It can be too much that when joy—not the toe-tapping, hum-a-happy-tune kind of joy—but the joy that abides deeply in one’s heart even in the midst of despair—is such a surprise, that it is—well—frightening. We quake in joy.

The Angels brought the news that Father Mohr penned so well. We hear the refrain, “Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born!” In a world where maybe we have become numb to all that is oppressive or frightening, may we “quake in joy” at the Light that breaks into the darkness.

Jonathan Sherrod, KoHS

December 10

How Great Our Joy!!

*It was a silent night, a holy night
There was no snow but there was the light
All was calm as the star shone bright*

*The young virgin gave birth to a sweet child
Angels sang praises in glorious song all the while
To honor this special infant so tender and mild*

*Sweet holy child, sleep in heavenly peace
While the shepherds and wise men look to you for release
And the choirs of angels did steadily increase
Singing, Alleluia! Christ, the Savior is born*

*For you our King still comes to us today
Our Savior who lay in a manger filled with hay
Emmanuel! Has come to be with His people today!*

*And now as we wait for another peaceful night
There still shines that star so beautiful and bright
And today that tiny baby is still His people's guiding light!
How great our joy!
How great our joy!*

In the stillness of the silent night, let us follow the bright, shining
Star of Bethlehem that leads to Jesus, the light of the world.
Wishing you a bright and joyous Christmas!

Kathy White

December 11

Surprised by Joy

In CS Lewis' book, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, Lewis writes of circumstances that led to his conversion to Christianity. He tells of the accidental discovery of joy in his life and how these "stabs of joy" revisited time and time again. Eventually he discovered the true nature and purpose of this joy as he moved from atheism to Christianity. Joy was something bestowed upon him by God, something derived from living with the hope of a future yet to come.

As Lewis was surprised with this longing inspired by God, we are surprised as well when we read that lowly shepherds were the first to learn of the birth of Jesus. Though honoring the shepherds this way does fit with the long history of God's making his presence known to ordinary and common folk and Jesus himself eventually identifying himself as the Good Shepherd; still we are talking about the Savior of mankind! The special effects overcame them with the startling presence – the multitude that lit up the starry night. How does the hymn state it? They "quake at the sight." Taking the bold move to follow a star sounds more daring and brave to me. Is it their curiosity, or are they 'stabbed with joy' at the prospect of the message? Their trust in believing the angels' message is a message for us today.

It is no surprise that David, "a man after God's own heart," trusted the Creator to hear his most intimate thoughts. As so often the psalms teach us, we start with prayer and end with praise. The wrenching of one's heart delivers us into our savior's arms and we rise again to ask God to unite our hearts with his. He asks us to trust in him and glorify his name.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, You surprise us everyday with your greatness. We too are implored to follow the true path to the Star – to walk straight to Jesus, the way that leads to one heart and one mind, undivided in our allegiance to you. We can't exhaust your love – that's reason enough to be joyful!*
Amen.

Sandi Torrant

December 12

Keep Calm and Sing Alleluia!

Today Will and I are celebrating our 26th wedding anniversary. On this day in 1992 at the United Church of Christ in Milltown, New Jersey we stood before God, family and our closest friends pledging to love each other till death do us part. Afterwards, at our reception venue we shared in blessings, music, dancing, delicious food, and fellowship with our 100 guests. It was a joyous occasion!

Yet, it almost didn't happen. Twenty-four hours earlier, a monster Nor'easter storm battered much of the East Coast with high winds, heavy rain, flooding and power outages that caused numerous delays and wreaked havoc on all of our pre-wedding day plans throughout the morning and into the evening. It seemed my hopes for the perfect wedding day might not happen. Before the evening ended, Will said, "It could be worse, at least it isn't snowing!"

Like the shepherds in the fields on the holiest of nights, our fears can prevent us from hearing the good news. In Psalm 86, we are reminded that our God is awesome and a wonder-worker. He is ever-present in all our days.

The next morning Will called (with a slight panic in his voice) to ask if I had looked out the window. Opening the blinds, I stared wide-eyed at a blanket of white covering the ground. The snow was coming down steadily. "What are we going to do now?" he said. I took a deep breath, and replied, "I'll see you later at the church. We are getting married!"

Despite a few weather related challenges, including my 45 minute late arrival to the church, it was an amazing day! And the falling snow provided the perfect backdrop for our Christmas themed wedding. God is such an awesome wonder-worker! Alleluia!

Prayer: *Loving God, we glorify and honor your name. Open our hearts to receive the good news of the Savior's birth. Help us continue to hear the Heavenly hosts singing "Alleluia" long after the Christmas season ends. Amen.*

JoAnn Sutthill

December 13

Are You Talking to Me???

I try to imagine the night. To the shepherds, it is just another night keeping up with sheep. Building a fire, cooking a meal, trying to stay awake. Suddenly, an angel appears. An angel? Are you kidding me? And God's glory shining all around? What a way to turn a quiet, routine night upside down. And now the angel is saying not to be afraid. Hmm??? That is hard to imagine, but somehow, the shepherds manage to listen to what the angel has to say. The Angel is a messenger bringing good news...joyous news...for everyone. Everyone???? I can see the shepherds looking at each other saying "Wait...do they have us confused with somebody important?" No wonder they were scared.

Clearly God had chosen the right people to reveal his joy to. The common folk, not to kings, or the priests, but just plain folk. Certainly, all thoughts of sheep vanished when the sky lit up with the Heavenly Host praising God. The Lord's joy at this great gift could not be contained in heaven, and He wanted to make sure the joy spread. The joy of a Savior, Christ the Lord. His son.

The glories of the Lord still stream for us like they did for the Shepherds. True, sometimes we have to look closely to see them, but they are there. It is that same joy that we should feel every Christmas Season in our own realization of the gift that God revealed to the Shepherds. The great gift of our Savior Jesus Christ. Not just to Kings. Not just to the Priests, but to all Nations. To us.

Lane and Dave Yow
Kirk of Holly Springs

December 14

The Doves and The Crows Can Both Bring Glory

Maybe I can pick a rose and not have thorns stuck to my finger,
God may say a miracle could happen if the darkness and frightful
thoughts didn't linger.

I am born because it's just the venue;

no, you are made because you have a reason to be here and God
made you.

Joy is an uncertain feeling,

but when you feel it, always cherish it.

A halo will surround your head my dear, only in heaven, no all the
time here.

At night, the shepherds watch over their sheep, as father like son;
but spending no time on themselves, buying mantles for cheap.

Our Father God brings joy, light, miracles, and glory,

but just like these have a reason so does sending the angel
to frighten them, no, to bring good news and tell this story.

Christmas is for gifts only;

right, that's what our children might think.

Tell them no, it's for Jesus' birth and the reason you blink.

The Holy Spirit is one part of you, like your legs and arms;

and it's also part of God just like his eyes and light.

Just as I fade into the silent night, the sins I've done were all
forgiven,

because I am human and I have you Christ, you have done so much.

And yet people still can't see why you're with all the leaves and
trees.

"I will bring a sign of joy," the angels said to the shepherds,

"a newborn baby wrapped gently in a manger."

They were no more afraid now, they were finally feeling joy within
them;

Just like you should every day,

when you are alive or in heaven, God loves you even in the holy
night.....

"Silent night, holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight. Glories stream
from heaven afar, heavenly hosts sing "alleluia"! Christ the savior is
born, Christ the savior is born."

December 15

Stopping for Simple Joys

Imagine sitting down to write your Christmas letter, looking out the window as you gathered your thoughts on the past year, and suddenly seeing “glories streaming” in your own backyard? Wouldn’t you need an angel close by, proclaiming, “Don’t be afraid?” Me, too! Have you ever been too busy to look up, though? Too tired after checking off items on the “to do” list to catch a glimpse of heaven? I’m afraid of my heart not being focused enough to see God’s glory. Not that I’m yearning for a Currier-and-Ives, snow-covered, and picture-perfect starry night, but it seems easier to imagine a heavenly host showing up long ago, in “simpler” times. Those shepherds didn’t need to thaw the turkey and spruce up the guest room, but they received “Good news!” with open hearts and acted upon the angel’s instructions. Imagine one of them reflecting on it all the next night, looking up at the stars and whistling a tune to himself:

“Tis the gift to be simple
'Tis the gift to be free
... when we find ourselves in the place just right
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.”

Slowing down and watching for the baby Jesus every day sounds like a great recipe for a God moment. Being less worried about everything turning out “just right” and being more willing to drop everything and check out what’s going on in that humble stable is what I’ll be hoping for.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, the holidays seem so perfect in the eyes of a child. Give us that sense of wonder at all your Glories. Help us seek Joy by living more in the moment with you and your wondrous creation. Help us share your Joy so that all may witness your love for us, your children. Amen.*

“Be still, and know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth!” Psalm 46:10

Lee Ann Ryan

Week Three

Redeeming Grace - Love

John 1: 1-18

Scripture: What came into being through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light... The Word became flesh and made his home among us. We have seen his glory, glory like that of [an] only son, full of grace and truth... From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace; as the Law was given through Moses, so grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ. - *John 1:1-18*

Silent Night Verse: Silent night, holy night, Son of God, love's pure light, Radiant beams from Thy holy face, With the dawn of redeeming grace, Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth - vs. 3

December 16

Welcome to the Party!

“The grace of God means something like: Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are because the party wouldn’t have been complete without you.” This is one of my many favorite quotes by Frederick Buechner. Whenever I struggle with a word or phrase and what God is trying to say to me, I start with Frederick Buechner. So far, his words have not let me down. Buechner takes those things which are difficult to define in a spiritual context and lays them out for everyone to understand.

“You are because the party wouldn’t have been complete without you.” What a powerful statement. You, me, every single person we know, and every single person we don’t know exist because the party would not be complete otherwise. I love the inclusiveness of this thought and the reminder that God is the God of all. We are all here and welcome to the party. Because, without any one of us, the party is not complete. What would our world be like if we greeted everyone from God’s lens, that they were meant to be here because the party would not be complete otherwise?

In this season of Advent, we are waiting for the arrival of the Christ child. Our Scripture passage for this week reminds us that, “What came into being through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people.” On Christmas Eve, our young children will throw a birthday party for Jesus. We will celebrate with three worship services. And at the end of each one, we will turn off all the lights, light candles and welcome “Love’s Pure Light.” Because when Jesus comes, the party is complete.

Prayer: *Gracious God, as we wait for Jesus to join the party, let us invite others to join also, remembering that they are because the party would not be complete without them. Amen.*

Victoria Vojnovich

While we eagerly await the arrival of our Savior, we are excited. The Advent season brings with it joy, ribbons, bows and gifts. We are excited about seeing our loved ones; we are excited about opening gifts, as well as bestowing gifts upon those we cherish. During this exciting and busy time, let us remember to silence the noise around us and revel in the greatest gift of all, the gift of Christ. Just as we eagerly open the gifts under our tree, let us be overjoyed with the best gift we'll ever receive – grace.

As the days get shorter and the nights longer, let us take time to reflect on the fact that with the birth of our Lord came the “dawn of redeeming grace.” With the arrival of Jesus, we entered a new relationship with God, one full of grace! God gave us a gift which we are unworthy of, and nothing is required of us but to love Him with all our heart, soul and strength. God’s love for us is so immense we cannot fathom it, so during this season of joy and love, let us be silent and reflect on the fact that we are redeemed through the grace that is bestowed upon us.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help us to silence our world for just a moment and reflect on the most important gift we will ever receive, the gift of your redeeming grace.*

Ruth Menechella

December 18

Let Light Shine

Have you ever been deep inside a cave when the guide turned out all the lights? Now that defines darkness; the complete absence of light. Darkness so extreme that no form or outline can be seen, regardless of its distance from your eyes. Darkness so intense that within a few moments it seems to press in on you. Yet, even a small light source, a burning candle or a cell phone screen, can provide illumination to displace the darkness. And there is a great feeling of relief when the lights are turned on again.

John's gospel describes the Word as light coming into a world of darkness. A light that shines on all of us. A light that was made flesh as God's only son. A light that extends grace, a most compassionate form of love, to each person, including you and me.

We can be grateful that the light God shines on us can displace the darkness around us. And we too can extend that light to others through acts of love and grace. And for a person living in a world of darkness, or even just in a period when life seems to press in on them, that act of love and grace can provide just enough illumination to displace the darkness.

Barney Hale

I can only imagine the chaos, the fear, the tension, the cold and the darkness on the battlefield in 1940's France on Christmas Eve...When a lone voice is heard floating over No Man's Land, singing "Silent Night." Another voice joins in, then some German voices. The shooting stops and an impromptu concert breaks out.

You've maybe seen it on YouTube -- the stage frightened five-year old ballerina in her debut recital. She enters stage left, sees the crowd and freezes. No coaxing can convince her to move. A few awkward moments later, the little girl's big, burly dad appears and begins the dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy. Soon the young girl is spinning around the stage with him, and the rest of the troupe joins in.

It was her final culinary class before Christmas break. She had made the trek to school for months and remembered the homeless man on the corner. Her final exam was an exquisite apple tart, made to perfection. The future pro chef was carrying home her prize dessert and came upon the old man on the corner. Without fanfare or anyone really noticing, the young woman presented her "grade A" culinary art project to the homeless guy, who had his best dessert ever.

Whether it's inspiring someone with a song, getting someone to dance, or sharing a meal...especially during this time of year, help us look for chances to be that radiant beam.

Dave Buning

December 20

The Verdict

Rules are made to be broken say some but not I, never!
Striving, Pleasing, Regulating.
Not to avoid penalty, though there is that too.
My heart is breaking to be recognized, loved, lauded, applauded
For doing the right thing
For being so good.
If I do this and don't do that, will you love me?
So many mandates monopolize my mind and I try so hard
To do the right thing
To be so good
And yet, it's not enough.
I'm not enough.
Until God reveals that I am.
The I Am comes to me
Recognizes me and loves me
Lauds and applauds my efforts
The Great I Am does the right thing and is so good
And that is enough
More than enough
So now there is nothing I can do
Nothing at all
Except share His amazing grace.

Melinda Merkley King

December 21

Jesus Brought Gifts of Love and Redeeming Grace

God offers an unceasing supply of redeeming grace--the greatest gift of all- that allows us to recover when we have done wrong. And love is what makes this great gift possible. Jesus was sent to show us this love and grace, and he did so thoroughly. Yet, somehow, it's not a concept we often embrace. Why is it so hard to follow in Jesus' footsteps and extend that grace to others?

To want to love is human nature. Actually being loving is another thing altogether. As a parent, a spouse, a friend; I have found that being loving requires the giving of grace and being loved requires the same.

Over the past couple of years, we have all been given a tremendous opportunity to extend grace and love to those who act or speak in ways that seem anything but loving. It seems natural and even "right" to withhold love and grace from those who seem to be unloving and ungracious, but this is the perfect opportunity to be most like Jesus; sharing his grace and love with them.

What would our world be like without redeeming grace--that of God and that of our fellow humans?

Prayer: *Gracious God, shine love's pure light on us, so that we see each new day as a rebirth, a new chance to be loving and full of grace. Help us to share that grace with those we find easy to love, with those we don't, with ourselves, and even with you. And help us to recognize your redeeming grace, and that of our fellow humans as the loving gift that it is.*

Tina Hammer

December 22

Pondering the Light

This week, we are pondering John's account of the Incarnation. It looks much different than Luke's account. In John, there is no manger, no shepherds or magi, no Mary and Joseph, no baby wrapped in cloths. John uses lofty, ethereal language. The Word becomes flesh. Images of light and darkness dominate. And so, I wonder... how might pondering John's story help prepare us to celebrate Christ's birth?

Perhaps we will be prompted to pay attention to the contrasts of light and darkness around us. The Christmas lights that decorate our town provide light at a time when the nights are longer. They can also remind us of the true light that has come into the world.

We might think about "light" when we watch the evening news. Jesus was born into a world where there was violence, grief, despair, pain, hatred, and suffering. Not much has changed; we still see and experience this type of darkness. It might be that you are experiencing hard times in your life right now. All of the celebrating this time of year can make it more pronounced. God may feel distant. John's story is reassuring. It gives us hope. The true light will never be extinguished. We might ask ourselves, in the midst of tragedy and suffering, where do we see glimpses of light? Where have we seen God's glory, God's redeeming love? In the past, when have we been recipients of grace upon grace?

As we continue to ponder, we might be prompted to think about ways we can radiate the light of God's Love. Do you know someone who lost a loved one recently? Ask how they are and listen. Who might be lonely? Spend time with them. Be a light for those who struggle to put food on their table. Make donations to Dorcas or volunteer at a food pantry. How can we shine light, show love? It's worth more than pondering.

Prayer: *Loving God, open our eyes to your true light today. Help us see your love in others, and to reflect the light of your love. Amen.*

Nola Boezeman

Week Four

Let Us Sing - Hope

Isaiah 9:6, Matthew 2:1-12

Scripture: A child is born to us, a son is given to us, and authority will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. - *Isaiah 9:6*

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, Magi came from the east to Jerusalem. They asked, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We've seen his star in the east, and we've come to honor him." When King Herod heard this, he was troubled... - *Matthew 2:1-12*

Silent Night Verse: *Silent night! Holy night! Wondrous star, lend thy light; with the angels let us sing, "Alleluia" to our King: "Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born." - vs. 4*

December 23

HOPE For Home

The year is 1980. Our family of four was living in a house I expected to occupy for the remainder of my life. I created a banner with the nine homes I had lived in from birth to the age of nineteen, with two more where I raised my children. "Home - where the heart is" appears at the top. I left one space at the bottom for my "final" address - the home of my soul. Three more addresses are needed due to changes in my adult life. It is little wonder that house and home are so important to my sense of security and well-being considering the many I have occupied. In my adult quest as a wife, mother and homemaker, I wanted and needed my family's home to be a place of comfort and stability. I have been clinging to this understanding of my need for many years.

In this eighth decade of my life, the home Henry and I share is the place I have felt most at home for the past twenty-three years - and all the days of my life. The stability of these years has given me a new perspective. My longing for home I now see as clearly spiritual; a place of comfort for my soul! I have shared experiences with those near the end of life who long to "go home" to the place they were born or lived for many years. My mother tried to walk from Ohio to her home childhood home in Indiana as her cognitive ability declined. I now internalize this HOPE for home as a subconscious longing for a spiritual home, different from all others.

I find the familiar hymn, *It Is Well With My Soul*, comforting and reassuring. It resonates with me as the HOPE I can all carry through this Christmas Season and the remainder of my earthly life, with the sure knowledge that a new home awaits me. This is the treasured gift that faith, HOPE and God's love through others have given me. Rejoice!

Nayda Swonger Colomb

December 24

With the Angels Let Us Sing

Today, we have reached the end of our annual journey through Advent. Tomorrow, tonight really, Christmas will be here. This is one of my favorite parts of our church year, and I really like combining the traditional scriptures with “Silent Night,” to guide us.

I’m certain that every one of us has favorite scriptures, hymns, and possibly poems associated with this blessed season. And that every one of us has warm memories associated with them, too.

When I read Isaiah 9:6 I do not hear spoken words in my mind, but rather a bit of Handel’s *Messiah*. And I expect many of you do, too. But perhaps trying to hear them as words and not music can help us to grasp what a wondrous thing it is that such a grand prophecy finds fulfillment in a little baby lying swaddled in a manger.

And when I read Matthew 2:1-12, the coming of the Magi, my mind flashes to many traditional children’s Christmas pageants over the years. Some are serious staged productions almost worthy of Broadway. Others are more what I remember from the small church to which my grandparents belonged, where the pageant was part of the one evening service. Many characters were clothed in bathrobes, the Magi were bejeweled with borrowed costume jewelry, and towels wrapped, and sometimes even staying on, served as turbans. And I remember the role of sheep reserved for us who attended church just occasionally. My grandfather worked in a woolen mill and had secured several sheep pelts which were tied onto us. And so, we stood on all fours, off to one side of the chancel, supposedly to not block the view but likely also, considering how fresh wool smells, at the request of the other children. But it was a joyous occasion, concluded by the climactic singing of “Silent Night” by candlelight.

“Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born!”

Jon Heckerman

Christmas Morning

Luke 2:10-14 ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,¹⁴ *“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*

Here is a word I would share with you on Christmas morning. I offer it as a way to reflect on the morning and the gift of Christ that continues to truly keep on giving. The meditation-prayer is called, “On Christmas Morning!” by Sally Foster-Fulton from the Church of Scotland. May you have a joyous Christmas day!

Jody

On Christmas Morning!

It's just gone 10:30 in the morning, God, but some of us have been up since the crack of dawn...

Excitement is not a sleep-inducing essence. Santa's come and gone- he's such a good guy, one of your really best ideas.

Our living room's strewn with paper, the turkey's on, and Uncle Oscar is having a long lie in our guest room.

Christmas.

Thank you for all you've given us; not the stuff but the people: their love,

their dreams,

the possibilities that weave their way into our days.

Christmas.

Tell us...

tell us again about forgiveness that frees,

about love that is boundless,

about peace that passes all understanding.

Christmas-

the gift of you that introduces us to each other.

Amen.

KIRK ADVENT OPPORTUNITIES 2018

(Events listed will be held at Kirk of Kildaire in Cary unless otherwise noted)

Sunday, December 2 - three events at Kirk of Holly Springs

GREENING OF KOHS WORSHIP SERVICE 10:00 am

FAMILY FIRST ADVENT ACTIVITIES 11:00 am - 12:30 pm

ADVENT CELEBRATION DINNER 5:00 - 6:30 pm

Sunday, December 2, 5:00 pm

GREENING OF THE KIRK - Come hear the story of "Silent Night" as we celebrate the 200th anniversary of this beloved carol. Led by Kirk children's Choirs and Kirk Youth. Reception follows. Childcare available.

Thursday, December 6, 7:00 pm

DEVOUT STOUT CHRISTMAS PARTY - All Young Adults are welcome to celebrate the season at Buffalo Brothers. R.S.V.P. by Dec. 2 for childcare, www.tinyurl.com/KirkChildCare.

Saturday, December 8, 9:30 am

PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN'S CHRISTMAS BRUNCH - All ladies are cordially invited! Contact Kat Russell, 919-819-7986 by December 2 to purchase your \$10 ticket. Childcare available with advance reservation.

Sunday, December 9

WHEN HEARTS ARE TROUBLED:

A SERVICE OF LAMENT AND HOPE, 4:00 pm

Gather in the Session Room for a service with those suffering from a heavy heart during the holidays. If you would like to stay for dinner served afterwards please RSVP by December 7 to Pastor Melinda, mmking@kirkofkildaire.org.

YOUTH CHRISTMAS PARTIES, 5:30 pm - Middle school at the Kirk (Activities Building); High School at the King home.

Sunday, December 16, 8:45 am & 11:00 am

A SERVICE OF LESSONS & CAROLS - Enjoy a presentation by the Kirk Music Ministry and Orchestra of traditional holiday music during both morning worship services. Invite a friend or neighbor!

KOHS YOUTH EVENT, 4:00 pm - See "Christmas in a Barn" at 1st Presbyterian Church, Smithfield.

CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP SERVICES

3:30 pm Children's Service (new building)

5:00 pm Family Candlelight Service*

6:30 pm Kirk of Holly Springs Communion & Candlelight

8:00 pm Communion Candlelight Service*

11:00 pm Communion Candlelight Service

(*childcare available)

Sunday, December 30, 11:00 am

One Worship Service only - No Sunday School



200 High Meadow Drive
Cary, North Carolina 27511