

Enola First Church of God



Advent Devotions

ANTICIPATION...is making me wait.

The Lamplighter's Ministry Team of ECOG has commissioned this project as an outreach to our church family and community. Our goal is to allow individuals to reflect upon the birth of Christ and share their thoughts or memories with others.

This year's Advent devotional booklet's theme is ANTICIPATION. We, as Christians, are awaiting the birth of Jesus Christ. Congregational members from ECOG have contributed their own submissions for us to read a devotion each day of Advent. As we read, please pray that each will touch your heart and allow the Holy Spirit to work through you to be disciples of Christ, not just this Christmastide, but throughout the year.

We want to thank each writer and artist taking their time to participate in this endeavor. If we didn't have volunteers to share their thoughts through the written word, this project would have failed. Thank you to the Board, Pastors and staff for their support and assistance. Finally, we want to thank each of you that takes the time to read, reflect and pray for the individual who wrote the devotional for the day and for ECOG.

May God Richly Bless You and Keep You,
The Lamplighters Ministry Team
Dan Marrow, Pat Watson, Crystal Hammond, Dave and Faith Duskey



A CHRIST-CENTERED CHRISTMAS ADVENT READING PLAN



Explore the true meaning of Christmas as you travel through God's Word. Discover God's promises he fulfilled through the birth of His only Son, the **KING OF KINGS.**

1 Isaiah 7:14 	2 Isaiah 9:6-7	3 Malachi 3:1	4 Micah 5:2-4	5 Luke 1:5-7	6 Luke 1:10-15	7 Luke 1:18-22	8 Luke 1:24-25
14 Luke 2:15-20	13 Luke 2:8-14	12 Luke 2:6-7	11 Luke 2:1-5	10 Luke 1:30-33	9 Luke 1:26-29		
15 Matthew 1:18-21	16 Matthew 1:22-25	17 Matthew 2:1-3	18 Matthew 2:4-6	19 Matthew 2:7-9	20 Matthew 2:10-12	21 Romans 15:13	
	23 Philippians 2:8-11	22 Galatians 4:4-5	24 James 1:16-18	25 John 3:16			

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DECEMBER 1

Come Let Us Adore Him!

As a young man, I was surprised to learn there is no biblical mandate to observe Advent. It developed as a tradition over the course of church history as a way to commemorate the arrival of Christmas. *Anticipation* implies taking action and responding emotionally to something before it happens. The prophets anticipated the arrival of Messiah. We anticipate the actual fact of Christ's birth. And soon, His return in Glory.

The events surrounding Jesus' birth—the prophecies foretold and fulfilled (Isaiah 7:14); the birth of John pointing the way to Jesus (Luke 1:5-25); the way God guided Mary and Joseph and protected Jesus from King Herod (Matthew 2:11-12)—all speak to God's intimate involvement in our salvation. This is the God we adore—the God who spared not even His own Son, but gave Him up for all (John 3:16).

God deserves our worship and praise for all that He has done for us. And in the birth of Jesus into our world, born to save us from our sins, born to give us eternal life—God gave us His very Best. To which we can only respond: “Come, Let Us Adore Him!”

Randy Watson



DECEMBER 2

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.’” Matthew 2:1-2 NIV

Although we traditionally think of only three Magi, or wisemen, there may have been up to twelve of them; however, only three brought gifts. The Magi went to the palace where King Herod lived, expecting to find the “King of the Jews” there, in the residence of a King. Imagine their disappointment when he wasn't there. Their trek from the east may have been long, but their end goal was meeting and worshipping the new King! They found him at a house, not a palace, with his mother. They worshipped the child, Jesus, King of the Jews. They did not ask for proof that he was who they believed he was. They did not hesitate to worship him. They were led there by God, and they believed.

This holiday season, may we find the same joy in the birth of our Savior. May we seek him with our whole heart, may we find him, worship him, and be committed to serving him. May we glorify him and follow where he leads us. Let's take a lesson from the Magi. Salvation and a relationship with the Savior is the greatest gift we can ever receive. The trek to the King is worth it.

Amy Kreiger

DECEMBER 3

With having two young adult mentally challenged sons, Christmas is always an anticipated season. My sons will always be excited to help put up the Christmas tree and decorations both inside and outside of the house. I just love the joy on their faces when they get up Christmas morning and see all the gifts under the Christmas tree. It does not matter to them what the gift is that they open. Even if it is new underwear, the youngest son will hold up a pair, tell me how gorgeous they are and then thank me. I cannot fully explain the love and joy I always feel watching them enjoy Christmas. Christmas will always be a magical time for us. My sons are the precious gifts that God entrusted to me to love and raise them as God fearing men.

But isn't that how we should anticipate Christmas? How our loving God sent his only begotten Son, Jesus, to us to show us how much he loves us. God only wants us to show him how much we love him, follow his commands, and praise him for his grace and mercy. And we should always thank God!

John 3:16 (NKJ) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

1 John 4:9 (NKJ) In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

Daphne McConnell



DECEMBER 4

CHRISTmas! My time of year!

It has always been my favorite time each year since childhood. Receiving gifts from friends, family, parents and of course, Santa, and the special feelings that someone was thinking of me. I felt loved and being a part of a family and friendships. This “fuzzy” feeling has remained unchanged over the years except that now I feel this way when I give a gift to someone. I love to see the appreciation and surprise of my thoughtfulness.

I wonder how God felt when He gave his most precious gift to humankind? John 3:16 (KJV) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. The greatest gift we can receive in life is salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. He was born to die for each of us. He is the true GIFT of LIFE for eternity.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful. Is 9:6 (KJV)

Dear God, I want to thank you for giving us your most precious gift, Jesus Christ. May we remember to keep Jesus in our forethought throughout the year, just not at Christmastime. Please bless each of us with your love and forgive us of our sins so that we can live eternity with you in heaven. Amen.

Faith Duskey

Luke 1:30-33 ESV And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 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.”

Faith, Waiting, and the Joy of Fulfillment

Mary had to have faith that what the angel told her was true. She chose to trust in God’s plan for her life. Then, she had to wait with anticipation as the baby grew inside her body. The waiting is hard for any mother expecting the birth of her child. She had to have had many questions on her journey, but she knew that God was with her. The bible doesn’t say why, but that Mary went to visit Elizabeth, her relative, maybe for comfort and reassurance. I think sometimes God puts other people in our path to reassure us that he is with us. When Mary arrives, Elizabeth exclaims in wonder, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!” (Luke 1:42). This meeting is a moment of shared anticipation for the fulfillment of God’s promise. Elizabeth affirms Mary’s faith that her choice to trust in God’s plan was good and they shared the joy that she would give birth to the Son of God. As my family looks forward to Christmas, we like to spend time with our friends and family members who also celebrate the true meaning of Christmas. Over the years we have participated in caroling, baking together and we always enjoy attending Christmas Eve services with family at various churches.

The world is LOUD at Christmas time shoving all the distractions at us regarding gifts, parties and decorations. It helps to spend time with other Christians talking about Jesus and singing songs that praise Him. My favorite Christmas song is “Breath of Heaven (Mary’s song)” by Amy Grant. In this song, Mary reflects on her own uncertainty and vulnerability, asking for God’s strength to carry her through. Lines like, “I am waiting in a silent prayer, I am frightened by the load I bear,” and “Breath of heaven, hold me together, be forever near me,” mirror the trust and faith that Mary had when Gabriel delivered the news.

Prayer: Lord, during this Advent season, help us to wait with expectant hearts like Mary. Grant us the courage to trust in Your plans and the joy to share in the anticipation of Your Son’s coming. Prepare our hearts now for Christ’s return. Amen.

Tonya Leo

“Breath of Heaven (Mary’s song)” is: © 1992 Clouseau Music Ltd; Age To Age Music, Inc.; Riverstone Music, Inc.





The most BEAUTIFUL
things in life ARE NOT things.
They're people AND places,
memories AND pictures
They're feelings AND moments
AND smiles AND laughter.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Austria on my Bucket List

For a long time I wanted to see Switzerland and Austria and thought I never would. My dream would remain a dream.

One day Naomi asked me if I wanted to go to Switzerland. I said why and she told me there were back to back weeks open in both countries. I was ecstatic and since my spiritual ancestors were from there, the pull was greater. We spent hours tracking down Anabaptist sites to visit in Switzerland while following The Sound of Music in Austria. The trip was everything I wanted and we came home with a new and deeper appreciation of our spiritual heritage.

But I have a greater dream which is not a dream. I long to be free from my fleshly cravings and enjoy my eternal life that Jesus gave me. I long to see him face to face and walk and talk with him. It will be everything I expect and more.

Wayne Rohrer



Anticipation of Christmas, The Second Coming

The seasons of life and one's perspective on the Christmas season change with each stage of development. As a child, the ideas of gifts, lights, and getting a tree were of paramount importance to the celebration. Attending services on Christmas Eve always ending around midnight with the knowledge that Christmas had come as we ventured home was magical. Our Christmas band concerts in school including secular tunes like Sleigh Ride but ending with the Hallelujah Chorus brought more meaning of what Christmas was about in contrast to the world's meaning.

The Old Testament patriarchs and prophets of old anticipated the coming of the Messiah but did not enjoy that fulfillment before they passed. (Heb. 11:13) Those who enjoyed the presence of Jesus during his time on the earth could anticipate the promise of God's kingdom as they saw him minister.

His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension gave the Church and those in the present day the blessed hope of the soon return of Christ. (1 Tim 6:14-15) My perspective today is that even with the enjoyment of the Christmas season, knowing its historical basis, it is more important and eagerly mindful of preparing and looking for the second coming of Christ where we will ever be with the Lord. As I Thess. 4:16-18 testifies... "the dead in Christ will rise first: then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words." Merry Christmas!

Jeff Imboden

DECEMBER 8

Read Isaiah 9:2-7

In 1957 a new character emerged onto the American pop culture scene who became associated with Christmas—in a negative way. That character is Dr. Seuss's ever-popular (and ever-despised) Grinch. Yeah, that's right, the Grinch who stole Christmas. The Isaiah passage is written to a group of people who were living a "Grinch-like" lifestyle; and it was well-deserved. Isaiah describes God's people as walking in darkness and misery because of their sin.

But the focus of the passage is not about this "Grinchy" life of darkness. Isaiah prophesied that in the future, the exact opposite was coming. God's people could anticipate that a Great Light would appear—one that will increase the joy of the people. Matthew 4:12-16 tells us that Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of this light that Isaiah prophesied. And what a light He turned out to be! He is "Wonderful" (extraordinary, marvelous), "Counselor" – (one who advises). "Mighty God" (God the Son in the flesh), "Everlasting Father" – (again, verifying His divinity), "Prince of Peace" (He came to bring peace between God and humanity).

When you're dealing with a Grinch, it is a blessing to anticipate that God has something better coming. And that fact is true for every follower of Jesus. "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Whatever "Grinch" you may be currently dealing with, may the story of God's people anticipating the coming of that Great Light and Prince of Peace encourage you as a believer. You can truly anticipate that in the end, better things are coming. God ultimately will work all things for your good.

Pastor George Jensen



DECEMBER 9

With the Christmas season approaching, the anticipation of family parties, decorating our homes or buying the perfect gift for family or friends can be stressful. We sometimes forget about the gift that God has given us all. A gift that cost us nothing, chosen for all, and yes, it was perfect for everyone around the world.

When our savior was born, he wasn't in a perfect location or in a perfect bassinet or even in a warm room. Yet, the gift of love brought to all of us that evening was "perfect." I had a professor who once asked, "What is love?" After many definitions from the class the professor said simply, "It's the ability to put someone's feelings before your own." In John 13:34 Jesus says that we are to love one another based on Jesus's sacrificial love for us.

Love is more than simply "warm feelings" for someone but rather an attitude that is revealed in action. This Christmas season, let's help others when it's not convenient, give money to someone in need, give them time, or listen when they want to talk. Most importantly, pray for someone when the Holy Spirit urges you.

Don't allow your anticipation and stress of the Christmas season take away the love that Jesus commands we share with everyone.

Merry Christmas,

Curt Whitmer

Anticipating and Waiting Continually for our Lord

“So you, by the help of your God, return,
hold fast to love and justice,
and wait continually for your God.”
Hosea 12:6 (ESV)

When I think about anticipating Christmas--the celebration and commemoration of the birth of Christ our Lord and Savior, there is one person who immediately comes to mind: one of our dear Pastors who, if you are on Facebook with her, you know how excited she is for Christmas. Her posts even start the day after Christmas “Only 364 days until Christmas” and then about every few months we see the update... “Only 6 months until Christmas,” “Only 60 days until Christmas...” and so on. The joy she has for this season is contagious, but more importantly, her love for Christ, and thinking about Christ, and waiting continually for Christ is what I see when I see these posts. She keeps her excitement for Christ front and center and isn't that what we all should do? Every day we should wait with joy and excitement for Christ's return; wait for God to work in our lives, to answer our prayers, to give us direction, to guide, protect and help us love Him and one another.

I pray this Christmas season and throughout every day of the year that we will wait with excitement, with rejoicing, with patience, continually for our God.

Pat Watson



Anticipation: Are You Feelin' It?

Definition: The act of looking forward in expectation of an event.

Anticipation has been part of the human experience since Creation. We look forward to (anticipate) all kinds of events in life: new experiences, new homes, new schools, weddings, health issues, different jobs, death, babies, etc. Anticipation can generate positive or negative responses depending on the circumstance, experience, or occasion.

I have a friend who gets great joy from reminding us how long we have to anticipate Christmas. I must confess that the countdown makes me crazy. So it may seem a little strange for me then to say that Christmas is my favorite holiday. I suppose that the best explanation for these conflicting feelings is the secularizing of the Christmas holiday. It has become for many just another day to be exploited for profit.

But with more of my life behind me than in front of me, I find great joy in the anticipation of revisiting the catalog of memories that flood my mind during this season. But the most special part to me is the anticipation written about in the words of the old testament prophets – Isaiah 7:13-14, Isaiah 9:6, Micah 5:2-3. The longing of Israel for deliverance from their captors is reflected in the words of the Christmas standard, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel".

O Come, O Come Emmanuel
and ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice, Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel!

In today's world as we long for the division and hatred to end and a return to being "One nation, under God", we sing these words in anticipation of the One we call the "Prince of Peace".

O Come Desire of Nations, bind all peoples in one heart
and mind. Bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease;
Fill the whole world with Heaven's peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee,
O Israel!

However, you express your anticipation, let it be the Advent of Mary's little son... the Incarnate Deity, Jesus, our Emmanuel, who took on flesh with us to dwell.
Sharon Crock

There are many wonderful Christmas carols that bring to mind beautiful scenes of God's love. A favorite is "Away in a Manger." Isaiah 9:6 foretells how the Savior will come to us. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." No one would have guessed he would arrive in a manger, not a palace. If we can create a picture in our minds of the manger scene, the sights, the sounds, the smells, it's difficult to think of a more perfect place. Verse one of the hymn helps create the picture:

"Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
the little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay,
the little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay."

Jesus, secure in His Father's love, was asleep on the hay. The same peace is available to us! Trust Him, give it (whatever your "it" may be) to Him, worship Him, serve Him, share Him. And love Him with all you have in you because He loves you even so much more than that.

Merry Christmas!

Amy Kreiger



"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."



Jesus Christ is Coming for You

Oh you better watch out,
you better not pout.
You better not cry
I'm telling you why.
Jesus Christ is coming for you.

He's keeping a list,
He's checking it twice
For those who hear his voice
Above the hollow noise
Jesus Christ is coming back.

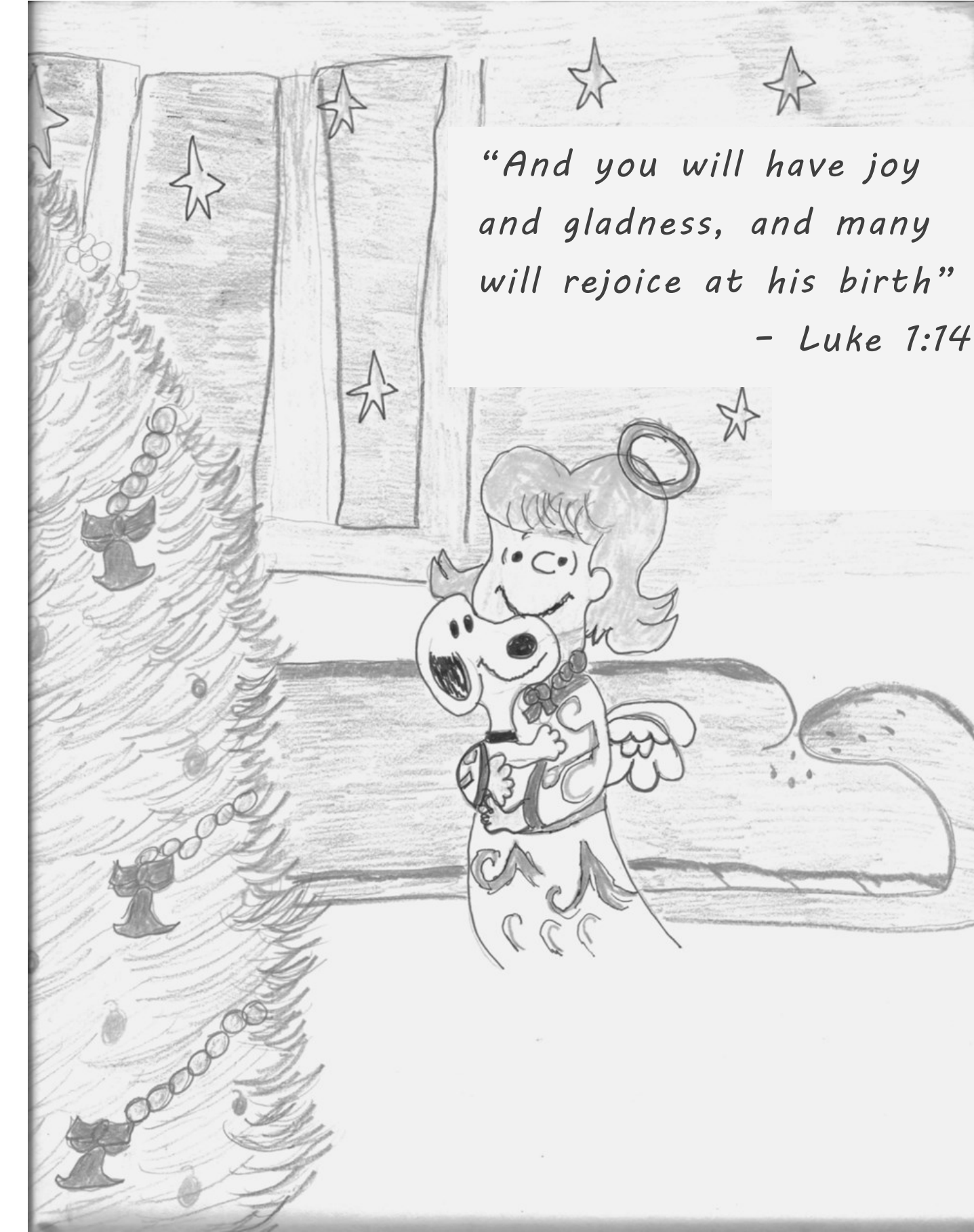
He sees you when you're busy,
He knows when you are not.
He knows if you are hot or cold,
So for your sake stay glowing hot.

His coming will be quick,
The day and hour unknown,
So keep your wicks well trimmed
So at his coming you won't moan

Because you doubted his word
And chose to go your way
Choosing only to live for today
And discover that today is the day

So, you better watch out,
you better not pout.
You better not cry
telling you why.
Jesus Christ is coming for you.

Wayne Rohrer



*“And you will have joy
and gladness, and many
will rejoice at his birth”*

- Luke 1:74

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

This was my Great Aunt Dot's favorite verse. I have come to lean on it also. With life's ups and downs you it is very easy to lose track of what you are doing or where life is taking you. I've had many disappointments in my life...quit my senior year of high school and ran off to get married. It ended in divorce after 6 years (no children). Then four single years where I was a wild child. *Where was the Lord leading me?* This was a hard lesson to learn. I then met Glenn Luke. We married in March of 1979. Glenn didn't go to church. He drank and smoked. I started back to church when I got pregnant with Nicole in 1980. Rodney was born in 1982. I wanted my children to be brought up in church. I was anticipating a life with God and raising my family even though changed churches several times. December 1988, we bought the house on the river. My mom died in 2009. (I had a wonderful mother. She always wanted all of the kids home for Christmas. It wasn't the same after she passed.) Glenn died in 2010. He accepted Christ on his death bed and that was very important to me. I rededicated my life to Christ and was baptized again. I always try to help others when I can so I bake banana bread and cookies to give to others. Another difficult time was in 2019 when I was diagnosed with breast cancer and I elected to have my breast removed. I wasn't worried because the Lord was in control and whatever happened I was okay with it. God was with me and still is my Savior. I started to collect angels and I have one out front of my house in the yard. She stays lit all the time.

God has truly blessed me. I'm trying to get to know more people here at ECOG, helping out where I can. I'm anticipating staying here and growing with God. My favorite verse is Psalm 23 because God is my Shepard. God Bless!



Jessica Luke

A Gift Worth Waiting For

Waiting for the birth of our children was both tedious and joyful. Tedious because nine months is a long time for young people to wait for anything. But joyful because of the gift we had been ranted by almighty God, believing that soon we would hold our little miracles in our arms. For the Jews, the Messiah had been prophesied for generations, and the people were eager to welcome Him as the prophesies were passed down. No doubt they were anticipating a mighty king who would save His people from their oppressors, and make them a great nation. They knew that He would be a kingly heir from the line of David (Jeremiah 23:5–6). Isaiah told them that He would willingly die a criminal's death as a sacrifice for our sins (Isaiah 53). But was it hard for them to imagine that He would begin His heavenly mission as a helpless baby, born out of wedlock to a poor carpenter and his teenage fiancé? Could they conceive of the Savior, the Son of God, being delivered in a barn in Bethlehem, a small village virtually unknown but for the prophecy of Micah (5:2)?

Nothing about His birth pointed to kingship of this child. But such was the love of our Savior. Even at His birth, His example for us was one of humility, obedience, and faith in the Father. As a newborn, He was worshipped by shepherds, feared by King Herod, and loved by His young parents. And in Heaven, The Father watched His only Son begin His life in the flesh, knowing all that was to come. Knowing that one day, "at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:10)

For God's people, the prophecies were fulfilled that night in Bethlehem. The long wait was over. God's gift to sinful man had finally arrived. And though only a tiny handful of people witnessed His birth, we know that one day everyone will witness His glorious return.

Jeff Lynch

Are you awake or are you sleeping?

The Advent season reminds us that the awaited arrival of the Messiah was foretold in the Old Testament scriptures. (Isaiah 9: 6-7) They didn't believe that the Messiah arrived on Christmas night in Bethlehem. They missed the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies through Jesus. Today, many people don't feel the need for salvation and Jesus. Even 'Christians' will miss the signs and prophecies that are pointing us to His return. Jesus told us about this in the Parable of the Ten Virgins in Matthew 25:1-13. Christ's Return is talked about in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. The song "While You Were Sleeping" is a reminder to us to make sure we are awake and NOT sleeping.

Isaiah 9 (ESV)

⁶For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon^[d] his shoulder,
and his name shall be called^[e]
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins Matthew 25 (ESV)

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps^[a] and went to meet the bridegroom.^[b] ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the

bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'

⁷ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' ¹⁰ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. ¹¹ Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' ¹² But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' ¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

The Coming of the Lord

I Thessalonians 4 (ESV) "¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord,^[d] that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

While You Were Sleeping

by Casting Crowns

Oh, little town of Bethlehem
Looks like another silent night

Above your deep and dreamless sleep
A giant star lights up the sky
And while you're lying in the dark
There shines an everlasting light
For the King has left His throne
And is sleeping in a manger tonight, tonight

Oh Bethlehem, what you have missed while you
were sleeping
For God became a man and stepped into your world
today

Oh Bethlehem, you will go down in history
As a city with no room for its King

While you were sleeping
While you were sleeping

Mary shivers in the cold
Trying to keep the Savior warm
Born among the animals wrapped in dirty rags
because
There was no room for Him
In the world He came to save

Oh Bethlehem, what you have missed while you
were sleeping
For God became a man and stepped into your world
today
Oh Bethlehem, you will go down in history
As a city with no room for its King

While you were sleeping
While you were sleeping

United States of America, looks like another silent
night
As we're sound asleep by philosophies
That save the trees and kill the children
And while we're laying in the dark
There's a shout heard 'cross the eastern sky

For the Bridegroom has returned
And has carried His bride away in the night
In the night

America, what will we miss while we are sleeping?
Will Jesus come again
And leave us slumbering where we lay?
America, will we go down in history
As a nation with no room for its King?

Will we be sleeping?
Will we be sleeping?

United States of America, looks like another silent
night

Source: [Musixmatch](#)

Songwriters: John Mark Hall

While You Were Sleeping lyrics © Be Essential
Songs

Kathy Liddick



He knew me before he knit me in my mother's womb - He has a plan for each of us. As the year ends, many people are creating New Year's resolutions, hoping for a new beginning.

The holiday season is bright & merry, but it can be full of pain & sorrow. 2017 was the worst year for me. I had given birth to a beautiful baby boy – Gideon Andrew on July 5th. He was brought into this world through an emergency C-section, 12 weeks premature & after 9 days he slipped into God's loving arms. I struggled to find the joy of the 2017 Christmas season, both religiously & secularly, even though Rey & I were celebrating with Felix, our almost 2-year-old son.

That December, Mary, Did You Know? caught & kept my attention. While I do not have grandiose thoughts that any of my children are the next Messiah, I feel a kinship with Jesus' mother. We both brought sons into this crazy, confusing world & said "good-bye" far too early. Most importantly, do we as individuals, parents, mentors, "fishers of men," do we know what the Father has planned for us? What He has planned for those we come in contact with? Did Mary know what her son was going to accomplish?

"He shall be great & shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: & he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; & of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 1:32-33 KJV) While it declares that baby boy is the Lord of all creation & will one day rule the nations...it **does not** begin to even explain all miraculous things he did.

Did Mary know that her...baby boy would give sight to a blind man? (Mark 8:22-25, Matt 9:27-34, John 9:1-11), or give hearing to the deaf (Mark 7:31-37), or that the lame would leap because of him? (Luke 5:17-26)

Did she imagine that he would one day walk on water? (Matt 14:22-33) calm a storm with His hand? (Matt 8:23-27, Mark 4:35-41, Luke 8:22-25), or bring a man back to life? (John 11:1-44)

Most importantly, even after the angel spoke to her, did she know that the child that she delivered, would soon deliver her – and all of us? (Matt 1:21, 1 Peter 2:24)

While many argue that this song could have deepened my sorrow, because Gideon would never "accomplish" anything, it reminded me that there is a plan that God has for each and every one of us. Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) "For I know the plans I have for you" declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you & not harm you, plans to give you hope & a future."

While yes some say that there was some harm done to my heart, I did also prosper. Gideon fulfilled the plan God had for him, his birth & unfortunately death was part of the plan God had for my family & me. Since then, we had our son, John Paul, (JP), a miscarriage of a baby girl, Mia Grace, & this holiday season, we will welcome another son, Micah Jamison.

Erin (Duskey) Gagabuan

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Authors Buddy Greene & Mark Lowry



Do you trust predictions? Does it make a difference how “crazy” the prediction is? Or does the source matter the most? *Hundreds* of years before Jesus was born, Micah prophesied (or predicted) that Ephrathah, a district in the tiny town of Bethlehem, would be the birthplace of the ruler over Israel, the coming king. The folks in Jerusalem no doubt thought this was nonsense. Why wouldn’t the king come from a much more important place than Bethlehem? Now imagine being someone that lived in the tiny town of Bethlehem. You would be thinking, “Wow! Something so important is going to come from here?! I wonder how soon he will come?” They lived, hoping for that day to come in their lifetime. God’s promises are true, but His answers come on His time schedule. Do you think the people started to doubt what Micah prophesied was really going to happen? I’m sure some did! Have you read the many promises in the Bible and wondered if they were true or when they would come to be? Well, it may not happen in your lifetime or even in your great-grandchildren’s lifetimes, but if God said it in His Word, you can trust it WILL happen. What a comfort to see throughout the Bible what God says will be, will be. Micah 5:2 states, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times [or from days of eternity]. Wow. The fruition of these verses, knowing what we know now, can almost take your breath away. The prophecy had come true, and baby Jesus arrived just as it was told. And now we know: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Whether a baby, a man, or our risen Savior, He is what He says He is. Praise the Lord.

Amy Kreiger



So much to be thankful for

The big number one. Parents who love and cherish their children enough to teach them about God. They wanted us, to know the Lord. They took us to church and they taught us right from wrong. That takes patience, love and carting. They were taking the time to teach about our hearts and our walk in life.

One of my fondest memories was living in another town two hours away. I was only 6 when we moved from there. There was a Methodist Church across the street and up a block. I remember sitting in a pew, not too far back, and I was on the end. Dad sat next to me and Mom held my baby brother, who was just a tiny baby, then it was Dad and me. We filled a half of a pew almost. I can still close my eyes and see us all there in that pew. It was a happy time and it was and still is a happy memory for me. Thank you Lord.

We carried on that teaching, thinking that our boys would seek the Lord with all their hearts and lean not unto their own understanding. We often had other children in our lives at the same time they were growing up and we took them along also. It was understood. Now I have to ask my boys, “Are you walking with the Lord?” Of course they reply. And I pray each day, “Father, draw them close. I believe in my heart they do still walk with the Lord. I am thankful God hears my prayers and I have the knowledge that He hears every prayer that goes up to Him.

I am also thankful that God’s word is a living and loving work that He is still the same today as yesterday. I can still feel Him close to me when I spend time with Him. He is alive and His promises are still as relevant today as they were when He walked this earth.

I am so thankful and so grateful for the parents God gave me. That is not to say I always felt that way growing up, but now I can look back and see God’s hand on me and us as a family. Thank you Father, I am so grateful and thankful for parents who loved me enough to drag me to church when I was young. I am thankful for Christian friends who still uphold one another. I was raised in the Enola Church of God.

Allie Welker



iHeartCraftyThings.com

If asked, most of the children or the teenagers in my church would be able to tell what Miss Jill's favorite word is because I freely share it with them in my lessons and discussions. This special word brings me so much joy and truly captures the Christmas message in its fullness. According to Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, this word, when used as a noun, can be defined as:

“desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment”

“someone or something on which hopes are centered”

“something desired”

In case you haven't figured out the most powerful and meaningful word to me based on the above definitions, that word is HOPE. Although the NIV translation of the Bible uses this word nearly forty times, its appearance in the four Gospels is very rare; yet the essence of Christmas, the anticipation of the coming Savior, is oozing with hope.

I pondered each of the above definitions in relationship to the birth of our Savior. In definition #1, we *desire* salvation from the wages of sin (Leviticus 17:11, fulfilled in Matthew 26:28), and *believe* that the Old Testament prophecy of the Coming King will be *fulfilled* (Jeremiah 23:5, fulfilled in Luke 1:33). Definition #2 describes that *someone*, who we put at the *center* of our *hopes*, is most certainly Jesus, who would not only die for our sins but be raised to allow us to be raised in our death (1 Corinthians 15:19). Finally, in definition #3, we *desire* that anchor for our souls and the ability to freely approach the throne of God himself (Hebrews 6:20).

My most cherished word HOPE takes center stage in my most treasured Christmas song, “*Oh Holy Night*.” As you might have guessed, the phrase that grips my heart every time is:

“A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices.”

I share these lyrics with the children and youth quite often because with hope, everything changes. The bleak reality of our sinful world falls away, as our weary souls thrill in the coming of the Baby Jesus, who will change everything and whiten what sin has stained (Isaiah 1:18-19), giving us countless reasons to rejoice and...of course...reasons to hope.

Jill Kilker

I am the vine

Have you heard the song by Curtis Stephan called “Remain in Me, I am the vine?” Popular in 2014, it is about life when we make the choice to remain in Jesus.

One evening I looked out the office window and much to my excitement I saw six deer eating the crab apples that lay around the trunk of the tree. I had not seen this many deer close to the house, nor had I seen such a bounty of apples! Since then I learned that it takes three to five years for a crab apple tree to produce fruit and only when it has the necessary nourishment.

Looking at the crab apple tree, I am reminded that if the vines weren't attached to the branches and ultimately to the trunk, they would not have what is necessary to produce the fruit for these deer. Also there is a risk of disease that could interfere with the growth of the tree or even destroy some of the branches.

Does your family traditionally cut down and decorate a tree this holiday? As soon as it is removed from its nutrients it starts to dry out and wither. God reminds us in John 15:1-17 that much like the tree relies on water and nutrients from the soil to survive, we rely on God. When we abide in Him, we are just like the tree. We study scripture, worship God and pray, so that we receive the nutrients we need to produce fruit.

Sometimes I grow distant from God. If I am not careful, I can allow sin to creep in and distance me from Him. Perhaps I start getting caught up in holiday obligations or spending time with people who have a negative attitude. Or maybe I begin to allow fear, anxiety or stress to become an idol. I am too tired to read my bible or go to church. Soon the sin in our lives can lead us far away from God and the true focus of Christmas. We think we don't need Him.

Did you know that some trees require a “tree surgeon”? He removes infected branches so the disease doesn't spread or kill the tree. When we least expect it, the small sin in our lives can take over and destroy us like a disease. We no longer produce the fruit we once did. If only we could call the tree surgeon to help us out. But we don't need a surgeon. We must rid ourselves of the sin that keeps us from producing fruit. As the celebration of the birth of Jesus approaches, we must cling to the true vine, Jesus Christ. When we abide in Him, we will soon reap a plentiful harvest.

Further reading: Galatians 5:22-23
Memorize: Ephesians 5:9

Susan Sanders

Anticipation!!!

It's coming! It's almost here! What am I excitedly anticipating? Why, it's almost the birthday of the King! When was the last time you were excited and looking forward to an event? Maybe it was your birthday or a graduation. I can think of a few events in my life. I looked forward to graduating high school and going on the mission field. I was excited for my wedding day. And I could hardly wait for the day we were to bring into our home three young children who would change our lives forever. As I reflect on events I have anticipated over the course of my life, I can think of one event in history that I wish I could have been a part of, Jesus' birth! In *Luke 2:10-11 kjv* It says ¹⁰*"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: behold, I bring good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."* As Christians we should look forward to Christmas day because of the significance of the day. If Satan had won and Jesus had not come to earth as a baby we would have nothing to look forward to. According to *Answers in Genesis*, The Israelites waited about 4000 years for Christmas to come, starting with Adam and Eve. And when the day came, it changed their lives. Hope had come in the flesh. Are you looking forward to Christmas? Has the true meaning of Christmas ever changed your life? If Jesus' birth hadn't taken place, we wouldn't have a Savior. If he had stayed in heaven, he couldn't die on the cross to take the punishment for our sins. As we anticipate this Christmas season, may the words from this Christmas Song remind us of what we have to look forward to.

Judi Jensen

*"Oh come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant
Oh come ye, oh come ye to Bethlehem
Oh come and behold him, born the King of Angels."*



As a teacher, mother, and children's ministry worker, I have been working with young people my entire adult life. I count my interactions with children an honor and privilege and am still captivated by this precious period of life. The innocence, curiosity, and pure joy of this season of life allows the world to be viewed with fresh and enthusiastic eyes. During childhood, Christmas entails a wonder and excitement like no other time in one's life, and most adults enjoy watching this play out. As Psalm 127:3 says, "Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him."

I remember Christmas as a child. The holiday season was so enchanting that I started thinking and planning for it early... as soon as I packed away my trick-or-treat costume. I even did this in a time period when it wasn't promoted by businesses and media until after Santa arrived on the float at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade.

I loved decorating the tree, making my mom's special cookie recipes with her, going to Christmas parties at school, watching my dad hang Christmas lights on our house, singing "Silent Night," etc. On Christmas Eve, I could never fall asleep. To this day, my sisters still tease me because every Christmas morning... without fail, I would vomit because I was so excited. In all fairness, I must admit that some of that excitement was not just for celebrating the birth of Jesus. Some of it was from the anticipation of stockings, gifts, time with the cousins, and even soda (because I was only allowed to have it on holidays). As an adult, I know that Christmas is work...and a lot of it. Shopping, baking, decorating, wrapping, sending cards, attending gatherings, etc. can all be overwhelming. My innocence and wonder have been shifted to wisdom and sadly, to stress.

This year, as I anticipate Christmas, I am asking God to help restore some of that childhood awe (not to the point of vomiting on Christmas morning) and combine it with the knowledge and experience that years of walking with the Lord have afforded me.

God, this year, help me to be like young Mary in Luke 1:38, in both trembling and fear, when she says, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." Although her precarious situation was revealed by the angel and she lacked the ability to fully grasp what her future entailed, she willingly accepted God's Perfect Plan.

Lord, this year, help me to be like the shepherds in Luke 2:15, who...in their utter terror...obeyed the angel of the Lord and blindly traveled to Bethlehem, even though it didn't seem to make sense to do so.

Father, this year, help me to be like the Magi in Matthew 2:1-12, who followed the star to worship the baby and present their treasures to Him, while defying Herod's orders to report the whereabouts of the Savior.

Yahweh, this year, help me to be like a child, in awe and wonder of everything having to do with the Christ Child. Captivate me with the pure joy of what His birth, death, and resurrection continue to accomplish in this corrupt world. Allow me to combine that childlike faith (Matthew 18:3, Mark 10:14, and Luke 18:17) with spiritual wisdom (Ephesians 1:17). Help me to look forward to the Coming King with an excitement and anticipation that I have never before experienced (minus the vomiting)!

In the Name of Our Lord Jesus,
Amen

Jill Kilker

Christ is Born (Luke 2: 8-20)

² And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³ So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

⁴ Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. ⁶ So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. ⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

The Angels Announce Jesus to the Shepherds

⁸ Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

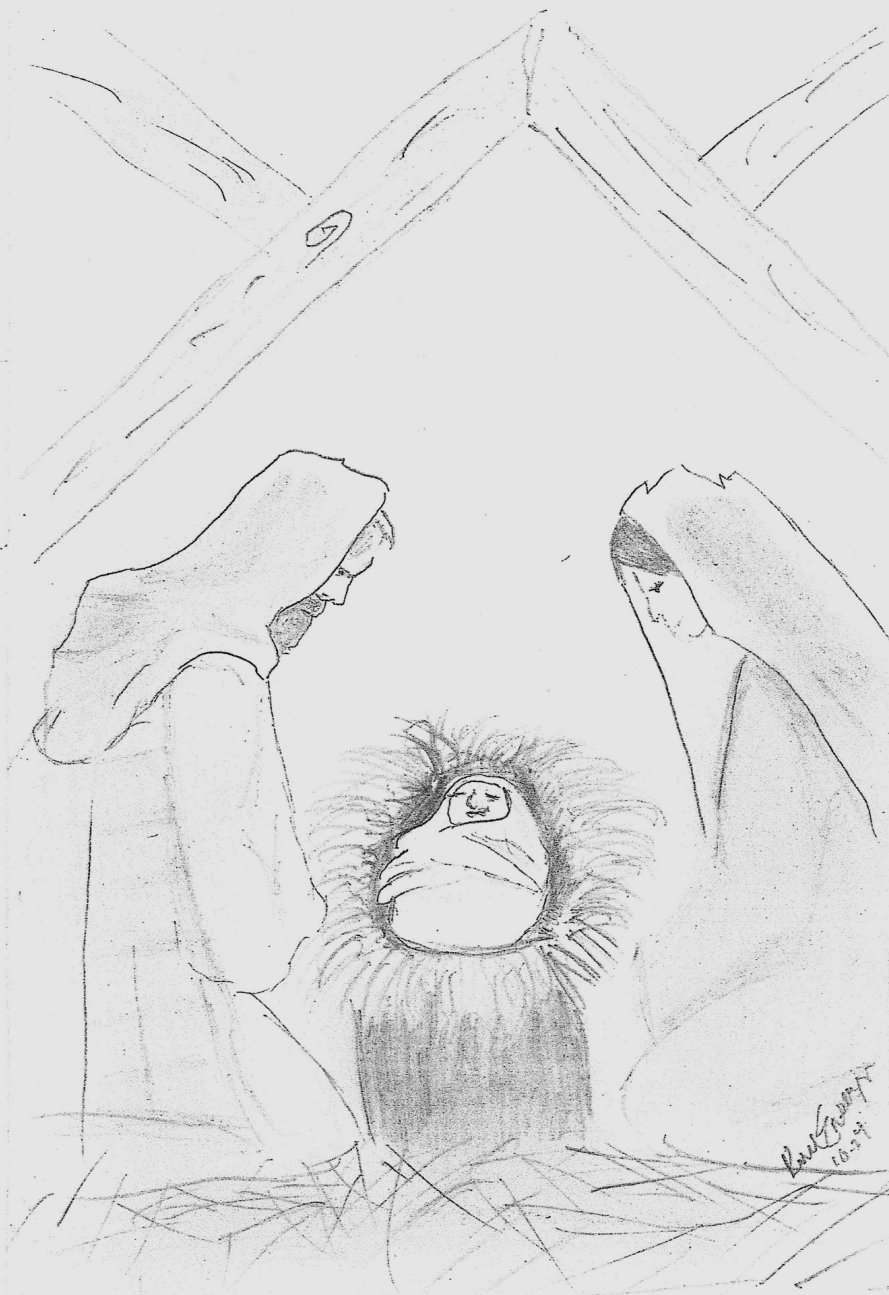
¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

The Shepherds Visit Jesus

¹⁵ So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. ¹⁷ Now when they had seen *Him*, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. ¹⁸ And all those who heard *it* marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹ But Mary kept all these things and pondered *them* in her heart. ²⁰ Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

Dan Marrow





Silent Night is one of the world's most famous and most performed Christmas songs. Originating in Austria in 1818, this timeless hymn has become a global emblem of holiday spirit. Immerse yourself in the rich history and universal appeal of Silent Night as it resonates with the essence of peace, love, and joy.

In 1816 the text to *Silent Night* was written by Fr. Joseph Mohr in Mariapfarr, Austria. The music to *Silent Night* was composed in 1818 by Franz Gruber. *Silent Night* was first played at St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf bei Salzburg, Austria.

Silent Night

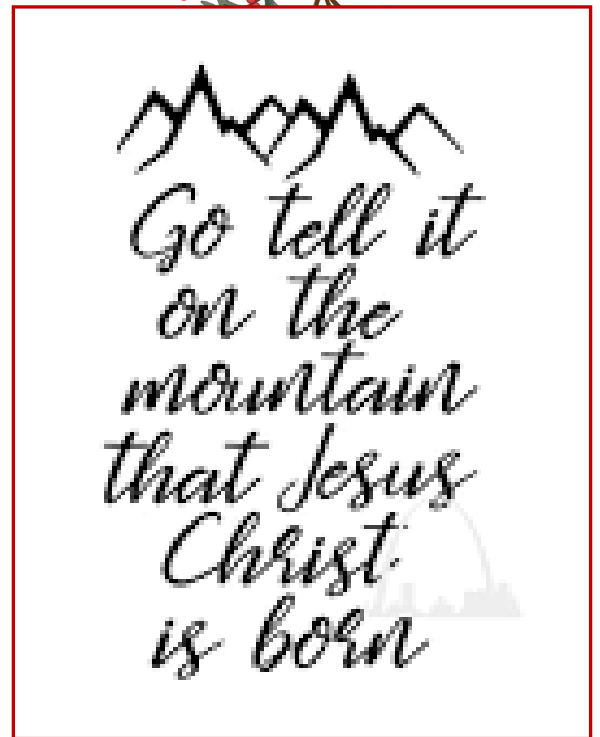
Silent night, holy night!
 All is calm, all is bright.
 Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child.
 Holy infant so tender and mild,
 Sleep in heavenly peace,
 Sleep in heavenly peace

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

Silent night, holy night!
 Son of God love's pure light.
 Radiant beams from Thy holy face
 With dawn of redeeming grace,
 Jesus Lord, at Thy birth
 Jesus Lord, at Thy birth

Enola First Church of God would like to wish you and your family a Merry Christmas on this glorious day that we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We hope this Advent Devotional Book has given you time to reflect about your physical and spiritual life. We pray for each of you a blessed holiday season and throughout the new year.

https://www.41051.com/xmaslyrics/silent_night.html



Where do I seek peace?

What is your definition of peace? Is it knowing your bills are paid at the end of the month? Maybe it is resolving the latest family argument, or getting your items checked off the Christmas list? If only God would heal my loneliness, I would beat peace. Oxford dictionary defines peace as freedom from conflict, a state of tranquility or quiet, free from civil unrest, disorder or war.

When King Herod summoned the wise men, he discovered that they saw a star in the east which was most likely Persia at the time, or modern day Iran. They had heard about Jesus the Messiah from Micah 5:2-5, “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you one will come forth for Me to be ruler in Israel, His times of coming forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity. Therefore He will give them up until the time When she who is in labor has given birth. Then the remainder of His kinsmen will return to the sons of Israel. And He will arise and shepherd His flock In the strength of the Lord, In the majesty of the name of the Lord His God. And they will remain, Because at that time He will be great To the ends of the earth. This one will be our peace.”

Too many things in this world can draw our attention away from Jesus. We can start to believe that things of the world will bring us peace. Now that it is December, we can easily be distracted by the shiny sparkly holiday decorations, the latest smart phone, or even the newest air fryer. Hurry the sale ends today! But we have to ask ourselves why we seek these things to find peace when weeks or even days after the holidays our peace is gone.

The three wise men had it right. They made the decision to take the journey following the bright light from the star in the East. Why did they go? Was it out of obedience to King Herod? Was the light so bright they were drawn to it? Or maybe they knew that meeting Jesus would be the best gift they would ever receive and the answer to find true peace.

This season, instead of focusing on worldly things, which are fun for the moment, but fleeting, we seek true peace. Only a life following Jesus Christ, who lived, died and ascended into heaven for our sins, will lead us to peace.

Further reading: John 14:27 Memorize: Isaiah 26:3

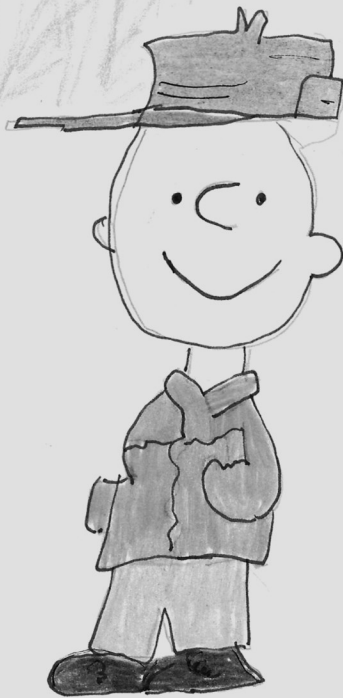
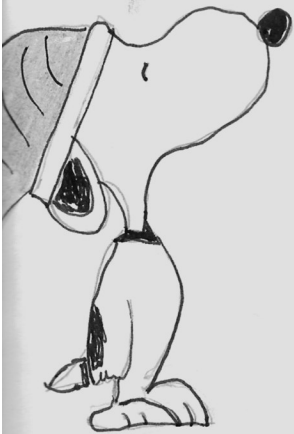
Susan Sanders



Merry

Christmas

And to All
Every one
A Good
night





**UPCOMING
CHURCH-WIDE ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS
EVENTS AND SERVICES**

DATE	TIME & EVENT
Sunday, December 1	First Sunday in Advent Worship Services 8:00 AM & 10:30 AM: The Word Made Flesh "The Bread of Life" - Exodus 16:1-17, Colossians 3:15-17, John 6:27-35 Pastor George Jensen, speaking
Sunday, December 8	Second Sunday in Advent Worship Services 8:00 AM & 10:30 AM: The Word Made Flesh "The Rock of Ages" - Isaiah 51:1-3, 1 Corinthians 10:1-14, Matthew 7:24-26 Pastor George Jensen, speaking 11:45 AM – Meet ‘n Mingle Luncheon
Sunday, December 15	Third Sunday in Advent Worship Services 8:00 AM – Message by Pastor Jensen 10:30 AM – The Children’s Christmas Program
Sunday, December 22	Fourth Sunday in Advent Worship Services 8:00 AM & 10:30 AM: The Word Made Flesh "The Light of the World" - Exodus 13:21-22, 2 Corinthians 4:5-7, Matthew 5:14-16 Pastor George Jensen, speaking
Tuesday, December 24	Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship Service 7:00 PM: The Word Made Flesh "Born in a Manger" - Isaiah 9:6-7, Galatians 4:4-7, Luke 2:1-20 Pastor George Jensen, speaking
Sunday, December 29	First Sunday after Christmas Worship Services 8:00 AM & 10:30 AM: <i>The Light of Grace</i> "Crowned with Glory" - Psalm 97:1-12, Philippians 2:5-11, John 1:14-18 Pastor Brad Moore, speaking





ENOLA FIRST CHURCH OF GOD

9 Sherwood Drive, Enola, PA 17025

717-732-4253

www.enolacog.com