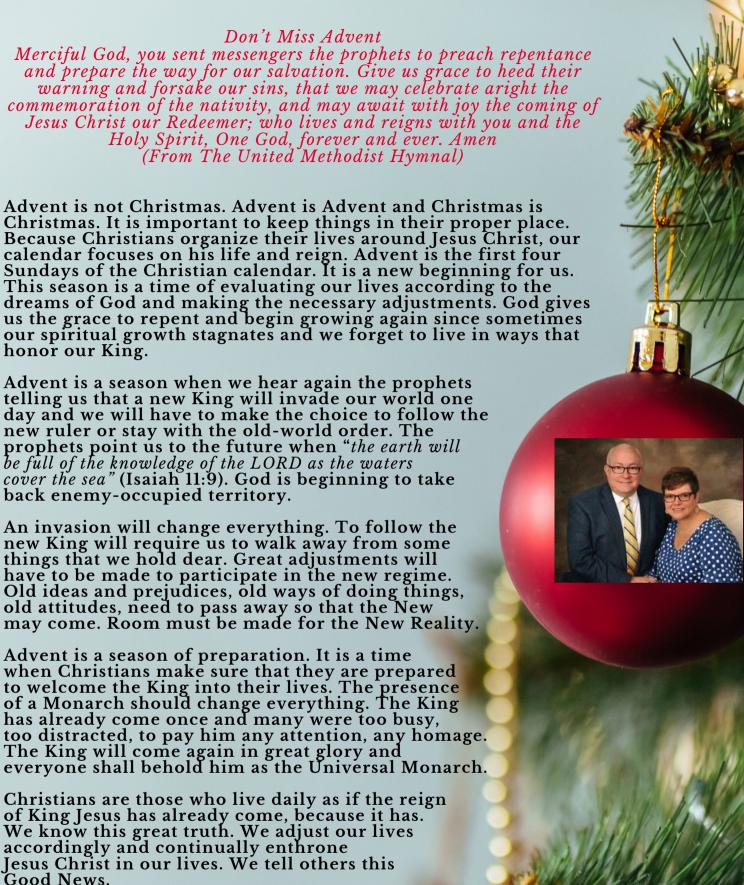




DAILY DEVOTIONALS CELEBRATING THE ADVENT SEASON

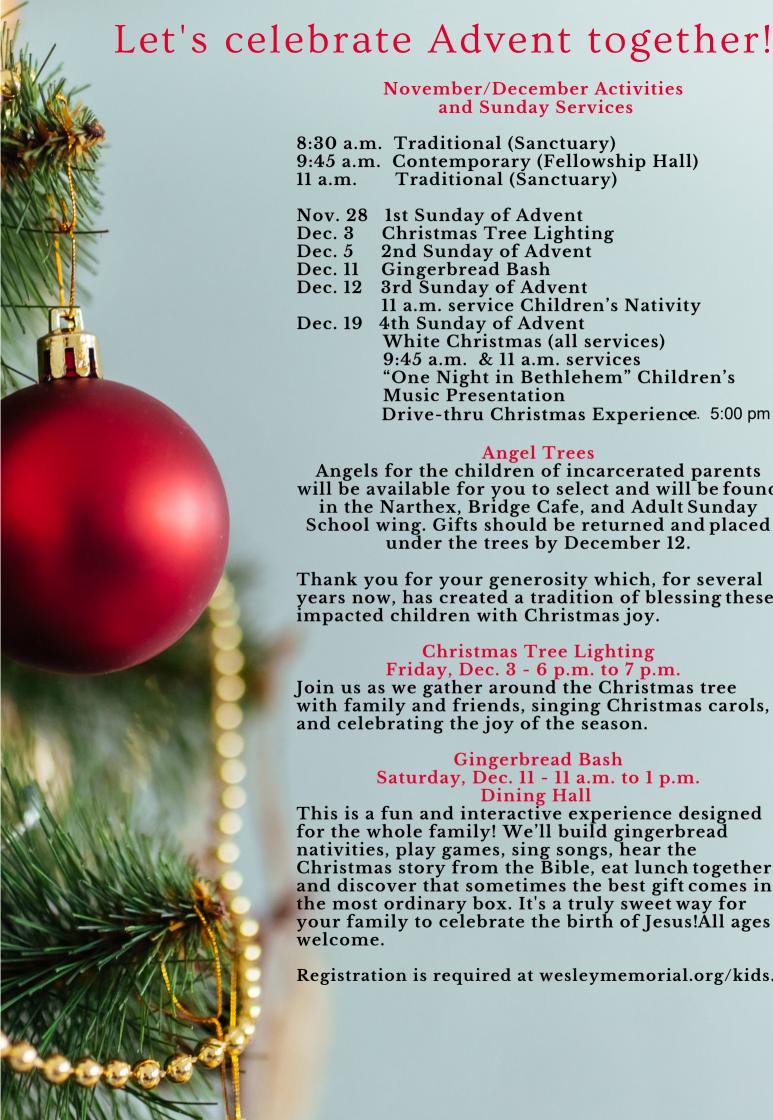


Good News.

I hope that you have a Spirit-filled Advent that will prepare you to experience the joy of Christmas when it comes.

With Confidence in Christ,

Pastor Jeff



#### November/December Activities and Sunday Services

8:30 a.m. Traditional (Sanctuary)

9:45 a.m. Contemporary (Fellowship Hall)

Traditional (Sanctuary) 11 a.m.

Nov. 28 1st Sunday of Advent

Christmas Tree Lighting Dec. 3

Dec. 5 2nd Sunday of Advent

Dec. 11 Gingerbread Bash

Dec. 12 3rd Sunday of Advent

11 a.m. service Children's Nativity

4th Sunday of Advent Dec. 19

White Christmas (all services) 9:45 a.m. & 11 a.m. services

"One Night in Bethlehem" Children's

Music Presentation

Drive-thru Christmas Experience. 5:00 pm

Angel Trees

Angels for the children of incarcerated parents will be available for you to select and will be found in the Narthex, Bridge Cafe, and Adult Sunday School wing. Gifts should be returned and placed under the trees by December 12.

Thank you for your generosity which, for several years now, has created a tradition of blessing these impacted children with Christmas joy.

> Christmas Tree Lighting Friday, Dec. 3 - 6 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Join us as we gather around the Christmas tree with family and friends, singing Christmas carols, and celebrating the joy of the season.

> Gingerbread Bash Saturday, Dec. 11 - 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Dining Hall

This is a fun and interactive experience designed for the whole family! We'll build gingerbread nativities, play games, sing songs, hear the Christmas story from the Bible, eat lunch together, and discover that sometimes the best gift comes in the most ordinary box. It's a truly sweet way for your family to celebrate the birth of Jesus!All ages

Registration is required at wesleymemorial.org/kids.



Children's Nativity Sunday, Dec. 12, 11 a.m. service

Experience the dramatization of the birth of Jesus presented by Wesley Memorial Kids. This is a beloved Wesley Memorial Church tradition.

"One Night in Bethlehem" Children's Music Presentation Sunday, Dec. 19, 9:45 a.m. & 11 a.m. services

Through song and creativity, children thank God in worship for the gift of His Son and the gift of salvation.

> White Christmas Sunday, Dec. 19 (All Services)

Please bring a gift wrapped in white that will be given to the shelter at Open Door Ministries.

Requests:

- Coats (XL & up)
- Socks
- Sweatshirts (XL & up)
- Toiletries shaving cream, razors, soap, shampoo, deodorant, men's flip flops (shower shoes)
- Winter hats
- Scarfs
- Winter glovesCanned foods
- Blankets
- Twin sized sheets

Drive-thru Christmas Experience Sunday, Dec. 19 - 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

All are invited to drive-thru the Wesley Memorial campus and experience the Nativity story in a unique way. Each car will receive a special packet full of family-friendly Christmas activities that relate to the experience.

> Christmas Eve Worship Services Friday, Dec. 24

Candlelight Contemporary Service in 3 p.m. Fellowship Hall

No Lovefeast

Candlelight Traditional Communion 5 p.m. Service in Sanctuary with special music

7 p.m. Candlelight Traditional Communion Service in Sanctuary with special music

Candlelight Traditional Communion ll p.m. Service in Sanctuary with special music

The 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. services will be live-streamed.



#### NOVEMBER 28 1 CORINTHIANS 13

Advent begins today. Advent means, "Coming." For Christians, it should be a time of expectation, preparation, prayerful contemplation, and joyful celebration of the meaning of the Christ Child's coming.

Liturgically, advent encompasses the period of the four Sundays immediately preceding Christmas. However, in my mind, it begins some nine months earlier when the angel Gabriel announced to a virgin and unmarried teenager named Mary that she was about to become pregnant through the Holy Spirit and give birth to God's only begotten Son. Imagine the bewilderment that Mary must have experienced. Even so, Mary and Joseph, to whom she was engaged, eventually took the path laid out for them by God's messenger.

The road taken by Mary and Joseph was doubtless a bumpy, twisty, rocky, and at times inglorious way to the glorious first Christmas. Such a way was taken during the final weeks before that Christmas day and was thus an Advent journey. The way from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem of Judea was known to be beset with bad roads, bandits, wild animals, and few conveniences. In Mary's and Joseph's case it was ostensibly taken for tax reasons. Yet with all, we know that it was a most excellent way!

When considering scripture appropriate for Advent 1 Corinthians 13 probably does not leap to the forefront of the minds of most Christians. But it does to mine. Words and phrases from that particular passage of scripture are regularly recited at weddings: Love is patient and kind, neither rude nor self-seeking, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. "Love never fails." Yet the prefatory first sentence in 1 Corinthians 13 is seldom recited and rarely referenced, although it should be: "And now," wrote Paul, "I will show you the most excellent way."

It is rightfully said that God's purest expression of His love is found in His gift of Jesus Christ to the world. No doubt Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 was urging people to love one another. But he was also speaking of the way God loves us. How excellent a way was the journey taken by Mary and Joseph along that lumpy, bumpy, and twisty Advent road to the manger in Bethlehem to deliver God's pure expression of love to a broken world.

May we all pray this Advent season that each of us can find our own most excellent way to the love of God in Jesus Christ, and to one another, as Paul has revealed it to us in 1 Corinthians 13.

Amen

Bill Wheeler

#### NOVEMBER 29 I CORINTHIANS 1:3-9

We love the song titled "Great Day" made famous by the musical group called Eddie From Ohio. It's an uplifting rendition reminding us all that whining is the opposite of thanksgiving. That faithful courage is more impactful than human capacity. That every day brings with it a new ray of sunshine with hope and anticipation for a life filled with success and framed with significance.

When God breathed in our nostrils and gave us life, He intended for us to be extraordinary stewards, cheerful givers, loving neighbors, and focused disciples. As the Scottish theologian says "always give without remembering; always receive without forgetting." His definition of giving isn't solely about legal tender, rather, it is about giving of our hearts and souls to build bridges with others and to intentionally be congruent in our work and in our life.

This is the season for joy and cheer. For renewed commitments and sustainable determination. For acknowledging God's grace and adhering to the four W's:

Learn the WORD of God, WORSHIP the Lord, do His WILL, and carry out His WORK.

It is the season for forgiving and for loving. For caring and sharing. To remember the gratitude of the pilgrims for their first harvest in America and to be blessed with the birth of our Savior in the little town of Bethlehem. To love members of our family and to be gracious to all others. It is the season for prayerful times and inspiring gatherings.

Let us look up to the Heavens with an abundance of appreciation that we are His children and that He is our Lord.

Nido and Mariana Qubein





#### NOVEMBER 30 I THESSALONIANS 3:13 & 5:23

There was one person after the resurrection of Jesus that had difficulty waiting for His second coming and that was Paul. He was hoping that His return would be in his lifetime but he was not sure. So, for those he wrote in Thessalonica, he let them know how to wait for our Lord's return. He writes in 1 Thessalonians:

3:13 May He strengthens your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

5:23 May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

How do we wait? We seek to be "blameless." How we do this? In the second chapter, he writes: "live your lives in a way God would consider worthy. For He called you into His Kingdom to share His glory."

Chapter 4 enumerates how to please God and become "blameless" before our Lord.

- live in a way that pleases God (:1)
- seek to be holy and live pure lives (:3, :7)
  love one another (:9)

- live a quiet life (:11)
  mind you own business (:11)
  work with your hands (:11)
- comfort each other with the assurance of our resurrection (:18)

With God, seek to be blameless and holy during Advent.

Quentin Scholtz Servants' Servant Ministry Retired UMC Clergy

### DECEMBER 1 JOHN 1:1-5

The book of John starts by letting us know that Jesus, the Word, has been forever. In Advent we anticipate his coming into this world. Jesus's birth is the moment eternity entered into our reality. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God has set eternity in the human heart. Of all the creatures God created, man is the only one He "breathed" life into and gave a soul.

To quote C. S. Lewis, "There are no ordinary people, it is immortals whom we work with, play with, snub and use." Everyone we meet is an eternal being which God treasures so much he sent his Son to ensure we could spend eternity with him. This makes the individual person, from the poorest to the richest, the slowest to the most brilliant more valuable than anything man can create. The largest company may last 100 years and an empire 1,000 years, but either is just a blip compared to eternity.

The fact that Jesus, who has been with God forever, was willing to become a helpless infant in order to reconcile us to his Father should give us pause during this Advent season to think about how we treat each other. A kind or crossword to a stranger, care or indifference for the orphaned or homeless will have eternal consequences. The prisoner you visit in jail or the person you tell about Jesus may thank you forever. How we treat someone can help to turn them toward or away from God. So be like Jesus and be kind to those you meet. They are not ordinary people but immortals we walk with.

God Bless

Dan Smoak President, Wesley 100





#### DECEMBER 2 JOHN 1:6-9

Is it the season of craziness, presents, parties, specialty foods, and decorations or does Christmas mean something different to you?

God has given us the power to turn on the light. Not literal light but it still warms and brightens the same. The light will dispel the darkness. Is there darkness in your life? Are you the light for others? Do you share the light so all may feel its warmth?

As this spirit-filled season arrives and the excitement of celebrations, family, friends, joyful sounds, tempting smells, treasured traditions of old and new are remembered and created, I encourage you to find the light in all that you do. It is there for the taking. You can be the light that shares such an emotional high for those around you. Jesus is our LIGHT! In so many ways, daily, weekly, hourly, if we look and listen the light is there burning brighter as we find peace and patience.

A child's voice, an elderly person's hand, a belly laugh, sunset and sunrise, the cold wind, the anticipation of snow, a worship service, serving others, singing joyfully, baking cookies, taking deep healing breathes, a nativity retelling of Jesus' birth, a phone call to an old friend, a grandchild, putting differences aside and coming together for the greater good... what brings the light into your life?

Darkness seems to spill over into our lives and into the lives of those we love. Prayer and spiritual focus remain a foundation that is needed to just survive some days. God sent the light to protect, love and nurture us. Jesus came to take all the darkness away and needs us to welcome that light and spread it far and wide.

May this glorious season of the greatest gift, Jesus, bring a little extra something special and treasured memories into your life that will sustain you for all times.

Susan Kelley Associate Director Wesley Memorial School

#### DECEMBER 3 JEREMIAH 33: 14-16

I am in awe of the Bible's ability to speak to us across the barriers of time and circumstance with messages that are as relevant today as they were over 2000 years ago. In this passage from Jeremiah, God makes mighty, and what must have seemed nearly impossible, promises to the people of the kingdom of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. He assured the beleaguered multitudes that their warweary nation would be saved and that their violence-riddled city would be restored to peace. Jeremiah, a true prophet in a world of false prophets, relayed a message from God that people desperately needed to hear. This promise was a beacon of light in a profoundly dark world.

So, here we are in 2021 in a war-weary world filled with false prophets and cities riddled with violence. It is a world that has become dark with doubt and often short on hope, in no thanks to warring nations, a worldwide pandemic, bitterness and strife. Yet, out of the Word of God, Jeremiah tells us of God's promise today just as surely as he spoke to the people of Judah and Jerusalem between 627 B.C. and 580 B.C. This is part of the wonder of God's unfaltering Word. It speaks to us exactly where we are.

On our Advent Journey, let us identify with the pilgrims who have gone before us and have found God's promised Peace: The Lord Our Righteous Savior.

And let us know with all our heart that with Christ, Peace is waiting for us. In our cities. In our nations. And, most importantly, in our lives.

Cathy Weaver





# DECEMBER 4 ISAIAH 6

Christmas is a season of sending. Gifts are ordered online or purchased in stores, stacks of holiday cards are sent far and wide with the latest family photo or recent vacation picture to both close friends and to those you have not seen in over a decade.

The season is a celebration of God sending his Son to earth, for us and our salvation. As a result, the act of sending, extended to the sending of gifts and presents to others, becomes one of the primary ways we carry forward this most holy moment.

Isaiah 6 describes a vision of God's people who are in deep need of God's deliverance and salvation. The passage depicts a vision of the majesty of God's temple, where we hear the voice of God saying to the prophet, "Whom shall I send?" to which Isaiah replies, "Here I am! Send me!"

Just as God sent his Son so long ago, God's work of saving the world and reconciling all things to Himself continues to this day. We continue to be a people in need of deliverance, and our communities continue to need the transforming presence of God. And so, the voice of God continues to call out to each of us, saying, "Whom shall I send?"

Whom shall Godsend to lift the poor and the needy, to bring comfort to the afflicted, or to speak a word of peace to a friend in despair?

As we enter the season of sending, how might we respond like Isaiah, saying to God, "Here I am! Send me!"

McKennon Shea UMC Clergy HPU Assistant Vice President of Development

#### DECEMBER 5 ROMANS 15:12

I love Christmas trees. The piney smell, the sap on your hands, the constant watering(?). Truly, the Christmas tree is a wonderful (formerly pagan) symbol in which the evergreen leaves symbolize the virility of life, the lights point to Christ as the Light, and the ornaments emphasize the gifts we bring to Christ each Advent.

And yet, in Romans 15, the apostle Paul does not point to a tree to symbolize Christ's reign over Jew and Gentile alike. In Romans 15:12, Paul refers to Isaiah 11 in which the prophet has a prophetic word about this coming Messiah:

"A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots."

A stump? That isn't nearly as romantic as a tree. "Gather 'round the Christmas stump" doesn't have quite the same ring, you know? You can't decorate a stump! That's almost as sad as Charlie Brown's tree, only sadder.

Friends, hear this: God is never afraid to tear something down to help it grow again. Jesus did say that His Father is the Gardener (John 15:1). He will prune whatever does not bear fruit. God will let a movement die to resurrect it to new life and according to His perfect will.

In this regard, the stump is a fitting image. From the stump of a dead movement, God would birth His Son to emerge through the lineage of common (and royal) people. Just when it looked like all was dead and gone, God would bring eternal beauty from our temporal ashes.

Even life from a dead stump.

Clark Chilton Associate Pastor Wesley Memorial Church





#### DECEMBER 6 PSALM 43:3-5

We've only been in the Advent Season for a week and one day, and the psalmist is in the midst of a faith crisis. Where is his joy, his praise of God? "Why are you cast down O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?" With his joy gone, he calls out to God to send light and truth to lead him back to God so he can again praise God with his harp.

I can identify with the psalmist because I have also been overwhelmed with sadness and the feeling that God was not with me, that God had abandoned me, and that God had allowed an awful thing to happen to me. No, I reminded myself, not allowed, but he certainly did not prevent the awful thing.

My most recent episode of letting sadness overwhelm me and pick me up and whirl me around like a tornado was last Christmas when we could not have our daughter and her family with us on Christmas Day. Nor could we travel to Florida to visit our firstborn child, our son-in-law, and our grandson. I had stayed positive through the Advent Season, doing my usual preparations for Christmas and singing lots of Christmas hymns and songs. But I was just protecting my feelings, my sadness of not being with family, my disappointment. We were blessed to have been able to visit our family who lives here in High Point outside and eat meals together outside when weather permitted. However, we had not seen our family in Florida for a year, and last Christmas I could not foresee when it would be okay for us to travel. A huge, dark, oppressive cloud descended upon me, and I didn't fight against it because I was confident that God would guide me through it. I believed that I should experience the pain and grief that I felt because so much had been taken from me. I was secure in the knowledge that no matter how far I fell into the depths of despair and sadness, God was, and is my safety net. I pictured God catching me in a huge hammock. And then eventually, I knew that I would begin to climb out of my dark hole. But in that time of "waiting," it was not pleasant. At the same time, I knew in the depths of my soul that it was okay to "wait for the Lord" because as Isaiah tells us in Chapter 40:31, "but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." Then, like the psalmist with his cast down soul and disquieted spirit, I hope in God for he is my help, and again I would be filled with gratitude and praise.

While my suffering was intense and real for me, I know that there are people who lost a loved one to COVID, and that their suffering is ongoing. I pray for God's comfort, love, and peace for them.

For anyone who may be experiencing sadness over a life event, our church offers the wonderful service of Stephen Ministry, and there is also a counselor, Tom Barker, who has an office in the church. You can contact any of the pastors for more information.

Sylvia Cook

#### DECEMBER 7 PSALM 27: 1-4

"Good morning to you, good morning to you, we're all in our places, with sunshiny faces, and this is the way we start a new day."

This children's song focuses on beginning a school day on a positive note. In my years of teaching first grade, it was important to welcome the children with smiles and open arms. Many of the children already have had a busy, stressful morning, even before they arrived at school. As adults, we know that a bright beginning sets the tone of our days and also for those around us. As we connect with others in our everyday lives, we can serve as a bright spot and a reminder of the light of God's love. Each of us has the opportunity to reflect that light in our own lives and share it with those around us.

So as you move through these days of Advent, think about the ways you can reflect this light and love. Reflect on the ways you draw on God's love and light in your life. When you face adversity, illness, and fear, remember that the Lord is by your side. He provides the light for our sunshiny faces and gives us His presence, protection, and peace.

- How can you behold the Lord's beauty and proclaim it to others?
- How can you reflect His light and love in your connections with others?
- How can you live a life with less fear, drawing on the strength of the Lord?

During this Advent season, behold the beauty of the Lord and bask in His light and love.

Our faith and confidence in God's promises will lead us throughout our lives.

May God shine His light on you!

Carolyn Steed





#### DECEMBER 8 PSALM 119: 105-106

Research shows the meaning of the Bible verses as: We journey through a fallen world with many dangerous pitfalls, slippery places, and dark foes seeking to destroy our close fellowship with our Lord, but in Psalm 119, we are given a beautiful promise and an eternal truth... that God's Word is a gleaming lamp to our feet that will guide us through the darkness of this fallen world and it is a shining light to brighten the pathway we take.

While it is sometimes easier to travel a path of darkness (internal failings and weaknesses) and to live in fear, this scripture reveals that the word of God is like a torch in a dark night. It shows us the way; it prevents our stumbling over obstacles, or falling down, or wandering off into paths that would lead us into danger or would turn us away altogether from God's path for our lives. Well, AMEN!

Especially during this Advent season, let's seek the path of light in all things and all areas of life. Let's look for the light in the darkness in everyday moments. We need light and a lot of it to show us the way down the perilous paths that often seem to stretch out before us.

Many moments of light can be found in the eyes of a child at Wesley Memorial School, in delight while practicing Christmas carols or being part of the Nativity, in the star on top of the Lassiter tree in the Front Circle, on the glow of the Chrismon ornaments on the Sanctuary trees and all the other trees throughout the church.

We also see it in the candlelight at all four services on Christmas Eve, in the light of anticipation as we await the birthday of Jesus, plus so, so many more at Wesley Memorial and in your homes and the community!

Seek the light, feel God's presence, savor the promise, be a shining light to others this Advent Season and beyond.

In God's love and light,

Cindy Dominick Manager of Facilities Usage and Hospitality, Wesley Memorial Church

#### DECEMBER 9 JOHN 12:35-36

What is the purpose of light? So that we might be able to see clearly. Maybe you had a night light when you were little, or maybe you have a child or grandchild who uses one now. One small little light makes such a big difference and brings comfort and peace to those who use it.

You've probably heard the phrase, "to shed light on" something. We use this phrase to mean to make something more known or clear; or "bring the truth to light," meaning to bring to the surface what is true or find out the truth amongst a lie or false information.

There are numerous verses in scripture where Jesus uses light as a metaphor for himself and his followers. In two different places, He says that He is the light of the world (John 8:12) and that we (His followers) are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). In John 12, it is Holy Week, and Jesus is preparing His disciples for His departure from the earth. Jesus left glory and humbled himself to come to this world to shed light on the darkness that existed in the world, brings truth to the surface through his every word and being, and bring comfort and peace to those who choose to walk in the light. Without His guidance, we cannot see the truth or know where we are going.

So what happens when He has physically left the earth? This is what he was preparing His disciples for; because while He is gone, we have to be the light. It is our job, as His disciples, to shed light on the darkness, bring the truth to light, and provide a sense of peace and comfort in this dark world through sharing the light of Christ with others. So as we celebrate the first coming of the Light, may we also remember to share and be the light until He comes again.

Mary Cullen Bills Dixon





#### DECEMBER 10 EPHESIANS 5:6-14

First off, I like the Message translation. I like the plain, everyday language it employs. Once, I think I found the word "dude."

Kidding, but it comes close.

So in The Message translation, it says:

"The bright light of Christ makes your way plain. So no more stumbling around. Get on with it! The good, the right, the true—these are the actions appropriate for daylight hours. Figure out what will please Christ, and then do it....... Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busy work, the barren pursuits of darkness."

Like the Nike slogan. The book of Ephesians is telling us to - Just do it! Figure out what will please Christ and do that.

I love that!

Then it also says that things get in our way. Stuff. All kinds of stuff. Busy-work-type stuff.

And isn't that true during the month of December? Holy Moly! For me, the month of December sets the world record for absolutely the most busywork month of the year.

I think most of us fall into this trap. We know what to do, we know what's really important, but.....like the verse says.....we need to focus on only that which is really important.

So, for me at least, this holiday season, I'm going to pray over this verse. I'm going to pray for discernment. So that I can do a better job of only doing what is pleasing to Christ, and not waste time so much time on all the busy work.

Mac Lane

#### DECEMBER 11 1 PETER 2:5-9

Whenever I hear the word "Cornerstone" two things come to mind. One is a Bob Marley song that says, "The stone that the builder refuse will always be the head cornerstone."

The other is a poem that I like, but have no idea who wrote it:

Isn't it strange, that princes and kings, and clowns that caper in sawdust rings, and common-folk like you and me, are builders for eternity?

To each is given a bag of tools, a shapeless mass and a Book of Rules; and each must make 'ere time has flown, a stumbling block or a stepping stone.

Jesus told Peter that he was the rock upon which he would build his church, and Peter quotes Isaiah whose reference is that Jesus is the "stone in Zion," put there by God as the foundation of the new temple.

The cornerstone is the most significant stone in a structure because it determines the design and orientation of the building. The imagery is that Jesus is the cornerstone and that the believers are the balance of the stones that make up the temple. On the other hand, the capstone is the final stone that goes on a building, In the same way, Jesus, who was rejected by human beings, has been exalted by God. And we are reminded that we should praise God who led us out of the darkness into His wonderful light.

**David Horney** 





#### DECEMBER 12 ISAIAH 60:1-3

Christmas has always been a magical time for me. Growing up in Richmond, VA my brother and I woke up to a transformed living room complete with a huge Christmas tree, a large LIONEL train set-up with ducks on a pond, another pond for skaters, and a snow-covered hill for sledders. Horses and cows stood in the pasture to watch the merriment. Christmas to me was family.

Last Christmas, the pandemic fractured our Christmas traditions and it appears this Christmas will require adjustments. While the pandemic has altered our lives in many ways there have been some positive results. Many of us have been forced to slow down and examine our lives-spending more time listening to God than chattering away. This time has made me so aware of how we need each other. God has made us to be loving creatures who share each other's burdens and joys. How we have missed the hugs and smiles hidden by a mask. More importantly, God has made me aware of his presence in this world. Through all of this chaos and anger, many of God's people have continued to show his message of redemption and love. We see it in the kind acts of first responders who cradle a small child after an accident. We see it at our church as it has found new ways to minister to our community in our time of need. It has been a beacon of light in our city.

This Christmas we are challenged to be that beacon of light in a confused world. I pray that each of us will answer His call to be His witness in a broken world.

Pat Colonna

#### DECEMBER 13 2 CORINTHIANS 4:3-6

Scripture says in our natural state, we are blind. Unbelievers "cannot see the light of the gospel," and we are unable to wake up on our own. Have you ever had a nightmare and you knew it was a dream, but you couldn't wake up? It is such grace when it's finally time to sit up, look around, and see what is real.

The Bible says only God can wake us up from the veil of darkness.

As Charles Wesley wrote in 1738,

Long my imprisoned spirit lay, Fast bound in sin and nature's night.

We wonder, then, how can anyone know God or see Him? We can't wake anyone up. Only God can "make His light shine in our hearts." But He does, and what light He shines! The light of His love is better than we can imagine.

Thine eye diffused a quickening ray, I woke, the dungeon flamed with light

It is a mystery that Jesus left His Father's throne above. He was born into this broken and violent world. His earthly parents were on the run. But He came. He lived. He emptied Himself of all but love. Jesus causes His light to spread all over the dungeons of our lives. He wakes us up from imprisonment to a nightmare. He wakes us with His love and goodness.

Tis mercy all, immense and free, For O my God, it found out me

It is only because of His goodness and mercy that we can see Him, worship Him, follow Him, know Him. It is only because God has decided to "give us the light of the knowledge of (His) glory." The only way we can see His glory is when He shines the light, and that light shines solely on "the face of Christ."

My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth and followed Thee

As we rise each day in expectation during Advent, let us go forth and follow Him. It is our job to preach Jesus Christ as Lord in all we do. That is all that matters. It is our singular task to shine the light on Christ. When we choose to serve Him, for His sake, His light will shine in the darkness and touch others. Only in His face can anyone find hope, love, and life.

Jesus and all in Him is mine! Alive in Him, my living Head, And clothed in righteousness divine, Bold I approach the eternal throne, And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Amazing love, how can it be? That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

Lyrics from "And Can It Be That I Should Gain" by Charles Wesley, 1738

Ann Marie Chilton Director of Children's Ministry, Wesley Memorial Church



#### DECEMBER 14 1 JOHN 1:4-7

When I read my scriptures, I find that the word joy is in the majority of the messages we receive in the Bible. This scripture starts with verse 4 telling us: "And these things we write unto you, that your joy may be full." I thought about this, and I had a strong feeling that our Heavenly Father has sent us to this world so that we may have joy.

I know that after this past year and all the things we have been through, it doesn't seem like that is the case, but then we read verse 5 from 1 John 1:5 and it says "This then is the message which we have heard from him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

What a powerful message! As this Christmastime approaches us, we know why we are having this special time of the year. It is the time when we are the closest to our Savior, Jesus Christ. In verse 6 it tells us: "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk-in darkness, we lie, and do not tell the truth."

I can tell when I am going down that path where darkness is setting in. I forgot to say my prayers or just talk with my Heavenly Father that day. I did not read my scriptures because I was too busy and just wanted to watch the TV. Things will not go in my best interest for that day. It is like I don't have the Holy Spirit with me to guide me and let me know what my Heavenly Father would have me do. But then in verse 7, it tells us:

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son will cleanse us from all sin."

Wow! I don't know about you, but I know this is the reason Jesus came into the world. To cleanse us from all sin so that our joy may be full.

Nothing is more joyful to think about than seeing the baby Jesus lying in a manger with Joseph and Mary and knowing in our hearts what great things he would accomplish and that He was willing to die for you and for me to wash away our sins. It is my hope this Advent season that you will find your true joy in the birth of Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Blessings to all of you!

Tish Schultheiss Pastoral Administrative Assistant Wesley Memorial Church

#### DECEMBER 15 JOHN 3:16-21

CHRISTMAS!!! What a joyful season!

The word conjures up so many feelings and emotions.

As we look forward to our 54th Christmas together this year, we are so grateful for the blessings the Lord has graced our family with so many times over. Now, this has not meant we haven't faced challenges, as all God's children do. Rather it has meant we have relied on God's grace and abundant love to help us through whatever we were facing. As He promised to all who have faith and believe, His love will be abundant and He will always be there for us in our time of need, if we only ask and trust in His love.

In this current time of COVID-19 with all the sickness and death it has brought, it is easy to succumb to the ways of the world and the bad things that happen. The world wants us to rely only on worldly things and not Godly things to get us through this pandemic. But, just like all other calamities that have befallen mankind throughout human history, only God can resolve the pain and suffering we feel, whether globally, as with this pandemic, or, personally, as with a loss of faith

As you and those you love prepare to celebrate Christmas this year.....take time to consider all the blessings that God has given you all of your life. The blessings are great and His love for you is immense and ever-lasting.

For us.....and for you...this is the true meaning of Christmas!

Gloria and Jim Adams





#### DECEMBER 16 ISAIAH 40: 1-11 (KJV)

As a child, I memorized Bible verses in Sunday School. I remember some, but many have faded away. However, there is a whole host of Bible texts that I remember because they are words to music I have rehearsed and sung over the years in various choirs. I find these memories very comforting. Often, when I awake in the morning, there is an anthem or hymn "ear worming" itself through my brain. This is a way God speaks to me. He speaks to me through Handel's Messiah.

I have no idea how many times I have sung portions of Messiah. Still, it does not seem like the Advent season until I hear that tender tenor opening, Comfort Ye and Every Valley Shall Be Exalted. In the score, it is followed by the chorus, And The Glory of The Lord (Shall Be Revealed).

Alto and chorus proclaim, O Thou That Tellest Good Tidings to Zion. Later comes the soprano solo, He Shall Feed His Flock. Messiah goes on to cover the birth, passion, and resurrection of Jesus.

Today's text of messianic prophecy brings comfort and proclamation. It portrays God as being both powerful and gentle. It heralds the coming of the Messiah. The message is simple. All is well. Jerusalem's sins are pardoned. People are to prepare their hearts for the glory of the Lord to be revealed, and shout that the word of God stands forever.

Joy to the world!

Carol Huff

#### DECEMBER 17 JOHN 9: 1-7

Today's reading is only John 9: 1-7, but I'd like to draw our attention to the whole story, which comprises all of John 9. This is one of the rare gospel stories that follows a character who isn't Jesus. Instead, we mostly experience this story from the perspective of the man born blind. A man whose community rejected him, whose only means of providing for himself was living as a beggar.

Yet, the man faithfully waited, likely his entire life up to this point. His community did not wait with him, the disciple's question of "whose sin made this man blind?" reveals much about how persons with disabilities were regarded in the time period. This suggests that suffering, particularly that caused by possessing a "disability" was (and sometimes still is) regarded as the product of sin. The religious leaders of the day don't even accept him after he becomes sighted. The man isn't trusted when he tells the Pharisees what happened.

We could poetically say that Jesus was the only person who "saw" the man born blind as someone worthy of love. Jesus sees a person, not an invalid, not a problem to be solved, not a "sinner." But someone deserving compassion, capable of reflecting the image of God.

This Advent, I invite us to spend some time reflecting on the question, "Who do you 'see'?"

Tom Barker
Therapist, Sanctuary Counseling Group,
office on the campus of Wesley Memorial
Church



# DECEMBER 18 ISAIAH 40:3-5

Kick a path to Bethlehem and beyond.

"Kick a path" is an idiom my mother used and I continue to use to refer to de-cluttering the house in preparation for a thorough cleaning. In the "kick a path" scripture reading today, Luke gave the historical time frame as well as the prophetical text from Isaiah 40:3-5 in his introduction to the ministry of John the Baptist.

God gave John the commission to prepare the way of the Lord. John was to warn all who heard his voice that the Kingdom of God was near. He was to urge listeners to open their ears to the Word of God, to repent for their sinfulness, and to be baptized in preparation for the coming of the Lord. John kicked a path for the ministry of Jesus, Savior of the World.

Advent is the beginning of the liturgical calendar; the New Year for Christians. It is a time of waiting for the birth of the Christ child and anticipating the second coming of the Lord. Advent can also be a time to "kick a path" through our cluttered lives and again prepare the way to Bethlehem, to the cross, and to take up God's commission to tell all the World that He sent His only begotten Son to save us from sin.

**Dottie O'Connor** 





#### DECEMBER 19 ISAIAH 11:1-10

Isaiah lets us know that God is faithful to his promises, and that we can trust God who is in control of history and gives us hope for a glorious future. Isaiah brought good news to Israel in the 8th century BC when inexperienced King Ahaz reigned. God sent Isaiah to tell King Ahaz not to be afraid because God is in control and is with us in trials. In this scripture, Isaiah prophesied the coming of Messiah from the line of Jesse (King David's father). And in so doing fulfilled God's promise to King David that his house would endure forever (II Sam 7:12-16).

Israel should have hope because this shoot of Jesse will grow and bear fruit. "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him." The Spirit who gives wisdom and understanding, counsel and power, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord. The Lord will bring justice and peace. Isaiah said the Messiah will not judge by what he sees with his eyes or hears with his ears but with righteousness. He will judge the needy with justice. Remember Jesus told Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world...I came... to testify to the truth" (John 18:36-7). Christ came to proclaim the truth and to establish justice by what he taught on earth but justice will not be complete until Christ returns.

We then get a vision of the glorious restoration of the world when Jesus comes again. Envision the world when a defenseless lamb will live with a wolf, unafraid. Creation will be reordered with predators living in harmony with their prey. The most vulnerable in society, children, do not have to worry about being bitten by a viper. Envision a wild leopard lying with a domestic goat, a domestic cow eating with a wild bear, and a little child leading them. God gives us hope and a future if we trust in God, our Savior.

Barbara Coughlin

### Dec. 20 Zephaniah 3:14-17

Imagine the day of judgment has arrived. You look around and all that is visible has been completely consumed or swept away. There are no animals, no humans, and the atmosphere is dark and gloomy. The air is thick with dust, and blood and dung run in the streets. Where is God?

At the beginning of Zephaniah 3, this is the image that is conveyed. Zephaniah prophesies that Judah will be destroyed due to the people worshipping false gods, such as the sun and moon, and other pagan gods. It's difficult to imagine how joy can come from this scene. How could they go so quickly from judgment to joy?

Zephaniah warns the people to repent before it's too late. He says to seek righteousness, and seek humility, and to regard them as vital; they are necessary for life. Then on the judgment day, the Lord may pardon them. (Zeph 2:3)

In Chapter 3, Verse 12, God says that He will leave "a humble and lowly people" who take refuge and trust confidently in the name of the Lord. Those are the people who get to have joy. Their enemies are gone, God is with them, and they no longer need to fear any disaster.

Are you one of the people who take refuge and trust confidently in the Lord? Are you humble, or do you seek approval and boast? Are you full of fear of the next disaster? Do you rely on money, power, status, or other idols to support you?

The people Zephaniah wrote about were worshipping pagan gods. Of course, that is not an issue for many of us, especially if you are reading this! But what do you rely on most? It could be a job, a person, money, notoriety, reputation, or other things. If it's not God, then you may be worshipping at the feet of a false idol without even realizing it. Use the exercise below to help you examine your daily practices and go to God for guidance in making adjustments.

#### Writing Exercise:

- List how you spend the time you have in a week. How many hours are devoted to working, family, self-care, worship, etc.?
- Make a second list, this time of what you consider to be your life's priorities.
- Compare the lists. Does the second list align with how you allocate your time and energy? For example, if God and family are first in your life, then is that where you spend your time and energy? If not, go to God in prayer and ask for His guidance and direction.

Amanda Thompson





#### DECEMBER 21 MATTHEW 1:18-25

How do we prepare our little children for Christmas and what Christmas is really about amongst all the influences we are surrounded with pertaining to everything but Jesus?

In our earliest ages, we start teaching the children the beautiful Christmas story. We teach the children that Jesus was born on Christmas Day, and He was God's very special gift to us. Jesus came to teach us how to live and love. He came to teach us to say "Yes" to God. Yes, to follow Him. Yes, to worship Him. Yes, to unimaginable love.

As we read the Christmas story, very little focus is on two very important "Yes" responses. The first is Mary. She said Yes to trust and follow God's plan when she was told she would give birth to this very special baby.

The second Yes comes in today's reading in Matthew when we learn that Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, planned to divorce Mary secretly. He woke from his slumber and did as the Lord's angel had commanded him to do. He took Mary as his wife and named her son, Jesus.

So, this Advent season, what is your "Yes" moment? We all have them. Give the great love of this little baby a chance to do great things in your life.

Thank you, God. Amen.

JoAnn Clifton Director Wesley Memorial School

#### DECEMBER 22 LUKE 2:8-20

In the Gospel of Luke, we are given a glimpse into the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. The angels are majestic, it is a birth announcement that will never be rivaled.

But the moment that most stands out to us is the shepherds. As heaven invaded earth these unsuspecting shepherds were caught participating in their ordinary, mundane daily expectation of tending their flocks. Perhaps the very reason God chose them as the honored individuals to be heralded His glorious announcement was their faithfulness. God saw their commitment and knew they would be individuals that could be trusted to follow through with making the birth of Jesus known.

They proved their faithfulness in the ordinary and mundane. They could be entrusted with the extraordinary! We began to question for ourselves, "Are we trustworthy carriers of His Good News for this world, even in our ordinary, mundane moments of life?"

May we each be like the shepherds that were found faithful; the shepherds that witnessed heaven meeting earth and knew the world would never be the same. Just as the shepherds, let us return to the Savior, glorifying and praising God for all the things God is doing right now in the ordinary and mundane.

Steven and Jessica Nelson Student Ministries Wesley Memorial Church





#### DECEMBER 23 MATTHEW 4:14-16

When I was a kid, I got soo excited for Christmas. One day, I jumped up and down and asked my big brother, Chuck, "if tomorrow is Christmas Eve, then what is today?"

"Christmas Adam!" he said confidently.

"Christmas Adam?... I don't get it," I replied.

"Adam comes before Eve," he said slowly and smiled with a look that seemed to say - don't be stupid here.

"OH, I see," I said, trying to sound convincing.

I really didn't get it, but as the younger sister, I figured he had to be right somehow.

Often this is how my own Bible study goes. I ask the question, and the answer lies in what comes before or even in what comes after in the passage. Right after verse 16 in Matthew 4, it says "From then on Jesus began to preach, repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near."

I love that, because that's how I met Jesus as an adult. No school, no church, no program, not even my big brother could convince me. It was when I sat in the darkness of my selfishness and pain, turned to the goodness of God, and said "not my will, but yours be done."

Happy Christmas Adam to you today! Let His light in and expect His goodness!

Michele Lane Student Ministries Wesley Memorial Church

#### DECEMBER 24 ISAIAH 2:1-5

Advent is an opportunity to imagine the world not as it is, but as it should be.

Isaiah narrates a beautiful picture of this for us. As we come together to wrap up this season let us anticipate a time as Isaiah did when people from all nations turn toward God for light and direction. Imagine all the things that will no longer be necessary when the nations come to the mountain of the Lord to learn His ways and to walk in His light. The very things that separate and divide are no more. The future kingdom is free of war, therefore armies and training for war are things of the past. Weapons will be turned into useful tools for growth. This transformation communicated in these verses cannot be fulfilled apart from the grace of God.

Isaiah lived during some of the most turbulent times, but he still speaks a message of hope and promise. The message that Isaiah shares with us amid such chaos is clear: God is in control.

Often we may feel like the people in Isaiah's time did, experiencing one challenge after another. These challenges can put distance between us and God. The mountains we forge in our lives are treacherous and, yes, impossible, without the Lord. But God's kingdom rises above all things. Isaiah reminds us that we are all an integral part of God's plan and purpose for this world. When we face the mountains in our lives let us strive in these moments to allow God's embrace to surround us and carry us to the peaks.

As a church, let's pray we have all strived to bring our hearts to Bethlehem this Advent season to celebrate the glorious mystery of Christmas by allowing the prophets, like Isaiah, to light the path which leads us there.

On the final day of Advent, let us not only journey back to that dimly lit stable in Bethlehem, but as we move forward keep the season of Advent in your hearts and the midst of struggle, just as Isaiah did, speak of hope and let us walk in the light so that we may be prepared for the return of a glorified God.

**Melody Emerson** 







Thanks for the following for support of this publication

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