



2023 Advent Devotions

WV Conference of
The United Methodist Church



West Virginia Conference

The United Methodist Church

December 3, 2023 – First Sunday in Advent

Advent Season – Waiting and Preparing

[Isaiah 64:1-4](#)

¹ Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! ² As when the fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you! ³ For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you. ⁴ Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

Isaiah the prophet in verse 4 stresses waiting for God. It's the encouragement the prophet provides the people. How are you waiting for God to appear in your life to assist you with dealing with a situation in your life? Ask and he shall provide the guidance; cry, he will hear; listen, he will speak; he will provide the way.

Advent is the time of preparation as God creates Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. He takes on human form and lives among us. He lives with the poor in spirit to renew and give us grace and peace. Isaiah provides us the waiting which is a passive verb, whereas preparing is an active verb. However, we are called to do both during the season of Advent. What are you waiting for: things to return to normal, forgiveness? Are you marveling in his creation – the WV mountains? Looking for answers to those in pain, poor and lonely who live on our cities' streets?

Let's spend time in our waiting to reflect on the present and the future. Are we excited and hopeful about what God will deliver? The future is uncertain to us. We don't see outside the frame or what is in the picture, but we can picture our peace among us – delivering goods to those who have lost their homes with recent fires and floods. Yes, there is hope among us as we give with a grateful heart. Praise God for the grace and peace of the birth and miracle of Christ in human flesh.

There is no God like our heavenly father. Let us pray for peace and hope in our present and future waiting and preparing for the season of Advent. God's grace is not contained, and Isaiah's prayer ends in Hope. There is no purpose without God or the grace of Christ's coming. He arrived in human form to take on all our sin. Isaiah's prayer calls for nothing less than a recurrence of the great wonders.

What acts will you do in waiting? Will you ponder upon the star that leads you to the inn to see the miracle of Christ's birth? Will you prepare your heart and mind to open your arms to others who haven't heard the news? Will you open doors to others and make room for the joy of salvation? May the peace and understanding prepare your heart for Christ the King.

Prayer: *Dear God thank you for the reminder to slow down and ponder the gift of creation and your grace shared with us through the miracle of Christ incarnate as we wait and prepare. Amen.*

Malissa Hohmann
Elizabeth Memorial United Methodist Church
Charleston, WV
Worship Committee Chair

December 4, 2023

Lord, Save Your Vineyard

[Psalm 80:1-19](#)

O God, restore us. Smile on us. Then we will be delivered. Psalm 80:3 (NET)

Life is a struggle. All seems well, when suddenly everything falls apart.

The car we were holding together with rubber bands and chewing gum fails, and we find ourselves hurtling backwards downhill before crashing into a grove of trees. The car is a total loss, and we have an unanticipated hospital admission with unexpected diagnoses. Then the job that had seemed secure for decades is threatened with elimination. And a legal issue that could lead to a loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars arises.

Why can't we simply enjoy life? Does God care? Asaph may have an answer.

Asaph?

Asaph was a musician during the reign of King David, one of those assigned "to offer prayers, songs of thanks, and hymns" (1 Chronicles 16:4 NET) to God. This involved writing some of the songs we call psalms. Some of his songs have been preserved as Psalms 73-83.

We read Psalm 80 hoping to find a reminder of the goodness of God and his love for us. Instead, Asaph describes Israel as resembling a vine, formerly protected by a fence. But now the fence has been destroyed, wild animals eat the unattended fruit, and the vine is damaged by fire and severe pruning. Asaph begs God to intervene and rescue his people.

That is the sense of hope in this psalm. In the middle of his despair over the status of Israel, Asaph remains confident that God is able and willing to rescue his people. And, inspired by God, he describes how God will eventually rescue Israel (and us).

Verse 17 in Hebrew refers to "the man on your right hand" and "the son of man you strengthened for yourself." (NET notes) A man on someone's "right hand?" Remember that Mark 16:19 says "Jesus . . . sat down at the right hand of God." (NET)

Even in the time of Israel's great despair, there are both hope that God will rescue the Israelites from their current situation and a veiled hope that in centuries yet to come God will rescue all believers through his promised Messiah.

Prayer: *Ruler of the universe, sometimes we are so busy with career, family, and even church that when parts of our lives stop functioning as we're accustomed, we become overwhelmed. Please remind us that even in the midst of chaos in our lives you are still present and in control of our lives. Keep us mindful of your love for us and of your "eternal power and divine nature" (Romans 1:20, NET). In the name of the One on your right hand, we pray, Amen.*

Frances Van Scoy
Wesley United Methodist Church, Morgantown
Certified Lay Speaker and Certified Local Church Historian

December 5, 2023

God is NOT Done
[1 Corinthians 1:3-9](#)

⁶ just as the testimony of^{fb1} Christ has been strengthened among you—⁷ so that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸ He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the partnership of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

In today's scripture, Paul is writing to the Corinthian church. It is a reminder of the many spiritual gifts that God has graciously given to us. Paul praises the people of the Corinthian Church for the ways he is grateful to see them using their spiritual gifts. He explores the correct understandings of knowledge and speech.

If he was writing today, what spiritual gifts would he be grateful to see among us?

What gifts would he want us to use more often?

Dear West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I am so thankful to see that you are collectively caring for those in need. You are a testimony about Christ to the world. You are using your spiritual gifts to proclaim peace and bring good news to future disciples. God is faithful. Continue your work for the kingdom.

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all,
Paul*

During this season of Advent, we are looking back at the first Christmas, currently to Christ's presence in our lives, and forward to the second coming of Christ.

We rejoice knowing that God is not done! We can go a new direction with God in our lives.

We will continually improve our spiritual maturity by loving like Jesus. We strive to live out Wesley's rules, "Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God." God is not done; get prepared!

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, we are grateful for the birth of your Son, our Savior. We are blessed to use our spiritual gifts. Help us not grow weary and use them for peace and bringing good news about your kingdom. In your Son's precious name, we pray, Amen.*

Jeannie Blake
Fairview United Methodist Church
Moundsville, WV
Lay Speaker pursuing CLM

December 9, 2023

You Just Never Know.....

Mark 13: 31-37

And since you don't know when that time will come, be on guard! Stay alert (and pray).
Mark 13: 33

When my wife Connie and I bought our first house (really small), we positioned our couch right in front of the large (really large) picture window in our living room. It offered a great view of the street and our neighbors.

As our girls grew older, they and our dog would often climb up on the couch and wait expectantly for me to return home from work. As I would drive by, I could literally see our dog's head follow me down the road and see him scamper from the top of the couch to hurry to the basement steps to greet me.

I have to admit that often it made my day! It's a warm and comforting feeling to know that your family has been eagerly watching and waiting for your arrival. Girls jumping into your arms. The dog wagging his tail to beat all.

At this time of the year, we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus. A babe wrapped in swaddling clothes who grew to bring joy and hope to generations of people. A new hope and a blanket of grace for all who would believe.

But Jesus talked often about His *second* coming. A very glorious coming. A time when "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." (Rev. 21:4).

However, in sharing the good news of His return, He also warned that we should be prepared. We should be watching. We should not be sleeping and taking our lives here for granted. In Jesus's words, "Be on guard. Stay alert. Don't let Him find you sleeping when He arrives without warning. Watch for Him!"

Singer and song writer Jordan Feliz, in his song, "Jesus is Coming Back," sings:

*"And when the world gets complicated / We're gonna keep on celebrating
'Cause we know (woo) / That Jesus is coming back, Jesus is coming back (oh, yeah)."*

So, yes, when your world is topsy-turvy, remember that we indeed celebrate the birth of our Savior during these days, but....but we also work to remain prepared for His second coming which will bring even greater joy and usher in a beautiful time of peace and healing like never before. Come, Lord Jesus, Come.

Prayer: *Lord, may we know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, as we diligently await your glorious return.*

Dan Erenrich

Spruce Street United Methodist, Morgantown, WV

Lay Member of the Annual Conference, Adult Sunday School Teacher, VP of UMM

Wednesday, December 6, 2023

Opening up to Receive Christ

[Isaiah 64:5-9](#)

You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, who remembers You in Your ways. Behold, You were angry, for we sinned, we continued in them a long time; and shall we be saved?

For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on Your name, who arouses himself to take hold of You; for You have hidden Your face from us and have delivered us into the power of our iniquities.

But now, O Lord, you are our Father, we are the clay, and You our potter; and all of us are the work of Your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, O Lord, nor remember iniquity forever; behold, look now, all of us are Your people. (Isaiah 64:5-9 NASB)

To be honest, it is not the easiest scripture to read at first. How does it connect with Advent and preparing ourselves for the birth of Christ?

In this time of preparation for Christ's birth, we have to recognize that even in our praise and thanksgiving of God we still fall short, at times, of hitting the ideal that God calls us to be. We stumble; we fall; and we sin. But rather than being angry, God gave us Christ to remove our iniquities instead of letting our iniquities remove us from Him.

The more I read this scripture the more I connected with it as a coach. I see the possibilities that a player will have and what they could become. I will give my wisdom and knowledge into their training.

And yet, the player has a choice of submitting themselves to my instruction and allowing the potential to grow into reality versus the player doing it their way and fighting and resisting the wisdom and knowledge of the coach. In resisting the submission of their ego to be able to learn, they fall short of that potential.

Our preparation process includes being able to submit ourselves to God, through Christ, to allow him to create the masterpiece that he sees and that allows us to proclaim the peace of Christ and bring the Good News.

Prayer: *Lord, may we be still and hear your call. Prepare us, mold us into how you see us. Amen*

Ron Moreland
Beckley Community United Methodist Church
Beckley, WV
Certified Lay Speaker

December 7, 2023

Jesus - Our Light in the Darkness

[Mark 13:24-30](#)

In those days, after the suffering of that time, the sun will become dark, and the moon won't give its light. The stars will fall from the sky, and the planets and other heavenly bodies will be shaken. Then they will see the Human One coming in the clouds with great power and splendor. Mark 13:24-25, CEB

Driving home from church on a dark, cloudy evening, my usual exit was closed for repair. The detour took me down a little-used rural route with few homes, no streetlights or pavement reflectors. I was immensely grateful for my bright headlights as I navigated a winding road down a steep path to reach the brightly illumined city streets.

I was reminded of that frightening drive as I read today's passage. In it, Jesus repeats the prophetic warnings of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Joel who prepared their audiences for the absence of their guiding lights before sin-related calamity came upon them. Jesus' warning is two-fold: he's preparing the Twelve for the coming destruction of Jerusalem and all believers for the dark, troubled times we will experience before he comes again.

Our life journey takes us through dark places of personal tragedy, disaster, loss, and societal evil. Our safety in reaching our heavenly destination depends on the light we choose to illuminate our journey. If we navigate by the light of our own, others', or the world's wisdom, we'll be left in darkness when those uncertain lights fail. Only the true Light that came into the world, that shines on every person can never be extinguished (John 1:5,9).

Jesus, the Light of the world, promised that whoever follows him "won't walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12), and his light in us makes us the light of the world for others (Matthew 5:14). When we shine His light by sharing the Good News of his love, we illuminate the way for others to know the One who leads us out of darkness and into the light of his eternal presence.

Prayer: *Father, thank you for sending Jesus our Light who shines into our dark times and leads us to safety in his presence. Urge us by your Spirit to walk in the Light as He is in the light so that together we will be a beacon of hope to those who are stumbling in the dark. Because of Jesus, Amen.*

Heidi Schmidt
Mount Olivet United Methodist Church
Wheeling, WV
Lay Delegate, Certified Lay Servant
Prayer Coordinator, Nurture Ministries Coordinator

December 8, 2023

He Will Come Again

[Psalm 89:19-26](#)

*²⁴My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him,
and in my name his horn shall be exalted.*

*²⁵I will set his hand on the sea
and his right hand on the rivers.*

*²⁶He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father,
my God, and the Rock of my salvation!'*

As we are in this Advent Season, we reflect on the “Prophecy” in the Psalms. Ethan the Ezrahite was the author of Psalm 89.

Verses 15 and 18 might be considered “Prophetic.” In Ethan’s past, people could not look upon the face of God. In verse 15, Ethan wrote: “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance.

In Ethan’s future, people would indeed walk “in the light of thy countenance.” In verse 18 he wrote, “For the Lord is our defense; and the Holy One of Israel is our King.”

The Book of Psalms was written centuries before Jesus was born.

Somehow Ethan knew people in the future would walk in the presence of and with “The King.” Ethan knew “The Holy One” would be coming. These verses do not apply only to the people who would in Ethan’s distant future walk with Jesus, who was yet to come. They also apply to us.

The Prophets knew the Messiah would come. The Gospels speak of the time when He would be here on Earth. “The King” was here. We have been told Jesus is coming again. Bible verses tell of the triumphant return of Jesus. The King is coming. The King was here. The King will come again.

That is a promise Jesus made and was recorded in the book of John, chapter 14, verse 3. He specifically said, “**I will come again.**” There is a wonderful hymn entitled, “The King Is Coming.” The time may be very soon when we all hear the trumpet sound, and then, His face we will all see! Come, Lord Jesus!

***Prayer:** “Dear Lord: Help us to be ready, as we await your return. Amen.”*

Joseph C. Duckworth
Kanawha United Methodist Church
Davisville, WV
Certified Lay Servant

December 9, 2023

You Just Never Know.....

[Mark 13: 31-37](#)

And since you don't know when that time will come, be on guard! Stay alert (and pray). Mark 13: 33

When my wife Connie and I bought our first house (really small), we positioned our couch right in front of the large (really large) picture window in our living room. It offered a great view of the street and our neighbors.

As our girls grew older, they and our dog would often climb up on the couch and wait expectantly for me to return home from work. As I would drive by, I could literally see our dog's head follow me down the road and see him scamper from the top of the couch to hurry to the basement steps to greet me.

I have to admit that often it made my day! It's a warm and comforting feeling to know that your family has been eagerly watching and waiting for your arrival. Girls jumping into your arms. The dog wagging his tail to beat all.

At this time of the year, we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus.

A babe wrapped in swaddling clothes who grew to bring joy and hope to generations of people. A new hope and a blanket of grace for all who would believe.

But Jesus talked often about His *second* coming. A very glorious coming. A time when "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be *no* more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." (Rev. 21:4).

However, in sharing the good news of His return, He also warned that we should be prepared. We should be watching. We should not be sleeping and taking our lives here for granted. In Jesus's words, "Be on guard. Stay alert. Don't let Him find you sleeping when He arrives without warning. Watch for Him!"

Singer and song writer Jordan Feliz, in his song, "Jesus is Coming Back," sings:

"And when the world gets complicated; We're gonna keep on celebrating;

'Cause we know (woo); That Jesus is coming back, Jesus is coming back (oh, yeah)."

So, yes, when your world is topsy-turvy, remember that we indeed celebrate the birth of our Savior during these days, but...we also work to remain prepared for His second coming which will bring even greater joy and usher in a beautiful time of peace and healing like never before. Come, Lord Jesus, Come.

Prayer: *Lord, may we know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, as we diligently await your glorious return.*

Dan Erenrich

Spruce Street United Methodist

Morgantown, WV

Lay Member of the Annual Conference, Adult Sunday School Teacher, VP of UMM

December 10, 2023

Prepare Yourself

[Mark 1:1-8](#)

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.

2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

*“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way,*

3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

*‘Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight.’ ”*

4 so John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

Have you ever seen the movie or the musical play *Godspell*? In the beginning, the people are going about their own business when they hear the call of John: “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” The people drop whatever they're doing to follow John.

The Jewish people in this scripture passage were so desperate for someone to save them from tyrannical Roman rule that they sought out the crazy man who was living in the desert, apart from civilization and polite company, wearing what he could find, and eating what was available.

Today we would say he lived off the grid and left a small footprint. He preached a message of redemption.

No longer would the people have to journey to Jerusalem every year to offer a sacrifice for any sins they committed. Now, being baptized in the Jordan River meant that God washed away their sins, and they need only turn away from sin. The Sacrifice would be provided soon. John’s job was to get the people ready so when the Messiah arrived, they would recognize him.

Who has God sent into your life to prepare the way for the task to which he will call you? How will you answer that call: eagerly, with reservations, or will you ignore it, and hope God forgets?

Prayer: *God Who Calls Us, use us as proclaimers of Peace and Good News Bringers. Let our answer to your call be a resounding “Yes!” Grant that during this Advent Season we will prepare our hearts to receive Jesus once again. Amen*

Janet Farmer
Madison United Methodist Church
Madison, WV
Member PPRC, Certified Lay Minister

December 11, 2023

Past, Present, Future

[Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13](#)

⁸ *Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.^[a]*

⁹ *Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.*

Advent brings the past, present and future into focus in one wonderful season of preparation and reflection. For centuries God's people heard the ancient promise of the coming of the Messiah.

Advent in the present time is our preparation to celebrate Christmas and the birth of the Christ child in our hearts anew each year. In the future we long with hope for the coming of the Victorious Christ, who will usher in the fullness of His Kingdom.

In our reading of Psalm 85, we likewise see the past, present and future merged into what the *Wesley Study Bible* calls a "Prayer for the Restoration of God's favor."

First, we are reminded that God was faithful in the past, blessing His chosen people with productive land and forgiveness of sins. In the present we ask God to restore us to his favor so we can experience His grace. For the future we can rest assured that God's Kingdom will come and that his "steadfast love and faithfulness will meet." We gain a glimpse of what that future salvation will look like.

Righteousness and peace will bubble up from the ground and pour down from the sky. The land will be fertile and productive, and righteousness will pave the way for the Lord's steps. Clearly, the Second Coming, which we look forward to during Advent, will be a time of great rejoicing for God's faithful people.

Advent, in the words of the Conference's theme this year, is a time to "Proclaim Peace and Bring Good News." This is a time for celebrating God's past promises, our present personal salvation, and the hope of the coming of the Kingdom.

Prayer: *Holy God, just as your people longed for the coming of the Messiah, we long for His coming in our hearts, and for that day in which He will establish the fullness of His Kingdom. In His Name, Amen.*

Ed Via
Union United Methodist Church
Union, West Virginia
Local Church Lay Leader

December 12, 2023 – Second Sunday of Advent

Jesus Christ is Coming to Town

[2 Peter 3:8-15](#)

⁸Now, dear friends, do not let this one thing escape your notice, that a single day is like a thousand years with the Lord and a thousand years are like a single day. ⁹The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some regard slowness, but is being patient toward you, because he does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief; when it comes, the heavens will disappear with a horrific noise, and the celestial bodies will melt away in a blaze, and the earth and every deed done on it will be laid bare. ¹¹Since all these things are to melt away in this manner, what sort of people must we be, conducting our lives in holiness and godliness, ¹²while waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God? Because of this day, the heavens will be burned up and dissolve, and the celestial bodies will melt away in a blaze!

¹³But, according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness truly resides. ¹⁴Therefore, dear friends, since you are waiting for these things, strive to be found at peace, without spot or blemish, when you come into his presence. ¹⁵And regard the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as also our dear brother Paul wrote to you, according to the wisdom given to him.

I remember as a child, and as a parent, the warnings to be good because Santa Claus is watching. You better watch out because he is coming to town. He is making a list. He is going to find out if you are naughty or nice. It is a catchy tune, but we need to be more concerned about Jesus Christ coming to town and if our name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Just as children think Christmas is taking forever to get here, we need to take heed to Peter's writing "that a single day is like a thousand years with the Lord. The Lord is not slow concerning His promises." Jesus Christ is coming to town. We are told "to be found at peace, without spot or blemish" and conduct ourselves with "holiness and godliness," while we are waiting "for new heavens and a new earth."

Children are very eagerly waiting for Santa Claus. They will strive to be on their absolute best behavior. We should eagerly be waiting for Jesus Christ. We need to strive to be on our absolute best behavior, "at peace, without spot or blemish" and "conducting our lives in holiness and godliness" because Jesus Christ is coming to town. May we be reminded He sees us when we are sleeping. He knows when we are awake. He knows if we have been bad or good. We need to be good for goodness' sake.

God is good and is good to his people. If you have accepted Christ into your life, you have made the list. Your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. So be on your absolute best behavior because Jesus Christ is coming to town.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you are good all the time. May we strive to be on our absolute best behavior and proclaim peace and good news to others. Amen.

Carol Hall
Cairo United Methodist Church, Cairo, WV
Cairo Charge Lay Delegate

December 13, 2023

Comfort vs. Comfortable

[Isaiah 40:1-2](#)

*Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins. (Isaiah 40:1-2)*

“Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.” As a mom and a teacher, it is not uncommon to provide comfort with a hug or an encouraging word throughout the day. As a mom and a teacher, it is also not uncommon to be in need of comfort.

Sometimes I come home ready to put my feet up and forget the troubles of the day.

As I was reading this passage and thinking of my own responses to the word comfort, I realized something. In this passage we are not asked to be comfortable; we are asked to provide comfort. There is a distinct difference between the two. A difference that I wonder if the Church has lost sight of. Our command is not to comfort ourselves but to comfort Jerusalem.

Perhaps you are asking, why? Why are we told to comfort? The passage continues, “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” We are told to proclaim that the people are no longer in debt. There is a world of people who need to hear the tender, not angry, words that their penalty of sin is paid.

One day in a school, in a workplace, or watching the news will quickly remind you that there are a world of people living in darkness.

Too often we complain about the effects of sin while sitting comfortably in our grace. We must follow this command and comfort God’s people.

How can you and I share the good news that through the grace of Jesus we have freedom?

The world around us needs to hear the comfort of grace. We sing about this grace, we read about this grace, we write about this grace, but we need to proclaim this grace to those who are outside of the walls of our churches: those on the mountains and in the valleys of our community.

Prayer: God we proclaim this grace at the baseball and soccer fields, within the jobs we work, maybe we are even willing to walk the streets with the “backpack” people or sit in the recovery meetings. May our words be kind, tender, comforting – grace has been given, our debt has been paid. Amen.

Karyn Bennett

United Methodist Temple, Beckley, WV

Ministry Spouses’ of West Virginia Annual Conference, Conference Camping Team

December 14, 2023

The Lord's Great Love

[Psalm 89:1-4](#)

I will sing of the LORD's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. (Psalm 89:1 NIV)

Throughout the Bible we read many examples of the good news of the Lord's great and everlasting love. From the Old Testament, God delivers His people out of bondage into the Promised Land and continues on to the New Testament and Jesus Christ healing the blind, lame, and sick. There is no better example of the love of our Heavenly Father than God sending His only begotten son as the final sacrifice for all our sins.

Jesus Christ was born a babe in a manger and experienced all this world had to offer: both good and bad. At any moment during His life, He could have chosen to leave this earth and return to His Father's side in Heaven. At any moment during His trials and tribulations, He could have called down the angels to protect Him and punish His transgressors. Instead, He chose to endure both pain and suffering so that by His stripes we all could be healed.

John 15:13 tells us there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for a friend. Jesus Christ chose death so that we might live. For this selfless act, we should spend each and every day praising Him and making His love and faithfulness known to all those with whom we come in contact.

In the 89th Psalm King David proclaimed, "I will sing of the Lord's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations." He spent his life proclaiming the good news of the everlasting love of our Heavenly Father.

As we continue through this season of Advent, ask yourself this question: "Have I made the love and faithfulness of my Heavenly Father known to all?" If your answer is no, what are you waiting for?

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, we come to you today with thankful hearts for all that you are and all that you have done for us. We pray that you will give us faithful hearts to always spread the good news of your everlasting love. We pray for the strength to shout your praises whether from the mountain tops or in the valleys of life. We pray for your guidance as we navigate life's many obstacles. We thank you for your grace and your mercy, and we pray that you will be with us every step of the way. For it is in the sweet and precious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

Chad Lusk
Claypool United Methodist Church
Man, WV
Certified Lay Servant, UM Men President, PPR committee member

December 15, 2023

Hope
[Lamentations 3:21, 22a, 24](#)

Yet there is one ray of hope: His compassion never ends. My soul claims the Lord as my inheritance; therefore I will hope in him.

HOPE. We all hope for something. I imagine as Mary waited for the birth of the Messiah, she hoped, as all pregnant women do, for a healthy baby.

Sick people hope to be well.
Those out of work hope for a job.
Hungry people hope for food.
Homeless people hope for a home.
Children in orphanages hope for parents.
Children hope for presents at Christmas.
We all hope and pray for peace in the world.

And the list goes on....

I think back several years when my sister Cindy was diagnosed with MDS, cancer of the bone marrow. I prayed and hoped she would be healed by modern medicine. It wasn't to be.

As I sat by her hospital bed in August this year, seeing how sick and suffering she was, my prayers turned to God for His mercy and comfort for her last days. I knew the band of angels would be coming for her soon to take her to her heavenly home, where her husband Paul, who passed away on January 18, 2023, would be waiting for her.

She was a generous spirit, a woman of faith right to the end that came during the night of August 30th. Throughout her illness, she remained hopeful of at least feeling better. At the end, all she wanted was to go to her home of 50 years, surrounded by all the things that told the story of hers and Paul's life together.

The hymn, "Come and Find the Quiet Center" in *The Faith We Sing*, page 2128, speaks to me in a powerful and hopeful way.

"Come and find the quiet center in the crowded life we lead, find the room for hope to enter, find the flame where we are freed: Clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes that we can see all the things that really matter, be at peace, and simply be." (Words: Shirley Erena Murray, Music: Attr. to B. F. White)

All our hope lies with Jesus, for without Him, there is no hope.

Prayer: *Precious Lord, let me live a life of hopefulness. When my earthly life ends, may I dwell with you in my eternal home. Amen*

Penny Turley
Spruce Street United Methodist Church, Morgantown, WV
Sheepdog Ministry, Coordinator

December 16, 2023

Revealing Secrets

[Romans 16:25-27](#)

²⁵ Now all glory to God, who is able to make you strong, just as my Good News says. This message about Jesus Christ has revealed his plan for you Gentiles, a plan kept secret from the beginning of time.

²⁶ But now as the prophets foretold and as the eternal God has commanded, this message is made known to all Gentiles everywhere, so that they too might believe and obey him. ²⁷ All glory to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, forever. Amen

One of the things I have always enjoyed about Christmas is the surprise you get when opening presents. It is also exciting keeping the secrets of other people's gifts. The secret-keeping part of Christmas is often very fun.

I love seeing the surprised looks on people's faces when they open their gift.

I especially love it when the secret gets revealed.

You have probably had an experience similar to mine of a secret being unveiled. Perhaps it was with Christmas, or possibly a birthday, a surprise party, a gender reveal, or a baby shower.

You might have shared in that secret reveal, either knowing beforehand or figuring it out with everyone else.

This talk of secrets being revealed reminds me of Romans 16:25-27. In this passage, Paul talks about how God's secret was finally told to be made known to all the world and not just the Jews. The Jews were the only ones who had the prophecies from scripture, until this time they were the only ones who really knew about the Messiah's coming.

Paul is saying that this secret should be made known to **everyone**, not only the Jews.

Now, what should we do? The scripture says to let this message be known throughout the world, so, that must mean we should go out there and tell everyone the good news.

We need to tell people the "secret" of salvation. We need to do as the Lord commands.

***Prayer:** Dear God, help us, as a church, to reveal your secret and to show the world your truth. Amen*

Gabby Bennett
United Methodist Temple
Beckley, WV

December 17, 2023 – Third Sunday of Advent

The Build-Up

[Isaiah 61:1-4](#)

“They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.” – Isaiah 61:4

Hope is a powerful force. Hope gives us strength to survive, to cope, to seek peace, and to dream of glorious times even amidst loss, travail, and destruction.

By the time the last chapters of Isaiah were written, the people who heard it read to them were down and out. After all kinds of misfortune, many had given up hope.

At this special time, the message of hope again becomes personal. “The Lord has anointed me,” the author says. He promises liberty, freedom, comfort – even “the day of vengeance of our God.”

Those who have been steadfast, “those who mourn in Zion,” will be strengthened. They will trade in their vestments of pain and their vessels of penitence. In return they will receive garlands, and gladness, and a mantle of praise.

What a great message of hope. For those who have known the depths of loss and separation, be it financial or societal or emotional, it’s a wonderful feeling of liberation to know that there is a God who cares for them – and, importantly, that there are people who believe in, and act upon, this calling to “bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted...”

We have the green light to make it right for those who mourn. They will have their pride renewed so that they will be like “oaks of righteousness,” displaying the Lord’s glory. They will take their energizing hope and they will restore and repair their devastated cities, and lives, into something new and glorious.

This message of hope, of newness, resonated with people in the time of Christ’s birth. It’s little wonder that the verses of Isaiah 61 have been paired up with the Christmas story through the 21 centuries since.

As we build up to Christmas Day, may we remember the power of hope, and the need to empower all the world through the message of Christ’s birth and redemption for us.

***Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us share with others the hope of your world-changing love. Help us remember its power to heal and to restore and to repair the brokenness in our world. Amen.*

Tom Bone III
Concord UMC
Athens, WV

Worship Leader, Chairperson of Communications Team

December 18, 2023

God's Gift

Psalm 126

³ *“The Lord has done great things for us,
and we are filled with joy.”*

⁵ *“Those who sow with tears
will reap with songs of joy.”*

Today marks one week until Christmas Day! Because “the Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy,” we can **Proclaim Peace, Bring Good News**, and offer hope to our neighbors because we live immersed in the love and forgiveness that Jesus Christ offers to our world.

Psalm 126 reminds us that times of trouble and sorrow do not last. God brings joy out of sorrow, laughter out of tears, and good out of evil. In life we can expect both joy and weeping.

Our joy assures us of hope even when we weep. We rejoice in God for his past faithfulness, and hope for more rejoicing, especially as we celebrate Advent. The Season of Advent is dedicated to remembering the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ. As we devote time to reflection, we acknowledge that our lives will be affected by all the emotions that we as humans feel.

Yesterday, we lit the Advent candle of Hope. Hope brought about because of Christ's birth into a broken world and into our mortal lives.

Psalm 126 proclaims, “Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.” Some circumstances can be overwhelming, and hope seems impossible to find. Our faith assures us that we can hold on to hope even when all seems lost.

During Advent, we're reminded that Jesus Christ can bring hope to all our lives so that “we are filled with joy.” Even when our circumstance brings us tears, we can have hope that we “will reap with songs of joy.” Jesus said, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”
YES, THE LORD IS STILL DOING GREAT THINGS FOR US!!

***Prayer:** Gracious and loving God, we praise you for your gift of Hope. Energize us in this Advent Season so that we are able to offer hope to those who do not know you. We pray for all who need to find hope as they struggle to face life without your Holy Presence. Amen*

Robert Jackson
Milton UMC
Milton, WV

Certified Lay Speaker, SPR Committee, District Lay Academy

December 19, 2023

Waiting for the Light

[John 1, 6-8](#)

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ This man came for a witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. ⁸ He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. NKJV

Almost everyone can remember a time of stressful waiting.

Being in a waiting room for surgery or an Intensive Care unit in a hospital, crowded with people, all there - waiting. Each time the door to that seemingly sacred space is opened and someone came out, all eyes turned to see who it was – and whose name would be called.

Feeling like you are being kept in the dark.

The people of Israel were waiting – as they had been for generations. Their religious leaders had been promising a Messiah – someone to come and relieve their suffering.

Someone who would to bring them a light in the darkness – a sense of peace.

When you enter a dark place, nerves tense and, trying to find your way, you seek a light. Maybe you pull out your cell phone and use the flashlight on it to find the switch to turn on the light?

When you are in that waiting room – nerves on edge, every time the door opened you look – was it your doctor? Did they call your name or that of your loved one?

John the Baptist has been born to bring news of the coming of the Light of the world. John is to be that guiding light, until Jesus -- the Light of the World -- was ready to Proclaim the Peace of the Good News. The Way of loving to all who would listen.

As the people of Christ, we are to be that guiding light, leading people out of the darkness of unknowing, to know Jesus Christ, the Light of the World.

Prayer: *Gracious and loving God, we come to you today with the gift of knowing Jesus Christ. Give us strength and energy to be a candle – a guiding light in the darkness to Proclaim Peace and bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to even one person struggling in the darkness. Amen*

Jane Ensminger
Crim Memorial UMC
Philippi, WV

Certified Lay Servant, Treasurer Crim Memorial, Member MonValley LEAD team,
Lay Equalization member/MonValley District

December 20, 2023

Mary's Magnificat

Luke 1:46b-55

He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant. Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored because the mighty one has done great things for me. Luke 1:48-49a

Mary's song is focused on the blessing she will receive for being part of God's plan. In this scripture, the blessing is seen as the fruits of the relationship we have with God. In today's world, the meaning of being blessed just doesn't mean the same as it did in Mary's time. Many of us feel we are blessed with health, wealth, and status. Although these are good and important things, we need to realize that even the small things we received from God are blessings as well.

Mary's Magnificat is just the opposite. Where the humble are exalted, our joy is not found in our status, but in our connection with God.

What does a blessing look like? What values do we consider as a blessing from God? Is it in our health, wealth, or status, or do we see ourselves as God's humble servants? Mary's Magnificat is geared toward the poor and the marginalized and warns those who place their identity to their position here on earth.

This may not sound like "good news" to many of us. The message is not that if you are well connected, you are bad or evil. The good news is, we can repent and turn to our God who cares for everyone from the lowly to the exalted. It's good news for us because it means there is a place for each of us in God's Kingdom.

Prayer: Gracious God, we thank you for the song of Mary. Our spirits rejoice in you, our Savior. You looked with favor on your unlikely servant, and she delivered a blessing for all generations. We know we are blessed during our time here on earth, but the ultimate blessing is there is a place for each of us to spend eternity with you. AMEN

Pastor Andy Fowler, CLM
Duff Street United Methodist Church
Clarksburg, WV
Assigned to Stealey UMC, Clarksburg

December 21, 2023

Finding joy
[I Thessalonians 5:16-24](#)

“give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

Giving thanks can sometimes be hard in tough situations, even in our daily lives our tendency is to complain about our circumstances: “it’s too hot today,” “the rain is messing up my plans,” “this traffic is slowing me down.”

This scripture in Thessalonians tells us to be thankful and to rejoice; how hard that is especially in truly difficult times.

On one of my trips to Old Mutare Mission Hospital in Zimbabwe I was visiting with my friend, Dr. Manyeza who is a missionary physician. We were discussing his work at the hospital and some of the good news he had.

He always had such joy as he described being able to see his patients and deliver babies even though the work was hard and the hours were long. Supplies and medicine were always running out. Inflation was going crazy; the x-ray machine did not work while they were waiting on parts for months.

There were not enough staff, and there was no hot water in the hospital. The list goes on of what was not working and what they did not have to work with that we would consider absolute necessities.

But that was all replaced by the absolute joy I witnessed in the ward with mothers and their newborn babies. How could there be so much rejoicing with such difficult circumstances?

In Dr. Manyeza’s case, it was his faith that carried him through; he was truly giving thanks in all circumstances.

My prayer for you and me this Advent season is that we look for joy, especially in the little things which many times we overlook even in a world that is full of pain and give thanks.

Prayer: *Lord help us to rejoice and look for the joy around us, help us to spread this joy to others as we anticipate the celebration of the birth of your son.*

Jeff Matheny
Mt. Pleasant United Methodist Church
Mineral Wells, WV
Conference Secretary of Global Ministries

December 22, 2023

What Will I Wear?

[Isaiah 61:8-11](#)

I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations. (Isaiah 61:8-11, NIV)

How often do we take notice of the clothing we will wear for the day?

Are you one who likes to lay out clothing the night before, ready for a new day or are you like me? I get up and see what mood I'm in for the day. It's fine to be aware or concerned of the garments we will wear for our new day, but how often do we think about the "garment" we will wear on our Heart for the day?

Is it one of PEACE and GOODWILL or one of despair, dread, anger, etc.?

When Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph, I feel sure, did not concern themselves with the "outfit" they would put on Jesus at his birth. You see, Jesus was wrapped in a swaddling cloth and laid in a manger.

What he wore was a glow of God, radiating Peace to all mankind, Savior of the World, King of Kings. A garment of our Salvation and a robe of our Righteousness.

This Advent season and all year long let us begin our day by praying and asking Jesus to cloth our Heart with Peace and Good News. Isaiah prayed in verse 3 that God would bestow on Zion a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

We are a nation of Christians, clothed in the righteousness of God! Let us wear it with a glow that was like unto that moment of Jesus's birth in Bethlehem. The garment we clothe our heart in will affect others for eternity. Blessings and Peace.

Prayer: *Our Loving Heavenly Father, may we be aware everyday of the "garment" our heart wears. May it be one that will have the glow of peace and goodwill, a garment of salvation and a robe of our righteousness. May others be aware of our "garments" of our heart so that Jesus our Lord and Savior will be revealed unto them. In Jesus's name we ask these things. Amen*

Angela Hazelwood, CLM

Monroe Charge

Gap Mills and Sweet Springs, WV

Assistant Assigned Supply, Certified Lay Servant

December 23, 2023

John the Baptist

[John 1: 19-28](#)

Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah." They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

Now the Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

"I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing. (John 1:19-28)

John was the voice of one crying in the wilderness. How he must have longed for the coming Messiah. Living such a dedicated life as to be mistaken for the Messiah or the prophet Elija, that even the Jews questioned his identity. What a peculiar man, dressed very poorly, eating wild honey, offering hope to people as we should do.

We should live a life so that we stand out from the world as John did. When we are seen in our daily lives, we should have a true spirit of concern for our fellow man, proclaiming with joy the love of Christ.

How great John's message was to be for us all. Repent. Confess. Be baptized. The Good News then and still today! John's message for me is this: I am not the Christ, but let me tell you how to find him. He is here! REJOICE, PROCLAIM, The King Has Come.

John had a burning to shout to all that would listen. I am not Christ. But he is among you; make straight the way of the Lord. Even the Pharisees were astounded with John.

Prayer: Now as we celebrate this happy time within the Church, let us pray that we all may be known in our faith shouting, praising and exhorting Christ daily as we should. Amen.

James Miller
Smith Memorial United Methodist Church
Prichard, WV
Certified Lay Servant, CLM in training

December 24, 2023 - Fourth Sunday of Advent - Christmas Eve

All is Well?

[Luke 1:26-38](#)

For nothing will be impossible with God. (Luke 1:37)

On the day I received the invitation to write this devotional and saw that it was for Christmas Eve, my mind jumped to my first Christmas play as a young teenager. A man walked across to the pulpit, waving a lantern and proclaiming, “Christmas Eve and all is well.”

This morning I had just read of another killing in a hate crime, and I proclaimed, “Christmas Eve, and all is *not* well.” In a world filled with hate and violence, we need a time “when all is well.”

Then I read this very familiar passage and reminded myself of the hope that the birth of a tiny child brought into our world.

A hope that still lives through the hate and violence that is so prevalent in today’s world.

A hope that brings peace and love to troubled hearts.

A hope that changes the lives of men and women who seek to know more of this tiny child.

In the midst of all our darkness, Jesus is the light. In the midst of all our war and conflicts, Jesus is peace. In the midst of all our depressions, Jesus is our hope.

So, Christmas Eve and all is not well, but a lot is well. All over our Conference and all over our world are those who strive for that day when peace and love are not strangers to any. So let us celebrate the birth of the Christ Child who brings us hope and peace and makes the impossible possible. Merry Christmas Eve.

Prayer: *God, Thank you for the gift of your Son, the hope for the world. May our hearts stay ready for His gifts of love and hope. Let us never forget that we can do all things through your love for us. Amen*

Judy Raines
John Stewart United Methodist Church
Bluefield, WV
Certified Lay Minister, Chair, Global Ministries
United Methodist Foundation Trustee

December 25, 2023 – Christmas Day

Open the Gift

[Luke 2:1-14](#)

⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.^[a]

When do you open Christmas gifts in your family? I found out when I got married that not everyone has the same traditions! In my family, we always opened one gift on Christmas Eve (not the gifts from Santa, mind you, they weren't under the tree yet). Christmas morning we would open all the gifts that Santa brought and wonder how he knew just what we wanted. But in my husband's family, all gifts were opened on Christmas morning. It took us many years to navigate this chasm of differences!

How do you open Christmas gifts? In my family, everyone tore into any package that had their name on it, with wild abandon and shouts of joy. In my husband's family, each one took turns opening a gift, being careful with the paper, smoothing it out so it could be reused, or repurposed as shelf-liners. The ribbons were saved as well, untied and rolled onto a cardboard tube. This tradition, too, took a while to reconcile.

On that first Christmas morning, the greatest Gift of all was given to the world, wrapped in swaddling clothes. And all the participants opened that gift in a different way. The angels sang, their joyful praise echoing off the Judean hills as proclaimed peace to all. The shepherds quietly adored the newborn baby, wondering how and why they were chosen to be present. Joseph stood by the manger, smiling quietly in awe, knowing that this child would change the world. And Mary, gazing into the Miracle's eyes, pondered all these things in her heart.

I have learned over the years that there is no right or wrong way to open a gift. The joy is not in the time of day or style of wrapping paper -- but in the gift itself. Something that someone has chosen just for you, something that meets your needs, something that stirs happiness within your soul.

Gracious God: This Christmas Day help us to open the gift of Christ in our lives. In your awesome generosity, You sent your son, chosen just for us, sent to forgive our sins, and to provide us all a Savior. Remind us not to leave this gift under the tree. Let us open the Gift, sing praise to the Giver, and share the Good News with all. Amen.

Julie Conley
Forrest Burdette Memorial UMC
Hurricane, WV

December 26, 2023

The Christmas Rush

[Luke 2:15-20](#)

¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger.

The shepherds wasted no time in setting off to find the baby Jesus. The scripture states they “hurried;” other translations use “with haste” and the Message states, “they left, running.” They did not hesitate. They dropped what they were doing and immediately began their search for the Christ Child.

We, too, rush at Christmas time just like the shepherds did, only for different reasons. We have the Black Friday rush which is filled with a steady flow of shoppers rushing to get the best gift and the best price. We rush to get our cards mailed; we rush to get our presents wrapped; we rush to get our tree up and decorated.

Instead of rushing with our Christmas preparations of buying gifts and decorating, we should be rushing to the manger to see the best Gift of all. We should be rushing to church to hear about the baby born to save us all.

The shepherds dropped everything and rushed to hear the good news of great joy. Is this our attitude? Do we drop everything to worship him? Or do we hesitate and drag our feet when it comes to worshipping our savior? Are we so hung up on the rush of Christmas that we forget the purpose of Christmas?

We rush to get things done when we should be rushing to tell others about the good news of Jesus Christ. We need to be filled with the same rush of excitement that we had as children for our presents underneath the tree.

This Christmas season let us be like the shepherds and rush to tell others about the baby Jesus and what he has done for us. Let us tell others about the peace, which is like no other, that only he can provide. Let us be like the shepherds and glorify and praise God for all we have seen and heard.

Enjoy the Christmas rush to see, worship, and adore Christ the Lord.

***Prayer:** Heavenly father, may this Christmas season be filled with the rush of worshipping your son and our savior, Jesus Christ. Fill us with your peace which surpasses all understanding. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.*

Lynn Ritter
First United Methodist Church, Elkins, WV
jimlynnritter@gmail.com
Local Church Volunteer Staff Liaison,
Certified Lay Servant, Member Greenbrier-Wesleyan Lead Team

December 27, 2023

Teaching the Justification of God's Grace

[Titus 3:4-7](#)

⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water^(a) of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. ⁶ This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Many times we often ask ourselves “what is love?” or “How and where can I find love?” and “Why is it so hard to find and how do I know if and when I have found it?” Those are a few questions we often ask ourselves when we endure hardships. Sometimes the Lord doesn't seem to be present in our trying times and we need comfort. We are only human.

We often lose hope and faith in the Lord when we pray and receive nothing in return except silence and/or more challenges and trials. However, with our many questions, there are many answers even in the silence and more importantly in the *Book of Life (Holy Bible)*.

As Christians, we often start to ask many questions when bad things happen. It is acceptable to feel lost as a follower of Jesus. Most times when we receive an answer or a call, we get tested because we become blind to what we are asking for and fail to see everything that the Lord has given to us. God shows his love in many ways and blesses us daily -- even when we make a mistake because of His divine love for us.

There are many examples in the Bible that show the justification of God's amazing grace for us: when God sent His son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins and when Jesus left the flock of 99 sheep just to find the one missing sheep. God's love and grace heals the sick, causes the blind to see, and even raises the dead when we praise His name and meet Him halfway.

If we tell people and teach them about God's grace, we plant a seed that will multiply and grow in other people. Planting seeds can be a way to justify God's grace both visibly and invisibly as seen in Acts 3:16: “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” As we plant seeds and teach others about His love, other people will go out and spread seeds. Not only does planting these seeds justify the grace of God, it also pleases Him and His love along with His miracles. Teaching others about God's grace is a big part and role as Christians, and it also helps to open up the gateway to Heaven and slowly close the gates of Hell.

In conclusion, we as Christians need to teach people about the Lord and His love. The best way to justify God's grace is to plant seeds by talking to and praying for others. Without Christians, God's love would be difficult to justify since there will be no one to help spread and teach the word of God. Praying for others is an easy way to plant seeds and justify the grace of God.

***Prayer:** Heavenly Father, as we come to you in prayer, we all ask that you guide your light and open our hearts as we learn and teach people about your wonderful grace and love. We ask that you be with us as we go out and plant seeds in the hearts of others as we talk about you and your love for us. Lord, we all ask that you give us the words to speak and the patience under your grace to help us to teach your love as the seeds spread. We ask all this in your precious name under your divine love, AMEN!*

Ryan Nichols
Mt. Carmel United Methodist Church. Walker, WV
Certified Lay Servant

December 28, 2023

The Peace In-between

Isaiah 57:7-10

*⁷ How wonderful it is to see a messenger coming across the mountains, bringing good news, the news of peace! He announces victory and says to Zion, "Your God is king!"
⁸ Those who guard the city are shouting, shouting together for joy. They can see with their own eyes the return of the LORD to Zion. ⁹ Break into shouts of joy, you ruins of Jerusalem! The LORD will rescue his city and comfort his people. ¹⁰ The LORD will use his holy power; he will save his people, and all the world will see it.*

We are stuck now in this in-between, the lull after Christmas, and the lull before New Year's. These days in some ways can be tough. Just like how the day in-between the death of Jesus and his resurrection was tough. As our anxieties start to creep up regarding the new year, and all of the things we face, wondering, will peace and prosperity finally come for the world, my family, my church, my friends? Will yesterday's heartbreak stop following me? Can we close this chapter?

This silent time is a time to ponder, to look forward to the promise that Christ has given. As is said, "break into shouts of joy, you ruins of Jerusalem!" We, the broken people of Christ's body, even in the silence and dread, should break into shouts of joy. Because we know of the promise, even in the lulls, when it is hardest to hold onto the peace that the Christmas season promises -- that Christ has won. It was written from the beginning with the LIVING word! It lives today too!

This is not the time to let it slip away; this is the time to hold onto it the hardest. This is when we show our discipline as Christians, as is said in the Prayer of St. Francis on page #481 of our Hymnals, "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace."

The Lord will rescue us all, we just have to continue believing it, simply and surely!

The world will see it: heaven and earth will become one. By the token of that prayer, let us be those messengers in this season, and outside of this season too, that instrument of peace across the earth. So let us be image bearers of Christ, for people who desperately need his comfort, his perfect, good news of hope, peace, joy, and love.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for this silent, but solemn in-between time. Let us reflect on our year, and how on the upcoming year, we can be instruments of peace for your glory, so in our giving, we can receive, and in our pardoning, we are pardoned. Help us to see you fully this year and help us bear through this silent time. Amen.*

Jason Schafer
Meadowdale H&H Chapel UMC
Fairmont, WV
Certified Lay Servant; Mon Valley District
Assigned Supply; Colfax UMC; Levels UMC; Cornerstone Charge

December 29, 2023

No Matter How It Is Said, God's Word Stands

[Hebrews 1:1-4](#)

¹ Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son,^[a] whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³ He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains^[b] all things by his powerful word.

It isn't always "what" is said, but "how" it is conveyed that can make the difference in understanding. Sharing the Good News isn't any different.

Our Scripture today begins with the statement that the message had come from God in several different forms; "in visions, dreams and even face to face" (*The Living Bible*). We know from Scripture and our history books that God's message most often was rejected as the people wanted their own way with things.

In time, God sends His Son to bring the message. Same message, different delivery.

Many came to believe, yet many did not, either in that time or down through the ages, which brings us to today. God's message has never changed, but the messengers have. Isaiah 40:8 speaks of the flower that fades, "but the Word of our God will stand forever" (RSV).

God has not given up on mankind.

He keeps sending messengers with His Word. Each messenger has a unique way of putting across a thought. Just who are these messengers in today's world?

They are us. WE are the ones chosen to share the message of salvation through the gifts and graces He has embedded in each of us.

We who believe have the responsibility to proclaim peace through the salvation brought to us by Jesus Christ. Each of us who responds to the Gospel's call will use different words, or no words at all. Some will quote Scripture, others will act out the Love of God in some way.

Maybe something I say today, while being the same thing said before by another Believer but with different words, will be the very one that take hold in the heart of someone who says, "Why has no one ever told me this Good News before?"

We each can be the reflection of God's love in some small way and point the way to the narrow pathway that leads the way to Salvation for someone. We can do this today through Christ who gives us strength (Philippians 4:13).

***Prayer:** Lord God, Help me to hear the words you have for me to share. Show me the ones You would have me speak to; the words that will never fade away. in the name of Jesus, in His name I pray, Amen.*

Virginia Buttel

Lindside United Methodist Church, Lindside, WV

Lay Leader, Administrative Board Secretary, Sunday School Teacher

December 30, 2023

At the Right Time

[Galatians 4:4-7](#)

⁴ But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. ⁵ God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. ⁶ And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." ⁷ Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir. (NLT)

I enjoy watching college and professional football games. Passing plays often amaze me. The flight of the football, its elevation, and speed must coincide with the location of the intended receiver. If the timing of each of these elements is not right, the pass is either incomplete or intercepted.

God's timing, however, is always right – neither too early nor too late.

For example, we read in the book of Esther that she became queen at just the right time to save the Jewish people from destruction.

And, in Ecclesiastes we read "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens" (Eccles. 3:1).

Paul writes that, at the right time, God sent Jesus. Many scholars emphasize the "rightness" of this historical time. This was the *Pax Romana*, a time of relative peace throughout the Roman Empire. Greek was becoming the common language. The Romans had developed a system of roads to tie their empire together.

Together, these made it easier to spread the gospel throughout the world.

We have more means at our disposal to spread the gospel than those available to the early Christians. Perhaps, today might be the right time for us. We enjoy many blessings to share with others from being children of God. We have experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit working in our lives that others need to hear. We are God's children, heirs to His kingdom. Glory to God!

***Prayer:** O Lord, empower us to be your messengers to proclaim peace, to bring the Good News of your kingdom, and to share your love with others. May we understand that today is the right time. We ask this in the name of the One who is our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen*

Tom Woods
Stout Memorial United Methodist Church
Parkersburg, WV
Certified Lay Speaker

December 31, 2023 – First Sunday after Christmas

Simeon's Proclamation

[Luke 2:22-35](#)

Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word" (Luke 2:28-29)

Mary and Joseph had each been visited by angels who proclaimed 'Good News' about their child before his birth. And now this righteous man named Simeon, a man of great faith, proclaimed this baby Jesus was sent by God to bring peace to the world.

This was a huge announcement for such a small baby. But Simeon was obedient to God, and he knew this baby was different from other babies who were brought to the Temple. This baby was truly the Son of God. Simeon also knew that while Jesus would bring peace to many, the world would not believe nor accept Him.

I never had any children so I can only imagine hearing what grandparents, aunts and uncles would have said/proclaimed about my child's future. I was told very few stories about my own birth. I am not sure what plans my parents had for me or what they imagined or sensed my future would hold for me.

As a congregation within the United Methodist Church, we have the opportunity to also proclaim the Good News for each child who is baptized. The congregation is asked the historic question: Will you nurture one another in the Christian faith and life and include this child now before you in your care?

And we PROCLAIM:

With God's help we will proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ. We will surround this child with a community of love and forgiveness, that he/she may grow in their trust of God, and be faithful in their service to others. We will pray for them, that she/he may be true disciples who walk in the way that leads to life.

I cannot say this without tears falling on my face because this is an awesome responsibility and privilege to be a part of service and hopefully in this child's life.

This is just a reminder that through babies, we can still proclaim the Good News! Look around you. We can see the Holy Spirit proclaiming through others as well as each of us when we open our hearts to once again hear the proclamation of Good News.

Prayer: Lord, give me the ears to hear and the boldness to proclaim your Good News to the world. Amen

Deborah Shaffer

First United Methodist Church, Parkersburg, WV

Certified Lay Minister, District Committee on Ministry, Conference Disaster Relief Team

January 1, 2024 – New Year's Day

He will Make All Things New!

[Ecclesiastes 3: 1-13](#)

¹¹He has made everything beautiful in its time, He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. (Ecclesiastes 3: 11)

I am often told that as far as dogwood trees go the one in my backyard is huge. I am blessed with a front row seat of God at work as I watch from my double glass doors. The continuing cycle year after year is my reminder: God is consistent in His work.

Fascinated by God's creativity and intricacy, I feel renewed, encouraged and best of all, I feel closer to God. I watch amazed as February's bare, brown, gray branches slowly develop green leaves and form tiny brownish green buds. As the days grow warmer, each day I witness those tiny buds grow a fraction bigger.

By Easter, I see full green leaves with beautiful pink flowers showing through. The flowers over time become wide open to the welcoming sun. All too quickly, spring turns to summer, the flowers start to fall.

Not to be discouraged though, I see that God has provided the perfect shade tree and a home for nesting birds. We enjoy watching a variety of God's creatures seeking shelter from weather and a place to nest.

Around September, bright red berries start forming and the leaves become duller green. Once the berries become ripe and full, the birds migrating south will feast on them for months. By late November, my dogwood has completed its full cycle and is back to the brown, gray bare branches.

The good news is as I watch the dogwood go through the changes, I am reminded that God has always been, and will continue to be.

Every attribute that defines who God is lasts forever. His love for us is eternal, and He will always be in complete control of the universe.

This eternal God created us to be in relationship with Him, and He has fashioned each of us in His own image so that we might reflect to those around us who He is. Like God we have the ability to love and care for others.

God planted within us an expectation that we will be around for the rest of eternity. He offers this eternal destination to all who believe in His wonderful Son, Jesus, who gave his life so that we may be brought back into fellowship with God.

Prayer: *Eternal God, it is through you that we are empowered to be the hands and feet of Jesus. We have been chosen to proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light. As Christians, we are entrusted with the gospel and the passing on of the faith from generation to generation. We are commissioned with the mission to share the love of Christ with all the world. We pray we are bringing You glory and praise through our humble service, Lord, as we spread Your good news! Amen.*

Tammy Harris
Simpson United Methodist Church, Moundsville, WV
Certified Lay Speaker

January 2, 2024

He is Real!

[Psalm 8](#) and [Matthew 1:23](#)

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means "God with us"). (Matthew 1:23)

Several years ago, my young twin nieces joined us for church services. Our pastor at the time allowed time during the worship for a "children's sermon." All the children of the church were asked to join him on the steps leading up to the pulpit and altar.

My nieces excitedly joined him on the steps to receive a message geared especially toward youth.

I don't remember what the lesson was that day but the pastor closed his talk with the phrase "Jesus is right here with us" and patted the top of the step beside him.

He then invited the children to move closer to share the word of prayer.

One of my nieces got up to move closer to the pastor. As she started to sit down the other one shouted "Don't! You'll sit on Jesus."

We adults often talk about feeling God's presence, but it is seldom as real as it was for the young girls.

This Christmas season is important to once again have the faith of children that the babe of Bethlehem is real and lives among us through the Holy Spirit.

May we always recognize that Immanuel (God with us) is real and close by.

***Prayer:** Heavenly father: May we feel your presence in our hearts as we share your spirit during the Christmas season. Amen*

Bill Elkins
Hamlin United Methodist Church
Hamlin, WV
Worship Liturgist, Lay Leader
Chair PPRC, Delegate to Annual Conference

January 3, 2024

Slower Than Christmas

[Luke 2:36-40](#)

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. (Luke 2:36-38)

How long have you ever waited for something? *Insert jokes about a man waiting on a woman shopping.*

For a child, waiting on Christmas seems like forever, birthing the saying “slower than Christmas.”

The Prophetess Anna, awaiting the literal birth of Christ, could teach us something about waiting.

Most posit Anna was between 84 and 107 when her wait ended. Though widowed and likely impoverished, Anna remained faithful by living in the temple and worshipping the Lord night and day.

In his book, *Twelve Extraordinary Women*, John MacArthur describes how Anna must have waited for decades, “She was singularly and completely devoted to the service and worship of God – mostly through her prayers and fasting.”

During her decades of widowed loneliness while awaiting the Messiah’s appearance, I imagine Anna must have wondered, Is God still good?

Are His promises true? Is He going to come through for us as He promised?

Is He ever going to send the Promised One of Israel to save and redeem us? Anna’s faithful life demonstrated the opposite of such questions.

In the verses that precede these, when Simeon saw Mary, Joseph, and the infant Jesus in the Temple and began prophesying, Anna so expectantly awaited her Savior that upon hearing the Good News, she also began offering thanks to the Lord. The rest of her life’s work was speaking of Jesus to “all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.”

Prayer: *Lord, may we all be found worshiping you through prayer and fasting and possessing sustaining faith and love for you when you again return for your church.*

Erin Bias

Claypool United Methodist Church

Jr./Sr. High Sunday School Teacher and Certified Lay Servant

January 4, 2024

Your Light Has Come...And So Will The Camels!

[Isaiah 60:1-6](#)

*Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
(Isaiah 60:1)*

In a world often overshadowed by uncertainty and despair, the arrival of Christ's light offers us hope and renewal.

Just as the darkness of the night is pierced by the radiance of the morning sun, so too does the birth of Jesus illuminate our lives with the promise of redemption and salvation.

When I was young, I felt the darkness in a heavy way. Cowering underneath the blanket on my bed, I would shake until I fell asleep because I feared the secrets that were too daunting to uncover. Every shadow became a menacing creature waiting to pounce.

It was a phobia that had plagued me since I was old enough to comprehend the concept of night, a dread that clung to me like a relentless shadow itself. In this darkness, I felt as if demons haunted me, and I remember telling my dad how scared I was that Jesus couldn't get to me.

Much like my childhood fear of the night, the darkness of the world often plagues us. Without much effort, it convinces us that the world is a lost cause to the demons that haunt it.

Our faith is challenged, and many of us fear Jesus can no longer get to us under this shroud of darkness. How little is our faith in Christ, though, that we so easily forget the promise of his light?

As I sat shivering in my dad's arms with tears running down my face, he would say, "Don't you worry. Jesus can always get to you. Do you know why? Because he is within you."

Sure enough, as soon as I started praying for freedom from the horrors of the darkness in Jesus' name, my fear gradually vanished until I was no longer afraid.

Like we see in Isaiah 60, Jesus is the light that has come to eradicate darkness. That light, the glory of the Lord, is within each of us.

When we believe this, we will be radiant, our hearts will thrill and rejoice, multitudes of camels will come to us... In other words, the wealth of nations will come to us.

Prayer: God: This year, let us kindle the flame of faith in our hearts, rejoicing in the light that dispels the shadows of fear and doubt, and may we share this luminous hope with others. Amen.

David Westfall
Forrest Burdette Memorial UMC, Hurricane, WV
Minister of Youth and Young Adults

January 5th, 2024

Take Hope

[Psalm 72:1-7](#)

Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. May he judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. May the mountains bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. May he defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; may he crush the oppressor. May he endure as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations. May he be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth. In his days may the righteous flourish and prosperity abound till the moon is no more.

On January 5, Christ had been on Earth for only a few days. In hindsight, we can attest to his brilliance, his selflessness, and above all, his love. However, before all that, he was but a babe, a series of cells with something unknowable and truly magnificent under the surface.

Solomon, along with all people prior to Jesus' crucifixion, was forced to simply wait and hope for a future savior.

Oftentimes today, we start to lose hope. In times of suffering and worry, it can seem almost impossible to hope.

Looking to my future (as a youth), I see a huge amount of debt I must take on for college. I see the development of a housing bubble making it hard for me to own property. I see inflation making my savings grow thinner and thinner. I see politics becoming increasingly polarizing and tearing apart communities. I see dangerous changes to the very climate in which we all live and breathe.

For many Americans of all backgrounds, the future can seem dim.

Solomon hopes for a future king just like Jesus. He hopes for one who can crush the oppressors, save the needy, judge truly, let righteousness abound, and reign forever.

Today, just like when Solomon lived, we are ruled by flawed leaders in a flawed system. However, as Solomon did, we must look to the future with hope. We must have faith in our God to bring us safely once again towards greener pastures.

And not only must we hope, but we must work towards a better future.

If we all work together, attending church, donating to charity, and volunteering our time, we can make the future seem just a little bit brighter. In conclusion, take hope like Solomon and use this Christian hope to help make the world better.

Prayer: *Lord, help us to have hope in the future. Let us not worry about trivialities and wantings of this world but focus on your spiritual and never ending love. Help us to not only hope for a better future, but to help will it into existence. Amen.*

Wesley DeLeurere
Wesley United Methodist Church
Morgantown, WV
Lay Youth, Staff-Parish Relations Committee Member

January 6, 2024

Abounding Joy
Matthew 2:1-12

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ~ Matthew 2:10

The visit of the “wise men” is a famous story—but what exactly is it intended to teach us?

To begin with, the focus is on “worship” (three times repeated in these twelve verses), and a contrast between the response of Herod and the response of the Magi (or the “wise men”).

Herod responds in fear, and a vicious secret plot begins to brew in his mind to protect his kingdom from this apparent threat of the newborn king. The Magi have come to worship, and because of this, they experienced great joy, rejoicing with great joy. Herod pretends that he too wishes to worship, but the reality is very different.

The Christ-child has always called us to respond either in faith in worship, or if we find his rule a threat, we may find ourselves responding in a more Herod-like fashion. There are “Herods” today who object to the exclusivity of Christ, the claim of his kingship, the claim that he is the Savior (and the only Savior).

Somewhere inside all of us, there is a tendency to give way to fear, and fear that this king will uproot our little Herod-like kingdom over our own world and neighborhood, and our own little empire. And in a way He will.

He must be worshipped, and therefore He must be put back on the throne of our lives. But when we do that, we also experience joy, great joy, exceeding joy.

The other theme here, of course, is that of the Magi or the “wise men.” In ancient culture these Magi were thought to represent an astrological or astronomical star gazing, an Eastern wisdom, perhaps even “magic.”

They function here in this story first to remind the hearers that Jesus was also about bringing people of all cultures and races to worship him. Second, they also function to tell us that all wisdom—even this strange Eastern wisdom—is really one that finds its fulfillment in Christ.

He is Lord of heaven and earth, and, yes, of the stars too, this miraculous star leading the way.

Come then, bow before him, and worship him as the real King, put away our Herod-like fears, and join with the Magi in experiencing and sharing in our great Christian joy.

***Prayer:** Loving God, Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, I love you and thank you for sending Jesus. Please receive my heartfelt worship and praise for his worthiness and glory and use me to advance his cause in the world. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

Sheila Radochio
St. Andrew United Methodist Church
St. Albans, WV
Certified Lay Minister