2026 ADVENT DAILY DEVOTIONALS



STAR CHILD, EARTH CHILD, GOD'S HOLY CHILD

BAKER MEMORIAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Star Child, Earth Child, God's Holy Child

This year's theme is based on the Gospel of Matthew 2:1-12 and the Christmas song *Star-Child* with words by Shirley Erena Murray and music by Carlton Young.

Matthew 2:1-12, NIV
After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi[a] from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

> "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
> are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
> for out of you will come a ruler
> who will shepherd my people Israel.'[b]"

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Sunday November 11, 2026, 1st Sunday of Advent

Read: Isaiah 64:1-9, I Corinthians 1:3-9, Mark 13:24-37 (NRSVUE)

"…You were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself, we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth…Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people." Isaiah 64:1-9 (NRSVUE)

The next time I attempt to dust the baseboards of the parsonage, I will look at the grime on the rag and think of this passage: "and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth." Welcome to Advent! At the start of the Advent season were you expecting something warm and fuzzy? Friend, that comes AFTER the preparatory work. It is time to prepare for the Lord's coming to earth.

The scripture text for the first Sunday introduces the prophetic words of Isaiah. Whether as a single voice or as the collective wisdom of the ancient Hebrews (Isaiah is written from both perspectives in different sections) these words remind us that the human condition, our mortal existence, is incredibly dependent upon a God who is angered by our sin but who also delivers us from it! The individual and the people who struggle to know liberation can find it in the Lord God. Now is the time to trust, to believe and to receive the forgiveness our Savior offers.

Our souls are in God's hands – who fashions us – as a potter into purposeful objects of God's desires. Advent encourages us to be clay (much better than dust or grime) that we may once again be molded by the One who comes not to condemn but to save us from ourselves, from the brokenness of society and the things by which

we contribute to a world in need of salvation. Advent returns us to the One who formed us from the Genesis dust of the earth and breathed into us life calling us “GOOD!” May we anticipate the holiness and earthiness of Christ’s arrival as Jesus, the babe of Bethlehem, Star-Child, Earth-Child. Shine bright upon us, O Christ. Let’s get ready!

Sunday Intercessory Prayer and Petitions from The United Methodist Book of Worship:

God of the ages, we praise you, for the dawn of time you created the world, sending light by your Word to dispel darkness. In Jesus Christ you began a new creation, sending him to be the Light of the world, to drive away fear and despair, and to rule in peace and justice, holiness, and love.
Especially we thank you
For the order and beauty of your creation…
For coming in Jesus Christ to share our human life…
For the place you give us in your continuing creation…
For the promise of peace among nations, and justice for all peoples…
For the Church as the sign of your coming kingdom…

Mighty God, prepare the world for your rule, for we long for the day when there shall be no more crying or tears, and death will be destroyed. Help us to share the ministry of Christ and be agents of his compassion.

Especially we pray
For the nations of the earth and peace in the world…
For victims and survivors of violence…
For those who are sick and suffering…
For our families and friends…
For the Church and those who serve in Christ’s name…

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Written by the Reverend David Aslesen

Monday November 30, 2026

Read: Revelation 15:1-8 (NLT)

I saw before me what seemed to be a glass sea mixed with fire. And on it stood all the people who had been victorious over the beast and his statue and the number representing his name. They were all holding harps that God had given them. And they were singing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb:

"Great and marvelous are your works,
O Lord God, the Almighty.
Just and true are your ways,
O King of the nations.
Who will not fear you, Lord,
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come and worship before you,
for your righteous deeds have been revealed."
Revelation 15:2-4 (NLT)

Reading Revelation during Advent? While at first it might seem a bit odd, remember that Advent is a time in which we both remember the birth of Jesus two thousand years ago, and look forward to his return.

In this part of his vision, John of Patmos is shown the people "who had been victorious over the beast," which in his day most likely

meant those who had refused to worship the Roman emperor—and very possibly paid for this with their lives. Yet they are celebrating, singing a song reminiscent of the song Moses and Miram led the Hebrew people in after they were led out of bondage in Pharaoh's Egypt. But they have added to the song, for it is now also the song of Jesus, the Lamb of God, who leads all people out of bondage to sin.

The heavenly vision is inspiring. The earthly reality of John's day was not so great: the emperor demanded worship, under penalty of death. Many scholars believe the "number of the beast" was a not-very-secret code for the emperor's name being stamped on Roman coins, so that people could not conduct business without acknowledging his authority. The heavenly context of the vision suggests that the people singing were martyrs who had died for their faith. Yet they are singing joyfully, knowing they have been saved by the Lamb.

What does this passage mean to us today? Our earthly reality is a long way from John's vision of heaven. We are a long way from seeing "all the people" victorious over the idols of our age and singing joyfully together. We are divided by race, by class, by politics, and even religion is weaponized to divide us and try to separate us from Christ. We need Someone to rescue us! And so, we prepare to celebrate the birth of that Someone long ago... and wait eagerly for that Someone to return.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, in this season when we remember your earthly birth, help us to also look forward to your return. Amen.

Written by Dan Starr

Tuesday December 1, 2026

Read: Revelation 18:1-10 (NLT)

After all this I saw another angel come down from heaven with great authority, and the earth grew bright with his splendor. He gave a mighty shout:

"Babylon is fallen—that great city is fallen!
She has become a home for demons.
She is a hideout for every foul spirit,
a hideout for every foul vulture
and every foul and dreadful animal.
For all the nations have fallen
because of the wine of her passionate immorality.
The kings of the world
have committed adultery with her.
Because of her desires for extravagant luxury,
the merchants of the world have grown rich."

Then I heard another voice calling from heaven,

"Come away from her, my people.
Do not take part in her sins,
or you will be punished with her.
For her sins are piled as high as heaven,
and God remembers her evil deeds.

Revelation 18:1-5 (NLT)

"Babylon" in the Bible has always been more an idea than a place: the world's center of power, wealth, and luxury. In the days of the prophet Daniel, Babylon was Nebuchadnezzar's capital, between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. When John had his vision,

“Babylon” referred to the great city of Rome (according to Biblical scholars). And today...? We might just be living there ourselves.

Unfortunately, where there is wealth and power, evil is never far away. “Babylon” is also the place where greed is considered “good,” where it’s accepted that some people are “better” than others and have the right to dominate and exploit those deemed “lesser” (remember that in John’s day, fully a third of the Roman population was enslaved). It is the city where the “street child, beat child” has “no place left to go,” and the “hurt child, used child” finds “no one wants to know” and no one offers help. Revelation reminds us that the city of Babylon and the city of God are incompatible; when Christ returns “and God remembers her evil deeds,” the great city will be swept away. The voice from heaven warns, “come away from her, my people.”

When that voice calls, it is not telling us to run from a specific place (for in these times, where is there to go?); it is warning us to “not take part in her sins.” We are to build, within the walls of Babylon, the city of the Star Child who will be born on Christmas. Can we accept this challenge? Can we be *in* Babylon but *of* God’s kingdom? As we await the birth of the Christ Child, let us resolve to make a Christmas that is for everyone, rich and poor, honored and exploited, from the greatest to the supposed least.

Blessed Jesus, as we prepare to celebrate your birth, help us to come out of Babylon, to live in your city of love and joy, and to share that city with everyone. Amen.

Written by Dan Starr



Wednesday, December 2, 2026

Read: Luke 21:34-38 NIV

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man. Luke 21:34-36 (NIV)

Our theme for this Advent is Star Child, Earth Child, God's Child. I began to reflect on the characteristic traits of such children and how these might relate to the newborn Savior and His plan for our lives.

The mythical view of a Star Child coming from outer space is of course not real. However, there are some very gifted children, deep thinkers who seem to possess a natural adherence to psychic or spiritual awareness at a very young age. They exhibit abilities far advanced from the developmental milestone of the average child. Their special gift is to see beyond the ordinary and to envision possibilities far and above the mundane and wounded world. They are an inspiration and a role model to all.

Earth Children embody a deep connection to nature and their environment. Their holistic view demonstrates a deep respect for people and their planet. The healthy Earth Child strives to be a person of integrity who values inclusion, imagination, spiritual growth, and continued learning. They, too, are an inspiration and a role model to all.

God's Child, born to us at Christmas, has come to bless each of us and to inspire us to heed His command: Choose the path that will

lead us to Him. During His time on earth, Jesus showed compassion for the hopeless and melted the hearts of sinners. He spoke to truth and justice and courageously confronted iniquities. He overcame adversity, humbly forgave, and above all, taught us to value love! Through His example and His investment in our well-being, He is our ultimate gift, all that we will ever need! As God's Child here today, how will you use your gifts and talents to demonstrate your love for Him and inspire others?

Lord, how grateful we are for the unique gifts and talents you have provided for each of us. May we humbly strive each day to use our hands, hearts, and minds to the honor of your name, in Jesus Christ we pray.

Written by Isie Barclay

Thursday December 3, 2026

Read: Hosea 6:1-6 (NIV)

For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings. Hosea 6:6 (NIV)

My study Bible puts this thought very succinctly: "Religious rituals can help people understand God and nourish their relationship with him. That is why God instituted circumcision and the sacrificial system in the Old Testament and baptism and the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. But a religious ritual is helpful only if it is carried out with an attitude of love for and obedience to God. If a person's heart is far from God, ritual will become empty mockery. Why do you worship?"

What is your why? Throughout my adult life, it has become more and more apparent that “my why” for the activities I’ve chosen to devote a lot of time to is really more important than the actual outcome. I spend a notable number of hours every week training for various races that I participate in. My real goal in this is to stay as healthy as I can for as long as I can. That is what gets me out of bed at 5:00 or 5:30 am. Crossing a finish line is always fun, but that joy lasts only a short time. The consistent training for better health has to be the driving force for me.

I’ve sung in our choir for 40 years. We are reminded that we are singing for an audience of One, to the glory of God. But it’s not just about a Sunday morning anthem. “My why” is that it’s the opportunity to offer this gift alongside people that are among my dearest friends. We truly care about and support each other in all areas of our lives. It gets me to choir on Wednesday even after long days at work.

If I reflect on “my why” in nourishing my relationship with God it is clear that He is demanding that same consistent, focused, and legitimate work to grow our relationship. Real repentance, real joy in helping and accepting others, real joy in giving. Walking up to the communion rail without a commitment to ask forgiveness and be better is not enough.

In many endeavors, the “why” is a worthy effort but the outcome is not necessarily guaranteed. In this case, if we can make a good faith effort to improve our closeness to God, He offers a resounding Yes. Kept promises are a very special gift. This one sits right in front of us if we choose to do our part.

Dear God, let me offer my best and most sincere efforts to You, not only in the outward things I do but in my heart. Amen.

Written by Sandie Benhart

Friday December 4, 2026

Read: Jeremiah 1:4-10 (NLT)

The LORD gave me a message:

**“I knew you before I formed you in your mother’s womb.
Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations.”**

“O Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I can’t speak for you! I’m too young!”

The LORD replied, “Don’t say, ‘I’m too young,’ for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you. And don’t be afraid of the people, for I will be with you and will protect you. I, the LORD, have spoken!” Then the LORD touched my mouth and said,

**“Look, I have put my words in your mouth!
Today I appoint you to stand up against nations and kingdoms.
Some of you must uproot and tear them down, destroy and overthrow.
Others you must build up and plant.”
Jeremiah 1:4-10 (NLT)**

Then there was the moment that time stood still. Prayer in isolation can teach us that silence is the supreme language of God. The

distractions, busyness and noise of the world are not our masters. In our quiet place we can approach the threshold of God's divine presence. To initiate communion with God we breathe deeply each time saying the mantra: praise God, love God, trust God, thank God, know God. Now in silence and hard listening we wait for God to speak. Just as God spoke to Jeremiah in ancient times saying "I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born, I set you apart and appointed you as my spokesman to the world." Today, He wants to speak to us. Are we ready to listen?

In our quiet place each morning, we can listen to God reveal his plan for our life today. As we interact with people, we can change their lives in a good way with kind words and encouragement sharing the provisions God gives us with them. God chose Jeremiah to be His ambassador, but he said, "O Sovereign Lord," I can't speak for you! I'm too young!" "Don't say that" the lord replied, "for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you. And don't be afraid of the people, for I will be with you and take care of you. I, the Lord, have spoken!"

We, like Jeremiah are chosen by God to be His ambassadors. We are commissioned to live each day following Jesus as our model and teacher to share the Good News to all who will listen. Jesus frequently went to a quiet place to commune with his Father. Once, when He returned his disciples asked Him, "what are the most important commandments?" He said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind." Secondly, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Let us obey God's commandment's each day in our work and in our leisure, During Advent we anticipate and celebrate the birth of Jesus. Although the commercialism of Christmas will always be here, may God's Light and the true meaning of Christmas shine though us into the world.

Holy Father, Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit, we thank you for giving us one more day. Help us worship you in Truth and in Spirit each day. Guide us so that your plan for our lives may be fulfilled. Amen

Written by Dave Wilson

Saturday, December 5, 2026

Read: Ezekiel 36:24-28 (NIV)

For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God. Ezekiel 36: 24-28 (NIV)

The Book of Ezekiel from the Old Testament is a prophetic book written by the priest-prophet Ezekiel while in exile in Babylon. The first half of the book contains oracles and prophecies condemning foreign powers for their malice toward Israel during its fall from grace.

The second half of the book is a shift to restoration and future blessings. Chapter 36 is part of this shift. In chapter 36, we hear the Lord promising salvation and a new land. The Lord is very clear prior to these verses that He is cleansing His people for his name's sake; to vindicate His own Holy name.
In these verses, the promise is more than simply a restoration of land, it is an inner restoration for renewal. God won't just gather His

people and bring them back to their land; He will cleanse them and put a new heart and spirit in them.

Today, we might think of God returning us to our own land as God securing our shelter or our work or our food sources. Like the Israelites who longed to be returned to their land, we long for these basic securities. But, having our land returned or our basic needs secured, means nothing if our hearts are hardened or unclean. Even with our own land and needs secured, life is not tenable, and far from enjoyable, if we do not have our hearts aligned with God.

Our advent theme is ‘Star Child, Earth Child, God’s Holy Child.’ In this passage, the Lord is addressing his earth children and promising inner renewal. By cleansing us and putting a new spirit in us, He is making us His holy children. Is this not similar to what is to come when Jesus becomes an earth child and then sacrifices himself as God’s holy child? This passage in Ezekiel about becoming God’s people is a glimpse of what is coming when Jesus dies on the cross for us to become God’s people.

Ask yourself, how can I know God has given me a new heart and spirit? What evidence do I see in my life of these things?

Loving God, we pray that you continue to work in our lives, creating a new spirit and a new heart. May we act as your people on this earth, doing your will and following your ways.

Written by Chandra Gravit

Sunday December 6, 2026 - 2nd Sunday of Advent

Read: Isaiah 40:1-11, 2 Peter 3:8-15, Mark 1:1-8 (NRSVUE)

A voice says, “Cry out!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All flesh is grass; their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers; the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers; the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. Isaiah 40:1-11 (NRSVUE)

Seminary preaching professor Dr. Chatfield had each student come forward to take a “mystery” scripture passage out of the hat and prepare a five-minute impromptu sermon on the spot. Guess who got this passage? It is one of those passages – whether as a preacher or a listener – you don’t quite forget. Adaptive defenses (primitive or otherwise) or notions of self-resilience within our psyche gets checked by the naked truth offered by this passage.

Our flesh is fragile. Our time on earth is short. The grass has its season. Each blade is destined to die.

And yet there is the perennial blessing of the Lord’s word (interpreted as logos and wisdom) that more than fills our lungs. The Word sustains us with an eternal promise of God’s keeping throughout our living – and our dying, too. Is there comfort for us in this passage? Perhaps it comes in knowing the powerfully merciful nature of our Creator who does not abandon us to worry or fear. Does the flower ever fear the end of summer?

God in Christ is coming to us as the infant Jesus to affirm life is a gift – for however long we take our breath. And when life becomes difficult our faith can find its foundation in the One whose love and care remain forever ours.

Sunday Intercessory Prayer and Petitions from The United Methodist Book of Worship:

God of the ages, we praise you, for the dawn of time you created the world, sending light by your Word to dispel darkness. In Jesus Christ you began a new creation, sending him to be the Light of the world, to drive away fear and despair, and to rule in peace and justice, holiness, and love.
Especially we thank you
For the order and beauty of your creation…
For coming in Jesus Christ to share our human life…
For the place you give us in your continuing creation…
For the promise of peace among nations, and justice for all peoples…
For the Church as the sign of your coming kingdom…

Mighty God, prepare the world for your rule, for we long for the day when there shall be no more crying or tears, and death will be destroyed. Help us to share the ministry of Christ and be agents of his compassion.

Especially we pray
For the nations of the earth and peace in the world…
For victims and survivors of violence…
For those who are sick and suffering…
For our families and friends…
For the Church and those who serve in Christ's name…
All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Written by the Reverend David Aslesen



Monday December 7, 2026

Read: Acts 2:37-42 (RSV)

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:37-38 (RSV)

Today’s scripture is a portion of the address Peter made to 3000 Jews, from all over and speaking many languages. His speech was made during Pentecost and just after the receiving of the Holy Spirit by the apostles. When Peter went outside, the miracle of the crowd hearing each other speak in their own languages and yet being understood by everyone was taking place.

Peter engaged them and explained in Acts 2, verses 22-24, “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know - this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having tossed the pangs of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it.” Then in Acts 2, verse 36, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

The people gathered were full of guilt and asked what they were to do. In verse 38, “And Peter said to them, “Repent, be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” And in verse 39, “For the promise is to you and to your children and to all

that are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.”, Peter extends God’s reach beyond those present.

Peter offers repentance, baptism into Christ’s family, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and assurance that this gift and the teachings of Christ are for the world.

This mass conversion is the birth of Christianity. From this moment people all over the world began to hear about the teachings and life of Jesus and could choose to be baptized into the family of Christ.

Today, we continue to learn about the doctrines of our faith and the teachings of Christ. We share Fellowship and support each other. We break bread for communion and have potlucks and dinners together. And we pray for everyone in need as a congregation and in private.

This all started with Peter’s address to the 3000 as the Holy Spirit poured forth from him and began Christianity as we know it.

Jesus is for everyone. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Let us be devoted to Christ’s teachings, fellowship with one another, and continue to pray for the Holy Spirit to work through us for the betterment of our world.

Lord give us the desire to follow the teachings of Christ. The ability to discern good from evil and to effect positively the world around us. And during this Christmas season help us to find acts of compassion we can do for others in need. Amen

Written by Allan Scales

Tuesday December 8, 2026

Read: Acts 11:1-18 (CSB)

I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ “No, Lord! I said. ‘For nothing impure or ritually unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ But a voice answered from heaven a second time, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call impure.’” Acts 11:7-9 (CSB)

I remember the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If, then, God gave them the same gift that he also gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, how could I possibly hinder God? When they heard this they became silent. And they glorified God, saying, “So then, God has given repentance resulting in life even to the Gentiles.” Acts 11:16-18 (CSB)

The book of Acts is about the unstoppable process of the gospel. It looks to show how the gospel moved from its Jewish roots in Jerusalem outward into the Gentile world. Luke's overriding purpose was to demonstrate that the advance of the church is the work of God and the fulfillment of his plan to bring salvation to the end of the Earth.

This passage in Acts 11:1-18 is the story about a dream that Peter had while praying. In the dream, he saw a large sheet being let down from heaven. On the sheet he saw four footed animals of the Earth, the wild beasts, birds, and reptiles. He heard a voice telling him, “Get up, kill and eat.” Peter replied, “surely not Lord, nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.” The voice spoke a second time: “do not call anything impure that God has made

clean.” This happened three times. Things are told three times in scripture when a point is to be emphasized.

Then someone knocked on Peter's door. It was three men who had been sent from Caesarea. Peter was told by the Spirit to have no hesitation going with these men. Peter, with witnesses, went to this man’s house. The man told Peter how he’d seen an angel that told him to send for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and your household will be saved.

If Peter had not had the dream that told him, “Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean,” he would never have gone to the Gentile’s house. He never would have presented the message of salvation. They would never have received the Holy Spirit.

We have the message of Jesus Christ being spread to the Gentiles. God has told us the message is for all people. This passage is about inclusion. Peter never would have gone to a Gentile’s house without receiving the message from God. Peter and the disciples “othered” the Gentiles. “Othering” is a way of negating another person’s humanity. Consequently, people who are “othered” are seen as less worthy of dignity and respect.

Where are we today, subtly “othering” people? Excluding those who aren't like us? Or maybe we are more blatant in our exclusion? I hope not.

This year, this year, let the day arrive when Christmas comes for everyone, everyone alive!

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. I pray that we have learned and remembered that EVERYONE is a child of God. That the Christ child is for ALL. In Jesus name. Amen

Written by Kim Starr

Wednesday December 9, 2026

Read: Luke 1:5-17 (NIV)

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth. Luke 1:11-14 (NIV)

Luke 1:5-17 fits the theme "Star Child, Earth Child, God's Holy Child" through its story of answered prayer. An angel tells Zechariah that he and Elizabeth will have a child whose life will prepare the way for Jesus.

The angel tells Zechariah, "Your prayer has been heard." How often do we pray, then wonder whether anyone cares or whether God has heard us? Curious, I looked it up and learned that about 650 prayers are recorded in the Bible, with roughly 450 described as answered.

In 1 Samuel, Hannah also prays earnestly for a son, and God grants her request. In faith and gratitude, she keeps her promise and dedicates her son to the Lord.

When our prayers are answered, do we share Zechariah's joy, or do we feel surprised—even disappointed—when the answer differs from what we hoped? Can we trust that the answer serves God's larger plan for us?

In this season of anticipation and joy surrounding the Holy Child, remember that God not only hears our prayers but answers them according to His plan.

Written by Betty Erickson

Thursday December 10, 2026

Read: Habakkuk 2:1-5 (NRSVUE)

I will stand at my watch post and station myself on the rampart: I will keep watch to see what he will say to me and what he will answer concerning my complain.
Habakkuk 2:1 (NRSVUE)

Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!

In our scripture reading today we find ourselves in the middle of a dispute, Habakkuk is waiting for a response from God concerning a complaint. Specifically, Habakkuk is lamenting the cruelty of the Chaldeans and the conditions of life under Babylonian control, he does not hold back when he finally asks God directly “Your eyes are too pure to behold evil, and you cannot look on wrongdoing; why do you look on the treacherous, and are silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they?” (Hab. 1:13) Our reading today is the just the beginning of God’s answer, but it is foundational and once you know it to be true is a source of great comfort and hope.

The answer came loud and clear to Habakkuk and God wanted it to be loud and clear to humankind too: God’s response will come in good time, in God’s time. The proud are ill of spirit and the arrogant

will not endure, but the righteous live by faith. Faith in what? In God's steadfast trustworthiness and unfailing love for creation.

I have experienced the faithfulness of God in ways big and small and try to recall the many blessings God has bestowed on me quickly when things don't work out the way I had hoped or expected. I have asked God something like what Habakkuk did and have pled for mercy and justice to prevail. But of course, it is our work to do on behalf of, in honor of, and for the glory of God; we are the ones lacking mercy and justice, we are the ones who can change what we do with that – with God's faithfulness. Maybe that's why God's time is so slow, we're being given an opportunity to do something for God. Maybe the question isn't "God, why do you look on" but why do we? Either way, God is here.

The remainder of chapter 2, verses 6-20, detail God's future plans for the wicked and the book closes with chapter 3, a prayer from Habakkuk for deliverance from his enemies which closes:

Though the fig tree does not blossom and no fruit is on the vines;
though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food;
though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation.
God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer
and makes me tread upon the heights. Habakkuk 3:17-19 (NRSVUE)

May we feel the presence of the God of all Creation in our lives today and every day and be changed by knowing it.

“Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, Blessings all mine and ten thousand beside.” - Great is Thy Faithfulness

Written by Mandy Hale

Friday December 11, 2026

Read: Habakkuk 3:2-6 (NIV)

Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy. Habakkuk 3:2 (NIV)

The Book of Habakkuk applies to us today by giving a model for how to wrestle with doubt, face cultural injustice, and choose faith when the world does not make sense. Instead of delivering a message from God to the people, Habakkuk speaks to God with raw honesty about the violence, corruption, and confusion of his time.

Habakkuk's prayer, if we look back one verse, begins in Chapter 1 with unfiltered complaints about violence. He then shifts in Chapter 2 to waiting with patience for God’s word as he remembers what God did in the past. In Chapter 3, his prayer shifts, choosing to trust and rejoice in God.

We simply need to look at Habakkuk’s prayer life to see what a personal transition looks like, a powerful example of spiritual growth. Christian theology weaves Habakkuk’s intimate prayer life together with the arrival of Jesus, recognized in the scriptures as God’s "Holy Child." Habakkuk mentions the Holy One in verse 3. Habakkuk 2:4 (the most powerful verse) states “the just shall live by

faith.” Romans 1:17 states “righteousness is revealed by faith in Jesus.” Habakkuk did not know the name "Jesus" or the specific details of the New Testament gospel, though his prophecies pointed toward God’s ultimate plan of redemption.

Can this prayer be a model for our prayers today? It absolutely can! I believe that we must pray boldly for our world today, remembering God’s faithfulness in the past, and ask God to help our generation and show us mercy. If we cannot see God's hand, we must remember His past faithfulness and trust His heart.

Father in Heaven: We pray for our country and our world. May your spirit bring us to a kinder gentler place. Bring peace to lands caught in conflict, wisdom to our leaders, protection to the vulnerable, comfort to those that are hurting and help us to heal our communities and our planet. In the name of God’s Holy Child, our savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN

Written by Chris Stumpf

Saturday December 12, 2026

Read: Psalm 126 (NKJV)

When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion,
We were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing.
Then they said among the nations,
“The Lord has done great things for them.”
The Lord has done great things for us,
And we are glad.

Bring back our captivity, O Lord,
As the streams in the South.
Those who sow in tears
Shall reap in joy.
He who continually goes forth weeping,
Bearing seed for sowing,
Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,
Bringing his sheaves with him.
Psalm 126:1–6 (NKJV)

Psalm 126 is a hymn of joy, celebrating all that God has done for His people. What is especially meaningful is that it also acknowledges that, along with joy, hardships still exist. The psalm reminds us that joy and sorrow are often intertwined and that some of life's greatest blessings emerge from the most difficult moments. There's something especially meaningful about the image of a farmer planting seeds through his tears. He can't know what the harvest will bring, but he plants anyway, holding on to the hope that something beautiful will grow from his efforts.

That same sense of faith and hope is what Advent is all about. We wait, we believe, and we trust that God has a plan, even when we can't see what it might be. Life is very much the same way. No matter how carefully we plan, things often don't turn out the way we hoped. We lose people we love, important relationships end, our health deteriorates, fulfilling jobs disappear, and sometimes life simply takes a turn we never saw coming. But like the farmer, we must find the faith to keep going and trust that God is working on our behalf, even when it doesn't feel that way. Advent reminds us that amid our hardest trials and our darkest seasons, there is always hope.

I certainly wouldn't have chosen some of the painful experiences I've been through. But looking back, I can see how they brought unexpected gifts into my life: people who lifted me up, love I learned to accept without reservation, and a perspective I never would have gained otherwise.

As we celebrate Advent and the birth of Jesus, we're reminded that hope doesn't mean a life without hardship, but rather the assurance that God is with us through it all. It's a time to be grateful for the blessings we've already received and to trust Him with what lies ahead. And remember that life's greatest gifts can grow out of our most difficult experiences in ways we never saw coming.

Dear God, thank You for the many blessings in our lives, including those we may not recognize until much later. Help us to trust You when life is difficult, to keep moving forward in faith, and to find hope even in our sorrow. Open our hearts to the unexpected gifts You place along our journey and remind us to always be grateful for Your love and goodness. Amen.

Written by Lisa Weier

Sunday December 12, 2026 – 3rd Sunday of Advent

Read: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24, John 1:6-8, 19-28 (NRSVUE)

“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor…” Isaiah 61:1-2 (NRSVUE)

This passage from the prophecy of Isaiah is quoted by Jesus in the gospel of Luke. Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus returns to his hometown Nazareth ready to begin his ministry. As used in the Advent season, when we await the birth of the Messiah, the passage affirms the Spirit's power is with the infant Jesus, too. But how might a baby bring about the redemption of an entire people? Maybe it is about the power of hope.

Hope is one tool for our waiting time: an instrument to analyze the present condition of mind, body, and soul. Maybe your hope for yourself, your loved ones, our world has been damaged, bruised. Is having hope always easy? No. Hope has to be more than a logical conclusion. You can't think your way to having hope nor is it accessible by collecting evidence. More than a feeling, hope of an Isaiah kind is to be a lifestyle, a daily routine – never to become stale or naïve – but active, expectant, resilient and powerful – for in this way it will resemble Isaiah's.

Isaiah's time isn't so dissimilar to our own. Isaiah's world was much smaller than our own but in some ways the conflicts are the same: civil unrest, suspicion of government, economic distress, and the hardship of a people. And Isaiah writes these conflicts will not be overcome by throwing up hands in discouragement or by dismissiveness or merely being optimistic. Isaiah sees these conflicts as having a spiritual dimension. God's intervention is required.

The prophet knows: hope is associated with the action of God to overcome what is currently plaguing humankind. According to Isaiah, God will install a new way of being, living and moving about the earth. This will come through God's Holy Christ, our Jesus, who promises to us the power of hope. This is the word offered by the prophet Isaiah.

Sunday Intercessory Prayer and Petitions from The United Methodist Book of Worship:

God of the ages, we praise you, for the dawn of time you created the world, sending light by your Word to dispel darkness. In Jesus Christ you began a new creation, sending him to be the Light of the world, to drive away fear and despair, and to rule in peace and justice, holiness, and love.
Especially we thank you
For the order and beauty of your creation…
For coming in Jesus Christ to share our human life…
For the place you give us in your continuing creation…
For the promise of peace among nations, and justice for all peoples…
For the Church as the sign of your coming kingdom…

Mighty God, prepare the world for your rule, for we long for the day when there shall be no more crying or tears, and death will be destroyed. Help us to share the ministry of Christ and be agents of his compassion.

Especially we pray
For the nations of the earth and peace in the world…
For victims and survivors of violence…
For those who are sick and suffering…
For our families and friends…
For the Church and those who serve in Christ's name…
All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Written by the Reverend David Aslesen



Monday, December 14, 2026

Read: Ephesians 6:10-17 (NIV)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

This passage reminds us that, as God's children, we must remain strong against evil forces and recognize that all true power comes from Him. It calls us to take a stand against the devil and to live a righteous life rooted in truth and integrity. Ultimately, the word of God provides salvation and protects our minds.

Dear Lord, As God's holy children, please help us to remain steadfast in our faith when challenged by evil ways. Safeguard us against our doubts and fears with Your gospel of peace so that we may stand strong. In Your Holy Name We Pray, Amen

Written by Linda Hefferin

Tuesday December 15, 2026

Read: 2 Kings 2:9-22 (ESV)

Now when the sons of the prophets who were in Jericho saw him opposite them they said, The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha. 2 Kings 2:15 (ESV)

In this reading Elijah was testing Elisha's commitment in taking his position as a prophet. God put Elijah in front of Elisha and got a double portion of God's spirit. But the fifty strong servants still needed to do the due diligence in searching for their old leader Elijah, and when they got back, he gave the ole' I told you so approach and went on to heal the city.

We all feel the need to do our due diligence in things we do, and it helps with buying a car. Usually, the answer is the same, but it helps us make the decision. The Lord is behind the scenes doing the diligence for us. Let the Spirit within us do the due diligence for us and through us. God's driving and he's got us. Then we can fully know we are in the right place or making the right decision.

Our God who loves us and is testing our love for Him. Let us be patient in these times of uncertainty, to not let evils ones question us and say, well it's okay to do this or that and make ungodly decisions.

It is tough being a Christian. We all have a portion of the Lord's spirit in us. Let us lean on the Spirit as much as we can to get through our day-to-day circumstance.

Dear Lord, engulf us with your spirit of kindness and love and let us use it. Your will always and forever! Amen. Thank you, Jesus!

Written by Carl Masters

Wednesday December 16, 2026

Read: Psalm 125 (NIV)

Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever.

As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people both now and forevermore.
The scepter of the wicked will not remain over the land allotted to the righteous, for then the righteous might use their hands to do evil.
Lord, do good to those who are good, to those who are upright in heart.
But those who turn to crooked ways the Lord will banish with the evildoers.
Peace be on Israel. Psalm 125 (NIV)

This Psalm would be easy to memorize! It's short and to the point. It is called a psalm of ascension or a song of ascent. In these days of confusion and challenges that can leave us in a lonely place, this psalm reassures us of God's constancy.

God provides unshakeable, permanent care; encircling us with His divine presence like the mountains that surround Jerusalem. The wicked will not prevail! Reject temptation and keep "doing the right thing."

Let shalom rule your heart and don't let the cynicism and bitterness of the world damage you.

Written by Cathie Ruth

Thursday December 17, 2026

Read: Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 (NIV)

I will sing of the Lord's great love forever;
With my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations.
I will declare that your love stands firm forever,
That you established your faithfulness in heaven itself.
You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one.
I have sworn to David my servant.
'I will establish your line forever
And make your throne firm through all generations.'" Psalms 89:1-4 (NIV)

What powerful words this psalm uses to describe God's eternal love! Great words of praise are given to God because He is steadfast and faithful. God promises not just protection and blessings but says he "will establish" his line forever through David. Thus, He makes a sacred covenant with David and with the world.

After reading the whole Psalm 89, however, it is obvious that believing these words is not as easy as it appears at first. We live in a broken world, both in ancient times and today. This is a world where there are many sorrows, injustices, and tribulations. It's easy to proclaim rich words of praise for the Lord when all is going well, but when the hard times arrive, and the storms appear, then it is more difficult to believe in God's steadfast love.

This psalm reminds us, that God is there not only in the good times, but also during the trials of life as well. It tells us of God's steadfast love, his loyalty, his protection even when times are not easy. Sometimes we look at the world around us, and we think all is lost. At times we despair and feel alone, but this psalm reminds us that God IS our constant companion. God did fulfill His covenant with David in a most wonderful and extraordinary way, the birth of Jesus Christ. It took many, many years for God's promise to David to be fulfilled. Ultimately, however, God's promises were fulfilled in a magnificent way.

God renews His covenant with us every Christmas as we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Advent is coming soon and it is a perfect time to renew our covenant with God. Look for God's protection, love, and guidance. His presence is always there for us in the midst of uncertainty. He is our rock. He has made a covenant with us as well as with David.

Dear Lord, help us to remember to praise you and lean on your faithfulness. Remember, that through the ages, people have had many difficulties, but they were sustained, comforted, and guided by God's covenant. Let us work to embrace our covenant with God by praying daily to know His will for us. Just as God was there for David, He will be there for us as well.

Written by Sandra Cook



Friday December 18, 2026

Read: 2 Samuel 6:12-19 (NIV)

"… So David went to bring up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing … David was dancing before the Lord with all his might, while he and all of Israel were bringing up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets." 2 Samuel 6: 12-15 (NIV)

"Star child, Earth child, Go-between of God, Love child, Christ child, Heaven's lightning rod …" "Star Child, Earth Child"—Shirley Erena Murray and Carlton R. Young

"From that day (when musician Eric Clapton began praying for sobriety) until this, I have never failed to pray in the morning, on my knees, asking for help, and at night, to express gratitude for my life and, most of all, for my sobriety. I choose to kneel because I feel I need to humble myself when I pray, and with my ego, this is the most I can do. If you are asking me why I do all this, I will tell you … because it works, as simple as that." Eric Clapton

A number of years ago, contributing to one of Baker Church's devotional series, our own Josh Fredrickson wrote that he often enjoyed reading devotions and praying while having his morning cup of coffee. He called it "Coffee With God," or something like that. Being a coffee drinker myself, I embraced that idea. The informality of it seems to allow a free flow of honest conversation—maybe even a give-and-take.

Today's reading from 2 Samuel has been interpreted by scholars as meaning, at least in part, that prayer and worship can be emotional, joyful, musical, and celebratory. It doesn't have to always be a solemn undertaking. "Star Child, Earth Child," a Christmas song

praising Jesus, is a form of that type of celebratory prayer. Check it out on YouTube.

On the other hand, Eric Clapton, aware of his ego and the need to humble himself, seems to feel more comfortable in a formalized, serious setting—kneeling while praying.

In his book “The Power of Positive Thinking,” Dr. Norman Vincent Peale wrote that he often engaged in what he called “bullet prayers.” They are short, quick (a sentence or two) prayers, to be used as the spirit moves you.

I’ll often pray while taking long walks. Experiencing nature, getting a little exercise, seeing people walking their dogs, inspires praying—mostly prayers of gratitude.

As I’m writing this devotion, I realize I’m not telling you anything you don’t already know. Prayer can come in many forms. Sometimes it’s just good to hear how other people go about it. And since 1 Thessalonians 5: 17 tells us to pray without ceasing, I figure we better have a way of mixing it up a bit.

Dear God, thank you for the variety of ways we can connect to you in prayer.

Written by Gary Johnson

Saturday December 19, 2026

Read: Judges 13:2-24 (NIV)

Then the woman went to her husband and told him, “A man of God came to me. He looked like an angel of God, very

awesome. I didn't ask him where he came from, and he didn't tell me his name. But he said to me, 'You will become pregnant and have a son. Now then, drink no wine or other fermented drink and do not eat anything unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite of God from the womb until the day of his death." Judges 13:6-7 (NIV)

We celebrate our Savior's birth in the Christmas Season-the Star Child and the Joy Child-who will lead us out of darkness. We year intensely for peace and joy in this season, especially in the darkness of our present world and its challenges. It is a harsh world in which children suffer unjustly. Yet Jesus' resurrection proved that the darkest hour precedes the brightest dawn. And because we celebrate the deliverance the Joy Child's arrival brings, we take comfort that His reign is forever. Jesus' coming was foretold in many Old Testament scriptures. Judges 13:5 and the angel's announcement of Samson's birth is one such foreshadowing of God's ultimate Christmas miracle.

The story begins with Manoah's wife, who was previously barren-and the Lord's Angel messenger brings the promise of a son, Samson, who will deliver Israel. This miraculous conception sets the stage for the messenger and miraculous birth Mary will experience. The Star Child will ultimately fulfill this Old Testament story. The Angel's words hold great import: Samson will only *begin* Israel's deliverance. However, the Christ Child arrives to establish an eternal kingdom, not to deliver a temporary solution.

How well these verses illustrate our stubborn human tendency to demand evidence and validation of a miracle: how hard it is to see and discern the Lord's presence. Only when the angel ascended in the flame did Manoah realize the Lord's messenger.
Are we, in our present times, any more astute than Manoah? Are we any more alert to the Joy of the Christ Child? "Christ has died,

Christ has risen, Christ will come again." Yet even with the knowledge of the Divine Mystery, we bemoan our/the world's fate, sigh, hope, and pray as if miracles have never happened. We fail to see He is here with us, eternally, and will never leave us. Instead, we must celebrate the beams of truth from this passage, which presages the brilliance of Christ as a defenseless child-who brings the Kingdom of Heaven.

Dear God, give us the eyes of discernment and sensitivity as we approach the Season of Light and its brilliance, and the peace the Star Child will shine on us. When we receive messages from Him, let us be sensitive to and act on them. Let this unconditional Love motivate us to be more like that Child: we refuse to let the darkness win. May the same stars that shone at the Star Child's birth give us inspiration to be that light-and that justice-for others. Give us the necessary wisdom and strength to meet the needs of the world's children, and of each other. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Written by Denise Berry

Sunday December 20, 2026 – 4th Sunday of Advent

Read: 2 Samuel 7:1-11,16, Luke 1:47-55, Romans 16:25-27 (NRSVUE)

But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day…" "Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house." "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever." 2 Samuel 7:4-6, 11, 16 (NRSVUE)

Unlike modern quick-fix reality home shows, the PBS show “This Old House” documents a single, comprehensive residential renovation project over the course of multiple episodes per season (now in its 48th!). It’s a favorite show for my viewing. But the passage from 2 Samuel isn’t about renovation of an old house; it is about the construction of an entirely new dwelling: a house for the Lord and an everlasting covenant in the form of a dynasty for David.

No longer do the Israelites wander. David’s victory is complete, his enemies are no more and the people of Israel live in the promised land. A tented tabernacle for the Lord will no longer suffice. A house built of cedar is desired; a house to illustrate the agreement between the Lord and David on behalf of the people whose future is within God’s hands. Will God continue to build them as a people of faithfulness, loyalty and greatness? Yes. Yet, the covenant requires their obedience to all that God has promised. Is Israel ready for the new future God will build?

How often do we seek to renovate the “old house” of our hearts rather than appeal to God to make all things new? I appreciate wanting to preserve traditions, rituals, etc., but I want to make room for the new that God wants to bring to my life, the new promises for my future and ours as the church of Christ in this new day. Advent is our time to prepare to welcome the Holy Infant of Bethlehem. What new construction are you willing to let God build of your life, your future, your faithfulness to God’s will? May our hearts be built anew to truly receive the gift of Christ.

Sunday Intercessory Prayer and Petitions from The United Methodist Book of Worship:

God of the ages, we praise you, for the dawn of time you created the world, sending light by your Word to dispel darkness. In Jesus Christ you began a new creation, sending him to be the Light of the world, to drive away fear and despair, and to rule in peace and justice, holiness and love.
Especially we thank you
For the order and beauty of your creation…
For coming in Jesus Christ to share our human life…
For the place you give us in your continuing creation…
For the promise of peace among nations, and justice for all peoples…
For the Church as the sign of your coming kingdom…

Mighty God, prepare the world for your rule, for we long for the day when there shall be no more crying or tears, and death will be destroyed. Help us to share the ministry of Christ and be agents of his compassion.

Especially we pray
For the nations of the earth and peace in the world…
For victims and survivors of violence…
For those who are sick and suffering…
For our families and friends…
For the Church and those who serve in Christ's name…
All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Written by the Reverend David Aslesen



Monday December 21, 2026

Read: Luke 1:46b–55 (NRSVUE)

And Mary said: “My soul glorified the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior…”
Luke 1:46–47 (NRSVUE)

When we were younger, most of us probably had a pretty good picture of how our lives were going to turn out. We had ideas about careers, families, where we would live, and what we would accomplish. Some of those plans worked out, and some didn't. Looking back, I can think of jobs I didn't get, opportunities that passed me by, and dreams that had to change because, well, life happened.

I've often said that I may not have ended up where I pictured myself, but I like where I am. That's not to say there haven't been disappointments or that I wouldn't have done a few things differently. But when I look back at all the twists and turns, I can see how some unexpected opportunities led to wonderful things I might otherwise have missed. Sometimes I can recognize God's hand in those moments, and sometimes I think I've simply learned to appreciate the life that unfolded.

I wonder if Mary ever looked back on her life that way.

In Luke's Gospel, Mary offers a beautiful song of praise and gratitude to God. We know it as the Magnificat. What strikes me about her words is that she is praising God before she knows how her story will turn out. She's a young woman whose life has suddenly taken a direction she certainly couldn't have anticipated. She has plenty of reasons to be worried about what comes next,

yet she chooses to recognize the extraordinary blessing in the middle of all that uncertainty.

Most of us aren't quite that good at accepting unexpected changes. We like our plans, and we especially like knowing what's coming next. When things don't work out the way we hoped, it's easy to focus on the disappointment rather than the possibilities that might still lie ahead.

But Mary's story reminds us that God's work in the world rarely follows the script people expect. The promised Savior wasn't born into wealth or power, but into an ordinary family facing extraordinary circumstances. And through that unlikely beginning came a gift that would change the world.

As we approach Christmas, perhaps we can take a moment to look back at the unexpected turns in our own lives. Not every disappointment leads to something better, and not every difficult experience comes with an explanation. But even when the road takes us somewhere we hadn't planned to go, we can trust that God hasn't stopped walking with us.
Maybe one of the gifts of Advent is learning to recognize God's blessings, not only in the things we've hoped and prayed for, but also in the good things we never saw coming.

Gracious God, thank You for walking with us through life's unexpected turns. Help us to trust in Your presence when our plans change, to find peace in uncertainty, and to recognize the blessings we might otherwise overlook. Open our hearts to the hope and promise of Christ's coming and guide us along whatever paths lie ahead. Amen.

Written by Michelle Noyes

Tuesday December 22, 2026

Read: Hebrews 8:1-13; Luke 1:46b-55; 1 Samuel 1:19-28 (NIV)

“This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.” Hebrews 8:10 (NIV)

“He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.” Luke 1:52-53 (NIV)

“I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.” 1 Samuel 1:27-28 (NIV)

Scripture 1: Hebrews 8:1-13
Our Advent theme, “Star Child, Earth Child, God’s Holy Child," traces God’s grace from heaven into our daily lives, beginning with the heavenly promise of the *Star Child*. In this passage, God promises a new covenant where divine laws are no longer carved onto cold stone tablets but written directly onto human minds and hearts. Authentic faith is more than following external rules; it is an internal transformation of the heart. As the *Star Child*, Christ bridges heaven and earth, changing us from within so we are empowered to love God and our neighbors.

Scripture 2: Luke 1:46b-55
When God writes love onto our hearts, that internal change moves outward as the heavenly promise takes physical shape in the *Earth Child*. In Luke’s Gospel, Mary, an ordinary young woman from an overlooked background, sings a bold song praising a God who brings down powerful rulers, lifts up the humble, and feeds the

hungry. Genuine faith cannot remain private; it must overflow into active compassion, justice, and care for the vulnerable. By entering the world through a humble family rather than a palace, Jesus proves that God's grace meets humanity right in our earthly struggles before we ever take a step toward him.

Scripture 3: 1 Samuel 1:19-28
When heavenly grace transforms our hearts and moves us to serve others on earth, our lives are set apart for a higher purpose, showing us what it means to follow *God's Holy Child*. Centuries before Mary's song, a woman named Hannah offered a remarkably similar prayer after enduring years of grief and infertility. Keeping her vow, she brings her young son Samuel to the temple, dedicating his entire life back to the God who answered her prayers. Hannah's surrender reminds us that true holiness is not about escaping the world or achieving instant perfection, but a lifelong journey of offering our transformed hearts and earthly lives back to God for a greater purpose.

*Heavenly Father, thank you for uniting your divine promises with our everyday lives. Write your new covenant of love upon our hearts as the **Star Child**, move us to reflect your justice in the world through the **Earth Child**, and, following Hannah and Mary, help us dedicate our entire lives to you as we follow **God's Holy Child**. Amen.*

Written by Mae Masterman

Wednesday December 23, 2026

Read: Luke 1:46-55 (NIV)

And Mary said:
"My soul glorifies the Lord

and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
Luke 1:46-49 (NIV)

After finding out from the angel Gabriel that she has been chosen to give birth to the Messiah, Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth to share her news. Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, has her own miraculous story of finally becoming pregnant for the first time at an older age. After hearing Mary's news, Elizabeth blesses her. Mary responds with this passage called *Mary's Song*. She reflects that God has chosen her, a poor humble young woman, for such a significant role and gives glory to God. Indeed, the *Mighty One* does do great things for her.

The Bible is full of examples of God choosing the unlikely person—by human standards—to fulfill his plan. Jesus did this as well. As we near the birth of Jesus, it is worth keeping in mind that the Advent story is full of people from all walks of life and set in humble settings. Christ, the newborn king, was not born in opulent surroundings to a wealthy important family. It was unassuming Mary who was picked to bring the child into the world.

This Christmas, I will think of humble Mary. She was chosen by God to do something difficult to comprehend and her reaction was to glorify God in her soul. Mary accepted her role in the Advent story. Let us give thanks for God's plan and the amazing gift of Christ.

Dear Heavenly Father, let us be open to seeing your plan—especially when it is not obvious or it is challenging. May we be

mindful that people from all walks of life are chosen by you to serve and that we are all your children. Thank you for loving us and blessing us in countless ways this Advent season. Amen.

Written by Michele Claney

Thursday December 24, 2026 - Christmas Eve

Readings: Luke 2:1-14, (15-20); Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14

“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.” Luke 2:19 (NIV)

I have a vivid Christmas memory from years past. It was my first Christmas season as Directing Minister at a large church in Central Illinois. We offered FOUR Christmas Eve Services that year. FOUR! Add to the avalanche of preparations a major snowstorm that closed every other church in our community. Snowplows worked feverishly to clear our parking lot. Volunteers staffed the phones, answering, “Yes, we have four services, you are welcome to join us!” Greeters welcomed everyone. Ushers helped our members and guests find seats in the sanctuary.

At each service, the sanctuary was packed with worshippers, all eager to celebrate the beauty of Christmas in the house of God. Our musicians were at their best. Both pastors preached the Christmas Story of the birth of Jesus, and the hope that He brings to our lives as our newborn Savior. We worshipped and we raised our lit candles high as we sang.

Then everyone went home, including two exhausted pastors following an exhilarating evening of worship. Everyone was in bed and asleep when I dropped into my chair in the wee hours of

Christmas morning. There were no more expectations from me, I had done what I could do. In those moments of stillness, I remembered Mary: *“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”* In the tranquility of the moment, my heart and mind lingered in the beauty of the birth of Jesus; the innocent One, the unlikely One, who came to save us all.

In those moments, Christmas came for me. It hadn’t occurred when I was busy making all the preparations, or even executing all that the Advent and Christmas held for a busy congregation. Christmas came when I gave myself the time to ponder, to reflect, to remember, and to cherish.

I invite you to do the same. Pause with me and remember the words of the Christmas hymn: “Good Christians men, rejoice with heart, soul, and voice. Now ye hear of endless bliss. Joy! Joy! Jesus Christ was born for this. He hath ope’d the heav’nly door. And man is blessed evermore. **Christ was born for this. Christ was born for this**.”
Merry Christmas, everyone!

God, help us to still our hearts, and let the hush of holiness settle deep within our souls. Still the restless thoughts that keep us awake. Remind us of your coming among us to bring us hope, peace and comfort, but most of all, Your salvation. Warm our hearts again in the beauty of Your love for all. Like Mary, help us to ponder and to cherish this season in our hearts, and carry the light and beauty into the New Year that awaits. In the precious name of Jesus, Our Savior, we pray. Amen.

Written by the Reverend Michael Ebersohl

Thursday December 25, 2026 - Christmas Day

Read: Isaiah 52:7-10, Hebrews 1:1-4, John 1:1-14 (NRSVUE)

“Break forth; shout together for joy, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem…and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.” Isaiah 52:9-10 (NRSVUE)

As performed by the Chancel Choir earlier this month, one of the best known arias of Handel’s “Messiah” invokes this beautiful passage announcing once again God’s promise of redemption brought by the beautiful and beatific messenger who announces peace, rings good news, announces salvation and says to the fearful “Your God reigns!”

Even before the Lord’s redemption is known in Jerusalem, the residents of the Holy City are invited to respond to God’s intervention with praise and joy. The promise of God’s care is without the limits of human time. In God’s time, the fullness of God’s salvation has, is and will be given to those who yearn for the gift. May God’s grace you’re your heart to receive and treasure the gift of Christ on this Christmas Day.

Use today’s devotion to claim the gift of God’s saving love, hope, peace, and joy for yourself again – or for the first time. What does salvation look like in your location at this “end of the earth” in the Fox River valley? As in Jerusalem in the time of Isaiah, where is there ruin that needs renewal, rebuilding, reimagination in your life, in your neighborhood, in your community? Where is their ruin within humankind and upon the earth that God is calling the church to respond to with generous prayers and actions of love? Where can our Christmas joy bring comfort?

Our Advent theme offers us a prayer for today's celebrating and tomorrow's ministry. Let us be thankful for the Christmas gift of Jesus Christ and our redemption; gifts we can share with every child of every age and everywhere.

Star-Child, earth-Child, go-between of God, love Child, Christ Child, heaven's lightning rod,
Street child, beat child, no place left to go, hurt child, used child no one wants to know,
Grown child, old child, mem'ry full of years, sad child, lost child, story told in tears,
Spared child, spoiled child, having, wanting more, wise child, faith child, knowing joy in store,
Hope-for-peace Child, God's stupendous sign, down-to-earth Child, Star of stars that shine,
This year, this year, let the day arrive when Christmas comes for everyone, everyone alive!

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Written by Rev. David Aslesen





Star Child

Words By Shirley Erena Murray

Star-Child, earth-Child,
go-between of God,
love Child, Christ Child,
heaven's lightning rod,

Refrain: This year, this year,
let the day arrive
when Christmas comes for everyone,
everyone alive!

Street child, beat child,
no place left to go,
hurt child, used child
no one wants to know,

Grown child, old child,
mem'ry full of years,
sad child, lost child,
story told in tears,

Spared child, spoiled child,
having, wanting more,
wise child, faith child,
knowing joy in store,

Hope-for-peace Child,
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