

Advent

DEVOTIONAL



Village Church

FOLLOWING JESUS FOR LIFE

December 1 – December 24, 2024

villagechurch.org/advent-season



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended to provide families, individuals, or study groups with a devotion to study each day of the Advent season. Several of the days include a devotional entry written by a member of the congregation.

DECEMBER 1, 2024: FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

REFLECTION: *Written by Judy Walters from The Village Church.*

During my childhood, one of my earliest encounters with Jesus began with a tradition of creating a front door decoration to welcome family and friends to our home during Advent. The scent of fresh greenery from the yard is something I fondly remember. An exquisite holly tree provided glossy leaves and red berries. We cut sprigs from pines and evergreen trees, pinecones, boxwood, and variegated ivy, which grew on a wall. Nature provided a bountiful array of texture and shades of green. Faux greens and glue guns had not yet been invented, nor were there Michaels and Hobby Lobby to purchase supplies. We used wire and string saved up in the garage from past projects. The only thing purchased was ribbon, unless we had some left over. I recall such a sense of pride and familial unity as Mother, my sisters and I held the greens, while tying and wiring them together in a pleasing way to make a Swag. Then, we attached a bright red or plaid ribbon. Our Dad ceremoniously hung it on the door. Each part of the finished piece symbolizes the Christmas story. Holly represents Christ's crown of thorns, while the red berries are the Lord's blood. Ivy represents the Virgin Mary, while Martin Luther believed that pine, fir, and spruce symbolized immortality and eternal life. I continue to encounter Jesus each Advent while creating a fresh swag year after year, and listen to a favorite old English carol, "The Holly and the Ivy," while remembering our family tradition.

For my father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. [John 6:40]

Christmas is best pondered, not with logic, but with imagination.
[Max Lucado]

DECEMBER 2, 2024

PRAYER: *Written by John Calvin (1509-1564), a French theologian, pastor, and reformer in Geneva during the Protestant Reformation. This is an excerpt from the preface to his book "Commentary on the Psalms."*

My father intended me as a young boy for theology. But when he saw that the science of law made those who cultivate it wealthy, he was led to change his mind by the hope of material gain for me. So it happened that I was called back from the study of philosophy to learn law. I followed my father's wish and attempted to do faithful work in this field; but God, by the secret leading of His providence, turned my course another way...When I was too firmly addicted to the papal superstitions to be drawn easily of such a deep mire, by a sudden conversion He brought my mind (already more rigid than suited my age) to submission [to Him]. I was so inspired by a taste of true religion, and I burned with such a desire to carry my study further, that although I did not drop other subjects, I had no zeal for them. In less than a year, all who were looking for a purer doctrine began to come to learn from me, although I was a novice and a beginner.

For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. [1 Thessalonians 2:11-13].

DECEMBER 3, 2024

REFLECTION: *Written by Teresa of Avila (1515-1582, a Carmelite nun, prominent Spanish mystic, and religious reformer. This is an excerpt from E. Allison Peer's book "The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus.*

My soul was growing weary, and, though it desired to rest, the miserable habits which now enslaved it would not allow it to do so. It happened that, entering the oratory one day, I saw an image which had been procured for a certain festival that was observed in the house and had been taken there to be kept for that purpose. It represented Christ sorely wounded; and so conducive was it to devotion that when I looked at it, I was deeply moved to see Him thus, so well did it picture what He suffered for us. So great was my distress when I thought how ill I had repaid Him for those wounds that I felt as if my heart were breaking, and I threw myself down beside Him, shedding floods of tears and begging Him to give me strength once for all so that I might not offend Him...Knowing that the Lord was certainly within me, I would place myself at His feet, thinking that my tears would not be rejected. I did not know what I was saying, but in allowing me to shed those tears He was very gracious to me, since I soon forgot my grief.

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. [Galatians 5:24]

DECEMBER 4, 2024

REFLECTION: *Written by Duncan Smith, a contemporary pastor.*

The first time that I encountered God was in Colorado at Estes Park. When I heard the gospel preached, when the altar call came, instead of running up to the front, I ran outside the building. As I went stumbling up this mountainside, I literally walked smack into the presence of God. Although He was invisible, I knew I was standing face to face with Jesus and I was in His presence. I hit the deck right there. I just collapsed into the pathway and wept before God as I felt this incredible weight of all of my sin, and yet His incredible love, washing over me. Instead of killing me, He lavished His love on me, and called me His son and called me into His kingdom. I have never ever been the same since.

*Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.
[Proverbs 30:5]*

***Once in our world, a stable had something in it that was bigger
than our whole world. [C.S. Lewis]***

DECEMBER 5, 2023

REFLECTION: *Written by Juan Carlos Acosta, Director of Worship at The Village Church.*

I sometimes wonder if the author of this Psalm (below) was a choir director who was tired of the same old songs sung year after year. Christmas Eve worship, in particular, is filled with the well-loved traditions and carols, but as a church musician who has been involved in the making of this music since the age of nine, there are times I too grow tired of the same old songs. Don't get me wrong, I also get emotional on Christmas Eve as we get to certain verses of songs that are sung every year. I look up at my friends and family in the choir who are also choking back tears as we sing and I know that *now* it is Christmas. I wonder though, if sometimes the familiarity of the scriptures, the songs, the traditions makes us somehow blind to the beauty and wonder of this story. Can we listen with fresh ears and open hearts to this new song that is Jesus, sung into the world? Can we take up this song like it is both new and familiar so that others may hear? When the opening fanfare on the opening hymn is played on Christmas Eve, will we be ready to meet Jesus?

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord; bless His name; tell of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous works among all the peoples. For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; He is to be revered above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. [Psalm 96:1-6]

DECEMBER 6, 2024

REFLECTION: *Written by Carol Arnott, a contemporary Canadian pastor.*

I was in a horrible spot; I thought I was having a nervous breakdown. I thought everything in my life was falling apart. I was in the bathroom; I had put the boys to bed because I was feeling depressed. I'm not a depressed type of person, but this night I was feeling really down. I heard an audible voice, and I thought 'Oh my gosh, it's my ex-husband, he's breaking into the house again! ... It started and stopped five times. I checked the house thoroughly; there was nothing. Finally, I thought, 'I must be having a nervous breakdown, I'm hearing voices.' I threw my toothbrush in the sink and said, 'Alright, I'll listen.' This voice, this audible voice, began to speak the 23rd Psalm from the beginning to the end, 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...' and it kept on going. About three-quarters of the way through, suddenly I knew it was Jesus. I knew that He loved me. All of the sin that I was in, and all of the pain, and all the anger, and all the problems, I knew without a shadow of a doubt that He loved me just like I was, in that moment in time. I ran to my dresser where I had my confirmation Bible in the drawer in its box. I got it out and I read that 23rd Psalm over and over and over. The more I read it, the more love poured into my heart, the more assurance poured into my heart. Did my circumstances change? Not for a while, but God's transforming love, that encounter with His presence and His love, changed me forever.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. [Psalm 23:6]

DECEMBER 7, 2024

REFLECTION: *Written by Ruth Grendell from The Village Church*

Several years ago, I met a pastor from the church on the Navajo Indian Reservation in Northern Arizona. We discussed the possibility of taking student nurses to partner with nurses at the hospital, there. He said there was a sufficient place to stay, a restaurant, and even a multipurpose store nearby! That summer 15 students and I drove there. We stayed in a barn that had been converted with small rooms, a bathroom, and a shower. (Sometimes, a horse would peak through the window.) We discovered delicious home-made brown bread. Of course we took several short walks to the store! Each day a student went with the home-health care nurse while the others accompanied nurses in the hospital. Communication was difficult due to the indigenous language, but we managed. One day we were amazed when the native male fighters "danced" with their arrows. (We stepped back!) On our final day, I walked through the hospital and thanked the nurses for sharing their skills with the students. When I thanked the Charge nurse, she said: "I am a Christian, too." I suddenly realized that I had encountered Christ every day.

If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed (John:8:31)

DECEMBER 8, 2024: SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

REFLECTION: *Written by Walter Walker, a contemporary author.*

On Saturday, August 22, 1741, George Frederic Handel, the German-born composer, sat down at his desk in the front room of his house in London. After bowing his head to ask the Lord's blessing, he wrote at the top of a blank piece of paper, "Messiah." His quill pen could hardly keep up with the musical notes and harmonies that soon began to flow through his mind. Hour by hour and day by day he wrote. He continued morning, noon, and night. All food placed at his door by servants remained untouched. He finished the first part in seven days, the second part in nine days, and the final part in six days. On September 15, twenty-four days after he began, Handel put the final touches on the closing lines of the Hallelujah chorus. Emerging from his study with tears streaming down his face, he cried out to the startled servant who met him, "I did think I did see all heaven before me and the great God Himself!"

And he shall reign for ever and ever. [Revelation 11:15]

The great challenge left to us is to cut through all the glitz and glam of the season that has grown increasingly secular and commercial, and be reminded of the beauty of the One who is Christmas. [Bill Crowder]

DECEMBER 9, 2024

REFLECTION: *Written by Steve Long, a contemporary writer.*

The first time that I encountered God through the Holy Spirit, I was at a Billy Graham crusade in Toronto. I was sitting at the top of the bleachers at Exhibition Stadium where the Blue Jay baseball team play. Billy Graham, he's giving the altar call for people to give their lives to Jesus. I'm already a follower of Jesus, I'm there to watch and to see what he is doing and how is he doing it. At some point in his invitation of calling people to the front... he said, "Holy Spirit, will you convict people of their sin." From near the top of the bleachers, I saw a wave of emotion hit people and go up the bleacher stands and come towards me. Row after row, they just begin to weep. People would get out of their seats and head to the front, run to the front, and I remember watching this phenomenon come towards me, and hit my row, and go behind me. It was like, 'Woah!'

Therefore, whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven [Matthew 10:32]

DECEMBER 10, 2023

REFLECTION: *Written by Vickie Stone from The Village Church*

My friend Sue and I like to find treasures at thrift stores, yet we are keenly aware "we don't need more stuff!" So often we walk away, but if the next time we go to the store and the treasure is still there, we say, "It's a sign!" The Christian faith likes signs. Signs can help us in following Jesus. Advent candles are symbolic and their signs help us prepare for the coming Christ child. Numerous, beautiful decorations of this Christmas season are excellent for reminding us how to encounter Jesus. If we see Christmas candles or twinkling lights we can think of them as signs of Jesus, the Light overcoming darkness. When we see evergreen Christmas trees we can think of Jesus living through every season with vibrant life and the eternal life assured to us, if we follow Him. Gift giving to one another represents the ultimate gift that Jesus provided all of mankind, in laying down His life for our salvation. Circular wreaths remind us of Christ's everlasting love for us and when hung on doors, wreaths are a sign to welcome the Christmas spirit into our homes. May this Advent season have you looking in wonder at all the beautiful signs. And may these signs encourage you to encounter Jesus on a daily basis and share His love with others.

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign.[Isaiah 7:14]

DECEMBER 11, 2023

REFLECTION: *Written by Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968), a Baptist minister, activist, and prominent civil rights leader. This is an excerpt from his work "Stride Toward Freedom."*

I got out of bed and began to walk the floor. Finally, I went to the kitchen and heated a pot of coffee. I was ready to give up. With my cup of coffee sitting untouched before me I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing a coward. In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had all but gone, I decided to take my problem to God. With my head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory. "I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left, I've come to the point where I can't face it alone." At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I never experienced Him before. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet inner assurance of an inner voice saying, "Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth; and God will be at your side forever." Almost at once my fears began to go. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything.

*To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.
[Colossians 1:29]*

DECEMBER 12, 2024

REFLECTION: *Written by Catherine Marshall (1914-1983), an American author. This was written in 1944 during a two year confinement with tuberculosis.*

In the middle of the night, I was awakened. The room was in total darkness. Instantly sensing something alive, electric in the room, I sat bolt upright in bed. Past all credible belief, suddenly, unaccountably, Christ was there, in person, standing by the right side of my bed. I could see nothing but a deep, velvety blackness around me, but the bedroom was filled with an intensity of power, as if the Dynamo of the universe were there. Every nerve in my body tingled with it, as with a shock of electricity. I knew that Jesus was smiling at me tenderly, lovingly, whimsically—as though a trifle amused at my too intense seriousness about myself. His attitude seemed to say “Relax! There’s not a thing wrong here that I can’t take care of.” His personality held an amazing meld I had never before met in any one person: warm-hearted compassion and the light touch, yet unmistakable authority and kingliness. Instantly my heart wanted to bow before Him in abject adoration. Would He speak to me? I waited in awe for Him to say something momentous, to give me my marching orders. “Go,” He said in reply to my unspoken question, “Go, and tell your mother. That’s easy enough, isn’t it?” I went to where my mother and father were sleeping, woke them and said “I just want to tell you that I’ll be all right now. It seemed important to tell you tonight.” When I returned to my bedroom, that vivid presence was gone. I found myself more excited than I have ever been before or since and more wide awake. It was not until the first streaks of dawn appeared in the eastern sky that I slept again. [Within six months the doctors pronounced her completely well.]

Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and let them enjoy abundant peace and security [Jeremiah 33:6]

DECEMBER 13, 2023

REFLECTION: *Written by Nina Pope from The Village Church*

Fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious hand. [Isaiah 41:10]

“I have always taken care of you.” were the exact words God whispered in my mind that day. I was startled at first at the clarity of the statement and the way it came into my awareness. We were going through an angst-ridden dilemma about a job transfer out of state that sounded promising in daylight, but which tortured our sleep at night...good in so many ways but somehow just not quite right. So, there I sat on my garden bench pouring out my malaise when God verbally and unmistakably inserted Himself into my predicament. The matter was not settled, but my mind was instantly at ease when I answered back acknowledging affirmatively that yes, the Good Shepherd was now as always in charge. Ultimately, other solutions appeared and we did not make the move. It is a bit of a blur now but was crystal clear then. That was somewhere in the 70’s. Fast forward to the 21st century: After nearly 2 years of

uncharted and often unwanted changes following the sudden death of our beloved husband and father, the Good Shepherd has continued unmistakably leading and guiding our family into new directions. Guidance comes from an astonishing array of sources ~ among others, family inspiration, wisdom, and support from adult children, church fellowship and studies, ongoing encouragement from friends in countless ways, others helping me enlarge my lackluster financial and computer skillset, images and ideas from God, plus solutions related to the trials and tribulations of downsizing, finding suitable new quarters, moving (!), and making untold adjustments to daily routines and the re-shuffling of life in general. It has been a ride. I continue to lean on the everlasting arms. Our God is both infinite and intimate. It is beyond understanding to contemplate the scope of God's managing the universe while minding the details of all His creatures...and we don't even have the full picture yet! I bow my heart in gratitude for all the ways God makes Himself available to me and all humanity, and especially in this particular season as our Immanuel, God with us presently and eternally. Merry Christmas!

DECEMBER 14, 2024

REFLECTION: *Written by Walter Walker, a contemporary author. This is an excerpt from the book "Extraordinary Encounters with God" about Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), a French mathematician, physicist, inventor, philosopher, and writer.*

On November 23, 1654, Blaise Pascal experienced what is known as his "second conversion," the first being of the intellect and the second of the heart. Pascal recorded that from 10:30 in the evening until 12:30 a.m., he had a divine encounter with "the God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not for the philosophers and scholars." He then made the following resolve: "Total submission to Jesus Christ and to my Director." ... After his death, a servant pulled a parchment written in Pascal's own hand, with notes taken after his divine encounter...at the top of the sheet of paper stands a cross, with the following notes: God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and scholars, certitude, certitude, feeling, joy, peace. God of Jesus Christ. My God and your God. Thy God will be my God. Forgetfulness of the world and of everything except God. He is to be found only by the way taught in the Gospel. Greatness of the human soul. O righteous Father, the world has not known Thee, but I have known Thee. Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy. I have been separated from Him. ... Let me not be separated from Him eternally. This is the eternal life, that they know Thee as the only true God, and the one whom Thou has sent, Jesus Christ...I have been separated from Him; I have fled Him, renounced Him, crucified Him. Let me never be separated from Him. He is preserved only by the ways taught in the Gospel. Renunciation, total and sweet. Total submission to Jesus Christ and to my Director. Eternally in joy for a day's trial on earth. I will not forget Thy Word. Amen.

*Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world.
[Isaiah 12:5]*

DECEMBER 15, 2024: THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

REFLECTION: *Written by C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) a British author, professor, and lay theologian. This is an excerpt from his book "Mere Christianity."*

The real problem of Christian life comes where people do not usually look for it. It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. And so on, all day. Standing back from all your natural fussings and frettings; coming in out of the wind.

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. [John 10:27]

DECEMBER 16, 2024

REFLECTION: *Written by Kate Smith, a contemporary church planter and revivalist.*

The first time I encountered God, I actually didn't know what had hit me. It just felt like there was this tangible love that came with a weightiness. It was just so silky smooth... My heart felt so much peace, I just wanted to rest... I didn't want to move, just stay in it, to rest, to let this love that felt almost liquid come into my soul in every part. It was like a realization that God was doing something deep within my heart... I was giving Him permission, just saying, 'God, whatever you have for me, I'm here, just come. I'm so not used to this, but I love it, so would you just keep coming and filling me with that liquid love and presence.'

*I will abide in your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of your wings.
[Psalm 61:4]*

DECEMBER 17, 2024

REFLECTION: *Written by Alan Goodman from The Village Church.*

As a Christian, I am always amazed when I receive instructions from God to do things for people in pain/grief. I am certainly not a Pastor, but there have been many instances in my life when I felt COMPELLED to pray for the person after I get aware of the anguish and pain that is just in front of me. I know when I get these divine instructions from God. They come through loud and clear to me. I have asked people if they want me to pray for them RIGHT NOW. I have been totally surprised that through the tears and grief, all I have prayed for in a one-on-one setting accepted my prayer offer. When I do these instant prayer sessions, it is amazing to me that my own words just flow - not from me but from God. The people I have prayed for are not the only ones directly affected by these prayers. Add me to that list of humans overcome with a power

greater than I can ever be to even do this kind of thing! I am one Christian that certainly doesn't understand a lot of things, but I sure know when God uses me for his Kingdom. Praise be to God. I have prayed for God to use me to further his kingdom as a servant. I know that has (and is) being fulfilled.

Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not disregard it. [Proverbs 8:33]

DECEMBER 18, 2024

REFLECTION: *Written by Wayne Jacobsen, a contemporary pastor and writer*

God's presence "feels like" different things to different people, and even different ways in different circumstances. I don't want to describe it as a feeling, because it goes way beyond that. At its heart it is a simple knowing that something greater than us is making His presence known in the room. That can be accompanied by supernatural events, a simple inner knowing, or the affirmation of what a number of people are sensing at the same moment...For us at that hospital bed it was a powerful sense of connection with Him and each other. It added a lightness to the room that was more spiritually seen than physically seen. It manifested itself in the lightness of heart and trust that we all sensed afterward, very different from when we went in. But it doesn't always look like that, which is why I hesitate to define it. I find people recognize Him less when they are burdened down by expectations of what it should look like. Then we are looking for manifestations, rather than simply seeking Him. For many people it isn't so much that God isn't making Himself known, it's that they haven't yet tuned to His frequency to recognize His voice or His fingerprints in the simple realities around them. I think most of God's supernatural working appears to be incredibly natural as it unfolds.

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. [Psalm 51:11]

DECEMBER 19, 2024

REFLECTION: *Written by Walter Walker, a contemporary author.*

Six Soviet cosmonauts said they witnessed the most awe-inspiring spectacle ever encountered in space: a band of glowing angels with wings as big as jumbo jets. Cosmonaut Valdimir Solovov, Oleg Atkov, and Leonid Kiain said that they first saw the celestial beings during their 155th day aboard Salyut 7 space station. "What we saw were seven giant figures in the shape of humans, but with wings and mist-like halos in the classic depiction of angels. Their faces were round with cherubic smiles." Twelve days later the figures returned and were seen by three other Soviet scientists, including cosmonaut Svetlana Asvitskaya. "They were smiling," she said, "as though they shared a glorious secret."

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly. [Hebrews 12:22]

DECEMBER 20, 2024

REFLECTION: *Written by Garland Vance, a contemporary writer.*

Have you ever had the experience of feeling God's presence? It may have been in a powerful worship service. Or when you saw the Grand Canyon. Or holding your child for the first time. Or when you helped someone in need because you sensed God leading you to do so. Whenever it was, there is nothing more powerful and memorable than when you sense God's presence. His presence can overtake your whole body and overcome all of your emotions ... But there is a danger to this feeling of God's presence. It can be like a drug. Once you have experienced it, you keep trying to get another fix. Instead of trying to feel God's presence, learn to rest in the truth and reality of His presence. He is with you whether you feel Him or not. He is with you even when you do not want Him to be. Even when you can't feel God's presence, you can rest in the truth and reality that He is with you. Cultivate an *awareness* of God's presence. There are dozens of ways to do this. But a few of them are: short prayers throughout the day, silence and solitude, memorization of Scripture, and talking with Him as you take a hike.

And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. [Matthew 28:20]

DECEMBER 21, 2024

REFLECTION: *Written by Margot Wallace from The Village Church*

Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind [Philippians 2:2]

As I watched the Opening Ceremony of the 2024 Olympics, I was so inspired while viewing the French Cauldron rise in the sky! After watching each country sail down the Seine, I realized there appeared no trace of animosity. Rather, each vessel held smiling faces, waving to others, happy to be present, and eager to perform! At that moment, I realized that affairs in our world were not as hopeless as predicted. Instead, here I saw instant comradery! That unification was symbolized by the French invented hot air balloon floating above. The faith of the world - all the way from ancient Greece - moving forward to a more positive future!



*Olympic Cauldron 2024
by Margot Wallace*

DECEMBER 22, 2023: FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT,

REFLECTION: *Written by Vickie Stone from The Village Church. The writing was inspired by the book "Intimate Moments with the Savior," which was written by Ken Gire.*

I recently sent a delicate porcelain creche to my 10-year-old great niece for her birthday. I thought Mady would enjoy setting it up each Christmas and it will probably be her first "grown-up gift". In her birthday card I shared how the nativity reminds us of the night of Christ's birth. Then I found myself really pondering that night, thousands of years ago when a weary Joseph was turned away by the innkeeper but offered use the stable. How Mary must have nodded, eager to slide off the donkey and massage her swollen ankles. I can imagine Joseph creaking open the stable door as a chorus of animals protest the intrusion, the pungent stench overwhelming. Such a shocking place for a woman in the throes of childbirth; far from her home and family. Far from what she had expected for her firstborn. Mary winces, fighting another contraction and Joseph desperately looks around the stable with no time to spare. He spots a feeding trough that will have to make do for the crib. Some hay will serve as the mattress. Blankets? He grabs some rags hanging out to dry and as Mary doubles over with the latest labor pain, he races for a bucket of water. Mary's anguished scream cuts through the silent night and she pushes with all her strength. Joseph puts the garments beneath her and with a final push her labor is over, and the Messiah has arrived. The baby coughs and Joseph instinctively turns him over to clear his throat. When the baby cries, Mary lays him on her chest as his tiny head bobs and he gropes to nurse. Mary marvels at the tiny hand, a hand that sculpted mountains clings to her finger. She looks at Joseph and through teary eyes they smile. Together they stare in wonder at the infant Jesus. Where one would expect angels, there were only flies. Where one would expect heads of state, there were only donkeys, a few haltered cows and some sheep, a tethered camel and the scurrying of barn mice. Except for Joseph, there is no one to share Mary's pain. Or her joy. Yes, there were angels announcing the savior's arrival - but only to a band of blue-collar shepherds. And yes, a magnificent star shown in the sky to mark the birthplace- but only three foreigners bother to look up and were following it. Thus, in the little town of Bethlehem... that one silent night... the royal birth of God's son tip toed quietly by... as the world slept.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. [Luke 2:6-7]



DECEMBER 23, 2024

REFLECTION: *Written by John Bunyan (1628-1688), an English writer and Puritan preacher, best remembered for his work "The Pilgrim's Progress." This is an excerpt from "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, from "The Complete Works of John Bunyan (Philadelphia, 1874).*

One day as I was passing into a field, ... suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, "Thy righteousness is in heaven"... , I saw with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand; there, I say, is my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say to me, "He wants my righteousness," for that was just before him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, not yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, "the same yesterday, today, and forever." Now did my chains fall off my legs, indeed; I was loosed from my afflictions and irons; my temptations also fled away; ... now went I home rejoicing, for the grace and love of God...I saw that the man Christ Jesus, as He is distinct from us, as touching His bodily presence, so He is our righteousness and sanctification before God. Here therefore, I lived, for some time, very sweetly at peace with God through Christ.

It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. [1 Corinthians 1:30].

DECEMBER 24, 2024: CHRISTMAS EVE

REFLECTION: *Written by Kathy Loftman from The Village Church.*

God my maker, who giveth songs in the night. [Job 35:10]

It was midnight after The Village Church Christmas Eve Service. Most all the congregation had filed out of the sanctuary. The organ was playing the postlude, a beautiful, almost haunting piece that sounded like a carillon. The room was darkened and still. I intensely felt God's amazing presence as I had never felt it before. It was beautiful, overwhelming, and awe inspiring. This was His special night of celebration. This moment is one of those few special "snapshots" of life that I shall never forget. I felt alone with God, the beautiful organ piece, and the light dimly shining through our beautiful stained-glass windows. I shall forever treasure my special time in the presence of God.

Merry Christmas

ALTERNATIVE CHRISTMAS MARKET KICK-OFF

Sunday, November 24 | 8:30 AM

LADLE FELLOWSHIP

Sunday, December 1 | 12:00 PM

BLUE CHRISTMAS

Friday, December 6 | 11:00 AM | RSVP Online

BREAKFAST IN BETHLEHEM

Saturday, December 7 | 9:00 AM | Tickets Online

HANDEL'S MESSIAH CHORAL CONCERT

Two Nights | December 8 & 9 | 7:00 PM

WOMEN'S CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

Wednesday, December 11 | 11:30 AM | Tickets Online

CAROLS IN THE VILLAGE

Sunday, December 15 | 4:00 PM

LUMINARIA PARTY

Monday, December 23 | 9:00 – 10:00 AM

CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP

Tuesday, December 24 | 2:00, 4:00, 6:00 & 11:00 PM

BRANCH BBQ

Wednesday, December 25 | 12:00 PM

SUNDAY WORSHIP

Sunday, December 29 – 9:00 & 10:30 AM

SEE MORE ONLINE

villagechurch.org/special-events

Come



WELCOME

the Savior

**2024 ADVENT
EVENT SCHEDULE**
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Village Church

FOLLOWING JESUS FOR LIFE