



**WESTWOOD CHRISTIAN
CHURCH
ADVENT 2021**

Hope

November 28 through December 4

The first theme of Advent is Hope. Hope is something that often gets confused with optimism, but the two are not the same. Whereas optimism is a blind belief that things are either good, or better than they seem, hope is the belief that whether or not things are currently bad, there is something good, something loving, and something to look forward to. For Christians, that belief is located in the persons of the Holy Trinity and the promises of Scripture.

In hope, we are challenged to hold to the preferred future, to refuse to allow fear to dominate our lives, and to hold fast to the promises of Jesus.

The devotions this week on Hope should begin our anticipation of Jesus this Advent season. Through these readings, we'll be thankful for the promises we've been given. You may consider how you might have lived as a 1st century Jew, going through similar circumstances, but without the teachings of Jesus, and only the longing for a Messiah.

Our authors this week are Dennis Seman, Rob Ehlers, Linda Middlesworth, Roy Ratcliff and Linda Auer.

Adam Tomlinson

November 29

Hope, Revelation 7:9-17

Dennis Seman

This may seem a strange scripture to choose for writing about the hope for the Advent season. Strange because it does not seem to have much to say about Christmas and Jesus birth. However, it does have some things to say about hope. In fact, the whole book of Revelation is about hope. The hope that is derived from the fact that Jesus will win out in the end, that he will share that victory with his people, that this hope will get us through the times of trouble that will occur as time progresses to the end. In Rev. 1:17, Jesus placed his hand on John after he fell down at His feet and said, “Do not be afraid . . .” I think this is the real theme of the book. In spite of all of the chaos surrounding us, do not be afraid because Jesus is the First and Last, the Living One, once dead, but now alive for ever and ever!

In Chapter 7, which occurs after the opening of the six seals, John sees a great multitude of people so vast that no one could count them. They were from every nation, tribe, people and language and were standing before the throne before the Lamb. One of the elders there asked John who these people were. John seemed to be hesitant to suggest who they might be and said, “Sir, you know.” The elder responded and said that these were the ones that came out of the “great tribulation” and “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”. He stated further: 15 Therefore, “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. 16 ‘Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,’ nor any scorching heat. 17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; ‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’ ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”

Such is the hope for all whose sins are washed away by Jesus. Times of trouble are all around us and also involve us. But we are to take courage that our faith in Jesus will carry us to

the end and that this hope is based upon the Dauntless Christ described in chapter 1.

November 30

Advent is a Time of Hope

Rob Ehlers

The dictionary defines hope as a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen. This definition fits the idea of Christian Hope. As Christians we have the hope of eternal life with our Creator by the intercession of Jesus on our behalf. Romans 5: 1-6 Shows how our suffering produces perseverance and perseverance produces character and character produces hope. It is through our struggles that we can appreciate what God has done for us. For when we were powerless in our sin and in our suffering Jesus died for us and all of the ungodly in this world.

Romans 5: 8 states “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Colossians 1: 15-23 Show us how God reconciled us through Christ’s death so that we may appear before him holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

1 Peter 1: 3-9 Show us how God the father of our Lord Jesus in his mercy has given us a new birth into living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This hope is an inheritance that can never perish , spoil or fade – kept in heaven for us.

Advent is the season leading up to Christmas (the celebration of Jesus’ birth) when we focus on what Jesus’ birth, life, death and resurrection mean for each of us and for all of mankind.

I think the Hymn “Solid Rock” is a joyous expression of what hope means for us as Christians: “ Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. On Christ the solid rock we stand all other ground is sinking sand.”

The Bible does not promise us a life free from suffering, pain, struggle, disappointment, or death. The Bible (God’s Word) does promise us freedom from the burden of our sins,

conquest over death, and life eternal when we leave this life and return to our creator.

Let us all take HOPE in the belief that God has promised us a future that is certainly undeserved and beyond our comprehension. A future free from all the earthly failings of our flesh. A future where we will be one with our creator.

December 1

The Christian's Hope in Troubled Times

**Linda Benda
Middlesworth**

There are many meanings to the word HOPE. The world's view is that it is a desire-a wish-for something. As a Christian, HOPE is much more than that if you are a believer, your HOPE is in the Lord. You don't just wish for something temporary, you KNOW assuredly that God will keep His promise of life eternal. We expect it; we trust in it; and we have the confidence that we will be reunited with our loved ones-as well as Almighty God. We will have trouble in this world-but the Holy Spirit will comfort us and somehow get us through. If we can't find the words, the Holy Spirit will intercede for us. If you can find the words, pray-pray-pray!

If you feel weak and are hurting-do NOT lose HOPE. (Read Romans 8:25.) If you are grieving the loss of a loved one (or several) 1 Thessalonians 4:13 instructs the Christians "Now, do not grieve as those with no hope". We miss our loved ones. We cry, but we do not lose HOPE that one day the Lord will return and take them and us to live with Him forever. Revelation 21:4 promises that there will be no more tears, pain, or separation. Hang on to that HOPE. Even Jesus, in human form, felt the emotions of losing a dear friend. In the smallest verse in the Bible "He wept" (John 11:35.) He truly had compassion for the family of Lazarus. It was not a showy response-often used back then-but a sincere response. Do not have HOPE in this life only, though, but know and believe, HOPE in the life to come. (Read 1 Corinthians 15:19.)

No matter how bad you feel, hold onto the anchor of HOPE that will keep you close to God. Jesus is the Rock of our Salvation (Hebrews 6:19.)

December 2

Hope

Roy Ratcliff

In the song, *Mary Did You Know?*, we imagine ourselves standing beside Mary as she holds the baby Jesus and looks upon His face. We want to ask her if she knew what Jesus would do and how he would bless the world. Of course, she wouldn't know all the details, but neither was she totally clueless. She had been told by the angel Gabriel that her son would be great and would be called the Son of the Most High. He would receive the throne of David and will reign over the house of Jacob. She had some idea of what Jesus would be. But we can identify with the question because we've looked upon the face of our baby and wondered what kind of person they would be and what things they would do.

I think Mary felt what the elders of Israel felt when Moses first returned to Egypt after the burning bush experience, and he told them everything God had told him and even performed the signs before the people. The elders bowed down and worshiped. I think Mary would have looked at her baby's face and worshiped because of the hope that he brought to the world. The story of Jesus still brings us hope and a reason to worship.

December 3

The Lord Says

Linda Auer

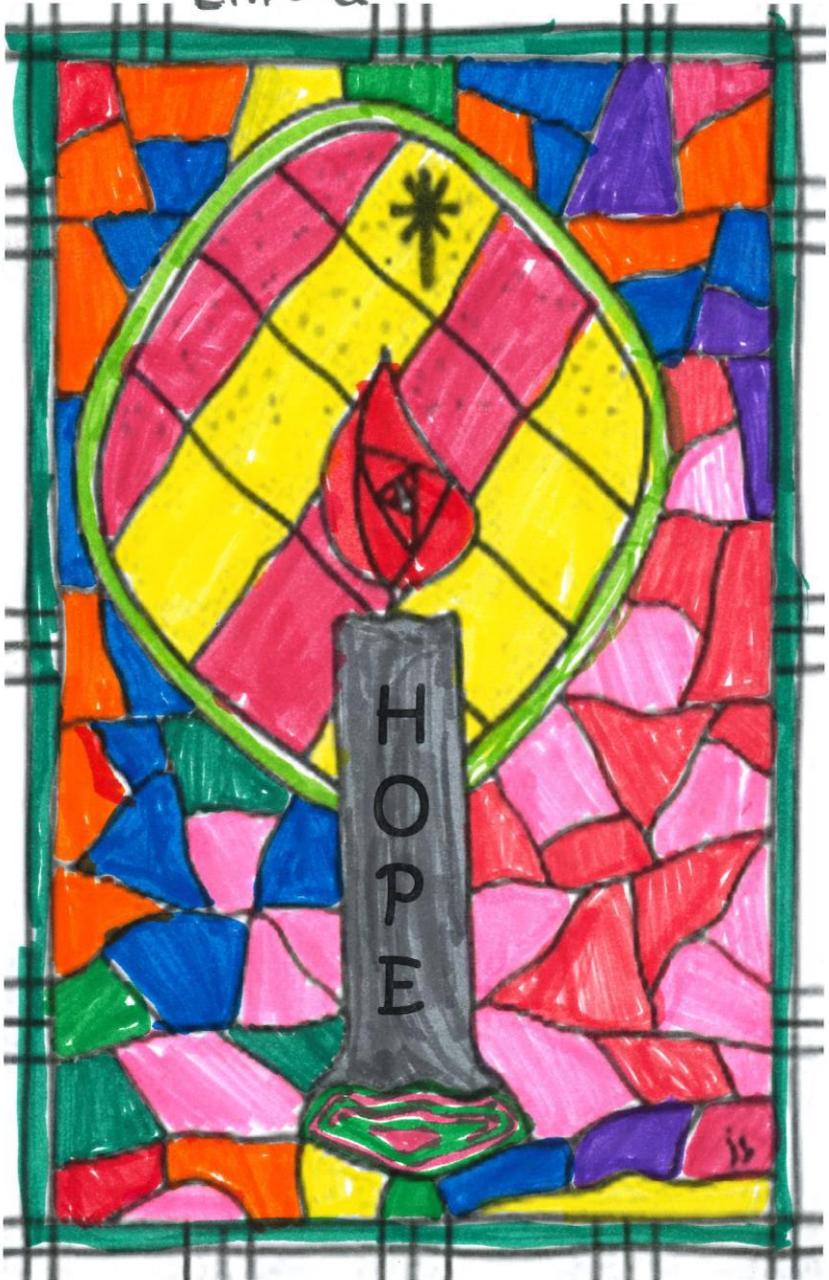
The Lord says Peace, be still to calm the raging water. This is followed by Hope as God infuses us with His compassion.

December 4

Colored by

Erika Quarm

Erika Q



Peace

December 5 to December 11

This week, we are looking at Peace. Jesus is described as the Prince of Peace, an odd moniker for those who expected him to overthrow the world's super power in Rome—or those who expect him to do so today. And yet, we believe that the peace of Christ is the most revolutionary of peace.

The Peace of Christ is something that invades our lives, unlike any other peace we've experienced. This should cause us to pause and evaluate our lives. Why does Christ's peace seem to offensive to us? Is it because we thrive on busyness? Is it because we thrive on having our way, and are unwilling to rest on someone else's? Or is it something even deeper? I'm not sure we really desire the peace which surpasses all understanding (Phil 4:7). It's just too strange. We want to understand what we experience, and we understand conflict, stress, and power. We don't understand Christ's Peace and that makes it hard to desire it.

As we read this week and are challenged to abide in the Prince of Peace, let's prepare our hearts for the words and wisdom of the Spirit by striving to welcome the peace which surpasses understanding.

Our authors this week are Stella Muller, Steven Mooberry, Lauren Tomlinson, Tom Sippy and Sharon Staniforth.

- Adam Tomlinson

December 6

Peace

Stella Muller

Growing up in a small town in the Kickapoo Valley in the 1940's and 50's was peaceful. As a child, my life had no worries, thanks to my loving parents and grandparents. I was vaguely aware of World War II but felt little or no fear. Christmas was a wonderful season as we put up a tree, read the Christmas story from the Bible, and learned our "parts" for the Christmas programs at both school and church.

As I, and I'm sure many others, reach adulthood we seem to lose much of that peace as we become busy earning a living and raising a family. Even Solomon, in all his wisdom, found that didn't bring peace. As problems come our way they can only be solved by prayer and trust in God. He will take care of us and give us peace, one day at a time!

There are many opportunities during this season to help others less fortunate. This can bring peace and joy to our hearts. True peace can only be found in our relationship with God and his only son, our savior, Jesus Christ. May we experience "peace and good will toward mankind" during this holiday season!

December 7

Model of Peace

Steven Mooberry

It often seems too easy to think of peace as external to us. Have wars been settled? Hurricanes calmed? Political parties no longer argue? The natural line of thinking is: peace is the absence of conflict.

However, that conflict as Christians starts from the inside. Is there peace within my own heart and mind? Am I at conflict with myself? Do my desires get in the way of the gospel? The answer comes with how Jesus calls us to walk with him, not to simply be a calm individual but to enter into every instance of our lives with a spirit so set on his ways that there is no divisiveness. Like the builders in Matthew 7, if we obey him then we are like the man who built on the rock and have

nothing to fear. Peace isn't the absence of the rain and flooding but the total assurance that it cannot affect us.

To know we have a savior then, that even when in the midst of his own death said to the people; "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." He didn't lash out in anger, instead he continued to simply care for their well being. And in that perfect life, death, and resurrection we have the full model of how to be at peace with God, our neighbors, and even ourselves.

December 8

Freedom From Disturbance

Lauren Tomlinson

The dictionary defines peace as "freedom from disturbance". As a mother of three I do not get much peace in my daily life. There are some days when I can't even get through a shower without an interruption. But when God grants us peace, he does not mean that my life will be free of disturbance. No, his peace is an inner peace. God's peace is of inner wholeness. It is inner harmony. When I think of God's peace, it takes away the excuse of my outward circumstances. The world around me can be in chaos which is often how I feel, but I can have God's perfect peace within me even in the midst of that. God alone is the source of perfect peace. I have to be plugged into that source in order to be connect with and drawing from that well of peace.

When I am in a relationship with God, he fills my soul with peace, and the earthly chaos, doubts, and worries get swallowed up in that peace. Jesus is our perfect peace. He is the only way we can be connected to God's perfect peace because his birth and death made it possible for us to have a right relationship with God. I am so thankful for this peace that surpasses all understanding. That when my mom is fighting cancer, when my kids are going crazy, in all situations, I am able to connect with God and draw from that perfect peace.

December 9

Peace to Last a Lifetime and Beyond.

Tom Sippy

As I reflect upon the Christmas story as recorded in the second chapter of Luke, I was struck by the phrase in verse 14, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” Peace to men – what does that really mean? Peace, as we know it in our earthly realm, is often defined as the absence of conflict. Even the most casual student of history knows that conflicts or war between countries or even within a country is a situation that has continued to happen since the beginning of humankind. Any peace that is achieved in the world is usually not long lasting or is does not exist for all countries.

While peace in the world might seem elusive, can lasting peace for us as individuals be achieved? That really depends on the individual and what barrier or conflict that must be overcome to achieve peace in their life. The Bible tells us there has been conflict between God and people since the beginning of time. The root cause of this conflict has, of course, been sin. Until the birth of Christ, efforts to resolve this conflict with God and achieve true and lasting peace had been unsuccessful. Jesus resolved this conflict and has allowed us to be reconciled with God. Therefore, the opportunity for peace with God only became possible because Jesus paid the price for our sins. This opportunity is available to everyone who accepts Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

This peace with God is more than just a calmness and tranquility, it is an assurance that God is with us, and we have the hope and promise of eternal peace. A peace that is available no matter our circumstances in life on earth. The birth of Jesus is the “peace to men on whom his favor rests,” for which the angels praised God. May the peace of God always be with you.

December 10

“Peace”

Sharon Staniforth

“Peace is always beautiful” is a quote by Walt Whitman which certainly gives us a visual reminder of the many meanings of peace during this reflection time. To the Mom of little children peace may be that time when children are put to bed and are sleeping, when all is quiet. Peace comes to the student when the course of study is completed successfully. To the pastor, peace perhaps is felt when the sermon is delivered. Peace can be appreciated by the full-time employee when the weekend comes for rest and relaxation. When the biopsy report is negative, a sense of relief and peace is experienced by all. Peace of mind as described by Webster’s dictionary is explained as freedom from anxiety, annoyance, or other mental disturbance. We all know those feelings where deep concerns and unknown reasons for physical pain, mental illness, emotional and spiritual feelings continue to gnaw away at our happiness. A state of contentment is, I believe, what we all desire. Webster’s Dictionary defines contented as “satisfied with what one is or has, not wanting more or anything else”. Might we say: a feeling of peace. For the purposes of this devotion I will focus on Advent Peace.

How is this Peace different and where do we find this Peace? Another question is whether this Peace is a gift to all of us? Philippians 4:6 scripture is this: “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God”. Vs 7 says “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”. This peace is Perfect Peace

Perfect Peace and there is no such thing as imperfect peace unless we are unwilling to accept God’s peace as a gift. We have to ask ourselves if quietness and stillness are the result when we are seeking this peace or are they the pathway to finding it. The quiet times, perhaps on your knees, I believe, are the pathway to finding this Perfect Peace. God sent His Son on

Christmas Day and today's devotion encourages us that this Perfect Peace is a gift and we must open our hearts and decide if we want to accept this peace or reject it. We wonder who would reject such a thing as Peace for this life. There is no other Peace like the Peace sent by God through His Son Christ Jesus.

We are bestowed Peace which comes from Hope, Joy, and Love. Where else can we find all of these in one package? Without these other gifts, there would be no Peace. There is Peace in Hope. There is Peace in Joy. There is Peace in Love. Advent Peace is the ultimate Peace offered to each and every one of us as we await Jesus' birth this season. In John 14:27 Jesus comforts the disciples with this scripture: "My Peace I leave you, My Peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you. ... Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid". If fear and worry are what keeps us from Peace, let's help each other look to Jesus for the trust and consolation. We build our faith from this trust in our Lord and Savior every time we seek Him with a humble heart and feel the power, the answers, and His miracles.

Are we listening today for the still, small voice inside each of us which grants us this Perfect Peace today and every day through the Lord Jesus Christ?

December 11

Colored by

Nathanael (Nater) Tomlinson



Joy

December 13 to December 17

As we reach the third week of Advent, we celebrate the joy. Just as I recounted in the first week that Hope is often confused with optimism, so too is Joy often confused with something it is not: happiness. Joy and happiness are very different, for one can be joyful but sad. One can be joyful yet hurt. One can be joyful and scared. But one cannot be happy and these things.

The very first time the Gospel was proclaimed, it was done by 3 women, who, Scripture recounts, ran away from the tomb with great fear and great joy (Matt 28:8). Joy is not dependent on our emotions. Rather, Joy is dependent upon our attitude. These women were able to be really afraid *and* really joyful. Hebrews tells us that it was for the sake of Joy that Jesus endured the cross (Heb 12:2).

This week, we'll be challenged to broaden our understanding of Joy if not our experience. We'll be reminded that Joy is not happiness and that we can be joyful despite what is going on around us.

Our authors this week are Robert Odoi, Amy Calvetti, Ann Sippy, Marion Greaser and Adam Tomlinson.

- Adam Tomlinson

December 13

Invisible and Contagious Joy

Robert Odoi

Did you know that you can catch something that is so contagious right now? It can't be seen in air and doesn't live on surfaces but, will live in you and change you from the inside out. No, it's not the Corona virus, it is 'Joy'!

“But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.”

John 17:13

Jesus came to bring about the fullness of joy in man. Often, we see Christians who are not exhibiting a lifestyle of joy, and therefore we assume God is not a happy God. But in John 17:13 Jesus prayed to the Father, “But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.” Jesus' prayer in John 17:13 demonstrates two important, life-changing truths for you and me today.

First, Jesus had joy. We could not have his joy fulfilled in us if he doesn't have joy to start with. And the whole of Scripture supports the truth that within God dwells the fullness of joy. Psalm 16:11 says, “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” He longs to make you a joyful person from the inside out, that your joy wouldn't be based on circumstances or the fleeting whims of the world.

Second, John 17 tells us that we can have the joy of Jesus for ourselves. The God of joy longs to fill you to overflowing with satisfaction and hope. He longs to make your joy abundant and transcendent of the good or bad around you.

Joy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which one receives after believing in the saving power of Jesus Christ. No human being can bring joy to fellow human beings, except the Spirit of God. Joy is a deep calm delight that springs forth from within, and the origin is the invisible Spirit of God. It is not an emotion nor a mood for happiness, but the antithesis of our fickle hearts. Joy maintains its independence from circumstances and external

influences such as pain and suffering at the workplace. Nevertheless, many people consider the concepts of joy and work as mutually exclusive. Rarely would any person claim that work brings them joy unless the Holy Spirit guides them. It is also difficult for people to find joy as they work. The reason is the selfish self of human beings. In the explanation of the hierarchy of human needs, we learn that human beings are greedy beings, whose needs are ever dynamic. After meeting basic needs, one strives for higher level needs, and the struggles continue. Consequently, it becomes difficult and almost impossible to find joy in the work we do. However, leaders and managers can help everyone at the workplace to find joy by directing them to the source of joy, Jesus Christ. Whether at the workplace, home school, or wherever, abiding in Christ brings joy that no man or work can give. Instead of viewing ourselves as inadequate and not good enough, Christ makes us see his fullness in us, and by beholding him, we are content with the blessings given to us. The subsequent is joy and peace and rest, regardless of the amount of work pressure, pain, and suffering we experience daily.

God is joyful because it's a part of his nature. And he longs for it to be the same with you. Do you believe that God is a joyful god? Have you experienced how happy he is? Have you met with him and encountered the joy and peace in his heart towards you?

December 14

Joy

Amy Calvetti

I've learned over the years that when I hear God whisper a thought in my mind, I act on it. Some of you might not know, but Bonnie McCausland and I were very close. She was my 2nd mom. What most people don't know is that Bonnie is the reason I became a Christian. Sonny & I moved here in the fall of 1995 and lived with a friend in Waunakee. Prior to our move, I had felt something missing in my life. I called Bonnie up out of the blue and asked if I could go to church with her. From

that day forward our friendship grew stronger and stronger with each passing day. Bonnie was the guiding light I needed to find my way to accepting Christ as my Savior, which I did on February 22, 1997.

Fast forward to the last 18 months of her life. The pandemic tried to isolate her from her family and friends as she battled pancreatic cancer. I would have lunch with Dan & Bonnie on occasion. When Dan told me the news, they were out of treatment options, I felt sick. God planted the seed to make a stain glass piece for her. I made 2 butterflies using Brewer & Packer colors. We had a wonderful lunch that next weekend and got caught up. Bonnie opened her gift and said how beautiful the butterflies were, gave me a hug & a smiling thank you. Five days later Bonnie passed away. I have thanked and praised God for that one last special day with Bonnie. If not for her I wouldn't have that personal relationship with God & learned to act on his whispers.

The reality of her passing hit home during the funeral at the grave site. As I was leaving Waunakee, God's word came alive as a bald eagle flew low & slow right at me & over my car. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." Isaiah 40: 30-31

The song "Scars in Heaven" by Casting Crowns came on the radio. Now my tears were not only for the loss of my dear friend, but the eagle was God's comforting arms around me. He sent me a sign telling me that he was near. So never loose hope my dear friends God's word is alive & he is always near. Merry Christmas & God Bless you all.

December 15

Oh, Joy!

Ann Sippy

Sometimes when I am in a mood where I do not know what to do or say, I have said, "Oh, Joy!" with a sigh. If my dear

husband is nearby, he often quips, “Do you have it?” I usually come back with “down deep” or “somewhere!”

It is often hard to feel or express joy while going through our daily routines, but it is even more difficult to be joyful when we go through tough times. Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:16 “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” The reason it is even possible to “be joyful always” is because we know the source of our joy is not what is happening around us, but who is with us. In Psalms 16:11 and Psalms 21:6 David refers to the “joy of your presence” in his praise to God.

At this time of year, we reflect and celebrate the time when the physical presence of God came to us. The shepherds were frightened and then amazed when an angel announced, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”

We know that this was only the beginning of God’s physical presence with us. Jesus lived, taught, suffered, died, and was buried. There was more news of great joy, however when He rose from the dead! He ascended into Heaven and then sent the Holy Spirit! This joy continues when we individually accept His gift of Salvation!

“Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her king!”

If you have received Jesus as your King and Savior, then you have this joy of His presence with you always! We just need to express it and share it!

December 16

Joy to the World

Marion Greaser

When I thought about what I would share concerning the theme “Joy”, my mind immediately went to the song “Joy to the World”. Music has always been an important part of my life, and the songs of Christmas bring me great joy.

The words of this hymn were written by Isaac Watts (1674-1748). Isaac was born in England and grew up in a deeply religious family that were nonconformists. Because of his beliefs, he was excluded from attending Oxford or Cambridge because these colleges did not accept students unless they were part of the Anglican Church. This exclusion from the most prestigious schools of his day did not hinder him, and he made major contributions in the areas of theology and logic in addition to his hymn writing.

Isaac had an ability for rhymes from an early age. When asked why he kept his eyes open during prayers he responded: “A little mouse for want of stairs ran up a rope to say its prayers.”

After receiving corporal punishment for this remark, he cried: “O father, father, pity take and I will no more verses make.”

Isaac Watts wrote over 750 hymn lyrics in his life. Joy to the World is his most famous, and the song has been acclaimed a favorite among Christian hymns.

The words of Joy to the World are built on the theme of rejoicing with the Lord. This idea is found in numerous scriptures, but Psalm 98 particularly emphasizes this. My prayer is that you will find special joy as we meditate on the meaning of our Savior’s birth.

December 17

Joy in All

Adam Tomlinson

When the angels appeared to the shepherds outside Bethlehem, their first words were, “Be not afraid, I bring you good news of great joy for all people.” (Lk 2:10) The birth of Jesus is not just good news, it is news of great joy. Joy is different from happiness because joy is possible in the midst of sadness. Happiness cannot meet suffering or sadness and exist together like joy can. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, meaning that where there is joy, the Spirit is somehow involved. Since joy comes from the Spirit, it can exist alongside sorrow or satisfaction, in times of pain or prosperity, because it comes

from outside of us. It may be hard to imagine joy in certain situations, but I have often found that such trouble comes when I am trying to cultivate joy myself. Such attempts always prove futile.

Advent and Christmas remind us that salvation comes from God and—importantly—came in the midst of darkness and sadness. Rome, which claimed to be able to offer salvation to all, could not even provide a sterile room for an expectant mother to deliver her child, instead relegating her to the animal stalls. Israel, which had expectations of familial land being immovable had long since driven Mary and Joseph away from their ancestral home of Bethlehem to Nazareth, far to the north. Jesus' story is the story of "all people." Despite the humble beginning, the end of the story is glorious. Jesus will deal with sin. Jesus will defeat death. Jesus will rewrite the story of humanity. And best of all, just as he did in a stable two thousand years ago, Jesus will come again and with it, will come his Kingdom of joy.

As we prepare for Christmas in Advent, I hope that today you will dwell in the joy the Spirit offers. Invite it to cover your being and fill your life so that you may be a messenger—like the Angels of Advent—of Good News of great joy for all people.

December 18

Colored by

Ann Sippy



Love

December 19 to December 23

The final theme of Advent is love. Love is one of our favorite things to talk about as humans. We write about it. We watch movies about it. We even have a whole day of the calendar dedicated to it—kind of. And yet, Jesus tells us that nothing is greater than a person who displays love by sacrificing his or herself for a friend (John 15:13).

We must remember that God is love. This is a categorical statement. What I mean is that God doesn't (just) love. God doesn't (just) show love. God is *defined as* love. Put another way, anything that is not love, is not God.

It is because of God's love that we have the holiday this weekend, we call Christmas. It is because God love the world that he sent his uniquely begotten Son for us to believe in and find our salvation. God did not send the Son in order to condemn, but in order to provide salvation (John 3:16-17).

Love is a wonderful thing. Even so, we often trivialize, underestimate, or overlook its importance in our lives. God is love, which is why we love him. God is love, which is why we love others. God is love, which is why we have Christmas. Our authors this week are Jeri Mooberry, Kathi Seman, Keith Schoville and Chardel Johnston.

- *Adam Tomlinson*

December 20

Love Is

Jeri Mooberry

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

“Dear friends, let us continuously love one another, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born from God and knows God. The person who does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God’s love was revealed among us: God sent his uniquely existing Son into the world so that we might live through him. This is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” 1 John 4: 7-10

I can not think of any better way to try to explain God’s love for us! The Bible is God’s words of affirmation to all of us.

December 21

Don’t be a Cymbal

Kathi Seman

Crash! Oliver Wendell Douglas, the main character on TV’s “Green Acres”, jumped as Ralph crashed the cymbals right behind him. Oliver, Ralph and other rag tag musicians were all part of the newly-formed Hooterville Community Band and were rehearsing. Have you ever been a cymbal player? In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, Paul writes If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. I’m certainly guilty of crashing and clanging my way through life. No matter that God has given me a gift of musical and other abilities. Without love it means nothing. Paul continues on: 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain

nothing. When Jesus arrived on this earth, he came in love, quietly, humbly. If anyone deserved a grand entrance, including cymbals, it was him. But He lived quietly and humbly, in love.

In case you need a refresher, here's more of what Paul wrote about love from 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

So live your life in love and, with God's help and guidance, you won't be a cymbal.

December 22

Love

Keith Schoville

You have likely read or heard the phrases "God is Love," "Love one another," "And now remains Faith, Hope and Love, and the greatest of these is Love." And "love your neighbor as yourself." Everybody knows what love is, but do they? Take a look in a dictionary, as I did in my copy of Funk & Wagnalls. The first thing one has to decide is whether the word is a noun or a verb, which is determined by the context. Nouns are subjects or objects of a verb, as in "Love is a many splendid thing." By contrast, compare love as a verb, "She loves me."

Another way to think about love is to think of its opposite: antipathy, enmity, hatred. Or think of love's synonyms: "affection, attachment, attraction, charity, devotion, esteem, feeling, fondness, friendship, liking, regard, tenderness."

But enough of this grammar lesson! The closest definition I could find compared to my own is "to please or promote the welfare of the other." My definition of Christian love is to have a "genuine concern" for the other person. For example, I love my wife and our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren! Who would have dreamed that I would live long

enough to write this! Of course I don't want to see any of them go hungry, or naked, etc. I have a genuine concern for their welfare. And the same is true for my brothers and sisters in Christ, both those whom I know personally here at Westwood and others of whom I am aware scattered across our nation and elsewhere in the world. I try to manifest my genuine concern in ways that I can. Yes, I have a genuine concern for my neighbors, and I am thankful for their genuine concern for me and Merrlyn. Two of my neighbors have mowed my pasture, the donkey pasture, every week for most of the summer, and I never asked them to do that. In turn, we have given them apples and grapes, and last spring I went over and pruned a couple of the small apple trees. Enough said.

December 23

Why Love?

Chardel Johnston

There are things I really, really like and may have said that "I love them". Like Key Lime cheesecake, cream colored ponies, babies, puppies and kittens, crisp apple strudel, changing of the seasons in Wisconsin, snowflakes that stay on my nose and eyelashes. And many, many more. However, I am using the wrong word when I say I "love" these things.

The word "love" is used more freely these days. Like loving the gorgeous autumn we have had this year. So beautiful, colorful, energizing, and the scents we associate with this season are also wonderful: spices, pumpkin and apples just off the trees. Love is not the right word here-try appreciate, enjoy, celebrate the beauty. Not love.

God is Love. That is it. God is Love. And because He is love, we all get His love in full measure, even, and especially, when we do not deserve it. That is a guaranteed constant. He loves us so much that He sent His one and only Son, to our dinky (in the grand scheme of things) speck of a planet, earth, to show Himself to us and teach us about Him, and then, to die to pay for our sins so we can spend eternity with them. His love gives our lives meaning, joy, and purpose—to share God's

forgiveness so all those unbelievers can spend eternity in the presence of the love of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. God has loved us even before we were formed; they loved us through all our sins, our failures, even on those days we neither felt it or shared it. And we are to love all others because we have first been loved unconditionally by God.

Accept their all-encompassing love, share it and show it by how you love with that same love that came to earth on that blessed night in Bethlehem.

Merry Christmas.

December 24

Colored by

Eva Quarm



Please join us for Christmas Eve Services today at
5210 Odana Road Madison, WI 53711
5:00 pm