



THE SONGS OF CHRISTMAS

2010 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

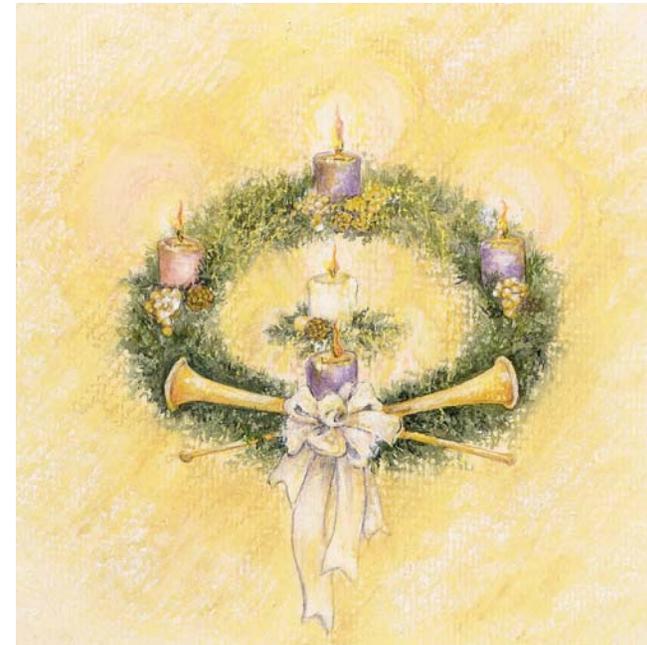
WHERE SHEPHERDS LATELY KNELT

Where shepherds lately knelt, and kept the angel's word,
I come in half-belief, a pilgrim strangely stirred;
but there is room and welcome there for me,
but there is room and welcome there for me.

In that unlikely place I find Him as they said:
sweet newborn Babe how frail? And in a manger bed;
a still small Voice to cry one day for me, for me,
a still small Voice to cry one day for me.

How should I not have known Isaiah would be there,
his prophecies fulfilled? With pounding heart I stare;
a Child, a Son, the Prince of Peace, for me, for me,
a Child, a Son, the Prince of Peace, for me.

Can I, will I forget how Love was born
and burned its way into my heart unasked, unforced,
unearned,
to live, and not alone for me, for me?
to die, to live, and not alone for me.



Art: Rosie Cooper

Editor: Martha Evans Sparks

Unless otherwise noted, scripture quotations are from the NIV.

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WILMORE FREE METHODIST CHURCH

...CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN THE WORLD

CHRISTMAS DAWN

The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light (Romans 13:12).

Day and night are opposites. At night it is dark and we can no longer see. It is often spoken of as a time of confusion, not knowing what our surroundings are. At night safe places become dangerous—stairs can become lethal and furniture seems to move. It is hard to define night without thinking about the absorbing, sweeping darkness.

Jesus is like that first glimpse of dawn inching over the horizon. He illuminates our surroundings and shows us the truth. The light of day comes and chases out the darkness of night. Jesus comes and clears all confusion, showing us the way, changing our hearts and minds.

Paul urges us to put on the armor of light. When we embrace God's light we allow Jesus to shine in our surroundings, in the deep, dark places that we hide, and in the wounds that we feel won't heal. His armor of light brings hope to the lost, peace to the restless, and day to our darkest of nights.

Salvation rescues all of us from the darkest places inside and outside of ourselves. As His light, the light of Jesus, continues to swell this Advent, may God drive out the shadows of fear and despair and let hope rise in every heart that readily awaits His birth.

Chloie Goforth is the daughter of Bill and Karen Jamison and the sister of Ethan Goforth and Forrest Jamison. She is a senior in high school and has been a part of WFMC for nine years.

WHY HE CAME

For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost (Matthew 18:11 KJV).

However we celebrate our Christmas, we must not forget why Jesus was born. I marvel with the people who heard the shepherds' story of how the angel appeared to them in the fields. They received a first hand report from heaven that a Savior who is Christ the Lord was born. (How appropriate that shepherds should first receive the news that the Lamb of God has come.) The angel even told them where He lay.

It was a little different with the wise men from the east. They followed a star in the heaven and had to ask where the King of the Jews was born. Did they recognize the young Child as a king, coming to set up an earthly kingdom, or, like Simeon, did their eyes see God's salvation—the Savior? Their actions indicate the latter, as they fell down and worshiped Him.

As much as we like celebrating baby Jesus, we cannot leave Him in the manger. This Child grew and became strong in spirit and wisdom with the grace of God upon Him. Jesus began His ministry about 30 years of age although He knew He must be about His Father's business at the age of 12. He fulfilled His Father's business, but it took the cross to accomplish redemption for the lost. We need be lost no longer. Glory to God in the highest!

Ruth Brown is retired after many years of service on the library staff of Asbury University. She has been a member of WFMC since October 2003.

THE CHRISTMAS AND EASTER CONNECTION

Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, ...humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5, 6, 8).

Christmas is almost always celebrated in a vacuum. This seems to be true of our culture at large, but is often the case among those of us who should know better.

Here's what I mean. We're all conditioned to respond warmly to, or romanticize the notion of, a "babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." But seldom do we connect the dots and extend the line to Calvary and the empty tomb. I suppose the empty tomb is not so hard to add to the mix, since it is a place of joy. The problem with the empty tomb, though, is what it took to get there. The brutality and shame of the cross and the notion of human sacrifice for sin is just not polite dinner conversation, and seems out of place at an Advent celebration.

Yet we do a great disservice to ourselves, to non-believers, and to our loving, merciful, just God, when we neglect the rest of the story. I wonder how retailers and consumers would respond if the connection between Christmas and Easter was front and center.

Years ago, when our children were young, we added the Apostle Paul's version of the "Christmas Story" to our family Christmas tradition. You'll find it in Philippians 2:5-11.

Why not consider including Paul's version as part of your family's Christmas tradition? Christmas is a non-event without the death and resurrection of the Savior.

John R. Swaim is Chief Operating Officer of First Southern National Bank. He and his wife, Marilyn, have been members of WFMC for 15 years. He is chairman of the church's Foundation, Faith, Future Capital Campaign team.

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER NEVER FORGETS US

I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee (Hebrews 13:5 KJV).

It was Christmas Eve, 1974, a snowy, cold night. All 15 of my children lived under our one roof in the frigid Upper Peninsula of Michigan. After church that evening, since Rex, my physician husband, was working in the hospital emergency room, my plan was to pack up our traditional Christmas Eve dinner of ham sandwiches, potato salad and Jell-o and have dinner at the hospital.

That night Stephanie and Anne, my five- and six-year olds, had a very messy room. I told them to tidy up while I packed the meal. Then it was time.

"C'mon kids, get in the van. Girls, is your room clean?"

Arriving at the ER, we tumbled out of the van and began to unpack the meal. Suddenly I realized that Anne was missing. I was frantic as I drove the three miles home on snow-covered roads.

The house was empty, but across the street, warm lights shown from Rita Chopp's house. Rita, a devout Catholic, had gone to mass earlier that evening. As our van pulled away that night, she saw Anne standing on the porch and brought her to her home where she gave her a doll and comforted her.

Back at the hospital, with Anne this time, we were met with clapping and cheering from the rest of the family. We found our child and she was reunited with her family. Our earthly parents may leave us, but God never will.

Nancy McConnell is the organist at the Nicholasville Disciples of Christ Church on Sunday mornings. She attends WFMC on Sunday evenings.

SUSTAINER OF ALL

...carrying all things along by the word of His power... (Hebrews 1:3b, Rick Boyd's translation).

Though Hebrews is not often considered for Advent passages, the book begins with a description of God's ultimate and perfect word to us in a Son. According to v. 3 this Son doesn't merely sustain creation but He continually carries all of creation along, from age to age, beginning to end, by the word of His power, or better yet, "ability." The word translated "power" is also the word for "ability" and this is significant.

All of creation, throughout history, has been looking to the Christ-event when Jesus would bring redemption and restoration to creation itself. The coming of Jesus has initiated "these last days" (v. 3) before all evil is annihilated and those who belong to Christ will live in glory as the children of God forever. Such is the ability of the Son. All of creation finds its purpose and glory in the ability of the Son whose birth we celebrate. This is the single event in history, anticipated in the Old Testament and revealed in the New Testament, which would reorder all things for all time. It is the realization of the purpose of God for creation and the center of the focus of "all things" (v. 3). It is the Son who leads "many sons" (Hebrews 2:10) to glory, the destiny of humanity from the beginning. So as we celebrate the babe in a manger, we celebrate the coming of the One whose appearance and ability is the focal point of all of creation for all time.

Rick Boyd is a visiting Ph.D. student from London School of Theology, working toward his doctorate in New Testament under Dr. David Bauer at Asbury Theological Seminary. His thesis is on the concept of sonship in the book of Hebrews. Rick is married to Jodi and they live in Wilmore.

WHY ALL THE FUSS ABOUT CHRISTMAS?

The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14).

Why are we so prone to "fuss" about Christmas? You know, all the shopping, attempting to find the best present for loved ones with little time to think about anything else. I observed many a shopper in my teenage years when I worked retail in my hometown over the holidays—cheery faces outside, burdened souls inside. Why do we put ourselves through all this?

Over 2,000 years ago the world was graced by God's presence. In the hustle and bustle of life this season, have you taken the time to ponder this Word made flesh? Jesus voluntarily gave up heaven's glory to live the life of a servant...for you! Do you fathom the humiliation of eternal glory to temporal humanity? Do you realize the abundant amount of love this illustrates?

The Old Testament records many laws and sacrifices required before God could be sought and found. Jesus' entry into our way of life provided the ultimate sacrifice. We no longer need to kill an unblemished lamb in the Most Holy Place to get God's attention. That most holy place can be your heart, should you choose to embrace Jesus' death for you! From "Emmanuel, God with us," to Emmanuel, God within us! Has this crossed your mind as you stand in line to purchase gifts?

Ask God to rekindle within you a focus upon Christ rather than a fuss about Christmas. How about fussing over what really matters?

Joy M. O. Ireland has lived in Wilmore since 2000 when she began M.Div. studies at ATS. She has called WFMC her church home since August 2007. She currently serves as Assistant Chaplain at Asbury University.

Scripture: Luke 2:8-14

December 1, 2010

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM ANGELS

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God...(Luke 2:13 KJV).

Rejoicing angels are a big part of our celebration of the birth of Jesus. But scripture tells us that was not the only time angels rejoiced. They rejoiced when the earth was created (Job 38:7), and when Satan was cast down (Revelation 12:12). You can cause the angels to rejoice by leading someone to Jesus (Luke 15:7)!

Jack Cassidy was the official photographer for the Philadelphia Flyers and a member of the church where my son was pastor. Jack was destroying his liver with alcohol. While in a hospital in a semiconscious state he reached out to Jesus and was saved. He became a vital testimony for Christ. The doctors released him from treatment a few months later and told him "your liver is as good as new".

Jack had a friend named Bob, also an alcoholic, whose wife and twin daughters had left him. He sought Jesus. Jack brought the young man to my office. I shared the message of Christ with Bob while Jack prayed and wept. Bob became a new creature in Christ. After leading someone to Christ, Jack had a new glow about him.

The next evening, he attended a big Flyers party. He drank Coca-Cola and chatted with the players. A big, well-known band played. Somebody asked Jack what he thought of the band music. Jack replied, "Well, yesterday I heard the angels sing and this band isn't much in comparison."

Be encouraged. You can make the angels sing this Advent season.

Harry Stevenson is a retired United Methodist pastor. He and Ann, his wife of 56 years, live in Wilmore. With Brian Kidwell, he teaches an adult Bible class at WFMC.

Scripture: Revelation 7:9-12

December 22, 2010

CHRISTMAS IN AFRICA

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude, ... from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb (Revelation 7:9).

What a day that will be. Imagine the color, the sounds, and the beauty. Christmas, with its colored lights and decorations, majestic and festive music, elegantly wrapped presents, and people dressed in their best apparel, helps us envision that glorious day prophesied in Revelation.

Missionaries are blessed to see a vision of that here on earth. In Cameroon we would invite the neighbors, those who worked with us, and the farmers from the rich green valley below to come to our house every year just before Christmas to share a chicken dinner and exchange small gifts. We all dressed in our best. A highlight was the singing. One year a Batwa Pygmy family richly serenaded us with amazing harmony. On another occasion a Baka Pygmy pastor brought a short message from the Bible. There were many tribes represented around the table: Batwa and Baka, Bamiléké and Basa and more—not to mention Swedish and German, Dutch and Finnish. Christmas in Africa was very special.

At the conclusion we would watch the French version of the *Jesus Film*. It was a wonderful time as we experienced together the story of our Lord. We miss that and look forward to the day when we will gather together around the throne of Christ Jesus with people from every language and every ethnic group. May our celebration of the birth of the Christ Child, this year and every year, anticipate His second coming. Even so come Lord Jesus!

Stephen and Lorrie Liversedge served as missionaries with Evangelism Resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon from 1984-2003, and now work in the home office in Wilmore. They have four children.

Scripture: Luke 2:8-14

December 21, 2010

DID YOU HEAR THAT?

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them (Luke 2:9 KJV).

“Lo!”

All creation sat up to see what was happening. The scripture says of the angels, “...the heavenly host praising God, and saying...”(v. 13). Angels couldn’t praise God without singing. I’m sure the angels sang.

Lo! Can we even imagine what an angel choir would sound like? There would be high notes beyond what our ears could hear. There would be low, bassoprofundo notes that people would mistake for an earthquake. The melody would surpass those of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. The harmonies would be so rich they would probably sear our ears.

Lo! The shepherds may be the only people ever to hear angels sing. What would they have told their children about the music that night? If we listen very carefully, we might hear the angels sing. At church when the organ roars and the people lift their very souls in song I think the angels join in for a note or two.

Lo! We wait for the Lord to come again and to hear the angels sing again. If we aren’t ready we will miss the angels’ song.

Lo! Advent is the season to help us to be ready to hear the angels sing.

Gilbert Roller and Jeri, his wife of 61 years, have been members of the WFMC for 36 years. For 40 years Gilbert taught music at Spring Arbor and Asbury Universities. He’s a pianist, artist, and writer.

Scripture: Luke 1:26-38

December 2, 2010

FAITH PROMISE

“I am the Lord’s servant.... May it be to me as you have said” (Luke 2:38).

Mary responded to the angel’s message in simple faith and obedience. I doubt that she was able to anticipate much of what the future would hold. Initially she knew great joy as her baby lay in the manger and angels sang praise to God in the highest. But all was not well. Simeon was to prophesy that a sword would pierce her soul; very quickly she and Joseph and her baby would rush away to Egypt, seeking escape from the sword of King Herod.

Scripture says that Mary pondered such events in her heart. She watched as Jesus grew. Surely her heart was filled with hopes and dreams for her son. But what did it mean to be the Son of the Most High? She was to learn that it meant misunderstanding, rejection, and ultimately death. I am not sure that she always understood *why*. Her heart must have been crushed by the scorn He endured. Scorn that, at times, He seemed to invite. She must have been filled with many emotions—love, hurt, confusion, unknowing. But she remained true to her son and faithful to her God. When one day she was able to see God’s bigger plan, her tears of sorrow became tears of joy. She shares today in the victory made possible through Jesus, the Savior of the world.

To what obedience is God calling you? Are you willing to be crushed, and yet be faithful even though you may not understand? In such we find victory through Jesus, our Lord.

Joyce Thomas enjoys sewing, entertaining, and finding opportunities to share God’s love. She and her husband, Timothy Thomas, are currently on assignment in Toronto.

Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:18-29

December 3, 2010

GOD OF THE UNUSUAL

Then King David went in and sat before the Lord and he said: “Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign Lord, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign Lord?” (2 Samuel 7:18-19).

We serve a God of glory, beauty, omnipotence. But one thing about our God that sometimes people overlook is that He is the God of the unusual, the abnormal. Sometimes people shy away from that word. They don't like to use it in regard to others. But how normal is it for someone to give up His one and only Son to save a dying world, a world that many times had turned its back on Him? In order for God to save the world from its sins and to reveal His glory, He did something abnormal, something impossible.

Sometimes people, when thinking of the Christmas story, get a warm, fuzzy feeling inside of them, as they should. They think of the happiness of a newborn baby, and they see the beautiful picture of Mary and Joseph with baby Jesus. But people often overlook that it hurt God deeply to see His Son go. It took immense, abnormal love to do this for a sinful world.

One thing I don't want us to forget this Advent season is how much it hurt God to give up His Son. But He loved us enough to do it for us. Is this usual? Is this normal? God's love is anything but usual or normal by human standards. “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved” (Ephesians 2:4-5).

Sam Cooper is 17 years old and a high school senior. He has attended WFMC for 6 years, and has been active in youth group and Bible quizzing ever since he has been at WFMC.

Scripture: Matthew 2:7-12

December 20, 2010

SELECT YOUR CATEGORY

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 make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him (Matthew 2:7-8).

Christmas is a time of year that is most out of the ordinary. We find ourselves praising God, giving thanks for all that He has done, and asking Him for continual blessing all at the same time. However, we can often forget that it should also be a time for reflection, spending time asking God for ways that we should change to be more like Him. One of these ways is to always have pure motives.

As you read these verses today, it is very easy to look at Herod and say, “Wow, what a terrible guy!” However, can't we also be just as terrible in the way we respond to God's sovereignty? The answer unfortunately is yes. We often want to use God for our own selfish gain, whether it's finding a social place to “fit in,” finding help in times of need and then forgetting about Him in times of plenty, or using Him as an excuse to receive presents.

If you find yourself in one of these categories, then know that there is hope! We can choose to be like the Magi, who trusted God and came to Him with humbled hearts eager to praise their savior, no matter what obstacle came in their way.

So will you spend time in prayer that you may always have pure motives, celebrating His birth with giving and not with gaining? Have a wonderful day and of course, Merry Christmas!

Jonathan Kellogg is a lifetime attendee of the WFMC. He is a senior at West Jessamine High School and a soccer player.

Scripture: John 17:20-26

December 19, 2010

GOD'S MISSION TO HUMANITY

"...that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me." (John 17:21-23 NASB95).

Christmas is the beginning of the high point of God's self-revelation. It was God's mission to humanity. This high point is none other than a person, Jesus the Messiah. John affirms this essential reality of the Son—"No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (1:18). Indeed, Jesus said, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father" (14:9). When we look at Jesus, we see God the Father. That is why Jesus repeatedly affirms of Himself that what He does and says is of the Father: "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner" (5:19). And again, "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (5:30). Thus, the real joy and glory of Christmas lies in the invitation to all people to share in the intimate relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit, as Jesus prayed in John 17.

Fredrick Long teaches at Asbury Theological Seminary, specializing in New Testament studies. He and his wife, Shannon, and their five children have been members of WFMC for 2 ½ years.

Scripture: Luke 2:8-12

December 4, 2010

THE ROAD TO BETHLEHEM

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11 KJV).

Never in my growing-up days did I dream that one of my roads would lead to Bethlehem. Nevertheless, here I was en route from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to view the birthplace of Jesus Christ. I approached Bethlehem with anticipation.

The visit to Bethlehem was short-lived. The city, because of political unrest, remained inaccessible to tourists. However, within walking distance lay a shepherd's field, straw-colored in the December sunshine. Nearby a mound revealed a cave-like niche, a hollow manger within. Gratitude for commemorating Christ's birth, yes. Yet all seemed so empty—no recognition that the Messiah had come. Of course, what was missing was the glory of that Holy Night. The tour group left in silence ready for the next place of interest.

Wait! There was another road to Bethlehem—God's road from Heaven to Bethlehem. What God set in motion that night in Bethlehem was an event so incomparable that it would forever change the history of mankind. By God's loving sacrificial offering of His son, Jesus, born by a virgin named Mary, Jesus became the God-child. By identifying Himself with the human race, yet still being divine, He could, and did, by His life, death on the cross and resurrection bear the weight of the sin nature for everyone (II Corinthians 5:21). He then could offer to everyone who would accept His gift, the guarantee of freedom from guilt of sins and give assurance of everlasting life.

Although the paved road to Bethlehem brought a tinge of disappointment, God's road brings joy, peace and love.

Ruth Mitchell, now retired, has been a pastor's wife, a missionary to Barbados, and an educator at Asbury University.

Scripture: Luke 2:22, 25-28

December 5, 2010

GOD'S TIMETABLE

And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.... Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God...(Luke 2:25-28 RSV).

Oh, to have the faith of Simeon, to believe God's promises and patiently await His faithfulness even when it would be easy to give up. It is this faith that often many of us lack. It's not because we don't believe God is capable, nor do we think God is unfaithful. This we know to be true in our hearts. Rather we are often too impatient to wait upon God's promises. In today's times of cell phones, Internet, etc., we expect our answers immediately. One thing I have learned in life is that God's timetable seldom matches my own. But, when we choose to wait patiently on the Lord, He richly blesses us beyond what we could have imagined.

Lord God, we thank You for the blessing of Your son. Please grant us the patience of Simeon. Teach us to wait upon Your presence in our lives.

Dawn Tippey describes herself as "servant of God, wife of Paul, and mother of some pretty wonderful kids." She and Paul are members of WFMC where they have attended since 1999.

Scripture: Romans 13:11-14

December 18, 2010

GETTING READY

Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day.... Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires (Romans 13:12b,14 NRSV).

Joyful preparation! It gripped us in the weeks before Christmas. We prepared with gusto! We kids loved Christmas because we were primed for something new: a new piece of clothing or shoes and perhaps a toy or two. I still remember with nostalgia those black and white suede shoes my mother bought me one year. I loved those shoes. I almost wished my feet would never outgrow them, but of course they did.

We didn't just get ourselves ready. Our home got a makeover: We spruced it up, inside and out. Sometimes we repainted in one of those vibrant tropical colors seen in travel catalogs. We were getting ready! So we bought and prepared foods we didn't normally buy or fix—tasty Barbadian desserts, hams, a case or two of soda. There was the enticing smell of sorrel. On Christmas morning, long absent family and friends dropped by and always we served some tasty repast. Even though we were not churched, we got out those new clothes to attend an early morning Christmas service.

Those activities might seem frivolous, but I wonder if God hasn't built into us this need for preparation. We seem to intuitively know that Advent requires us to get ready. When we finally become Christians, we realize real preparation isn't chiefly about outward things. It's getting rid of the junk, letting in the light, and putting on Christ.

Anthony J. Headley is a Free Methodist minister, professor of counseling at Asbury Theological Seminary and a licensed psychologist. He is married to Adina.

Scripture: Isaiah 9:2-7

December 17, 2010

GOD'S PEACE

And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6b).

Hurry, wrap, clean, cook, clean again and fall into bed exhausted. Unfortunately December looks like this for most women. Is this frantic pace what God's gift of the Prince of Peace was to bring to our lives?

Come away with me to a stable in Bethlehem. The air is cold and crisp; it is late at night. No electric lights obstruct the beautiful inky black sky. The stars are bright and pulsating with excitement. One star outshines them all, huge and dominating in the darkness of the night.

Draw your coat closer. It is chilly. What is the sound we hear? It is the wind and cattle moving about in their stalls. Duck your head; the entrance is low. The stable is dark inside except for a lamp sitting on a crate. There in the small circle of light is a man, woman, and tiny newborn. All is quiet, and the air in the stable is heavy with the smell of fresh straw and cattle. The man and woman look up at us and smile. We are not the first to seek them out tonight. Mary nods to us, then looks down at the baby in her arms as she slowly pulls away the homespun blanket to reveal a lovely sleeping child.

Time stands still. All is culminated in this tiny face. The Prince of Peace sent to you and me from the Father of Peace. We stand transfixed. Our peace lies in this stable, a gift to the whole world.

“For he himself is our peace...” (Ephesians 2:14).

Jody Zweifel has attended WFMC with her family for four years.

Scripture: Luke 1:11-17

December 6, 2010

BE PREPARED

“While Zachariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him.... Zachariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him” (Luke 1:11-12 NLT).

Many times we may be where God wants us to be: at church, at school, our work, or the store. We know that we're in the right place and are prompted to do something. The opportunity to do God's will comes up, but we hesitate. We let the moment pass. Because of this, there may be one more lonely person in the world who doesn't know God. Because of this, there is one less friend that you could learn to love. Because of this.... Who knows what could have happened had we acted and been ready to believe in miracles?

Zachariah was in the right place at the right time, but was unprepared and dubious when God spoke to him. He was in God's most holy place, the sanctuary. He was there on the week that he was chosen to be, at the right time. Even this committed priest of the Lord was ill prepared to hear the word of the Lord and so doubted the ability of God to fulfill his promise of a son, (whom we know as John the Baptist).

In preparing for the Christmas season we should be willing to listen for what God has to tell us and be prepared to believe and do His will when the Spirit urges us in His way.

Alexis Kierstead is a senior at West Jessamine High School. Her parents say she was the best present they received for Christmas in 1993. She enjoys running, learning new things, and friends at WFMC which she has attended since 2000.

Scripture: Luke 1:26-38

December 7, 2010

SURRENDERING TO GOD'S PLAN

"I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me according to your word (Luke 1:38 TNIV).

A few years ago I decided that during Advent I would read through the prophecies and accounts of Jesus' birth, taking time to reflect on a short selection each day. One morning as I collected my Bible, notebook, and pen, I was already talking to God. Things seemed to be changing in a meaningful area of my life. I told the Lord, "I like things the way they are. I don't want things to change." This was not the first time God had heard those sentiments from me in recent days.

I turned to Luke 1:28 and began to read. I listened to Gabriel tell Mary of the life altering changes she would experience—exciting changes, but changes that would cost her dearly. Mary had questions and with respect the angel answered. Then came Mary's response to the flow of God's plan, "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me according to your word."

In those moments with the Lord, Mary's words became the heartfelt prayer of my heart. It was a beautiful time of reaffirming the commitment I had made many years earlier, of willingly relinquishing and living into that commitment in a new situation.

Mary's words reminded me of a planter a Catholic friend had given me, and I went in search of it. The front of the planter is a beautiful, simple white figure of Mary standing in an attitude of prayer and surrender. I found the planter, replaced the dead plants, and now Mary stands in my office reminding me of my call to be the Lord's servant, surrendered to God's will.

Cathy Stonehouse has attended WFCM for over 23 years and serves on the Children's Worship team. She is Dean of the School of Practical Theology and a professor at Asbury Theological Seminary.

Scripture: Psalm 98:1-6

December 16, 2010

A NEW CHALLENGE

Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things...(Psalm 98:1).

Concentrate on this sentence:

To get something you never had, you have to do something you never did.

When God takes something from your grasp. He's not punishing you, but merely opening your hands to receive something better.

Concentrate on this sentence:

The will of God will never take you where the grace of God will not protect you.

During this season of celebrating the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, challenge yourself to do something you never did before to honor Him.

Make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord!

Deano and Maquel Sarantakos live in Nicholasville, KY. They have been "faithfully attending" WFCM since 2006.

Scripture: Galatians 4:1-7

December 15, 2010

THE FULLNESS OF TIME

But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons (Galatians 4:4-5 KJV).

Galatians is not usually on the list of Christmas scriptures, but this is an intriguing passage. What does “the fullness of time” mean?

Soon after he became king, about 1000 BC, David received God’s promise of the Messiah’s coming. About the same time, a group of semi-savage fishermen established a village on the Tiber River that grew into mighty Rome. Over a millennium, by alliance and conquest, Romans neutralized threats to their borders until they built an empire almost by accident. Pompey cleared the Mediterranean of pirates in 66 BC, making seaborne travel safe for the first time in centuries. On land, Rome’s suppression of unrest and crime maintained order throughout the empire. Wherever they went, Romans brought cultural and technological advancements, including a fair system of justice and their famous network of roads. Roman legions kept these international highways safe for travelers. All this established the *Pax Romana*, the “Peace of Rome.” From 27 BC to 180 AD the world enjoyed a peace it had seldom known.

This—along with other numerous aspects—opened the window Scripture calls “the fullness of time.” God spent a thousand years “macromanaging” events for His Son’s birth and sacrifice. God moved armies and set up and tore down empires so “that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

D. Curtis Hale is a commercial artist and president of Schmul Publishing Company/Schmul’s Wesleyan Book Club.

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-8

December 8, 2010

CHRISTMAS IN KENYA

...prepare the way for the Lord....And the glory of the Lord shall be reveled, and all mankind shall see it (Isaiah 40:3, 5 NLT).

Christmas in Kenya was always a highlight of the year, not only in our family, but in the church. Each area or district of the church had camp meeting during the Advent season as a means of preparing for the Christmas celebration. All of the Sunday schools of the area put on Christmas pageants in the local churches, and then competed with other area churches to find the best pageant. Then the very best would be presented at the camp meeting. These pageants were greatly anticipated. On the Sunday of the camp meeting, there were always three major events. There was the pageant, the baptisms for the new converts giving public witness to their faith, and the mass wedding ceremonies for those families who had become believers and wanted to testify to this by having a Christian ceremony in the church. Often there would be a dozen or more families who would be “Married”: Mother, Father and all the children from the previous traditional wedding. It was always a time of great joy and celebration.

It seems to me that these three things all speak to us of the preparation for Christmas. To remember once again the story told many times of the birth of Christ, but still just as relevant, the need to make public our faith to a world that celebrates but does not really understand what it is all about, and the need to involve the whole family in a Christ honoring rectification of practices from the previous year that might not have been Christ pleasing. May our Advent season truly prepare us for the Christmas celebration.

Earle Bowen and his wife, Dorothy, served in educational ministries for 34 years in Kenya and several other African countries.

Scripture: John 1:10-14

December 9, 2010

THE CHRIST STORY

“He came into the very world he created, but the world didn’t recognize him.... But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn...a birth that comes from God” (John 1:10-13 New Living Translation).

This Christmas the retelling of the story of Jesus’ birth may provide a portal into unsaved hearts to receive the freeing truth of life in Christ Jesus. Revisiting the Christ story offers hearers’ choices to shun or embrace, ignore or recognize, accept or reject the Christ who came to give all who receive Him abundant and eternal life. For those who have already accepted Jesus, the Christ-story is a reminder to affirm anew and to celebrate both His coming and the Christian’s rebirth through Him.

At Christmas, the world’s closed and rejecting eyes, ears, minds, and hearts may open for a bit of time. Eyes may see and hearts feel poignant tugs from the beautiful visual presentations of the newborn Christ child, stories of wise men, shepherds, Simeon and Anna in the temple, and a fearful ruler. Angels appear as supernatural witnesses and directors.

What an important time also for us, like John, to add to the testimonies and stories of who He is: To “tell about the light so that everyone might believe” (John 1:7). Jesus Himself, of course, calls us as His disciples, to make disciples—baptizing and teaching obedience to Him (Mt. 28:18-20)—to reproduce and to share His birth and the availability of their rebirth. May we obey the call, helping the world’s people recognize Jesus, believe in Him and accept Him.

Linda Henson has been a Free Methodist since 1994. She has worked in public education as a counselor and teacher and in higher education as a communications professor.

Scripture: Luke 1:26-38

December 14, 2010

THE FINAL SHOT

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said” (Luke 1:38).

There are three seconds left in a basketball game. The coach calls a timeout and tells you to take the final shot for a win. What do you do? Do you take matters into your own hands, or do you put your faith in God and put up the shot? 3...2...1...

Whether you decide, “I’m too good to need help,” or “God doesn’t care about this,” you’re wrong either way. God cares about everything in our lives and wants us to trust Him with everything. Now, if you did put your faith in God, what if the shot didn’t go in? Does God hate you? Is He punishing you? No! Even if God does care about the little things, He doesn’t care about who the earthly winner or loser is. He cares about our attitude when we win or lose.

So, this all comes down to faith and trust in God. No matter what, we need to be “the Lord’s servants.” After all, think about what Mary’s family and friends must have thought when she announced that she was pregnant before marriage. But, even with that knowledge in mind, Mary put her faith in God and marched out to face the criticism, pointing, laughing, and abuse. She held her head high and was the proudest mother there has ever been, because God chose her for this task.

Just like the coach chose you for the final shot, God chose Mary to bear His Son. Will you hold your head high like Mary, or hide in the shadows?

Adam Schell is 14 years old and has attended WFMC since birth. He says, “I received Jesus around the age of five, and have followed Him, not without mistake, ever since.”

LESSONS FROM CROSS STITCH

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path (Psalm 119:105).

For years Wilmore Free Methodist Church has been decorating our Christmas tree with symbols of Christ Jesus. One of the Christmas symbols is a lamp designed in cross stitch to remind us that Jesus is the light of the World.

At this time I'm working on a cross stitch gift for my brother and his wife. The Lord is using it to remind me that the most important gift we can give or receive is the word of God—both the living word in Christ and the written word of Scripture.

When I work a cross stitch piece, I must have a pattern, a guide. If I carefully study the pattern, count and measure the stitches, the resulting picture is beautiful. But if I make a mistake, I may not realize it right away. I've caught myself blazing ahead with many stitches before seeing that something is "off." I have a choice then. I can just ignore the problem, hoping it won't be noticeable in the end. Or I can accept the fact that I made a mistake, carefully remove the stitches until I reach the point where my work last matched the pattern, then move forward again following the pattern.

How is God applying the lesson to my life? Scripture, the very word of God, is my guide. Obedience to the word of life allows Christ to be reflected in our lives. I cannot simply overlook flawed areas the Lord points out to me. If He says, for example, "Forgive," or "Apologize," and I neglect to do it, I am distorting the whole pattern. I cannot expect beautiful results in my life. I won't reflect His glory as well.

We are, as Paul said, working out our own salvation (Philippians 2:12-13). God has planned the work. He calls us now to work the plan according to the pattern of His word as the Holy Spirit leads us.

Rosie Cooper and her husband, Lynn, have attended WFMC since 1986. They have two children and two grandchildren. Lynn is a retired Asbury University professor; and Rosie owns The Rose Garden Flower & Gift Shop in Wilmore.

BE PREPARED

As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him' " (Luke 3:4).

So much of our lives are spent in preparation. A meal for the family might take hours to put together, but is devoured in a matter of minutes. Some students study for days, or even weeks, for a test that only lasts an hour or two. Likewise, a musician will practice a piece over and over (and over) again, even if it only takes a few minutes to perform in its entirety.

There is nothing wrong with being prepared for the things that we do. Actually quite the opposite is true, as God wants us to give our best to everything, and to do it all for Him. The problem comes when we neglect what is truly important. Typically this isn't intentional, but rather is an issue of becoming distracted by the day-by-day activities that have little impact on our eternal future.

Advent is a time when we focus our attention on preparing for Christ's coming. This can be a highly individualized experience as well as a period of communal expectation. We should search deep within ourselves to find those areas that we are still trying to control and hand them completely over to God. In this way, we are truly preparing ourselves for the future: a future of a much higher magnitude than that of deadlines and schedules here on earth.

Instead of obsessing over the details of the next holiday party let's focus this Advent season on preparing our hearts for Christ's coming and the work that He wants to do within us.

Hannah Schell is a freshman at Asbury University where she is double majoring in music education and elementary education. She is the daughter of Mark and Cheryl Schell of the WFMC staff and has attended that church all of her life. Her brother, Adam, is a freshman at West Jessamine High School.

SURRENDER AND FAITH

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said” (Luke 1:38).

What amazing faith Mary had! When the angel told her of the impossible thing that was to happen to her, she believed and submitted herself to God! I remember another woman in Scripture named Sarah who laughed in disbelief when told about God’s plan for a coming baby (Genesis 18:10-12). But Mary, in surrender and faith, willingly gave herself to God’s will. She didn’t try to convince the angel that this incredible plan was for someone else, not her. She trusted God’s word to her, even though she did not know all that it would mean in her life.

The keys that unlock the promises of God for us are surrender and faith. “Not my way, but Your way, O God.” The way may be one of heartache and misunderstanding, not success and honor, but the peace and presence of the Holy One makes the journey full of purpose and fulfillment.

At this time of the remembrance of Christ’s birth, may our response to God be the same as that of Mary, “May it be to me as you have said.”

Patti Fiskeaux has worked in the WFCM office for 16 years. She says she has “been blessed to participate in the kingdom of God in this way. I thank God for bringing to me the understanding of these keys that unlock all the promises of God.”

JOSEPH, THE QUIET HERO

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife (Matthew 1:24).

Joseph is one of my heroes. We don’t know how old he was when the events we call “Advent” happened in his life. I imagine he was a gentle giant kind of man with broad, strong shoulders and a lean muscular build. It came from sawing boards by hand and lifting roof beams without power equipment.

Do you remember anything he said? You would think the Bible would record something, but it doesn’t. What Joseph did more than makes up for his lack of verbal record. He believed the angel. In fact, he believed angels at least four times (Matthew 1:24, 2:14, 21, 23).

It must have been hard to have to go to Bethlehem with the baby just about due. When the shepherds came in babbling about choirs of angels the night Jesus was born, I wonder if it confirmed something to Joseph’s soul. This child was special.

He was willing to have his life interrupted to accommodate Jesus’ needs. It must have crossed his mind to wonder how he would make a living, a Jewish alien in a place like Egypt, even with the Magi’s gifts. But he got up and went. No doubt he and Mary proved God’s faithfulness to provide for their needs. And when he returned with his family to Israel, again he made adjustments for Jesus’ sake (Matthew 2:23).

Other children shared the home, a lot of them (Matthew 13:55-56). When Joseph was teaching the boys how to saw and fit things together, there was always something a little different about Jesus. Something in the way Jesus looked at him made Joseph know that child really loved and appreciated him.

Martha Evans Sparks has been a member of WFCM for about five years. She writes and speaks on caregiving topics.