

Songs of the Season



**Mount Calvary Lutheran Church
Advent Devotion Book**

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Greetings to all brothers and sisters in the Christian faith,

As we prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth, it is my hope that these devotionals will be read in your home each day during this Advent season. One of my favorite traditions leading up to Christmas Day has been reading the daily devotions made from different members of the congregation, with my family during dinner. Since it became so special to me, I wanted to take part in leading this collection of devotions in hopes that others may enjoy it just as much.

It has been a joy to work with Pastor Scott and the Mount Calvary family to create this composition of stories and insights. I hope you enjoy this Advent devotional booklet, and I wish you a very merry Christmas!

-Kadiya Lingenfelter



Wednesday, December 1, 2021

Submitted by Jim and Cathy Prisk

Song: *The Advent of Our King*

Song Verse: The advent of our King, Our prayers must now employ,
And we must hymns of welcome sing, In strains of holy joy

Bible Verse: Romans 12:12 “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in Prayer.”

The Advent season sets the stage with the assurance of our King coming to set us free. Free from the cares of this world so that we may embrace the world to come. As we continue our journey through these unsettling times of pandemics, and division in our country, we as Christians must continue to effectively love and serve the Lord and each other. We need not mold ourselves to this world, but be patient.

Life can be unpleasant, and not all moments are happy, but we must wait with patience and continue to be constant in prayer. The struggles here on Earth can be overwhelming at times but they cannot compare with the glory to come. God hears and understands our clumsiest attempts to communicate with Him.

Rejoice in our confident hope, be patient in trouble, and keep on praying.

Dear Lord, we thank you for coming to this earth in the flesh. Knowing your trials and tribulations gives us confident hope that we may be patient and wait for your glorious coming. Amen.

Thursday, December 2, 2021

Submitted by John and Teresa Lumley

Song: *Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel*

Song Verse: Oh, come, blest Day-spring, come and cheer, Our spirits by your advent here; Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, And death's dark shadows put to flight. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel.

Bible Verse: Isaiah 9:2 "The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them."

As we near the Advent season, the song 'Oh Come, Oh, Come Emmanuel' comes to life, literally. The song makes us prepare and rejoice for the birth of Jesus. Over the next four weeks of Advent we prepare for the coming of our Lord Jesus.

Growing up in Mt. Calvary, it was always an exciting time when the advent wreath and candles were displayed in front of the church for everyone to see. I remember how exciting it was to be part of the Advent season and my family being one of several families having the opportunity to light the candles on a given week of advent. Advent is the time to truly reflect, understand and enjoy the birth of Christ.

As the song tells us to Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel the next four weeks should be filled with prayer, reflections, special music and good deeds. Whatever gray clouds are hanging over us and whatever darkness surrounds us, there is light to be found in the birth of Jesus. We just have to look for it. But what I find amazing is, even if we are not actively looking for the light and we live in a dark land, the light will shine on us. Isaiah 9:2

Dear Lord, let us immerse ourselves in the Advent Season and understand and forever appreciate the birth of Your son, Jesus Christ. Let us prepare in the coming weeks through prayer and fellowship and make us so ever mindful of this special season. Amen.

Friday, December 3, 2021

Submitted by Shirley Glova

Song: *O Lord, How Shall I Meet Thee?*

Song Verse: Love caused Thy incarnation, love brought Thee down to me; Thy thirst for my salvation procured my liberty, O love beyond all telling, that led Thee to embrace, In love all love excelling, our lost and fallen race

Bible Verse: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 “Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude...Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.”

This hymn was written in 1653 by Paul Gerhardt, a Lutheran pastor in Brandenburg Germany.

It is an appropriate title and seemingly simple question in preparation for Advent. But the more I pondered on this question the more complicated it became.

How can we begin to adequately meet such an overwhelming gift? It was not requested and not earned on our part. The gifts of grace and salvation are generously offered to us.

His love came as an offering “in love all loves excelling.” We can take the time to look within and see what we can do to honor and worship Christ. We would find a variety of emotions and reactions – awe, humility, wonder, joy.

During Advent we think of how the Christ child came to us in Bethlehem. How did Jesus come to us in our own lives? Was there an instance, an event or a person that “introduced” Jesus to us?

As we prepare for the Christmas Season, this can be a reminder that we can best prepare to meet the Lord by trying to follow His example. One way is to follow the straightforward guidance on the meaning of love found in Scripture in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

Prayer: Holy God, we are so grateful for the gifts you give us and for loving us so much. Help us to be Your hands of blessing where You have placed us. In Jesus name, Amen.

Saturday, December 4, 2021

Submitted by Susan Brandau

Song: *The Holly and the Ivy*

Song Verse: The holly bears a berry, As red as any blood, And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ, To do poor sinners good

Bible Verse: Isaiah 1:18 “Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

The Holly and the Ivy has been a favorite Christmas carol of mine since I was introduced to it on a vinyl record by the same name produced in 1960. Sung by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. I liked the old sound of the music and never really paid much attention to the words until I was much older. It was then that I discovered it was a description of Jesus giving up His life to save us.

Whether crimson or scarlet, the color of blood is red. Ancients dyed their wool permanently red to brighten up its color much as red berries on a holly bush bring a spot of color to an otherwise nondescript green bush. The carol equates the holly bush's bearing red berries to the Virgin Mary's birthing of Jesus whose selfless act of the shedding of His blood through His crucifixion washed away the stain of our sins. The prophet Isaiah proposes that even though our sins may have stained us as permanently red as the scarlet and crimson colors of the ancients, Jesus' sacrifice will wash away those sins to make us as clean as snow and as unstained as wool before the dyeing process. Sinless. Blameless.

What greater comfort can we receive from God this Advent season than the assurance that the gift of His Son's birth on Christmas will ensure that no matter what, our sins are forgiven by the shedding of Jesus' blood. The slate has been wiped clean. We have been “reset” to our original sinless state. Our sins are forgiven by Jesus' death and resurrection and God's grace.

Dear God, help us to remember that no matter what we do in our lives we are forgiven by the greatest gift we could ever receive, Your son Jesus. Help us to live good lives that are pleasing in Your sight and remind us that our sins are forgiven before we even ask because of the birth, death and resurrection of Your dear son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sunday, December 5, 2021

Submitted by Ruth Pozun

Song: *Angels We Have Heard on High*

Song Verse: Angels we have heard on high Sweetly singing o'er the plains,
And the mountains in reply Echoing their joyous strains, Gloria in excelsis
Deo

Bible Verse: Luke 2:13-14 “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

This is such a beautiful song. Just imagining the angels singing their beautiful praises. This song reminds me of an angel that my friend gave to my oldest granddaughter when she was born. She said everyone's room needs to have an angel hanging in it. This beautiful angel had a prism in it. When the light hit it just right, the room would be filled with tiny reflections of light. It was breathtakingly beautiful. It was as if her room was filled with thousands of angels watching over her.

Try to picture yourself in today's Bible verse, the heavens open up and you see thousands of angels singing praises to God. Isn't it breathtaking? In this busy advent season, try to block out the noise of this world and just listen for the angels singing. I pray that they fill your home with light and always watch over you.

Dear God, please fill our hearts with Your Holy Spirit so that we may always join with the angels in singing Your praises. Amen.

Monday, December 6, 2021

Submitted by Kadiya Lingenfelter

Song: *Lift Up Your Heads*

Song Verse: Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates; behold, the King of glory waits; the King of kings is drawing near; the Savior of the world is here!

Bible Verse: James 5:7-8 “Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”

Playing the waiting game is fun for no one. As I moved toward the end of my first semester of college, I had become impatient thinking about seeing my family, eating a home cooked dinner, and celebrating the holidays. Although I was anticipating the joy that would come from being home, I knew all of the hard work and stress I was about to endure through finals week before I could begin break would be difficult. I spent many days praying and asking God to grant me patience and perseverance to get through the struggles and tasks I did not want to complete. I knew that there was a light at the end of the tunnel, that something great would come from my waiting and struggles, but I just needed the extra guidance to finish.

Now, try putting yourself in the shoes of the people waiting for the birth of the promised King. Would there have been times when you gave up on believing? It was easy for the Israelites to become discouraged as they anxiously and desperately waited, but Jesus' birth came with the everlasting light to the world, and ended their longing. Jesus is the living Word of God, and he lived his life teaching others about God's love and how we should extend that love to one another. His love is expressed to us as He sent His only son, Jesus, to perform the ultimate sacrifice by dying on the cross to save us from our sins. Throughout the Bible, it has constantly been proven that the wait for Christ was worth it.

If you are waiting for something in life, the best thing you can do is pray. Pray for patience, but remember that God will not necessarily just hand it to you, but instead, hand you the opportunities to become patient. As those who waited for Jesus' first coming, and as we are in the Advent for the second coming, let us be patient and ask God for guidance to overcome the difficulties we may face in our lives and in our faith.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for showing us Your abundant love through Your son, Jesus. Please help guide us through the struggles we may be facing, and to be patient in times of tribulation. Lift up our heads as we get ready to celebrate the birth of Jesus, and let us love each other as You have loved us. Amen.

Merry Christmas!

Tuesday, December 7, 2021

Submitted by Stan McQuaide

Song: *Hail to the Lord's Anointed*

Song Verse: He shall come down like showers upon the fruitful earth, to help the poor and needy and bid the weak to strong; To give them songs for sighing, their darkness turn to light, whose souls, condemned and dying, were precious in his sight.

Bible Verse: Lamentations 3:22 "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail."

Background: Lamentations is a sad funeral song. The people had rebelled and moved away from God. (This is the story of humankind over and over again throughout the centuries.) Sin had caused the people misery as God had punished them. Babylonia had destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. The king was gone and the people were in exile.

Jeremiah saw the Lord's anointed, Jesus Christ, as the one ray of hope. He knew that God is love and is merciful. God is faithful and will never abandon us. He will never fail us. Only God can deliver us from sin. He will give us the strength we need to get through the toughest times in our lives. God is our only hope for salvation.

Christ died for our sins and His resurrection and promise to those who believe is our bright hope for tomorrow.

PRAYER: Lord, help us to know that Christ died to forgive our sins and that His resurrection, where he conquered sin and death, gives us hope for salvation and eternal life. Thank you for Jesus, AMEN.

Wednesday, December 8, 2021

Submitted by Becky Lilja

Song: *Jesus, Thy Church with Longing Eyes*

Song Verse: Jesus, thy church with longing eyes for thine expected coming waits. When will the promised light arise and glory beam from Zion's gates?

Bible Verse: Psalm 27:14 "Wait on the Lord: Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."

This is an easy devotion for me to speak on, but not so easy for me to live. I have asked God this question for many years, but even more often in the past five years. "God, when are you coming back to us? When are you coming to dismiss the pain, death, corruption, and disease the world is experiencing? When are you bringing heaven and earth together to live in peace, with integrity and well-being for all, loving each other with our whole heart, and you as our Lord and Savior forever?"

The corresponding verse from scripture seems a fitting answer. This is a frustrating answer for me.

Psalm 27:14

Wait on the Lord: Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart; wait I say, on the Lord. Be patient, continue to do God's Will and He will be here soon. I feel like an impatient child waiting to open and enjoy the "best present" ever. So I wait, continue to do God's Will, but as His child I continue to ask, "When? How long?"

Prayer: God, thank you for all the gifts you have given us. Thank you for your never ending love. Give all your children courage, patience, endurance, and peace as we wait for your glorious return. Amen.

Thursday, December 9, 2021

Submitted by Jack Weisbrodt

Song: *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*

Song Verse: Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of heaven to earth come down! Fix in us thy humble dwelling, All thy faithful mercies crown. Jesus, thou art all compassion, Pure, unbounded love thou art; Visit us with thy salvation, Enter every trembling heart.

Bible Verse: 1 John 4:18 “Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced His perfect love.”

Love Divine, All Love's Excelling...What an appropriate “love song” for the Advent season!! Having worked in radio for nearly 50 years, I've played tens of thousands of songs. Probably 75 percent of them were love songs...mostly with a positive message, but some had a negative message...

‘Love Stinks’ by the J Geils Band comes to mind..and I know there are many others.

Of course, the Beatles gave us “All You Need Is Love”. At this time of year we contemplate the greatest love of all..the love that God has for us, and he showed us by the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. That's really all the love we need!

God's love is incomprehensible, much greater than any love mentioned in even the most beautiful love song. This Christmas season, as we prepare for the celebration of the birth of our Savior, hopefully we will pause and reflect on this special Christmas gift from our Heavenly Father!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, at this time of year, we give you thanks for loving us as much as you do . Thank you for the best Christmas gift ever...Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen

Friday, December 10, 2021

Submitted by Mark Williams

Song: *Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers*

Song Verse: Rejoice, rejoice, believers, And let your lights appear; The evening is advancing, And darker night is near. The bride-groom is arising And soon is drawing nigh. Up, pray and watch and wrestle; At midnight comes the cry.

Bible Verse: Zechariah 9:9 “Rejoice greatly, Oh Daughter of Zion! Shout Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

If you ask anyone who knows me, they will describe me as an optimist; I am a “glass is half-full” kind of guy. When talking with colleagues, friends, or family members that are struggling with something, I have on a regular occasion used the phrase ‘there is a light at the end of the tunnel’ to give the person hope that what they are going through is only temporary. I have often wondered what the “light” at the end of that proverbial tunnel might represent and come to realize it depends on the situation, a person’s circumstances, or even the time of year. As we enter Advent, the light at the end of the tunnel takes on a special meaning to me. The word “Advent” comes from the Latin word *Adventus* which means coming or arrival. In the New Testament, this is the term used for the Second Coming of Christ. However, before we get to the end, let us begin in the Old Testament and the Book of Zechariah. In this book, the prophet Zechariah told of the Messiah, the One whom God would send to rescue His people and reign over all the earth. Zechariah gave several prophecies about Israel’s future, which described the first and second comings of Jesus Christ. In Chapter 9, Versus 9, Zechariah said “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

I can imagine his followers were eager to meet their Savior and Lord now that they had finished building the temple coupled with the stirring messages that their King was coming. This rag-tag group of exiles and ex-captives were surely rejoicing with the promise of the light at the end of the tunnel made by the Oracle of the time. As we know now, it would take another five hundred years before Zechariah’s prophetic vision happened, but eventually it did when Jesus Christ came to the earth.

During this time of year, as we celebrate the birth of our Savior and Lord we also look forward to when Jesus will come back again. We can take solace in knowing God is in Control and will send His son back when the time is right. With everything the secular world throws at us it can be easy to get distracted these days. However, there is no better time for the faithful to remember there is a light at the end of the tunnel and that light represents the second coming of Jesus Christ. As the song verse goes, ‘Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers, And let your lights appear, the evening is advancing, And Darker night is near. The bride-groom is arising And soon is drawing nigh. Up, pray and watch and wrestle; At midnight comes the cry.’ While we wait for the “cry” and mark this season by lighting the four candles on the Advent wreath together symbolizing hope, love, joy, and peace, I challenge you to be the light at the end of the tunnel for your neighbors, friends, and family, at least until we are graced by the next visit of our Redeemer.

In closing, I ask we all pray in Jesus’ name for those in need this holiday season and I ask God to help them find the light through the Gospel and, in turn, be the light for others. Let us remember from Psalm Chapter 36, Verse 9, For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.

Saturday December 11, 2021

Submitted by Joan and Dave Hunter

Song: *Breath of Heaven*

Song Verse: I am waiting in a silent prayer, I am frightened by the load I bear, In a world as cold as stone, Must I walk this path alone? Be with me now.

Bible Verse: Isaiah 41:13 “For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.”

Loneliness.

“Must I walk this path alone?” The feeling of loneliness and abandonment is a deep-seated fear in we humans. We are social in nature. We need one another, the companionship, the pleasure of one’s company in the good times, and the support and comradery of others in bad times. We are not, as much as Simon and Garfunkel want us to believe, a rock or an island, having no need for friendship. The worst thing we can do is cut someone else, or ourselves, out of companionship that we all need.

The book of Isaiah tells us of our ultimate companion, one who is always there, hears our pleas, and never shirks being by our side, even when we reject his overtures to follow Him.

He offers us His hand to hold and asks us not to fear. It is comforting to know that the Lord God will help. He even sent His own son to free us and comfort us. Jesus requested we do the same, to feed the poor, visit the sick and those in prison, to help and walk that path with our brothers and sisters. No one ever walks alone.

The Prayer.

Heavenly Father, Thank You for providing Your comfort, companionship, and love. It is comforting to know that you will not abandon us or shun us, even when we fail to meet your expectations. Thank you for the unconditional love and support You show us, even if we don’t deserve it.

AMEN.

Sunday, December 12, 2021

Submitted by Ray Leverknight

Song: *Lo, How a Rose is Growing*

Song Verse: Lo, how a rose is growing of loveliest form and grace; The prophets had foretold it: A branch of Jesse's race would bear one perfect flower here in the coldest of winter, and darkest midnight hour.

Bible Verse: Isaiah 11:1 "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from its roots a Branch will bear a fruit."

This is one of my favorite seasonal hymns to hear and sing, especially in 4 part harmony in English (ELW 272) and in the original German.

Es ist ein Ros entsprungen au seiner Wurzel zart; al suns die Alten sungen aus Jesse kam. Die Art und hat ein Blumlein bracht, mitten im kalten winter wohl zuder halben nacht.

Many, many images and messages come to mind. It's easy for us in these hills and valleys of Western PA to identify with "amid the cold of winter"! Now picture a bright red Rose against a drab, gray sky full of snow flurries! It certainly would stand out.

In many Sunday School classes I've taught, I've included a Rose/Thorn exercise. I display color pictures of a Rose and a bunch of thorns. At some point we go around the room and, reflecting back on the past week (mo/yr), verbalize the "thorny" situations we've experienced and those that stand out because of their pleasantness. In the closing prayer, we ask for help dealing with the former and thank Him for the later. Try it as your mental exercise.

There is a growing interest in tracing our family trees as far back as possible. The verses referencing lineage (branch of Jesse's race, stump of Jesse, Isaiah foretold) ties in the Davidic Descent of the baby born on that holy half spent night.

So the event promised (foretold) to us; has happened for us (to show God's love aright). My wish for you this season is to continue to celebrate this and, as a result, we, too, strive to show His love through our words and deeds.

Prayer: Lieber Gott (Dear God), May we be the Rose that stands out in the lives of our brothers and sisters in the mission center called Mount Calvary, Richland Twp, Johnstown, Pennsylvania, USA, Earth, no matter the season. Amen

Froliche Weihnachten!!! Merry Christmas!!

Monday, December 13, 2021

Submitted by Ida Mary Williams

Song: *When Sinners See Their Lost Condition*

Song Verse: When Jesus comes,-O blessed story!-, He works a change of heart and life; God's kingdom comes with power and glory to young and old, to man and wife; Thro' Sacrament and living Word; Faith, love, and hope are now conferred.

Bible Verse: Isaiah 38:17 "Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back."

There are times in our lives when we become ill or injured and have difficulty believing that it will pass....Or, that "the sun will come out tomorrow," as Annie put it.

I had emergency surgery earlier this year and was hospitalized for six days. It was the first time in my life I've had an extended hospital stay. I was fearful of the unknown. By the grace of God, all went well.

I know through the sacrament and Living Word; Faith, Love, and Hope are now given. Jesus will come to All in need of comfort.

Patience is the key.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for sending Your Son. In His Name, AMEN.

Tuesday, December 14, 2021

Submitted by Cindy Solarczyk

Song: *Come Rejoicing, Praises Voicing*

Song Verse: Whom the sages and the ages anxiously awaited, Angels proudly herald loudly in their songs elated. Let us too, in these days, thankful hearts gladly raise, to the tender infant render all our praise.

Bible Verse: Isaiah 40:3-5 “In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD ; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together”

Looking at the Bible verse I thought about some of the words that are giving us direction.

Wilderness. There are several definitions, but all mean basically, neglected or abandoned. As we “prepare” in the wilderness, I feel we need to look into our hearts. Are there struggles or difficulties you may be going through that cause you to feel abandoned? We suffer our own “wilderness” in life. When that happens some may turn from God. That is when God leads us to Him. This allows us to prepare ourselves by opening our hearts and allowing his Grace to fill us. We can begin to make straight our path with God in our hearts and in our faith. When we seek God, these valleys, will be raised up with thanksgiving. If you find yourself prideful at times or feel you may be better than someone, when you seek God, your mountain and hill is made low to realize you are a child of God and are no better than others in His eyes. Your rough ground and rugged places become a plain. There you know you are given grace by God and joined together with others in praise to our Lord. The Glory of God can refer to His presence: His character; or His exalted state. You have opened your heart and mind to prepare for God’s Glory. Can Isaiah also be speaking of the Lord’s second coming? We must always prepare ourselves in our hearts to be ready when the Lord appears. We are the Lord’s humble servants and we are to always be serving our Lord with gladness and thanksgiving! When we have prepared, made straight our paths, leveled our plains and awaited the Lord’s Glory, we will be ready to “Come Rejoicing with Praises Voicing!” Let us open ourselves with thankful hearts and hands raised high, to join the Angels heralding the Lord’s coming!

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, help us to bring to You our wilderness and valleys as we prepare for Your arrival. Let us open our hearts to welcome You in as we offer our praise to You with hands raised and Glorious songs to You our Lord and King. Amen

Wednesday, December 15, 2021—part 1

Submitted by Dan Gresh

Song: *From Heaven Above/ Von Himmel Hoch*

Song Verse: From heaven above to earth I come to bring good news to everyone! Glad tidings of great joy I bring to all the world, and gladly sing.

Bible Verse: James 1:17 “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

This hymn stands out among the works of Martin Luther. Luther talks so much of the dark hordes of hell, battles against evil, swords, shields, sin and damnation.

But with this hymn Luther speaks of joy! Verse after verse, it is like skipping and dancing through a field of flowers!

And he goes on and on! It would work well in a monastery alternating verses from one side to the other, or it could be used for a long procession.

I actually love every verse! Luther wrote in German, but the translations of Catharine Winkworth capture a mood and flow that so often are lost when shifting to another language.

Let us pray that we may be part of the joy of the new born Christ child through this Christmas season and the New Year!

Wednesday, December 15, 2021—part 2

Submitted by Mark and Deb Rychak

Song: *From Heaven Above/ Von Himmel Hoch*

Song Verse: And so it pleases you to see this simple truth revealed to me: that worldly honor, wealth, and might are weak and worthless in your sight.

Bible Verse: John 14:6 “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

What this means to me is that God our Father has a vision for our lives that is perfectly planned. No detail is overlooked. Sometimes life is a rollercoaster with the peaks being the light and the valleys are the shadows. Satan will try his best to obstruct or detour our journey and make us feel as though God got it wrong or has forgotten. But, in reality, He is still in control and is allowing me to build my “faith muscles.”

As a small child, I remember having a bad cold that settled in my eyes. Every morning when I awakened I would call out to my mom and she would bring warm compresses to apply to my eyes so I could finally open them as they would be glued shut. This went on for several days. One evening I said to my Mom that I haven’t been saying my prayers because I was distracted by my illness. So that night I said my usual prayers and asked for God’s help, and the next morning my eyes were perfect! I didn’t realize it then as a child, but God was allowing me to build my “faith muscles.”

Thank You God for allowing me to make mistakes, learn and grow from them all the while still keeping me in the framework of your perfect plan.

Prayer: Dear God, Thank You for challenges and for opportunities. Thank You for allowing me to make mistakes, learn and grow from them all the while still keeping me in the framework of Your perfect plan. Amen.

Have a blessed Advent season!

Thursday, December 16, 2021

Submitted by Claudia Plows

Song: *The Bells of Christmas*

Song Verse: Now let us go with quiet mind, the swaddled babe with shepherds find, to gaze on him who gladdens them, the loveliest flower of Jesse's stem.

Bible Verse: John 1:14 "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

The bells of Christmas symbolize faith, hope and joy as the Christ child was born. Bells ring to tell us Christmas is here bringing good cheer, peace on earth goodwill to men. The bells represent harmony and is the meaning of Christmas. This verses tells us: The Father loved us so much that He sent His Son Jesus Christ in human form to serve us, NOT to be served....To forgive us all our sins and to love us unconditionally. His glory is dignity, honor, praise and worship.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, We Thank You for sending us Your Son, in human form to take on the sin of the world. We Thank You that by grace through faith in Him we are loved and forgiven. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

AMEN!!!

Friday, December 17, 2021

Submitted by Harold Ashcraft

Song: *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*

Song Verse: Still through the cloven skies they come with peaceful wings unfurled, and still their heavenly music floats o'er all the weary world. Above its sad and lowly plains they bend on hovering wing; And ever o'er its babel sounds the blessed angels sing.

Bible Verse: Hebrews 1:6 "And again, when he brings the first-born into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."

A lone shepherd watches - he sees the sheep, the huddled sleeping shapes of his fellow shepherds and the dome of an inky black sky above him. Between him and the stars above, is the bone chilling cold of deep space, a cold that reaches through the thin shroud of Earth's atmosphere, to freeze the very marrow of his bones, a cold that takes the film of moisture on the thin blades of grass and creates tiny diamonds of ice, sparkling in the faint light of distant stars. The dome of the sky is rent with a clap of thunder. Walking out of the dome are winged creatures of indescribable beauty, walking toward the shepherd on nothing at all. Their mouths barely move as the voices of heaven shake the earth beneath the shepherd's feet. While the choir stops in mid air, a lone being continues until the shepherd feels he can almost touch the hovering wings. The being touches the shepherd's mouth with an outstretched hand. The hand moves until it points. The shepherd follows the pointing finger to see the fires of a tiny village in the valley. "Go," the being seems to say. "Go to Bethlehem."

The choir marches back through the rent, save one. One being stays behind to watch the shepherds in their treacherous dash over broken rocks, keeping them safe. One being hovers over the sheep left on the mountain, the rams, the ewes and the newborn lambs, keeping them safe. One being looks down into the valley, seeing a tiny baby, worshiping him from afar and keeping him safe.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, Thank You for the Gift of Your Son. Thank You for the music of heaven. May our ears be open. Thank You for the guidance of heaven. May our hearts be open. Guide our meditation this Advent season so that we may be ready to accept and appreciate the gift of Your Son. Amen.

Saturday, December 18, 2021

Submitted by Diane Venet

Song: *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*

Song Verse: Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn king; Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.” Joyful, all you nations, rise; Join the triumph of the skies; with an angelic hosts proclaim, “Christ is born in Bethlehem!”

Bible Verse: Luke 2:10-12 “But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

This verse in “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” is comforting to my heart. The Lord sends to earth our Savior who will suffer many tragedies, but is so triumphant in the end. This only straightens my belief in the Lord. I am put at ease being a sinner that mercy and joy are within reach with the birth of Christ. I too have crosses to bear, but I know our King is near to guide me. We can rejoice in His glory, and pray for forgiveness and not be so afraid.

Heavenly Father, You have told us to not be anxious for anything, yet we are so often anxious about everything. As we turn to You in prayer, we ask that You would hear our requests which have kept us from Your peace. Help us to keep our minds on Jesus, trusting Him in all things, so that we may know of Your perfect peace, even in the difficult trials in our lives. Instill in us the understanding that the things of this world will pass away, but the blessings You give in the name of Jesus will endure forever. In Jesus’ name. Amen

(Prayer sent by Waneta Lingenfelter)



Sunday, December 19, 2021

Submitted by Noelle Berkey

Song: *The First Noel*

Song Verse: The first Noel the angel did say was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay; keeping their sheep on a cold winter's night that was so deep. Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel! Born is the King of Israel!

Bible Verse: Matthew 2:10-11 "When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him."

With my given name as Noelle, I am naturally rather partial to this song! But aside from that, I find this song a song of hope and assurance. The shepherds were in the field guarding over their sheep while dealing with the discomfort of the cold and the danger that lurks in the darkness. They were in a fretful situation waiting for daybreak to come with its warmth and light. We may not all have actual sheep to guard, but we do have ourselves and our loved ones to protect from danger and evil. We have the discomfort of living in today's imperfect world with its dangers and trials that can be so exhausting and discouraging at times just like what the shepherds felt.

Noel comes to us from the Latin verb nasci, meaning "to be born". Noel can also mean good news, coming from the French phrase "bonnes nouvelles". The good news here is that the Savior has been born! I imagine the believers of that time hoping for another type of daybreak to chase away the darkness and chill of despair and hopelessness, anticipating when this event would occur. How long and anxiously they waited. And when it finally happened, what joy! What an affirmation of what they believed! We can still experience that joy and wonderment today. Take heart in knowing that Jesus is with us always and celebrate once again the good news of His birth. Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel! Born is the King of Israel!

Prayer: Dear Lord, we marvel again at the wonder of Jesus' birth. Renew in our hearts the joy, hope and affirmation of Your love and mercy. May we celebrate with song and glad tidings with each other and do our part to bring peace on earth. Amen.

Monday, December 20, 2021

Submitted by Chris Koshute

Song: *What Child This*

Song Verse: This is Christ the King, Whom shepherds guard and Angels sing;
Haste, haste, to bring Him laud, The Babe, the Son of Mary.

Bible Verse: John 1:5-11 “And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”

When I think of the phrase ‘Son of Mary’, I place myself in Mary’s shoes (as best as I can) from the perspective of being a mother. I think most of us have held a child in our arms, or have watched a child laugh and play. I think that Mary gave birth to this Christ child and felt the human aspect of instant love of her child. She fed him, cradled him, taught him to walk and talk. She watched him grow into a teenager and then into a man. She watched him teach others about his father...not Joseph, but God the Father. She watched as he gathered followers and spread the news of Christ. How her heart must have been full of love and pride and thankfulness for his life. This Christmas season, let us remember that this Christ child was Mary’s little boy, God’s son, and our Savior, which is Christ the King. Her faithfulness to God’s plan is something that I struggle to fathom and I pray each day for faith like Mary. To trust God, to follow His plan and listen to His direction.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we ask you to bless this day, to be our light in this darkened world and to help us always listen to Your calling. Help us to have the faithfulness of Mary. Hold us up and make us strong beacons of Your love and grace. We ask this in Your precious name, Amen.

Tuesday, December 21, 2021

Submitted by Beth Pruchnic

Song: *Away in a Manger*

Song Verse: Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay close by me forever and love me, I pray. Bless all the dear children in Your tender care, and fit us for heaven to live with You there.

Bible Verse: Psalm 84:10 “For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.”

-Luke 2:12 “And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

When thinking about the story of Christmas, I always think of the Gospel of Luke because of its use in ‘A Charlie Brown Christmas.’ Throughout the special, the other kids, and even Charlie Brown’s own dog Snoopy, are focused on the commercial aspects of Christmas. In his frustration over everyone’s criticism of his Christmas tree choice, Charlie Brown yells out “Isn’t there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?” One of the children, Linus, says I do and quotes the Gospel according to Luke (2:8-20). This passage describes the angels appearing to the shepherds to announce the birth of Christ the Savior.

During the Christmas season, we should focus on quality over quantity. We want to be loved and cared for by Jesus, not to be rich in earthly goods. We want one day in his court, not a thousand outside. Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes, not a velvet robe; he was lying in a manger not in a castle.

Christmas is about the baby in the manger, not about the size of our Christmas tree or the gifts below it. As we prepare for Christmas, be more like Linus and proclaim what Christmas is really about, like he did for Charlie Brown.

Let us pray during this Advent season for all those searching for the true meaning of Christmas. Let us pray for all the children in His care. Let us pray for peace on earth and good will to all men. Amen.

Wednesday, December 22, 2021

Submitted by Mari Grace Lingenfelter

Song: *Twas in the Moon of Wintertime*

Song Verse: O children of the forest free, the angels' song is true. The holy child of earth and heaven is born today for you. Come, kneel before the radiant boy, who brings you beauty, peace, and joy. Jesus your king is born! Jesus is born! Glory be to God on high!

Bible Verse: John 14:27 "Peace I leave with 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."

Have you ever tried to teach someone a topic in which it is clear to you that they don't understand? You then try to come up with a variety of ways so the lesson is learned.

This hymn is credited as being the first hymn written in North America, around 1643. Legend has it that a missionary wrote it to explain the story of Jesus' birth to the Native Americans in Canada. That is why there are words and verses about nature, which is a vital part of their culture. The text includes references to the stars, moon, forest, hunters, birds, and instead of Jesus being wrapped in swaddling clothes, he is wrapped in rabbit skin. The words may not be the telling of Jesus' birth as we know from The Bible, but the refrain keeps ringing of :

Jesus, your King, is born;

Jesus is born!

Glory be to God on High!

Knowing Jesus came on this earth for all of us is the message we need to tell others. Maybe we need to think about how to get the message across in a variety of ways for more people to know and understand. This Christmas think about how you will spread the news that JESUS—OUR KING IS BORN!

Prayer: Thank You Dear Heavenly for sending Jesus to be born to save us all. Please fill us with the Holy Spirit to spread the Good News to others in ways that will bring them closer to You. In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN!

Thursday, December 23, 2021

Submitted by Brian and Debbie Wechtenhiser

And Heidi and Gracie

Song: *Once Again My Heart Rejoices*

Song Verse: All my heart this night rejoices as I hear far and near sweetest angel voices. “Christ is born,” their choirs are singing ’til the air ev’rywhere now with joy is ringing.

Bible Verse: Psalm 68:4-5 “Sing to God, sing in praise of his name, extol him who rides on the clouds; rejoice before him—his name is the Lord. A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.”

People who know us are aware of how deeply we love dogs. For us it truly makes sense that God spelled backward is dog, for He has blessed us with five precious female toy poodles as He has prospered the course of our 40-year marriage. We’re presently loving parents of 8-year-old redhead Heidi and 7-year-old snow-white Gracie. Each day with them is a cherished gift from God.

Our scripture reading speaks of being exultant, triumphantly happy, and singing songs of praise to our Lord God. The referenced hymn likewise speaks to how we should rejoice, feeling and showing great joy at the news of the birth of Christ which was delivered through angelic singing.

This concept of joy conveyed through song is perfectly illustrated for us in the treasured bond with our dogs. Heidi and Gracie absolutely love to express their joy through their special “singing” to greet us, regardless of whether we’ve been away from home for 5-hours, out of the room for 5-minutes, or especially when we bring their bowls for dinner time. Their love for us is surely an example of the infinite and unconditional love God has for us.

As we reflect on the joy we give and receive with our loved ones here on earth, let us seek this relationship with God. Receive the joy that comes from the angel voices singing “Christ is born”. And return this gift by singing praises to the One who rides upon the clouds, through whom we would be nothing and have nothing. He longs to receive your continuous thanks and praise.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank You for all Your “treats” and blessings. Please shape me into the person You want me to be, and the person my dogs think I am. Amen.

Friday, December 24, 2021

Submitted by Barb Miltenberger



Song: *Silent Night*

Song Verse: Silent night, holy night! Son of God love's pure light. Radiant beams from Thy holy face with the dawn of redeeming grace, Jesus Lord, at Thy birth Jesus Lord at Thy birth

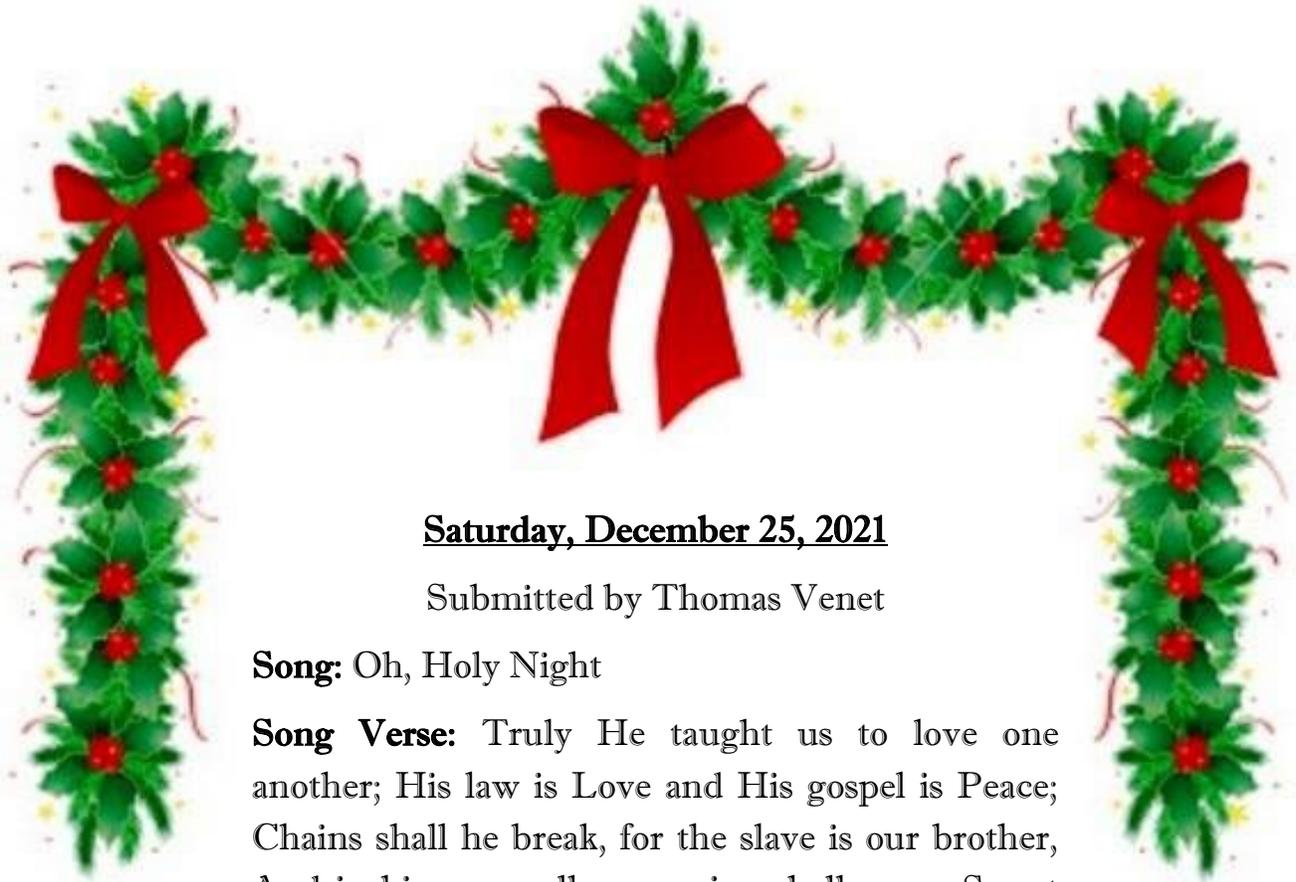
Bible Verse: Luke 1:14 "And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth."

"Silent Night" is an Austrian hymn which was written and composed by pastor Josef Mohr and church organist Franz Gruber, in the tiny alpine village of Oberndorf. The church organ was not working and they needed a song for Christmas Eve. Both men put the words and music together, taught it to their little congregation, and sang it accompanied by a guitar. As Christ's light is passed around and each candle is lit, "Silent Night" is softly sung at the end of many Christmas Eve candlelight services. Combined together, the song and candles create a wonderful presence of Christ's Spirit being among us. It is in this moment that the joy for salvation is born. These "radiant beams" are the visual display of this joy.

The moment is a strong memory: it was Christmas Eve and the church was overflowing with families celebrating the coming of the infant King. It was almost at the end of the service that candlelight was spread through the sanctuary as we sang "Silent Night." The light of just one candle was shared from person to person until the entire church was filled with this amazing glow. It's one thing to see the candles on the Advent wreath, but to hold a candle during a Christmas Eve worship service, is for me a sign that the Light of the World has come to share His joy with us up close and personal.

Twenty-first-century Christmases are anything, but silent or still. It's a busy, hectic, joyfully noisy season. We can easily become overwhelmed with family, friends, and fun. We have added so much to our Christmas celebrations today that it might not be easy to remember how it was for Mary. But we have songs like "Silent Night" to help us imagine what that first Christmas could have been like. Of course, I'm sure it wasn't a totally silent night. Jesus was born in a manger, and if any animals were nearby, it couldn't have been quiet or still all that long. However, it was a holy night because the Son of God had entered the world.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, this is Your Holy Day and we rejoice with the angels at Your birth. As we light candles tonight may we hear as God "sings for joy" over us. The sound of this joy though silent is radiating like the light from the candles. In Your Holy Name, we joyfully pray. Amen.



Saturday, December 25, 2021

Submitted by Thomas Venet

Song: Oh, Holy Night

Song Verse: Truly He taught us to love one another; His law is Love and His gospel is Peace; Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother, And in his name all oppression shall cease, Sweet hymns of joy in grateful Chorus raise we; Let all within us praise his Holy name!

Bible Verse: Luke 2:11 “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”

This Christmas season, praise the Messiah with all of your being. Sing out joyous hymns with gratitude. God’s presence on earth in human form as Jesus Christ is the greatest Christmas present mankind will ever receive. Obey the Lord’s laws of love and follow His gospel of peace. Love one another as you would love Jesus. In return your chains of oppression will be broken.

Thanks to all who participated in pulling together this year's Advent devotional. I think of a few verses recently read in worship as I consider the project as a whole. In the book of Hebrews, we read, "We must consider how to rouse one another to love and good works. We should not stay away from the assembly, as is the custom of some, but encourage one another, and this all the more as you see the day drawing near," (Hebrews 10:24-25). In my judgment, the prayers, songs, and reflections you've just got done reading are all helpful attempts to answer this charge from the book of Hebrews. Each prayer, each song, each reflection finds a sibling in Christ endeavoring to strengthen us in our faith as we do our best to faithfully await the Second Coming of Christ. By this point in our Advent journey, the celebration of Christmas has also endeavored to do the same. For if Christ came once to save us from our sins, he will most certainly come again to usher in the life everlasting.

Let us pray. Holy Father, we thank you for the gifts of song and scripture. They instruct and inspire us as we do our best to follow Jesus all the way to the blessed future you have prepared for all people of Christian faith. We also thank you for every member of the faith community known as Mount Calvary Lutheran Church, particularly those who have written devotions for Advent or had a role in the editing and production of this year's Advent devotional. May we continue to rouse one another to love and good deeds and encourage one another as the day of Jesus' final return draws nearer. As we await that day, the timing of which only you know, may we be upheld in faith and trust until we eventually see our Lord Jesus not in a manger, not on a cross, not in a tomb, but on a throne of glory forever and ever. Amen!

Pastor Scott



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