

ADVENT 2022

METROPOLITAN A M E C H U R C H

The Right Reverend James Levert Davis, Servant Bishop
Reverend Ronald E. Braxton, D. Min., Presiding Elder
Reverend William H Lamar IV, Pastor

Foreword

To God Be the Glory!

Two Thousand Twenty-two

Advent is a season of anticipation and preparation for the coming of a baby who would become our savior, Jesus Christ. We pay homage to Mary and Joseph for accepting, by faith, a child destined to be the moral and just compass for the world.

This year has brought issues that stirred us to call on our faith and strength to meet the challenges confronting us. The issues of ongoing wars and rumors of wars, election concerns, COVID-19 and its omicron variant, booster vaccinations, injustices, the homeless, violence, inflation and personal concerns are all pressing us to seek and pray for community and worldwide solutions.

This booklet is a reflection of the emotions and concerns written by members and friends of Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church. The scriptures, thoughts and prayers of each writer come from a range of perspectives and emotions. Each testimony reflects the writer's personal feelings and experiences. Advent helps us to focus on the blessings of Hope, Joy, Peace, and Love that keep us going not just at this time but throughout the year.

We welcome Advent, believing and trusting that God is with us.

We invite you to use this booklet as a daily devotional. Join us in sharing the love of Christ at Advent and through all seasons of the year.

Joy to the World!

***YVONNE L. BOLLING
DIRECTOR, COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION***



November 27, 2022



ADVENT REFLECTION 2022

“... Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Matthew 24:36-44

This jarring passage from Matthew is the gospel lection for the first Sunday of Advent 2022. These words call us to dispense with the warm and fuzzy notion that Advent is preparation for cultural Christmas celebrations. No bells, no toys, no plays, no angels, no shepherds, no wise men or women, no cute children, and no cuddly babies are to be found at the beginning of this season.

Something is about to happen. It will not be inaugurated by human effort. That which is about to break forth in the world will be by God’s effort alone. No one knows when it will begin. The angels are unaware of its origin. The Son is not privy to its commencement.

The flood caught Noah’s generation by surprise. And the coming of the Son of Man will not be forecast accurately by preachers or pundits. God will not announce the appearing of the Anointed One. Like a thief, stealth will be God’s stock-in-trade. The Holy One will not be ringing doorbells or pinging our handheld devices.

Therefore, let us get ready. Let us greet the Coming One with justice by fighting and praying for a world where there is room in every inn for every child and every mother. Let us greet the Coming One by showing radical hospitality to God’s emissaries among us, the dispossessed and the downtrodden. Let us greet the Coming One with prayer and worship that stir up the *imago Dei* in each of us such that we join God in the co-creation of a new theological and sociopolitical order.

Prayer: *Heavenly Parent, scripture teaches that we shall be surprised by the Coming One. Incline us to surprise the Coming One by being about God’s business. Amen*

REVEREND WILLIAM H. LAMAR IV
PASTOR

November 28, 2022



EVERYDAY IS A LITTLE CHRISTMAS

“But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?” Malachi 3:2

Stevie Wonder’s “Someday at Christmas” is one of my all-time favorite Christmas carols. At first, it seems like the song is more about a season than it is about the birth of Jesus. The song hopes for freedom from war, bounty for all, and fearlessness among humankind. But if you listen to the song closely and read the lyrics, the relation of those “worldly” things to the divine birth of Christ is abundantly clear. We await a warless world where everyone is equal, where hate is gone, and love prevails---not unlike our awaiting Jesus’s birth. In fact, both moments of waiting are intimately linked. Jesus is also the Prince of Peace, the Son of Righteousness who has come to end the waiting mentioned in the song. Because Jesus was born, we need not wait anymore for Christmastime and all it represents. When we sing “veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail incarnate Deity,” we must remember that God is forever born in us. So, we can feel empowered to make the “someday” Stevie Wonder sings of today, every day.

Prayer: *God, help us to live up to your expectation of us so that we don’t long for Christmas but that we, instead, work every day to make manifest the world the season has come to represent.*

**SISTER DANA A. WILLIAMS
BETHEL 21 HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

November 29, 2022



THE REASON FOR THE SEASON

But the angel said to them, “do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.” Luke 2: 10

Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day, the Sunday nearest November 30th, and ends on Christmas Eve, December 24th. It is preparation for the celebration for Jesus the Christ’s birth.

Each week of Advent represents our growing faith that Jesus is coming; a journey from hope to celebration.

- Week #1 focuses on hope, with a special Sunday church service and prayers that fill our spirit with the hope that Christ will come to us.
- Week #2 focuses on preparation. We are called to prepare for the coming of the Lord.
- Week #3 is all about joy. It’s known as Gaudete Sunday. Gaudete means “rejoice” in Latin.
- Week #4 is focused on God’s love as we prepare for the good news.

While we are transitioning from the “COVID-19 pandemic season,” think of all we've seen, all we've heard, and all we've felt. And nonetheless, know that God has been and is within us. He is in our hands, our arms, our hearts, and He’s kept us to prepare for another season!

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, as we focus on hope, preparation, joy, and your love, help us to be at peace; knowing that you will never leave us and that you dwell among us in all seasons. Amen.*

**SISTER MARIA WALLACE
ROBERT AND ORA B. KELLY LAY ORGANIZATION**



THE ADVENT CALENDAR

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. James 1:17

The Advent calendar is rooted in a tradition that spans centuries of church history. Emerging from a Protestant Christian context, Advent calendars carry an underlying spiritual message of anticipation and hope. By helping us remember and reflect on the coming of Jesus Christ, Advent calendars can be a valuable aid for Christian families.

Advent calendars now come in many forms, but the tradition began simply enough when German families in the mid-nineteenth century started counting the days until Christmas by tallying chalk marks on a door or wall. Some families made homemade Advent calendars to accompany their countdown. There are many unique styles of Advent calendars. Some are overtly Christian while others play to the more secularized aspects of the holiday season.

For families who want to remain Christ focused during Advent, a nativity-themed calendar is an excellent choice. Other calendars highlight Bible stories that tell of God's people leading up to Jesus. The spiritual focus of these Advent calendars is built into the countdown in the form of brief devotionals that may be used for personal reflection.

Prayer: *Lord, fill us up with love, hope reverence and celebration as we approach this Advent season. Amen.*

**STEWART ELIAS "PETE" PRIOLEAU, III
SENIOR STEWARD BOARD
MIGHTY MEN OF MAMEC**

December 1, 2022



THE SEASON OF ADVENT

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh. Matthew 2: 11 (NRSVUE)

The season of Advent is a time of anticipation. We Christians anticipate the coming of Christ. Many children (and adults!) eagerly anticipate the receiving of gifts. When I was an unmarried woman living 2,000 miles away from my family, the days of Advent signaled that it was almost time for my annual visit with my extended family. My anticipation of Christmas was less about Christ's birth and more about an impending reunion with my family.

As I have grown in my Christian faith and my family situation has shifted, my relationship to Advent has changed. For me, Advent has become a peaceful period before the whirlwind of the commercial Christmas holiday. It is now a time for me to prepare my heart and mind for the coming of Christ. During the Advent season, I take time each day to reflect, give gratitude, and read the Metropolitan Advent Booklet.

Prayer: *Our gracious God, most merciful parent, thank you for giving us another opportunity to celebrate the birth of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen*

**SISTER SIDRA SMITH-GARNER
UNITED VOICES
SONS & DAUGHTERS OF ALLEN**



YOU CAN'T BEAT GOD GIVING

“For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son.” John 3:16 (NRSVUE)

As we enter this Advent season, I can't help but think of the gift God has given us. I know we all like to think we give so much, but in comparison there is no way we can surpass the gift God gave us when He gave us his son. That is why we can't beat God's giving.

The gift God gave to us is truly the light of the world. When we accept that light and walk in that light, we know that his Son, Jesus is the light of the world. When we sing glory to the newborn King, we get a feeling of just how significant a gift this is, and we know that there is no gift we can give that allows us to beat God's gift/giving.

The gift lets us know the Lord is blessing us right now, He woke us up, started us on our way and He does that every day. This is how I know that we can't beat God's giving.

Prayer - *Father, keep us in your care and accept our thanks for the gift of your son Jesus. Have us to live lives that show others how grateful we are for this gift and in ways that will help us bring others to salvation. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen*

**STEWART THEDFORD COLLINS
STEWART PRO TEM**

December 3, 2022



THE MOST PRECIOUS GIFT

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

I Peter 2:9

Another year is speeding by. Advent is upon us, and we focus on preparing to celebrate Jesus' birth. This has been another year of stress, strife, and sorrow in so many areas. I resist the feeling that I do not want to watch the daily news because too much of it is bad. I resist the temptation to withdraw from exposure to others' pain so that I can detach from the need to help somehow.

As I reflect on Advent, I think about the goodness of God and the unmatched, unfathomable gift of God's precious son who came to save a sinner like me. God gave this gift of love because God has chosen us as special possessions, part of God's holy nation.

During this Advent, I want to focus on how to be more of a gift to God. As part of God's holy nation, we are equipped to be brighter lights in doing God's work on Earth. We cannot get weary in well doing. I need to do more to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and work unceasingly for the liberation of the oppressed. The Creator does not require grand gestures, but simple practical ways to show love to her people.

Prayer: *Dear Holy One - Thank you for life, new mercies each day and the unmatched gift of Jesus the Christ. Please plant in me a spirit of deeper humility, more fervent prayer and a closer relationship with you so that I might be a stronger, more effective citizen of your holy nation. In Jesus' name I pray, AMEN*

**STEWARD MARIE C. JOHNS
PASTOR'S STEWARD**

December 4, 2022



SO, I PRAY

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (ESV)

This year has been difficult for me because certain personal occurrences have been hard to process. It’s been challenging to find the logic in why certain things have happened even though I have lived long enough to know that life is unpredictable and illogical. I have to keep reminding myself that there are very few things I can control and that I must continue to pray.

I pray for peace because when the Prince of Peace was born the heavenly hosts shouted, “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!!” Luke 2:14.

I pray that we love one another because Jesus said “...You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Matthew 22:39. Also, I pray that we all express the joy of knowing that God sent Jesus so that we can experience the joy of everlasting life.

Finally, during this Advent season let us all pray that we never lose hope and that we “Let your unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you.” Psalm 33:22

Prayer: *Our Heavenly Parent, thank you for sending us Jesus and thank you for teaching us to pray.*

**SISTER BARBARA FARROW JONES
STEWARDESS**

December 5, 2022



WORKING IT OUT

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”
Matthew 11:28 (NRSV)

After more than forty years of keeping house, it is no surprise that we have accumulated “stuff.” In this case, “stuff,” is worldly goods; some of which should have been discarded. I have learned to purchase less often and recently avoided buying a desk organizer when I realized that I had a basket that would serve the same purpose. I was very proud of myself for saving money and a shopping trip.

It is unfortunate that in life, we/I have often purchased or invested in extraneous worldly resources (stuff) to solve a problem. Christ is our greatest resource. Prayer and contemplation often yield marvelous results, but there is a lot of stuff that *appears* more attractive. Often it ends up being more costly as well.

Following scriptural advice requires discipline that sometimes challenges us, but it comes without a price tag. Advent is going to be followed by Christmastide and in our tradition, the season can be costly, dollar-wise and emotionally. Perhaps this can be the year of celebration without burden. Perhaps the celebration can be more adoration of the Christ and His powerful presence among us.

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, this year, please help us to get it right. Less glitz and glut and more peace and sacred presence. Amen*

**SISTER MARSHA TURNER BOTTS
LOVE & PEACE UNIT/SAMS
CHURCH SCHOOL**

December 6, 2022



“LET’S GO”

“I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord, our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.” Psalm 122:1-2 (KJV)

This Psalm was written by David for the people of Israel when they came up to Jerusalem to worship at the three solemn feasts: Passover (the Feast of Unleavened Bread); Pentecost (the Feast of Weeks) and Sukkoth (the Feast of Booths). The invitation was very welcomed. So much so, that David himself was glad.

Psalm 122: 1-2 is also the first line in the traditional African Methodist Episcopal Church Call to Worship. We are invited to “enter His gates with thanksgiving,” to “bless The Lord at all times, (for) His praise shall continually be in your mouth,” and to remember that everyday is “the day that the Lord hath made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

It is the will of God that we worship together and in our houses, but that’s not enough. We must “go into the house of The Lord” to pay homage to Him there. Encourage one another to worship God in public. Let us go – not, you go first then we come later, let us go together to honor God for our mutual edification and encouragement. Are you ready? Let’s go!

Prayer: *In the name of Jesus, let us walk together and not get weary. Rejoice in the name of The Lord for the things He has done. Rejoice I say, rejoice! Amen.*

**REV. GEOFFREY E. TATE, SR.
MAMEC MINISTERIAL STAFF
MINISTER TO SENIORS**

December 7, 2022



IS THIS IT?

“but examine everything carefully and hang on to what is good.” 1Thessalonians 5:21 NRSVUE

Am I the only one who continues to struggle with the changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic? As we enter Advent, we look forward to the celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior.

For some reason, the funeral services for Mother Estella McLean Speaks triggered in me a reflection on my Metropolitan's of yesterday. I suppose it was the assemblage of the Voices of Inspiration, the presence of Brother Keith Derrick, and the joyous music of our past. I thought of some of the things I miss --- choir and clergy processions, flags and flag bearers, chancel duty, hymnals and Bibles in the pew racks, church bulletins, the call to worship, the Apostles' Creed, the opening hymns, hymns of preparation, the annual presentation of Handel's Messiah... And, of course, the multitude of ways chicken could be prepared at the various organizations' Christmas parties.

As much as I would happily reflect on the people and times of my yesterday, I am awakened to my today. Will Roger's declared, “Don't let yesterday take up too much of today.” I thank God for this opportunity to witness Advent 2022.

Prayer: *Father, I thank you for allowing me to have a closer walk with thee. Amen*

**BROTHER JAMES F. ROBINSON
STEWART EMERITUS
USHER**

December 8, 2022



GOOD HABITS

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

When I was growing up in Portsmouth, Virginia, I had a Vacation Bible School teacher who taught my classmates and me to frequently recite this quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson:

“Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.”

She wanted us to develop good habits. For more than two years, I have habits that I have developed to deal with the pandemic. I wear a mask. I try to keep a distance of six feet from others. And on Sundays, I attend church on online.

When we started having church in-person, I was initially reluctant to come to church. I was concerned about COVID-19, which has killed 6.5 million people. But, God made me realize that I shouldn't be afraid. I have been going to church my entire life. Why should I let the pandemic keep me from the sanctuary? I came back. I am glad I did.

During this Advent season, I am grateful that I was brought up in the church. I am grateful that God gave his only son to save my life and the lives of other believers.

Prayer: *God help me to remember the good habits that have brought me so far. Amen*

**SISTER ATHELIA KNIGHT
MEMBER**

December 9, 2022



JESUS IN OUR HEARTS

“Be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” Eph. 3:17

Recently, I conducted an unscientific survey to see how many people, including myself, wear a cross pendant. I was amazed. Six out of ten Christians wear a cross; for some the cross is publicly displayed and others tuck it under their clothing.

Every Christmas neighbors seem to compete to see whose house has the most decorative lighting. While the utility companies collect more money during the holidays, we tend not to worry too much about the expense until the new year.

Do we really love the Lord or are we superficial? Does the cross we wear compel us to help the homeless, clothe the naked, visit and minister to those who are incarcerated? How often do we see someone who needs help, but turn away? How often do we shower our loved ones with presents during Christmas but can't afford to donate at the Salvation Army collection booth? Answers to these questions might amaze you.

As we prepare our hearts for the coming of our Savior, let's do as He has commanded; love and care for one another, forgive each other, and obey the commandments.

Prayer: *Eternal and merciful Father, give us new and clean hearts to love one another more and material things less. Grant us wisdom not to act foolishly in preparing our homes with colorful lights but shun people when they ask for help. Prepare our minds and souls to be like Jesus. This we ask in His name. Amen*

**TRUSTEE PIUS BOLA AKINOLA
FINANCE OFFICE TEAM**

December 10, 2022



COME LORD AND SAVE US

“Be alert and sober of mind. Your enemy, the devil prowls around like a roaming lion looking for someone to devour” 1 Peter 5:8 NIV

In the twenty-first century the world has become an international family. The news comes into our homes letting us know in real time what war looks like in countries far away. We see the destruction as it is occurring; families displaced, children traumatized, property destroyed and world leaders making decisions about whether they should get involved. We can hardly believe and understand what we are seeing. There is never a good reason for war. It usually can be determined that power and greed had something to do with it.

War is the most destructive force on humankind and those who support it will have to justify their decisions to God. The people of Ukraine have been pelted with weapons of war for most of this year and there is no justification. Our prayers are for the innocent who are being slaughtered.

“The Lord will grant that the enemy who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you in one direction but flee from you in seven.” Deuteronomy 28:7 NIV

We look forward to the coming of the Lord who brings peace, justice, love, kindness, compassion, forgiveness, and salvation.

Prayer: *Dear God, remove the enemy from the midst of the Ukrainian people. Give them courage and strength to overcome all evil. In Jesus name we, pray.*

**SISTER JOAN W. OXENDINE
STEWART EMERITUS**

December 11, 2022



COUNT IT ALL JOY

“The Joy of the Lord is My Strength”
Nehemiah 8:10

Advent is a season filled with many reasons to treasure and commemorate, the greatest reason of all to me is the feeling of joy. As disciples of Christ, we are taught to give thanks and be joyful in all seasons; even in times of hardship and difficulty. In the Advent season, Jesus is the joy that reminds us of the importance of sharing the Christ story. We recognize the blessings of being called a child of God and thank God for sharing His greatest joy with us.

As we reflect on our lives, we should take time to find even more reasons to rejoice. As children of the most high, we can rewind our memories to identify past joy and seize joy in the present; always remaining hopeful for joy in the future.

Joy and faith anchor our presence, and, in all circumstances, we have the option to be joyful. The joy of Jesus gives us strength.

Prayer: *Father, we pray that you continue to fill us with the joy of your spirit. Help us to see joy not only in this season of Advent but help us to see Jesus in ALL that we encounter in all seasons. Amen.*

SISTER LEILA M. KENDRICK
WMS-LIFE MEMBER

December 12, 2022



ADVENT-- A SEASON OF INTENTION

*“He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself,
according to the kind intention of his will”*

Ephesian 1:5

Every few years a new catch phrase begins to trend. “Unprecedented” is one such word of the pandemic era. More recently, a new word began to trend -- "intentional" -- a decision to act with purpose for a specific outcome.

It is Advent again. For some of us, myself in particular, I concluded that to celebrate the light of the world, I must be *intentional* in acknowledging the disappointments in my journey this past year and then, release them. This doesn't mean to forget or pretend that unfortunate events occurred, but to be intentional in acknowledging, yes, it happened, but God was still with me through it all. I still have joy.

The joy of Advent requires an open heart to be reminded of God's gift of love. An intentional Christmas experience requires an examination of the heart, a desire to feel hope, and to claim the gift of redemption through Jesus. In acting with intention, we can realize Advent's aim, which is God's love and promise to be with us through eternity.

Be intentional.

Prayer: *Gracious God during this season of Advent we seek your presence. We acknowledge your Son, our savior, and **intentionally** set aside those things that would hinder our focus on the hope and joy of this season. In Jesus' name, amen.*

**STEWARD GRETA L. KENDRICK
SENIOR STEWARD BOARD**

December 13, 2022



IN A LARGE ROOM WITH NO LIGHT

The light shines in the darkness, and darkness has not overcome it. John 1:5

The great musician Prince asked, “did you ever feel like life was like looking for a penny in a large room with no light?” These days are filled with disruption; be it the War in Ukraine and its catastrophic effects on human life or political acts of division which echo the worst chapters of history (those chapters that various states are forbidding our children to read). And there are personal worries -- Will the kids be alright? Will this disease be defeated? Will we ever get our church back to the way it was?

“Unprecedented” seems to be a reoccurring word in our zeitgeist. While historians, scientists and pundits argue whether various events are without precedent, the word is used regularly; seemingly to heighten our anxiety. However, The Spirit reminds us that “the light is not overcome by the darkness.” When our ancestors used a cosmic map to escape to freedom., when a Black woman with an African name ascended to the highest court in the land; light prevailed. Still today, God’s enduring light remains undefeated and shines a path forward through the darkness, thus expanding our universe of imagination.

Prayer: *Creator, may we always remember that night goes before light and that our darkest hour is preparation for the illumination to come. Let the glow of blessings direct us to recollect what we have received and praise You in the twilights and dawns of life. Amen*

**BROTHER JONATHAN BOTTS
YOUNG ADULT CHURCH SCHOOL CLASS**

December 14, 2022



THE VOICE OF GOD

Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true."

Luke 1:38 NLT

My father taught me to drive when I was sixteen years old. I was truly excited because it meant I could run errands for my mother and grandmother. Even though it was many years ago, each time I get in my car I still hear my father's voice saying, "what is the speed limit," "you are tailgating" and "take your foot off the brake."

Just as I hear my father's voice, God speaks to us also. We hear God's voice, but many times we do not follow it. We think our plan is better than his and proceed with it. In the Bible, there are stories about people who did not listen to God, e.g., Adam, Abraham, Sarah, Solomon, and others.

God will accomplish his plan for your life without your cooperation and when the task is accomplished it will be so spectacular that you will know it is God. Mary heard the voice of God from an angel and responded with the above scripture. This Advent season I suggest we follow the example of Mary and listen to the voice of God.

Prayer: *Dear God, Draw me nearer Precious Lord to your voice by prayer, meditation and obedience. Amen.*

**SISTER JUDITH WATKINS
STEWARDESS**

December 15, 2022



WHO ARE YOU?

And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am? Luke 9:18 KJV

In today's society, people are recognized by their name or title. For instance, the "King of Pop" (Michael Jackson), the "Queen of Soul" (Aretha Franklin), the "Godfather of Soul" (James Brown). There are also the one name phenoms--Beyonce, Prince, Serena. We often present ourselves with our titles to those with whom we interact; hoping that this will impress and give us the esteem and admiration of that person or group of people.

In the scripture above, Jesus asks the disciples who the people think He is. In reading the subsequent verses, the disciples give several answers. Finally, Jesus asks them who do they think He is. Peter answers "The Christ of God."

In these tumultuous days, it is important that we believers know who Jesus is and who we are in the body of Christ. Knowing and expressing to others, the great news of the risen Savior should be the mission of all who claim Jesus as Lord and Savior in their lives.

Know who He is!

Prayer: *Almighty God, grant us the wisdom to know who Jesus is and grant us the courage to proclaim His name. Amen*

**STEWARD WADE DUGGER
STEWARDSHIP AND FINANCE**

December 16, 2022



BIRTH STORY

“But even before I was born, God chose me and called me by his marvelous grace. Then it pleased him to reveal his Son to me so that I would proclaim the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles.” Gal: 1-15-16

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Do you know your birth story? During a recent group discussion, this question was considered and we were asked whether we know our “Birth Story.” What were the circumstances or situations that surrounded how we came into this world?

In your story, who was present to welcome you? Was there joy, gladness, great anticipation or uncertainty, confusion, disappointment? Does your birth story shape or determine the direction of your life? While none of us have a choice regarding our birth, God had a singular purpose in creating each one of us. We did not just happen to our family or to the world.

During this Advent season we reflect upon the circumstances of Our Savior’s birth and remember how and why He came in human form to change a sin full world. He came to order our lives...in love, peace, hope, joy...and to be His witness. God’s great purpose and plan for our lives is revealed in the birth story of Jesus.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank you for the birth of Jesus Christ our Savior. Thank you for your great love for us. Help us to live and walk purposefully, in the wonderful name of Jesus. Amen*

**SISTER JACQUELINE BROWN WOODY
FRIEND OF METROPOLITAN**



I CELEBRATE LIFE WITH NEW VIGOR

“They that hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar on eagles; They will run and not grow weary, walk and not faint.” Isaiah 40:31 (NABRE)

As the year comes to an end and as Advent begins, I will move into the new year knowing that new blessings and adventures are ahead of me, no matter what my experiences have been. The birth of Jesus reminds me that with each new year there is the opportunity for new beginnings, to celebrate life, to seek understanding, and to thank God for the many blessings received and to come.

It's easy to focus on the challenges we experience rather than to look for the blessings hidden in the challenges. It is not what we get, it is how we react to what is given, that tends to challenge our beliefs and our blessings. Since retirement, I have experienced my father's transition, breast cancer, ongoing after effects of chemotherapy and radiation, COVID-19, my oldest brother's transition, arthritis, and pre-diabetes.

Yet, I know that “God is good” and I am so very blessed. So, during this Advent season, I will take the time to sit quietly, talk to God, talk to myself, to give thanks, to seek direction and purpose so that I am open to new blessings and challenges.

Prayer: *Thank you God for being with me during my challenges and for helping me realize that my life would have been worse without you, those are your footprints in the sand and not mine.
Amen*

**TRUSTEE MARIE DAY
KELLY LAY ORGANIZATION
CHURCH SCHOOL**

December 18, 2022



JESUS LOVES ME

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” John 13:34

As a child in Brookhaven, Mississippi, my siblings and I looked forward to the Christmas parade and festivities. We would cheer and applaud the sights and sounds of the floats and performers, especially the Alexander High School band. Everyone knew that the band from our "colored" school was the best in the county. The rest of the performers and everyone on the floats was white. All the floats were designed and sponsored by white organizations or businesses and the parade's grand marshal was white. Of course, the baby Jesus and the other members in the nativity scenes had pale skin although the Biblical geography disputes that message.

I was 11 or 12 when I realized that the Christmas of our parades and decorations was a Christmas of segregation. It reflected the racial realities of the Jim Crow South. In our "colored" school we read from discarded textbooks with pages missing and we had faulty equipment in our science lab. In stores Black folks had to wait for white patrons to finish their business before we could purchase our items. To some, we did not deserve equal resources and equal treatment, but from my family and church community I learned something important: we are all equal in God's eyes.

Prayer: *Lord, help me to love others as you love us. Help me to do what I can to make the world a better place for all. Amen*

**BROTHER BOB SMITH
NEW MEMBER, GULFPORT, MS**

December 19, 2022



GOD'S LOVE

"I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me." Psalm: 13:6

Giving thanks to God for keeping my family, friends, and me safe and secure from all alarm. Life and living have been challenging over these last few years of coping with the pandemic and the threat on our democracy. Republican extremists, some Democrats and Independents will not admit to the truth. Instead, they continue to lie, attack our institutions, government, freedoms and tear down our country.

So many have died and sacrificed for us to be free. But God has given me the strength and good health to weather these storms. Thank God for His mercy, grace, and faithfulness to survive these difficult times. I will sing and offer praise unto the Lord as He has dealt bountifully and abundantly with giving me the strength to survive. I've taken all of my COVID-19 vaccines and boosters without complications. Glory be to God and give Him all the praise.

Our democracy is under attack, and I thank God for giving me the strength to endure this painful stress of deceit, lies, and hurt. We are regressing with some of our freedoms. But the birth and gift of Jesus Christ gives us freedoms that can't be taken away by hate, lies and corruption.

Prayer: *Thank you God. You are love and your love will transcend hate and will endure. Amen*

**SISTER BETTY SMOOT
CHURCH SCHOOL**

December 20, 2022



GETTING READY

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. Romans 5:8

During this season of Advent, my mind rewinds to six months of this year, when I was in a perpetual mode of anticipation. My life was in an upheaval. I was sick and unable to stand or walk. I honestly didn't think I was going to make it out of those two hospitals and nursing facility, **alive**. I figured it was my end to this life. God knew otherwise.

I wrestled often with God. However, there's no question, God was with me. I wouldn't be here today, had it not been for the Lord. And because of that fundamental belief, today God's spirit remains alive within me. For me, during my intersection of "what's next," I see a new day. And for humanity, I envision, that glorious day, "when Jesus came forth as the Light of the world".

I am so grateful for Advent. Believers like you and I have been given time to refresh our hearts and minds to receive Jesus, anew. In preparation, here are a few things we must do **now**: strive harder to live in peace; love ourselves, our neighbors, and stop behaving like victims; embrace the joy of the Lord; and walk in the light of hope, while focusing on Jesus, "the Light of the world."

We have Good News for this Advent and beyond, it is of God's redeeming love through Jesus Christ. Time is short; you and I must show our love towards each other, **now**.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, where would I be without you? Thank You for keeping me, lifting, strengthening, guiding, and helping me believe your promise, to never leave. Thank you for being my Lord and my God. Amen*

**REV. AISHA KARIMAH
ANCHORS**



LOVE: FRIENDSHIP OVER TIME

“Friends come and friends go, but a true friend sticks by you like family.” Proverbs 18:24 (The Message)

I received a call from the sister of one of my best friends from elementary school. Coming out of a pandemic where these type calls usually mean a death notice, I braced myself for bad news. It was not one of those calls. My friend told her family that she wanted to celebrate her birthday with her best friends from elementary school.

Of all the things she could have requested, she chose her first friends who live in different parts of the country, have pursued different careers, and who have only seen each other at school reunions. We came together via Zoom for the first time as a group since we left our hometown many years ago. We reminisced about teachers, classmates and the things that made our bond so special.

Leaving the call, there was gladness in my heart reflecting on the meaning of love and friendship, and what is really important in life. With true friends, we do not have to see or talk with them every day, but the bond remains.

Prayer: *During the season of Advent, help me to stay focused on the true meaning of love.*

**SISTER ELSIE SCOTT
STEWART EMERITUS**



A HOLIDAY GIFT GIVING GUIDE

“We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy. . . ; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.” Romans 12: 6-8.

It’s ‘gift giving rush hour’ in the USA! Many of us are fretting that months have slipped by, and we have yet to plan holiday gifts for friends, family and colleagues. Gift-giving guides of all sorts, for any budget, are available simply at casual glance—from the average run-of-the-mill to the colorful, most usual, rare and even strange! For certain, we can find something for those on our holiday gift lists.

And, as well, for those we may not have thought of.

This year, give gifts that *really matter*. Give gifts that reflect the message of Advent and signal love, joy, hope and peace, to

- Homeless women, men and children: gifts of nourishment, shelter, warm clothing.
- Senior citizens: gifts of face-to-face or virtual visits.
- Haitian and Ukrainian refugees: gifts of welcome and enhanced mental health.
- Everyone: good deeds, prayer, and a joyous heart.

Prayer: *God of the Universe, help us honor Advent season by sharing gifts that help transform lives.*

SISTER GLADYS GARY VAUGHN, Ph.D.
DANIEL ALEXANDER PAYNE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

December 23, 2022



GRATEFUL FOR THE GIFT

“I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall be ever in my mouth. Let my soul glory in the Lord: the lowly will hear and be glad. Glorify the Lord with me, let us together extol his name.”

Psalm 34

Recently, our Minister for Youth and Families, preached the story of the cleansing of ten lepers. His focus was on gratitude. Ten lepers were cleansed, only one returned to thank Jesus. The message led me to think about the things I take for granted.

Advent is the season when we prepare for the birth of Jesus, but do we truly take time to show appreciation for the gift of a savior? During Advent we bestow and receive gifts, send greetings, celebrate, and prepare for Christmas. Do we really spend contemplative time to sit still and appreciate what the gift of Jesus’ birth means for us and the world? Are our thanks for this gift just cursory, or as heartfelt as the one leper, who fell prostrate to the ground and gave thanks?

At Advent and in all seasons, let us think on and be grateful for the things Jesus has done in our lives. Let every day be a season to share love and kindness, to tell others how grateful we are for the gifts we receive with each breath.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, Thank you for being the gift of hope, peace, joy and love. May we always remember that each day is a time to give you glory for your loving gift. Amen*

**STEWART YVONNE BOLLIING
STEWARDESS
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PROPHECY FULFILLED

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2. The same was in the beginning with God. 3. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. 5. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”

“6. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light,, that all men through him might believe. 8. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. 9. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. 10. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. 11. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. 12. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. 13. Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 14. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” John 1: 1-14

During this season of Advent, let us internalize and exemplify the meaning associated with the prophecy fulfilled in the Gospel of John.

Prayer: *Father, bless us to bear witness of your truth. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

**REV. DR. SANDRA SHANDS-STRONG
PASTOR'S STUDY**



A VIRGIN SHALL BRING FORTH A SON

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John 1:1

Jesus’s birth was foretold, predicted, and recorded hundreds of years before that historic night in Bethlehem. Isaiah 7:14 prophesied, “Behold a virgin shall conceive by the Holy Spirit and bear a son and His name will be Emmanuel.” [God with us]

Thus, this was all done to fulfill the prophecy. Before a baby is born, they are such a wonderful mystery. According to Jeremiah 1:5 “Before, I created you in your mother’s womb, I knew you.” What questions did Mary have as she prepared to meet her son for the first time? What questions did she have as she welcomed the Baby Jesus? What anxieties did Mary and Joseph feel when the birth of their son was announced by angels? What was the reaction to their blind faith?

We are to accept, with blind faith, that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. His birth was for us. It is a demonstration of God’s Love.

Prayer: *Thank you Father for your love, the blind faith of Mary and the birth of Jesus-the Christ Child. Amen*

**SISTER DOROTHY PAYNE BRYAN, PH.D.
MEMBER, CIRCLE OF TWELVE**



THE ULTIMATE GIFT

They saw the child with his mother Mary, bowed down, worshipped him, and then opened their treasurers and presented him with gifts. Matt 2:11

There are verses in Matthew 1 and 2 that highlight Jesus' birth. The gifts from the wisemen are emphasized, but sometimes with tainted meaning. Gifts were shared because Jesus was not an ordinary baby, but the King of Kings, and deserving honor. Of the three wisemen, Melchior, brought gold, which symbolized royalty and power. Balthazar brought frankincense, which is a resin from a tree, that is burned for its fragrance during temple worship, to offer worship and respect. Caspar, brought myrrh, whose oil was used for its medicinal properties to promote healing and comfort, and to anoint the dead before burial.

The gifts represented the power, worship and healing that Jesus would bring to the world. Ideally, gifts are given at Christmas to remember and honor Jesus. The true meaning of Christmas is the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Christmas is not about the materialistic gifts we give, but the gift that God gave us. The ultimate gift is Jesus, and He is worth more than anything in the world.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, please help us to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas, the birth of your son, the light of the world. Instill in us that Christmas is not about the gifts we give, but the gift You gave us. Amen*

**TRUSTEE JOCELYN Y. HARRIS
UNITED VOICES**



DREAM BIGGER

Matthew 15:21-28 (NRSV)

We know the story of the Canaanite woman who followed Jesus and begged for help for her tormented daughter. The disciples urged Jesus saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” Jesus, initially responded to the mother, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” The woman refused to let Jesus’ followers delude themselves with this myopic view. Their ministry was not to be restricted to their tribe. God said to, “dream bigger!”

True story: To say that Debbie has a green thumb is an understatement. She looked past an underutilized, unattractive, weed and mosquito infested courtyard in the back of a homeless shelter and saw an oasis. She imagined a sustainable source of fresh and nutritious herbs, vegetables and berries to help feed the food insecure in Silver Spring, Maryland. Debbie sold her vision to the management of the shelter and now has volunteers to help realize her vision. Fall plants have sprouted. Daily, chefs were able to harvest peppers, parsley, and basil. Even the starlings come for their daily ration of cilantro (until we got the netting in place).

Debbie is grateful for donations of labor, ideas, and even native plants from the community. She said, “I either have to cut back on volunteer hours or dream bigger.”

Prayer: *Lord, as we participate in creating this New Kingdom, open our hearts and minds to dream bigger. Amen*

**BROTHER CARLOS E. BOTTS
MIGHTY MEN OF METROPOLITAN
METROPOLITAN CREATIVE ARTS MINISTRY**



WHEN THE BREAKTHROUGH HAPPENS

“The godless spread lies about me, but I focus my attention on what you are saying.” (Psalm 119: 69, MSG)

This summer went so fast, that as the school year started, I realized I needed to prepare differently. I needed to use this time to get ready for the next stage. I started each day surrounding myself with, scripture, song, prayer, and good people. Realizing the removal of things, objects and fog was for a reason. Getting down on my knees, releasing the past in preparation for another season and looking forward was difficult, but much needed.

As I am praying and waiting for the breakthrough. Lord, ‘Teach me...good judgment.’ (Psalm 119: 66). Taking each day to show appreciation for what we have and how we all have made it is a blessing. I got my sea legs back.

To obstinate forces, I say, “you are not going to stop me just because you erected a barrier. I’m not going to let fear overtake me. It’s there, I can see it.” Sometimes we need a little fear to motivate us and move us beyond the past.

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for self-discipline that brings our body, mind, words, and emotions under control. As I look back on my life, I can often see the ways you have used the hard times. Lord, help me to be faithful in following you regardless of hard times.*

**SISTER ANTOINETTE L. McENTYRE
GIRL SCOUT TROOP LEADER 3089**



LIFE ON WINGS

“But those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint.” Isaiah 40: 31

The cry for “wings” is as old as humanity. Our souls were made to “soar on wings.” The clue is contained in the scripture “those who hope in the Lord.”

Yet even in our uncertainty, we walk in the presence of the holy God who is far more interested in our honesty, than our piety. We have only to offer him a willing heart and truthful spirit. He will change it from the soul that hopes in the Lord to the soul that is entirely surrendered to him and trusts him perfectly.

Therefore, we might rename our wings from the “wings of surrender” to the “wings of trust.” If we surrender ourselves, utterly to the Lord and trust him perfectly, we shall find our souls “soaring on wings” to the heavenly place in Christ Jesus.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help me to bless the lives of my family and friends. Shine your love through my life, that I may be a beacon of your light. Help me to glorify you, Lord, in all things. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

**TRUSTEE LINDA JEFFERSON
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