

Christmas in the Carols



ADVENT DAILY DEVOTIONALS 2025

First United Presbyterian Church would like to thank everyone who contributed to this project. We would also like to thank Ruth Rodgers for allowing the use of her beautiful artwork on our cover.

This booklet is available to church family and visitors in several ways:

- As a printed booklet which you can pick up at the church
- As a PDF on the website, which you can download and print out for your household
- As a series of posts at the website, with videos of the hymns
- As links at the Facebook page and group so you can easily find the posts at the website

Please consider joining in at our Facebook group to share your devotional insights and pondering. We hope to share insights and questions there throughout Advent as we read these meditations together.

Please search for *A Light on the Hill* Facebook group to join, or copy and paste <https://www.facebook.com/groups/112641492101599> into your browser window.

We look forward to connecting with everyone more this season as we prepare for the coming of our Lord!

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Sunday, November 30**

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

John 1:1-2

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. (NRSV)

It's the first day of Advent. Wait. Prepare. Make ready. The world around us says it is Christmas. It is not. Not yet. It's coming, but it is not here yet. You've been hearing "Christmas Music" for some time already. If it brings you joy, then enjoy it. The world and the life of faith are intertwined but are not the same. Put yourself in the place of pre-Christmas Judeans. They didn't know what was coming, but they were hopeful that something would come. They expected a warrior, they were given an infant. They expected regime change, they were given an opportunity to change their hearts. They expected strength, they were given community, forgiveness, grace, and love. What are you expecting? What are you hoping for?

The song is plaintive. It not only speaks of longing, the musicality embodies it. It is in a minor key (indicating sadness, melancholy, unsettledness). The song exhorts us to rejoice, briefly moving through a major chord (upbeat, optimistic) and then returns to mostly minor chords. The rhythm is not straightforward and simple. It meanders and blends. Words are stretched over moving musical phrases. There is beauty in that fluidity. We are not certain of what is to come and must pay attention. We must choose when to breathe, how to break up the words to fit the melody. This recording differs some from the more common version we often sing. Your preparation may look different than your neighbors'. Your hopes and expectations probably do so as well. The writer perfectly captures the mystery, the waiting, the preparation, the hope that John proclaims: The Word was G-d and was in the beginning with G-d. The Word is about to be with us. Are you preparing?

Contributed by Rob Button

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Monday, December 1**

Creator of the Stars of Night

John 1:5

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (NRSV)

Christmas is our annual reminder that God lights the way in the darkness. Mankind has had physical light since creation began: the sun lights our days, and the stars light our nights. When Christ was born in a manger all those years ago, he became the spiritual light of the world. He is our example to follow and our pathway to forgiveness when we falter.

The hymn selection to accompany this devotion is “Creator of the Stars of Night.” The video of the hymn contains beautiful pictures of the stars. Christmas comes at the darkest time of the year, very appropriate conditions to consider our nighttime sky. This holiday season, when evening comes, take a minute to look up at the spectacle. If Christmas is a lonely time for you, consider those stars a reminder that you are not alone and you are loved. If Christmas is an incredibly busy time for you, consider them a reminder to focus on the wonderful gift God gave us that first Christmas.

The hymn “Creator of the Stars of Night” is a beautiful prayer of praise. Sing along with a prayerful heart.

May the peace of Christ be with you.

Contributed by Amy Rossetti

First United Presbyterian Church
 Christmas in the Carols
 Meditations for Advent
 Tuesday, December 2

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

Matthew 3:1-3, 11

Don and I recently spent a few days hiking in the Wichita Mountains of Oklahoma. I've never visited the wilderness of Judea, but I suspect the Wichitas are a good approximation—rocky, rugged, wild, and beautiful, with a tracery of crooked paths laid down by elk, deer, and bison. The first afternoon, hiking down from Elk Mountain, we stopped for a water break in a wooded area. For ten minutes we sat with closed eyes listening to the stillness. No birds spoke. Only with deep attention could we hear the small voices of crickets above us. As we rested in silence, the hillside breathed a sigh, and to our left leaves shuffled on their trees. The sigh slipped behind us, leaves shifted, lightly brushing each other. The breath crept below us, circled back, stole around our shoulders, an unimaginably hushed movement drawing sound from the attendant leaves. Then, as softly as it began, the hillside inhaled the wind back into stillness and silence. The wood is breathing, I thought, and God has wrapped a shawl of peace around us.

There are many ways to encounter God: through prayer, contemplation, worship, music, service, in dreams, in vision quests, in community, and in solitude. Both John and Jesus prepare for their ministries by seeking contemplative, prayerful quiet in the wilderness. John knows that for a deep encounter with divinity, repentance comes first. He's passionate about his ministry—willing and able to die for his calling—but he also knows who he is, that he is not the long-awaited Messiah. In fact, he considers himself unworthy to carry the sandals of his cousin, God incarnate. John is part of the vanguard preparing the way for Christ and the baptism of the Holy Spirit that Jesus will bring.

I know of no better way to prepare ourselves to encounter the Holy Spirit than to do as Jesus did, to remove ourselves from distraction, and quiet our hearts and minds in silence and in prayer. If wilderness is available to you and you like it, go there.

*Lord Jesus,
 we thank you for showing us a way forward,
 for leading by example,
 for giving "to all the faithful
 your own self for heavenly food.
 Alleluia, Alleluia,
 Lord Most High."*

Quote from Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

Contributed by Jane Steinkraus

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Wednesday, December 3**

Angels from the Realms of Glory

Isaiah 40:3-5

A voice cries out: In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all the people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

This carol reminds me that we should pause and take a moment to pay attention to the important things in front of us. The first verse, directed toward the angels, calls them to go around the world announcing the birth of the infant Lord. The birth of a baby is always an important thing, but in this case, it's the birth of the Son of God. It's important enough to send angels out to announce it —so it has to be important enough for us to stop and pay attention.

Verse 2 is directed to the shepherds, working overnight in the fields tending their flocks. Work can be all consuming. It can be easy to get lost in all the tasks that are in front of us. They are important to do, but when a baby arrives, we have to stop working and direct our attention to the new life.

Verse 3 speaks to sages lost in contemplation. Few of us are sages but we also get lost in our thoughts and worries. We have so many touch points for information, whether it's politics or celebrity gossip or sports scores, that can consume our thoughts and even our emotions as we process them. The birth of a baby makes us put these things aside. We are consumed with wonder and love, and we forget the things we've been fretting over.

How much more true in the case of Jesus Christ, fully human and also fully God. This is the time to turn our attention toward the most important things and prepare for the birth of our Savior.

Contributed by Rosie Haden Chomphosy

First United Presbyterian Church
 Christmas in the Carols
 Meditations for Advent
 Thursday, December 4

Of the Father's Love Begotten

Psalm 89:1-4

O Lord God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty O Lord, and your faithfulness surrounds you. Psalm 89:8 (NIV)

At the time for the worship service to begin, the imposing six-foot four pastor clothed in his long, formal, black robe, entered the sanctuary. The congregation quieted. Suddenly the exuberant voice of three-year old McKenzie rang out. **"Look Mommy! THERE'S GOD!"**

Of course, as the Psalmist wrote, no one, not even an esteemed pastor, can compare with the Lord God, the Alpha and Omega, the One from whom all creation came to be. Conceived from indescribable love, Jesus came humbly, a helpless infant, yet born from the power of incredible compassion and faithfulness. He came to save us from our sin, waywardness, apathy, pride, from all that prevents us from sharing in God's intended abundant life.

Yet we often forget the wondrous gift which comes to us in Jesus, the Christ. We busy ourselves with daily concerns and forget our Source. Even then, Jesus Christ waits for us to turn to him, ever ready to embrace and lead us in faithful love. How then can we respond to such generous grace?

Little McKenzie was mistaken in thinking her pastor was God. Still, we can learn from her. We can live expecting God to be present, and when we notice God's presence, we can respond with joy and enthusiasm.

So "let our voices in concert ring":

*Christ, to thee with God the Father, and O Holy Ghost to thee,
 Hymn and chant and high thanksgiving and unwearied praises be.
 Honor, glory, and dominion,
 And eternal victory, evermore and evermore! Amen.*

Contributed by Joyce Daniel

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Friday, December 5**

The Yearning

Psalm 130:6

My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

During the Christmas season, waiting is a familiar experience. The church observes Advent, a time of anticipation and preparation as we await the celebration of Jesus's birth. Children eagerly await Christmas Day to open their gifts. Today's scripture from *Psalm 130:6* says, "My soul waits for the Lord"; it conveys a profound yearning for the Lord from deep within our soul ("Out of the depths I call to Thee, O Lord," *Psalm 130:1*). The psalmist further emphasizes this at the end of verse 6 by stating, "more than the watchmen wait for the morning." Watchmen had the responsibility of guarding their city throughout the night and warning of impending danger. Upon the arrival of morning, visibility improved as the darkness dissipated, and there was a sense of relief with the change of the guard.

One of my favorite Advent songs that our choir has sung is titled "The Yearning." The lyrics, written by Susan Bentall Boersma, and the music, composed by Craig Courtney, beautifully capture the anticipation for the Lord.

*There is a yearning in hearts weighed down by ancient grief and centuries of sorrow. There is a
yearning in hearts that in the darkness hide
and in the shades of death abide, a yearning for tomorrow.*

*There is a yearning, a yearning for the promised One, the Firstborn of creation.
There is a yearning for the Lord who visited His own,
and by His death for sin atoned, to bring to us salvation.
Emmanuel, Emmanuel within our hearts, the yearning.*

*There is a yearning that fills the hearts of those who wait the day of His appearing.
There is a yearning when all our sorrows are erased,
and we shall see the One who placed within our hearts the yearning.
Emmanuel, Emmanuel within our hearts, the yearning.*

Contributed by Isaac Thomas

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Saturday, December 6**

Watching, Waiting, Longing

Matthew 24:36, 44

But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the son. ... Therefore, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

“Are you ready for Christmas?” Wherever you are today—at the mall, at work, or having dinner with friends—you will hear this question. For some of us, just the asking of the question strikes terror in our hearts. A few may smugly reply, “All ready!”—but they are definitely in the minority.

I love Christmas, all the things—decorating the house, hanging the lights, baking the cookies, even eating the fruitcake. It’s so easy to get sidetracked by the commercialism of the season that I find myself barely stopping to consider the simplicity of its beginning: a weary mother, a babe, and a smelly manger. It’s not the look Hobby Lobby is promoting this year.

When was the last time you found yourself *longing* for something? I mean really *longing* for something of true importance, something lasting and eternal? Relief from a world gone crazy, a release of pressure from job stress, grown children who have lost their way, and bills and debt that seem to mount by the month? What if—just for a moment—we stepped away just to sit quietly before the Lord? What if we chose in that sacred moment to commit ourselves to something bigger? What if during this Advent season we chose to watch and wait not just for Christmas Day but to truly live as if we are longing for the second coming of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords?

Choose with me this day to really look into the eyes of the oppressed, the weary, the marginalized, the poor, the lost among us. Those folks Jesus said He really came for. He promised we will encounter Him in the needs of another. He didn’t come just so that we could go to church. He came so that we could be salt and light in a world that really needs a little Jesus.

Contributed by Pam James

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Sunday, December 7**

Hark! the Herald Angels Sing

Luke 2:8-18

*"Hark!" the herald angels sing, "Glory to the new-born King;
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations rise, Join the triumph of the skies;
With th'angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Refrain: Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the new-born King!"*

Charles Wesley is said to have written at least 6,500 hymns. In 1739, "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing" became one more among his prolific output.

"Our theology is something that we've sung," says Rev. Alfred T. Day III of the United Methodist Commission on Archives and History. "And we've sung it in a way to help us understand it and to help us feel and experience it at the same time. So it's one thing for me to say, for example, incarnational theology. It's another thing for me to say 'Hark, the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn king.'" Day explains that Wesley "not only helps us sing our theology, but he helps us to understand what it is we really have to sing about and belt out with joy and inspiration."

Wesley wrote this Christmas hymn in 1739 within a year of his conversion to the faith. He originally titled it "Hymn for Christmas Day." As to Day's reference to "incarnational theology, C. Michael Hawn of the Southern Methodist University theology faculty tells what that's about: "Rather than citing the final phrase of *Luke 2:14*— "good will toward men" (KJV)—[Wesley] offers his theological interpretation—'God and sinners reconciled,'" according to Hawn. "This is indeed a stronger theological statement."

The multiple verses that Wesley wrote and that have later been rewritten are the objects of much theological analysis. One summary of the work as a whole by the Rev. Dr. Peter Johnston, an Anglican priest in Louisiana, states: "The paradox of the kingdom of God is that the things that seem least glorious turn out to be the most glorious. Yes, Jesus 'lays his glory by,' or as Paul puts it, he 'emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men' (*Philippians 2:7*). Yet we now glorify with great joy the one who lay his glory by, for he was 'born that man no more may die.' We celebrate the birth of Christ because by it, we receive our 'second birth.'"

Contributed by Dave Edmark

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Monday, December 8**

The People Who Walked in Darkness

Isaiah 9:2–7

Have you ever been in a dark place? Perhaps Advent is a difficult time because of loneliness, estrangement, or bittersweet memories of Christmases past. Why do anxieties multiply in darkness, emotional or physical? The psalmist wrote

*I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping. Psalm 6:6 (ESV)*

The prophet Isaiah was called to bring messages of warning and hope to a people dwelling in darkness. They were surrounded by enemies and led by men on the throne of David that placed their own interests above those of their people. Isaiah's call (*Isaiah 6:1-8*) came at the death of a king who restored the temple worship of God and the crowning of a son who would profane this worship. During his 40-year prophetic career, Isaiah would see the northern ten tribes defeated by Assyria and the spiritual reforms of King Hezekiah, followed by the idolic atrocities of his son, Manasseh.

Prophetic texts may have multiple fulfillments. Certainly, Isaiah's joyous proclamation was meant to lift the spirits of his listeners. Perhaps he was speaking of the cleansing of the Temple and the rediscovery of God's Law by Hezekiah. Centuries later we have Jesus' own testimony that Isaiah foretold his coming (*Luke 4: 20-21*) and his ministry to the poor and oppressed. Today we prepare to celebrate the birth of the "Prince of Peace." As we look back on the gift of God's Son, we are also a people who "have seen a great light." The psalmist writes,

*Weeping may tarry for the night,
but joy comes with the morning. Psalm 30:5b (ESV)*

Wonderful Counselor, may I feel your presence in the dark watches of the night. When I am filled with anxiety and feelings of worthlessness, help me to turn to your Word and seek your will and purpose for my life. Mighty God, you sent your son for my redemption as your adopted child. You have a plan for me. Reveal paths of justice and righteousness in my life and community. Reveal to me in this Advent season the joy of your salvation.

Amen

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Tuesday, December 9**

Ready the Way

Malachi 3:1-3

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. (NRSV)

What if the task isn't solely personal righteousness? What if the task is more communal? What if the life of faith is a group project? For some people, that is comforting, for others, it's terrifying. There's a big difference between awareness that injustice exists and doing something to address it. There are many things we can do as individuals, and those are important. Education, prayer, individual action, providing resources, all are crucial. But until we gather together as the children of God, our individual efforts are sure to fail.

I think G-d knows this. I think that is the point. G-d does not desire for us to feel isolated from our brothers and sisters. G-d craves for us to be in fellowship with each other. Anything that drives wedges between people is not from G-d. Jesus walked this earth to show us how to live in community. He healed, he forgave, he told stories, he challenged injustice, he encouraged us to live together in community. The coming of the LORD is an opportunity for us to evaluate our lives. How would we prepare for the LORD? A refugee born to a teenager from Palestine? Would we side with Herod and report their location? Or would we go home another way? It is not enough to just avoid persecution. We must gather with people who are different from us. We must elevate marginalized voices and care for our brothers and sisters in Christ. How are we preparing the way? As the song suggests, will we "lift up the lowly," "give rest to the weary," or "give hope to the hopeless"? We can only change systems of policy and economics as a community. We are called to do so. Prepare the way of the LORD.

Contributed by Rob Button

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Wednesday, December 10**

Gabriel's Message

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

This lovely medieval Basque carol tells the story of the Angel Gabriel announcing to the Virgin Mary that she would be the mother of the Son of God. This miraculous news was good news to all humankind, but it must surely have been a shock to Mary. I've tried to imagine how I would have responded if I, as a teenage girl, had a visit from an angel with flaming eyes and a piece of news like that.

I don't think I would have showed the same aplomb.

"To me, be as it pleaseth God" Mary said, in the words of this hymn. "My soul shall laud and magnify His Holy name."

We have to assume that God gave Mary the composure to respond in this way. We're not likely to be called upon to make polite conversation with Gabriel, but we are called upon to deal with news that we find shocking, distressing, or exciting. Sometimes it involves actions and understandings on our part that will not be easy for us or comfortable.

Whether we perceive them as good news or bad news, surprises like these can be tough to navigate. We probably should always respond with "To me, be as it pleaseth God," but I usually find myself casting about for a solution that I can carry out on my own.

During this busy season, let us welcome surprises and remember that God loves the world He made. Let us pray to God for the wisdom and the serenity to say, "To me, be as it pleaseth God."

Contributed by Rebecca Haden

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Thursday, December 11**

Song of Mary

Luke 1:46–55 (NRSV)

*And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name; indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. **He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.** He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” Mary’s Song of Praise*

Mary’s song is a public proclamation that God’s mercy confronts a disordered world. Mary’s verbs test our reflexes. God has shown strength, scattered pride, brought down the powerful, lifted the lowly, filled the hungry, sent the rich away empty. This is God’s holy disruption. As people of privilege, it should remind us: **pride** can be the refusal to notice how our convenience costs others; **power** can be the quiet leverage of connections that open doors for some and close them to others; **riches** can look like responsible planning that never requires faith. Where do we instinctively take the high seat? How often do we organize our common life so those with the least flexibility do the most adapting? When do our prayers thank God for daily bread while our practices insulate us from the hunger of others?

The Song of Mary helps us receive the edge with the tenderness: “Sing, O sing, my soul, the greatness of the Lord. Rejoice, my spirit.” Tenderness is the doorway. Disruption is the way. Grace loosens our grip so we can receive better gifts.

Mighty One, tune our hearts to Mary’s song. Scatter pride when our convenience costs others; expose the quiet leverage of our connections and turn it toward those without it. Convert our habits so planning requires faith, not comfort; loosen our grip on time and status, and open our hands in listening, hospitality, and generosity. Let your holy disruption reshape our life together until the lowly are lifted, the hungry filled, and our praise is visible in daily choices. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Contributed by Amanda McDonald

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Friday, December 12**

In the Bleak Midwinter

Psalm 147:16–17

“He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes. He casts forth His ice like morsels; who can stand before His cold?”

When winter settles deep around me, I often return to these words from the psalmist. They capture something both majestic and mysterious about God’s character. The snow, the frost, the cold—they are not random forces of nature, but reflections of His sovereignty. Each flake that falls, each breath of icy air, reminds me that even the harshest seasons are under God’s command. The psalmist sees purpose in the cold. God “gives snow like wool,” as if He is clothing the earth in a soft, protective covering. *The same cold that bites also blankets.* It conceals the ground, but it also guards the life beneath, allowing it to rest and prepare for spring. Beneath the frozen soil, unseen growth is already beginning.

One of my favorite Christmas carols is *In the Bleak Midwinter*. Its melody paints a picture of stillness—frozen earth, silent skies, the world waiting for warmth. Yet into that bleakness came the Christ Child. The King of Kings entered a cold, quiet world to bring the fire of divine love. The contrast is stunning: eternal light arriving in the darkest season, eternal life wrapped in human frailty.

There are times when my own spirit feels like winter—when joy is distant, prayers feel unanswered, and faith seems frozen beneath layers of worry or weariness. *But even then, God is not absent.* He is working quietly beneath the surface, cultivating renewal in places I cannot yet see. Just as He commands the frost, He commands my seasons. His timing, though mysterious, is always merciful.

Christmas reminds me that no season is too cold for God to enter. The same God who scatters ice across the land once scattered stars across the heavens—and then stepped into His creation as a newborn child. He chose the bleak midwinter of humanity’s need to reveal the warmth of His grace. So when I look out at the snow this winter, I will see more than frozen beauty. I will see the reminder of His power, His tenderness, and His promise. The chill has a purpose; the silence has meaning. Beneath every frost lies the quiet preparation for something new.

In Christ, every bleak midwinter becomes holy ground—because even in the stillness, God is near. And when His warmth breaks through, every frozen heart will thaw, every silence will sing, and every waiting soul will rejoice in the eternal spring that only He can bring.

Contributed by Mary Mann

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Saturday, December 13**

Comfort, Comfort, O My People

Isaiah 40:1-2

The moment most people remember from the ending of *A Christmas Carol* is Scrooge throwing open his bedroom window and calling jubilantly to a street urchin, learning that it is indeed Christmas Day. Often, they recall him tossing down coins so the boy can purchase the large goose in the butcher shop window for his loyal employee Bob Cratchitt and his family. Or perhaps they remember his encounter with the charity solicitors, to whom he makes a generous donation.

But the true final moment of the story is quieter and more profound: Scrooge, with great trepidation, visits his nephew Fred's home for a Christmas party—an invitation he's harshly declined in the past. To his surprise, Fred welcomes him with generous warmth. After a night of haunting nightmares, like shackles being unlocked, Scrooge's moral debts have been forgiven.

*Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.*

Isaiah 40:1-2

The Israelites have been banished to Babylon after centuries of unfaithfulness to God. But now that their punishment has been served, God comforts them, opens His ears to their cries, and exchanges all their penances for abundant forgiveness. He commands it, imploring them to release their own shame about their sins. Johann Olearius, a 17th-century Lutheran songwriter, echoes this in his hymn about this passage:

*Comfort those who sit in darkness,
Mourning 'neath their sorrows' load.*

The shame is a shadow and a burden—and it is relieved. The covenant is not broken. And in this season, we remember that Jesus is the fulfillment of that covenant. He was given to us to comfort us (*John 14:18*), to relieve us of our burdens (*Matthew 11:28*), and to bring peace (*Romans 5:1*). And that's what the last line of the first stanza of the song promises: "*And [Jerusalem's] warfare now is over.*"

Let's take this time to let go of our failures and our shortcomings, knowing with certainty that we will be met with reassurance and solace. "In moments of turmoil, may I find a quiet place within myself. Let my mind be still and my heart be at peace, no matter the external circumstances." (from *Calm in Chaos*)

Contributed by Christopher Verdery

**First United Presbyterian Church
A Pilgrim's Journey to Bethlehem
Christmas in the Carols
Sunday, December 14**

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Micah 5:2

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

Micah 5:2 offers a message of hope amidst despair. During Micah's time, Israel faced significant threats and moral decline. The prophecy of a future ruler from Bethlehem, a seemingly insignificant town, offered a glimpse of hope and restoration. It assured the people that despite their current challenges, God had a plan for their future, involving a leader who would bring peace and justice. This theme of hope in desperate times is a recurring motif in the Bible, encouraging us to maintain faith in difficult circumstances.

Dear Heavenly Father, we come before you with hearts full of gratitude. We are humbled by your wisdom in choosing Bethlehem, small and seemingly insignificant, as a birthplace of our Savior, Jesus Christ. We pray for a heart of humility, that we always remember the significance of Bethlehem's choice, be small in our own eyes but great in faith and obedience to your will. Give us strength to hold onto hope even when circumstances seem bleak, knowing that your promises are true and your Word is sure.

May the message of Micah 5:2 inspire us to live with expectation, looking forward to your plans unfolding in our own lives and in our world.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Contributed by Cathy Henry

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Monday, December 15**

'Twas in the Moon of Wintertime (Huron Carol)

Luke 2:1-20

“Jesus, your king, is born! Jesus is born! In excess gloria!”

Jean de Brébeuf, a French Jesuit missionary, went to Canada in 1625 to minister to the Huron people. At some point, he wrote a Christmas carol which we call the *Huron Carol*. It's the classic Christmas story, with angelic announcements, a baby in a humble make-do cradle, and adoring local people.

The song was written in Huron, set to a French folk tune, and arranged in a style which would appeal to the local people and work with their musical instruments.

The images of shepherds in Bethlehem would not have made sense to the listeners. They did not have mangers or donkeys, sheep, or cattle. Instead, hunters heard the angels, and the babe was placed in a nest of rabbit skin. God is prepared to meet us where we are, and de Brébeuf was ready to do the same. He told his flock, “O children of the forest free... The Holy Child of earth and heaven Is born today for you.”

Among the many messages we can meditate on during Advent, this is surely one of the most important: the Holy Child of earth and heaven is born for us. And for everyone else, too. Praise the Lord! May we take time during the busy and exciting season to think of others different from ourselves, and to make the extra effort to communicate well with them.

Contributed by Rebecca Haden

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Tuesday, December 16**

Beautiful Star of Bethlehem

Matthew 2:9

“After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.”

Who were the Magi? No one really knows. They were wise. They studied the Heavens and understood that something major was happening when a new star appeared: a King was being born in Israel. They made an arduous journey to worship this baby. The Magi dropped everything to follow the Star to the Christ Child, the incarnation of the Eternal Living God. How far did they travel? 500 miles? We don't know.

They brought gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They mounted their camels and headed West! They slept under the skies, gazing at the sparkling stars, paying rapt attention to the new Star. Modern humans cannot imagine how spectacular the night skies were before electric lights.

There is beauty in this story. It is not important if the “Star” was a comet, a supernova, a conjunction of bright planets, or a magical new creation by God. What is important is that the Magi followed the Star to Jesus and worshipped Him. Their gifts were important. The gold may have paid for Joseph and Mary to take Jesus to Egypt to avoid the murderous King Herod.

The Magi were not led to a palace but to a stable where a poor young couple cared for a baby. This baby became a Teacher and Healer who suffered and died for us so that we could be reconciled to God. The Light of Jesus shines in the darkness of this world. The Magi saw the light of the Star that led them to a humble baby boy. They knelt and worshipped Jesus. This Advent, like the Magi, I want to follow the beautiful Star to Jesus, lay down my gifts, and worship Him, as the Wise Men did long ago.

Contributed by Don Steinkraus

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Wednesday, December 17**

Hope

Isaiah 40:9-11

Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep. (NRSV)

It is just one week until Christmas Eve. The world around us is always full of some sort of chaos. There is plenty to distract us from this time of preparation; there always is. Take this time to listen to our song today. Let the soft refrain of *Hope* wash over you, reminding you that your Hope and your Peace are found in God.

The world around us does not change quickly or easily, but in these moments, we are the ones who can be changed through the way we turn our focus. Breathe deeply and let the words remind you that even though the world around us is chaotic, our hearts and minds can be stilled, and we can be assured that God provides that for which we long. Our scripture for today, from Isaiah 40, is found just after the verse we hear Pastor Stewart remind us of each Sunday after the scripture reading: *The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever*. Isaiah then invites us to go up to the mountain top and proclaim it. Our hope is in God. Now it is time to say it loudly. The more we say it out loud, the more we can embody this truth. Our very speaking of this hope in God pushes back against a narrative that would tell us otherwise. Our scripture ends with the peaceful reminder of the safety that God provides for us, just as a shepherd protects the flock, devotion and love envelop us. Let yourself be held and then proclaim the hope out loud. Let yourself be held ... proclaim hope ... be held ... proclaim, on repeat.

Contributed by Kristi Button

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Thursday, December 18**

He Shall Feed His Flock

He shall tend his flock like a shepherd. Isaiah 40:11

This beautiful song from Handel's *Messiah* is familiar to us as an image of Jesus as a shepherd, feeding his flock and caring for the lambs. "Come unto Him, ye that are heavy laden," the song assures us, "And He will give you rest."

Rest can be in short supply at this time of year. Some of us are busy cramming all the entertainment we can into a few brief weeks. Some of us are worried that we won't be able to meet all the obligations we've taken on — or had thrust upon us — for our families, our workplaces, and even our church. Some are burdened by loneliness and a sense that the people who complain about being too busy are having fun while we miss out. Jesus offers rest for all of us.

But if we listen closely, we'll find that Jesus is not offering all his flock the same sustenance. He carries the lambs in his arms. He gently leads the expectant ewes. He offers rest to the hard workers carrying heavy loads, but also gentle guidance to those who need direction. The rest the song offers us is not just a break. It is the particular healing support each of us needs.

Jesus does all of this in humility and kindness, with authority as our sovereign Lord, but somehow still with a meek and lowly heart.

This Advent season, may we be thankful for our Good Shepherd, who knows just what we need and provides it. May God give us grateful hearts, and also meek and lowly hearts of our own.

Contributed by Rebecca Haden

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Friday, December 19**

O Come, All Ye Faithful

Luke 2:15-18

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us. So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

What do an 18th century cleric/calligrapher, the 1925 massed choir of the Glee Clubs of America, and Bing Crosby have in common?

In 1745, John Francis Wade, a Catholic Priest and music historian, fled from England to France to seek refuge from the cultural war between the Church of England and the Catholic Church. Wade became immersed in the ancient church music he had been translating and preserving. His studies led to inspiration for his composition, *Adeste Fideles*. It wasn't until 1841 that "O Come, All Ye Faithful" was translated from Latin to English, but Wade's name was removed as composer.

Men's Glee Clubs were so popular in the 1920s that thousands attended the 1925 Associated Glee Clubs of America convention in New York. Columbia Records had invited 5,000 men to perform "O Come, All Ye Faithful" at the Met. The production was to be live on radio, while the new Western Electric's microphone system recorded the sound for disc record copies. The sound and emotion of the music was astounding. Sales of the record skyrocketed and continued strong for ten years.

Bing Crosby was heard on the radio in the 1930s and 1940s as he sang "O Come, All Ye Faithful." During this period historians discovered that Wade should have original credit for the song.

Why is this hymn so enduring that it survived through the centuries? The music, pulled from ancient manuscripts, is strong, encouraging, and rhythmic. The 6 stanzas I found encapsulate the eternal glory of the true God. Several lines jumped out as I read and listened. Three translations from verse 2 follow: "Lo, he shuns not the virgin's womb"; "born of a Virgin, a mortal he becomes"; "Word of the Father, Now in flesh appearing". The Nicene Creed is echoed. Angels sing, people adore Him, earth and heaven exalt, and we come on joyful footsteps. The emotion of the fifth stanza is so moving that I can hardly sing "... for us sinners poor and in the manger ... Who would not love thee, loving us so dearly?"

We are in the manger with Jesus, born, loved, and renewed. Sing loudly together!

Contributed by Carol E. Van Scyoc

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Saturday, December 20**

On Christmas Night All Christians Sing

Psalm 96:1, 4, 13b

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. ... For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods. ... He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth. (NRSV)

Children's voices have always been some of the most beautiful sounds on earth for me. And the descant that David Willcocks arranged for the young choristers of King's College is an example, for me, of what it might be like to hear angels sing. Listening to this carol on repeat while preparing my devotional offering has been a Christmas blessing.

While looking at the history of this carol and the changes in the text from its original publication in 1684, the message that kept coming to me was: after our sin, our grief, our affliction ... comes joy. God became flesh—God with us in our humanity, making it possible for us to be reconciled to our Creator. Jesus' birth was cause for great celebration! *"All out of darkness, we have light, which made the angels sing this night."*

What a beautiful reminder for me this season. Because of Jesus, my present and my future are safe in God's loving care. Even when life and circumstance seem bleak or dark, I am assured that there will be light.

Contributed by Pamela Gilbreath

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Sunday, December 21**

Angels We Have Heard on High

Psalm 96:11-13

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth. (NRSV)

The Psalmist says in Psalm 19 that the heavens speak for themselves about the glory of God's handiwork, and in the beginning of Psalm 96, three times we are commanded to join in and sing along. There are occasions, though, when the testimony of God's creation and the praise of His people are not enough. In Luke 2, the angels themselves sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace ..." In both the carol and Psalm 96, nature reverberates with the songs of God's kingship over all the earth and righteousness.

The carol's second verse is made up entirely of questions. When the shepherds have proclaimed what they have seen, Luke says, "all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them," and the carol asks "Why? Why? What? Which?" The shepherds respond, obeying what the Psalmist commands in Psalm 96:10, "Say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns!'" but the Psalmist continues, "... he will judge the peoples with equity."

If we read Psalm 96:11-13, the turn in verse 13 from joy to judgement might seem strange, "the trees ... sing for joy ... for he comes to judge the earth." This is why, though, the angels burst through creation and sing to lowly shepherds. God's glory is his justice that makes peace when "He will judge the world in righteousness." Through every injustice, we have hope in God's faithfulness. It echoes off the mountains, through the trees, and over the birth of Christ the King.

Contributed by Lance Hall

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Monday, December 22**

Jesus Christ, the Apple Tree

Song of Solomon 2:3

"As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons".

The anonymous 18th-century carol *"Jesus Christ, the Apple Tree"* offers a simple yet profound vision of Advent hope. Its imagery reaches back to Eden, where humanity's first longing for knowledge led to separation from God. Yet here, the apple—once a symbol of disobedience—becomes a sign of redemption and restoration. The singer turns from the barrenness of worldly seeking to the fruitful, life-giving tree that is Christ Himself.

"I'm weary with my former toil," the carol confesses. In Advent, we too feel that weariness. We sense how our striving and consumption, our constant hungering for more, leave us hollow. The song invites us to rest—not in possessions or accomplishments, but in the shade of the Tree that bears true fruit. Christ, the Apple Tree, offers nourishment that satisfies the soul: grace, peace, forgiveness, and love.

The refrain of the carol is not exuberant; it is tender and intimate. It speaks of one who has tasted and seen that the Lord is good. The fruit of this Tree revives and restores, just as the Tree of Life once stood in paradise. In Christ, the lost garden blooms again.

As Advent unfolds, this carol reminds us that preparation for Christ's coming is not frantic but fruitful. We are called not to decorate or accumulate, but to abide—to find our life in His. "His beauty doth all things excel," the carol sings. When we turn our gaze toward Him, we find that what we most deeply desire has been waiting all along: a love that renews creation and gives rest to the weary.

This Advent, come and sit beneath the branches of the Apple Tree. Taste and see that Christ is the fruit of God's mercy, ripe for the healing of the world.

Contributed by Anonymous

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Tuesday, December 23**

Breath of Heaven

Luke 2:1-7

Luke 2:1–7 recounts the story of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. Under the order of a Roman census, Joseph and a pregnant Mary travel to the city of David, only to find no room at the inn. It is a demonstration of God's control, using Caesar's decree to fulfill the prophecy of the Messiah's birthplace. When there is no room at the inn, Jesus is born, swaddled, and placed in a feeding trough for animals.

The birth of Jesus is a symbol of humility and simplicity. Amy Grant's song, *Breath of Heaven*, is a beautiful expression of what must have been a frightening and bewildering chapter in young Mary's life. She accepts God's will, though she feels unworthy of it. While it is not directly beneficial in a practical sense, it serves as a powerful reminder of faith and the importance of living a life guided by God's teachings and values. Jesus' humble birth in a manger emphasizes that greatness often springs from simplicity, and that His ministry was for everyone, not just the rich and powerful. This act of humility sets an example for followers to prioritize faith and humility over wealth and status.

For me, this is one of humanity's great lessons: that we recognize when we have enough and that we share what we have with one another, with God guiding this recognition. Christmas, and the story of our savior's birth, is a powerful reminder of why this lesson is important. It renews our faith in God's power and his love for us all.

Contributed by Ron Warren

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Wednesday, December 24**

Silent Night

John 1:14; 16-17

“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. ... Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

Christmas Eve has always been my favorite day of the year. It’s magical. I know that Jesus Christ wasn’t born at the stroke of midnight, or even on December 25th, but Christmas Eve represents that moment in history when everything changed. And it’s magical. At First United Presbyterian Church, as at many churches, “Silent Night” is the last hymn sung as the Christmas Eve service draws to a close. Each worshipper holds a small candle, and as the hymn is sung, the candles are lit on each pew, one by one, as each neighbor lights the next candle from a larger candle on the aisle. The lights are dimmed, and then extinguished, as voices join in song, and faces are lit by flickering flames. It’s always magical.

But one year it was even more special. For many years, we had a Christmas Eve service that began at 11:00 pm, so that it ended at midnight as Christmas morning began. That year, as we sang “Silent Night,” we made our way to the doors out to the courtyard so that we would blow out our candles right at the door and put them in baskets. As people exited the sanctuary, rather than making their way to their cars, everyone silently gathered in the courtyard, looking up to the cross on top of the steeply pitched roof. It’s impossible to describe what we saw, or what we felt, other than to say it was magical. There was a glow—perhaps from the light shining on the cross reflecting off moisture in the air, or from frozen particles, or perhaps it was the moon, or a special star in the sky. But the sky was lit with a special light that seemed to come from heaven, like God’s glory. No one wanted to leave. No one wanted to break the magical spell of the moment. We whispered to one another rather than breaking the holiness of the night with the sound of our voices.

I don’t remember how we finally broke away. I guess it became time to go home. But I will never forget the magic of that night. It was as though God had given it to us as a precious gift. It wasn’t just magical. It was grace.

Contributed by Leslie Reeves

**First United Presbyterian Church
Christmas in the Carols
Meditations for Advent
Thursday, December 25**

Love Came Down at Christmas

Psalm 89:1-4

I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens. You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David: 'I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations'."

Psalm 89 is a community lament, provoked by some major defeat, composed for an occasion when the continuity of the Davidic kingship was in doubt. But the opening verses read as a hymn of praise reminding us of the covenant that God made with David. "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David: I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations." Psalm 89:3-4 This summarizes what the prophet Nathan spoke to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-16. Jesus fulfills that prophecy as the Messiah who will remain on the throne forever. Remember that Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem to be registered for the census because Joseph was from the house and family of David. (Luke 2:1-4)

Matt Ortman has set Christina Rossetti's poem written in 1885 to music with a beautiful rendition of "Love Came Down at Christmas." I've heard the following story retold numerous times. A seminary professor once drew a downward arrow on the chalkboard and said, "If you understand this, you'll know everything you need to know about the Christian faith." He asked the class to ponder that and walked out the door. They were very perplexed and came back to the next class eager for the explanation. He explained, God came down to us at Christmas in the person of Jesus Christ. We can never turn the arrow around and make our way up to God. God came down. God always comes down.

Today we celebrate the unique aspect of Christianity which is distinct from all other religions in that God came to us and lived among us in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the fulfillment of prophecy and a new covenant which is everlasting. He opened the door to everlasting life, and he calls us to share a love like the world had never known before.

Our season of preparation and anticipation is over. Jesus Christ is born bringing love and joy and new life to the world. I pray that each of us can be startled once again by this incredible gift given by a loving and gracious God!

Merry Christmas Everyone!!

Advent 2025 Devotion Carols

November 30 - December 25

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
30 	1 	2 	3 	4 	5 	6 
7 	8 	9 	10 	11 	12 	13 
14 	15 	16 	17 	18 	19 	20 
21 	22 	23 	24 	25 		

Notes



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