Advent Devotional Booklet 2025

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Psalm 124:8

Liberty Lutheran

Lutheran Congregational Services

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Dear Friends,

Welcome to this year's Advent Devotional, lovingly compiled by Liberty's Lutheran Congregational Services.

We are deeply grateful for our family of faith as we continue to walk together in service to others. You are at the heart of our mission to faithfully accompany individuals and families facing life-changing situations.

In the midst of holiday preparations, I invite you to take a sacred pause—time to refresh your spirit and strengthen your faith as you prepare to receive Christ's love in a new way. Within these pages you'll discover reflections, stories, and prayers from people who are woven into the fabric of Liberty Lutheran.

This Advent, we are reminded that the season is not only about waiting for Christmas Day, but also about embracing new beginnings.

Liberty Lutheran is celebrating 25 years of service. We are also celebrating Luanne Fisher's legacy and leadership as she retires. I am honored to step into the role of President and CEO, and look forward to joining you in nurturing new growth in the months and years ahead.

May these devotions bless your Advent journey.

Advent blessings,

John Barnum

President and CEO,

Liberty Lutheran

Each day's Devotional will be available online at http://lutherancongregationalservices.blogspot.com

Additional copies are available while supplies last; contact Julia Frank at JFrank@libertylutheran.org.

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Sunday, November 30, 2025

That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. *John 17:21*

In Chapter 17 of the book of John, Jesus calls for unity and protection for all present and future believers.

This first reflection here, in a way, serves as an editor's note.

In the devotions that follow you'll find voices of lay people, pastors, executives, counselors, and Reverend Doctors; all of us probably consider ourselves just regular people. Some of us write for a living, others of us find the act of writing a spiritual reflection way out of our comfort zones. A wide variety of traditions are represented here too – Catholic, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and more.

It is my prayer that as together we read through these devotions this Advent, that we will see each other as children of the same heavenly father, and each one of us a unique expression of our Creator.

You may also notice that in some cases there is more than one reflection on the same Bible passage! This was not necessarily by design but personally I really like to read the ways different writers point us to different insights.

Loving Creator, Emmanuel, you are with us always. Give us the faith and awareness of your presence, especially in the moments when we find ourselves most fraught. Bless all who contributed and all who will read these sincere reflections in the coming weeks in our journey to Christmas. Amen

Julia Frank is Director of Community Outreach, Liberty Lutheran and Lutheran Congregational Services

Monday, December 1, 2025

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we, too may live a new life. *Romans 6:4*

Romans 6: 4 reminds us that we will be raised from the dead through the glory of the Father. But what does that mean in everyday terms? I believe that these words represent not just the end of our lives, but the manifestation of something beautiful in our souls to nurture in the present.

For me, Rosemary Trommer expresses this well in a poem she wrote called “Little Explorer”; here it is:

To walk in the woods is a kind of prayer.

Come in on quiet feet and feel how you are not alone.

The golden trees are full of eyes. What are those sounds you cannot name?

Whatever is untamed inside you sings along.

Dwarfed by awe, you might feel small, but the song says,

You are all.

God of heaven and earth, we give thanks for the resurrection of Jesus, and for the new life you’ve given us. May the untamed spirit inside us sing along, reminding us that we are your beloved - we are all. Amen.

Sylvia Havlish is grief counselor for Lutheran Congregational Services, and a member of St. John’s Lutheran Church in Emmaus

Tuesday, December 2, 2025

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. *Psalm 124:8*

Creation Overcomes Chaos

Disaster struck Berks County in July 2023 as 9 inches of rain fell in a few hours turning gentle streams into torrents of destruction. A high school was destroyed. Over 60 properties suffered damage. Survivors faced the challenge of rebuilding and the ongoing challenges posed by poverty.

There was chaos and something more. The Spirit was brooding over the flood waters just as she brooded over formless void at Creation. Immediate relief appeared overnight as the Lower Alsace Fire Department was transformed into a relief center dispensing food, clothing, clean up kits, and other necessary supplies.

Volunteers collected donations and coordinated their distribution. They walked flood-soaked streets and neighborhoods letting people know they were not alone; pointing them to where help could be found; and organizing a relief effort that would birth the Antietam Valley Long Term Recovery Group, whose work would assess needs, assist in applying for state disaster recovery funds, and recruit and deploy the volunteers who would rebuild and restore the damaged properties.

Creation overcame chaos, and it did so quietly. No fanfare. No TV cameras or news articles. No social media campaign going viral. Just good people doing good work "in the name of the Lord."

In this season of Advent, in the darkest time of the year, we confess our faith that the darkness is not absolute. Light will shine. Light will overcome. The Maker of Heaven and Earth is our Helper. The Lord overcomes chaos with creation through the humble faithfulness of ordinary people who do what they can and keep doing it until the good work is done.

What if we saw darkness as an opportunity to be confident that light will shine? What if we changed our mental model from, "ain't it awful?" to deep trust that Creation will overcome the Chaos, because Psalm 124:8 "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

Maker of Heaven and Earth, open my eyes to see what can be done. Deliver me from the despair that denies the possibility of making a difference. Inspire me to help in your name confident that you are the Maker of Heaven and Earth, able and active in the world you created, making all things new through the good work of people like me. Amen.

Rev. David Duquette is pastor of Pennside Presbyterian Church and Chair of Antietam Valley Long Term Recovery Group.

Wednesday, December 3, 2025

For the mountains may depart and the hills be moved, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you. *Isaiah 54:10*

Summer before last, my husband and I vacationed in Eastern Tennessee amid the Smoky Mountains. We stayed in a cozy AirBnB with a breathtaking view and an admonitory sign nailed on a nearby tree that read, “Caution Bears.” Mountainsides dovetailed against one another as misty clouds clung to the tree canopy like angel hair dripping from Christmas decorations.

As it was, Bruce and I arrived at our AirBnB in late September. So did Hurricane Helene. It rained. And rained. And rained. After a few days it became apparent that something more sinister was happening. Raging waters covering roadways made travel nearly impossible and we had serious concerns about whether or not we would be able to leave. Our AirBnB hosts were very understanding and accommodating. Fortunately, we were able to leave by taking a rather circuitous route on our way to South Carolina.

As news reports rolled in, the amount of devastation suffered by the people of Western North Carolina and Eastern Tennessee was monumental. Rivers and creeks exploded from their banks, bridges failed, roads washed away, and dams were opened to release unprecedented volumes of unyielding water. Homes were destroyed and lives lost.

Immediately, rescue workers, first aid workers, and other first responders leapt into action. Neighbors sustained one another with offers of shelter, clothing, food, and water. It was surely a sign of the presence of God’s compassionate hands in service to one another.

The author of Isaiah writes, "For the mountains may depart and the hills be moved, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you."

Even as Helene assaulted the mountains around us, the love of God could never have been destroyed—not by rain, wind, or flood. God always brings peace amid the storms of life. Isaiah reminds us that God gave this promise to Noah after the flood. And so, in this Advent season we await the one who comes to us bringing the hope and promise of God's steadfast peace, love, and compassion even when hurricanes roar.

And so this past October was the one-year anniversary of Helene. In response to the presence of God's abiding love, the Mission Possible Team from Trinity Lutheran Church in Wernersville, PA—working through Lutheran Disaster Response—sent a group of folks from multiple congregations to North Carolina to assist with rebuilding efforts.

Gracious God, when mountains fall, and unceasing storms and flood roil around us, your steadfast love never abandons us. Bring us the peace you promised Noah that we might know your great compassion for us. Amen.

Rev. Julie Osterhout is the pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Wernersville, PA.

Thursday, December 4, 2025

All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers. *Acts 1:14*

In times of distress, I often wish to turn to prayer to help center me, guide me, and lead me.

However, sometimes, I'm not even sure how to pray.

It comes as no surprise to me, then, that the apostles, in this time of distress, having just witnessed Jesus return to heaven, and now not knowing who will be next to join them, decidedly

turned to prayer. And not only did they just turn to prayer, they "constantly devoted" themselves to prayer. Even Mary, mother of Jesus, was present! It is not to be looked over that the women were praying, too.

Frequently in our broken world I feel overwhelmed by all that is happening around me. In my personal life, in church life, and, of course, on the national scale. It often seems that I have no control or power in any of what is happening, and I am left to feel hopeless. It is in these moments where I know I want to pray, but I have no idea what to pray. Or how to even begin.

Then I am reminded.

I am reminded that no matter how I pray, my prayers are good enough. Whether it is a formal prayer with all the "right" words, or simply a prayer of, "God, help me!" Our prayers, these conversations we have with God, are good enough exactly as they are. In this season of beginnings and endings, of hope and confusion, I hope we all remember that, no matter how we pray, it is good enough. Devoting ourselves to prayer in our lives does not need to be difficult and convoluted with inquiries into whether or not we are praying the "right" way… We just need to pray. To turn to God and engage with God. We just need to pray.

God, I don't always get it right. I know that. You know that. But, Lord, be with me today. Be with me in this season of Advent. Grant me peace of heart and mind, knowledge of your love, and, of course, the love of your Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Vicar Connor Watson, is Pastoral Intern at Atonement Lutheran Church, Fishtown & St. Michael's Lutheran Church, Kensington.

Friday, December 5, 2025

You crazy Galatians! Did someone put a spell on you?

Galatians 3:1

The Epistle to the Galatians is a story of freedom. It is also a wake-up call! It reflects our journey, including both our failures and triumphs. Eugene Peterson writes, "…each story tells how a person has been set free from the confines of small ideas, from the chains of what others think, from the cages of guilt

and regret, from the prison of self, and from our separation from God." Each story is unique—what we call "único" in Spanish. Yet, every story shares common elements.

Paul expresses his frustrations in Galatians passionately. He recounts his past of persecuting Christians until the day he was knocked off his high horse, blinded, and asked, "Why, Saul, why?" His powerful story of transformation is testimony that anyone can change in Christ Jesus. With God, nothing is wasted, nothing is impossible, all is made new.

Over the years, I have grown weary of sharing my story. I've learned to keep it hidden, out of sight, and silent. Yet, it still seeps out through the cracks and crevices of my brokenness, and that scares me. How can I let you see who I truly am? Despite this fear, I believe that the answers to all our "Whys" lie in our common experiences. We are all embraced by God's unwavering love. Our cracks and crevices are held together by His grace and mercy. Accepting this unconditional love can be overwhelming, especially when we focus on the shame of our brokenness. The small, confining prison often calls us back. Crazy, right!?

But I have good news: the door to that prison is gone. You can walk out again; you can start anew. Jesus is present in our brokenness, the prison door is gone, and we have been set free. We choose this freedom with the strength of the Holy Spirit with every breath we take. There is no going back; you belong to God.

Lord Jesus, thank you for guiding us along our path. Thank you for loving us as we are and for always inviting us into the wondrous yet daunting life of freedom. Help us remember that our past does not define our identity. Our human story is defined by your life, death, and resurrection. Amen.

The Rev. Maritza Torres Dolich is Pastor at St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Allentown, PA.

Saturday, December 6 and Sunday, December 7, 2025

On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious. *Isaiah 11:10*

This verse of Isaiah is positioned between two sections of chapter 11. The first part describes a shoot of Jesse growing from the roots of a stump. Life shall spring forth from what appears dead and the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon this person or "shoot" who will be an amazing combination of the Good Shepherd with the Mighty Counselor.

Then we arrive at verse 10, which transitions us to how this shoot of Jesse will be a signal to the nations, coming to establish love, peace, and justice to the earth – to all of humanity, the animals, and creation itself. God will continue to redeem and claim, to call the remnants, the distanced, and the outcasts. ALL people are called back to God no matter how unlikely or far off they may seem. Hostility, jealousy, and division shall end too. What a relief that must be!

Today, we look around and see wars raging, violence in schools, and unease spreading. Perhaps worse, we see envy, competition, and isolating, do-it-alone attitudes in our churches. These words of Isaiah written thousands of years ago remind us that others have faced these same evil things. It is hard to know if it is comforting to know we are not alone, or if it is profoundly discouraging, wrestling with the fact that violence has persisted for millennia. For all our modern talk of progress, international interdependence, and so-called enlightenment, it does not sound like we have made much progress at all. When will this signal finally ring in this new era of harmony?

Jesus is our signal. Jesus taught, healed, and loved in ways that showed a new way to live. While violence did not cease as Jesus suffered a terrible death on the cross, death and violence did not have the last say. Jesus did not lash out in retaliation; instead, the power of love lived into a resurrection dawn. The Holy Spirit remains with us, empowering us to live in these new ways. We, too, have the power to choose love over hate, kindness over greed, forgiveness over resentment. We experience these Jesus-signals in the breaking of bread, in acts of kindness, in moments of reconciliation, and in so many other ways each day. May this Advent season be a signal to live in the power of God's unfailing love.

O God of all peoples, we long for your peace – both inside our souls and outside our homes. Signal us to participate in your breathing of justice and love upon all nations, near and far, until we can live in harmony with you and one another. Amen.

Deacon Kat Tigerman is Director of Evangelical Mission for the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA.

Monday, December 8, 2025

I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. *Genesis 9:13*

This scripture tells the story of God's promise to Noah after the flood. The world was washed clean. Noah and his family now had the opportunity to begin again. God showed them a new start, the rainbow. It was a sign. A beautiful message in the sky. Even more, it showed His love, mercy, and faithfulness to His people.

When we read the whole chapter, we see that God cares deeply for life. He blesses Noah and his family. The rainbow stands as a reminder that God is patient and that His heart toward us is peace.

For us today, the rainbow still speaks to us. The rainbow shows us that God's love is greater than our worries and that His promises last forever. And just as the rainbow points to God's covenant, it also points us to Jesus — the greatest sign of God's love and grace.

So the next time we see a rainbow after the storm, may it remind us: God is faithful, He is with us, and His love never fails.

Thank you for the rainbow that reminds us of Your promise and Your love. When life feels hard or uncertain, help us to remember that You are always with us and that Your word never changes. May every rainbow remind us of Your peace and grace. Amen.

Rose Richardson is Executive Director of the West Philadelphia Senior Community Center, a life service ministry of Liberty Lutheran.

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

I will open rivers on the bare heights and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land springs of water. *Isaiah 41: 18*

Hope is expensive. Every day, images of war, disease and famine flood our screens. Disturbing stories of greed, lust, and hate cross our newsfeeds. Our energy is spent wading through

the nastiness, searching for a drop of good news. Hope is unaffordable when our spirits are crushed in a sea of fear and desperation.

Isaiah lived in Jerusalem during a time of fear and desperation. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen to the Assyrian army and Babylon had conquered and sacked Jerusalem and exiled the elite Jews. Heathens who didn't believe in Israel's God had destroyed the temple and scattered the people. God's promised land seemed lost. Isaiah's job was to relay the word of God, but in a time and place where the future was so terrifying, what could God possibly have to say to the people of Jerusalem?

Isaiah is not terrified. Instead of fear, he offers a word of assurance to the people, despite the uncertain future ahead of them. God is not going to abandon God's people. God will judge the conquerors and provide for Israel, God's chosen. Isaiah reminds the people of God's power and might. When there is desperation, God is still there, providing hope.

Hope is expensive, but God pays the price. Fear has no power over God. Isaiah's vision reminds us that we are a people of hope, no matter how bleak the circumstances. Living into the truth of God's word means flooding peace, joy and love into a broken world. We trust that there is always something better coming, because God has promised us life with Jesus. And we know that God always keeps God's promises.

Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of hope. When we are flooded with despair, remind us of Your light. When we can't go any further, carry us home. When we feel lost and alone, remind us that we have each other, and You, to be our community. Give us the peace that only You can give. In Jesus name, Amen.

Heidi Shilanskas is Director of Faith Formation and Discipleship, and MLK Day and GWOH Day Coordinator for LCS.

Wednesday, December 10, 2025

And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness. *Genesis 15:6*

Years after the Flood and years after the collapsed Tower of Babel, God was in the midst of another "do-over", choosing to work through an individual human and his family – Abram and

Sarai – to renew and restore God's relationship with humanity. Abram and Sarai were both quite old (as old as me!) when they left their country, their people, and all that was familiar to them to begin a journey. It is unclear what qualifications God looked for. Do you ever wonder how it came to be that God chose you and called you? In what ways was your response to God a brand new adventure of leaving behind to go forward?

God made wonderful promises to Abram of land, many descendants, and blessing to all the families of the earth through Abram and Sarai. What do you sense that God has promised you?

In truth, Abram wasn't always "all in" as an unwavering believer. To save himself, he once shoved his wife into Pharaoh's arms with the pretense that Sarai was his sister. (And this wouldn't be the last time he used this ploy.) Thinking that God hadn't studied the reproductive abilities of seniors, Abram suggested that his younger male slave Eliezer could be the first branch in that promised family ancestral tree. Sarai would also offer an alternative solution. Can you recall, admit, and now chuckle at some of your own missteps as you stepped forward bearing the name, spirit, and mission of Jesus Christ? Aren't you glad that the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love?

In Genesis 15:1-5 God offers Abram blessed words of reassurance. Where in your life do you need God to say, or to pass on through God's human ministry partners and angelic messengers, "Don't be afraid, I am your shield, your great reward."?

The entire journey of Abram and Sarai to that first promised child would take a name change for each, plus twenty-five years of waiting and wondering in the midst of sore feet and long divine silences. And, after the birth of Isaac, there would be more challenging moments. But, the fact that Abram (and Sarai) didn't quit the journey along the way and didn't give up on the vision, brought joy to God's heart, as today's Bible verse suggests. "The Lord reckoned it as righteousness." Like Abram and Sarai in today's verse, you are still in the midst of that journey. There are days, miles, and challenges ahead.

Dear God, we are grateful that You have given us life and breathed into us your Spirit… that You have led, fed, and blessed us along the way… that You have pledged your love to us and called forth our hope, trust, and faith… and that You have promised us both a meaningful journey along the way

and an unfailing treasure in heaven at the end of the journey. Help us to hold on just a little while longer. We are ready to step forward again. Amen.

The Rev. Neil A. Bond is pastor at St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church, West Oak Lane, Philadelphia, PA

Thursday, December 11, 2025

But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you, to turn back from following you!

Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God. *Ruth 1:16*

Ruth was a Moabite, an outsider to the Hebrew people. And yet, she commits herself to following her relative, Naomi, to Israel and becoming a follower of God. This incredible act of trust brings blessings not just to her and her family, but eventually the entire world as her great-grandson will be King David and her lineage will include Jesus.

Ruth's story is one of an outsider, someone who should not be welcome according to tradition and culture, challenging division and being brought into a community. In our lives, we are challenged to welcome outsiders and open ourselves to what they may bring to us.

The devil's work in this world is often focused on dividing us, on setting us up against each other. People "on the other side of the aisle" become our enemies, instead of our neighbors. Yet scripture calls us to seek reconciliation, which transforms our relationships. It doesn't mean we simply give in, but it means we forge a new way of living together in community, and the Holy Spirit gives us strength to do this.

I spent time in South Dakota, with many Lakota people as my neighbors. The racial divisions and historical tension runs deep in many places there, yet God was already at work. I quickly learned a Lakota phrase, Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ, that can often be translated as "we are all one" or "all my relatives." In a Lakota congregation, this phrase was used as the "amen" at the end of prayers, reminding us all that God's family is larger than any social or cultural divisions we may have in this world.

This Lakota congregation, Woyatan Lutheran Church, worked to make space for strangers, as Naomi and other welcomed Ruth into the land of Israel. Facing some of the worst divisions I have encountered in the United States, this group of faithful people made space for outsiders, for those outside the Lakota people, to be part of their community. In wonderful acts of trust and reconciliation, the Holy Spirit was forging new relationships.

In this Advent, let us remember that God makes a place for us, and the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to welcome strangers. In this work, the love of Christ is embodied, as people are able to see the reality of Immanuel, that God-is-with-us, making us one.

Lord of all peoples and nations, of all tribes and cultures, of all times and places, come and be with us. Break down divisions where they exist, and stir in us the compassion for others that you have for us. Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ.

The Rev. Jonathan Steiner is associate pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church, Lansdale, and serves on SEPA Synod Council.

Friday, December 12, 2025

But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you, to turn back from following you!

Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God. *Ruth 1:16*

In this verse, Ruth is speaking to her mother-in-law, Naomi, who had moved to a new land and then lost her husband and sons. Facing this new reality, Naomi tells Ruth to go back to her people so she can have a chance at a new life. This is Ruth's response, she refuses to turn her back and chooses to stay.

When it feels like the world is crashing down around us, it can be difficult to feel that there is hope. At times it can seem kinder to push people away so they don't need to share in our heaviness. It is in these times that we can often feel the love of God through those that surround us.

In this time of Advent, reflect on who has been a loving presence in your life or who you've made the decision to stand beside. When we are struggling to feel God's love or to understand why life's twists and turns are happening, take a

moment to look into the faces of the people in our lives who show up.

There are the big, life-changing moments that can be seen and acknowledged and there are quiet struggles that can be overlooked or brushed over but can be so tough to carry every day. In our daily lives we are faced with the decisions of how to be present with those around us, what are you choosing to do today?

Make the phone call, bring the cookies, show up at the performance, send a silly card, have the conversation, listen – do the things you think about but may not always make the time in your schedule to do. You may never know the impact that a gesture, big or small, can have on someone.

It can be hard. Allow others to stand by you. Be there.

Dear Lord, As I reflect on my relationships during this Advent season, open my heart and mind to ways that I can support those around me. Help me to be a source of light, love and comfort. And when I am the one in need of your loving embrace, allow me to see the countless blessings all around me in the form of those who show up. Amen.

Sharon Schmidt is an employee at The Manor at Yorktown

Saturday, December 13 and Sunday, December 14, 2025

Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. *James 5:7*

Reading this bible verse gives reflection to "what is patience and perseverance?" Here's some examples: living through a pandemic, experiencing childbirth, living with a long-term illness, being unemployed with no one calling, and the constancy of troubling world events.

Each day we are confronted with life events that truly weigh heavily on our hearts and our spirit. Those events can cause emotions like fear and anxiety. As Christians we know that we are to remain faithful and not succumb to fear. When you live through a pandemic, you learn the importance of resilience.

While in the gestation period of childbirth, you await the miracle of a new life. As you live with a long-term illness, you learn to accept the things you cannot change and resolve to live through the circumstances. When unemployed and no one is calling, you learn to self-motivate and self-educate in order to remain encouraged and relevant. When confronted with the non-stop barrage of troubling world events, you lean on your faith.

In all situations, faith is what allows you to be patient. Matthew 21:22 reads "and all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Hebrews 11:1 reads "now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith is what gives us confidence in things we do not fully understand yet we live with assurance. Faith gives us the courage to keep believing and moving forward even during life's difficulties. As James 5:7 reminds us, "be patient" because through all of this, our Lord is in control and will return in his time. Be reminded of his time as described in 2 Peter 3:8 "But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

God of all creation, give us both the patience and faith of the farmer in James 5:7, especially in challenging times. Remind us that through it all, you are in control. Amen.

Charmaine R. Maddrey-Smith is the Director of Training and Leadership Development for Liberty Lutheran.

Monday, December 15, 2025

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel. *Isaiah 7:14*

I have taken these words to prayer many times but this year it is a little different as we look at what is happening in our World today.

We know that God is with us but when we look around us, when we listen to the news, when we see children starving it is hard to walk in hope. Then I look at Mary who gave her unconditional "yes" when God planted the seed of Jesus in her virgin womb, she did not know what life would be for her. Would the people stone her, would Joseph abandon her, what would become of her family, how would she raise the Son of God? She did not

know what her life would be like or how she would raise the young child but she said yes because she trusted that God was with her.

After presenting the child in the temple she was told by Simeon that a sword would pierce her heart and we know that she stood at the foot of the cross the day that Jesus reopened heaven for all of us. Through all of this she knew that God was with her and working through her.

These days I think of Mary and what is going on today—hate, violence, lack of justice. This was part of what Mary experienced in her life and yet she had hope. I know I also have to give my unconditional love to those I work and live with, and even those I do not know or like.

I look around and see that many children in our world are starving to death, not because of lack of food, but because people in power want more power, and won't release food for starving children. And as Mary stood at the cross powerless to help Jesus in that moment, there are mothers today too, who feel helpless watching their own children suffer. Yet I live in hope that our world will be a better place because God is with us.

I'm going to trust in the Lord, I'm going to trust in the Lord, I'm going to trust in the Lord till I die. I'm going to hope in the Lord, I'm going to hope in the Lord, I'm going to hope in the Lord till I die.

Lord, create in me trust and hope. Amen.

Sr. Carole Eden Resident at Paul's Run

Tuesday, December 16, 2025

Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish once these waters reach there. It will become fresh, and everything will live where the river goes. *Ezekiel 47: 9*

Where do you go for refreshment? Where do you go for healing? Could Advent be a time to ask these questions?

Ezekiel 47 presents a vision. It is a vison of hope, of restoration, of radical welcome. It is a vision of God's presence spoken

to a people who, after exile, are sorely in need of such a word. Ezekiel is led to the temple where he sees flowing water coming out from under the door. As we discover, this water, which flows with increasing volume, is the presence of God. Ezekiel first just dips a toe, but soon is immersed in the water! Ezekiel is immersed in God's promise to heal and restore what was broken.

I'm not sure that we often think of Advent as a time of reflection and repentance. There is a lot to do! Choir practice, Christmas pageants, gifts, parties!!! Everyday seems to have a seasonal activity. But, I wonder, in the midst of all the prep, are we willing to take a moment or two to consider…to ponder. Where is the brokenness God comes to heal when God is born into the world? This birth we are awaiting, is it a refreshment? Does it flow into our lives opening us to visions of hope, healing, welcome, restoration?

Every Advent the carol that rings in my ears speaks the words, "Christ is born for this." To be a flowing river of God's presence into a waiting world.

Let us pray. O God incarnate, we are waiting in a world, and in lives, with brokenness, and need and division. Remind us that you are coming to bring healing. Let your loving presence flow into our hearts and restore our hope. Amen.

The Rev. Ghislaine Cotnoir (she/her), Director of Pastoral Care-Artman Home and The Hearth at Drexel

Wednesday, December 17, 2025

O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

Isaiah 2:5

In these beginning days of Advent, our reading from Isaiah asks us to take a look at what it means to "walk in the light of the Lord." Isaiah's verses (2:1-5) describe the world that God has in mind for all nations to enjoy when people have learned to live in accordance with God's teachings. There will be justice and peace for all nations – for everyone. But, living in this way will take some preparation – and instruction – from God. Come, let us learn what God has to teach us. Let us walk in the light of the Lord.

In the times of Isaiah, the people of Israel were living with instances of violence, corruption, unfaithfulness, desolation and war in nearby countries, poverty, injustice for the poor and weak ... the same as existed in the times of Jesus ... and the same dark places we still see existing in today's world. We long to see God's light triumph. And, through the weeks of Advent, we call out, "Come, Lord Jesus." "Come now, O Prince of Peace, make us one body. Come, O lord Jesus, reconcile your people."

So we ask what can we do to bring about God's peace? Well, the simple answer is that we can't. Only God can. But, we can express it in our own lives – as we try to "walk in the light of the Lord." In a commentary by Barbara Lundblad she told of a program developed by community activist Pedro Reyes, from Culiacán, Mexico . Culiacán was described as "the city with the highest rate of gun deaths in the nation." In response, Reyes collected 1,527 guns for the project Palas por Pistolas, melting these guns down into 1,527 shovel heads. But the project didn't stop there. The 1,527 shovels were used to plant 1,527 trees in the open spaces of the city. Matter used for death transformed into matter promoting life. Walking in the light of the Lord.

The first Sunday in Advent we light a candle for hope and peace. Let us pray that God's reign of peace will come to the world as we wait in hopefulness for the Christ child to come to us again.

O God, enlighten us with your grace and prepare our hearts to welcome the Child you have sent us with joy and hopefulness. Amen.

Paulette Obrecht is interim pastor at Christ Lutheran Church in Allentown and serves on the Advisory Board for Lutheran Congregational Services, and as an as-needed case manager for Lutheran Disaster Response of Eastern PA.

Thursday, December 18, 2025

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. *Galations 3:28*

I am writing this the day after conservative activist Charlie Kirk was killed in Utah.

Let me write what should be obvious to all of us and especially

to those of us who strive to be followers of Jesus: violence is never the answer, violence has always and forever will only lead to more violence.

Kirk's death is tragic because he was a human being, a child of God. Period. Every life that is stolen by violence is tragic. Which is not to say that I agreed with Kirk on pretty much anything, or with his understanding of Christianity.

I have felt recently, and yet even more so today, after reading too many news stories and watching too many videos, that there is only one side or the other, only poles of thought set far apart with a vast chasm of danger in between.

And then there is this biblical passage. For those clothed with Christ in baptism, Paul writes, "there is no longer Jew or Greek… slave or free…male or female." We, all of us, are heirs to God's promise that we are one in Christ.

In the juxtaposition of what I am feeling and seeing today and what Paul writes, I am full of angst; I don't know what to say.

But then I remember the season for which this devotion is being written. Advent.

Advent is expectation, a rumor unleashed but unconfirmed. It is girded in anticipation, its garments a hopeful, bright blue. But it walks in the gray before the dawn, in the darkness prior to the sun's arrival. Urgent, with eager longing, Advent leans forward toward the promise that the Lord will come. And then? No longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female.

On this day when I am weary with waiting, and my hope diminished, this promise nudges me to lean forward toward the living flame of Christ, far away as it may sometimes seem. Not one side or the other. One. In Christ. A chasm bridged by love that itself suffered the ultimate violence but Godly resurrection resumed.

In Advent we grope about in familiar darkness but, by God, we are clothed in a royal, hopeful blue. Our words may fail us, our fears may stalk us, our hearts will grieve, but we wait, ever watching, for the light that lives and enlivens us, we who dwell in shadow and doubt.

Come, Lord Jesus. Come. Open our eyes to your light, open our hearts with your love, open our hands with your compassion, that especially amid the darkness of our days, we might find that we are all one in you. Amen.

The Rev. Richard (Rick) Summy is Program Director of Love Revolution, a ministry of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA.

Friday, December 19, 2025

Then King David went in and sat before the Lord and said, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?" *2 Samuel 7:18*

In this Advent season, we're focused on the coming of Jesus. Our scripture today takes us back to a promise God made to King David, centuries before the first Christmas. God told David that from his family line would come an eternal king—the Messiah.

David's response to this breathtaking news wasn't a cheer or a boast. Instead, he sat quietly before God and asked, "Who am I... that you have brought me thus far?" David knew he was just a shepherd, a flawed man, and yet God chose his family to bring the Savior into the world.

This is the very heart of Advent. We are preparing to celebrate the birth of a King who came not because we earned it, but because of God's perfect grace. The promise made to David was fulfilled not in a palace, but in a humble manger in Bethlehem.

So this Advent, let's follow David's lead. Let's sit in quiet awe of God's love and humility. The greatest gift ever given was not something we deserved, but a gift of grace from a God who loved us so much He came to us.

Thank you, Lord, for your amazing grace. As we await the celebration of your Son's birth, fill us with a spirit of humility and wonder. Amen.

Pastor Rolf Schmidt serves St. John's Lutheran Church in Sinking Spring, PA.

Saturday, December 20 and Sunday, December 21, 2025

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel. *Isaiah 7:14*

Wouldn't it be amazing if we all got a sign that said we were doing all right? Who has not asked for a sign from above at least once?

In this crazy world we live in, I often keep praying on my way into Paul's Run in the morning for a sign that God has got me and all of us. I am not even sure if it's really for me, or if my prayer is more for those I serve to give everyone a sign that God is with us, even in those tough moments.

But in Isaiah 7, the sign that God gives us is, the sign, Mary the mother of Jesus miraculously expecting the Savior of the world and through him all of will be forgiven and loved unconditionally. Emmanuel- God with us. And its my favorite reminder in this Advent season, that God does indeed have us- always, to the ends of the age.

As we continue through this journey of Advent, may we remember that in the tough and dark times, God has already sent us a sign- Mary the Mother of Jesus, who will bring that amazing savior into the world.

Holy God, remind us in this human-filled world that you do indeed have us and you give us signs you are with us all the time. May this season be another one of those signs that shows you are in fact Emmanuel- God with us. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Rev. Michelle Wildridge is the Chaplain and Director of Spiritual Life at Paul's Run.

Monday, December 22

Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel. *Matthew 1:21*

Immanuel—God with us. Over the years, I've heard countless sermons on what those words mean. Some messages fade quickly, but others stay with me because they touch a deep place in my spirit.

It is profoundly comforting to know that God, who became human in Jesus, fully understands our struggles and the emotions they stir:

the pain of losing someone we love,

the despair of losing a home and belongings in a fire,

the anxiety of not having enough to provide for our families,

the fear that comes when our health is threatened.

Yet the God who created us has also given us a remarkable capacity for love and compassion. And in Jesus—Immanuel—we see clearly how to live as God's beloved children to one another.

As I write this, Lutheran Congregational Services has just completed God's Work, Our Hands, where God's people prepared kits for those who are overwhelmed by the devastation of a disaster. These simple gifts, born of generosity and compassion, are powerful signs of God's love. They tell survivors: You matter. You are beloved. You are not alone.

Dear God, as we approach Christmas, help us embrace Jesus as our model of love. Give us eyes to see the struggles of others and hearts strong enough to respond with compassion. May our words and actions remind people that they are not alone, for you—Immanuel—are with us. Amen.

Patty Cline is director of advancement for Liberty Lutheran.

Tuesday, December 23, 2025

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would reckon as righteous the gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the gentiles shall be blessed in you."
Galatians 3:8

This verse from Galatians points back to the Old Testament scriptures wherein God foretold that there was coming a means of salvation for all people, not just those of Jewish faith

or lineage—but that all people can be saved. The verse prior (verse 7) states: "Know then that those who have faith are children of Abraham", which basically means all those who have faith are part of God's family.

It tells us that one's lineage and adherence to religious laws does not make you righteous in God's eyes (as Jewish people in the time before and the time of Christ believed), but that anyone who has faith in God (and thereby Jesus) is a member of God's family.

God's plan plays out each and every day, in each and every aspect of our lives. He has known from before time began what He was going to do and how He was going to save mankind from sin. How awesome is that?

God knew humans would fall into sin—every one of us—and he put in place a plan that would save us even before we were born. Whether Jew, Gentile, or anything else---God offers salvation if we just believe that only faith in Jesus and all that He did will gain for us eternal salvation. Nothing we say, nothing we do, nothing we avoid doing—nothing but the blood of Christ will save you from your sins and make you righteous in God's eyes. We are all "blessed in" Jesus.

When we pass from this life, we can stand before the throne of God and say only: "I plead Jesus as my savior" because anything else you say –any deeds, sacrifices, or plea you say to God as a way to gain His favor or pardon will not do. Only Jesus. Thank God for His pre-ordained plan to offer a way to salvation for every human who ever lives.

Dear God, we are so thankful to you for providing us with a way to come before you in righteousness—not our own righteousness, but that of Jesus, for there is no other way to be righteous in your eyes. As we walk this side of heaven, keep us mindful of the way we should walk to bring you glory and to lead others into righteousness and everlasting life with you. It is in, through, and because of Jesus that we ask and pray all things. Amen.

Christine Naessens is staff recruiter for Liberty Lutheran.

Wednesday, December 24, 2025

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." *Luke 1: 46-48*

As children we loved to go to my father's workshop and play with all of the treasures held on the benches and jars and boxes. One of my favorites was a box of magnifying glasses. I'm not sure why they were there, or where they came from. I, frankly, don't think I ever saw dad use them, but my sister and I would go all around the house and the meadow behind the house magnifying anything in our path.

Mary, a young Jewish woman, has been visited by an angel whose God message changed her world. I imagine her as overwhelmed and afraid, but maybe, slowly, also excited and curious. Faith feels like that sometimes doesn't it? Overwhelming. Maybe even a bit scary in what it calls us to do and to be in the world.

Mary goes to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. Pregnancy, and faith, call us into relationship, I think. Who else is going through all the stages, asking the same questions, experiencing the fear and the excitement?

Elizabeth rejoices! Was she the first to show joy at Mary's announcement? Did she allow Mary finally to sing the song of her heart? The song that magnifies- notices- makes big- what God has done and is allowed her to participate in.

In this Advent season, as we prepare to tell the familiar birth story of our God, what are we noticing? Where do we see God? What do we see God doing in our lives? Are we filled with enough excitement that we are magnifying God in our lives?

My sister and I made sure that everyone in our home heard about what we had seen on our magnifying glass adventures! We didn't ask if they were interested. We just knew in our hearts that these were things to be told! I pray now, in Advent, that I might find the same joy in what God is doing. That when I see God, I cannot wait to magnify what I see and sing my joy to proclaim God my Savior in a life of faith.

Loving God, you look upon us with loving favor, inspire us by this blessing to live lives that notice your presence and magnify your goodness as we notice and love one another. Amen.

The Rev. Ghislaine Cotnoir (she/her) is Director of Pastoral Care-Artman Home and The Hearth at Drexel

Thursday, December 25, 2025
Christmas Day

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

If you've been reading these reflections over the last month, you've read a lot about waiting that is marked by the season of Advent. And today on Christmas, we remember and celebrate the end of the waiting for Jesus's birth. God in the flesh, here with us on earth. Jesus the Deliverer, Messiah, Savior, Most High Priest, Carpenter, Prince of Peace, Redeemer, Miracle Worker, Liberator, and Rescuer, has arrived in the flesh for all people.

For me and probably for a lot of us, candlelight Christmas Eve services hold a special place in my heart. The telling of the story of Jesus's birth in favorite songs and re-enactments, the glow from the whole church lit up by candles, the evening service, and despite all the chaos that also goes along with the rest of the Christmas season, these moments in church can create a beautiful and comforting experience.

Pastors, of course, remind us that this is only the beginning of the story. The redemption that comes from the fraught journey to Good Friday and the mystery and power of the resurrection that we celebrate on Easter, is what restores true peace.

But the angels words here in Luke 2:10 do tell us that the intent all along was always good news…"great joy for all people."

So when we go back to our regular day to day, when we go back to the waiting for an end to oppression, injustice, anxiety, and all the other burdens of this life, we have a taste through these sweet words, of what God intends for us and what God ultimately has in store for us because of Easter, and that is good news worth sharing.

Loving Creator, renew our hope and confidence in you, and bring us and all people everlasting peace. Amen.

Julia Frank is Director of Community Outreach for Liberty Lutheran and Lutheran Congregational Services.

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7002 Butler Pike, Ambler PA 19002
www.libertylutheran.org