

In Our Own Words



Advent Reflections *by members of Good Shepherd*

Good Shepherd Episcopal Church and School

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About Advent

In the Episcopal Church, Advent marks the beginning of the church year. It begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and continues through the day before Christmas. The word *Advent* comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning “coming.” It is a season of preparation, expectation, and longing—when we ready our hearts both to celebrate Christ’s birth and to welcome Christ’s promised return “in power and glory.”

We are grateful to the members of Good Shepherd who generously offered their time and prayer to write the reflections in this booklet. Inspired by the Advent wreath, each author chose one of the traditional candle themes:

- **Hope** – Trusting in God’s promises and looking toward the light of Christ.
- **Peace** – Welcoming Christ’s peace into our hearts, our homes, and our world.
- **Joy** – Rejoicing in God’s nearness, especially on the third Sunday—*Gaudete*—represented by the pink candle.
- **Love** – Remembering God’s boundless love revealed in the gift of Jesus, and sharing that love with others.

There are seven reflections for each theme, carrying us from the beginning of Advent into the early days of the Christmas season.

Within these pages, you will find glimpses of God at work among us—quietly, tenderly, and faithfully—through the voices of our Good Shepherd community. As you move through this holy season, may these reflections awaken deeper wonder, steady hope, and renewed trust in the One who is always coming to us.

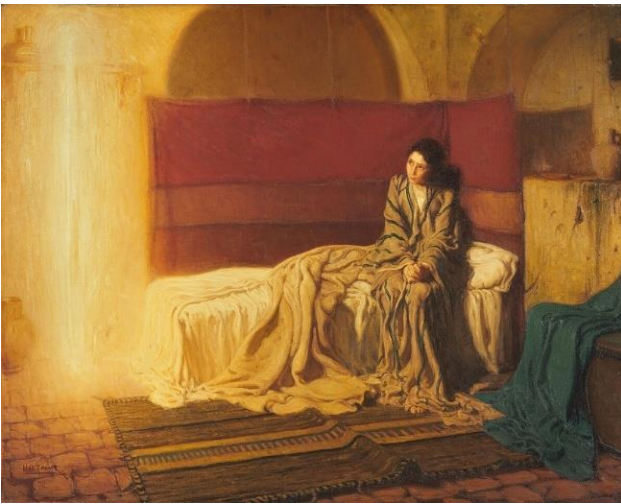
With gratitude to all who contributed, and blessings to all who read, may this Advent be a season of grace.





A Reflection on *The Annunciation* by Henry Ossawa Tanner

I've never liked the traditional depictions of the momentous moment of The Annunciation - a serene, softly smiling Mary calmly accepting the angel's presence and the divine task for her he was delivering. If I were the typical teenaged girl, would I be cool, calm and collected? I don't think so!



It wasn't until Mimi Howard introduced me to Henry Ossawa Tanner's painting of *The Annunciation* on display at the Philadelphia Art Museum that I finally saw a representation of the event which resonated with me. Here, Mary is shrinking away from a column of light appearing in her home, only a few feet away from her. It is communicating a message Mary clearly is initially afraid of. For a young girl the message is truly terrifying. There are severe consequences to bearing a child out of wedlock for her, for her family and for her older fiancé who will know the child is not his. Gabriel will not be sticking around to help her break the news to them. Will they believe her word that she has seen an angel and that the Child will be divine? Or will they think she is making it all up, and arrange for her to be sent away?

Thankfully for us, Mary gathered up her courage and HOPE with both trembling hands and approached her loved ones with the amazing news. Her parents didn't banish her but supported her (even though Joseph did require some additional persuasion by an angel in a dream!). What must the future have looked like to them in those brief, shining moments, when only they were privy to the astonishing salvation to come?

We can relive that HOPE each year as we prepare for the Savior through Advent devotions. Every year brings that sense of anticipation and hope anew as we pray and read and sing and ponder on what makes this season so special. We take Mary as our model as we step forward and hopefully say "Be it done unto me according to Thy will."

PRAYER: O God, may we like Mary, dare to do your bidding, with utmost hope that You have a role for us each to play in Your Creation. Let us rejoice in the work you have given us to do and plant Your Word in our own gardens faithfully. Amen.



Peggy Chittum and her husband Mark, have attended Good Shepherd since 2005. They participate in the choir and as lay readers and Eucharistic ministers. An avid reader, Peggy facilitates the Literary Circle.



Waiting.

I don't do it well.

Whether in a long line at Publix, listening to Muzak on an interminable telephone hold, or waiting for a table at a restaurant during the busy season.

Waiting.

I just don't do it well.

So it might have been fitting when it came time to leave for an eleven day "Camino" in Italy – a journey tracing part of the route that pilgrims for centuries have walked on their way to the Cathedral in Santiago, Spain to see the relics of Saint James – that I spent over three hours watching mechanics work on the right engine of the Swiss Air plane that was supposed to take me to Europe. There must have been over a dozen updates – "we will know for sure in 30 minutes..." before they finally gave up and the flight was cancelled.



I assessed that the "Camino angels" must be telling me something, that, contrary to whatever else I had thought I needed to be working on during the Camino, that what THEY thought I needed to work on was patience.

Waiting.

Waiting in hope, in expectation, in anticipation of something to come is one of the themes of Advent. And this was REALLY LONG waiting. In the days of Mary and Joseph and Elizabeth and Zechariah, the people of Israel had been waiting for centuries, oppressed by Babylonian, Persian and now Roman empires, one generation after another. They longed for freedom, for deliverance, for peace in their home land.

They waited for a Messiah.

As Phillips Brooks, the hymnwriter of O Little Town of Bethlehem, put it, *"The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."*

Puts a bit of perspective on my impatience at waiting.

So, I hope to wait this Advent.

Patiently.... In expectation... In hope.

Of the arrival of a tiny baby in a barn of a small town of Israel.

A baby who will change the world... Who will change me... Waiting.

Maybe not such a bad thing after all.

So may it be.

PRAYER: Help us to wait these days, and every day, as we look to you, O Lord, in hope. Amen.



Steve Hendrickson attends the 10 a.m. service with his husband David McCord. They live with their adorable Dachshund puppies, Bea and Bentley, and English Springer diva, Miss Marple, and have been attending Good Shepherd for several years.



For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Isaiah 55:12

On July 3 of 2018, my dad died. On the first anniversary of his death, together with my mom, we placed a Bird of Paradise plant at his niche here at Good Shepherd. Not only is it a favorite flower, but I considered my wonderful dad to be in Paradise. After a week at the church, I planted the small plant in our yard.

This plant was much loved and tended by both Mike and myself. It grew steadily in growth and beauty, and as a constant reminder of my dad. Never did it bloom...2019, 2020, 2021. In mid-June of 2022, I noticed a single bud taking shape. I gave this potential flower my best love and energy for the following weeks.

Upon waking the morning of July 3, 2022, it was clear to see that my dad's Bird of Paradise flower had indeed bloomed, raising its glorious and magnificent head for all to see. It continues to bloom now in abundance, but that first single bloom on that special day will remain in my heart forever. I know my dad is near.



Do you believe that God moved in nature and caused this flower to bloom to life on the anniversary of my dad's passing, or was this just a coincidence?

PRAYER: O God of our fathers and of creation, we give thanks for little miracles, and for all the ways you speak to us. Help us to hear you, this day, and every day. Amen.



Peggy Greene has been Worshipping at Good Shepherd for 34 years. Peggy and her husband, Mike, attend the 10:00 service. Peggy trains and coordinates the lectors and intercessor. She serves as a Verger. In her spare time she creates sumptuous meals which she generously shares with the parish.



Week 1 – HOPE

December 3

*I heard in Addison's Walk a bird sing clear:
This year the summer will come true. This year. This year.
This year time's nature will no more defeat you.
Nor all the promised moments in their passing cheat you.*
C. S. Lewis

In the Church year, Advent is our threshold,
the quiet doorway into something new.
Before the world turns its calendars,
the Church lights a single candle and calls it Hope.

Hope is the first flame.
The small light that tells us God is drawing near.

I'm reminded of a moment in the life of C.S. Lewis,
walking along Addison's Walk at Oxford,
a place of old stone, turning leaves,
and conversations that linger in the soul.

Lewis walked there with Tolkien and Dyson,
speaking of Christianity,
of myth that is truer than myth,
of longing pointing toward the divine.
Lewis was still unsure,
a "reluctant theist," as he called himself.

And then he heard it,
a bird singing clear in the early light.
A simple song, yet it carried the weight of promise.

It inspired his poem *"What the Bird Said Early in the Year,"*
a poem that dares to say that this year,
this year, something will be different.
That the old cycles of disappointment will not circle back,
that time itself will be met and transformed by grace.

This is the heart of Advent:
God steps into our waiting,
into our longing, and whispers,
"Behold, I make all things new."

As we light the first candle of Advent,
may its flame remind us that Hope is not optimism,
but trust, deep trust,
that Christ is coming
to renew, redeem, and restore.

May this Advent be the season
when we, too, hear the bird's song,
and believe that this year,
God is doing something new.

Amen.

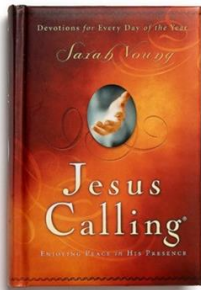


George Creel is a life-long Episcopalian who has attended Good Shepherd for six years. He attends the 10:00 service and often serves as Eucharistic Minister or lay reader. He is a Vestry member and participates in the Investment Committee. An avid reader, George enjoys participating in the Bible Study, Literary Circle and Theological Book Study when time allows.



*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,
so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13*

I need to stop and sit, close my eyes and breathe in a deep breath – with God. Doing this in the morning is one of my favorite *Rules of Life*, one of the daily habits I seek to set aside time to maintain. I will admit that often I have to remind myself that this life not supposed to be easy. While easier seems appealing, I know that it really wouldn't be better as, challenging as it is, I want to be pulled and stretched because I want to evolve and grow. After I have sat and taken my deep breath and reset myself with God, I am more ready to enter the day. On the best reset days, I walk lighter with peace and do have a hopeful and excited energy.



I love the devotional *Jesus Calling* by Sarah Young.

Recently the devotional began with the following:

I AM CHRIST IN YOU, *the hope of Glory*
The one who walks beside you
Holding you by the hand
The same One who lives within you

May Christ hold your hand – and all our hands – today, and every day of this Advent.

PRAYER: Lord, thank you for this new day. Thank you for your presence in it and your plan for me in it. May I breathe in your peace. May I set myself to walk with you into whatever challenges might be ahead today and be hopeful for the continued unveiling of your fulfilling plan for me. Lord, may I remember your presence with me in every moment of it and feel your guidance as I need it throughout this day. In your Son, my Savior, Jesus Christ's name – AMEN.



Teresa Grashof attends our 10am service, most often with her husband, Mike, and often with their son, Jack, and daughters Ansley and Kendall. Teresa and her family have been members at Good Shepherd since 2009. She serves as a Verger and is a member of the Outreach and Missions Committee.



For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, says the Lord. Jeremiah 30:17a

There are mornings when we wake up with heavy hearts feeling broken, alone and in despair. The sadness, whether from grief, physical or mental challenges, seems to envelope our very being. The erosion or loss of hope is what makes suffering unbearable. When John wrote the book of Revelation, he was writing to people who were suffering terribly. What did he give them so that they could face it all? John gave them the ultimate hope, “New heavens and a new earth” was coming.

Human beings are creatures of hope.

Suffering often reveals that there are things we love too much or that we love God too little in proportion to it. Know that suffering will only make us better rather than worse, if while enduring it, we teach ourselves to love God more intensely than before. When adversity reveals moral failures or sinful flaws, it means we will have “to learn to do far more work to repent and reconcile with God and ourselves.” George Herbert wrote, “Doing all these things will first bring your joys to weep, but then your griefs to sing.” As we turn our weeping to song, we have Hope.

God’s strength flows into us at all times. One cannot force the work of healing, but when it comes, we may be assured that it is faith that gives us this manifestation of Hope.

Prayer groups help us learn to send to a distance the protecting power of God. In this “circle of protection” those who trust him are walking in the footsteps of those in the Old Testament. In such a clear certainty of His surrounding love, we have an inner surety and a consciousness, a place of safety in which we can dwell even in the midst of great despair.

This is Hope.



Agnes Sanford wrote, "Man forever failing yet forever destined to succeed. Man defeated time and again, yet forever, destined to triumph through Jesus Christ. Man dying from generation to generation, yet forever, destined to live."

What is this if not Hope?

Even in times of uncertainty, when grief and loss threaten to consume us with hopelessness we feel God’s comforting presence. When we are struggling through quicksand, the Lord lifts up our heads. Even when our grief is deep, He comes into our pain. Sometimes, the simple act of sharing with others is exactly what we need. He does not leave us to suffer alone. Though anguish may envelop our very being, we must keep our hearts open to allow His grace to cleanse the darkness in our souls. The light that will then fill us, is the light of Hope.

PRAYER: Help us, O Lord, even in days of grief or sadness, to sense the healing presence of your Spirit, who gives hope that will heal the world, and us. Amen.



Alex Lesbirel has attended Good Shepherd since 1999. She is a regular at the Wednesday Bible Study. Alex has a heart for Pastoral Care which is seen through her healing prayer ministry and as facilitator of Grace in Grief.



"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." - Hebrews 11:1

We often hear the saying, *"Where there's life, there's hope."* But Scripture invites us to turn that phrase around: *Where there's hope, there's life.* Hope strengthens us, sustains us, and calls us to face reality—even difficult reality—with courage.

Recently my attention has been deeply fixed on the state of our planet. I have been working on a manuscript exploring the connection between global warming and the Earth's internal heat. I have noticed something troubling: since 2005, global warming has accelerated faster than greenhouse gas levels alone can explain.¹ My research suggests that the Earth itself may be responding in ways that intensify warming—cracking, shifting, and leaking additional heat into the oceans. The implications are sobering. The limits identified by climate scientists may arrive sooner than expected. The abstract of my manuscript now reads as follows.

ABSTRACT

Global warming has been increasing exponentially since the 1940s. However, despite this rapid change, the rate of increase of global warming heat is now less than 16% of the rate of increase of ocean heat content. By a process of elimination, global warming has triggered thermal expansion of the Earth, causing its brittle rock crust to crack further, and enabling more of the Earth's internal heat to leak into the ocean. This is causing an additional increase in global warming amounting to thermal runaway, and is shown by relationships among the Annual Greenhouse Gas Index, global warming, global warming heat, ocean heat content, and sea level rise. The estimated arrival times of two IPCC 1.5°C global warming limits are in the 2030s.

And yet, even as the data unveils a more urgent picture, Advent calls me back to **hope**—not a shallow optimism that denies the gravity of the moment, but the deep, steady hope Hebrews describes. A hope rooted in faith. May this hope open our eyes, strengthen our resolve, and lead us to become better stewards of the world God has entrusted to us.

PRAYER: God of promise and light, kindle in us a hope that is stronger than fear and deeper than anything we can see with our eyes. as we face the challenges of our world, give us wisdom to understand, courage to act, and hearts open to the hope Christ brings.

Amen.

¹ Lindsey, R. (2023). *Climate Change: Atmospheric Carbon Dioxide*. [online] Climate.gov. Available at: <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-atmospheric-carbon-dioxide> (Accessed 28 March 2024).



Jim Schueler has been part of the Good Shepherd family for 15 years and is a faithful member of our Wednesday Bible Study. A nature lover and gifted photographer, Jim beautifully captures the spirit of our Hallowed Hikes through his lens.



"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." John 14:27

Hi, Bingley here. I'm a dog. I don't know everything humans know—but I do know peace. I can feel it in a warm patch of sunlight, in a quiet nap after a long walk, or in the way my human's breathing slows when they rest a hand on my back. When Jesus talks about peace, I think He means something like that, only deeper—a calmness that stays even when the world feels loud or confusing. A peace that comes from God, not from anything that can be fetched or chewed or chased.

You humans like to worry. A lot. You worry about time and chores and bills and traffic and things that happen far away. When your hearts get troubled, I notice it—I always do. Dogs are good at feeling what you feel. And when you're afraid or stressed, we try our best to help. We sit close. We lean in. We breathe slowly. We remind you that you're safe. Somehow, just petting us brings your shoulders down and your heartbeat back to normal. I've even overheard that it lowers your blood pressure, whatever that is.

Maybe God made us this way on purpose.

After all, "dog" spelled backward is "God."

Coincidence? I wag NO.

For me, peace is simple: a soft place to rest, someone I love nearby, and the quiet knowing that I'm cared for. It's a lot like the feeling you humans get on Sunday mornings at Good Shepherd—when everyone gathers, breathes, sings, and remembers they're loved.

During Advent, I see you moving fast—wrapping gifts, decorating trees, running from place to place. Exciting, yes. Peaceful? Not always. But Jesus promised a peace that doesn't disappear when life gets busy or messy. A peace that curls up beside you like a loyal companion, steady and warm, even in the dark of winter.

So this season, slow down. Take a deep breath. Notice the signs of God's love all around you. And if you need help finding that peace... well, you know where to find me.

Just pet a dog.

A Dog's Prayer for Peace: Dear Maker of Sunbeams and Soft Grass, help me spread peace wherever my paws go. Let my wagging tail chase away worry, my snuggles calm grumpy or worried hearts, and my goofy joy remind everyone to love big. Keep all Your creatures safe tonight and wrap the world in peace - cozy as a pup curled up for a nap. Amen.



Mr. Bingley, Good Shepherd's beloved *Morale Officer*, is a small pup with a big heart. Calm, cuddly, and endlessly gentle, he takes his ministry of comfort seriously—whether by offering a quiet presence to the staff or sharing friendly affection with anyone who needs a little extra love. When he's not making the rounds on a walk across the church campus, Mr. Bingley can usually be found napping on his cozy dog bed in Jo's office, ready to provide encouragement at a moment's notice. He is highly motivated by treats, prefers belly rubs to paperwork, and remains steadfast in his belief that the "cone of shame" is best avoided at all costs.



"Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" Psalm 46:10

Growing up on a farm in rural Indiana, I always equated peace with countries not being at war. When we would sing, "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me," I would think: "I have no control over countries fighting and soldiers dying." I believed that peace just meant living without conflict.

During the season of Advent, I like to reflect on past seasons of my life and what the birth of Jesus means to me. This reflection can sometimes be painful when I think of times in my life when I was going through periods of darkness, despair, grief, and sadness due to illness or the absence of loved ones. Sometimes God's encouragement to "Be Still" doesn't bring immediate peace or calm. The verse goes on to say, *"I will be exalted,"* not *"I already am exalted."*



If God can be patient, then I must learn to be patient and trust in His control.

When my husband was diagnosed with a terminal cancer, I was drowning in that despair, but God's words came to me and told me to *"Be Still,"* to trust Him. God doesn't promise a life of no conflict, but He sent Jesus with the gift of peace so that we could know that He is in control. Jesus told us that the Holy Spirit would be with us to remind us of this peace.

I miss my husband since his death nearly 12 years ago; I miss many loved ones during the holiday celebrations (dad, mom, brother, sister, so very many friends and family), but I have learned to let the peace of God carry me by acknowledging that He is in control. I let His peace guard my heart and mind so that I can try to avoid anxiety and remain hopeful for that time when God is exalted among all the nations.

PRAYER: Loving God, calm our hearts and quiet our worries. When grief feels heavy and peace seems far away, draw us into Your presence. Remind us that You are in control, and that the gift of Jesus brings a peace the world cannot give. Hold us with Your comfort, steady us with Your hope, and guide us toward the light of Your love. Amen.



Julie Brown has been a member of Good Shepherd for almost 30 years. You'll usually find her at the 8:00 service, greeting others as an usher or brewing coffee for the congregation. She also shares her gifts through our healing prayer ministry.



*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
(Isaiah 9:6)*



The peace candle is also known as “The Bethlehem Candle.” The peace of God allows us to look at others through heaven’s eyes and help guide the world to see God’s “here and not yet here kingdom.” Peace from God, biblical peace, allows us to trust in God’s promises (Proverbs 3:5) through restful, tranquil faith, despite the dark, scary world around us.

I grew up Lutheran and Advent and the lighting of the Advent wreath has always been a tradition in my life. As an adult, with my children and grandchildren, I have my own

Advent wreath that we light in our home each Sunday during Advent, and on Christmas Eve, the white center candle is lit. This candle is called the “Christ Candle” and represents the life of Christ that has come into the world. The color white represents purity. Christ is the sinless, spotless, pure Savior. Those who receive Christ as Savior are washed of their sins and made whiter than snow. The songs most precious in my mind during Advent are “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus” and “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.”

The Peace Prayer of St Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life. Amen



Janice Thomas has been part of the Good Shepherd family since October 2018 and is a regular at the 10:00 a.m. service. A devoted participant—and frequent co-facilitator—of the Wednesday Bible Study, Janice also serves at the altar as a lay reader and Eucharistic Minister. She gladly shares her gifts with our youngest members as well, bringing Scripture to life as the Bible storyteller at Vacation Bible School.



*Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has dawned upon you.
For behold, darkness covers the land; deep gloom enshrouds the people.*

*The sun will no more be your light by day, by night you will not need the brightness of the moon.
The Lord will be your everlasting light, and you God will be your glory. Isaiah 60:1, 20*

When I was a child, the season of Advent was a favorite of mine. There was an Advent calendar to open each day, there were special hymns to sing in church and, of course, Christmas was right around the corner!

Childhood memories like these are great but they are more than just memories. They are the basis for our lifetime of faith. It is easy to fall into despair as we witness the turmoil and conflict of the world around us. It does seem as if deep gloom does enshroud us. But, as Isaiah tells us, "The Lord will rise, and his glory will appear upon you."



It is our faith that gives us peace to face the darkness.

May the peace and light of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ, shine upon you this Advent season.

PRAYER: Loving God, as we wait for Christ's coming, shine your light into our darkness. Strengthen our faith, calm our fears, and fill us with your peace. May the light of Jesus guide us and brighten the world through us this Advent. Amen.



Wendy Frezza has been part of Good Shepherd for nearly 20 years and is a regular at the 8:00 a.m. service. She faithfully serves on the Altar Guild, participates in the Wednesday Bible Study, and often joins our Hallowed Hikes. Wendy is always ready to lend a hand and serve wherever she's needed.



Let God's Peace Find You!

From the Gospel of Matthew, we are told “seek and ye shall find.” But, from my experience, the emergence of peace seems well expressed by a play on this maxim, written almost two thousand years after Matthew, by Pablo Picasso: “I *do not* seek, I *find*.”

Uttered this way, peace represents a bit of a paradox, one whose character is structured such that the more we attempt to hold onto it, encapsulate or cultivate it, the less of it we actually end up with. But peace is, itself, one of the most unexpected of God's gifts, and one whose paradoxical nuance evidences His abundance. To demonstrate this, I would like to offer a metaphor:

Has your family vacation ever gone exactly to plan? In other words, has the fantasy of this vacation that you so precisely crafted in advance—diligently, with itemized lists, pen and paper, suitcases double and triple checked—ever materialized, point-by-point, in the way that you expected? Has this ordeal ever once gone without so much as a hiccup, lost keys, unpacked socks, a missed flight? If you can answer “yes” to these interrogations, I commend you.



I, most certainly, cannot.

It seems that the more we try to pull together an order, an order we become beholden to, the more we end up actually generating chaos. We white-knuckle our way to the turnpike ten minutes early, only to find an unanticipated, hours-delaying traffic jam. One tiny nail in the road is all it takes to unravel every bullet-point of our itinerary. The careful preparedness we imagined in order to minimize stress, to really make the journey as *peaceful* as possible actually ends up transforming into an unexpected antagonist. Here, the more we seek *control*, we *find* disruption.

Ironically, it seems that when we cruise onto the highway with fewer expectations, we actually begin to relax: not at our destination, but at the moments that surprise us from the second we get on the road. A good song on the radio, a meaningful conversation. In this case, we are not looking for anything, but what we *find* is of a surplus value.

Peace evidences this unexpected gift—it is inscribed in the moment that we relinquish control, whether in our expectations or over our stresses. As we enter into a season historically full of busyness, events, and planning, I can offer only this: don't *seek* control—and let God's peace *find* you!

PRAYER: In these days of Advent, help us to let go of life's wheels, and let God's peace come to us. Amen.



Quinn Foerch is a fairly new member of Good Shepherd. He attends the 10:00 service and has recently become an usher and greeter. As a psychoanalytic theorist and clinician, Quinn recently shared his thoughts as a presenter at the Sunday Forum.



[Jesus said] "I've said these things to you so that you will have peace in me. In the world you have distress. But be encouraged! I have conquered the world." John 16:33

When I was a teenager, my beloved grandmother was diagnosed with cancer. She fought valiantly, but at the beginning of December she passed away. As my family grieved, the world around us seemed to move on without us. The gray stillness of early winter was suddenly brightened by twinkling lights, decorated trees, busy shoppers, and joyful music. But my heart wasn't ready for celebration. I only wanted to retreat to my room, to look through old photo albums, and find comfort in memories of my loving grandmother.

We went through the motions of Christmas that year. As always, our family ventured into the woods to find the perfect tree. We strung the lights, hung the ornaments, and filled the house with the smell of baking cookies. Yet instead of comforting me, those familiar traditions deepened my sorrow. My grandmother had taught me how to bake—biscuits, pies, and cookies of every kind. As a child, I'd shape the leftover dough into little creatures or tiny tarts, proudly showing her my "masterpieces." Remembering those sweet times only made me miss her more.



On Christmas Eve, my family attended the midnight service at our small church. The sanctuary was filled with people, their faces glowing in the soft candlelight. Still, sadness weighed heavily on my heart. After receiving Communion, candles were passed from one person to another, each small flame spreading light through the darkness. We knelt together to sing *Silent Night*. I glanced at my mother and saw tears streaming down her face as she sang. I reached for her hand, and as my own tears fell, something inside me began to quiet.

In that moment—bathed in the warm glow of candles, surrounded by my church family, listening to the gentle beauty of the music—I felt the first stirrings of peace. It was not the peace that takes away pain, but the peace that comes from knowing we are not alone in it. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, was there with us—bringing light into the darkness and comfort into our sorrow. It was the beginning of my healing, and the first time I understood that even in grief, God's peace can still be found.

PRAYER: Loving God, in this holy season, quiet our hearts and calm our fears. When sorrow lingers and joy feels far away, remind us that your peace is still near—a gentle light that shines in the darkness. Help us to rest in your presence, to trust your love, and to share your peace with those who need comfort today. Through Christ, the Prince of Peace. Amen.



Mary Lou Crifasi has been a member of Good Shepherd since 2019. Since failing retirement, she has served as the Office Coordinator and was also the Interim Children's Minister for a year. Her passion is lifelong Christian Formation.



Peace on Earth, Goodwill to Men. Luke 2:14

PEACE--my mind took off in two very different directions! One way made me think about peace as a lack of war and suffering. The other direction made me consider peace as a quiet mind, calm actions, and a relaxed heartbeat. Are both possible this Advent Season??

If you tune into the nightly news, you are greeted by images of bombed out cities, starving children, and horrendous pictures taken in hospitals of people injured by war.

Each Sunday in *The Prayers of the People*, we pray: “We beseech thee also so to rule the hearts of those who bear the authority of government in this and every land that they may be led to wise decisions and right actions for the welfare and peace of the world”.

For me, our only hope is to continually pray to God for his guidance and protection. We must trust in God and have faith that He will be by our side.

From The Book of Common Prayer (BCP): #27 (p.823)

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

How many of the Hallmark movies depict peaceful scenes of snow-covered trees, twinkling lights, hot chocolate, and perfectly decorated trees surrounded by presents? They never seem to show the dad out front shoveling snow off the driveway, or mom slaving over a hot stove preparing a holiday feast, or the kids whining for dinner or arguing over a video game!!

We all need to slow down and set aside time to gather with our loved ones and just sit and enjoy each other! How peaceful that scene would be if it were uninterrupted by the ding of an incoming text, or the vibration of the cell phone, or the noise from the TV!

Time to be quiet and calm. Time to focus on the beauty that surrounds us. Time to share the love of family and friends. Time to pray to God and focus on the real meaning of the season. We need to take time to be mindful of all those who are not as fortunate as us and to help as much as we can.

From The Book of Common Prayer (BCP) #59 (p. 832)

O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

My hope and prayer for each of you is that you find PEACE in the world and in yourself, this Advent Season.



Harry Hawken has been a member since 2010 and regularly attends the 8:00 service. He serves as acolyte, lay reader, Eucharistic minister and usher. He volunteers as a cook for St. George Table. Harry is a Good Guy and he co-facilitates this men's ministry.



Finding Joy in Small Things

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Psalm 100 v. 1-3



As an Army brat, I spent my childhood moving around frequently, but one of the biggest moves was to Germany when I was in 3rd grade. My family lived in a tiny town where we were the only Americans around and this tiny town was only a 20-minute drive from a very famous German town called Rothenburg. Rothenburg is famous for several reasons—its medieval walls and traditional timber houses draw tourists year-round, but Christmas is an especially beautiful season there. Rothenburg transforms for Christmas with a huge market and all the trimmings. My family was soon well acquainted with the German holiday traditions—the wooden ornaments, the

wooden nativity pyramids that spin thanks to the candles that surround them, and most especially the treats that only come out at this special time of year. My sister and I were probably most excited to adopt the Advent calendar that allowed us to open a numbered box each day to reveal another piece of German chocolate.

It has been a long time now since that first Advent calendar when my sister and I had to exert self-control to avoid opening every last number on the countdown to get to the chocolate, but the tradition carries on. Every year my parents buy German Advent calendars and mail them to my family—now it's my kids rushing downstairs every morning of December to open the next box and get to that candy (well, they're all teens now so there's not as much rushing down first thing in the morning!).



In a season that can overwhelm us with traditions and to do lists, pageants and presents to buy, lights to string up and last-minute trips to the grocery store for the missing cookie ingredients, the German Advent calendar calls us to slow down first thing in the morning and remember the countdown to Christmas. As we savor that bite of chocolate, we pause and experience a small taste of Christmas joy.

Merry Christmas and Joy to the World!

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, as we await the birth of your Son on Christmas Day, help us to wait with joy. Keep our hearts focused on the true joy You bring rather than on being caught up in the chaos of the season. Remind us to slow down and savor the sweetness of something small like an Advent chocolate so that we can deeply connect with You while we prepare for the coming celebration. Amen.



Stacey Ulman and her family have been members of Good Shepherd for more than a decade now. You will find her serving as an usher or Sunday School teacher at the 10 a.m. service. Stacey also serves on the Flower Delivery and Artie's Party Committees, as well as Chair of the Good Shepherd School Board.



Luke 2:10–11 — The angel said to the shepherds: *“I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”*

Joy and kids just go together! Our 2nd–5th grade Sunday School class reflected on what joy means to them.

Joy is knowing that everything will be okay because God is with you. Joy grows when you’re around people who love and care for you. We can spread joy by being kind—like smiling, giving hugs, saying nice things, helping others, or even telling funny jokes.



Joy and happiness aren’t the same thing. Happiness can come and go, but joy stays. If there was a meter that measured happiness and joy, happiness might fill it halfway, but joy would fill it all the way to the top!

Joy is always there—we just have to find it. Joy is kind of like gratitude (being thankful) and even better than happiness.

In the Christmas story, angels came to the shepherds. First, they told them not to be afraid. Then they said they had “good news of great joy.” That joy is Jesus! Jesus brings hope and joy to everyone.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for giving us joy that comes from knowing you love us. Help us share that joy with others as we celebrate Jesus’ birth. Amen.



2nd – 5th Grade Sunday School (L – R)

Cohen Mann
Evelyn Morris
Jack Davis
Vivien Boren
Lucy Davis
Jack Evans



It is through giving we receive...

From the prayer attributed to St. Francis, BCP pg 833

My Advent story is based on the concept of *"finding joy through service."* It calls to mind a phrase in the Prayer of St. Francis, "...It is through giving that we receive."

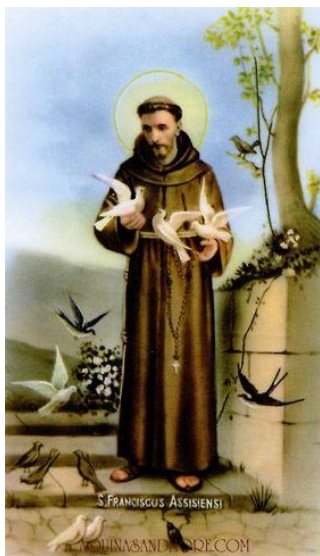
To illustrate that point, I'm sharing an experience from my volunteer work.

After retiring, my husband Greg and I lived in various world cities for a year at a time. As part of that adventure, we spent 2018 in Washington, DC. To meet people and get involved, we did several service projects. At the Washington Literacy Center, I volunteered to be an instructor. I devoted many hours every week to creating lesson plans and preparing materials to inspire my adult students to read. We worked hard together, reading stories, doing workbook exercises, and playing word games.

Months later, the Center's director invited me to speak at a program to recruit new volunteers. On the day of the event, I stood on a small stage and described my reasons for volunteering. I wanted to help other people learn to read, I said. I wanted to help them become more confident and successful. I added that, frankly, I wanted to change my students' lives.

Suddenly, my throat tightened. To my surprise, I choked out the words, "but, what I realize is that it's *my* life that has been changed!" One of my students sprang from her chair in the audience and rushed to the stage, embracing me. Tears of joy welled up and spilled out, my tears and hers.

In aiming to help others at the literacy center, I myself received a gift! Such joy! St. Francis taught us that fulfillment comes not from seeking personal gain, but from rendering service and giving to others. As I remind myself of this wisdom, I am inspired to find new opportunities here at Good Shepherd to help others (and to find joy myself) in this Advent season.



THE PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:

where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console,

to be understood as to understand,

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.



Susan Bendlin has been attending Good Shepherd for 4 years. She and her husband Greg attend the 10:00 AM service where they are frequent ushers and greeters. She is a Pennies volunteer and a lay reader. Susan and Greg both participate in the Theological Book Group.



***“If you can’t be a sun, be a star.
For it is not in size that you win or fail.
Be the best of whatever you are.”
Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.***

I learned a long time ago that my New Year’s resolutions fell short of their prescribed outcomes sometime around mid-March. Actually, some years, those resolutions never really got off the ground. Thus a few years ago, I adopted a twelve month plan, with specific smaller, short-term goals. Twelve of them; one for each month. Certainly I could manage a 30-day goal better than a 365-day goal.

Or could I?

It appears that setting goals is a whole lot easier than accomplishing goals. Sadly, it doesn’t really matter if this resolution could drastically improve my personal life (train for a 5k race) or advance my career (watch a webinar on labor laws). Either way it appears that a commitment to change requires the one thing I don’t seem to have: time.

Of course I have the same amount of time as everyone else. Each of us is allotted the same 720 hours every month. Yet I can’t seem to find the time for that exercise routine or that legal webinar. The reason is simple: it would require me to give up something else that I am already enjoying.

What would be the purpose of stealing time from one activity, to spend on another? As nothing obvious comes to mind, I am altering my expectations for 2026. I am giving up on the idea of changing myself, but instead, committing to give more of myself. Continue to do the things that bring me joy, but do them with more conviction and more passion. Simply be better at them. Be better at being me.

After all, I don’t have to be a sun; I can just be a brighter star!

PRAYER: Holy God, during this Advent season, shine your light upon the paths we walk. Teach us not to strive for perfection but to offer more of who we truly are—the gifts, the kindness, the joy you’ve already planted within us. Help us give ourselves generously to others, trusting that even small acts done with love can brighten the world. Make us steady stars in your night sky, reflecting the hope and joy of Christ who is coming among us. Amen.



Heather Vaughn and her family are long-time members of Good Shepherd. They attend the 10:00 service. Heather has been on the school staff for years and currently serves as the Head of School.



*“A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you;
and I will remove from your body the heart of stone
and give you a heart of flesh.” Ezekiel 36:26*

Joy Rooted in Transformation

There are moments in life when joy seems tied to circumstances—when we quietly hope that if everything finally goes right, then joy will come. But Scripture reminds us of a deeper, steadier truth: true joy is rooted in God’s transforming work, not in the shifting pieces of our lives. Joy rises not because every detail is settled, but because God is present and active in the midst of every change.

I learned this in a very real way.

After spending nearly 30 years in the Florida Keys—raising a family, building traditions, forming lifelong friendships—I felt God leading me somewhere entirely new. I packed up memories, trusted the nudge of the Spirit, and moved to a place where I knew only a handful of people. The excitement was mixed with uncertainty, and I wondered if joy would follow me into this next chapter.

But God is faithful.

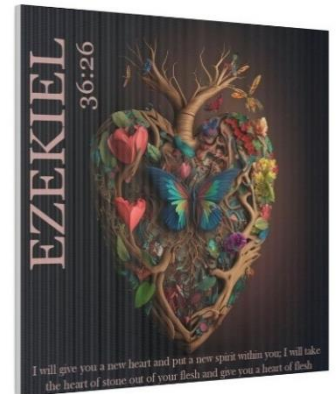
And joy, the kind that flows from transformation, met me here.

This church, and the people within it, embraced me with open arms. You welcomed me into community, into worship, into friendship. In a season where I wasn’t sure how things would unfold, God used *you* to bring joy—real joy—into my life. Not joy dependent on familiarity or comfort, but joy rooted in the Spirit’s quiet work of reshaping my heart, my path, and my sense of home.

May we trust that wherever God leads, joy will meet us there.

And may we continue to be people who offer that joy to others—just as you have done for me.

PRAYER: Gracious and Transforming God, You are the One who brings light into our uncertainty and joy into the places that feel unfamiliar. We thank You that true joy does not depend on everything going right, but on Your Spirit working within us—renewing, reshaping, and making all things new, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.



Michelle Lane has been with Good Shepherd for a little over four months. She is on the Church staff as well as involved with the Children Ministry. She has two adult children who live in Florida.



"A cheerful heart is good medicine." Proverbs 17:22

Small Joys

Finding joy in small things can be hard to do. These things don't have to be objects, though. They can be small acts of kindness - a smile or a laugh. Joy actually isn't hard to find as long as you try to look for it.

Looking for joy is good, but creating it is even better. Another way to feel joy is to create it for others. You don't have to be the one receiving the small acts of kindness to feel the joy. When I am the giver of joy to others, it feels the most powerful to me.

One big, annoying thing that some kids do at my school is bully other kids for being smart. I am a "smart kid." My friend, Jorge, is a really great friend because he is a smart kid too. He understands what I go through. He is always there with a smile or a Beacon Buck (a currency at my school).

In order to become a safety patrol at my school next year I have to do ten random acts of kindness or one BIG act of kindness. I hope these will bring others joy.

Being kind is so important. Finding joy is just as important, too. If you can find joy in everyday occurrences, then you can feel lots of positive emotions. All types of good things stem from looking for small joys.



PRAYER: Loving God, thank you for the small joys that brighten our days and for the kindness that grows when we share it with others. Help us to see joy in unexpected places and to be people who spread encouragement, courage, and compassion. Bless all who try to make the world gentler and kinder, especially our children. Amen.



Jack Davis is a 4th grade student at Beacon Cove Elementary where he is a "smart kid". He loves reading, yo-yos and Rubik's cubes. He plans to be an astrophysicist and study at CalTech. He is very into tennis, playing twice a week and competing in tournaments. He attended the US Open this year in NYC for his 10th birthday. At Good Shepherd he is a regular in Sunday School where he expresses an impressive knowledge and understanding of the Bible.



*All the people were beside themselves with wonder. Filled with awe, they glorified God, saying,
“We’ve seen unimaginable things today.”*

Luke 5:26

I didn’t realize how much my sense of wonder had dimmed until I became a mother. As children, awe and joy come easily, but as we grow older the magic of the world often fades. My days had become filled with career, friendships, finances, and the nonstop responsibilities of adulthood. Somewhere along the way, I had lost my wonder.

Motherhood brought it back.

When my daughter, Vivien, was three, we stepped outside one morning to pick up a package from the front porch. She paused at the top step and suddenly exclaimed, “Congratulations! Wonderful job! You are doing great!” No one was there—just our quiet street. When I asked who she was talking to, she replied, “The birds, Mom. They are singing beautifully, and I want them to know that.”

Vivien has always recognized goodness and joy everywhere. In preschool she learned *Feliz Navidad*, and one December afternoon it came on the radio as we drove home. She belted it out—loud, wildly off-key, and full of unrestrained delight. Then she asked me to roll down her window so “everyone” could hear her—because to her, wishing the world Merry Christmas simply made sense.

My child is more attuned to wonder than I am. Watching her grow has opened my eyes to the beauty woven into each day. Hope surrounds us constantly, yet I often fail to notice it. I get caught up in being protector, chore-delegator, chauffeur, teacher. But the truth is, she is my greatest teacher.

Now eight years old, she continues to keep me grounded in wonder and hope. Recently we talked about mythical creatures. I asked if she knew what they were. She nodded confidently. “Yes. They may not be real, but some people think they are—like the half-man half-horse. Unicorns. Fairies.”

Her understanding surprised me. I explained that some people need to see things in order to believe. She added, “Yes. Like some kids think their parents put all the gifts under the tree instead of Santa. Who would believe THAT, Mom?” I agreed—because to her, wonder and magic matter.

Hoping to steer us gently away from a question every parent eventually faces at Christmas, I said, “You know, some people don’t believe in God.” She reacted instantly—eyes wide, hands thrown in the air. “What? Who would *not* believe in God?” Then she pointed around our living room: “God is everywhere, Mom. God is outside in the trees and animals. God is in your laptop. God is in this glass of water.” She pressed her hand to her chest, took a deep breath, and said, “God is in the air I breathe and inside my lungs and body right now. It’s ridiculous that people don’t believe in God. God is everywhere.”

In our home, God is not a mythical creature. God is in everything and everywhere. And children often see what adults have forgotten to notice.

As adults, we try to make sense of the world. We analyze, we worry, and we carry responsibility. But God is not found only in answers or explanations. God is found in laughter from the backseat. In a child cheering for the birds. In a car-window serenade on a bright December afternoon.

When we slow down and look through their eyes, we remember: wonder is not something we lost. It is right in front of us, waiting to be noticed. And God’s love is revealed in that wonder.

PRAYER: God of Joyfulness, awaken our hearts to the wonder all around us. Open our eyes to your presence in simple joys, your hope in everyday moments, your love shining through the children who teach us. As we journey through Advent, may your light restore our wonder and draw us closer to you. Amen.



Caroline and Vivien Boren have been members of Good Shepherd since 2019. Caroline is a member of the Vestry and teaches Sunday School. She is very active in the Parent Association for Good Shepherd Episcopal School where Vivien is in third grade.



"And to all these qualities add love, which binds all things together in perfect unity." Colossians 3:14

As I begin to prepare for the Advent season, I find myself reflecting on memories from my childhood in Indiana. Life seemed magical to me because we always had plenty of snow, there were twenty-one cousins to play with, and my great grandparents had a farm.

The first annual snow was always magical. I loved watching the world become blanketed in sparkling white. There was tobogganing and sledding with my dad, my brother and my sister, ice skating at Sycamore Pond with hot chocolate and music over the loudspeakers, and huge drifts of snow to dive into. It was a special treat to go shopping on Main Street right before Christmas while snowflakes fell, the Salvation Army volunteers merrily rang their bells, and people called out, "Merry Christmas!"

On Christmas Day, my family would open gifts, show our friends next door, then head to Grandma's house for a splendid day with aunts, uncles, and twenty-one cousins. We played games, had snowball fights, and sang around the piano. There was always laughter and love. Each family brought a favorite dish, but Grandma's chocolate fudge was the highlight. We drew names for gifts and each child got a \$2 bill.

I felt so loved and so special.



Then there was the farm with horses, cows, pigs, sheep and chickens. What fun we all had! It was always a grand time building forts in the haymow and playing with the baby animals. At bedtime, when I slept over, Great Grandma would place a hot brick at the foot of my featherbed to keep me warm. There were no cell phones, no watching TV, no YouTube...just family enjoying being together.

We were surrounded by love.

May we all remember to give undivided attention and share warm hearts with each other this holiday season.

May heart-warming memories be made by all.

PRAYER: Loving God, stir in us the childlike wonder that once made the world feel bright and full of possibility. Let the memories of warmth, laughter, and simple joy remind us of Your faithful love that has surrounded us all our lives. Teach us to slow down, to give one another our full attention, and to create moments of kindness and connection that reflect Your light. May our homes be filled with peace, our hearts with gratitude, and our gatherings with love that lasts far beyond the season. Amen.



Debbie Gilbert and her husband, Dan, have been faithful members of Good Shepherd for 19 years and are regular worshipers at the 8:00 service. Debbie serves as a lay reader, and she and Dan often usher together, offering warm hospitality to all who enter. She is also a deeply supportive spouse to our Senior Warden—a role she embraces with grace, strength, and good humor.



Ubi Caritas et Amor



In 1998, composer Morten Lauridsen wrote “Ubi Caritas et Amor” to honor Loyola Marymount University’s beloved choral director, Father Richard Trame. The piece is a modern setting of an ancient antiphon once sung on Maundy Thursday—a reminder of Christ’s commandment to love one another. Lauridsen weaves the simple chant melody into rich, luminous harmonies that seem to breathe with compassion and grace.

At the heart of this music is Love—divine love that binds us to God and one another. The ancient words, translated as “Where charity and love are, God is there,” remind us that love is not just a feeling, but a holy presence. Whenever we choose kindness, forgiveness, or compassion, God’s love is made visible among us.

During Advent, as we await the coming of Christ, we are called to prepare our hearts with that same love. The love that entered the world in the quiet of Bethlehem continues to shine wherever people live with generosity and care.

Let us listen, reflect, and open our hearts to Love’s presence—for where charity and love are, truly, God is there.

Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.
Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor.
Exsultemus et in ipso jucundemur.
Timeamus et amemus Deum vivum
Et ex corde diligamus nos sincero.

Where there is charity and love, God is there.
The love of Christ has gathered us together.
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.
Let us revere and love the living God.
And from a sincere heart let us love one another.

Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.
Simul ergo cum in unum congregamur:
Ne nos mente dividamur, caveamus.
Cessent jurgia maligna, cessent lites.
Et in medio nostri sit Christus Deus.
Amen.

Where there is charity and love, God is there.
Likewise, therefore, when we come together
let us be united as one: let us be careful,
lest we be divided in intention.
Let us cease all quarrels and strife.
And let Christ dwell in the midst of us.
Amen.

Click the link below to listen to Lauridsen’s music on YouTube.

<https://youtu.be/peCZuRpJm8g?si=IU1BZPbhZk34VASX>



Debbie White has been a member of Good Shepherd for over 30 years. This was her mother’s church, Miriam Carlson. Debbie completed four years of Education for Ministry (EfM) while at Good Shepherd. Music is her passion. She serves as our Assistant Choir Coordinator and she organizes our concert series.



On October 22, 2024, Bishop Eaton made his annual visit to Good Shepherd. During his sermon he said, “God will sustain us even if we lose everything we now have.” I was so struck by that statement that I wrote it down and dated it. Whatever was he referencing? War, disease, financial ruin, the severing of family ties? And then he added, “Love Remains.”

I did not foresee what was coming. Surely it was not referencing our lives, mine or Mike’s. We had just celebrated our 51st anniversary, and despite a couple of recent brief hospital stays, Mike had lived well after his aorta was replaced in 2014. And surely the new pacemaker he was about to receive on October 25 would be the answer as promised. No one suggested otherwise.

Mike passed away one month later, November 24, 2024.

Ah, my loss of everything.

And yet, Bishop Eaton’s message of hope in the stark face of reality has turned out to be so. God has sustained me from all sides, the last voice I hear at night, and my first thought in the morning. And belatedly, I see “Love Remains” so after all there is such Hope that not all is lost.

The Good Shepherd has not let me wander too far (sorrowful, faltering sheep though I may be), but has brought me into His fold and that of his Tequesta flock. I’m sure He also found Mike and led him Home. And so. I would like to share the Stephen Paulus song that Debbie White sang at his service.

The Road Home.

It is the ultimate song of the Good Shepherd at work.

Thanks be to God.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PjTLLZKmws&list=RDPjTLLZKmws&start_radio=1

PRAYER: Good Shepherd of us all, thank you for reminding us, through all of life, “Love Remains.” Help us to live our lives in that light, and in that love, knowing that you are with us, each day, every step of the way, on the Road Home. Amen.

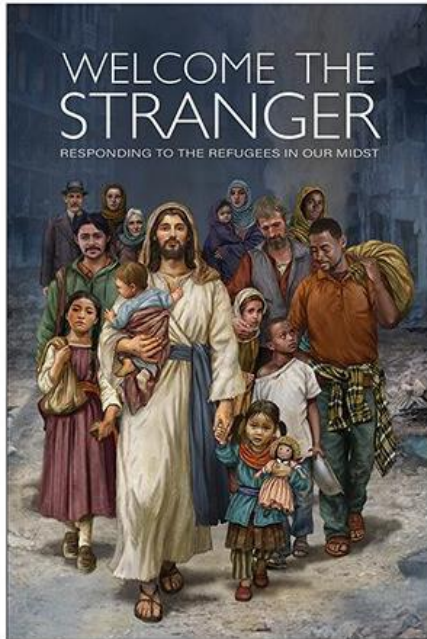


Barbara Waters has been a member of Good Shepherd since 2019. She is currently on the Artie’s Party planning committee. In addition she helps with the school where two of her grandchildren are students.



Welcoming the Stranger

“Do not be afraid.....God is with us.”



Everywhere I have gone in life, I have entered as a stranger. A new city. A new job. A new country. A new experience. We are all strangers – until we hold out our hand, put a smile on our face, and say Hello. Everyone I know or love was once a stranger – before they became a colleague, became a friend, became family, became a wonderful blessing in my life.

Twenty years ago, a couple of us started the Greeter program at Jupiter Medical Center. No one comes to a hospital relaxed! Patient or visitor, they come into a strange environment. They are anxious, excited, worried – or just plain scared. To be greeted with a warm smile as they enter the door, and a quiet word of, “Welcome, how can I help you?” can cut through their wall and touch their heart.

We are strangers to them, and they to us.

But both of us may be angels unawares.

PRAYER: Lord, help us to know that there are no strangers to you. We are all your beloved children. It was a stranger who welcomed and gave shelter to the mother of your Son. Help us to welcome and give shelter to one another.



Marilyn D. Lawrence is a regular at the 10 o'clock service where she is a greeter and keeps the coffee flowing. In her 12 years at Good Shepherd, she has made a BIG impact. She chairs the Outreach and Missions Committee and coordinates our Food Pantry.



Mary's Song of Praise (Luke 1:46-55)

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 come to the aid of his child Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

My favorite gospel is Luke. Luke is believed to have been a physician, gathering information carefully and writing as the facts dictated. His gospel contains many details of Jesus' life not found in the other gospels, but particularly in Jesus' birth and the events preceding. One such event is Mary's visit to Elizabeth, who is often referred to as her aunt or cousin; in most translations now as a "relative." We surmise she was much older than Mary, as Zechariah had told the angel in the temple. Scholars believe Mary may have been barely into her teens.

At any rate there is much to read between the lines. Mary knew something extraordinary had happened for Elizabeth – that she was pregnant in her old age with John the Baptist. Perhaps she came to Elizabeth seeking counsel for her own extraordinary experience, as the angel Gabriel had just visited Mary in Nazareth. As we learn, Elizabeth also knew what had happened to Mary, for as soon as she heard her voice, “the child in my womb leaped for joy.” Elizabeth assures Mary how blessed she is because she believed “what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

The *Magnificat*, or *Song of Mary* follows. Beautiful prose that proclaims joy, humility, hope and gratitude to God, it also serves up a warning to the rich, the powerful, the proud. Mary exclaims her profound wonder that “the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.” She notes that “from now on all generations will call me blessed.” Mary's *Magnificat* often doesn't receive the attention it deserves. It is among the first indicators of what Christ's ministry was to be: “he lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things” – that the ‘lowly’ will be valued highly by God.

In the Protestant church, Mary's *Magnificat* was glossed over in the readings. I had never thought much about it until attending the Catholic church, where it is given far more attention and importance. Catholic devotions are lifted from *Magnificat*: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb," "He satisfies the hungry hearts." Studying the *Magnificat*, I had a new understanding of Mary's unique devotion and trust in God's plan for her. Her song is the assurance of love for the lowly, spiritual food for the hungry, mercy and comfort for God's people.

This meeting of Mary and Elizabeth has been portrayed frequently in religious art. From Byzantine art of the two women with halos, to more contemporary versions with visible pregnancies, the visitation has captured artists' hearts for two millennia. Often, the elderly Elizabeth is depicted as kneeling in front of Mary. One of my favorite renderings is *The Visitation* by Danish artist Carl Bloch (1834-1890). In this rendering, the artist portrays the older Elizabeth on the steps of a columned veranda, welcoming her with arms stretched wide open. You can almost hear her exclaim, "And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy."



PRAYER: Lord, as I begin this new day, guide me and help me to love and to trust You fully. Give me strength and courage in the days ahead. Bless our marginalized neighbors, and help me to meet daily challenges with grace, kindness and empathy. In Christ's name I pray, Amen.



Lisa Ellington has attended Good Shepherd off and on since 2020. Moving here in 2022, she began working in the church office in 2023.



"We love because he first loved us." John 4:19

As I began reflecting on love this Advent, my thoughts returned to my childhood and the moments when the love of Christ first became real to me. Love is such an extraordinary word that stirs up so many feelings and emotions. Love is a deep affection exemplified by respect, commitment, trust, and care, for one another. Love is life-long spiritual journey, which evolves into a selfless desire for the well-being of others. However, love is not just felt, it is shared.

Love was shared with me when I was young girl by a group of women at my church. It transformed my life. Their actions, prayers, and the love of Christ drew me to them. I began to follow these ladies around the church curious about what they were doing, what they were talking about and how I could join in. I began to ask questions like curious kids do: "What are you doing?" and, "Can I help?" Instead of just brushing me off like most adults, they took me under their wing. They took time to explain to me whatever question I had. They let me feel a part of their service and love for the church. I felt not only a sense of belonging but also acceptance and love.



I continued to pay attention to these women and, as I grew up, I increasingly saw the actions of their love through their work for the church and others. I also noticed they all always wore the same cross as each other on their lapel. One day I asked about the cross. It was explained to me that they always wore this cross as part of a vow they had taken when they joined an Order and that they were Daughters of the King.

Their cross became emblazoned in my mind from that day forward.

I knew it meant they loved Jesus, and I wanted to be like them.

Through their modeling the life of Christ and His love, I became a Daughter when I grew up. Today, I now wear the same cross as they did. It was through their act of love and kindness that has inspired my life in Christ.

When I think of Love during this Advent, I remember the gift of unconditional love I was given as a child by the women who were the Daughters of The King. I remember how it molded and changed my life with Christ. They displayed to me that love is not only felt but also shared.

I hope through this Advent season you will experience God's gift of love from those around you and, knowing how precious the gift is, give it away with all your heart.

PRAYER: Gracious Father, open our hearts to the power of your love poured out for us through your gift of Jesus, your gift to all your Creation. Prepare our hearts not only for the arrival of your Son but also for a life to be fully lived in your perfect love. For His Sake, Amen.



Margaret Dunstan has been a devoted member of Good Shepherd for more than 20 years. She serves faithfully as a Daughter of the King, participates in the healing prayer ministry, and offers her voice as a lay reader. Margaret also shares her musical gifts with the congregation, enriching worship with her grace and talent.



Advent invites us to wait—not with anxiety, but with expectation. Scripture tells us that *“God is able to do exceedingly, abundantly above all we ask or think,”* and that there are things “no eye has seen” and “no human mind has conceived” that God reveals to us by the Spirit. These promises remind us that even when we cannot understand the path before us, God is already at work in ways that surpass our imagination. Hope is rooted in this truth: that God’s light is already dawning, even when our lives feel covered in shadows.

The prophet Isaiah proclaims that *“those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength...they shall soar on wings like eagles.”* In seasons of weakness, grief, or uncertainty, this promise becomes more than poetry—it becomes an anchor. When our own strength fails, God’s strength carries us. When we feel as though the earth beneath us is giving way, Psalm 46 reminds us: *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble...The Lord of hosts is with us.”* This steadfast presence is the heart of Advent: God coming near, entering our fragility, and lifting us up with a love that does not falter.

I carry a deep gratitude shaped by the ways God revealed that steadfast love during my sister Kathy’s final season of life. God’s promises were not abstract; they were lived. We were upheld with strength when ours ran out. We were surrounded with compassion, wisdom, and unexpected joy—moments of blue sky, song, laughter, and tender care. In hospital rooms and hospice halls, God’s faithfulness appeared in small mercies and sacred gifts, in the love of family, and in the peace that gently settled over us when words failed. Truly, we were “carried on eagles’ wings.”

In those days, the familiar words of Psalm 23 became living water to our weary spirits: *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”* God was with Kathy, and with us, in every moment—comforting, guiding, restoring, and finally welcoming her into the fullness of His peace. Her final message—“Christmas. One gift. One word.”—pointed us back to the heart of our faith: that in Christ, God has given us the greatest gift of all. The Word is Love, and Love is stronger than death.

As we move through this holy season, may we hold fast to the God who is our refuge and strength, the God who wipes every tear, and the God whose faithfulness outshines even our deepest sorrow. Christmas assures us that the story does not end in darkness. The light has come, and the Lord Himself is our everlasting hope.

PRAYER: Everlasting God, open our hearts to your steadfast love. Renew our strength, lift our spirits, and surround us with the peace you alone can give. May the light of Christ shine upon us and lead us ever closer to you, our refuge, our Shepherd, and our eternal hope. Amen.



Patti Dunne and her husband Kevin have been members of Good Shepherd for twelve years. She is a longstanding member of the Healing Prayer Team. She was instrumental in starting the Grief Share program with other church members. In January, Patti will facilitate the Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Course.



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