

Advent 2020

SCRIPTURE READINGS • REFLECTIONS • PRAYERS

Peace be with You



Society of St. Andrew
GLEANNING AMERICA'S FIELDS
FEEDING AMERICA'S HUNGRY

Advent - is the beginning of the Christian year and a fresh new start!

It is a season of waiting and expectation! With great expectation and anticipation, we await the birth of the Christ Child. This year has been an unprecedented year with a string of seemingly endless challenges: the Covid-19 pandemic, the economic impact on families and the systemic racial inequities. When will it end? The stress of those who have lost jobs, as well as those still working on the frontlines to cure the societal ills, is paralyzing. Most have a hard time seeking or finding peace in the chaos because they are searching in the wrong places. This Advent, let us seek the peace that passes all understanding from the Prince of Peace.

The birth of the Prince of Peace is the greatest gift of all. With His free gift of salvation, we are called and compelled to give back and to love our neighbor. We can give our time to glean fields, farmer's markets or serve others. We can give of our talents when writing devotionals or organizing gleaning events. We can give of our treasure when we donate to the Society of St. Andrew to feed hungry brothers and sisters in Christ, physically as well as spiritually.

As your spiritual hungers are fed by these devotions this Advent season, please consider giving back to help the Society of St. Andrew meet the physical needs of others with a monetary contribution that will provide healthy nourishing food for people in greatest need, right here in the United States. Perhaps you will give an amount equal to what you would spend on a gift for a coworker or your child's teacher. You could possibly set aside a tithe of your Christmas budget to provide healthy food for our hungry neighbors through Society of St. Andrew.

Thank you for using and sharing these devotional materials, for telling others about the Society of St. Andrew's gleaning and feeding ministries, and for making a generous gift. Together, let's seek the Peace that passes all understanding this Advent and help bring peace to hungry neighbors!

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Society of St. Andrew
GLEANNING AMERICA'S FIELDS
FEEDING AMERICA'S HUNGRY

The Hunger Problem

More than 40 million Americans sometimes go hungry, including women, children, the unemployed, the working poor, and homeless people.

And yet, plenty of food is available. The USDA estimates more than 25% of the food grown in the U.S. is never made available for people to eat – much of it is left in fields after harvest. Much more is deemed as excess or unmarketable because it is not pretty enough. It is plowed over or dumped into landfills where it creates a harmful greenhouse gas called methane. And after the remaining food is delivered to supermarkets and restaurants, another 133 billion pounds of food is thrown away every year.

There is enough food for everyone. The need isn't a shortage of food. The need is for the available food to be within reach of hungry people.

The Commonsense Solution

The Society of St. Andrew has the commonsense solution that bridges the great gap between millions of hungry Americans and the billions of pounds of nutritious produce that is out of their reach. SoSA has been fulfilling Jesus's command to feed the hungry (Matthew 25) since 1979.

The solution is to glean and salvage that food and make it available to those who need it most. SoSA does this by coordinating all the parties.

1. **Farmers and packing houses** with excess food let the Society of St. Andrew know when and where that food will be available to glean or to take away in tractor-trailers.
2. **Volunteers** are called when crops are available and they go into the fields and orchards, gathering the food and packing it for delivery.
3. **Feeding agencies** pick up the food, or it is delivered directly to food pantries, and used for prepared meals in soup kitchens.

A "Moving" Nativity Tradition

SUNDAY — NOV. 29

Scripture: Luke 2:1-5

Our family finds extra Advent peace through our nativity scene. We set it up Thanksgiving weekend, though not in the usual manner. The stable goes in our dining room where we can see it at dinnertime. Then, we place the rest of the pieces throughout our home using geographical clues from scripture.

Over the next month, we move the pieces on their way starting with Mary, Joseph, and the angel. They first leap onto the coffee table and then to the dinner table. Finally, they arrive at the stable...

On Christmas Eve, the pace picks up. Jesus comes out to play, the star goes up, and the shepherds, animals, and wise men turn toward the stable. After the angel appears, the shepherds and animals head to the stable. A few days later, the wise men move, stopping at Herod's palace (the coffee table) to ask for directions. They make their grand arrival during Epiphany!

After a few weeks, the pieces return to their homes, although the wise men secretly take a route through the kitchen, to avoid Herod's wrath. Then it's back in the box until next Thanksgiving! As we move into the Advent season, my hope is that tradition may be a source of peace to all.

Prayer: May the abundant peace and joy of Christ Jesus fill our homes to overflowing this Advent and every season. Amen!

Charlie Stribula - Woodbridge, VA

Righteous Work

MONDAY — NOV. 30

Scripture: Isaiah 32:16-18

Last Advent, I convinced my family I could bake dinner rolls. Nothing fancy, but they sopped up gravy and went well with butter. It was nice to do a small part to help bring the meal together. When we prepare for large get-togethers, there is a lot of organizing and preparation that goes into each meal. When the day comes though, we feel peace.

In our passage from Isaiah, we are reminded of the hope for a day when peace, security, and quiet are available to everyone. We are reminded that day

will come about through fruitful righteousness, people acting just and right in the intimacy of homes and the anonymity of the wilderness. This can seem like an impossible task, and without God, it would be. Nobody expects you to redeem the world by yourself. Jesus didn't walk among us to be alone; rather, Jesus dwells among us, bringing us together for righteousness sake! You don't need to make the whole righteousness meal, so to speak, but you could be the rolls person!

Prayer: Most merciful, Lord, you who loved us before we could love you, continue to grace us with the desire and ability to do what is righteous, so we too can seek after your peace through your son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

Pete Geoffrion - Winchester, VA

The Path of Peace

TUESDAY — DEC. 1

Scripture: Luke 1:67-79

This scripture is part of the song of Zechariah, as he rejoiced after the birth of John the Baptist. Zechariah was overwhelmed with joy at the birth of his son, a child that was one of God's miracles. Zechariah was made mute during this time of hopeful waiting for the birth of his child, but his speech was restored when the child was born. He prophesied that this child would "guide our feet into the path of peace." "Zechariah's son, John, prepared the way for the Prince of Peace, Jesus, our Lord.

The world has been a different place for most of us during this past year. We have stayed at home, and when we did go out, we wore a mask to protect ourselves and others. Violence has permeated the news, and we are striving to find a peaceful path with our brothers and sisters. Although our lives are turned upside down we, like Zechariah, can find joy in serving the God of Creation. Through the daily uncertainty, peace can be found in the ever-present Holy Spirit, as we rest on the promises of our loving God.

Prayer: Ever present God, we find ourselves, once again, waiting—waiting for the celebration of the birth of the baby that saved the world, Jesus. Grant us your peace as we strive to be faithful in our ever-changing world. Amen.

Doris Hedrick - Natural Bridge, VA

Costly Peace

WEDNESDAY — DEC. 2

Scripture: Matthew 5:9

My friend and I arrived at school for first grade and were assigned to different classrooms. My friend, who had asthma, began to cry. Her breathing became difficult and she was unable to say she wanted to be with me. The teacher attempted to take my friend to the other classroom. I took charge and kicked the teacher to express our feelings about the separation. Needless to say, I paid the price for a costly peace!

Jesus reminds us to be peacemakers. In sticking up for my friend, I was trying to be a peacemaker, but had more to learn! However, I was on the right track at a young age, for peace does involve action on our part.

Mother Teresa said: “Every act of love is a work of peace, no matter how small.” What acts of love am I doing where I am a peacemaker, a child of God?

Have I listened to others or only let others know what I think? Have I worked on restoring a broken relationship, or am I waiting for someone else to make the first move? Have I advocated for others, or am I afraid of what speaking out will cost me? Peace is costly.

Prayer: Holy God, enlarge our attempts at love for others, as we seek to be peacemakers. In the name of the Prince of Peace, Jesus, we pray.



Audrey Benjamin - North Mankato, MN

Remembering Peace with Mom

THURSDAY — DEC. 3

Scripture: Romans 12:17-18

My mother passed away April 2, 2020 at 96 years of age. Although it was during the coronavirus outbreak, she did not die from that. Instead, she passed after suffering a stroke. She passed quickly and did not suffer.

I will always remember the day I brought a DVD player so she could watch Bonanza. She and Dad often watched westerns when we were kids. As mom and I were watching an episode, a character, Little Joe, was being beaten up. My mom exclaimed, "They're gonna kill him!" "Mom," I said, "It's only a TV show! Does this upset you?" "Yes," she replied. So I told her, "Let's find a better show to watch!" She taught me a lesson I will take forever with me. We can change how we look at life and the value of peace. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." Romans 12:17-18 (NRSV)

In this time of anticipation of Christ's birth, let our hearts be filled with peace and our lives with peaceful images.

Prayer: Dear Father, may we be open to the working of your Spirit to make us agents of your peace. Amen.

Jack Davis - Bedford, VA

God's Gift List

FRIDAY — DEC. 4

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

In our family, we exchange Christmas gift wish lists in anticipation some of our wishes will be granted. Practically speaking, making a wish list also serves to guarantee we have made right choices for one another.

Long before Creation, God anticipated humankind would need help loving one another. The gift of freewill carried the seeds of rebellion against God's good intentions. Sadly, the human story has unfolded to reveal the consequences of our lack of love. Clearly, we needed another gift—the gift of peace beyond our

understanding. That gift came to us in the form of an infant. The Christ-child born of Mary, grew in grace and truth, fully human, yet completely divine. He went to the Cross, died, but rising to life again, Christ guaranteed we may stand before the God of peace, sanctified entirely.

Any gift we receive from our loved ones at Christmas will bring us momentary joy. Even though we know their gift is a symbol of their love, it can never bring us that deep, unending peace which only comes from our Lord. May we rejoice then that “The one who calls [us] is faithful, and he will do this.”

Prayer: God of light, life, and love, grant us that peace which passes all our understanding in your gift of Christ Jesus our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Chris Suerdieck - Emmitsburg, MD

He Will Bring Us Goodness and Light

SATURDAY — DEC. 5

Scripture: Isaiah 53:10-11

One of my first loves was music. At age 7, I remember my first “Christmas Carol church.” Years later, I learned this special service has a unique name: Lessons and Carols.

Now, this worship is something I look forward to each season. I never tire of hearing the words of Old Testament prophets, Jesus’ family lineage, or how Gabriel visited Mary and Joseph before the birth of our Savior.

The carols blend so well with the Scripture and flow effortlessly through the service. The highlight comes as the last scripture is read. The lights are turned off, and we stand in darkness. Then someone lights a candle. The small flame from that one candle is passed and shared with each person. The sanctuary, now quiet, takes on a warm glow. In the fading darkness, we sing Silent Night. The harmonies seem richer, as the words “Sleep in heavenly peace” seem to breathe—inhaling and exhaling with each refrain.

Show your love with
Society of St. Andrew
Christmas Cards!

**Send them to everyone on your list:
Co-workers • Neighbors • Pastors
Friends • Teachers • Shut-ins • Relatives**

Give a gift from the heart. Your gift of \$15.00 or more, in your friend or loved one's honor, will put 500 servings of nourishing, healthy food on the tables of hungry people!

Your honorees will receive a beautiful Alternative Christmas Card, designed exclusively for Society of St. Andrew for 2020 by Virginia artist James Harris.

The full color 5" X 7" card will feature original art for this Christmas season and an inspiring verse that conveys God's love and reminds your honoree that they hold a special place in your life. This unique card announces your generous gift to feed the hungry in your friend or loved one's name.

We'll also send a card to you, with our thanks and confirmation of your gift order.



sample of 2020 card

Finish your holiday gift shopping in only a few minutes today!

Order Alternative Christmas Cards by mail (using the form on the reverse side of this page), by phone, email, or online.

**Order today (form on reverse side) or
800-333-4597 • card@endhunger.org • Endhunger.org/card**

Society of St. Andrew

Christmas Cards!

Minimum gift donation for each card is \$15.00.

Do not send cash through the mail. Your donation is tax deductible.

Charge my: VISA • Master Card • American Express

Make checks payable to: Society of St. Andrew

Account # _____ Exp _____ CVV _____

Signature _____

Total enclosed or to be charged to card: _____

Orders must be received by December 5 to ensure delivery before the Christmas holiday. We will make every effort to expedite late orders. Please PRINT all information. Mail to: Society of St. Andrew
3383 Sweet Hollow Road • Big Island, VA 24526

Your name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Daytime phone _____

Email _____

() Send _____ cards to me for personalizing and mailing.

() Personalize and mail the following cards on my behalf:

In the blocks below, please indicate how you want each individual card signed. Attach additional sheets, if needed, to complete your list.

In honor of _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Sign this card with these words:

In honor of _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Sign this card with these words:

In honor of _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Sign this card with these words:

In honor of _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Sign this card with these words:

The prophet Isaiah states, “Out of anguish, he shall see light.” Let us take time in Advent to develop patience, practice gratitude, and to accept the stillness around us. Only then can we focus on the light.

Prayer: Lord, we remain distracted by worldly desires. Give us strength, bring us peace, and lead us to the Light. Amen.

Kelly Desclas-Estes - Glen Allen, VA

God's Peace is Sufficient

SUNDAY — DEC. 6

Scripture: Philippians 4:7

While adhering to the command “Pray without ceasing,” I often find my prayers for healing answered by the words of Philippians 4:7, “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

For years now, my eyesight has progressively diminished, and my ongoing prayers for a miraculous healing have seemingly gone unheeded. I realized the real miracle in all of this is the peace that God has blessed me with.

My ongoing prayers of praise, supplication, and thanksgiving have allowed me to move closer to God on a daily basis. I found that my fear of blindness, which once terrified me, was replaced by a thankfulness for enough vision to carry on and pursue the plan God has for my life.

Although I still struggle with self-pity and wonder “Why?”, God mercifully helps me realize I have been blessed with more than enough work to do within the guidelines of God’s plan, a plan that regularly offers new opportunities for service. With those opportunities comes a renewed sense of God’s peace.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for hearing my cry and always granting me your peace, that peace which always surpasses my ability to understand. All this I pray in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

Denny Engle - Gautier, MS

Peaceful Advent Traditions

MONDAY — DEC. 7

Scripture: John 1:1-5

As my children were growing up, we inherited the task of setting out luminarias for the Christmas Eve services. At first, it felt like another “have-to” for the busy season. Over time, it became a blessing and a joyful memory.

Christmas Eve was already busy! The kids and I enjoyed a wrapping party in the morning, complete with holiday music and my wife’s fresh-baked treats. And then, in the afternoon, we went to set out the luminarias, before the last light of day.

Years ago, the women of our church designed our luminaria bags with beautiful Christmas images—angels, stars, trees, etc. We continued using them every year, bolstered by a few reinforcements from time to time. The kids and I would set up our work station, fill each bag with a little weight, and place a candle in each. We then placed the bags around the sidewalks and parking lot of the church.

By evening, the candles were lit for worship, and soft columns of light illuminated our paths. What a beautiful and peaceful sight!

My hope and prayer for you this Advent season is you find a moment to begin or continue a tradition, creating peaceful memories and celebrating the birth of our Savior, the Light of the World.

Prayer: Lord, teach us to slow down and envelop ourselves in your Holy Light. Amen.

Bob Brooks - Fredericksburg, VA

Joy and Peace from Giving

TUESDAY — DEC. 8

Scripture: Colossians 3:17

As a child, I was blessed with a home where lots of presents were found under our Christmas tree every year. My parents also taught me the valuable lesson, that giving is greater than receiving. I soon appreciated joy and peace

delivering gifts to strangers every Christmas season—something our family did for many years.

I've tried to continue that tradition into adulthood. I introduced my son to the joy of giving at an early age. He soon appreciated our annual “shopping trip for Jesus”—purchasing food to provide Christmas dinner for a family in need. We also adopted families through our church. He enjoyed picking out toys and books to give to the children of those families.

In our business, we adopted families in our community or worked with agencies helping homeless people at Christmastime. Several of our staff members joined in those endeavors. They, too, valued the joy that comes with giving—whether a package of socks, or pooling our resources to buy gifts for each member of a large family.

Something about giving to others, especially during Advent, provides great joy and peace. It's a tradition I look forward to every year.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for the blessings that come from giving in your name, but especially for the greatest gift of all, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Julie Erickson - Olathe, KS

Perseverance

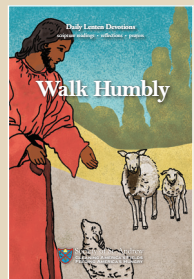
WEDNESDAY — DEC. 9

Scripture: Romans 15:13

Once upon a time, I was treated for cancer. They successfully treated the cancer using radical protocols, but I have dealt with side effects of that treatment

See what's inside!
Walk Humbly

All New Lenten Devotions for 2021
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ever since. Most days have been a challenge, but I have pushed through.

There were days when I felt I was at the end of my rope. On those days, I would go to church and rail at God. I would pace up and down the empty aisle, yelling at God, crying, telling Him how I felt. Once I vented my frustrations, I sat and cried. At that point, I felt God wrap me tight and hold me until my tears stopped. That is the Peace of God, which has sustained me over the past fifteen years and sustains me now.

I can persevere through any challenge because I know the peace that comes from knowing God's love. The joy that comes from believing that the God of Peace permeates all aspects of my life. On the worst days, as I near tears from pain, I can hold on for another day because of that peace.

Prayer: Lord, as we look forward to welcoming your reign here on earth, may each of us know your peace and find ways of sharing it with everyone around us. Amen.

Susan Keith - Rutherfordton, NC

Beyond Myself

THURSDAY — DEC. 10

Scripture: Colossians 3:2

I stared at my computer screen, critical of every sentence. Despite my efforts to focus on work, I battled recurring distractions—my holiday to-do list, my difficult relationship with a family member, multiple health concerns.

A bluebird startled me out of my mope. He flew at my office window, pecking the glass with his beak. From the wooden rocker on my patio, he jumped back and forth to the windowpane, scraping the hard surface with tiny claws.

At first, I flattered myself that he was watching over me like an attentive encourager. But then I realized he saw his own reflection. Bobbing and twisting his bright blue head, he peered at one thing—himself.

As he clung to the edge of the middle rail on my window, his loud, staccato chirps pierced the quiet afternoon. His preoccupation with his image eclipsed

the beautiful sunshine, the mealworms waiting in his feeder, and the clear water trickling down the fountain. It also eclipsed me on the other side of the glass.

I watched the bird take one last look at his visage before he flew into the cloudless sky. And I thanked God for the gentle reminder to turn my eyes away from myself and toward my Savior.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I know self-absorption only magnifies my troubles. You alone are my peace, at Christmas time and always. Amen.

Audi Lehman - Hernando, MS

Whispers of Peace

FRIDAY — DEC. 11

Scripture: Luke 2:13-14

When a multitude of the heavenly host proclaims “Glory to God in the Highest,” the message is unmistakable. It surrounds us with an updraft of excitement. We may even join in the chorus of praise and in the spirit of the season. Advent is, after all, the season of joy, anticipation and wonder. Decorations, music, shopping, wrapping, rehearsals, events... and the list goes on. It seems like weeks of constant motion.

When that same multitude of the heavenly host proclaims “On earth, peace,” it is whispered, elusive and quiet. Not meant to be heard above the noise, but instead of it. No matter how hectic the previous weeks have been, the trip home from church on Christmas Eve provides that “instead of” moment as Silent Night is but an echo.

In the stillness of almost Christmas, the peace, available to everyone everywhere, is suddenly very personal. It wraps me in a calm assurance that, in the midst of turmoil, God’s peace is closer than we think.

Prayer: Teach us, Lord, to tune out the noise and listen for “instead of” moments. Thank you for tucking those moments into the busy-ness of our lives. Amen.

Carolyn P. Maness - Lynchburg, VA



Society of St. Andrew is t



Good Stewards of God's Creation

Society of St. Andrew (SoSA) was founded in Virginia in 1979 on Christian principals of caring for the environment; living a simple, sustainable lifestyle; and caring for the “least of these” by modeling a commonsense solution to the problems of food waste and feeding the hungry.

SoSA uses the excess of God's abundance to feed those who don't get enough to eat, for 5¢ per serving.



Saves Good Food from Going to Waste

SoSA saves 20-30 million pounds of perfectly good, fresh produce each year, food that would otherwise go to waste, and donates it to feed the hungry throughout the nation.

Using the proven biblical practice of gleaning farm fields and orchards after the harvest, each year SoSA engages tens of thousands of volunteers who pick, bag, and deliver leftover crops that, for a variety of reasons, would not be sold.

Go Green with the Society of St. Andrew





The Ultimate Green Ministry



Benefits the Environment

SoSA keeps as much as 15,000 tons of food waste out of landfills, not only saving good food, but also reducing the production of methane gas, which damages the atmosphere.



Opportunities to Act on our Faith

SoSA supplies fresh fruits and vegetables rather than high-caloric “filler food,” improving the health and well-being of our society’s most vulnerable.

Harvest of Hope, SoSA’s mission retreat program, teaches youth and adults how to live responsibly in a hungry world, and to care about those who are hurting.

SoSA’s Gleaning Network and Potato & Produce Project put faith into action by gleaning leftover produce from farms and bagging excess loads of potatoes, and then distributing the food to critical local feeding agencies.

SoSA offers seasonal devotions and other programs– Lent, Advent, Vacation Bible School, and Christmas Cards – to enrich spiritual life, and inviting participants to feed the hungry through prayer, volunteerism, and financial giving.

In Stillness, Silence, and Solitude, God's Peace Awaits

SATURDAY — DEC. 12

Scripture: John 16:33

In John, Jesus tells us, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

What a fitting scripture as we face the world today. I would never imagine that my “trouble” would take the form of chaos, economic ruin, a worldwide pandemic, and racial injustice reaching its peak. Yet, in spite of this, Jesus says, “... in me you may have peace”—an amazing promise.

I know this peace. I recall when the peace that Jesus describes filled me. It is felt when I make time for stillness, silence, and solitude. His peace comes, even though the world may be crashing around me. Every day, his peace is made new, and my spirit is refreshed.

Each morning, I greet the God of the Universe with love, joy and thanksgiving. I listen and wait. I hear his voice in the stillness, silence and solitude of the morning and his peace fills me again.

Prayer: Father, no matter if the storm rages and the chaos threatens, we know you are the source of peace. Remind us your peace awaits in stillness, silence and solitude. We pray in the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Amen.

Deb Broadwater - Moneta, VA

Lay Your Head on Jesus' Breast

SUNDAY — DEC. 13

Scripture: John 13:23

Earlier this year, I was very sick. I grew weaker for several months when the medical staff finally discovered my problem. I had septic arthritis and sepsis in my blood. I did not know at the time, this was often a fatal disease. I only knew I was weak; I hurt; and I did not get better. I wanted it to end.

Before my cardio-thoracic surgery, my anesthesiologist and his assistant came to my room, and the assistant prayed with me. In the operating room, before they put me under, the assistant whispered in my ear, “Just be like the apostle John and lay your head on Jesus’ breast.” Peace flooded my mind as I closed my eyes and imagined leaning on Jesus. It did not make sense in any way of the world. It was a peace that passed understanding.

I am well on my way to recovery, but I believe regardless of the outcome, Jesus was there all along to give me His peace. Even today, I tear up thinking about it. After all, you and I are the ones whom Jesus loves.

Prayer: Dear God, remind us that at all times, we can lean on Jesus’ breast, and he will give us peace. Amen.

Michael Henderson - Florence, SC

Finding Peace

MONDAY — DEC. 14

Scripture: Joshua 1:5

During this Advent season, the stress of the world and the preparation for Christmas cause anxiety to build. We look for relief in the wrong places or in the wrong ways. Some look at their social calendar, others begin frenzied shopping— neither activities provide peace.

When our family was young, there was tension in our extended family over who we would visit over the holidays? No matter who we chose, it was not good enough for anyone. So we decided it was time for our own family to reconnect. We decided to go on a trip, just our family. We involved the kids in planning. On our trips, we reconnected with each other, found out what was happening in our lives and shared our wishes for the coming year.

Today the kids have their own families and traditions. I still look forward to traveling, reflecting, and resting. It gives me the opportunity to worship in a different environment to experience the peace of God.

God promised to be with the patriarchs in the Old Testament through their trials and tribulations. He said, “I will be with you...” (Joshua 14:27a) In the New Testament, Jesus told his disciples, “I will always be with you...” (John 14:27a) Those promises still stand today!

Prayer: May we seek the peace that God offers us, especially in these troubled times. Amen.

Sam Ramirez - Lakeland, FL

Returning and Rest

TUESDAY — DEC. 15

Scripture: Isaiah 26:31 & 30:15

Since leaving Memphis after high school graduation, I have tried to return home every Christmas. This meant long trips from school in Charlottesville, Dallas and finally South Bend. Later as pastor serving in Virginia, church activities filled the Advent season until all Christmas Eve services were completed. Then, it was a long road trip to Memphis and back again. After returning, I needed rest.



Artist Edwin Long, Anno Domini, 1883, shows the arrival in Egypt.

After long journeys to Bethlehem and from their exile in Egypt, Mary and Joseph needed rest. Do you need rest today? To return “home”?

Normally, we pastors stress the need to find quiet time during this season. Normally, the season is hectic with shopping, parties, cantatas and crèche scenes. Will Advent 2020 be a normal one? Or perhaps we will experience a new normal? Will it be a Zoom Christmas this year? Only God knows, as I write this devotional in June.

Whatever Advent brings our way in 2020, it is in God alone that we will find perfect peace... as did Isaiah, Mary, and Joseph—and all who have followed Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, help us to fix our minds upon you. As we return and find rest in you, keep us in your perfect peace. Save us as we trust in your quiet strength. Amen.

William Nash Wade - Strasburg, VA

Peace that Fills Emptiness

WEDNESDAY — DEC. 16

Scripture: John 14:27

In November 2005, I sat by the water at Walt Disney World, watching the ferries from the Magic Kingdom. This was where my wife Mary and I had gone for years, but I was alone now. It was a week after she died. The emptiness filled my whole being, and I wept.

That Thanksgiving, I volunteered to preach at an ecumenical service. When I went forward, the pastor had me kneel so that the church could lay on hands, whisper comfort and place God's love deep inside my emptiness.

Thanksgiving dinner was in Maryland where Mary and I had gone for twenty years. As I got up to leave, our old friends insisted I stay with them overnight. The peace of Christ was in their love and prayer.

Advent began. I was alone, often in grief, but God was with me through God's people. Christ gave me a peace that began to grow. Advent was truly a season of becoming.

Prayer: God of love, we thank you for Christ's promise of healing and peace. Let this gift grow in our hearts throughout this Advent and fill our souls. Amen.

Bill Obewiler - Fleming Island, FL

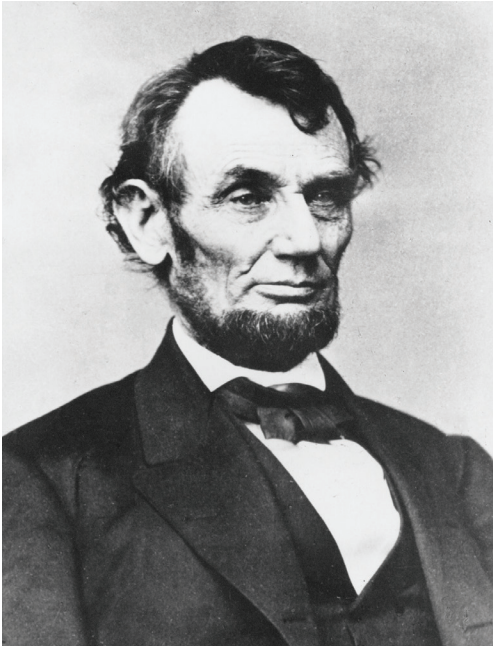
Peace, Friends!

THURSDAY — DEC. 17

Scripture: Luke 2:14 and Ephesians 2:14

I offer you a trip to the 1960's. I am living without peace. Inner and outer turmoils tear away at my seams. My parents, when not shouting at each other, are yelling at me; America and communists are in conflict from Berlin to Vietnam; Blacks struggle with Whites for equality, and revolutionaries clash with the status-quo. This was 1968 though it seems like 2020.

In 1969, at 19 years old, God opened my eyes. I saw each of the polarities: protester versus government, husband versus wife, Black versus White. Each caused division and pandemonium because of our estrangement from God. I realized my problem, each person's problem, enmity with God. "We were enemies," says the apostle Paul. Denying it, I finally owned up to it.



a friend of me. I found peace in accepting him by faith. "Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!"

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, give me peace, forgive me my enmity and make me your friend through your death on the cross. Amen.

H. O. "Tom" Thomas - Forest, VA

Deep Breath

FRIDAY — DEC. 18

Scripture: Colossians 3:15

It was Christmas, and as usual, I was running late. My life is often hectic, but during the holidays, I find myself running from one activity to the next. Work, family, Kiwanis, church—all compete for my attention. That evening was rehearsal for the Christmas program at church, and I was exhausted. I glanced toward the sky and stopped. The most beautiful full moon was glowing among the starry sky, and in the crisp December evening, I stared at the sky, drinking in the peaceful sight. I took a breath, and for a minute, committed myself to BEING instead of DOING.

It is easy to fall into... being so full of doing that we forget to just BE. That pause didn't affect my arrival time by much, but it affected my spirit tremendously. Instead of getting to the church annoyed, I was ready to work with a spirit of cooperation—that deep breath made a difference.

During this time of busy-ness, take a deep breath. Drink in a peaceful view and be thankful. I promise, it will make a difference to you and those around you.

Prayer: Father God, you desire good things for us. Help each of us to take a breath and remember you came as a tiny baby to transform our relationship with you. Amen.

Chris Howell - Lynchburg, VA

A Peace-filled Memory

SATURDAY — DEC. 19

Scripture: John 14:27

I grew up in Falls Church, VA. My mom was the church Music Director, and my dad served as a Trustee. I had two talented older brothers. We had a traditional Christmas Eve service where the youth choir sang. With candles in hand, we left the sanctuary and went to the manger in the front of the church, illuminated for all to see. One Christmas Eve as we walked to the manger, it began to snow. It was like the end of a Hallmark movie or the photo on the best Christmas card ever!

Each Christmas, I recall the beauty and innocence of that evening. It reflected the peace that only Christ gives. Along with my family, some of my best friends were there that night. Some were at my wedding; one who sang with me that night was killed in Vietnam; and with some others, I have stayed connected.

The roots of who I am were fed by that faith community. My memory of that evening is a church family, at peace, finding places for all to serve, and blessed with a chance to sing together in the snow. The “peace the world gives” is hollow and fake. I long for Christ’s peace for our churches, our nation and our world.

Prayer: Jesus, you are the Son of God, and we long for Love’s pure light this season. Amen.

Gil Hanke - Nashville, TN

The Rushing Wind

SUNDAY — DEC. 20

Scripture: Philippians 4:6-7

In my first year as a youth minister, I planned a mission trip to Washington, DC for our senior high youth that was almost disastrous. The host organization had the date wrong and hadn’t planned service opportunities for our group. After a frantic 24 hours, we found opportunities to work with seniors and to feed hungry people, but we’d need to walk there or use the Metro.

On the third night, we walked as a group to a soup kitchen. When we arrived, we realized that we’d arrived at the address for the wrong quadrant of DC’s four sections. We walked for nearly an hour in humid temperatures, herding our students along, until we came to a dead stop. Across our path loomed a city building that stretched for as far as the eye could see. Hot, tired, and lost, we circled up and prayed. As we prayed, a breeze blew for the first time all week. And then, a passerby stopped and asked if we needed help. Showing us a way through the building, the woman answered our prayer. God sent an actual person (and a mighty rushing wind) to answer our desperate prayers in a way I’ll never forget.

Prayer: Holy God, show us the way to go, and as we search, give us peace in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Jacob Sakms - Midlothian VA

Quiet Expectancy

MONDAY — DEC. 21

Scripture: Colossians 1:15-20

As I was growing up on my family's farm, Advent was a simple time where traditions centered on the natural world around us. I remember long walks to the woods where tall firs grew. There among the silent trees, we'd fill paper bags with running cedar. Back home, this fragrant fir lined our mantles. Our wreaths were pine boughs wrapped in red ribbon.

Some years my grandmother and I gathered pine cones, gum balls, and acorns and glued them to a cut-out cardboard star to make an elegant wreath. Our Christmas tree was usually unwieldy pine, so tall it bent at the top.

Looking back, I don't remember hectic shopping or parties. I remember the natural world: the winter sky streaked with color, the hush of snowflakes as they fell on fields and fences. The Bible says, "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth..." (Col. 1:15) It was into the silent beauty of this world that Christ was born. If we look, we can see him here, still.

Prayer: Father, help us to take the time this Advent to look for you in the quiet places. Amen.

Regina K. Carson - Chesterfield, VA

Unfathomable Peace

TUESDAY — DEC. 22

Scripture: John 16:32-33

Jesus was and IS always teaching those who follow him to listen carefully and attentively.

The One we hear in John 16, near the end of Christ's ministry on earth—in those intimate final hours with his closest friends—encapsulates the significance of Jesus' birth and being in the world: that God came to earth in human form as Emmanuel, "God with us," so that humanity might have abundant life.

I am not alone. My Father is with me.

John 16:32

I write this reflection amidst simultaneous pandemics: the COVID-19 pandemic, and the pandemic of intolerance, racial injustice, and insularity—where nationality, race, sexuality, politics, and religion divide us; where those not “like us” are marginalized and endangered. No one knows when these pandemics will be resolved, and whether those resolutions will be peaceful.

What we DO know is what Jesus promised to those who listen and hear. He promised we

can find answers to life’s conundrums in his life and teachings. He is the Prince of Peace who calmed raging storms, saying “Peace, be still,” and he can calm our hearts, even today.

Prayer: (A Gaelic Blessing) Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you. Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you. Deep peace of the gentle night to you. Deep peace of Christ, the Light of the World, to you. Amen.

Roger Dowdy - Richmond, VA

Uneasy Peace

WEDNESDAY — DEC. 23

Scripture: Numbers 6:24-26

When I was young, I often walked my grandmother’s mail to the post office. One snowy afternoon at the post office, I waited while a woman dropped off her mail. She saw me and said, “Bless you child. Your patience is a gift.”

I didn’t know how to respond. I felt uncomfortable. Why would she bless me? What does that mean? That evening, I was uneasy, but I experienced an awesome peace remembering that moment at the post office.

I think about that little boy sometimes when I think about Aaron’s blessing for Israel. Did Israel feel uneasy receiving his blessing?



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This nutritious, but excess, bounty is sent directly from the point of surplus (field or packing facility) to food banks or feeding programs that will share it directly with people in greatest need. The Society of St. Andrew's remarkable and efficient programs have proven extremely successful at providing nutritious food to those who need it most. Your gifts make this possible!

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Pounds Saved: 19.4 Million
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Volunteers: 25,544

**2.6 billion servings shared
in our 41 year history**

Average cost per serving 5¢

Less than 3% overhead



I'm in awe of God caring so much for so many people or for a particular person like me. The Lord blessing, keeping, shining, favoring, and gifting you peace—awesome! Then to remember Jesus walked among us teaching, eating, blessing, suffering, and then conquering sin and death with even more teaching, eating, and blessing—awesome! Wow, God's Awesome!

Prayer: Lord, you who held Israel, and showed them peace, so they may be your people and keep your ways: provide us with peace, that we may remain in you and the ways of resurrection life. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

Pete Geoffrion - Winchester, VA

Everything I Know, I Learned from Charlie Brown

THURSDAY — DEC. 24

Scripture: Luke 2:10

For most of my life, we had an annual tradition of watching the television special A Charlie Brown Christmas. It still is one of my favorite things and really gets me in the Christmas spirit.

Now, we are in the age of Netflix and On-Demand TV. I either catch it by chance, or slip in an archaic DVD. Though the tradition of watching it together is only a memory, I still love the simplicity of this program's message. I feel peace listening to Linus tell the Christmas Story, and listening to Schroeder playing Christmas anthems on his toy piano.

It is a blessing to feel the excitement of planning a pageant, looking for a Christmas tree and singing carols. All the materialism of the season melts away and the true message of Christmas rings loud and clear. Of course, even I sometimes find myself too busy to watch my beloved special, so I just say "Alexa, play A Charlie Brown Christmas soundtrack"—and that works too.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the many blessings you give us each day. Make us mindful of what is important and what we need to care for each other, as well as ourselves. Amen.

Kathi Wise - McLean, VA

Peace Be with You!

CHRISTMAS — DEC. 25

Scripture: John 14:27

When I was a teenager, I asked my dad every year what he wanted for Christmas. His answer was always the same. “Peace, I want peace.” I didn’t understand how to give peace then, so over the years, my dad accumulated an assortment of PEACE ornaments!

He took us to church every Sunday, and we knew that before taking communion, one must be at peace with God and one’s neighbor. Each Sunday we would declare “The peace of our Lord be always with you” to every person we could greet.



My dad continually sought peace in his heart, with his neighbors, and in the world. He sought the peace that only our Lord and Savior gives through the power of the Spirit. I strive to follow my dad’s footsteps to seek and share that peace.

“Jesus said peace be with you, not as the world gives, do I give to you.” Our world doesn’t give peace during these dark times. With a pandemic, systemic racism, hatred, and destruction all around, peace can be hard to find, especially

when we look in the wrong places. We must look to Christ and seek the fruit of peace from the Holy Spirit.

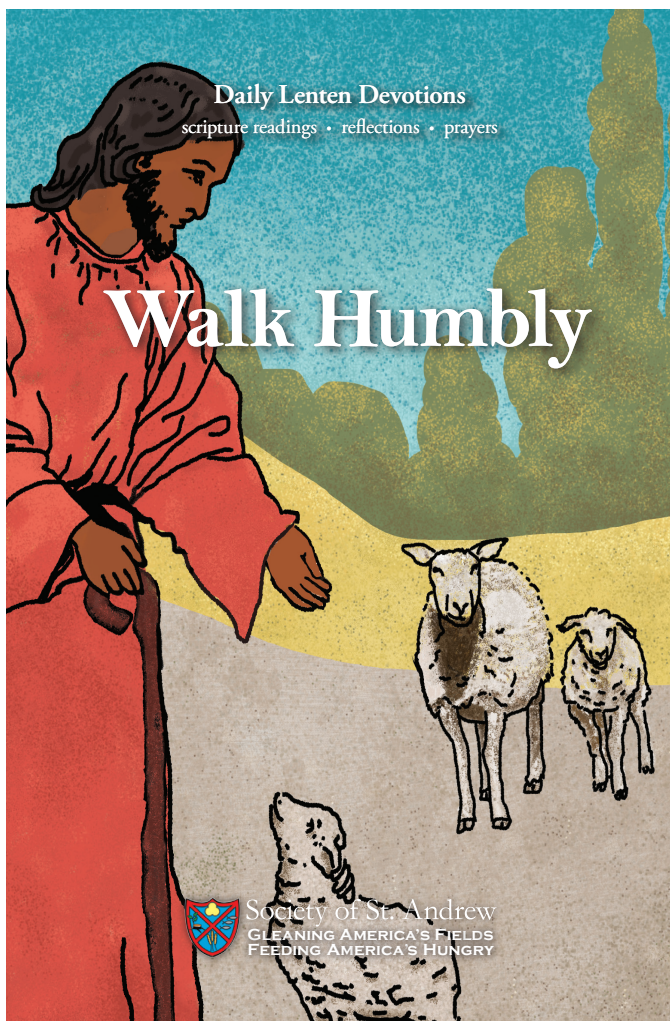
Prayer: Lord, this Christmas, may we experience the peace that surpasses all understanding by turning away from worldly things and turning our eyes on you. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

Chesley Volden - Forest, VA

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Hunger Relief Ministries of the Society of St. Andrew

Gleaning Network — A hands-on mission program for all ages, getting healthy food directly from fields and markets to the hungry people who need it most. The Gleaning Network brings together farmers with excess produce, volunteers to glean (pick, dig, or gather) that produce, and agencies feeding the hungry. People in need glean alongside people with plenty in this community-based program, that engages individuals, congregations, and civic organizations in service.

Potato & Produce Project — A produce salvage program, providing direct food relief to our hungry families in our nation, while addressing one of the major causes of hunger: food waste. The Potato & Produce Project salvages and distributes hundreds of tractor-trailer loads of fresh fruits and vegetables to food banks, soup kitchens, and other feeding agencies each year.

Seed Potato Project — A self-help program, providing seed potatoes purchased by the Society of St. Andrew to impoverished rural communities, where people have access to land for gardening. Families plant, cultivate, and harvest their own crops, realizing a yield of about eight pounds of potatoes per pound planted.

Harvest of Hope — A hunger-focused work/study mission program. Participants glean and distribute produce remaining in fields after harvest each morning and learn about the realities of hunger each evening. Bible study and dynamic worship round out days of Christian community and service, providing a basis for on-going commitment to ending hunger. Harvest of Hope offers middle school, high school, and intergenerational events throughout the summer and fall, as well as Alternative Spring Break programs for college students.

Each year, the Society of St. Andrew distributes more than 85 million servings of nourishing food to hungry people throughout the United States.

Society of St. Andrew, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, grassroots, interfaith ministry, has been working toward a world without hunger since 1979.