

May God be
gracious to us
and bless us and
make his face to
shine
upon us. Psalm 67:1

2019 Daily
Devotionals for
Advent &
Christmas Day

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, STARKVILLE

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INTRODUCTION

An Invitation to Turn to Jesus' Songbook and Prayer Book – *the Psalter* – to Prepare and Pray for His Coming and His Kingdom.

In Jesus' ministry and teaching recorded in the New Testament, which Old Testament book does Jesus quote more than any other? As Jesus left the Upper Room and made his way toward Gethsemane—preparing for the Cross—from which Old Testament book was Jesus singing? Of Jesus' "Seven Last Words" from the Cross, three were direct quotations from the Old Testament; from which one OT book did your dying Savior recite each of those three times? The answer to all of these questions is the Book of Psalms, the *Tehillim* of Israel.

Over half of the Psalms come from Jesus' kingly ancestor David. God called David "*a man after my own heart,*" and to David the LORD made special covenant promises about the coming Messiah and the Messiah's eternal kingdom. So meditating upon, praying and singing the Psalms is essential to knowing and following Jesus. Meditating, praying, and singing the Psalms is also essential to preparing and praying for Jesus' return and Kingdom.

In this Advent Devotional, you will spend time with Jesus in passages from his "favorite book" – Israel's Book of Praises, Israel's central book of songs and prayers. I have selected verses from Psalms for our focus and spiritual reflection in this season of repentance and renewal, hope and fulfillment – as we remember Christ's first coming and look forward to his return. Then, for each day from December 1 (Advent's Day 1 this year) through Christmas Day, there is a devotional and guided prayer from one of our church officers or a member of our ministry staff. Each writer has responded specifically and personally to his or her given passage. We also again this year feature artwork from some of FPC's children who have responded to some of the key Scripture and themes.

"Advent" (from the Latin word *adventus*) means "coming." The Season of Advent opens the Christian worship year. The season provides as special time for us to remember that God's

Word calls us to not only to repentant and joyful preparation for Christmas. God's Word calls us also to repentant and joyful openness for Christ's coming into our hearts and for Christ's ultimate return as Judge and King.

God's Word in the passages from the Psalms highlighted in this devotional proclaim the incredible Good News that all of Israel's, all of David's, and all of our best hopes and dreams for blessing, light, and life can be known in the One person whose face was first seen when He was born and laid in a manger. In Jesus' Holy Face shines all of God's glory for our salvation!

May you see his Face and know his Grace this Advent and Christmas. May you move through enter the New Year truly renewed in your King's blessings.

Your pastor and friend in Christ,
Martin



Art by Chloe Hardin

December 1, 2019 – Martin Lifer

First Sunday of Advent

Daily Reading: *Psalm 67: 1-4*

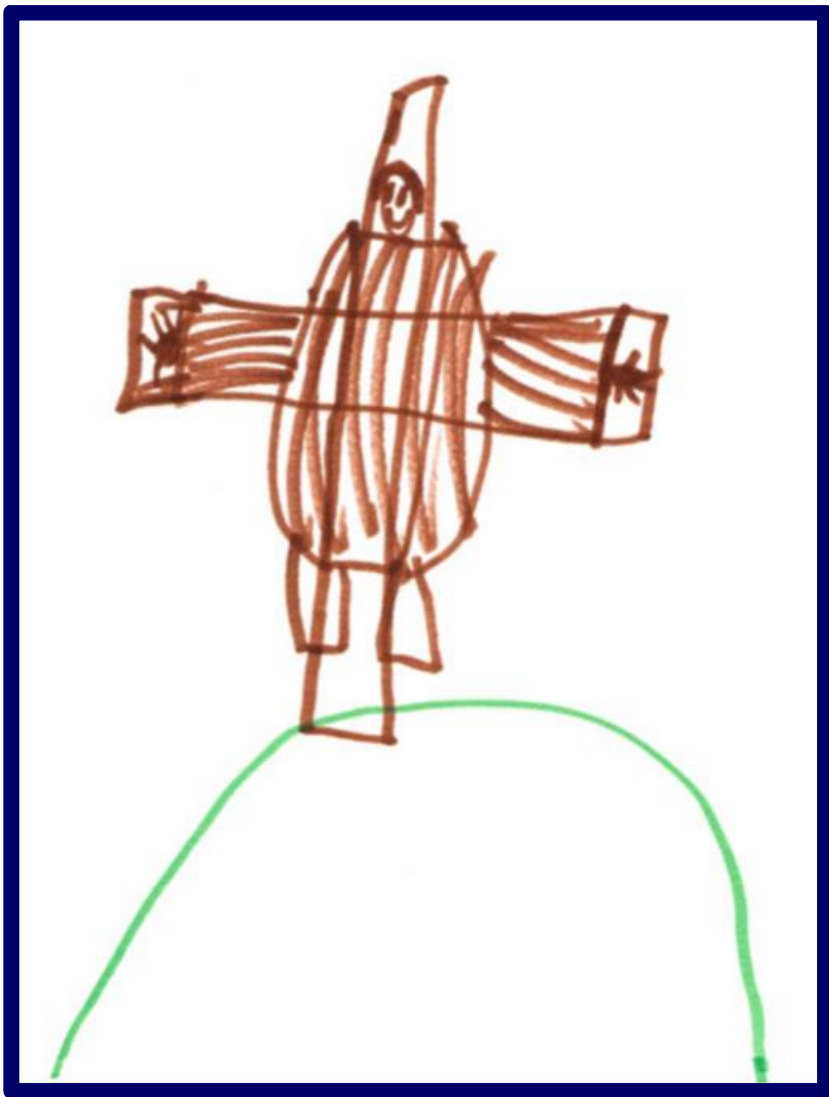
“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.’ So shall they put my Name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”[Numbers 6:24-27, the “Aaronic Benediction” that the LORD commands Moses to have Aaron and his sons impart to the LORD’s people.] The central hope, prayer, and promise of the great priestly benediction are all about the LORD’s all-glorious, all-gracious Face shining upon his people.

Psalm 67 connects that great benediction of Advent hope – *the LORD’s OWN FACE SHINING UPON HIS PEOPLE, ISRAEL* – with God’s gospel mission to bring his salvation and joy to ALL nations and people. ***May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, Selah, so that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations. [e.s.] Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth, Selah. [Psalm 67:1-4]*** This prophecy was fulfilled in Christ’s coming.

The gospel of God’s Kingdom is this: (A) ***“Joy to the World, the Lord Is Come!”*** and; (B) He *has* made HIS OWN FACE – from the Manger, from the Cross, and from Heaven – shine upon all his people in the fullness of his saving grace, truth, and glory. ***And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. [John 1:14]*** May you know the ultimate blessing of everlasting life in the LORD’s glorious face shining upon you to save, love, and bless you.

Daily Prayer: *Father, please give me eyes to see and a heart to receive the saving grace and glory of your Son’s face shining upon*

us and blessing us. By your Spirit, lead me to live in your blessings and to share your blessings with others – even among all nations to the end of the earth. In Jesus' Name I pray, Amen.



Art by FPC Student

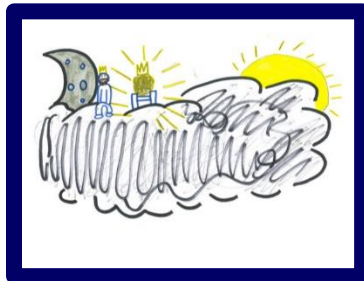
December 2, 2019 – Reid Roberson

Daily Reading: *Psalm 130: 3-8*

Advent is an anticipatory season in which we look to the coming of the promised Messiah. The question that naturally follows is this: “Why exactly are we looking?” The psalmist answers us well. “If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” We are desolate sinners with no hope outside of this Messiah, so the psalmist points our affections to God and his trustworthy promises. He says, “I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope.” By God’s providence, you and I have found ourselves on the side of history where we can look to and hope in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. In him, there is “steadfast love and plentiful redemption.”

Do you understand your relationship to God without Christ, that you are a sinner who cannot bear the burden of your own iniquities? Do you hope in the Word who is able to bear and has already borne those iniquities in your place, or do you rely on something else? Friend, the work of the cross is finished! The Lord has truly redeemed Israel from its iniquities! Because we know that he has fulfilled his promises in giving us the Messiah and redeeming a people for himself, we can continue to place our hope in the Word who never fails and who will bring his redemptive work to glorious completion.

Daily Prayer: *Heavenly Father, you are an awesome and glorious promise-keeper; give me grace by the power of your Holy Spirit to entrust my to your perfect promises and to hope in your Word, Jesus Christ.*



Art by FPC Student

December 3, 2019 – Kirk Kinard

Daily Reading: *Psalm 51: 9-14*

“Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities.” Reading over this passage I am struck more and more with this first verse. The words David uses throughout this Psalm are so vivid in describing a person wrestling with their own sinfulness. Part of living in Christ is realizing how filthy our sins make us before our holy God. But there is good news, because God does not hide His face or simply blot out our iniquities. Jesus saves and redeems completely. The Psalm lists several amazing things God does for those who repent: He creates, renews, restores, and sustains the new man in us. The Bible does not fail to show us our fleshly faults, and conviction from our faith in Jesus is a trial we should be joyous through. For me, it has always been so encouraging to read these kinds of passages because there is no double standard and no tricks. Where else are bad times and struggles so clearly shown next to the path of true peace and joy? Nowhere but in the Word. Nowhere but in Christ.

As wonderfully personal as this message is, we must not stop at ourselves in its application. Moreover, the scripture here shows that this act of God cleansing us is to one end: making His name known and praising Him. We do not place our salvation in a quiet place within ourselves to admire it whenever we are brought low in life. No, we must bring Jesus’ powerful work in us to others to teach those who do not know and convert the lost back to the found in Jesus. Then all can sing praises to the One who deserves all praise and glory. May that day come quickly.

Daily Prayer: *Dear Lord, I give thanks to You this day for every good and perfect thing you have given. Your blessings are continually poured out on this sinner. I pray that You would carry out Your Word in me, that you would create in me a clean heart and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Amen.*

December 4, 2019 – Joe Nasvytis

Daily Reading: *Psalm 94: 12-15*

The psalmist highlights the blessedness of the person who receives God's life-giving revelation of His words from God's law. For the person who "delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night" as Psalm 1 explains, God makes everything he does prosper. The promise of God's justice through His words give rest to those who long for justice and deliverance from the wicked. God's words also give us hope in God's promises to never forsake or abandon us. Advent is a time we focus on Jesus' coming, who promised to give rest to the souls of those who're weary and burdened. Jesus gives us rest by conquering our enemies of sin, death, and hell as the Apostle Paul says, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?...57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1Cor. 15:55, 57)

To those of us who're tempted to turn the holidays into a time of hustling and bustling, shopping, and stress, God offers us rest for our souls when we come to Jesus. To those of us who're worried about potential conflicts with family members, God offers us His continual presence to cheer and to guide through Jesus. Jesus the Great Shepherd equips us with everything good to do His will, and He'll never leave us or forsake us. Our hope in life and death is in Him during this season, "who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were." (Rom. 4:17)

Daily Prayer: *Dear God, when I'm stressed, worried or weary, help me to keep delighting in your word and coming into Jesus' healing presence through prayer for rest for my soul. Thank you for sending Jesus to conquer my true enemies of sin, death, and hell. Help me to fix my eyes and hope on Jesus and bank on the truth that you'll never leave me nor forsake me, whether in life or in death. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

December 5, 2019 – Faith Lifer

Daily Reading: *Psalm 143: 5-8*

In this Psalm, we see David remember all that God has done for David and God's chosen people. Before God anointed David as king, he was simply Jesse's youngest son: a shepherd with a humble future in sight. Yet God had bigger plans for David. Many years later, as David wrote this prayer, he was reminded how much he needed God. We can't know what David's specific trouble was in this moment, but we know he turned to God with a thirsty soul in response. When David felt far from God, David cried out to his Father in desperation. David knew a life without God was a life of eternal thirst. By verse 8, David had placed his trust in God once again.

This Advent, like David, we are also reminded of what God has done for us and how much we need Him. When we were dead in our sin, God sent his only Son to save us from ourselves. We rejoice that God came and dwelt among us, even though we never deserved it. We are also humbled and saddened that the King of kings—the Creator of all things—was hated, mocked, rejected, and subjected to a criminal's death when He did dwell among us. Jesus came to us knowing full well that we would reject Him, but our hatred was no match for his love. Like David reminds us, we still need God's love and grace each moment of every day.

Daily Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank You for sending your Son so that we can come before You without shame. Forgive us for being far from You. Help our souls to thirst for You amid this busy Christmas season. Restore our trust in you and lead us in your will for your glory. To You alone we lift up our souls. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



Art by Tate Ferguson

December 6, 2019 – Rebecca Banzhaf

Daily Reading: *Psalm 53: 1-2, & 6*

Psalm 53:1-2 begins with our fallen world. We are fools that do not believe in God and our ways are corrupt and vile. Our world is filled with evil doers turned away from God. But thankfully, our story doesn't end there. In the scripture verse Psalm 53:6 it states, "Oh that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!"

WE have a Redeemer, Our Heavenly Father sent to US!

It can sometimes be disheartening to me to think about this corrupt and evil world. Sometimes it seems the fallen ways and the evil doers are winning in this world. We can be so busy with the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season we do not focus on the right gift of Christmas. But as a child of God we know the story doesn't end there. We need to be so thankful our Lord forgives as HE gave His son for our sins. This Christmas season lets rejoice that our Heavenly Father, sent His son to redeem us, the evil doers.

Daily Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your son Jesus to come to this world and save us all! In this Christmas season let us remember the ultimate gift we receive is your Son!*



Art by FPC Student

December 7, 2019 – Susan Gamel

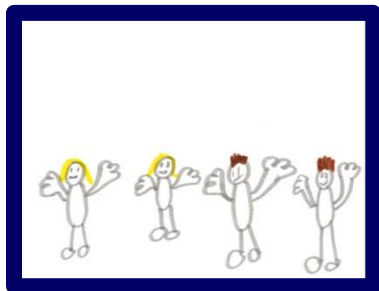
Daily Reading: *Psalm 85: 6-11*

In Psalm 85: 6-11 the temple assistants asked God to revive their people, to restore their spiritual life. The psalmists said they would listen to and revere God for, “Surely His salvation is near those who fear him.”

I wish I could say that all my actions are godly, but they are not. I wish I could say that I always exhibit the fruits of the Spirit, but there are times when I don't. I wish I could say I have a heart of pure submission, but, sadly, there are times when I want my own way...a lot of times. I wish I could say the spiritual battle is over for me, but there is clear and regular evidence that it is not. All this means that I highly value the justifying grace that Jesus brought to the world and that we celebrate this time of year especially. I am thankful daily for the perfect life of Jesus.

In a sermon in early November Bro. Joe told us about the fresh start he and his reputation were given when he went to live with his Aunt, Uncle and cousins to finish high school. He left behind some bad associates and started life anew. You and I are given a chance at a fresh start every morning ...a chance for revival and spiritual restoration. Let that be the desire of our heart in this Advent season.

Daily Prayer: *Father God, we praise you for our salvation which came through your son and our savior Jesus Christ. During the season of Advent revive your church, our families, and each of us with a fresh touch of your love, renewing our love for you.*



Art by Lucy Downey

December 8, 2019 – Bruce Latimer

Second Sunday of Advent

Daily Reading: *Psalm 24: 3-6*

While “The Advent Season” of the year is a designated calendar time of celebration and anticipation of the birth of Jesus Christ, I like to view “The Advent Season” as a year-long awareness and hope of the return of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. I also like to view this special season as a (Set-Aside Time of Self-Examination)—in regards to my personal developmental relationship in Holiness, Righteousness, and Obedience to our Savior and Lord. This fits squarely into our personal SANCTIFICATION—which is a life-long process. With this in mind, I seek our awareness of “The Advent Season” to last consistently throughout the entire calendar new year in Righteous Obedience. We should then, perhaps, view the Advent Season as a “SHADOW AWARENESS” of our direct responsibility to whole-heartedly commit ourselves to a HOLY, RIGHTEOUS, OBEDIENT life/relationship with our Savior and Lord each day of the New Year.

In Psalms 24, verses -3-6 clearly focus our attention on the ‘True Israel’. These verses also bring to our attention that our personal relationship/position before our Savior and Lord is for all people chosen by the Lord as His “Chosen-Elect Beloved—both Jew and Gentile alike.” We are reminded that Holiness trumps everything else before the Lord. And, as the ‘Chosen-Elect Beloved’ of God, we are called upon—as verse 3 boldly declares—that we must seek a life of personal Holiness, Righteousness, and Obedience, purified by the ‘Unction of the Holy Spirit’ to dwell in the ‘HOLY HILL’ of the Lord. AMEN.

There are two distinct and separate declarations:

- FIRST, we see an INQUIRY: Who shall ascent into the hill of the Lord? (Who shall be able to stand in His Holy Presence/Place?)

- Next, we see the ANSWER to this INQUIRY:
“He/She that hath clean hands and a pure heart– he/she shall.”
(Shall be allowed to do so.)

I close this brief ‘Advent Message’ with a special prayer offered by David to the Lord for forgiveness of sin in his life:

Daily Prayer: (Psalm 51:7-12)

“Purify me from my sins and I will be clean, wash me and I will be whiter than snow. Oh, give me back my joy again, you have broken me, now let me rejoice! Don’t keep me looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt. Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me. Restore to me again the joy of your salvation and make me willing to obey you. AMEN.



Art by Sophie Nasvytis

December 9, 2019 – Wesley Ferguson

Daily Reading: *Psalm 24: 7-10*

What a powerful illustration it is of our Lord that David gives us in these verses from Psalm 24. He describes a “King of glory, strong and mighty, mighty in battle, LORD almighty.” I can imagine a conquering hero, riding into the city on horseback, accompanied by a victorious army. I can imagine hordes of adoring people, all gathered to catch a glimpse of this mighty king. It’s ironic that our Lord almighty, our King of glory, chose to begin His earthly existence in quite the opposite fashion. Instead of the gates of the city being thrown open for an earthly king to enter triumphantly, our Lord entered quietly in a stable. Yet despite this seemingly humble beginning, He IS the strong and mighty King of glory, fully worthy of our praise and adoration. He will make an earthly return, complete with trumpet blasts and a multitude of heavenly hosts, ready to establish a new heaven and new earth. This is our LORD, mighty in battle.

Like the city gates being thrown open for the conquering king, so should the doors to our home and the gates of our individual hearts be opened wide for our LORD almighty! With the distractions of this world demanding our attention and the secular celebrations of the “holiday season” taking center stage, it is imperative to truly open *our gates* to our King of glory.

Unfortunately, it is all too easy to let the world seduce us with its version of what this time of year should look like. As followers of Christ, we must be vigilant. We must be intentional in opening our doors, literally and figuratively, to our King of glory. Pray daily for the Holy Spirit to open our hearts, to bless our homes and families, and to guide our worship, both corporate and individual, during this Advent season.

Daily Prayer: *Lord, open our hearts. Open our gates and our doors to You and to Your word. Open also our eyes to ways to serve you and others during this Christmas season. Guide us as we turn from the ways the world says we should spend our time and energy, and open our hearts to you and your indescribable gift.*

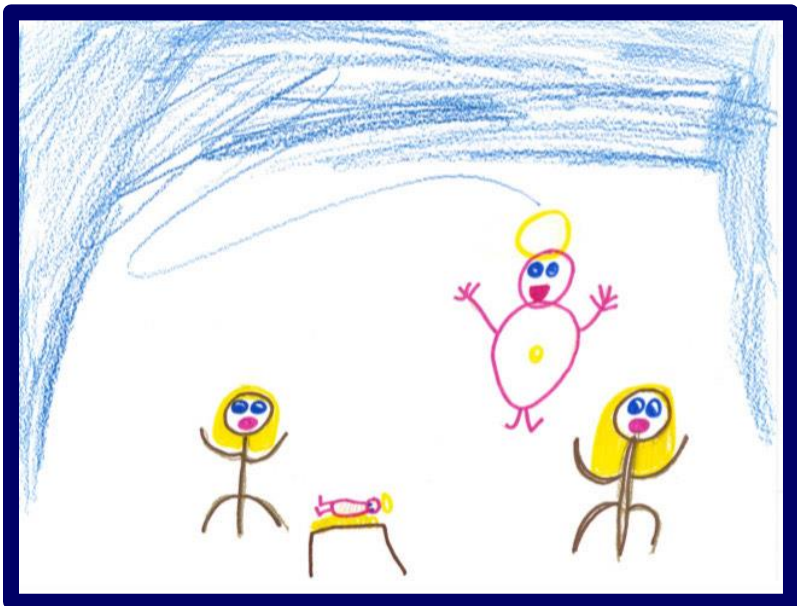
December 10, 2019 – Scotty Crawford

Daily Reading: *Psalm 25: 5-10*

Through life I have wandered down paths that were wrong. However, having parents and family who loved me and cared for me, they steered me back to the better way. This was only possible because I knew they loved me and would guide me in the right path, if I would trust them. As we make decisions in our lives each day, let us trust and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us in God's way.

Our devotional scripture today tells us to seek the truth and learn that our hope is in God who loves us and forgives us only through His son Jesus Christ. Even though we sin and take the wrong paths, God is always with us to help us. Are we willing to be loving and faithful to God's direction?

Daily Prayer: *Thank you, Lord Jesus, for being with us and teaching us the right path to God's desire. Only by your death and resurrection are our sins forgiven. Amen.*



Art by Edie Kemp

December 11, 2019 – Jennifer Blackbourn

Daily Reading: *Psalms 150: 1-2*

Praise Him! As I reflect on praising the Lord during this advent season, I am reminded of an occasion last summer which brought a renewed, yet very different, reason for praise. I want to tell you about Mary.

I spent two weeks in June in Cambridge, Massachusetts while accompanying my husband Richard on a business trip. On my second day there, a homeless woman, about my age, complimented me as I walked by. I smiled, and walked on. I felt the presence of God leading me to go back and talk to her. Her name was Mary. Over the course of two weeks, we visited every day. As she shared the circumstances of how she became homeless, I was overwhelmed with how, just with a few bad happenings, this could happen to me, to so many of us! During our visits, we talked about family (she has a daughter in San Diego who doesn't know her mother is homeless) and so many trivial things like shoes, hair, clothes. She suggested many places to see in Boston, while also showing me how to use the subway app to plan where I wanted to go. We also talked about things like surviving the cold winters, challenges of shelters, job possibilities, and daily living struggles. I asked questions; she asked questions. An unlikely friendship was formed.

As my time in Cambridge was drawing to a close, I searched for something that could provide a bond between us, even though I knew I would probably never see Mary again. I gave her a copy of 'Jesus Calling', the little book, because we had talked about how I could travel light but she traveled heavy with all her belongings with her. I shared that I would be reading every day along with her. Now, as I look to the daily readings in '**Jesus Calling**' during the advent season, I am praying that Mary is reading with me.

*I lift up praise to the Lord for the gift of a friend.
May I always remember that ministry can
happen, one person at a time. May I listen to*

God's call, always, to reach out to minister.

As a postscript to this story, I returned to Boston in October, and the first thing I did was to go in search of Mary. I didn't find her. I did find one of her friends; Mary had disappeared several weeks prior, and no one in the homeless community knew how to reach her. The friend now has my phone number, so maybe one day I will get a call. Nonetheless, I have to believe that Mary has gone to be with her daughter, or a friend, or in some way is no longer homeless. And I pray that during this advent season, she is reading the same words as me, and finding comfort in trusting God.

I have found special comfort in the following beginning words from the December entries of **'Jesus Calling'**:

Daily Prayer:

I am with you in all that you do.

Your needs and my riches are a perfect fit.

Make me the focal point of your search for security.

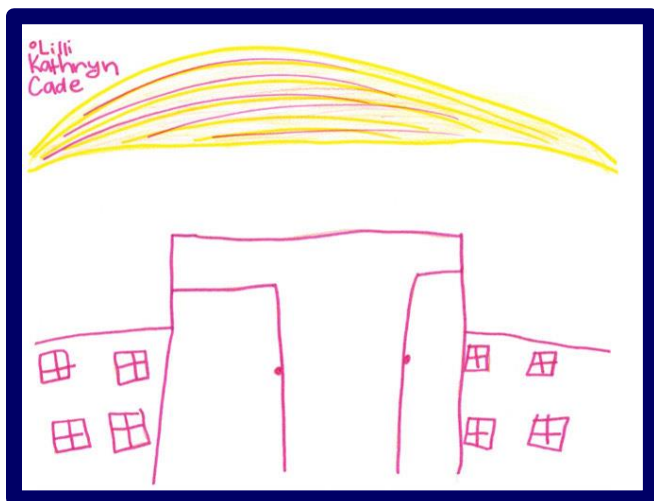
I am taking care of you.

Rest in me, my child.

My plan for your life is unfolding before you.

I am your refuge and strength.

Trust me.



Art by Lilli Kathryn Cade

December 12, 2019 – Craig Aarhus

Daily Reading: *Psalm 150: 3-6*

Using our loud voices to support something we love and cherish with the sounds of various instruments in the background— it sounds like an SEC stadium on any given Saturday in the Fall. But this isn't the description of a football game, but rather, a description of our attitude when praising God.

In the literal sense, we should not be afraid to celebrate what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, and that could mean worshipping at home or at church in a way somewhat different to what we are accustomed. Most of us prefer a more reverent approach to worship, which is appropriate as well, but we should not discount the effectiveness of other ways we can praise God. In another sense, it could just mean that our attitude towards worship could be similar to the way we approach cheering for our favorite team—with all our energy, passion, and yes, even with the sounds of instruments! The “musician’s psalm” paints a vivid picture for us about “praise” that is easy to understand.

As we continue in this Advent season, remember the gift of God’s son and celebrate it with the attitude of joyful praise. And maybe once this season, it would be ok to grab a tambourine and dance!

Daily Prayer: *Lord, remind us that you are worthy to be praised this season with joyful worship for all you have done for us. The gift of your son is the greatest gift we could have received and help us never hesitate to praise you passionately.*



Art by Mary Gresham Henry

December 13, 2019 – Lee Weiskopf

Daily Reading: *Psalm 33: 18-22*

No matter your age and background, Christmas is a season of hope. A young child may hope for presents to be under the tree on Christmas morning, while the parent of adult children may hope for all their children and grandchildren to be together on Christmas Day. Those are very real hopes and dreams from very different individuals, but as Christian believers we must not lose focus on the true hope; our hope and faith in Jesus Christ and the eternal rewards He has promised for that hope. The gifts, socials, and secular figures of Christmas can be fun and exciting, but they offer no long-term reward and often take attention away from the birth of Jesus Christ. Psalms 33:18-22 reminds us about his love and the hope we are to have in God for steadfast love, mercy and promise of eternal life.

In reading this powerful scripture, we are reminded of the basic tenets of the Christian faith: God will love us, protect us, show mercy upon us so long as we place our HOPE in him. He provides during the good and bad times in our lives, never leaving us without hope for a better and ever-lasting reward and promise. Most of all he provides a steadfast love that offers the greatest promise of them all, eternal life. All we are is because of Him and comes from the hope and trust we place in Him for his love, mercy and promise for eternal life.

Daily Prayer: *Dear Lord, we thank you for your steadfast love, your mercy, your protection and your promise. All of our hope and faith is in you and nothing but you, not the secularism and worldly possessions that dominate today's society. May we share that hope and faith with others during this exciting season of celebration and joy from the birth of your son, Jesus. Amen.*

December 14, 2019 – Nancy Lifer

Daily Reading: *Psalm 110: 1-4*

In this psalm, David foretells of the relationship between God and Jesus, His Son. God sets the place of honor to His right side, for His chosen one, Jesus. The Reign of Christ is revealed, and David yields to the truth of Jesus' superiority over him. David is an earthly king, but the LORD raises up our Messiah, Who is greater. Jesus claims this prophecy for Himself, as the One who will rule forever over the enemies of God. Jesus was in the beginning, and will continue as Messiah for all time.

I stand in awe of our God who has so carefully planned a personal way for our King and Creator to also be our Redeemer, Ruler, and Priest after the order of Melchizedek. The victory over death is here foretold, and here was also have the promise that Jesus will reign over His people forever. And in this ultimate position of power Jesus still seeks each of us, personally and lovingly, as belonging to Him and as part of His household. He comes to us in all the frailty of the flesh of man, and conquers death. This Advent, as always, we are reminded of our need for His saving grace, His willingness to die in our place, and His perfect intercession for us.

Daily Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me to remember Your purpose for Your people and Your church. Teach me humility, as You were willing to be humble in order to save us. Let me dwell in your love and righteousness and serve Your Kingdom in the way You will. Thank you for your amazing gift of eternal life. Amen*



Art by Edie Kemp

December 15, 2019 – Harry Bell

Third Sunday of Advent

Daily Reading: *Psalm 40:1-3*

In this Psalm David plunged into a horrible pit that is bottomless. He can not work out of it and keeps sinking further and further. He has waited patiently for relief from God and only God. He never doubted that God's help would come in due time. He continued hoping, praying, and believing until it did. God answered his prayers and silenced his fears. He placed David's feet on firm footings. He also filled him with joy and peace. David sang songs of praise to God.

Daily Prayer: *Lord when times get extremely difficult for us please hear our prayers and give us the patience to wait as you guide us on the path that you have chosen for our lives. We ask this in your son's name. Amen.*



Art by Henry Downey

December 16, 2019 – Janet Bardwell

Daily Reading: *Psalms 145: 1-5*

In the week before Christmas, we sometimes neglect to think about what the holy day really means. We need an awakening through the weeks in advent. Hopefully it will awaken us with a fresh glimpse of glory, memory and hope. We want to remember the God who became a child.

Psalms gives voice to human emotions. Many of the Bible's main ideas are echoed as the writers offer praise, thanksgiving, faith, hope and sorrow for our sins. True feelings of praising God or complaining in times of trouble shines forth, as one writes in a diary, by reflecting people's most intimate dealings with God.

David is the author of Psalms 145:1-5. He is not shy about giving praises and saying "Praise the Lord"(v.1-2). He has bold love for his God and gives us good reasons. God is good (v.3) God does mighty works and wonderful deeds (v.4) God is righteous, generous, gracious and compassionate. Praises abound to God for all that He is, He has done, and all that He will do. God's people are continually commanded to trust God for His protection, love and deliverance. If you are looking for a reason to praise God, start here. He is ready to listen.

Daily Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for your unending love for us. Help us to seek you in all we do. In Christ's name, Amen*



Art by Cannon Colotta

December 17, 2019 – Brien Henry

Daily Reading: *Psalms 145: 8-9*

During this Advent and Christmas Season, we need to wisely consider Scripture, seek the Lord's guidance in our daily lives, and be renewed in joy through praising Him for his greatness and his goodness. Psalms are a great resource for this, as they are full of condensed, practical nuggets of wisdom, and they lead us to pray and sing to God in all circumstances of our lives. My particular Scripture today – two verses from one of David's great songs of praise – repeat one of the Bible's great proclamations of the LORD's goodness through his mercy and love.

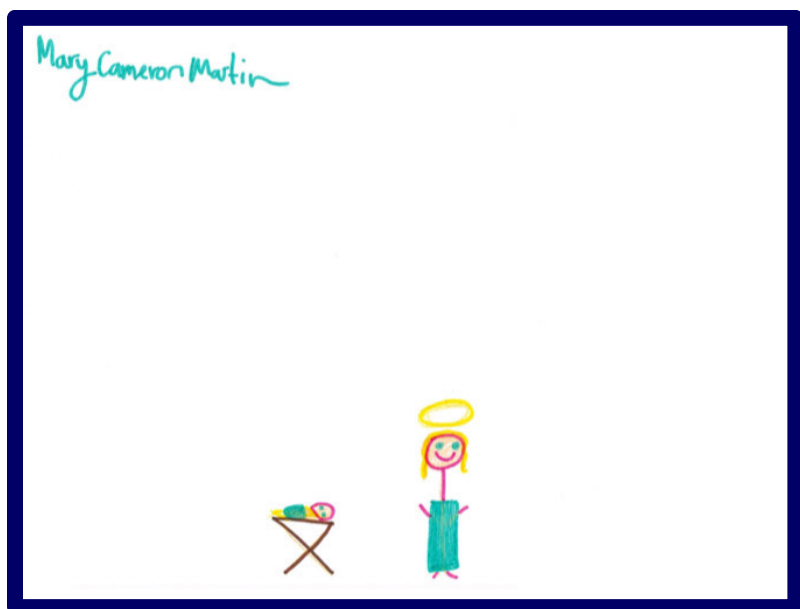
Psalms 145 carries the title "*Great is the LORD*" in the ESV translation and is the first of the final six songs devoted to praise that conclude the Books of Psalms (145-150). We may well know the Lord is great: He is all holy and perfectly righteous, while He is also supremely sovereign and omnipotent. However, if we believe the truth of God's divine greatness, we should not take Him for granted or remain silent about his greatness and all He has done for us. We should daily and continually praise Him. In fact, we grow in faith and are ourselves renewed when we remember all the specific ways in which the Lord is great.

Yet our specific verses for today (Psalm 145:8-9) lead us still further to rejoice not only in the LORD's *greatness* but also in his *goodness and grace*. These verses repeat one of the wonderful Old Testament proclamations of the LORD's character (see, for example, Exodus 34:6): the Good News of his grace, patience, and mercy and his kindness and goodness to all people.

Advent and Christmas should be a time of reflection and celebration, but if we allow it to get out of control with food, gifts, and concerns about who is going where with whom, this season can become an especially tense one. Psalms 145 and verses 8-9 about God's goodness, patience, mercy and love help us model our behavior after Him. So let us find moments today and each day to take the focus off of ourselves, to take the pressure off of

the holiday season, and to remember the Lord and the grace, mercy and love He showed us. We should think more of other people in this season and consider ways that we could lift someone up, much the way the Lord did for us. Also, we should note that the Lord gives mercy over all that He made; that means that for us to then be unmerciful would be in contradiction to His will for us.

Daily Prayer: *Merciful Lord, I pray that You will lead us to be gracious, merciful, patient and loving this Advent and Christmas season. Make us mindful today and each day to give of ourselves and to be kind to those who are struggling. May our positive interaction with friends, family, and colleagues, and the love that results from it reflect your steadfast love and goodness given for us, to us, and through us. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen*



Art by Mary Cameron Martin

December 18, 2019 – Jack Atkins

Daily Reading: *Psalms 145: 10-13*

A psalm of praise and a personal testament to the greatness of God and all His works and deeds. David has been described as a man after God's own heart and it's hard to argue that while reading Psalms. I'm not sure if David was aware that the purest gift, the most compassionate and mightiest deed that God would bestow upon an undeserving world would be His only Son for sacrifice and our redemption.

If I had to choose between the two main aspects of David's life; a conquering king or God's own poet, then I believe that would be the easiest choice of my life. However, if there is one thing that I know about myself, it's that I am not a poet. Words fail me or more aptly, I fail them. What good are the letters L-O-V-E when she looks your way and your heart stops for a moment? Can the word SACRIFICE encompass holding your family one last time before going off to war knowing that it may require your life? Here is the good news, we are all made in God's own image and He made us so that we can feel emotion like no other creation. I may not be able to express my devotion in words but God can look into my heart and see what is written there.

Daily Prayer: *Father, if our hearts could sing then let them fill your ears with music. May they weep with a beautiful sadness when even our emotions aren't enough to sing your praise. I pray that my heavenly body will know how to worship You properly. Amen.*



Art by Edie Kemp

December 19, 2019 – Bob Daniels

Daily Reading: *Psalms 145: 17-21*

Whenever I read the Psalms now, I am reminded of Luke 24:44 where Jesus tells the disciples after the resurrection: “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” In this Jesus revealed that the Psalms speak of Him.

These verses give us a list of Jesus’ characteristics. These traits are comforting for us in Advent (and always). It does us good to remember that Jesus is righteous and kind, near to all who call upon him and that He will hear and fulfill all the desire of those who (reverently) fear Him. It also tells us that Jesus will keep (preserve) all us who love him.

The Lord’s goodness and benevolence to us who love him is worth reminding at Advent. It is during Advent that God himself came to Earth as the Son, Jesus of Nazareth. He came to save all humanity from sin and spiritual death by being the Lamb of God sacrificed on the Cross at Calvary. Oh, great is the Lord’s goodness and I will praise Him for all He has done for me! I cherish that He is near me and I can call upon him daily!

Daily Prayer: *Oh Jesus, As John the Apostle wrote to end his Gospel, “If all the other things (healings, kindnesses and more) which (You) Jesus did were recorded in detail, the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” The magnitude of your love for us is unbounded. We thank you for your great kindness to us and amplify Your holy name in this Advent season. Amen.*

December 20, 2019 – Jeff Foster

Daily Reading: *Psalm 146: 1-7*

I could not seem to find a way to use this passage. Then two people that I have known for years let me understand how to do so. These two people were at the end of their lives. One lived into her late 70's and the gentleman was well over 101. These two people loved the Lord and both had their share of health problems. Both knew that this earthly body is temporary. They both spoke of how their time on earth is short compared to their eternal life. They both knew and trusted the Lord when He told us that Heaven is the reward for a faithful life. They were both happy with their station in life. They both enjoyed the things God placed on earth knowing that this wonderful place is just a glimpse of heaven. These two friends knew their God was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob— in the words of Jesus, *“not the God of the dead, but of the living.” [Matthew 22:32]*

Daily Prayer: *I often use Psalms 90:12 in my prayers. Father teach us to number our days so that we may gain hearts of wisdom*



Art by Crosby Taylor

December 21, 2019 – Ben Jackson

Daily Reading: *Psalm 62: 5-8*

Waiting is more than a part of Advent season. It's so much of the Christian life. Waiting quietly is antithetical to our nature. We naturally picture waiting as, at best, the bore of standing in long lines. When waiting is inevitable, we naturally try figuring out a solution or escaping from reality. In Psalm 62:5-8, the author, King David assumes that waiting holds an opportunity for profound change. Hear him speak this to himself, his "soul" in verses 5-7. This is the self talk and prayer of the Christian, much like the prayer of Jesus. Then hear David turn to others, repeating and intensifying the same truth in verse 8, urging that God is able and eager to contain our vulnerable hearts and fragile lives.

Like you and I, David sins every day. Like you and I, he witnesses and suffers deep and depressing injustice. Yet amid all kinds of chaos, he waits with hopeful anticipation. How in the world does he do this? It's because amid long waiting, he experiences for himself God's intensely personal and undeniable refuge. He tells himself and me that "at all times", however chaotic, confusing or boring, God is able and eager to give any soul what only God can give: the very quieting, saving presence of God. David's unique waiting foreshadows advent season, giving language to my longing heart -- a heart longing to see the coming Savior, the returning Savior.

Daily Prayer: *Returning King, while I groan along with creation, teach me how trustworthy, safe and present you are. Teach me to wait quietly, honestly, and increasingly confident in you amid troubled times. You alone are my salvation. Amen.*

December 22, 2019 – Allen Johnson

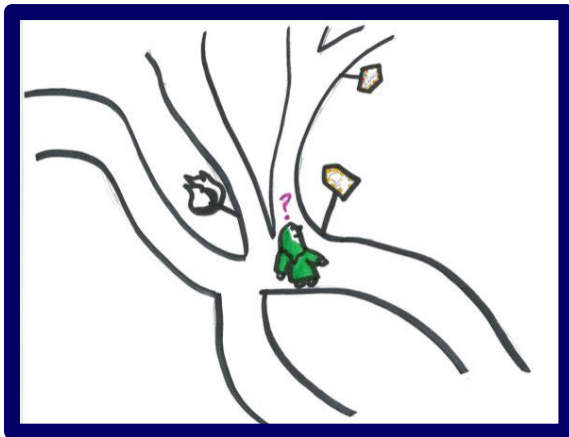
Last Sunday of Advent

Daily Reading: *Psalm 132: 11*

The LORD swore to David – alluding to 2 Samuel 7:12ff: Through Nathan in a vision, came the word of the LORD to David reestablishing the covenant concerning His people with David's reign (kingdom). This verse from Psalm 132 is a reminder to God's people that He promised David that his descendent will be a king whose throne will be established forever. God's promises are sure and true, He will not fail to keep them and although the sons of David were often corrupt and unworthy of the throne, God did protect the lineage down to the Son of David, the Son of God, Jesus, the Messiah, the everlasting King.

Advent is a time of anticipation and waiting for the celebration of the coming of the Christ-Child, the Messiah. 5 Just as God's promises are sure, His timing is perfect, and His love comes down to us in a special way as we celebrate the birth of our Savior. Christmas is all about Jesus.

Daily Prayer: *Holy God, every good and perfect gift is from You. We lift up our eyes, our hearts and our hands to You in praise and thanksgiving for the perfect Gift, Your Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In His Name we pray, Amen and Amen.*



Art by FPC Student

December 23, 2019 – Jim Beaty

Daily Reading: *Psalm 96: 1-3*

The theme of “newness” is reflected throughout Scripture. Isaiah prophesied of a new order that would bring new blessings to the people of God. This new order with its attendant blessings is further expressed by the climax of the newness theme in Revelation – a new name, the new Jerusalem, a new heaven and a new earth, and “all things new” are all mentioned. Indeed, all that is the old and the new comes together.

It is in this collision of old and new that God reveals His manifest for His people. Salvation would come in the person of Jesus – born in simple surroundings to a seemingly unremarkable set of parents. What a glorious story then unfolds! And our response is called to be the same both then and now – to extol His majesty as our Redeemer to all who will hear. Glory to God in the highest!

Daily Prayer: *Father God, we praise your holy name and give thanks for your unfailing mercy and love. You grant us a glimpse of your glory in the plan so perfectly executed in the birth of your Son our Savior – Jesus Christ. Help us to always be strong in our adoration and faithful in our devotion. Amen.*



Art by Chloe Hardin

December 24, 2019 – Ashleigh Murdock

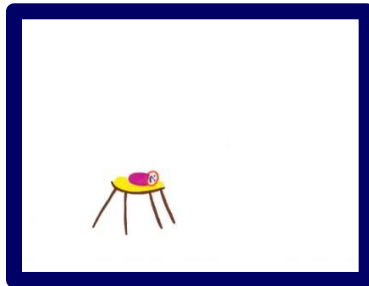
Christmas Eve

Daily Reading: *Psalm 98: 1-4*

As I read this scripture from Psalms, I was drawn to the verbs. Sing, shout, and burst all give instruction to make noise or outwardly display emotion. Sing a song to the Lord! Shout for joy! Burst into song! We are instructed to make a proclamation of joy and to worship the Lord with song and what better time than to do this than at Christmas when our Savior is born!

In this passage, we are reminded that the Lord is faithful and that His glory stretches to the ends of the earth. But the word that stands out most to me? New. Sing to the Lord a “new” song. As we prepare for the birth of our Savior, isn’t that exactly what our song will become? We will sing a new song because Christ is born! Our Savior is here. Christ is coming to the world to save us from our sins. We become new when Jesus makes his home in our hearts. Our song changes from law and death to grace and eternal life. As we await the birth of our Savior, let’s anticipate the new song and sing, shout, and burst into song that emulates joy and praise.

Daily Prayer: *Heavenly Father, as we eagerly await the birth of our Savior, please draw us to you and your faithfulness. Help us find joy in this Christmas season and confidently sing a new song praising Jesus, our Lord and Redeemer. Thank you for giving us the best Christmas gift we could possibly ever receive, the birth of your Son. In your precious name we pray, Amen.*



Art by FPC Student

December 25, 2019 – Martin Lifer

Christmas Day

Daily Reading: *Psalm 98: 6-9*

Joy to the World, the LORD is come! Let earth receive her King! This day is filled with lasting joy, remembrance, and hope. Christmas is perhaps THE day in the year in which our memories and hopes, hearts and minds connect most powerfully with our past, present, and future. The Supreme Source and Light of all those memories and hopes for us as Christians is Jesus. He is the ultimate Christmas Gift. The LORD' gives us his joy – Jesus – Who has come to us as THE Judge, Savior, and King. Amid all the other fun and frenzy of this day, **take time to receive HIM.**

"Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come!" Isaac Watts did not originally compose those words as a song; Watts most definitely did not pen those words originally as a Christmas Carol. Watts wrote the words of *"Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come!"* as a poem presenting the message of one of David's great Messianic Psalms, Psalm 98. Watts' poem (published in 1719) was a paraphrased summary of Psalm 98 and Genesis 3:18-19, focused on the ultimate coming of the Messiah (Jesus) to rule as Judge and King not only over the Church but also all nations and peoples and the entire world. Nevertheless, in the 19th Century, Lowell Mason set the second half of Watts' poem to music several times; Mason eventually set the words to the hymn so often treated as a Christmas Carol today. In fact, *"Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come!"* is now the most published and recorded of all Christmas Carols. In all this, I discern God's providence: in the story of how a poem based on Psalm 98 became eventually the *"King"* of Christmas Carols. Ultimately, our celebration of Christmas *should* be all about the King, his coming, and his rule.

"Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come!" Today, receive Him, bow to Him, adore Him, and rejoice forever in God's gift of Joy to the world.

Daily Prayer: *Jesus, this day belongs to You; it is all about You.*

May I – likewise – belong to You and be all about You. In Your Name, I pray, Amen.

***Joy to the World, the LORD is come!
Let earth receive her King!***

Merry Christmas from FPC!



Art by Sophie Nasvytis

Devotional & Prayer Notes

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