



Cover Art

“Holy Visit”

In the darkness  
glow Advent’s ever-rising flames.

From the heavens  
descends Gabriel  
on mighty wings  
enveloping Mary  
announcing God’s good news.

In Mary’s moment,  
bewilderment...  
acceptance...  
obedience...  
anticipation...  
awaiting another Holy Visit...

Eternal joy.

We may not encounter Gabriel on a regular basis, but with Advent’s light, may we recognize our own holy visits... in prayer, in worship, in the phone call, in the giving and receiving of a casserole, in a warm embrace, in (you fill in the blank). May this Advent find you waiting with hope, like Mary, for another Holy Visit.

## Happy New Year!

The rhythm of our church calendar begins with Advent. The word “advent” is derived from the Latin word “adventus” which means “coming.” We prepare our hearts for the coming of the Messiah. As Christians, we wait for Christmas and the celebration of Jesus’ birth. We also wait in expectation for the coming of Christ for the fulfillment of God’s kingdom of peace.

Our calendar honors a pattern of preparation – celebration – growth. We begin our year in preparation for the celebration of Christmas. Within this rhythm, the season of Advent varies in length from year to year. Rather than a set 24 days as propagated by many commercialized Advent calendars, the length of our season varies from year to year but is held constant by adhering to a set number of days of worship. Advent always encompasses four Sundays. Last year Advent lasted as long as possible (28 days) because Christmas Day was a Sunday, and Advent begins four Sundays prior to Christmas Day. This year, the season of Advent is as short as possible (22 days) with Christmas beginning on a Monday.

Advent is a season of waiting and preparation. Since Advent is a season filled with waiting, this shortened wait is good news. Right? Perhaps not. We tend to fill our time with lists and tasks and errands. We want to please the people we care about with gifts and experiences. We simply do not have enough time to get it all done. What if during this season of preparation, we prepare our hearts, not just our homes? What if we focus on being as well as doing? What if we focus our attention, not only on the lists, but also on the moments we have with people we love? The Psalmist writes, “Be still, and know that I am God!” (46:10). Only in the stillness of waiting will we know when to celebrate.

New Year’s Resolution: Be still.

## First Sunday of Advent, December 3

*Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37*

*In the bleak midwinter / Frosty wind made moan  
Earth stood hard as iron / Water like a stone*

In her poem “In the Bleak Midwinter,” Christina Rossetti imagines encountering the newborn Christ: “What can I give him, poor as I am?” Fabulous visitors had traveled from far away to pay homage; nothing she could give would compete with angels and magi.

What was Rossetti’s world like? Wars raged on nearly every continent; the United States was undergoing the bitter pessimism and racial violence of Reconstruction; settlers on the Great Plains massacred countless Sioux; and a divisive presidential election was taking place.

More than a creative take on the nativity, her poem envisions a hope her world didn’t have. The tension between despair and hope is reflected in the struggle between winter’s darkness and Christ’s light. Rossetti doesn’t try to melt winter with the warmth of the nativity but lets the two exist together by choosing to act.

*What can I give him? / Poor as I am  
If I were a shepherd / I would give a lamb  
If I were a wise man / I would do my part  
But what I can I give him / Give him my heart*

Rossetti reminds us that we live in a world in which death and life exist simultaneously. The real gift of Christmas may not be the birth of Jesus but our own potential for transformation in response to our encounter with him.

Our world can feel like Rossetti’s. The planet we share is warming, fascism is on the rise, and hate ideology poses a growing threat. Rossetti’s poem reminds us that, even in the bleakest landscape, when the world is cold and frosty winds moan, there is reason to hope.

Benjamin Smith

## Monday, December 4

*Psalm 79; Micah 4:1-5; Revelation 15:1-8*

“In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.’”

Micah 4:1-2

It makes sense that mountains are a religious symbol for Jewish and Christian cultures. They are representations of revelation, transformation, inspiration, and renewal, as they are places of power and close to Heaven. Many scenes in the Bible are set on or around mountains and are sites of transcendent spiritual experiences, encounters with God, or appearances by God.

In this season of Advent, be aware of “mountain” opportunities. Some will feel as large or as grand as a mountain in one’s imagination. Some, however, may happen in the small, still blessings of the Advent season, as we anticipate the birth of Christ. Let your heart be open to experiences of renewal and redemption. Be inspired by the people and life around you. See God in both the large and small things, knowing that the baby on the way, Jesus Christ, will teach you to walk in newness of life.

Father and Mother God, open our eyes to the joy of mountain experiences this Advent. Amen.

## Tuesday, December 5

*Psalm 79; Micah 4:6-13; Revelation 18:1-10*

Today's scriptures describe an unpleasant pathway. Starting an Advent journey in the ruins of Jerusalem is hardly a cheery departure. The lament is full-throated and graphic. And yet...

What better place to begin our own preparations for Christ's coming than right where we are, even if—or especially if—that is a place of suffering and sorrow?

And how are we to understand our stop-off in Revelation, where we're reminded to get out of Babylon, for it is about to be destroyed? Seems like today's readings are calling us to be witnesses to devastation from start to finish.

It would be a lot easier to turn our heads away from all this violence. And yet...

Is this how we are called to listen to the human hearts in front of us? How long will I try to avoid the troubles in my way, only to stumble over a new obstacle? Is there no clear pathway? When will I learn that the only way out is through? When will I begin the work that Pádraig Ó Tuama describes as picking up "the stones over which we stumble, friends, and build altars?"

Wednesday, December 6

*Psalm 79; Micah 5:1-5a; Luke 21:34-38*

“And in the daytime, He was teaching in the temple, but at night He went out and stayed on the mountain called Olivet. Then early in the morning, all the people came to Him in the temple to hear Him.”

Luke 21:37-38

In mature religion, the secular becomes sacred. There are no longer two worlds. We no longer have to leave the secular world to find sacred space because they've come together. That was the significance of the temple veil rendering when Jesus died. The temple divided reality into the holy world inside and the unholy world outside...There is only one world, and it's the supernatural one. There is no "natural" world where God is not. All the bushes burn now if we've seen one burn.

Richard Rohr

## Thursday, December 7

*Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Hosea 6:1-6; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10*

“For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

### I Thessalonians 1:9-10

In today’s reading excerpted above, we find Paul praising the church that has developed in Thessalonica. He praises their efforts to be faithful, and he reminds them that they are chosen for the task of growing the faith and that he is praying for their continued success. Paul encourages them that with the power of the Holy Spirit, “your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thess. 1:3), they must continue on the path to discovering what it means to serve the living and true God.

Four words stood out to me in the reading from Thessalonians: faith, love, endurance, and hope. Paul tells us their faith incites their work for God, that their work is driven by love, and the journey they are on is supported by a hope found in the resurrected Jesus—a pretty good roadmap for living a cross-formed life.

This Advent, surrounded by the pageantry and warmth of the season, take a few minutes each day to remember the basics. God loves us, Christ died for us (in a penultimate act of love), and God calls us to live (and love) like Jesus. May the power of love at Christmas nudge us to remember that the very feeling of love comes from our hopeful expectation of a better world to come, a world free from all the anxieties and fears of this one.

Of the Father’s love begotten / Ere the worlds began to be,  
He is Alpha and Omega / He the Source, the Ending He,  
Of the things that are, that have been / And that future years shall see,  
Evermore and evermore!

Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, “Of the Father’s Love Begotten”



## Friday, December 8

*Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Jeremiah 1:4-10; Acts 11:19-26*

“The word of the Lord came to me saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, ...I appointed you a prophet to the nations.’”

Jeremiah 1:4-5

Jeremiah’s “call” from God to speak to the nations to advise their leadership required a lot of courage for a young, inexperienced man. He was living in a turbulent time of political unrest and spiritual decline.

God instructed Jeremiah to call God’s people to repentance and to the Mosaic covenant that God had made with Moses and the Israelites. Like many today, the people were only interested in their own agendas which ultimately resulted in disaster for them and their homeland.

Fast forward to the new covenant of Christ and the early church being formed by His followers after Christ’s resurrection and transfiguration. These mostly Jewish Christ followers were answering their “call” to spread the message of salvation. Like Jeremiah, many were persecuted, and some were killed.

Unfortunately, today’s moral and spiritual decline seem to be repeating the patterns of Jeremiah’s era. “I know the thoughts that I think toward you says the Lord, ...to give you a future and a hope, ...You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me” (Jer. 29:11-13).

## Saturday, December 9

*Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Ezekiel 36:24-28; Mark 11:27-33*

“Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.”

Psalm 85:8-9

“You never know what may cause tears. The sight of the Atlantic Ocean can do it, or a piece of music, or a face you’ve never seen before. A pair of somebody’s old shoes can do it...You can never be sure. But of this you can be sure. Whenever you find tears in your eyes, especially unexpected tears, it is well to pay the closest attention. They are not only telling you something about the secret of who you are, but more often than not God is speaking to you through them of the mystery of where you have come from and is summoning you to where, if your soul is to be saved, you should go next.”

Frederick Buechner, *Listening to Your Life*

### “The Waiting Place”

By Dr. Seuss

Waiting for a train to go or a bus to come,  
or a plane to go or the mail to come,  
or the rain to go or the phone to ring,  
or the snow to snow or waiting around for a Yes or No  
or waiting for their hair to grow.

Everyone is just waiting.

Waiting for the fish to bite  
or waiting for wind to fly a kite  
or waiting around for Friday night  
or waiting, perhaps, for their Uncle Jake  
or a pot to boil, or a Better Break  
or a string of pearls, or a pair of pants  
or a wig with curls, or Another Chance.

Everyone is just waiting.

## Sunday, December 10

*Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8*

“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.”

Isaiah 40:6-8

From the recent widespread plague of Covid to a summer of unrelenting heat, we have known drought, disease, and seemingly endless misfortune. Advent, however, shows us another side of our God—a God of hope and promise, a God with a plan for lives that will bear fruit.

Advent scriptures bring us face to face with God’s will for our living. They reveal how God expects us to deal with a world of corruption, hate, and violence. They show us another way, the way of God’s peace and love. A listing of all the words that describe Advent reveals much of God’s plan. In such a list we find descriptive examples: love, peace, forgiveness, healing, and one of the most promising—HOPE. By keeping such a list, we encounter the opposite of the gloom and doom scriptures in some of Isaiah’s scriptures. Yes, the grass withers and the flower fades, but the promises of God endure forever. It is within these great promises that believers encounter a God who loves us and provides hope for all that we face.

Monday, December 11

*Psalm 27; Isaiah 26:7-15; Acts 2:37-42*

### The Journey

My master picked me! He picked me! There is nothing special about me. I wake up and eat and work all day, doing menial labor, but today, I heard his call. Today is very special! Today, I will travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem. I will be the one who takes my master's lady on a journey, albeit to pay his taxes, but it is a journey that will include the birth of the Most Holy Child, whose very existence will change the world.

On my back is Mary, who is heavy with child. My master, Joseph, is carefully leading me and searching for a place to give Mary comfort and shelter for the Heavenly anointed birth.

Mary's child is to be named Jesus and was sent by God to save the world, to guide all people, and to show them the way, the truth, and the light.

\* \* \*

Mary and Joseph, with my help, made the journey safely to the place where the Christ Child was born. The really wonderful story of Jesus came later, but I like to think I helped in the beginning. My job was done.

In fulfilling God's promise of a messiah, Jesus grew into adulthood and became the Savior who taught all to love God and to love one another as they would want to be loved.

The end.

Signed, The Donkey  
An Original Story for the Ages

P.S. There is some debate as to whether I really carried Mary on my back with Joseph leading. The four-day, 90-mile journey happened, and this is my story. Suffice it to say, I would like to claim my part in this exceptionally exciting journey.

Tuesday, December 12

*Psalm 27; Isaiah 4:2-6; Acts 11:1-18*

### Advent Optimism

It is important to remember the deep, in some ways anguished seriousness, of Advent, when the mendacious celebrations of our marketing culture so easily harmonize with our tendency to regard Christmas, consciously or otherwise, as a return to our own innocence and our own infancy...

But the Church, in preparing us for the birth of a "great prophet," a Savior, and a King of Peace, has more in mind than seasonal cheer. The Advent mystery focuses the light of faith upon the very meaning of life, of history, of man, of the world, and of our own being. In Advent we celebrate the coming and indeed the presence of Christ in our world.

Star of David,

Make your ways known to us. Teach us your truths, guide us in the paths of righteousness, pardon our sins, erase our guilt, rescue us in the arms of your mercy. Amen.

Thomas Merton, *Advent & Christmas with Thomas Merton*

Wednesday, December 13

*Psalm 27; Isaiah 4:2-6; Acts 11:1-18*

Advent is a time of waiting, but waiting for what?

We're called to awaken to what's already in our midst...I think Advent is a coming to a new consciousness of God, you know, already loving us into something new, into something more whole, that we're not in a sense waiting for what's not there; we're in a sense to be attending to what's already there. Let's awaken to what God is doing in us and to what God is seeking to become in us.

Franciscan sister and theologian, Ilia Delio

The Christ within you is king...every particle, every cell of your body, is subject to His divine power and glory. Realize the divine magical presence within you. The light overcomes all darkness. When you are in the shadows, or you feel that the shadows are near, remember to look up, to visualize the blazing Star above you in the spirit spheres, and to feel its strength, its steadiness, its radiance, pouring into your heart. Go forward in confidence and in full consciousness of the light of the Star of Bethlehem shining within and upon you. Let us rekindle His light within us.

White Eagle, *The Quiet Mind*

In me there is darkness,  
But with You, there is light;  
I am lonely, but You do not leave me;  
I am feeble in the heart, but with You, there is help;  
I am restless, but with You there is a peace;  
In me there is bitterness, but with You there is patience;  
I do not understand Your ways,  
But You know the way for me.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words encourage us to "Seek God, not happiness. This is the fundamental role of all meditation. If you seek God alone, you will gain happiness, that is its promise."

Let us SEEK THE LIGHT so we can BE THE LIGHT.

## Thursday, December 14

*Psalm 126; Habakkuk 2:1-5; Philippians 3:7-11*

Who among us likes to wait? I hate waiting! In traffic, the drive-through, airport, restaurant, medical or dental appointment, wherever. I have often been encouraged to have more patience. I don't have the time or the patience for that!

Scholars suggest the prophet Habakkuk was engaged in theodicy, trying to understand the ways of God. Habakkuk bristles at what he observes as God's tolerance of injustice and then questions God's intended remedy for establishing justice. Habakkuk appears impatient; God counsels waiting (Hab. 2:3).

Habakkuk could only see the present, but God asserts there is more to come concerning God's purpose that Habakkuk could not currently perceive. God assures the prophet that God's purpose could not be thwarted; it would become reality. God advises Habakkuk to live faithfully ("by faith") as he awaits the fulfillment of God's purpose.

Advent is a season of waiting, or perhaps better said, a season of awaiting. We await the season of Christmastide, when we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus. And we await the consummation of God's kingdom and purpose, when "God will be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).

Perhaps this Advent season can help me with my disdain for waiting. For me, "waiting" has a negative connotation (delay). Maybe what I need is a change of perspective, and vocabulary. Why not exchange "waiting" (delay) for "awaiting" (expectation)? I'll give it a try.

God, may we live faithfully as followers of Jesus as we await the celebration of Christmastide and the consummation of your kingdom. Amen.

Friday, December 15

*Psalm 126; Habakkuk 3:2-6; Philippians 3:12-16*

“Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:13-14

The black velvet nights fall fast. Stars and moon are wrapped in winter’s darkness. It is a time for long loneliness for some, circles of smiles for others, waiting or frenzy for many, and for all a hope for light. Habakkuk 3:3-4 reminds us: “God’s glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of God’s praise. God’s brightness was like light, rays flashed from God’s hand.” We hope for daybreak with its rays to flash into our lives, imperfect though they be. We hope for a day of Emmanuel, God with Us, to shine into the brokenness. In “Anthem” Leonard Cohen sings, “There is a crack, a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.”

The birds they sang  
At the break of day  
Start again  
I heard them say  
Don't dwell on what has passed away  
Or what is yet to be . . .  
Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack, a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in.



## Saturday, December 16

*Psalm 126; Habakkuk 3:13-19; Matthew 21:28-32*

What we take from the Gospels often depends entirely on where we place ourselves in the story. Are we the disciples? The crowds? The chief priests and scribes? The tax collectors and sinners? To glean the most, we have to try them all on for size, and I suspect the answer varies over time. We play all the parts eventually.

Today's Gospel pericope has Jesus addressing the chief priests and scribes, and I'm pretty sure we won't hear what he is trying to say unless we put ourselves in their shoes. Apparently, the Good News was all around them, but they failed to grasp it. The religious systems they have built obscure the truth instead of revealing it.

I think this happens to us all of the time really. It's the nature of systems...and of human beings. But their nearsightedness can help us learn to look up and out for signs of the kingdom here and now. Where are people being transformed by God's love? Where are people finding healing and hope?

The entire witness of Scripture is that the Good News tends to appear in the unlikeliest of places. Where are you looking these days?

## Sunday, December 17

*Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; Luke 1:46b-55;  
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28*

In his letter, Paul told the Thessalonians, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances...” (5:16-18).

“Always?” “Without ceasing?” “All?” Come on. We know Paul could grumble. And did he really “pray without ceasing” in prison? Did he “give thanks” upon receiving all those reports about church issues?

For those of us in modern-day December, who has time and energy for Paul’s command of constant prayer, gratitude, and good attitude? Paul never had presents to wrap or exams to grade or meals to take. Fine, he did have letters to write.

However, Paul also told the Thessalonians, “We worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you...” (2:9). Sure, that verse is plucked right out of context, but if that statement doesn’t sound like a Hallmark movie mother’s martyr speech on Christmas morning, then call me Saint Nick.

Or Saint Paul. I often forget that Saul-turned-Paul secured saint status. Maybe there’s hope for me yet. I’m certainly not counting on a Damascus Road or sainthood situation, but maybe just some Sunday stillness along Advent’s avenue, taking small, sandpaper steps: rejoicing more often, praying somewhat regularly, and giving thanks in more circumstances.

## Monday, December 18

*Psalm 125; 1 Kings 18:1-18; Ephesians 6:10-17*

“Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, from this time on and forevermore...Do good, O Lord, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts.”

Psalm 125:1-4

“Put on the whole armor of God...fasten the belt of truth about your waist and put on the breastplate of righteousness...take the shield of faith...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Ephesians 6:10-17

Advent is a time of preparation and embraces the promise of redemption. During the season of Advent, prepare your hearts for the coming of Christ by trusting in the faithfulness of God. God’s faithfulness remains a constant promise. God will never forsake us.

As a child, I lived in a small town in Louisiana. More than 100 years before my birth, a man named Solomon Northrup was a slave there. Solomon had been born a free African American in New York state. He was educated, played the violin, and had a wife and children. But at age 32, he was captured by slave traders and sold into slavery in New Orleans. Solomon endured 12 years of plantation slavery but never lost his trust in the faithfulness of God to return him to his family.

Finally, Solomon encountered a Canadian carpenter working in Louisiana. He gave the carpenter a letter to be delivered to his family in New York. Within a few months, a court in New York issued proof that Solomon was born a free man and was entitled to be free again. He was redeemed from slavery to return to his family by the faithfulness of God.

Tuesday, December 19

*Psalm 125; 2 Kings 2:9-22; Acts 3:17-4:4*

## Hope

Father William Inge once said, “Hope sees that which is possible, but is not yet.” The prophets and the Psalmist hoped for the “...not yet” while Peter and John had seen “...that which is possible...” Hope kept the prophets prophesying; hope kept the disciples preaching; and hope kept the Israelites singing.

And now here we are, six days before Christmas Day, our faces turned toward Bethlehem, our hearts hopeful, waiting for the “...not yet” but waiting with hope. Though I must admit that sometimes—ok often—I get tangled up in a different kind of hope. I get immersed in hoping that the presents are right, that the dressing tastes like Mama’s, that I get the desserts made in time, and on and on. It is stressful and busy and ignores that “good thing” that Jesus reminded Martha about when she was aggravated with Mary. But if I take the time to slow a bit, quieten my spirit, sit, and watch the fire and listen for God, I find that a different Hope slips in and sits with me—a Hope filled with promise and peace and rest. Hope that assures that the “not yet” one day will be the long awaited “now,” and our worries and fears and heart aches and disappointments and disillusionments will be no more because, as Chuck Poole often says, “In God’s world the last word standing will be hope.”

And I believe that just as we are waiting, God is waiting too, waiting on us and with us, waiting hopefully that we will remember whose we are. And I think that just maybe as our hopes fly heavenward, that God’s hopes spiral earthward and that all those hopes might just meet and get all mingled and tangled together so that what God hopes and what we hope all become the same thing. At least that’s what I hope.

As C.S. Lewis wrote, “Once in our world a Stable had something in it that was bigger than our whole world.”

Thank you, God, for that stable full of hope. Amen.

Wednesday, December 20

*Psalm 125; Malachi 3:16-4:6; Mark 9:9-13*

“Those who revered the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord took note and listened, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who revered the Lord and thought on his name.”

Malachi 3:16

Remembering that God remembers us can give us encouragement and the will to endure even the most trying of circumstances. Remembering the mysteries of our faith, such as the Incarnation, can lead us to marvel at the enormity of God’s love for us and inspire us to love others by holding them in our memory.

Five years ago, on December 19, 2018, my father died. The last six weeks of my father’s life were extremely painful and difficult. My only consolation was that, during his final hours, my father knew that he was surrounded by family and by God’s love.

On the day of his funeral, I was carried by the knowledge that my father had been drawn into God’s nearer presence, by the love and concern of those who attended the service, and by remembering that at the same hour I was living through my father’s funeral, dear friends from Northminster were gathered to remember me and my family.

As we travel the final days of Advent and prepare to celebrate the miracle of the Incarnation, let’s fill our minds and hearts with memories. Let’s remember all the good gifts God has given to us, and let’s remember that one of the greatest gifts we can give other people is to remember them—and let them know it.

## Thursday, December 21

*Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; 2 Samuel 6:1-11; Hebrews 1:1-4*

Advent brings the promise of Light and the fullness of that gift is best seen and felt at times in one's deepest and darkest night.

In 1953, composer Paul Manz and his wife, Ruth, found themselves in such a dark hour. Their beloved 3-year-old son lay critically ill, and they felt the heavy press of time running out for him. Ruth's heart cried out, "Lord Jesus, Quickly Come," calling on text from the Book of Revelation, as she and her husband surrendered the life and potential loss of their child to God. She penned text reflecting her clinging to the Lord and God's promise of Light and left it with her husband, Paul, as he sat by the child's bedside. It was during the darkness of that night that Paul composed the music to the lyrics Ruth left for him, and a most beloved Christmas carol, "E'en So Lord Jesus Quickly Come" was born.

E'en so Lord Jesus quickly come.  
And night shall be no more.  
They need no light, nor lamp, nor Sun,  
For Christ shall be their all.

May we, as they, anticipate this beautiful gift of light and love to us this Christmas, and always.

## Friday, December 22

*Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; 2 Samuel 6:12-19; Hebrews 1:5-14*

The people of Israel wanted a king. Samuel gave them one they did not expect. The last of Jesse's sons, not even deemed worthy to be called to the meeting, David, the shepherd boy, remained with his sheep in the fields. But then, as the Psalmist says, the unexpected happened. "I have exalted one chosen from the people...With my holy oil I have anointed him, with whom my hand will be established; my arm will also strengthen him. The enemy will not deceive him...He will cry to me, 'Thou art my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation'" (Ps. 89:19-22, 26).

The people of Israel got their king. And yet, as the prophet tells us, when David entered Jerusalem "with shouting and the sound of the trumpet ...Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart" (2 Sam. 6:15-16). This is not how a king is supposed to act, or so she thought. Then David "blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts. Further, he distributed to all the people, to all the multitude of Israel, both to men and women, a cake of bread and one of dates and one of raisins" (6:18-19).

Roughly one millennium later, the people of Judea longed for a king they would call Messiah. They were given one they did not expect. One born among the sheep and the shepherds who would become the Good Shepherd. One who was dedicated in the Temple, baptized in the Jordan, and anointed with oil in Bethany. One who was not deceived despite the enemy's best efforts in the wilderness. One who taught His followers to know God as "Abba—Father."

The people of Judea welcomed the King into Jerusalem with praise and shouting. Yet some despised him, "Behold a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!" (Matt. 11:19). This was not how a king was supposed to act, or so they thought. It mattered not to this King. He fed the five thousand and blessed the people in the name of the Lord, including His enemies.

This advent, two millennia later, what have we come out to see? Who are we awaiting?

Saturday, December 23

*Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Judges 13:2-24; John 7:40-52*

How do you solve a problem like this Jesus?

The scriptures from John bring to mind the song in the “Sound of Music” when the church leaders are addressing the uniqueness of Maria. They can tell that she is something special, but she throws a wrench into their routines. She is something unexpected.

The Pharisees were not looking at Jesus in such an endearing manner. They were trying to justify arresting Jesus, but they are obviously confused. The crowd and the temple police acknowledged the profundity of Jesus’ words, but surely such words were expected from a prophet or the Messiah. No such individual was scheduled to appear out of Galilee. Wasn’t Jesus from Galilee? The circumstances did not make sense. What to do? If they could not fit this man into a box—their expectations for a prophet or the Messiah—then Jesus must be dangerous.

Rules give form and framework to our lives and often keep us safe; however, they can also prevent us from seeing what is truly important. Richard Montague, sixth grade Sunday School teacher and longtime member of Northminster, often asked, “But what is the most important thing?” Generations of Northminster children grew up knowing that Love trumps everything else.

The source of the message is not as important as the message. Prophet? Messiah? Son of a carpenter? Son of God? Product of a virgin birth? King? We can get bogged down in the impossibilities of Jesus. Although he was not what the people expected in a savior, a messiah, a king, let us not fail to hear his message—LOVE.



Sunday, December 24

*2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:46b-55; Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26;  
Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38*

This night, Mary's wait is over,  
Isaiah's prophecy made complete,  
The virgin gave birth to Immanuel,  
Amid Bethlehem's cattle and sheep.

This night, God's greatest gift of love,  
Was delivered in a package so small,  
Wrapped in flesh, blood, and bone,  
For Jew...for Greek...for all.

This night, hope met humanity,  
No longer in bleakness to dwell,  
Darkness pierced by Eternal Light,  
Magnificent, miraculous, Noel!

This night is all that came before,  
The edge of what will be,  
Christ entered into this world of sin,  
Changed hearts, made the blind to see.

This night, love your neighbor and hate your enemy,  
Became love your enemy, too,  
And pray for those who hurt or curse you,  
God's laws began anew.

This night, eye for eye and tooth for tooth,  
Became turn the other cheek,  
By the power of God's transformative love,  
Revealed in the Prince of Peace.

This night, the forgotten are remembered,  
The brokenhearted find embrace,  
All are welcomed at the table,  
Everyone, everywhere has a place.

This night, bow down with bended knee,  
Alleluias with the angels sing,  
For the Giver of all life and grace,  
Has come to be our King.

This holy night, Incarnate Love was born,  
Good News is ours to tell,  
Go forth to share the light of Christ,  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel!

ABW

## In Appreciation

The Worship and Music Committee is deeply thankful for the creative expressions offered by members and friends of Northminster to create this year's edition of *The Season of Advent*:

Introduction	Holly Wiggs
December 3	Paul Smith
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December 9	Shirley Foster
December 10	Richard Joiner
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December 22	Kelley Williams, Jr.
December 23	Holly Wiggs
December 24	Amy Williams
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