

*The Season of*  
**ADVENT**  
2024



**NORTHMINSTER BAPTIST CHURCH**

## Cover Art

Jeremiah 33:14-16

“Behold, the days are coming,’ says the Lord, ‘when I will fulfill the promise I made to the people of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: The Lord is our righteousness.’”

## The Season of Advent

Advent is the dawn of a new year. Our God, who offers relationship as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, is revealed in the cyclical nature of the liturgical calendar which reveals God's love through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

This rhythm of the never-ending pattern of preparation – celebration – growth begins with Advent, the season of preparation for the celebration of Christmas. Advent always embraces the four Sundays prior to Christmas Day; therefore, the length of this period of preparation varies. Meanwhile, those store-bought Advent calendars always begin with December 1<sup>st</sup> and are limited to a 24-day countdown. But this year, the calendars align. We observe 24 days of Advent, and we can purchase 24 miniature doors hiding a world of chocolate.

Our spiritual Advent calendar is marked by the coming of the Light. As each candle of the Advent wreath is added, the mystery of our faith is revealed. Christ did die; Christ has risen; Christ will come again. We enter a moment where the shadows dance in the flicker of candlelight, and in the light of what we know has come before, we peer into the shadows of what has not yet come. We wait expectantly, with hope. We seek peace in the growing glow of light. We experience joy as the light dispels the darkness. We reach for the love of God who offers an invitation to relationship. We are reminded that we do not walk in darkness but share the light of Life.

On December 1<sup>st</sup> our liturgical calendar once again challenges us to look to the horizon for first light. This is the time to put aside the lists and planners and goals that rush us past the moments of connection and the glimpses of grace and the spark of understanding; to give presence, not just presents; to wrap one another in love; to engage in true preparation in the midst of our preparations; to experience time as *kairos* in the midst of *chronos*.

Evergreen branches, twinkling lights, giving gifts – how can the rhythms of life and the rhythms of Life be so similar and yet so different? Centering our lives around the evergreen wreath, we light the candles (hope, peace, joy, love) in anticipation of the Christ candle; we prepare for the coming of the Light of the World.

## First Sunday of Advent, December 1

*Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-10;  
1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36*

Our journey begins here, today, with the promises of God thousands of years ago in Jeremiah 33:14:

“Behold the days are coming,” says the Lord, “when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. . . and this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’”

The psalmist in Psalm 25 speaks for us and to us as though it were written yesterday, full of pleas for redemption, healing, longing, and waiting with peace and anticipation. With a full heart and all fears set aside, the psalmist professes, “Lead me in thy truth, and teach me, for thou art the God of my salvation; for thee I wait all the day” (Psalm 25:5).

So, with the anticipation of the fulfillment of God’s promise and our childlike excitement of this coming event, we find these words from Frederick Buechner that gives us a name for this journey:

The extraordinary thing that is about to happen is matched only by the extraordinary moment just before it happens. Advent is the name of that moment.

Merle Dean, *The Season of Advent 2015*

## Monday, December 2

*Psalm 90; Numbers 17:1-11; 2 Peter 3:1-18*

Psalm 90 gifts us with phrases that continue to ring through our lives:

“Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth. . . even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Psalm 90:1-2).

These timeless phrases remind us that we have been here before. We have known moments of creation, birth, wars, and tragedies. Through it all we realize that we worship a God who is eternal. God continues to redeem; God continues to love; God continues to be born in our living and in our relationships with others.

There is a redemptive plan here – a direction for us to consider. The Creator fashioned our lives for a purpose. Advent gives us the chance to consider that purpose in light of our shortcomings. Knowing our penchant for falling, and our hunger for better living, God gives us Advent days to reconsider and re-order our lives. We can live these days as God intended, knowing that with God’s help, we can live better because of the hope provided in Christ.

Let us live patiently, prayerfully hoping for what God plans to give us. This is the miracle of Advent’s promise.

Tuesday, December 3

*Psalm 90; 2 Samuel 7:18-29; Revelation 22:12-16*

Advent is such a trap for us planners. A time of expectation and anticipation surely means list-making, leaving nothing to chance. Year round my doctors and financial advisors encourage this thinking.

What is your attitude toward the future? Something to plan? To dread? Excitement? Despair? Apathy? When promises will be fulfilled?

I put fear aside by writing lists and schedules, thus making the future more predictable. (Go ahead, laugh).

And yet, the idea of Jesus' return. . . how do we get ready for that? Coming "soon"? Define "soon," please. "Where" and "how" would be appreciated, too.

But God is not predictable, and God doesn't call us to be prudent and timid. In *The Crime of Living Cautiously*, poet Luci Shaw reminds us:

The cliff edge of our anxiety about the future may indicate that God is calling us to a new and different level of faith. When we walk, praying for guidance. . . and breathlessly take that first step into the foggy mystery of the unknown, we must believe that one of two things will happen: either God will provide us with something rock-solid to land on and stand on, or God will teach us how to fly.

## Wednesday, December 4

*Psalm 90; Isaiah 1:24-31; Luke 11:29-32*

If you didn't read the prescribed passages for today, here are the highlights: wrath, evil generations, burning, destruction, judgment. Cozy, right? Advent passages should be about light, babies, and branches. Not "I will smelt away your dross as with lye" (Isaiah 1:25). I'm an English teacher, and even I'm like, "Isaiah, chill."

Of course, I should take into consideration the audience and context of scripture – national adversity, Israel's bondage, pagan practices, Pharisees, lawyers, and such. But those things feel too on the nose, too political, too un-Adventy. So, I'm going to do something we already know we do; I'm going to pick and choose. Look at my honesty about it though! I've learned at least that much from church.

Nestled among the readings are parts I prefer – lines from the Psalm such as "from everlasting to everlasting you are God," and "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations" (Psalm 90:1-2). And lines from Luke in which Jesus proclaims, "[S]omething greater than Solomon is here! . . . something greater than Jonah is here!" (Luke 11:31-32).

Now that's better. Much more Adventy. "Something greater is here." Or, at least, something – someone – greater is coming. Forgive me, but I will pick and choose to rest in that every time.

## Thursday, December 5

*Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:5-12; Philippians 1:12-18a*

“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Luke 1:76-79

We may ask ourselves, but who is this child who will be called the prophet of the Highest? I encourage us to consider this: It is us, all of us, and each of us; this child and we are called to give light to those who sit in darkness – beyond the notions of salvation and redemption, but because we are children of God, and we have been shown the beautiful and tender mercies that we are called to share. . . It is us, friends: We are this child.



Friday, December 6

*Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:13-18; Philippians 1:18b-26*

“He is the image of God, the invisible one,  
The firstborn of all creation.  
For in him all things were created,  
In the heavens and here on the earth.  
Things we can see and things we cannot –  
Thrones and lordships and rulers and powers,  
All things were created both through him and for him.

And he is ahead, prior to all else  
And in him all things hold together;  
And he himself is supreme, the head  
Over the body, the church.

He is the start of it all,  
Firstborn from realms of the dead;  
So in all things he might be the chief.  
For in him all the Fullness was glad to dwell  
And through him to reconcile all to himself,  
Making peace through the blood of his cross,  
Through him – yes, things on the earth,  
And also the things in the heavens.”

Colossians 1:15-20

## Saturday, December 7

*Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 4:1-6; Luke 9:1-6*

The angel Gabriel is busy in the first chapter of Luke. Just as the angel visits Mary with news that she will have a child, Gabriel visits Zacharias with the same news. Zacharias and Mary, unaccustomed to heavenly apparitions, are both shaken. “Zacharias was troubled when he saw him, and fear gripped him” (Luke 1:12). “But she was greatly troubled at this statement and kept pondering what kind of salutation this might be” (1:29). Gabriel reassures them with almost identical words, “Do not be afraid Zacharias, for your petition has been heard” (1:13). “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God” (1:30). Once Gabriel has delivered his message, both Zacharias and Mary venture to ask a question, “How shall I know this for certain? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years” (1:18). “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” (1:34).

But here is where the story takes a turn for these two. Zacharias’s reward for questioning God’s messenger is to be struck dumb for the next nine months “because you did not believe my words” (1:20). By contrast, Gabriel answers Mary patiently, gives her the encouraging news that her relative, Elizabeth (Zacharias’s wife), is also with child, and notes that “nothing shall be impossible with God” (1:37). Nine verses later, Mary offers the Magnificat. Meanwhile, Zacharias remains mute until his son, John, is born. When Zacharias’ tongue is finally loosed, his first words are the Benedictus (Latin for “blessing”), twin to Mary’s Magnificat (Latin for “magnifies”).

What can we say about this two millennia later? We, too, can be troubled when God visits us to shake up our routine, even when the news is good. We, too, have questions for God: “How?” and “Why?” We don’t understand why God seems to treat us differently, even when our posture toward God is the same. But whether as a young girl like Mary or an old man like Zacharias, sooner or later we will get a chance to sing our own song of praise to God. Will we be ready?

## Second Sunday of Advent, December 8

*Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 1:68-79; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6*

Peace, O God,

Amidst the struggles of peoples  
In the fury of battles  
When politicians on all sides claim truth  
Before the face of strife and suffering,  
inflicted pain and confusion . . .

Somehow, God, grant us peace.

Peace, O Christ,

In our attempts to foster security  
and in our fears of each other  
With each attempt at community,  
each quiet act of charity,  
each hospitable welcome  
As we watch and wait, keeping busy,  
biding time, chasing deadlines, worrying . . .

Somehow, Christ, grant us peace.

Peace, O Spirit,

As we search for silence in the dissonance  
of holiday overdrive  
As we long for resolution and rebirth  
In our grieving and our regrets  
With our attempts to express what cannot be said. . .

Somehow, Spirit, grant us peace.

O Holy One,

We who are tired and worn  
We who hope and wait  
We who try and fail and try again  
We who hunger and cannot be satisfied  
We who long for miracles  
and listen for angels  
and make room for Presence in our lives

As now for peace.

Amen.

HCBR (11-5-2003),  
*The Season of Advent 2003*

Monday, December 9

*Psalm 126; Isaiah 40:1-11; Romans 8:22-25*

“Hope springs eternal,” so they say. Over these past 3½ years I have suffered great losses. My Birdy, Elizabeth, and Jo Ann have all left this earth and left me feeling alone and carrying great grief that I cannot seem to get out from under. My faith is still intact, but my hope has dimmed. As we enter the season of Advent, I grieve their absence from my life. They always found the truth in me, and I could count on their support to carry me along life’s crooked and winding journey. They pointed me down the better path, even if I chose not to take it. Their love was unconditional and such a comfort.

In this season of expectant waiting, I wait for my hope to be rekindled. John Claypool says in his book, *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*, “While I cannot do your grieving for you or you for me, we can be with each other in honest and tender companionship.” This is what Northminster does so well as a community of faith. We show up! We fan the flames of faith and hope!

As we light the Advent candles of hope, peace, joy, and love in this expectant season, may we find that hope springs eternal in all of us once again. May that hope lead us through the darkness and carry us to the glorious love incarnate, made flesh yet again, as we gather for Christmas Eve Communion Service and the Passing of the Light. “O Come, All Ye Faithful” once again to light our lives with love and fill our souls with hope! Amen.

September 14, 2024, night shift  
at the Old Capitol Inn.....6:01 AM

Tuesday, December 10

*Psalm 126; Isaiah 19:18-25; 2 Peter 1:2-15*

Suffering is inevitable and must be accepted. And yet, suffering is also unacceptable. The world is what it is; all we have to do is read the newspaper to see how full of pain the world is. Our anguish is only increased when our hope that the world will be different turns once again to disappointment; things haven't improved, civilization hasn't made us more humane. We despair that there will always be wars and famines, injustice and trouble. And yet, I also know as human beings we must keep wanting the world and ourselves to be better than we are. So we have to hold both things in our minds and hearts at the same time: accepting what is, just as it is, and working to make it better one day.

Norman Fischer, *Taking Our Places*

Wednesday, December 11

*Psalm 126; Isaiah 35:3-7; Luke 7:18-30*

In the midst of our busyness, in the midst of all our decorations and gifts piled up in closets and attics, it's all too easy to miss the One we're waiting for. We're paying attention to too many other things, trying just to keep up, trying not to disappoint anyone, trying to do what our culture keeps telling us we should be doing this time of year. As a result, we don't really have time to pay attention to that ache, that other hunger, and if we do manage to get it together to come to church on Sundays, we might be reminded – maybe we perceive it as a rather rude reminder – of just what that ache might be about.

Poet Mary Oliver is a consummate observer who pays quintessential attention. She writes, “Everyday I'm still looking for God and I'm still finding him everywhere, in the dust . . .”

Some thought John was the long-awaited mighty savior, but Luke affirms John is the one who prepares the way, echoing the prophet Isaiah:

“Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Isaiah 40:3).

Mary H. Lee-Clark, adapted

It may feel like  
the world is leveling you  
emptying you  
as it asks you to give up  
what you have known.  
It is impolite and hardly tame  
but when it falls upon your lips  
you will wonder at the sweetness  
like honey that finds its way  
into the hunger you have not known was there.

Jan Richardson, adapted

## Thursday, December 12

*Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 6:1-8; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15*

Advent is a time of waiting, let us use this period of waiting to reflect, to reexamine, to recommit to living better and giving more of ourselves to loving others. Help us understand that all our good intentions, our vows, and our resolutions are useless without action. We must pattern our lives of loving as Jesus loves us.

Giving of ourselves is a work of God's grace in us.

Giving is getting involved, putting our lives into action, and it demonstrates the true work of God's grace in our hearts. Our lives should be like God's giving of grace: giving freely and generously because we want to give.

Let our motive of love for Jesus become so big in our hearts that we simply must give.

Let us never forget the wise words of Father Richard Rohr when he said, "We do not think ourselves into new ways of living, we live ourselves into new ways of thinking." We can do that by living into God's grace.

My friend Margeaux Nicholas said it the best in her poem, "Grace":

Grace does not need to be seen  
You can feel it stir your soul  
Melting pain, healing wounds,  
As it whispers forgiveness,  
Wrapping around your heart,  
Releasing burdens to the heavens.  
Power gentle as a summer rain  
And constant as a mountain.

Grace, every man's mercy,  
Grace the invisible cure.

## Friday, December 13

*Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 8:4-12; 2 Corinthians 9:1-15*

In Matthew 5:16 Jesus said, “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

In the inky dark of December, around us shine points of starlight, a near roundness of the moon, and the sparkle of Christmas trees. The lights seem all the more significant as we are wrapped in the black cloak of night. The lights remind us that we, too, must shine in a dark world.

In a world made dark by cruelty and injustice came the birth of Jesus, Light of the world, Emmanuel, God with Us. His birth had been long anticipated. Isaiah foretold it: “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned” (Isaiah 9:2). Jesus called us to be the lights in the world, no matter how small our candles may be. We are called to love the unlovable, be kind to the unkind, and seek justice in an unjust world. Some of us may be called to critique even as Amos did in today’s reading, as he condemned those who trample the poor, those who are anxious for holidays and holy days to end so to continue their selling and profit, those who deal deceitfully to feed their own ego and exploit the poor.

So, we are called to shine in love and perhaps even to shine into dark corners. Our little light makes a difference.



## Saturday, December 14

*Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 9:8-15; Luke 1:57-66*

Zechariah and Elizabeth, who Luke says are “righteous before God” (Luke 1:6), have given up on having the child they prayed for all their lives. Then, as they are “getting on in years,” Gabriel tells them that they will have a son and name him John (1:7). Despite their surprise, and maybe confusion, friends and family rejoice with them. Elizabeth, with relief, says that the Lord “took away the disgrace I have endured among my people” (1:25).

During this episode in the story of the coming of Christ, joy seems to prevail. Although tradition held that the son should be named for his father, the parents insist that their son is named John, meaning “God is gracious.” God is, indeed, gracious to answer their fervent prayer and to bring into their lives, and into the world, the one who would “make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17).

The waiting, sadness, and disgrace that Zechariah and Elizabeth had experienced were probably forgotten as John lived up to his name, baptizing and prophesying, making a path to Jesus.

So may we, during this season of waiting and praying, follow this worn path to the Lord, where our hearts will, once again, be filled with joy at his coming.

## Third Sunday of Advent, December 15

*Zephaniah 3:14-20; Isaiah 12:2-6; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18*

Today we light the Candle of Joy, sometimes referred to as the Shepherd's Candle. The liturgical color for joy is rose; therefore, the pink candle is used on the third Sunday of Advent. The lighting of this candle reminds us of the joy that the world experienced at the birth of Jesus, as well as the joy that the faithful have [passed] the midpoint of Advent. I found this lovely prayer as I was exploring ideas for this writing. The author is unknown.

### A PRAYER FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Joy-filled Giver of Life,  
let the anticipation of your birth  
fill us with overflowing joy.

May our excitement and anticipation  
be a sign to the world  
that you are always near.

Amen.

Gwen Anderson,  
*The Season of Advent 2020*

## Monday, December 16

*Isaiah 11:1-9; Numbers 16:1-19; Hebrews 13:7-17*

Art can inform and enrich our contemplation of Scripture, and I am certainly moved by “The Peaceable Kingdom of the Branch” (c. 1826-1830), which is based on Isaiah 11:6-9. This work of art is one of over 60 paintings centered on Isaiah’s vision of the Peaceable Kingdom and painted by 19th century Quaker, Edward Hicks.

In this painting, a young child, carrying a length of grapevine, leads a group of animals, including a leopard, kid, cow, and lion. The lion’s eyes are wide open with a “deer in the headlights” look, as if he is shocked by the peaceful scene. Imagine how wide our eyes would be if Jesus suddenly returned and we found ourselves at a local diner happily chatting with folks who were our extreme opposites politically and religiously!

Around the edge of the painting, moving from the top of the painting clockwise, we read the following words:

And not one savage beast be seen to frown,  
A little child shall lead them on in love,  
When man is led and moved by sovereign grace,  
His grim carnivorous nature then shall cease.

I rather like thinking the final line refers to man (and not the beast) and that this nature finally ceases when man is “led and moved by sovereign grace.”

During this Advent season, perhaps it would be good for us to contemplate our own grim, carnivorous natures and the ways in which we need to be led and moved by God’s sovereign grace. Are there times when we’re surly and sour and need to be more mindful of all our blessings? Are there ways in which we take much more than we give? If so, what can we do to change?

We cannot bring about the fullness of God’s kingdom. Only God, through Christ, can do that. However, through grace, perhaps we can, in some small way, help those around us experience a glimpse of the beauty – and the peace – that is to come.

Tuesday, December 17

*Isaiah 11:1-9; Numbers 16:20-35; Acts 28:23-31*

“A Short Christmas Sermon: Keeping Christmas”  
by Henry Van Dyke

. . . But there is a better thing than the observance of Christmas day, and that is keeping Christmas.

Are you willing to forget what you have done for other people, and to remember what other people have done for you; to ignore what the world owes you, and to think about what you owe the world; . . . to own that probably the only good reason for your existence is not what you are going to get out of life, but what are you going to give to life? . . . are you willing to do these things even for a day? Then you can keep Christmas.

Are you willing to stoop down and consider the needs and the desires of little children; to remember the weakness and loneliness of people who are growing old; to stop asking how much your friends love you, and ask yourself whether you love them enough; . . . to try to understand what those who live in the same house with you really want, without waiting for them to tell you; . . . to make a grave for your ugly thoughts, and a garden for your kindly feelings, with the gate open – are you willing to do these things even for a day? Then you can keep Christmas.

Are you willing to believe that love is the strongest thing in the world – stronger than hate, stronger than evil, stronger than death –and that the blessed life which began in Bethlehem [two thousand] years ago is the image and brightness of the Eternal Love? Then you can keep Christmas.

And if you keep it for a day, why not always?

But you can never keep it alone.

Wednesday, December 18

*Isaiah 11:1-9; Micah 4:8-13; Luke 7:31-35*

By now three candles of Advent are flickering. Last Sunday, Joy joined Hope and Peace to light our Advent path. Love and the Christ candle still await us. The gentle flickering light of Hope, Peace and Joy is our invitation to slow down and to anticipate the greater light, the light of the Prince of Peace. I wish I spent more time with that quiet anticipation of the birth of the Messiah and to his coming again to establish his Kingdom of Peace. I get so busy at Christmas doing lots of things – all good things, but the busyness can keep me from the Best thing.

Isaiah anticipated the Best thing in today's scripture. With his prophetic voice and hopeful heart he proclaimed that the stump of Jesse was more than just a stump. From that stump would come a shoot, and then a Branch, and from that Branch would come a Messiah who would bring righteousness and justice to the earth. Little children would be safe to play anywhere; former enemies would co-exist peacefully; the impossible would become possible; and "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord" (Isaiah 11:9). So far, righteousness and justice have not prevailed; little children are not safe; and many do not co-exist peacefully. But the gentle lights of Advent remind us that despite what is not, there is hope. Our hope rests on the Messiah, who came once, and in whom we have the joyful anticipation that He will come again. And when the Messiah returns, He will establish His Kingdom, and we will not need Advent candles because Hope and Peace and Joy and Love will reign. So, in these last few days before Christmas, I am going to slow down and to anticipate more of that Best thing and less of the other thing so that perhaps in my own life "the wolf will live with the lamb" (Isaiah 11:6).

Advent is a Journey toward Bethlehem. May we be drawn by the light of God made Man.

Pope Francis

Thursday, December 19

*Psalm 80:1-7; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 10:10-18*

Covenant-making God,

You use every possible means to reach us,  
breathing your Spirit in us,  
calling us by name,  
showing us symbols of your promise,  
offering us a new way of life.

We confess that our hearts are hardened.  
We choose certainty over faith,  
anxiety over courage,  
independence over compassion.

We turn our eyes from our neighbors in need,  
and from stories of despair,  
and from pleas for peace,  
and from anything that might bring tears to our eyes,  
for we prefer our own comfort.  
We get caught up in our own needs and desires,  
and forget you have made us to be your people, together.

Engrave your word on our hard hearts again, O God.  
Then break them open for what breaks yours,  
that your word might sink in  
and become a part of us, so we might truly live  
as if you are our God and we are your people.  
We pray in the name of the One  
who was, who is, and is to come,  
the One whose love breaks all bounds.  
Amen.

Terri Peterson, adapted

Friday, December 20

*Psalm 80:1-7; Isaiah 42:10-18; Hebrews 10:32-39*

“Listen, you that are deaf;  
And you that are blind, look up and see!”

Isaiah 42:18

Northminster has trained me in the observance of the Christian year. I’ve learned in Elementary Atrium that Advent is a season of preparation. Wow is it ever! Tree-trimming; house-decorating; shopping for the perfect gift; party-planning; choir practice; play practice; ballet rehearsal; the list goes on. Just thinking about it for too long will exhaust you! It’s easy to let our preparation get in the way of our preparation.

Matthew 2 declares the Magi saw the star and came to worship the one born king of the Jews. No doubt millions, including Herod and his counselors, looked into that same night sky, but they didn’t see; they were blind. Luke 2 asserts the shepherds saw an angel of the Lord, as well as a great company of the heavenly host, and heard their praise. As we prepare for and await the blessed coming of Jesus, may our eyes be focused upon, and our ears attuned to, the good news of great joy that is for all people: a Savior has been born to us; he is Christ the Lord!

“When they had heard the king, they set out; and there ahead of them went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.”

Matthew 2:9-10

“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”

Luke 2:20

Saturday, December 21

*Psalm 80:1-7; Isaiah 66:7-11; Luke 13:31-35*

What must it have been like for Jesus to return to his childhood haunts? A young adult returning home after years of college or work is faced with the preconceived wariness of parents and friends who knew them as a child, but the child is no more. With life experiences separate from those of family and friends who knew them when, the young adult has morphed into a new being – hopefully more mature, but definitely different. How much more exaggerated that difference must have been for Jesus. A child born into their community had become something more. How frustrating for Jesus, the adult – no longer the child. How frustrating for community leaders who are no longer the ones with true authority. How frustrating it must have been for Jesus to be so misunderstood.

This is the season we prepare our hearts to accept the gift of a child – a child who comes prepared to illustrate, once again, how we, too, are the beloved children of God. This is the season we shape our expectations in anticipation of a kingdom in which we, too, are in perfect relationship with God. This is the season in which we look forward to a homecoming in which our heavenly family sees us in all of our glorious potential.



## Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 22

*Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:46b-55; Psalm 80:1-7;  
Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-55*

During Advent we light candles of hope, peace, joy, and love, remembering the promises of God with prayer. The fourth Sunday of Advent represents Love.

Love is never abstract. It does not adhere to the universe or the planet or the nation or the institution or the profession, but to the singular sparrows of the street, the lilies of the field, “the least of these my brethren.” Love is not, by its own desire, heroic. It is heroic only when compelled to be. It exists by its willingness to be anonymous, humble, and unrewarded.

Wendell Berry, “Word and Flesh”

Love is what carries you, for it is always there, even in the dark, or most in the dark, but shining out at times like gold stitches in a piece of embroidery.

Wendell Berry, *Hannah Coulter*

Linda McGehee,  
*The Season of Advent 2021*

## Monday, December 23

*Psalm 113; Genesis 25:19-28; Colossians 1:15-20*

There's not much to surprise us in today's scripture readings about the authority of Christ (Colossians) and Jacob and Esau already fighting in the womb (Genesis). Since we know the Christmas story ends with Easter morning – the greatness of Christ isn't news to our 21st century ears. Anyone who has seen siblings separated by parents on a church pew won't find Isaac's offspring's behavior shocking. But the Psalmist who asked, "Who is like the Lord our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?" would probably be shocked to learn that the Lord who, "raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap," will show up as a baby and grow up to constantly befriend the 'wrong' kind of folk – and the surprises about Jesus won't end there (Psalm 113:5-7).

We are in a season of waiting and expectation; but it's not our first Advent, and we know how this story ends. Maybe this year we should try harder to be surprised by Jesus, look more thoroughly for things that delight, slow down long enough for goodness to sink in, and look out far enough to see the ways Jesus is calling us to be a surprise for others.

## Christmas Eve, December 24

*Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-4; Luke 2:1-20*

BC - AD

This was the moment when Before  
Turned into After, and the future's  
Uninvented timekeepers presented arms.

This was the moment when nothing  
Happened. Only dull peace  
Sprawled boringly over the earth.

This was the moment when even energetic Romans  
Could find nothing better to do  
Than counting heads in remote provinces.

And this was the moment  
When a few farm workers and three  
Members of an obscure Persian sect  
Walked haphazardly by starlight straight  
Into the kingdom of heaven.

U. A. Fanthorpe

To me, God is the Holy One whose other name is Surprise.  
The willingness to let the Ultimate assume whatever form  
he will and come in whatever manner he chooses is absolutely  
crucial, and it must be coupled with our trust that God  
wants to become known to us and is able to communicate  
with us, if we will allow it on those terms.

John R. Claypool

## 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*:

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\* Devotions offered in previous editions of *The Season of Advent*.