

An Advent Devotional

Cultivating Hope, Peace, Joy and Love in the face of fear

WAKE UP: The Disruptive Invitation of Advent

“Advent is the time for rousing. We are shaken to the very depths, so that we may wake up to the truth of ourselves. The primary condition for a fruitful Advent is renunciation, surrender. We must let go of all our mistaken dreams, our conceited poses and arrogant gestures, all the pretenses with which we hope to deceive ourselves and others. If we fail to do this, stark reality may take hold of us and rouse us forcibly in a way that will entail both anxiety and suffering.”

- Alfred Delp, German Jesuit Priest and philosopher of the German resistance (1907-1945)

Before the trick or treaters had rung a single doorbell, the Christmas displays were already being unpacked at stores across town. The radio stations switched their programming to 24/7 holiday music. Everything hurrying and rushing us towards the celebration.

No time to slow down. No time to reflect. Certainly, no time to think about “waking up to the truth of ourselves” as Fr. Delp speaks of above. *Who would willingly choose **that**?*

On top of the anxieties and hurry tied to everything surrounding the Christmas holiday, there’s no shortage of headlines in our world or storylines in our own lives that can lead us to worry, despair and **fear**.

And yet...right here, right now...amidst this whirlwind season, the church is invited to **Advent**. Despite the many calendars filled with chocolates or socks or beer behind numbered doors, Advent is not simply a countdown to Christmas. We certainly do spend these next four weeks preparing for the celebration of Jesus’ birth but this season has something else in mind, too.

Advent is a time not just to prepare for Christ’s coming but to **remember** and **prepare** for the reality that Christ will come again – that all things will be made new.

On the surface, the Gospel readings assigned to the four Sundays in Advent don’t initially seem to inspire glad tidings that we might associate with the build up to Christmas. There are unsettling warnings and unjust imprisonments and unplanned pregnancies – hardly sentimental escapes from the stresses of the season. And yet...if we move past the surface...if we wait...if we listen...we might discover something more going on. Moving past our fears we just might discover hope, peace, joy and love.

The readings, reflections and prayers in this guide have been put together by the community of Good Shepherd so that we might, together, slow down and listen - keep awake to the mysterious, challenging and life-changing news that the One who came as a baby in Bethlehem is coming again.

“Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord”
– Isaiah 2:1-5

Selected Advent Opportunities | gslcwi.com/advent



Advent by Candlelight

📅 Thursday, December 4 at 6:30 p.m.

👤 Ronda Beggs | rbeggs@gslcwi.com

📍 Verona Campus

We'll read scripture. We'll sing carols. Storytellers will share with us what Advent means so them. We'll also share devotional materials that could be a good anchor for you in this holy season.



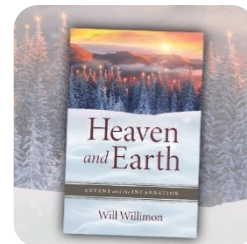
The Brilliance | An Advent Concert

📅 Sunday, December 7 at 6:00 p.m.

👤 Jared Stellmacher | jstellmacher@gslcwi.com

📍 Verona Campus

We're thrilled to welcome back The Brilliance, a dynamic New York-based group known for their poetic lyrics and soulful sound. Sponsored by The Good Shepherd Foundation.



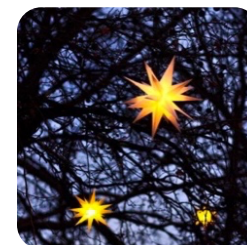
An Advent Conversation with Will Willimon

📅 Tuesday, December 9 at 6:30 p.m.

👤 Eric Holmer | eholmer@gslcwi.com

📍 Madison Campus and on Zoom

You're invited to a special in-person and online event featuring one of America's most influential preachers. Will Willimon will join us via Zoom for a conversation about the often-misunderstood season of Advent.



Blue Christmas Worship

📅 Thursday, December 11 at 7 p.m.

👤 Jared Stellmacher | jstellmacher@gslcwi.com

📍 Madison Campus

Come as you are, find comfort in prayer and song, and hear again the message of hope: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it."



Advent Hymn Sing & Lunch

📅 Wednesday, December 3 at 11:00 a.m.




👤 Jared Stellmacher | siverson@gslcwi.com

📍 Madison Campus

A time of Advent music, lunch, and fellowship. This lunch is open to all as a time to visit with folks you know and folks you don't know yet.






Carols, Cookies & Cabernet

-  Sunday, December 14 at 7 p.m.
-  Jared Stellmacher | siverson@gslcwi.com
-  Toot & Kate's Wine Bar, Downtown Verona






Music Monday Christmas Concert: Handel's Messiah

-  Monday, December 15 at 7 p.m.
-  Jared Stellmacher | jstellmacher@gslcwi.com
-  Madison Campus

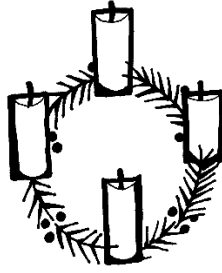
Experience the beauty of the season with Good Shepherd's annual Music Monday Christmas Concert!



Christmas around the Tree

-  Sunday, December 21 at 6 p.m.
-  Sarah Iverson | siverson@gslcwi.com
-  Verona Campus

An evening to ponder, pray, praise, and prepare in this Advent season.



Week One

Hope

“You must be men and women of ceaseless hope, because only tomorrow can today’s human and Christian promise be realized; and every tomorrow will have it’s own tomorrow, world without end. Every human act, every Christian act, is an act of hope. But that means you must be men and women of the present, you must live this moment – really live it, not just endure it – because this very moment, for all its imperfection and frustration, is pregnant with all sorts of possibilities is pregnant with the future, is pregnant with love, is pregnant with Christ.”

- Rev. Walter J. Burghardt, Jesuit Priest (1914 – 2008)

“Everything that is done in the world is done by hope”

- Martin Luther (1483 – 1586)

WEEK ONE | HOPE

Come, Lord Jesus, Come: A Candle Lighting Ceremony for Advent

Sunday, November 30 | First Sunday in Advent

Leader:

Aimless searching, lost in the night, come, Lord Jesus, come.

Deep in darkness, longing for light, come, Lord Jesus, come.

Everyone:

**Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our sins and fears release us; let us find our rest in thee.**

Responsive Litany

Advent is a time to be filled with anticipation and hope.

We wait and hope for the One who will bring light to the darkness.

Advent is a time to remember that God's love extends to all people.

We wait and hope for the One who will bring justice.

Advent is a time to renew our determination.

We wait and hope for the One who will bring righteousness.

Advent is a time to strive for understanding.

We wait and hope for the One who will bring peace.

Candle Lighting

Today we light the first candle – the candle of hope – marking the beginning of our spiritual journey this Advent season. The light of this candle reminds us that hope begins with a spark that at first seems small and insignificant, but in time grows into a brilliant flame, a flame that quickly spreads, filling the darkness with light and bringing a renewed sense of hope to a world filled with doubt and fear.

All (sung or spoken):

**Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our sins and fears release us; let us find our rest in thee.**

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for the promise of the scripture that through Christ, we have hope. Forgive our lack of faith and restore in our hearts the assurance that your love can conquer the tyranny of injustice in a broken world. We pray today that you would strengthen our faith in your mercy and righteousness so we can live in hope every day of our lives. Amen.

Words by Charles Wesley, Additional Words & Music by Joel Raney

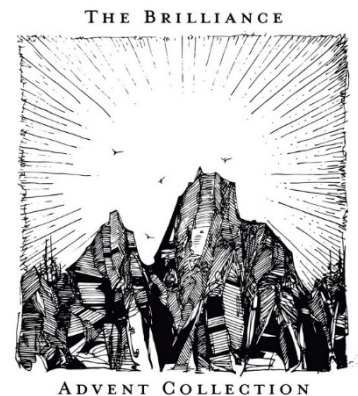
WEEK ONE | HOPE

Music Monday: “May You Find a Light” – The Brilliance

Monday, December 1

“Lost and weary traveler, searching for the way to go...Stranger, heavy-hearted, longing for someone you know...May you find a light, to guide you home”

Advent invites us to reflect on the many ways we are travelers—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Luke’s Gospel opens with Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, and the magi all stepping into a world marked by oppression, uncertainty, and very real fear. Each moved forward without fully knowing what lay ahead, guided only by faith, courage, and the steady gleam of God’s presence. The song “May You Find a Light” echoes this tender longing: the desire to be found, guided, and held by a light stronger than anything we face. As we enter this season, we may find ourselves carrying our own fears—fear of change, of loss, of loneliness, of not knowing the next step. And yet Advent reminds us that God’s light does not wait for us to be unafraid—it meets us in our trembling. In this holy season we are invited to wonder: Where do we feel weary or uncertain? How might God’s quiet, persistent light be nudging us forward? And how might we become that light for someone else who feels lost or heavy-hearted? Advent hope grows in these very places of vulnerability, slowly illuminating the path home.



WATCH/LISTEN

gslcwi.com/adventsong1

Prayer:

God of light and hope,

Guide us through our weariness and our fears. Shine your steady light in our hearts and in the lives of those around us. Help us trust, follow, and become light for others as we journey through this Advent season.

Amen.

Today's entry is written by
Jared Stellmacher.

Lectionary Readings for Today:

Psalms 124, Genesis 8:1-19, Romans 6:1-11

Finding Hope in the Overwhelm

Tuesday, December 2

Lowe's knows. If you've seen their commercials, you also know that Lowe's knows. And if you saw one of their commercials aired in 2024, then you know what this season is all about. It's the season "of going all out," or so its recent commercial would suggest. While I have an immediate negative reaction to any claim that Christmas requires "going all out," I suspect that the marketers at Lowe's have succeeded in diagnosing the American holiday zeitgeist. Within this short advertisement, Lowe's isn't so much selling, as much as they are describing. December is indeed a time of going all out. Some would argue that Christmas in a secular society is about excess and consumption. I used to agree with this widespread critique. But Lowe's has helped me to rethink things. Today I would argue that our current cultural understanding of Christmas isn't as a time of excess but as a time of fervor. We don't view December as a season of consumption and spending, as some would suggest, but a period of vigor. We don't attend 9 Christmas dinners and wrap 35 presents or sit through 5 school concerts because of a desire to consume. We do it because we are caught up in the new-found intensity of the yuletide. This isn't a season of consumption. It's a season of hustle. It's not a season of busyness, but a season of intensity. With steely and at times frosty determination, we shop, decorate, and sprint through our holiday preparations (all of which Lowe's can and does help with). Is it any wonder, then, that we don't know what to with Advent? We so often mistake the Christian liturgical season of Advent for the 24 days that lead up to Christmas, missing out on the practices of waiting and anticipation leading up to Christ's arrival.

At its core, Advent isn't a countdown to Christmas. It's a month-long reminder that Christ has come into our world. It's a four-week expression of the hope that Christ will come again. Advent, then, has something of a split identity - one of looking back but also ahead. That's why the readings in Advent lectionaries depict themes of anticipation and longing, and why traditional Advent themes are solemn, even a bit melancholy. The traditional practices of Advent have been practices of repentance, of preparing our hearts for Christ's presence in our lives. This has been the purpose of Advent throughout history. By the 9th century, the church recognized that Advent served a dual purpose - of waiting for the commemoration of Christ's birth, just as we await Christ's return in the fullness of time. But how does one find time for stillness in a season where commercials beckon us to go all-out? How do we dwell in the tension of liminal space, practicing waiting and contemplation, when there are concerts to attend, parties to host, malls to visit, presents to wrap? How do we find hope in the overwhelm? In a world that is increasingly fast-paced and filled with distractions, the traditional practices associated with Advent can feel out of place. The month of December, with its relentless flurry of activity, shopping, social gatherings, and the pressure to create the perfect holiday experience, may not lend itself easily to the contemplative spirit that Advent seeks to cultivate. And so I'd suggest that maybe the answer isn't to force a new contemplative exercise into the harried calendar of the 12th month of the year, to take on new spiritual disciplines or go "all-out" on the practices of the early church. You might try to read every book on stillness and solitude that you can, but even that might simply be an expression of the deep drive that defines December. Perhaps the answer is simply to recognize that our celebration of Christmas loses something crucial when preceded by intensity instead of introspection. The best way forward is simply to be aware that our own effort diminishes our appreciation of this high holy day.

Lectionary Readings for Today:

Psalms 124, Genesis 9:1-17, Hebrews 11:32-40

WEEK ONE | HOPE

Hope While Healing

Wednesday, December 3

Several years ago, I took a tumble off a chair as I was reaching for a wall clock, while working at church. The result of my fall, was a heel bone fractured in several places. Once the swelling subsided, I had several screws inserted to mend the break. What followed were weeks of no weight bearing and being dependent on the help of others. For an independent person, this took some adjusting. I was fearful, frustrated and in pain. Prior to my fall, I had been looking for a job. I knew my recovery would take months before I could be weight bearing, let alone resume my job search.

I followed my surgeon's instructions – keeping my leg elevated above my heart and putting ice on my foot several hours each day. The days were long and I had to rely on my partner Beth, friends, church members and neighbors to do the things I could not do. I tried to stay hopeful in my thinking and attitude, believing that with time, my heel would heal and I could slowly resume some

of those things I had taken for granted like walking unaided, climbing stairs, driving, grocery shopping, walking up to take communion, teaching church school class and working in our kitchen baking muffins and cookies.

I had pretty much given up job hunting while I was healing. God's timing was not my timing - as it turned out there was a job opening at the Front Desk in the Madison Office. Pr. Brent Campbell was willing to hire me and wait until I had clearance from my surgeon to begin working. I was fearful my accident would eliminate doing so many of those things I had previously been able to do, let alone get hired for a job I have been blessed to be at for the last ten years; serving our pastors, staff, church family and community.

Today's entry is written by **Judy Hoard**.

Lectionary Readings for Today:

Psalm 124, Isaiah 54:1-10, Matthew 24:23-35

WEEK ONE | HOPE

Suddenly, Hope

Thursday, December 4

I asked my mother yesterday to tell me why, in our family when I was growing up, we did not decorate our house until Christmas Eve. I knew the answer, of course -we were conscientious Episcopalians-but I wanted to tell her the old say. She surprised me. She said, "I think Christmas should come in a burst. Exactly. Auden writes, "Nothing can save us that is possible. The human race cannot expect to receive any lasting comfort from the word. The comfort that we so desperately need must come from somewhere else- in a burst of transcendent power breaking upon our ears from beyond our sphere altogether.

It was evoked for us last night in the Bach concert when the thrilling voice of the Evangelist sang, "And suddenly. (Und alsbald)!" That's why we are singing, today, "Sleepers, wake! A voice astounds us!" The news of God's entrance into the world ruled by sin and death is nothing less than astounding.

After a long and agonizing silence that seemed never to end, the voice at last is heard in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord. To each and all on this first Sunday of Advent, we bring this announcement: God will come, and his justice will prevail, and he will destroy evil and pain in all its forms, once and forever. To be a Christian is to live every day of our lives in solidarity with those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, but to live in the unshakable hope of those who expect the dawn.

"I don't dislike God. I'm not mad at him. I'm afraid of him." *And the angel said unto them, Fear not.*

Today's entry is a sermon excerpt from **Flemming Rutledge** originally preached on the First Sunday of Advent in 1996 at Saint John's Church in Salisbury, Connecticut. Fleming is an Episcopal priest, a best-selling author and acclaimed preacher.

Lectionary Readings for Today:

Psalms 72:1-7, 18-19, Isaiah 4:2-6, Acts 1:12-17, 21-26

WEEK ONE | HOPE

An Advent Blessing | “Do Not Be Afraid”

Friday, December 5

Do not live in fear.

Fear narrows your vision;

you’ll miss the neighbor,

the stranger,

and delay the joy of the kingdom

already breaking in.

Do not be terrified of yourself.

Fear will tighten lips

and silence your spirit.

Your gift will go unspoken,

and the world needs my Love sung in you.

Do not be anxious about the future.

Fear will quicken your pulse

and steal your breath.

You’ll overlook my provision

and miss peace being planted now.

Do not be intimidated by empire.

Fear will bend your spine

and make you forget your power.

You’ll miss my long justice

and forgo the hope that sustains you.

Do not be afraid.

Be alive.

Through Me.

With Me.

In me.

Today’s entry is written by **Sarah Iverson**.

Lectionary Readings for Today:

Psalms 72:1-7, 18-19, Isaiah 30:19-26, Acts 13:16-25

WEEK ONE | HOPE

Looking towards Sunday | It all points to Jesus

Saturday, December 6

John the Baptist is a fitting messenger for the season of Advent, a time for the church to prepare for both the nativity of the Christ and for his second coming. John's call to repentance in preparation of Jesus' arrival carries a challenge for us to rid ourselves of everything that obstructs our view. His proclamation is filled with images of cleansing: straightening paths, cutting down useless trees, and burning away chaff. John's baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins means cleansing as well as a changing of the mind, a turning toward Jesus, so that one's whole self is pointed toward the Lord of this world and of eternity.

Undistracted even by thoughts of our own worthiness, the church's focus year round is turned toward the coming of Christ. John points to Jesus, never to himself, and in so doing becomes a model for discipleship. Having heard John's cry, we join the chorus, becoming messengers in turn. All our efforts

in worship and evangelism, education and social ministry point, not to ourselves, our programs, our skill or our saintliness, but only to Jesus. Preparing the way of the Lord is very much about pointing others to his real presence in and among us.

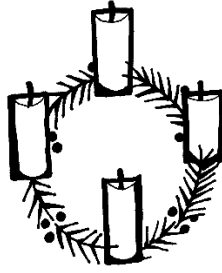
This Sunday's Isaiah reading ("the grass withers, the flower fades") and that of 2 Peter ("all things are to be dissolved") reinforce the church's teaching that amidst all that is transient in our lives, and creation, only God's word is eternal. John the Baptist's testimony points us to that Word made flesh, who brings with him a new heaven and a new earth after all else has passed away. John directs us in our faith journeys as individuals and communities toward a witness that is forever pointing to Jesus.

Today's entry is from **Sundays & Seasons**, the liturgical resource of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

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Lectionary Readings for Today:

Psalms 72:1-7, 18-19, Isaiah 11:1-10, Matthew 3:1-12



Week Two

Peace

O Day of peace that dimply shines
Through all our hopes and prayers and dreams,
Guide us to justice, truth and love;
Delivered from selfish schemes.
May swords of hate fall from our hands,
Our hearts from envy find release,
Till by God's grace our warring world
Shall see Christ's promised reign of peace.

Then shall the wolf dwell with the lamb
Nor shall the fierce devour the small;
As beasts and cattle calmly craze,
A little child shall lead them all.

Then enemies shall learn to love,
All creatures find their true accord;
The hope of peace shall be fulfilled,
For all the earth shall know the Lord.

- Carl P. Daw, Jr.

WEEK TWO | PEACE

Come, Lord Jesus, Come: A Candle Lighting Ceremony for Advent

Sunday, December 7 | Second Sunday in Advent

Leader:

Aimless searching, lost in the night, come, Lord Jesus, come.

Deep in darkness, longing for light, come, Lord Jesus, come.

All:

**Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our sins and fears release us; let us find our rest in thee.**

Responsive Litany

Advent is marked by a spirit of yearning for peace.

May the world be filled with the peace of Christ.

We long today for peace among nations.

May the world be filled with the peace of Christ.

We long today for peace among races.

May the world be filled with the peace of Christ.

We long today for peace in our hearts and in our lives.

May the world be filled with the peace of Christ.

Candle Lighting

Today we light two candles – the candle of hope and the candle of peace. The light of this second candle reminds us that God’s purpose in sending his Son into the world was to bring peace. We look at the division, the fighting, and the turmoil around us, and we see a world in dire need. We remind ourselves that peace begins with forgiveness, and that forgiveness begins in our hearts.

All:

**Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our sins and fears release us; let us find our rest in thee.**

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Closing Prayer (Or Prayer of the Day)

Gracious God, we thank you for your promise of peace, and we know that because of Christ, peace is possible. We pray today for the nations of the world, that we could find a way to live together in peace. We pray for our brothers and sisters everywhere, that we could become more forgiving, more understanding, and more loving to one another. Flood our hearts with the light of peace today so that we might take that light and spread your love to the whole world. Amen.

Words by Charles Wesley, Additional Words & Music by Joel Raney

WEEK TWO | PEACE

Music Monday: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

Monday, December 8

“O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear”

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” is one of the oldest and most cherished hymns of Advent, rooted in the ancient O Antiphons—short prayers sung for centuries during the final days of Advent, each calling upon Christ by a different biblical title:

Wisdom, Lord, Root of Jesse, Key of David, Dayspring, King of Nations, and Emmanuel. Emerging as early as the 8th or 9th century and later woven into a hymn in the 12th century, it carried the cries of generations who longed for deliverance. When it was translated into English in the 19th century, it brought that same deep yearning to new communities longing for redemption, justice, and peace.

In Luke’s Gospel, the world into which Jesus was born was steeped in instability, oppression, and fear—yet into that darkness, God’s first word to so many was “Do not be afraid.” The hymn echoes this longing for God to draw near and liberate us from all that binds us: fear, grief, division, loneliness, and the sense of wandering without direction. And

then comes the refrain—“Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

“These words are not naïve optimism but courageous hope. They proclaim that even while fear remains real and exile feels long,

God’s presence is already on the way. The call to “rejoice” is an act of defiant trust, a reminder that God’s promise is stronger than our uncertainty.

As we sing this familiar melody, we join centuries of believers who held onto hope even when

circumstances felt overwhelming. The hymn invites us to ponder how our own fears mirror theirs and how Advent’s promise meets us right in those vulnerable places. Emmanuel—God-with-us—does not wait for our lives to be tidy; God enters the ache and longing. Advent hope grows slowly but surely, like dawn pushing back the night, reminding us that God is both our comfort and our calling to become bearers of that hope for others.



WATCH/LISTEN

gslcwi.com/adventsong2

Today’s entry is written by **Jared Stellmacher**.

Prayer

Come, Emmanuel, and dwell among us. Bring courage to our hearts, hope to our waiting, and light to our darkness. Teach us to notice your faithful presence and share your promise with others this Advent season.

Amen

WEEK TWO | PEACE

Even if...

Tuesday, December 9

For years, whenever asked about my deepest fear, the answer came without hesitation: my inevitable future. There was always something to work towards, another test to be taken, a social interaction waiting to be messed up. The worries were relentless: What if I am wasting my time? What if I won't reach my goals? What if this, what if that— what if...?

This fear wasn't just a passing worry; it was a consuming force. It took over everything: my actions, my emotions, my thoughts— my life. My present became unenjoyable, a shadow of everything I feared about tomorrow. I was driving blindly into the fog of tomorrow. In the midst of my worrying, I forgot who has always had control over my future: God.

The future, when viewed through the lens of faith, isn't meant to be a source of anxiety, but a landscape of divine opportunities. The future is the hope that mistakes can be mended and lessons learned as you discover what it means to truly live.

Notice how that word—live— is inherently present tense. If you don't seize those present opportunities while they are occurring, you will have overlooked your future as it quietly shifts into the past. We are called to live today, trusting the one who holds tomorrow. The Bible reminds us in Matthew 6:34, "Therefore do not worry about

tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Through my faith in The Lord's plan for me, an abundance of peace has flooded my life. This peace is not something you can manufacture for the future, but is something to receive this very moment. Peace is the quiet assurance that the Author of your story already knows the ending, and it is good.

Instead of a fearful "What if?" that once consumed uncontrollably, think of the "Even ifs":

Even if I fall, the Lord will catch me.

Even if I mess up, the Lord will teach me.

Even if I doubt, the Lord will prove me wrong.

Even if I tell myself I am not worthy, the Lord will tell me I have always been enough.

Even if I don't believe it, the Lord will always love me and my neighbors. And if that isn't a beautiful thing to enjoy here and now, I'm not sure what is.

Today's entry is written by **Molly McCue**.

Lectionary Readings for Today:

Psalms 124, Genesis 9:1-17, Hebrews 11:32-40

WEEK TWO | PEACE

Peace amidst fear

Wednesday, December 10

As we waited for the ultrasound technician to begin, there was a quiet, sacred moment when our eyes met. Without saying a word, we both felt it. This was the future we had dreamed about. The “what ifs” and “can you imagine when’s” finally unfolding before us. After the ultrasound tech showed us our baby’s hands and feet, her demeanor shifted. Her gaze fixed on the screen. The once joyful chatter of the room faded into an uneasy silence broken only by the clicks and whirrs of the machine. When they left to call the doctor, Tyler and I sat in that cold room. Two hopeful parents now filled with confusion and fear. Waiting. “Something is wrong,” I said quietly. “Everything is going to be okay,” Tyler replied, “We’ll wait to worry until they come back.” So, we waited. The rhythmic hum of the machines filled the void. Finally, there was a knock on the door. The doctor entered and gently shared the news that they had found two extremely rare complications. Conditions so uncommon they affect only 0.04% of pregnancies. The risk of internal hemorrhaging after 28 weeks would be severe and inevitable. To preserve both my life and our baby’s, they would need to hospitalize me at 28 weeks and plan to deliver preterm. My stomach dropped. My heart sank. The room blurred as those words left the doctor’s mouth. I remember looking down at my hands, Tyler’s grip firm and trembling at once. Then I heard him speak, voice breaking: “What about my wife? I need you to promise me you will keep her safe.” From that moment on, our days were filled with specialist appointments, frequent ultrasounds, and a calendar carved up by medical scans and consultations discussing the percentages of viability of our unborn child. We called our pastors, our family, and our friends. All we could ask for were prayers—prayers for strength, for healing, for a miracle. It was Advent during this time and I remember resting my hands on my belly each week at church, feeling the soft flutters of life inside, and whispering prayer after prayer. I prayed that God would keep this tiny life safe. I prayed that peace would fill the waiting. Every week brought more waiting. More numbers. More odds. More uncertainty. Waiting amidst fear; this

became the anthem of our season. Through it all, God was our anchor. Tyler reminding us to lean into the comfort and hope that only Jesus can provide. Our church family surrounded us in prayer and held us when our strength faltered. Then, one night, the night before my scheduled hospital admission, I awoke to what I thought was Tyler’s voice. I looked over, but he was fast asleep. The room was dark and still. I closed my eyes again, and then I heard it clearly: “I am here. I am here.” Peace flooded my heart like warm light breaking through a storm. For the first time in months, my body and mind were completely still. I felt the presence of God surrounding me. The next morning, as Tyler began loading our suitcases for the hospital, I told him about the voice, the peace, the certainty that things would be okay. At the clinic that day, we went through one last ultrasound and again, one by one, multiple technicians entered the room. Their gazes transfixed on the ultrasound screen, brows furrowed and whispering to one another. But this time, instead of fear, we felt peace. We knew that no matter what the outcome, God would be there either crying with us or celebrating with us. No matter what happened, God’s presence was enough. That moment marked a turning point in our faith. It wasn’t the end of fear, but the beginning of peace within it. And then, the unexplainable happened. Our three specialists came back into the room with looks of astonishment. The two pregnancy complications they had been monitoring so closely for months were gone. Vanished. Every scan showed signs of a completely healthy and viable pregnancy. Our daughter, Mila, was born a few months later—healthy and radiant. She is our living testament to waiting with peace and courage through the most uncertain season of our lives.

Today’s entry is written by **Emily Gold**.

WEEK TWO | PEACE

Visio Divina: Reflecting on Art

Thursday, December 11



St. John the Baptist in Prison, Visited by Salomé,
Drawing possibly by Guercino
(Giovanni Francesco Barbieri,
1591–1666),
Mid 17th century, brown ink and
iron gall ink with brown wash
20.5 x 25.6 cm (8 1/16 x 10 1/16
in.) © Princeton University Art
Museum. Gift of Nathan V.
Hammer

Begin by reading the Lectionary Reading this Image is based upon:

Matthew 11:2-11

Reflect & Respond

Look at the image and let your eyes stay with the first thing you see. Focus your attention on the part of the image that first catches your eye. Try to keep your eyes from wandering to other parts of the picture. Breathe deeply and let yourself gaze at that part of the image for a minute or so.

Let your eyes now gaze at the whole image. Take your time and look at every part of the photograph. See it all. Reflect on the image for a minute or so.

Consider the following questions:

What emotions does this image evoke in you?

What does the image stir up in you, bring forth in you?

Does this image lead you into an attitude of prayer? If so, let these prayers take form in you.

Write them down if you desire.

Offer your prayers to God now in a final time of silence.

Instructions provided via upperroom.org/resources/visio-divina

WEEK TWO | PEACE

An Advent Litany of Fear

Friday, December 12

I'm afraid I'm too—

weak to try again,
tender to the world,
young and unheard,
old and unseen,
busy and brittle,
uninformed, unready.

I'm afraid it's all too—

far gone to mend,
beyond my reach or reason,
too heavy for my heart,
woven too deep to unravel.

I'm afraid of my—

doubt that lingers,
loneliness that echoes,
security that isolates,

failure that defines,

even of my light that shines.

Name them says God—all of them.

I am not ashamed of your fear,

nor unaware of your circumstance.

Speak them aloud till they loosen their grip.

Call on my name, remember my power.

For even here—in fear and in chaos—

my Love will find you.

I have split time and space to reach you,

torn open the heavens to dwell among you,

stirred the waters, then walked them toward
you.

I am the pulse in your trembling,

the light that will not fade.

Do not be afraid.

I am already on my way.

Lectionary Readings for Today:

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19, Isaiah 30:19-26, Acts 13:16-25

Today's entry is written by
Sarah Iverson.

WEEK TWO | PEACE

Looking towards Sunday | Living in the now and not yet

Saturday, December 13

In this season of Advent we stand in the discomfiting quiet of waiting for the salvation of the Lord while simultaneously seeing that very salvation breaking into the world around us. Like John the Baptist we ask Jesus “are you here, or should we still wait?” The answer to this question is “yes.” Yes, Jesus is here among us in his body and blood at the eucharist. But we wait for the day when he returns. Yes, Jesus is here among us bringing peace and reconciliation. But we wait for the day when he will make all things new. The new life promised by the coming of a savior is both realized and still to come. We who live in the Christian faith do so as people searching the world around us for signs of God’s kingdom. Gathering as Christ’s body on earth, we have a sort of dual-citizenship in the now and the not-yet as we both proclaim

that Christ is among us and also fervently pray “even so, come Lord Jesus.” As believers, our hope does not rest in the efforts of our piety or in the comfort of the hereafter. Rather, our hope is in the promises of a gracious, faithful God; promises fulfilled before our eyes and those not yet seen. We long for the day in which, like Isaiah’s vision of what will be, the blind see and the lame leap like deer. Yet we tell what we see and hear around us: that the dead are raised and the poor receive good news. The day is here and yet still we wait. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

Today’s entry is from **Sundays & Seasons**, the liturgical resource of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

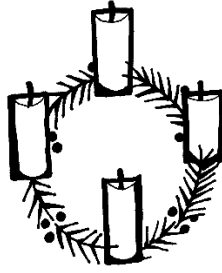
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Theological Reflection

In this week’s gospel, John the Baptist, the faithful forerunner, finally encounters his own doubts. Unjustly imprisoned and with access only to secondhand accounts of Jesus’ ministry, even John has begun to have misgivings. How many of us have been trapped in metaphorical prisons of sin or despair and have struggled to see and believe the promises of God? Jesus’ response does not condemn John for his doubts. Rather, he sends others to speak to John of what they have seen. How does your community lift one another up and encourage each other’s faith in times of personal hardship?

Lectionary Readings for this Sunday:

Psalms 146:5-10, Isaiah 35:1-10, James 5:7-10, Matthew 11:2-11



Week Three

Joy

O Lord, through your Son you command us, no, you counsel us to ask, and you promise that you will hear us so that our joy may be complete. Lord, I am making the request that you urge us to make through your Wonder-Counselor. Give me then what you promise to give through your truth. You, O God, are faithful; grant that I may receive my request, so that my joy may be complete.

Meanwhile, let this hope of mine be in my thoughts and on my tongue; let my heart be filled with it, my voice speak of it; let my soul hunger for it, my body thirst for it, my whole being yearn for it, until I enter into the joy of the Lord, who is Three in One, blessed for ever.

Amen.

- Anselm of Canterbury, Benedictine (1033- 1109)

WEEK THREE | JOY

Come, Lord Jesus, Come: A Candle Lighting Ceremony for Advent

Sunday, December 14 | Third Sunday in Advent

Leader:

Aimless searching, lost in the night, come, Lord Jesus, come.

Deep in darkness, longing for light, come, Lord Jesus, come.

All:

**Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our sins and fears release us; let us find our rest in thee.**

Responsive Litany

Advent is marked by a spirit of yearning for peace.

May the world be filled with the peace of Christ.

We long today for peace among nations.

May the world be filled with the peace of Christ.

We long today for peace among races.

May the world be filled with the peace of Christ.

We long today for peace in our hearts and in our lives.

May the world be filled with the peace of Christ.

Candle Lighting

Today we light two candles – the candle of hope and the candle of peace. The light of this second candle reminds us that God’s purpose in sending his Son into the world was to bring peace. We look at the division, the fighting, and the turmoil around us, and we see a world in dire need. We remind ourselves that peace begins with forgiveness, and that forgiveness begins in our hearts.

All:

**Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our sins and fears release us; let us find our rest in thee.**

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Closing Prayer (Or Prayer of the Day)

Gracious God, we thank you for your promise of peace, and we know that because of Christ, peace is possible. We pray today for the nations of the world, that we could find a way to live together in peace. We pray for our brothers and sisters everywhere, that we could become more forgiving, more understanding, and more loving to one another. Flood our hearts with the light of peace today so that we might take that light and spread your love to the whole world. Amen.

Words by Charles Wesley, Additional Words & Music by Joel Raney

Music Monday: “Handel’s Messiah, Part I”

Monday, December 15

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; And the government shall be upon His shoulder; And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

Few pieces of music have shaped the church’s Advent and Christmas imagination like Handel’s Messiah. Composed in just 24 days in 1741, the work emerged during a difficult season in Handel’s life—financial strain, declining health, and waning public interest in his operas. Yet out of that uncertainty came a work overflowing with hope. The libretto, drawn entirely from Scripture and arranged by Charles Jennens, moves through prophetic longing, the promise of Christ’s birth, and the dawning of God’s redemptive plan. When Messiah premiered in Dublin in 1742, it was met with profound enthusiasm, and over time it spread rapidly through England and beyond. Its accessibility, its stirring melodies, and the emotional power of its theology made it beloved across denominations and traditions, eventually becoming one of the most performed pieces of sacred music in the world.

Part I of Messiah in particular resonates with Advent’s themes of fear, longing, and emerging hope. In Luke’s Gospel, Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds each encounter circumstances filled

with anxiety and vulnerability—an unexpected pregnancy, a dangerous journey, a world ruled by oppressive power. And yet into each fearful moment, God sends the words, “Do not be afraid.” Handel’s music captures this movement from



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trembling to trust. The buoyant lines of “For Unto Us a Child Is Born” reflect the astonishing promise that God’s answer to fear is not force or might but a child—fragile, humble, and radiant with peace.

As the music rises and spins, we are invited to ponder how Advent meets

our own fears. Even when life feels unsteady or overwhelming, this proclamation reminds us that God’s promise comes not in grand spectacle, but in unexpected nearness. Hope breaks in like a melody that interrupts our worry—lifting our eyes, steadying our breath, and reminding us that God’s redeeming love has already entered the story.

Listening to Messiah becomes a form of prayer: a way of allowing awe, trust, and expectation to take root within us, guiding our days and softening our hearts toward one another.

Prayer:

God of promise and joy, We rejoice in your coming and trust your presence in our lives. Let your redeeming work shape our hearts, and let your peace inspire us to share hope, light, and love with others this Advent season. **Amen**

Lectionary Readings for Today:

Psalms 21, Isaiah 24:1-16a, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

WEEK THREE | JOY

Joy Despite Fear

Tuesday, December 16

I have an idea for a children's book all worked out in my head. It's about a dad who takes his seven-year-old son to the Grand Canyon.

Immediately upon arriving, the son runs to the cliff to peer into its depths, just like a dozen other kids are doing. But the dad is very afraid that his son will fall, so he puts up signs forbidding anyone from approaching the edge.

To no one's surprise, the kids ignore the sign in order to take in the view, so he builds a fence to keep his son safe.

The kids are intent on seeing the bottom of the canyon, so they climb the fence. The dad then decides to build a wall to keep his son from danger.

Sad that they can no longer see the canyon at all, the kids dig under the wall and scurry through the tunnel to reclaim their view.

Exasperated, the dad goes to collect his son and leave the park. As he approaches, he sees the joy in his son's eyes as he gazes on

this natural wonder. His heart softens, and he agrees to let the boy peer over the edge so long as he keeps hold of his dad's hand.

The End.

I even have a title: "The Canyon is Grand, Please Hold my Hand." And yes, it is based on a true story. I have a fear of heights, and that trip to the Grand Canyon gave me many gray hairs. I resolved that day, however, not to prioritize my comfort over others' joy.

Overcoming fear may be as simple as finding someone brave, and holding their hand. If you're afraid of boarding a plane to visit a sick relative, bring a brave friend, and fly! If you're afraid of looking foolish on the dance floor, grab a brave partner, and dance! If you're afraid of publishing a children's book, find a brave co-author and write! Because comfort is a cheap substitute for joy.

Today's entry is written by **Greg Meyer**

Lectionary Readings for Today:

Psalms 124, Genesis 9:1-17, Hebrews 11:32-40

WEEK THREE | JOY

Joy Pockets

Wednesday, December 17

During my senior year of high school, two of my classmates were tragically killed in a train versus car accident. There were three others in the car who survived. This was a crushing wave of grief for my high school and our small town. Given the impact on the community, it was decided that the double funeral would be held in the high school gym and the Senior Class President would give a eulogy. A few days after the accident, a group of my close friends, including the Class President, were gathered in my basement. We'd all been moving through life in a fog of feelings, but our friend needed help crafting the eulogy. As she sat at my family desktop computer (complete with dial up internet!), the rest of us were sprawled out on the floor and the couches sharing stories and memories. One of the stories sparked some laughter and then the giggling floodgates were opened. We laughed so hard and so long, we couldn't even

remember why we were laughing in the first place. It was a joyful interlude during our time of grief and mourning. The laughter did not take away our sadness, but it did allow some joy to creep in through the cracks. There is always room for joy in the midst of dark times. Those "joy pockets" are flickering lights that help us find our way through that darkness. Sometimes they are spontaneous, like in my story, but joy can also be planned or sought out.

Where do you seek/find/experience joy in your daily life?

Today's entry is written by **Jessica McCarty**

Lectionary Readings for Today:

Psalm 124, Isaiah 54:1-10, Matthew 24:23-35

WEEK THREE | JOY

“E’en so lord Jesus Quickly Come”

Thursday, December 18

Few things can steal the joy from the Christmas season more than someone close to you having health problems. I was a senior in high school in 1985 when in December, my paternal grandmother’s health started to fail. No matter what joyful occasions happened that season, her health put them in a different light.

We sang a Christmas concert in my high school choir that year, and one of the anthems was “E’en So Lord Jesus, Quickly Come,” by Paul Manz. The motet is a choral standard, and I’d heard my parents sing it in their choir several times. It’s a haunting piece...but with a joyful message.

But that year, with my grandmother’s health fading, this song resonated specifically with me. The song ends with these lyrics: “E’en so Lord Jesus, quickly come, and night shall be no more. They need no light, nor lamp nor sun, For Christ will be their All!”

My grandmother died on December 20, and her funeral was the day before Christmas Eve. But throughout that season, those lyrics gave me hope.

A few weeks later, our church held a special music festival, and Paul Manz himself came to play the organ. After the concert, I got a chance to talk to him and tell him how much his piece meant to me

the past few weeks. Then he explained the origin of the song.

He wrote the piece in 1953 while his son was fighting for his life in the hospital from a childhood illness. He and his wife were taking turns staying with him in the hospital. One day, his wife, Ruth, wrote some lyrics based on Revelations 21 and said he should try and create some music around it. Manz wrote the piece that night by his son’s bedside. Even when the composer was facing one of the worst things a parent fears- the loss of a child – he managed to create a song of joy that still resonates today.

Manz’s son recovered and now has the rough draft of his father’s chorale framed on his wall. The song has remained with me as well. We sang it at my dad’s funeral. And nearly every Advent, I get to sing this anthem, now that Jared has made it a regular part of our choir’s repertoire. The song has brought me joy many times in my life, even when the fear of death was weighing on me. I hope the next time you hear our choir sing this piece at Good Shepherd, it will remind you that “Christ is coming, is coming soon.” ...and that we have no reason to ever fear death again.

Today’s entry is written by **Rick Blum**

Lectionary Readings for Today:

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19, Isaiah 4:2-6, Acts 1:12-17, 21-26

WEEK THREE | JOY

An Advent Blessing | “The Light shines through”

Friday, December 19

The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness;
the darkness couldn't put it out.

The cracks are showing God

In our thinking, in our responses, in our
lifestyles

The seams are coming apart God....

In our hope, in our trust, in our health

The chasms are getting deep God....

In our politics, in our communities, in our
relationships.

The darkness threatens to claim these voids,
Making us afraid.

But it cannot.

Through the threadbare fabric,

Between the shattered pieces,

Under the cracking paint

Light is seeping through.

Buoyant Light that lifts,

Tenacious Light that pulls,

Holy light that restores.

The Light that shines in the darkness

Is claiming us still and again.

Today's entry is written by **Sarah Iverson**

Lectionary Readings for Today:

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19, Isaiah 30:19-26, Acts 13:16-25

WEEK THREE | JOY

Looking towards Sunday

Saturday, December 20

Making the right decision – it’s hard work, isn’t it? I try to “do the right thing.” But I second guess myself and over think things sometimes. Then, after I make a decision, I worry that circumstances might change and I’ll be required to make a different decision. Uff! Do you experience this too?

Joseph had thought very hard about doing the right thing when he learned Mary was pregnant. Joseph had made the best decision he could.

But before he could act on his own decision, an angel of God showed up in a vivid dream. The angel told Joseph to be brave, change his mind, and trust God’s direction to make a different decision.

Joseph had a choice to make when he woke from his dream. He chose obedience to God without knowing all details of how the story would end. Joseph made a different decision, trusting that God would take care of where the story was headed.

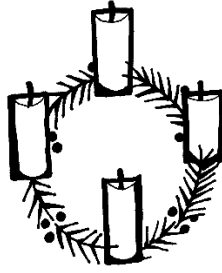
Obedience to God is taking one step at a time in life. We can’t predict what parts of life’s journey will be easy and what parts will be hard. In our decision making, obedience to God means looking for God’s insight through reading scripture and practicing prayer. It means thinking deeply before making a decision and even asking other people we trust to help us discern a next step. Then it is a matter of making the next best decision we can - each and every day.

As we try to walk in obedience to God, Joseph and the rest of us have one incredible promise that holds us. The child soon to be born of Mary – shall be known as Emmanuel, which means, “God is with us.” We aren’t to be afraid of our next step or next decision, because God has now entered into life in-person with us, to accompany us in every step we take along life’s way

Today’s entry is written by **Pastor Sheryl Erickson.**

Lectionary Readings for this Sunday:

Isaiah 7:10-16, Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19, Romans 1:1-7, Matthew 1:18-25



Week Four

Love

“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable.”

- C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (1898-1963)

WEEK FOUR | LOVE

Come, Lord Jesus, Come: A Candle Lighting Ceremony for Advent

Sunday, December 21 | Fourth Sunday in Advent

Leader:

Aimless searching, lost in the night, come, Lord Jesus, come.

Deep in darkness, longing for light, come, Lord Jesus, come.

All:

**Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our sins and fears release us; let us find our rest in thee.**

Responsive Litany

Advent is marked by a spirit of yearning for peace.

May the world be filled with the peace of Christ.

We long today for peace among nations.

May the world be filled with the peace of Christ.

We long today for peace among races.

May the world be filled with the peace of Christ.

We long today for peace in our hearts and in our lives.

May the world be filled with the peace of Christ.

Candle Lighting

Today we light two candles – the candle of hope and the candle of peace. The light of this second candle reminds us that God’s purpose in sending his Son into the world was to bring peace. We look at the division, the fighting, and the turmoil around us, and we see a world in dire need. We remind ourselves that peace begins with forgiveness, and that forgiveness begins in our hearts.

All:

**Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our sins and fears release us; let us find our rest in thee.**

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Closing Prayer (Or Prayer of the Day)

Gracious God, we thank you for your promise of peace, and we know that because of Christ, peace is possible. We pray today for the nations of the world, that we could find a way to live together in peace. We pray for our brothers and sisters everywhere, that we could become more forgiving, more understanding, and more loving to one another. Flood our hearts with the light of peace today so that we might take that light and spread your love to the whole world. Amen.

Words by Charles Wesley, Additional Words & Music by Joel Raney

Music Monday: “Everlasting Light” – Mosaic MSC

Monday, December 22

“You're the horizon, the bright...The glimmer that breaks the constant night...You are the brilliance, the dream...The evidence of things unseen...Even the darkest days are temporary—You are the everlasting light.” “You are the everlasting light, shining on the darkest night; You are the everlasting light, shining through my life.”

Mosaic MSC is the worship collective born out of Mosaic Church in Los Angeles, a community known for artistic creativity, multicultural identity, and a deep commitment to sharing faith through beauty and imagination. Since releasing their first recordings in the mid-2010s, they have become a significant voice in modern worship music, blending poetic lyrics with reflective, atmospheric soundscapes. “Everlasting Light” quickly became one of their most loved Advent and Christmas pieces, drawing listeners into an experience of hope that feels both intimate and expansive. Its imagery of horizon, brilliance, and breaking night resonates with the ancient longing at the heart of this season.

As Advent draws to a close, this song meets us in the very places where fear lingers most. The world into which Jesus was born was overshadowed by uncertainty, political tension, and deep human vulnerability—and yet into that landscape came a light the darkness could not overcome. “Even the darkest days are temporary” becomes not simply a lyric but a proclamation that echoes the

Gospel’s steady reassurance: God’s presence is stronger than the shadows. Advent teaches us that hope does not deny fear; instead, it moves straight into it with courage rooted in God’s promise. The everlasting light Mosaic MSC sings about is the same light that guided shepherds

through the night, steadied Mary and Joseph on their uncertain path, and drew magi across great distance toward a child who would change everything.

As we listen, we are invited to ponder the fears we carry—the anxieties we try to manage quietly, the heaviness we hold in our hearts, the shadows

we keep hoping will lift. Advent whispers that these dark places are exactly where God’s light chooses to shine. And as that light breaks into our own lives, we are called to reflect it outward: through compassion that interrupts loneliness, generosity that softens despair, and presence that steadies someone else’s trembling. In this final week of waiting, the song becomes a prayer that the light of Christ will not only surround us but live through us, illuminating the path toward Christmas with courage, trust, and unshakeable hope.



WATCH/LISTEN

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Prayer:

Everlasting Light, Shine in our hearts and guide our steps. May we trust your presence, embrace hope, and share your love with those around us. Lead us into a Christmas full of courage, joy, and faithful service.

Amen.

Lectionary Readings for Today:

Psalm 21, Isaiah 24:1-16a, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

WEEK FOUR | LOVE

Love over Fear

Tuesday, December 23

“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear...” – John 4:18

The fear of cancer can do many things - cause people to change behaviors, create conspiracy theories, prompt lawsuits, or train for a marathon. As an oncologist, I often find the fear of cancer to be misplaced. Cancer is a complex set of diseases reflecting genetic conditions, environmental exposures, and access to good preventive care and early diagnoses. Nevertheless, that fear is something you can feel when you walk into the room of a new patient who was referred to my office to learn about treatment options for a new diagnosis. Google “cancer” and you will often get a lot of wrong and certainly bad advice.

In those clinic appointments, and with the severity of the illnesses I treat, I often get to know the patients and their families quickly by necessity. It is in that setting that I first met Ben, not knowing right away that we both attended Good Shepherd. He described himself as many things: an avid runner, dad, wife, son, music lover, water skier, and (of course) Good Shepherd member. What

wouldn't ever make that list was “cancer patient,” even though that came to dominate his life over the course of his 3+ years battling an aggressive cancer.

It would be easy to see his journey and focus on the cancer recurrence, the side effects, the life cut too short. And all of that is true. But when I met Ben, and when I think of him now, I first think of how much he loved and how loved he was. He was immediately the patient I thought of when I heard the prompt “love over fear.” That kind of love sustains and carries patients and families through incredible trials of chemotherapy side effects, symptoms from the cancer spreading, changes in goals, and eventually transition to end-of-life care. Ben's story whispers that beyond fear's reach, love is what endures, what binds, and what remains.

Written with the permission of Ben's family

Today's entry is written by **Noelle LoConte**.

Lectionary Readings for Today:

Psalms 124, Genesis 9:1-17, Hebrews 11:32-40

WEEK FOUR

Behold & Rejoice

Wednesday, December 24 | Christmas Eve

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Luke 2:10–11 (ESV)

It might sound strange, but one of the most impactful parts of the Nativity story for me is the context into which Jesus was born. The wise men were searching for Jesus not simply to give him gifts, but to find him and report back to Herod so that Herod could kill him. Jesus arrived in a time when baby boys were being murdered by the government. The angel brings news of joy not during a time of peace and prosperity, but in some of the darkest and most brutal circumstances imaginable. The angel asks the shepherds to behold—to look, to notice. The angel invites them to experience joy.

If you watch the news or go on social media, you’ll likely be bombarded with the message that everything is terrible. Recently, our middle school son asked us if we thought his generation was “cooked.” The phrase might be funny, but we don’t want to minimize the feeling. No matter your political affiliation, it’s not hard to see that many of us are lonely, divided, and anxious. And yet, God asks us to seek joy. In fact, depending on the source, the word “rejoice” appears in the Bible between 250–300 times. The poet Jack Gilbert writes, in his poem “A Brief for the Defense,”

We must risk delight. We can do without pleasure, but not delight. Not enjoyment. We must have the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless furnace of this world.

It feels like it should be easy, or at least preferable, to “accept our gladness,” to just be happy! But in a world that’s full of comparison, hustle, instability, uncertain futures, and plain old grief, joy can feel elusive. I’m no joy expert. If anything I tend to be a little pessimistic, but there is a certain time of year, in the fall before we turn our clocks back for more daylight, when the sun is rising as I’m heading into work. Sometimes, I catch the moon going down, too. My daily route to work is a hilly one that passes several open fields, and there are days when the sunrise is simply spectacular—orange seemingly rising up from the ground while the clouds show off their pink underbellies. No matter how tired or rushed I’m feeling (I’m not a morning person either), I sometimes say out loud in our empty van, “well okay, God!” Here we are, embodied on this earth, to love and serve others, yes, but also to slow down and behold, to rejoice.

Today’s entry is written by
Rebekah (and Mark) Hewitt.

First Coming

by Madeline L'Engle

He did not wait till the world was ready,
till men and nations were at peace.
He came when the Heavens were unsteady,
and prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time.
He came when the need was deep and great.
He dined with sinners in all their grime,
turned water into wine.

He did not wait till hearts were pure.
In joy he came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.
To a world like ours, of anguished shame
he came, and his Light would not go out.

He came to a world which did not mesh,
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh
the Maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait till the world is sane
to raise our songs with joyful voice,
for to share our grief, to touch our pain,

He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!



WORSHIP TOGETHER

Candlelight Christmas Eve at Good Shepherd



Madison Campus

4:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m.
& 7:30 p.m.



Verona Campus

10:00 a.m., 4:00 p.m.
& 6:00 p.m.

gslcwi.com/christmas

Good Shepherd
LUTHERAN CHURCH