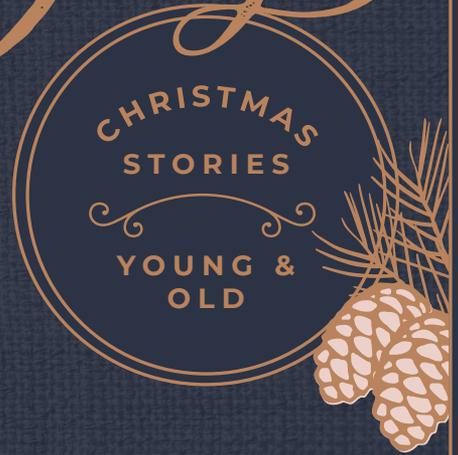




GOOD TIDINGS OF

*Comfort
& Joy*



BE IN CHRIST
ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

2021



November 29 - December 25, 2021

Comfort & Joy

Happy Advent!

It's my joy to introduce you to this year's edition of our BIC Advent Devotional - something that has become a very significant part of our life together as an extended BIC family. Sometimes events in our lives become "touchstones" - practices we enjoy and look forward to which centre us, bring our lives back into focus, things which remind us of what really matters. As we slowly emerge from the pandemic, perhaps now more than ever the historic practice of observing Advent can be a touchstone for us.

And so we invite you to read these devotionals, reflect on the scriptures, sing or hum the carols, make or purchase an advent wreath, light the candles, pray the prayers, and join weekly with a local spiritual community to enter in to the hope of the season. Advent means "to prepare for something good that is expected but not here yet". In all the busyness that comes with our cultural observances of the Christmas, Advent involves an intentional slowing. In that slowing God can speak to us in fresh ways. In that slowing our souls can find rest.

Our theme this year is "Tidings Of Comfort And Joy". We have invited our writers to share stories of Christmas memories and traditions that have impacted them. It is our wish as a BIC Church community that these same stories would impact you as you make new memories of your own. May this year's Advent season be the best one you have ever had! And may your heart be full of both the comfort and joy Jesus offers to all of us!

Charlie Mashinter

Rev. Charlie Mashinter
Executive Director,
The Be In Christ Church Of Canada



The Advent Wreath

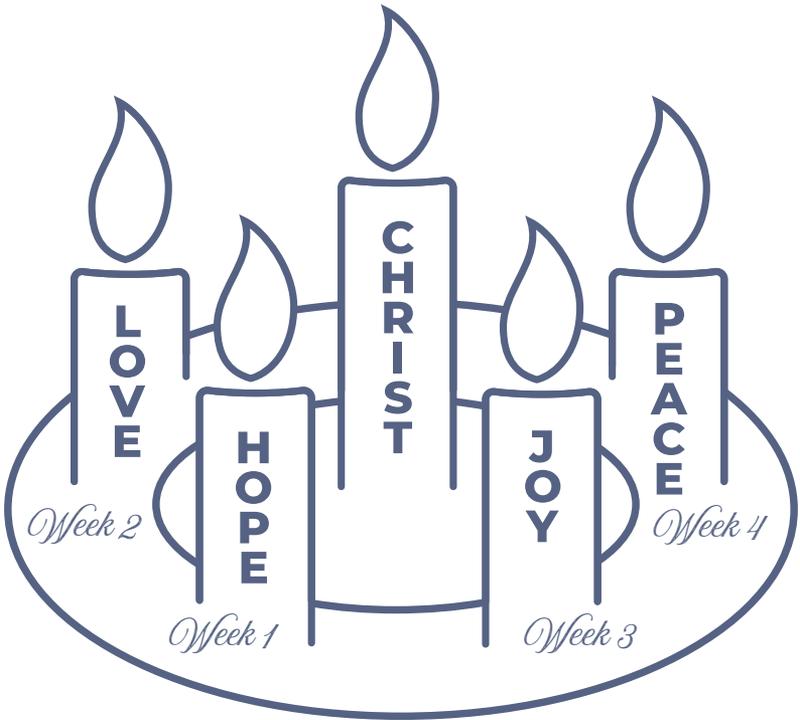


Using an Advent wreath provides us with a beautiful visual centred around the birth of Jesus. The wreath contains four candles representing the four Sundays before Christmas Eve. The candles, placed in a circle, each have a theme: Hope (week one), Love (week two), Joy (week three), and Peace (week four). In the centre of the wreath is a fifth candle, raised higher than the others, known as the Christ Candle.

Advent wreaths come in many shapes and sizes however the traditional shape is a circle that symbolizes God's never-ending love for us.

Light one candle a week during your service or at home during your devotional time. For the first week, light only the Hope candle. On the second week, light both the Hope and Love candles. On week three, light Hope, Love and Joy. On the fourth week, light Hope, Love, Joy and Peace. On Christmas Eve, light all four candles followed by the Christ candle in the very centre!

When you find a special place in your Church or home to place the wreath, determine which side is the front. In your sanctuary, it most likely will be facing the congregation. When facing the wreath to light it, the first candle will be at the front of the wreath on the left-hand side. Next, move clockwise around the wreath and light the candle at the back left. For the third candle, you hop across the wreath and light the candle on the front right. The fourth candle is at the back right.



Find detailed instructions at beinchrist.ca/advent



The Birth of Jesus (The Message Version)

Once Upon a Time...

About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David's town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant.

While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel.

There were shepherds camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."

At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises:

Glory to God in the heavenly heights,
Peace to all men and women on earth who please him.

As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherds talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us." They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherds were impressed.

Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The shepherds returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told!

Hope



CANDLE LIGHTING *Liturgy*

Reader 1:

"I pray that God, the source of Hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident Hope through the power of the Holy Spirit."
Romans 15:13 NLT

Reader 2:

The Poet Emily Dickinson writes,
"Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul."

Hope is more than wishful thinking. Hope is the Spirit of God dwelling within us, reminding us we are never alone. Hope is our active commitment to being God's faithful people, whether we walk an easy path or face fiery trials.

As we light the candle of Hope,
we embrace God's presence among us.
May we remember this Hope yesterday, today, and always.

Reader 1:

(While lighting the first candle)

Today we light the first candle of Advent, the candle of Hope.

All:

We place our Hope in Jesus today and every day.

Prayer:

Jesus, during this holy season of Advent,
help us to see you in all whom we encounter.
God of Hope, may we seek you.
We seek you in the crude manger,
a child born to save the world.
May your Hope be a comfort to all
who long for justice and peace.
God of Hope, we seek you.
May your Hope fill our hearts and grace our lips
so that we might reflect your Hope for all the world.

Amen.



November 29

GOOD GIFTS AND UNEXPECTED PACKAGES

Melissa Richer, Cross Roads Church



Read *Matthew 7:11 (NIV)*

“If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”

Confession: I was a Christmas snooper as a kid. I was an expert at picking tape and carefully unwrapping the ends of gifts to peek inside.

When I was twelve, the only gift I asked for was a baseball glove. My dad loved giving our family gifts and delighted in the excitement of Christmas. He took great care to creatively wrap gifts so my snooping wouldn't ruin his surprises. That Christmas, he bought me a brand- new Rawlings baseball glove. He wrapped it, box inside of a box, inside of box topped off with a bow.

On Christmas morning, I fought back disappointment as I received my last gift in its disguised box. I hoped it was a glove, but the package certainly didn't look, feel, or smell like one. As I unwrapped each nested box, my hope increased. Finally, in the last box, I found a glove chosen just for me!

Sometimes, the best gifts don't come in packages we expect. Sometimes, our best gifts and our most tremendous growth in life come through seasons of heartbreak or pain. At Christmas, we celebrate God coming to us in an unexpected package. Jesus came as a vulnerable baby rather than a king, or an elite religious leader, or a military commander. The hope of Christmas is that things are not simply what they appear on the surface; through Jesus, God is restoring all things – even the most painful of our experiences.

I didn't know it then, but that was the last Christmas I would spend with my dad before he passed away unexpectedly three months later. I still miss him. Yet, grief broke my heart open to the depth of God's love and care for me. Grief has been the unexpected package containing the best gift.

Prayer God, our great Redeemer, in our pain may we find your peace; and in our helplessness may we hold firmly to hope. Amen.

Ask Spend some time considering what "good gifts" God wants you to receive from Him today?

Listen *O Come Let Us Adore Him by Maverick City / TRIBL featuring Chandler Moore and Jackalyn*

Reflect *Advent Unborn (2018) by Mike Moyers*



November 30

JESUS IS THE REASON FOR THE SEASON

Andrés Ricon, REUNION Colombia



Read *Isaiah 9:2 (NLT)*

“The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.”

I was born in a predominantly Catholic home like the vast majority of Colombians (at least 40 years ago), and I remember that I never really understood why we celebrated Christmas. We gathered together as a family, received gifts; there were parties, meals, and a lot of celebrations, but I don't remember hearing anyone during my childhood or adolescence explain to my siblings or me the reason for the celebration.

Christmas takes on a very different meaning when the reason for why we celebrate is understood. One of the most beautiful prophecies about the hope that Christmas would bring in the Old Testament, written around 700 years before it happened, is in the book of Isaiah:

"People who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine."

This text illuminates the new hope for all humanity. That the darkness would not be eternal, that the darkness was not so dense that the love of a God wouldn't pierce it in search of his lost creation. The light would come, the light would shine, and that light came. That light shone, that night on the manger, the light of the world descended and became like one of us so that we could be like him, thus illuminating our hearts and lives, bringing hope to a new creation, giving meaning to the celebration, allowing us to celebrate, enjoy, eat, laugh, play and live the abundant life that gave us our new birth.

Jesus gives us hope, salvation, and the reason to celebrate for many people like you and me.

Prayer Dear Lord, I thank you for giving me hope through your incarnation, for the hope we have in you today and every day. Thank you for giving me reasons to celebrate life, for giving me a future and hope. When I was plunged in darkness, you came and brought light to illuminate my path to give me life. Continue to show me ways that I can bring your hope and light into the community I find myself a part of. Amen.

Ask How do you plan to be light, bring hope, and help others so that they, in turn, understand the reason for this season and why we celebrate Jesus' birth?

Listen *Saviour of the Nations Come by Holy City Hymns*

Reflect *The Huron Carol by Francis Tyrell*



December 1

THE GREATEST STORY OF HOPE

Chris Chase,
The Meeting House, Brantford Parish



Read *Luke 1:32-33 (MSG)*

"He will be great, be called 'Son of the Highest.' The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David; He will rule Jacob's house forever—no end, ever, to his kingdom."

I'm not a fan of snow on principle. Snow means shovelling. Snow outside means my kids will somehow bring snow INSIDE.

Snow means cold.

Snow means winter wins.

And I hate to lose.

Still, I wouldn't be lying if I said I always hope it snows on Christmas Eve and morning. There's something special about opening gifts while watching the yule log channel TV (we ain't blessed with the fireplace, y'all) and taking a glance out the window to see snowflakes slowly cascade towards the ground. At that moment, the thoughts of shovelling wait. All that matters is Hope, family, and whether or not we kept gift receipts. Hope keeps Christmas special.

Christmas is the story of the arrival of Hope. From Genesis 3, humanity is promised that Hope would one day arrive to crush all evils and restore life to mankind. Scriptures allude to this Hope through rituals, theophanies, and prophetic writings, but when Mary is confronted by the angel Gabriel in Luke 1:26-38, the World is introduced to hope to come as a baby. Gabriel tells Mary, "He will be great, be called 'Son of the Highest.' The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David; He will rule Jacob's house forever—no end, ever, to his kingdom." (1:32-33 MSG). "The hopes and fears of all the years are met" on the streets of Bethlehem

through the cries of the newborn King. From there, this Gift of Hope would change the World; from his birth announcement to his first steps, from his teenage independence to his adult ministry, from his death for the World's sins to his resurrection – Jesus' birth is the most incredible hope story of all time.

Prayer Lord Jesus, we thank you that we cannot only find Hope through you, but you are also, in fact, Hope personified. May we remember what the announcement of your coming did to your people. May we not forget that feeling each time we say your name and invite you into our coming and going. May we hold on to hope in the present while looking forward to the Hope that is to come through your love and presence. Amen.

Ask How has Hope kept you in peace when fear tries to lure you into despair?

Listen *Mary Did You Know* by One Voice Children's Choir

Reflect *The Annunciation (1616)* by Jacques Bellenge



December 2

CHRISTMAS MEMORIES IN OMI'S KITCHEN

Corinne Jones Chua - Bluewater Church



Read *John 1:9 (NIV)*

“The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.”

When we were little girls, my sister and I spent December afternoons in Omi’s bustling kitchen as she began preparations for the family Christmas Eve feast. Our particular task was to help roll and cut the dough for the gingerbread cookies. As the cookies baked, we sang carols and imagined all the fun we would have when our out-of-town cousins arrived. But, once the baking pans were out of the oven, we wanted to get right to the good part— decorating! Thank the Lord for the patience of grandmothers, or all our icing would have melted off the still-too-hot cookies. Once cool, we had total freedom to decorate them however we saw fit. My sister and I felt that loading the cookies with icing and sprinkles was more important than careful artistry.

Over time, the contented anticipation of two little girls awaiting family Christmas with their grandmother has seemed too simple for a complicated world. This year, especially, I feel the weight of things that divide. We’ve been separated by distance, as we follow regulations designed to keep us safe during a pandemic. Many of us have discovered a divide in our ideology or theology, and we aren’t too sure what to do about it.

But when I feel the heaviness settle on my shoulders, I turn to Jesus. Jesus gave up his divine nature to become human and dwell with us in the middle of the messiness. Jesus came to demonstrate a new way of being human and to establish a new kingdom marked by love and the flourishing of all. Jesus, our rallying King and loving shepherd, is actively leading us into new life. And I find myself back where I was in Omi’s kitchen, with a sense of intimacy and contentment in the preparation and anticipation of what’s to come.

Prayer Lord Jesus, draw our attention to the ways your Spirit is working in and around us, that we might co-labor with you to build your kingdom in our midst this Advent season. Amen.

Ask In what ways is Jesus filling you with fresh hope for the beauty that is yet to come?

Listen *O Come, O Come Emmanuel by The Piano Guys*

Reflect *O Come Emmanuel by Michael Torevell*



December 3

GABRIEL AND THE VAGABOND

Dean Morris, REUNION Richmond



Read *Romans 15:13 (The Voice)*

“I pray that God, the source of all hope, will infuse your lives with an abundance of joy and peace in the midst of your faith so that your hope will overflow through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Each year as Advent begins, I am reminded of our innate longing for a better world. And while the state of our own lives, and certainly the state of the world, can leave us feeling hopeless, Advent always reminds me of the potency of hope.

Hope is not sunny optimism or wishful thinking, nor is it an assurance that things will work out in the end. Instead, hope is a defiant act, or perhaps a rebellion against the narrative of despair that we often play on repeat in our minds and on our newsfeeds. Hope takes courage and a willingness to lean into the vulnerable work of embodying hopefulness in a time when cynicism and pessimism seem like the easy path to tread.

However, when we choose to embody hope, we make it real and raw. It moves from some sort of “out there” desire to an “in our midst” reality. Living as people of hope is a profoundly incarnational act. Hope invites us to attach to the world, and its inhabitants, rather than escaping it. And living this way encourages others to do the same, embody hope, become full of hope or hopeful.

Irish singer-songwriter Foy Vance has a beautiful song called “Gabriel & the Vagabond.” He sings about the transformative power of a simple act of hope. The poetic story of a song tells of the angel Gabriel who gives hope to a down and out ‘vagabond,’ which becomes a bearer of hope to a young girl living on the street. It is a poignant reminder that hope is an action. It is not simply something we have inside us, but we can share it with

others who can, like the vagabond, have and spread hope.

I love that Advent begins in the darkest months of our winter and calls us to hope. I love that the Hope candle is the first we light, as it breaks the darkness and reminds us that hope is a powerful force that can illuminate our world.

Prayer Jesus, the hope of the world, may we as your people embody the hope you have given us, that through our living, we may draw people to you. Amen.

Ask Consider the ways you may embody hope this season, allowing it to overflow from you to others.

Listen *O Light by Gungor and All Sons and Daughters*

Reflect *The Christ of the Breadlines (1950) by Fritz Eichenberg*





FOR YOUR *Table*

Mini Cranberry Brie Bites

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 (8-oz.) tube crescent dough
- Cooking spray, for pan
- Flour, for surface
- 1 (8-oz.) wheel of brie
- 1/2 c. whole berry cranberry sauce
- 1/4 c. chopped pecans
- 6 sprigs of rosemary, cut into 1" pieces

DIRECTIONS:

- Preheat oven to 375° and grease a mini muffin tin with cooking spray. On a lightly floured surface, roll out crescent dough, and pinch together seams. Cut into 24 squares. Place squares into muffin tin slots.
- Cut brie into small pieces and place inside the crescent dough. Top with a spoonful of cranberry sauce, some chopped pecans, and one little sprig of rosemary.
- Bake until the crescent pastry is golden, about 15 minutes.

Recipe from delish.com



Notes

Love



CANDLE LIGHTING *Liturgy*

(Reader 2 lights the candle of HOPE from the previous week)

Reader 1:

‘Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:
Because of the Lord’s great LOVE we are not consumed, for his
compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is
your faithfulness.’ Lamentations 3: 21-23

Reader 2:

The Poet George Herbert writes,
“Love bade me welcome, but my soul drew back.”

It’s hard to take in the enormity of God’s love-made flesh in
Jesus Christ. We look at the candles and enjoy the special music
of the season. It’s easier to listen to the radio or buy the
red cup at the coffee shop than to dwell on the truth.

The psalmist knew it long before Jesus:
“For with The Lord, there is steadfast love, and with him is great
power to redeem.” God became one of us, out of love for all of
us, then and now and forever. When we light the candle of love,
we stop in awe of God’s unending love.

Reader 1:

(While lighting the second candle)

Today we light the second candle of Advent, the candle of love.

All:

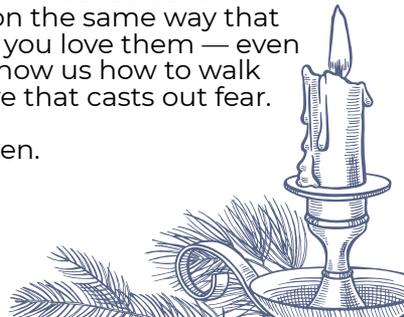
God, your steadfast love surrounds us.
Your compassion never fails; it is new every morning.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for loving us so much that You gave Your Son for
us, even before we loved You. Thank You for inviting us into Your
family. For all of us who are brothers and sisters in faith, please
help us to love one another as you have called us to.

Father, please help us to see every person the same way that
You see them. Help us love them the way you love them — even
when they don’t love us back. Please show us how to walk
continually in Your love, that perfect love that casts out fear.

We love you, Lord. Amen.



December 6

"I'M RIGHT HERE"

Kristin & Wesley Wood, REUNION Belleville



Read 1 John 4:18 (MSG)

"There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear."

"Fear's a powerful thing, baby; It can turn your heart black; you can trust" - Bruce Springsteen

Taking our kids to see Santa has always been an experience. What would they say? How would they react? As much as our kids love Christmas and the tradition of Santa, they are actually not too fond of the guy. There's always one that is scared to death, screaming, and unable to sit or speak.

As parents, we do our best to prepare our kids for the in-person experience, but fear is a powerful thing. Fear can come out of nowhere. But you get it. The last two years have shown us the power of fear. So in those moments of fear with Santa or otherwise, we, like most parents, recite this little profound statement to our kids, "I'm right here."

We love that some of the first words recorded about Jesus' birth and, for that matter, his resurrection are, "Don't be afraid." AKA... "I'm right here." So take a moment and breathe in God's arrival to you, "Don't be afraid, I'm right here."

Breath in 2,3,4 and out 2,3,4
Breath in, "Don't Be Afraid."
Breath Out, "I'm Right Here."

Fear is a powerful thing that loses its teeth in the presence of love. Eugene Peterson translated 1 John 4:18, "There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear." These words, "There is no room," are not a challenge but the invited reality for a life brimming with the presence of God. "Sorry! There's no more room for fear, my spirit's full." Or is it?

Prayer Jesus, may we make time this Christmas to sit and hear God's gentle whisper, "Don't be afraid. I'm right here." Amen.

Ask How might the arrival of Christ's presence impact a situation that currently brings you to fear?

Listen *Child of Love by We the Kingdom*

Reflect *Nativity Birth Of a King (2019 Production Cover Art)*



December 7

A GIFT TAG FOR JESUS

Zulema Evans, Jesus Collective



Read *Psalm 9:1 (NIV)*

“I will give thanks to you, LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.”

Do you remember those gift tags we used to put on Christmas presents (before there were gift bags)? They had spaces where you would write who the gift was for and who it was from.

One holiday, my mom decided to use these gift tags as part of a family devotional. She grabbed some green construction paper, cut out large versions of the gift tags, and handed them out to the family. She began by asking us to reflect on our lives over the past year. What brought us joy, what made us smile, what helped us crawl out of the mire. Then, she asked us to write down on the gift tag a gift that we received from Jesus with those reflections in mind. Once we finished filling out the tag, we read different passages of scripture that reminded us of who Jesus is, his character, his love, his promises.

After reflecting on those things, she asked us to flip over the gift tag and write down a gift we would like to give Jesus. I froze; what was I going to give Jesus? What was I going to give to the Saviour of the world who can fulfill all my needs? What could he possibly want from me?

And then I heard it, something so simple that I tend to forget it sometimes. I could give Jesus my love. And this simple gift of love gives so much more. Think about the people in your life that you love. Because you love them, you trust them, have faith in them, take care of them, are willing to put them first. It's the same with Jesus.

Because we love Jesus – we trust him, have faith in his promises, trust him to lead us, are faithful to him, and we put him first.

Prayer Jesus, continue to help us love you. Amen.

Ask What gift are you going to give Jesus this year?

Listen *What Child is This - Child of the Poor*
by *The Hound and Fox*

Reflect *Meeting of Mary and Elizabeth (1460-1520)*
by *Marx Reichlich*



December 8

LOVE CAME TO TOWN

Andrew and Charmaine Stulp, Welland BIC
Church and BIC Canada Global



Read *John 15:13 (NIV)*

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

Two specific miracles stand out to me in scripture.

The first is the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ which we celebrate specifically at this time of year, and the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For Charmaine and I, both of these miracles reveal the incredible love that Jesus has for us. We encourage you to listen to the song Love Is A Miracle by Maverick City featuring Majesty Rose and Bri Babineaux. One of the lines in this song is “you were singing over me,” which is a quote from Zephaniah 3:17, which is one of Charmaine’s favourite verses. One of my favourite Christmas songs of all time isn’t a Christmas song. Still, every time I hear it, it makes me think of Jesus coming to Bethlehem even though the song uses more of an Easter theme than Christmas. The song is Love Came To Town by U2, featuring B.B. King. When I listen to this song, the visual that always pops into my mind is Jesus being born in Bethlehem, even though this is not mentioned in the lyrics. The knowledge of knowing that Jesus would leave Heaven behind to be born in such a “lowly” yet loving way for me reiterates the chorus “Love Came to Town.”

Charmaine and I both share a love for music, and we share a passion for Jesus. Our hope for you as you read and reflect on this short writing is that you will be filled with the love of Jesus and that His love would overflow and shine through you as you endeavour to become more like him and share the great news of Jesus’ ultimate love.

We encourage you to memorize John 15:13.

Prayer May God fill your life with love, joy, and peace this Holiday Season and throughout the New Year. May His love be found in you this Christmas and always. Amen.

Ask How is God inviting you this Advent season to share his beautiful and unfailing love to those around you?

Listen *Love is a Miracle by Maverick City TRIBL*

Reflect *Love Came Down (2018) by Tyler Guinn*



December 9

GOD WITH US

Karyn & Jeremy Conway, REUNION Brockville



Read *Romans 15:13 (NIV)*

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

For our family, Christmastime is such a special time of the year. From the shimmering Christmas lights in the evening sky to decorating the tree, to pulling out old Christmas albums and ornaments, baking holiday favourites, to spending time with family and friends. It's a season of wonder, a season where love and hope are often renewed in our hearts.

I took some time to reflect on Christmas' past, and one childhood memory quickly came to mind. Growing up in a small village, it was one of my family's annual trips to Kingston, the BIG city I lived closest to! Every year my family and I would head into town for Christmas shopping and dinner out. As I thought about this day, I could feel the smile grow on my face, and for a brief moment, I was lost thinking about why this is one of my stand-out memories. I believe it stands out since this kind of outing was not a regular activity in my family throughout the year. As a farming family, this was the one day a year that our Dad took the day off from chores to come shopping and spend the whole time helping us pick out items for other family members. My Dad was simply there, present with us, and we were fully present with each other, not hurried but taking in all the moments, not wanting it to end.

During this season, we hear the name "Emmanuel" quite a lot. It's a beautiful thing to remember that God was and is with us in Jesus and invites us to be "with" others. His presence with us is always and in every moment. He's right there, fully invested in everything we are, everything we experience- the beautiful and the ugly, and in everything we do. I think moments where we are

intentional about being fully present to God fill us with love and hope. I guess that's what hope and love do; they fill us and allow us to move forward in the good and challenging times; in turn, this enables us to move outward in love and service of others because hope is so much bigger than us.

Prayer Heavenly Father, I pray that as we focus on You being present to us through Jesus and Your Spirit, that we would take moments to pause long enough to be aware that our full presence (one of love, support, understanding, and grace) is a beautiful gift to offer to those we love, those we are learning to love and to the stranger that comes into our path. Amen.

Ask What is one thing you can do to intentionally show up and simply be present in the life or lives of family members, friends, church community, neighbours, and co-workers?

Listen *Emmanuel God with Us by African Children's Choir*

Reflect *God is with Us (2006) by Hanna Varghese*



December 10

THE GREATEST ACT OF LOVE

Sarah Lyew,

The Meeting House, Toronto Uptown Parish



Read 1 John 4:16 (NLT)

“We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.”

A quiet night, in a small town, in a not so quiet stable, entered the greatest act of love in human form. And what an entrance it was. In the shame of a scandal, in the terror of an occupation, a tiny baby changed history in the fears of a young new couple. The Hopes and Fears of all the years are met on that night.

Love entered the picture, and the story has never been the same. This love wasn't an easy, cheap love. It wasn't a love of power or dominance; it wasn't a love driven by fear, shame, or messy family dynamics. It isn't a demanding love that pushes and nags.

This love was and is different.

The love that Jesus offers is a love that transforms. It's a love that, as we grow in understanding and experience, it absolutely flips our hearts and minds not only for him but also for those around us. As we experience what it is to have our deepest fears and shame met with gentleness, kindness, compassion, grace, and love, we begin to learn to offer that love to others.

Hope begins to take over.

This hope changes lives. Instead of the fear of being too much or not enough, we begin to understand what it was to be loved as we are. Instead of trying to strive to earn love, we begin to learn to exist in it, to settle in it, to trust it. This isn't a love that demands perfection, cleanliness, or is dependent on the direction of the wind. Instead, it is a love we can depend on, build on, and come

back to whatever our state and know we belong to. Whatever your story, whatever your shame, whatever your fear, you're wanted as you are, you're loved as you are, and you belong.

Prayer Jesus, by your Spirit may you draw us into a deeper understanding of your love. Help us to love others as you have loved us. Amen.

Ask Is there fear or shame that you think holds back God's love for you? What do you think Jesus says to you in response to that?

Listen *O Little Town of Bethlehem* by JJ Heller

Reflect *The Census at Bethlehem (1566)*
by Pieter Bruegel the Elder





FOR YOUR *Table*

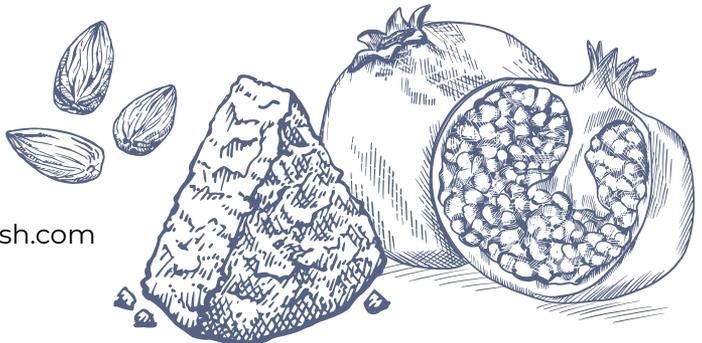
Parmesan Brussel Sprout Pomegranate Salad

INGREDIENTS:

- 5 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 5 tbsp. lemon juice
- 1/4 c. freshly chopped parsley
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 2 lb. Brussels sprouts, halved and thinly sliced (about 8 cups)
- 1/2 c. chopped toasted almonds
- 1/2 c. pomegranate seeds
- Shaved Parmesan, for serving

DIRECTIONS:

- In a medium bowl, whisk olive oil, lemon juice, parsley, 2 teaspoons salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper until combined.
- Add Brussels sprouts and toss until completely coated.
- Let sit, tossing occasionally, for at least 20 minutes and up to 4 hours before serving.
- Fold in almonds and pomegranate seeds and garnish with shaved Parmesan before serving.



Recipe from delish.com

Notes

Joy



CANDLE LIGHTING *Liturgy*

(Reader 2 lights the candles of Hope and Love.)

Reader 1:

“Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!” Psalm 95: 1-2

Reader 2:

The Poet Mary Oliver writes, “If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don’t hesitate. Give in to it...life has some possibility left...Joy is not made to be a crumb.”

It seemed impossible, but the Israelites returned to their home from exile in Babylon. The prophet Isaiah offered a song of celebration. Come and rejoice! Eat and drink! Get your priorities in order! Can’t you see that God is close by?
The people rejoiced, amazed to have a second chance.
The end of the story has yet to be written.

When we light the candle of Joy, we celebrate the One who has come, is coming, and will come again.

Reader 1:

(While lighting the third candle)

Today we light the third candle of Advent, the candle of Joy.

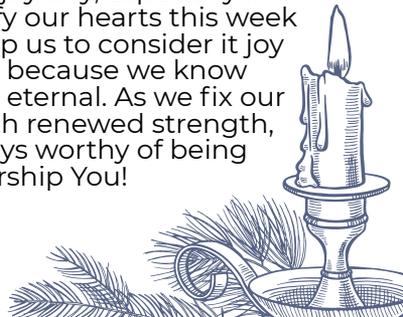
All:

Jesus, whatever we face in life,
may we seek and embrace your gift of joy.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, Thank You for the joy that entered the world when Jesus was born. Thank you for becoming God with us. Lord, sometimes it’s challenging to live joyfully, especially in complicated or busy seasons. Please purify our hearts this week and remind us that You’re in control. Help us to consider it joy when we experience trials of any kind because we know You’re creating something beautiful and eternal. As we fix our eyes and hearts on You, fill our souls with renewed strength, courage, and hope. Lord, you are always worthy of being praised – and we want to worship You!

Amen.



December 13

OUR GLORY AND JOY

Ben and Amy Crace, REUNION Kuwait



Read *1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 (NIV)*

“For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.”

On our third Christmas together, we were living in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Both of our grandmothers had died within weeks of each other, but we hadn't mourned and grieved for the loss. Our mission board had us on a tight schedule, and we had shipped out before my grandmother's funeral. She was my first grandparent to pass and the only one whose funeral I would miss. We would miss many more significant family milestones and changes, living thousands of miles away, separated from our families and long-time friends. Life back home carried on without us, and Christmases were difficult, especially that first one.

After digging through three external hard drives, I finally found pictures from that Christmas time nearly two decades ago. We had three celebrations; the first: our Ethiopian language teachers came to our house for a meal earlier in the week. They are all smiles while we play the nervous hosts. The second, it's just me and Amy on Christmas morning, taking pictures of each other with the gifts we had bought and the ones that loved ones had sent in the mail. Things of yesteryear: Law and Order DVDs and a Matchbox 20 CD. The third celebration was Christmas dinner with all the other missionaries from our board, our new family. The last picture in the folder is just Amy and I sitting in front of a tiny tree her mom had mailed to us. We hung what we could on it, including a gold-plated aspen leaf from our honeymoon, and set the timer on the camera. The camera was on a stool, so the perspective is that of a child. And, seeing our younger selves' bright eyes and hesitant smiles, we do indeed look like children.

The memories of loss and separation, together with gathering

and celebration, bring me back to a simple definition of joy, one I see refracted in Cocco's work: being together. Paul the Apostle, writing to the Thessalonians, remarks: "For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy." I imagine the Father telling us the same thing: we are His glory and His joy—so much so that to be with us—Immanuel—He emptied Himself and became one of us. And to be with us forever, He died, or as the writer of Hebrews says, "For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross."

Together, forever. Our joy and His.

Prayer Jesus, thank You for calling us into a family. May we have eyes to see and ears to hear the ways You are inviting us and others to share in the joy of that communion. Amen.

Ask As we meditate on shared presence as joy, who needs your presence, your attention this Christmas? To whom can we be that witness to the mystery of incarnation, ours and His?

Listen *Go Tell It on the Mountain*
by King and Country Feat. Gabby Barrett

Reflect *In the City of David* by Jorge Cocco



December 14

JESUS CAME TO BE OUR JOY

Written by Christie Latta

(pictured with husband John Latta),
The Meeting House, Burlington Parish



Read *Romans 15:13 (ESV)*

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”

It was the Christmas I will never forget. Yet, it seems like a lifetime ago. And somehow, it seems like yesterday.

Carols played. Lights were strung. Trees were decorated. Everything looked festive and normal. And yet, there was something uncertain—different—about that Christmas.

Everything seemed much quieter. There were no parties, no family get-togethers, no leisurely strolls through the mall searching for gifts. Instead, life, as we'd known it in past years, had been stilled. Hushed. Changed.

But that Christmas, amid Covid lockdown and the quiet and slow that those days brought, I found myself becoming more aware of Jesus. I became more in tune with the divine, sacred reality of His living presence. Of His presence bringing light amid the darkness, joy amid difficulty.

Jesus didn't enter our world to simply talk about joy. Instead, he came to be our joy. Joy came as a Person! He came to show us that joy does not depend on our circumstances, job, or relationship status. Jesus came, as the fullness of joy, so we can know and experience true, lasting joy for ourselves—in every situation and circumstance, through Him.

This year, as I string the lights, decorate the tree, and play the carols, I remember. As I wrap the gifts and plan the parties, I remember.

I remember that true, lasting, deep-soul joy isn't found in hustle, bustle, food, visits—as wonderful as these are. Instead, joy is truly and entirely found in Jesus.

Prayer Jesus, we look to You to be the fullness of joy in our lives this season and every day to come. Amen.

Ask Will you take time this season to remember where your true, lasting joy is found?

Listen *Praise the Lord (Joyful Joyful)* by Shane and Shane

Reflect *The Birth of Jesus Christ (1952-1953)*
by Woonbo Kim-Ki Chang



December 15

CAROLLING JOY

Charlene Neuman,
Westheights Community Church



Read *Psalm 92:4 (NLT)*

“You thrill me, Lord, with all you have done for me! I sing for joy because of what you have done.”

Every year, on December 24th, we—that is, an all-ages church group of some 30 volunteers spent the afternoon jumping in and out of vehicles, following a marvellously packed schedule visiting retirement homes, nursing homes, and hospital visits. We squished into semi-private rooms, lined up in hallways, hugged our knees, or sat cross-legged in TV Rooms. And in the evening, until nearly midnight, we pressed on with progressive visits, invading the homes of our own, mostly older, parishioners across the city.

Did I say we were carolling? Yes, carolling. For 11 hours, on Christmas Eve! And did I say we were all Chinese?!

The Chinese are serious about their singing, especially when it comes to anything classified as ‘inspirational.’ In this case, there was no rehearsal, but there were definitely assigned parts. And there was no point singing if you weren’t going to sing with all your heart!

My parents didn’t grow up celebrating Christmas. It was a foreign holiday of a foreign religion with foreign customs that my hard-working, now-Canadian, now-Christian mother made valiant attempts to emulate - by creating her own low-cost versions of traditions we saw on TV. So for us, Christmas was never in danger of being crowded out by decorations or presents, nor by baking or bright lights. Not even by the rare family gathering, where kids didn’t know each other, and adults seemed tired and resigned. Christmas had to find its own significance in our lives.

And for me, at least for a while, Christmas was about a joy that went on for hours. The joy of community, the joy of singing loudly with multiple harmonies! The joy of singing about the Great Joy, God with Us, all while blessing people who grinned back at us, thankful that they were not alone.

Prayer God, I marvel at your Good News for all people! It brings Great Joy that invigorates the weary and elates the mundane. Fill me, Lord, with this joy as I consider the wonder of Emmanuel. Amen.

Ask For some people, discovering Church community and being a part of how the Church lives and celebrates the gospel is the greatest joy they have ever known. How does that idea change how you view and participate in the mission of the Church?

Listen *Hallelujah by Carrie Underwood and John Legend*

Reflect *Adoration of the Shepherds (1663)
by Abraham Hondius*



December 16

THE BEST CHRISTMAS EVER!

Natalie Frisk,
The Meeting House, Brantford Parish



Read *Psalm 118:24*

“This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.”

Every Christmas when I was a kid, there was a flow to our mornings. First, we'd wait for the excruciating amount of time it took for our parents to awake. Then, my dad would head to the basement, where a rec. room housed our Christmas tree. Next, he'd set up a video camera to capture our youthful excitement. At the same time, my two older brothers and I would wait eagerly on the stairs. Finally, my mom would find her Bible and pour a cup of coffee.

We had to wait until my dad gave the official word, and we'd run down the stairs to see the tree in all its glory with presents filling the space under its boughs. And every year, I, in the squeaky voice I had as a child, would declare, "This is the best Christmas ever!" (Note, dear reader, we would then proceed to sit on a couch as my mother read us the story of Jesus' birth from Luke while we distractedly examined the presents under the tree.)

From year to year, it didn't matter what the gifts were, from the brand-new Nintendo gaming system to a creepy porcelain doll, every year was the "best Christmas ever" because it was the one we were experiencing at that moment.

We often access a kind of childlike joy at Christmas more readily than at any other time. It is that "best Christmas ever!" kind of joy that we allow to swell in our hearts and invade our lives. What if that joy didn't just exist for us at Christmas? What if that was an all-year-round kind of joy? Now, I don't mean some surfacy, happy-clappy kind of joy. But a profound joy that can coexist even alongside grief. A joy that we can offer to others – gifted to us by

the Spirit. A joy we first discovered wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. A joy we can uncover in our hearts each and every day. A joy named Jesus.

Prayer Holy God, thank you for the gift of childlike joy. Help us find our joy and hope in you each and every day that you have made. Let us rejoice. Let us exude your joy and your love. Amen.

Ask Can you recall an experience in your childhood of deep joy? Where do you presently find your joy?

Listen *Angels We Have Heard on High by the Pentatonix*

Reflect *The Nativity by Christopher Ruane*



December 17

A FAMILY HOPE

Dagmar Morgan-Sinclair,
The Meeting House, East Hamilton Parish



Read *Romans 15:13 (NIV)*

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Every year for Christmas, our family gathers at my uncle’s home in our city’s East End overlooking the majestic bluffs. In the summer, the skyline is dotted with sailboats and the sounds of people. In the winter, a hush comes over that same view blanketed by snow. The view connects seamlessly with the lake, only interrupted by the tiny footprints of deer. My uncle Thomas was always in the kitchen cooking his famous turkey, laughing, and dancing with whoever wandered in. There are stories of our grandmother, who could miraculously cut a pie into perfectly even slices for a gaggle of kids making sure no one else got “the bigger” piece. There were olde Irish songs sung in harmony, while laughter followed by people seated around winding tables, wearing paper crowns and sharing bad jokes like jewelry, all arguing over who gets the stuffing and cranberry sauce.

But perhaps the best part of these family moments was the outside guests. Friends who were far from home, or someone who had no family to celebrate with, or someone maybe who just needed cheering up. Many an adopted “Morgan” has come into our clan this way. There would even be extra gifts on hand to bless the visitors.

These were not moments we drew attention to; no one spoke about it directly. It was just something that happened. Looking back, it is one of my most impactful memories. The simple act of extending our table to offer hope. To do it because hope has been given to us through Jesus. The legacy that we can leave others is to teach by example what it means to experience a hope overflowing easily to others. In this, I see the continued hope that

an unsuspecting moment of kindness or extension can carry the presence of Jesus.

Each Christmas, we experience the story of quiet, humble childbirth in a manger. Jesus came to break bread with all and to break religion for all. This unsuspecting beginning became the story of our salvation and a model to follow as we receive hope and share our hope with the world.

- In honour of Thomas Kingsley Morgan

Prayer Jesus, in this season, let us remember that small, unsuspecting moments can bring hope. No act is too small; no moment is too fleeting. Give eyes to see these moments and opportunities to share your hope with those we encounter. Amen.

Ask Look around you this advent season for signs of hope. Big ones? Little ones? How many can you list?

Listen *Noel by Chris Tomlin Feat. Lauren Daigle*

Reflect *Bus Stop Nativity by Andrew Gadd*





FOR YOUR *Table*

Classic Green Bean Casserole

INGREDIENTS:

1 lb. green beans, trimmed
6 tbsp. butter, divided
1 onion, sliced into half moons
8 oz. sliced mushrooms
Kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/4 c. all-purpose flour
3 c. whole milk
1 1/2 c. French's fried onions

DIRECTIONS:

- Preheat oven to 350°. Prepare an ice bath: In a large pot of boiling water, add green beans and cook until bright green, about 6 minutes. With a slotted spoon or tongs, quickly transfer green beans to ice bath to cool, then drain and transfer to a large bowl.
- In a large ovenproof skillet over medium heat, melt 2 tablespoons butter. Add onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until tender, about 5 minutes. Add mushrooms and season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring often, until mushrooms are golden, about 5 minutes more. Stir in garlic and cook until fragrant, 1 minute, then transfer mixture to green bean bowl.



- In same skillet over medium heat, melt remaining 4 tablespoons butter. Whisk in flour and cook until golden, about 2 minutes. Gradually whisk in milk and season with salt and pepper. Bring to a simmer and cook until thickened, about 4 minutes. Remove from heat, then add green bean mixture and toss until even combined.
- Bake until warmed through and bubbling, about 30 minutes.
- Top with fried onions and bake 5 minutes more.

Recipe from delish.com

Notes

Peace



CANDLE LIGHTING *Liturgy*

(Reader 2 lights the candles of Hope, Love and Joy.)

Reader 1:

“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!””
Isaiah 52:7

Reader 2:

The Poet Wendell Berry writes, “When despair for the world grows in me, I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water.”

When we think of the 23rd Psalm, “He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul.” When everything feels hopeless, when we feel as dead as the dry bones in Ezekiel’s valley, God calls us away from the work day world. God calls us to breathe in the holy breath of peace.

When we light the candle of peace, we breathe in the One who restores us.

Reader 1:

(While lighting the fourth candle)

Today we light the fourth candle of Advent, the candle of peace.

All:

Whatever we face in life, God’s Spirit of peace will dwell within us. So may we be active stewards and bring your peace into the world.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank You for sending us Your Son Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Thank You for you caring for us, and thank You for promising to give us your peace. Please guard our hearts and minds with Your peace. You know the things that have been weighing us down with worry, anxiety, or fear. Lord, please help us fix our minds on you and on your Spirit. Thank You for promising to bring us life and peace. We can lie down and sleep, Lord, because you restore our souls.

Amen.



December 20

I AM YOUR FAMILY

Anna Lakatos,

The Meeting House, Oakville Parish



Read *John 14:27 (NIV)*

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

In our lives, we seek out spaces and moments where we can experience even a small measure of shalom: peace, wholeness, true well-being, and belonging—the feeling of home. After the unexpected death of my father, being raised in a single-parent home with both of my sisters out of the house and married by the time I was 12, my definition of “family” was my mom. It was just the two of us for the majority of my life. Every birthday, holiday, or event, we functioned as a unit, much like my sisters and their families did. Growing up, this definition of “family” was what I associated with Shalom. My Mother’s unexpected illness and passing devastated me and took away that sense of stability, peace, and belonging. I remember dreading that first Christmas without her. I felt out of place, like an add-on to my sisters’ existing family units.

I remember crying to God, “You already took my dad and now my mom. So, who is going to be MY family?” And then I heard God respond to me so clearly, “Anna, I am your family.” I was immediately filled with peace. That Christmas surprisingly turned out to be one of the best I had ever had. It was filled with joy, love, belonging, wholeness, and peace. It was the first time I realized that even amidst the most challenging seasons and all of life’s unknowns, I am never alone because of Jesus. He is Emmanuel – God with me. And the peace He gives is not like the peace the world offers: it is not fleeting or temporary, it isn’t based on our circumstances or actions, and it can’t be taken away. It is complete, and it is whole. It is true, Shalom.

Prayer Jesus, I thank you today for your perfect peace and belonging I find in you. Amen.

Ask Find space today and reflect on this peace that God is offering you. Where do you find yourself in need of His peace? How have you tried to create peace on your own?

Listen *In Labor All Creation Groans by Bi-Frost Arts*

Reflect *Jose y Maria Modern-Day Nativity by Everett Patterson*



December 21

MY PEACE FOR THE FUTURE

Kenol Bernard, Falls View Church



Read *John 14:27 (NIV)*

“Peace I leave with you; my Peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.”

Growing up, my Father was my hero. He was our provider, our protector, our everything. Everything changed when my Father passed away just after my 17th birthday. Growing up in Haiti, life was difficult in general, but our lives completely changed after his death. I lost all hope for my future. My mother was doing everything she could to provide for my siblings and me, but our future looked grim. I was very troubled.

One night I opened up to my mother about the emptiness I had in my heart. My mother is a strong woman of faith. She told me about the Peace that is in Jesus. After our conversation, I went to my room and began to speak to Jesus, asking him to give me Peace.

Thank God he heard my prayers. That night Jesus revealed himself to me, and my heart was filled with his Peace. I gave my life entirely to him and began to walk and experience a new life with Christ from that day forward.

In John 14:27, Jesus said to his disciples, “Peace I leave with you; my Peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.” My life has been filled with many challenges, but I have felt the Peace of God every step of the way through it all.

This Christmas season, we celebrate Jesus’ birth and the Peace He brought to us. I will never forget that night when I was able to let go of the burdens I was holding onto, and my heart was filled with Peace and hope for the future.

Prayer Lord Jesus you are Jehovah Shalom, the Prince of Peace. Help us to be thankful in this season. We pray that your peace will fill our hearts. Bring your peace into the hearts of those who need it today. Amen.

Ask Do you need Peace in your life this Christmas season? The Peace of God is found in Jesus when we give our life to him.

Listen *Peace by We the Kingdom*

Reflect *Silent Night by Liz Lemon Swindle*



December 22

CHRISTMAS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Alison and Peter Lublink, REUNION Kingston



Read *2 Thessalonians 3:16 (NIV)*

“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.”

When we lived in The Middle East, we had to develop new ways to create Christmas traditions that were a bit different from how we celebrated back in Canada. While some shops sold Christmas trees and decorations, there understandably wasn't a lot of specific “Christmas Cheer” throughout this Islamic country. No Christmas carols playing while we shopped, no snow, no houses lined with twinkle lights nor giant inflatable Santas. Instead, we enjoyed more subdued Christmas meals with friends, sang well-known Christmas hymns at church, and put up a Christmas tree in our home.

There's something peaceful about the glimmering lights and the familiar ornaments on the tree as a Canadian. We could plug the tree in, cuddle up under a blanket and pretend that the blow of the air conditioning was, in fact, a chilly winter's night.

It's a strange paradox to be in the region where Jesus was born and yet recognize that it was just another day for most people around us. Eventually, we stopped trying to make Christmas in Kuwait be something it was not and instead felt at peace about the both/and of the holiday. We still enjoyed our tree and Christmas carols, and we also enjoyed wandering through the old souk (market) on Christmas Eve and eating fresh dates.

There's something about embracing both our present reality, wherever that might be, and the rich traditions of the past that can bring a deep sense of peace.

A reminder that the earth continues to turn, that seasons come and go, that long before the notion of the Christmas tree, Christians marked the birth of Christ, and that long after us, Christians will continue to do so.

It's a tangible reminder that the story of Jesus is both past tense historic and still very much present tense. The both/and.

Prayer Jesus, thank you for the reassurance of your peace. Allow me to mirror that same peace to my neighbour and my community so that the hurt might find hope. Amen.

Ask Consider those around you who do not carry the peace of Christ, who perhaps find themselves filled with worry, fear, and doubt; how can you be an agent of peace in their lives this season?

Listen *Creators of the Stars of Night by High Street Hymns*

Reflect *The Starry Night (1889) by Vincent van Gogh*



December 23

PEACE THAT SURPASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING

Bobbi and Matt Vincent, The REUNION Network



Read *Isaiah 54:10 (NLT)*

“For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,” says the Lord who has compassion on you.

Last Christmas was like no other. On top of the ever-changing pandemic protocols that limited and rearranged our traditional family celebrations, we were also navigating a very difficult situation within our family that deeply affected us all. At times we weren't sure what Christmas would look like. Would we come out of the fog long enough to experience the Joy, Hope, Love and Peace of the season? As parents, we weren't really sure what to expect or how best to lead our teenage and young adult kids through it all.

Surprisingly and completely unexpectedly, Christmas ended up being one of the most meaningful seasons we've ever experienced. We know that difficulty can bring people together, but noticeable change started with the spark of an idea. Our daughters decided that they wanted to organize a food and toy drive for our neighbourhood, supporting two specific local charities. They bought large brown paper bags from the grocery store, stapled on a cheerful note of invitation to participate, and then dropped them off to 100 of our closest neighbours. We then waited to see what would happen.

To our surprise, people began dropping off loads of goods on a daily basis to our front porch. We found ourselves looking out the front window and began hooting and cheering each time we saw another vehicle approach. To be honest, we were overwhelmed and amazed at the response and generosity of our neighbours.

In place of all the regular holiday celebrations and parties, this small act of service filled the void. Days before Christmas we were able to drop off a van full of toys and food to local agencies, all because the kids had an idea and our neighbours were so incredibly generous.

On Christmas Eve we decided to go for a midnight walk through the freshly falling snow. We laughed, chased each other, and reflected on the goodness of the season. It was such a simple yet profound time as a family. While the difficult situation was still ongoing, we had an incredible time experiencing love and gratitude for each other. In the middle of terrible heartbreak and pain, we felt that Jesus was with us, and His peace and love found their way into each of our hearts.

Prayer Jesus, help us to remember that your peace is tangible and real. That when our hearts are hurt and grieving you want to extend your peace, love and healing to the very broken parts of our hearts and minds. Amen.

Ask Is there an area in your heart or mind where the Peace of Jesus needs to be felt at this time, in this very moment?

Listen *O Holy Night (Live) by The McClures*

Reflect *Annunciation by Scott Erickson*



December 24

SILENT NIGHT

Renee Kievet, Wainfleet BIC Church



Read *2 Thessalonians 3:16 (NIV)*

“May the Lord who gives peace give you peace at all times and in every way.”

As I think back over many Christmas Eve services, my favourite part comes near the end. We’ve sung the Christmas songs, we’ve read or maybe even watched the Christmas story dramatized, we’ve heard special music, an advent reading & lit the final candle on the wreath. Then it’s time to close with a tradition I enjoy, candle lighting & the singing of Silent Night. I love this moment; house lights down, the glow of candle flames, a young one sings the first verse, and we’re standing still just taking it all in. The flames flickering, the wide eyes of kids holding candles & the beautiful voices surrounding us ~ such a moment of peace.

But as a young mom, that very same service didn’t feel as peaceful. Instead, there were hushed, excited voices, nerves about a part that needed to be played by our little dressed-up angel; I was worried that wax would spill on the carpet or that long hair would be lit on fire by a waving candle.

When we attach finding peace to our circumstances, we ride the waves up & down. If peace & circumstances are tied, we may need to cut out everything or everyone that doesn’t fall perfectly in line with what creates peace and harmony. But Jesus, born as a baby, is the Prince of Peace; He is peace amid everything. He is peace whether we are feeling it, He is peace whether we see it, He is peace.

This Christmas Eve, may you experience the Prince of Peace, no matter what is on the to-do list or schedule of events, no matter what is swirling around in your mind. Seek Jesus! He was born into the world to bring us peace, to show us this new way to live.

Prayer Jesus, Prince of Peace, reign over my life today. Please show me how to experience your peace, no matter the circumstance. Amen.

Ask On this day, often very busy with family, worship services, last-minute food prep & wrapping, how are you experiencing Jesus, the Prince of Peace?

Listen *Silent Night (LIVE) by Tori Kelly*

Reflect *Silent Night... Holy Night (2018) by Maha Rukab*



FOR YOUR *Table*

Best-Ever Bread Pudding with Vanilla Sauce

INGREDIENTS:

1 loaf challah bread
2/3 c. plus 1 tbsp. granulated sugar
2 eggs plus 3 egg yolks
1 tbsp. pure vanilla extract
1/2 tsp. kosher salt
1/4 tsp. nutmeg (optional)
2 c. whole milk
2 c. heavy cream
1/4 c. raisins (optional)



VANILLA SAUCE:

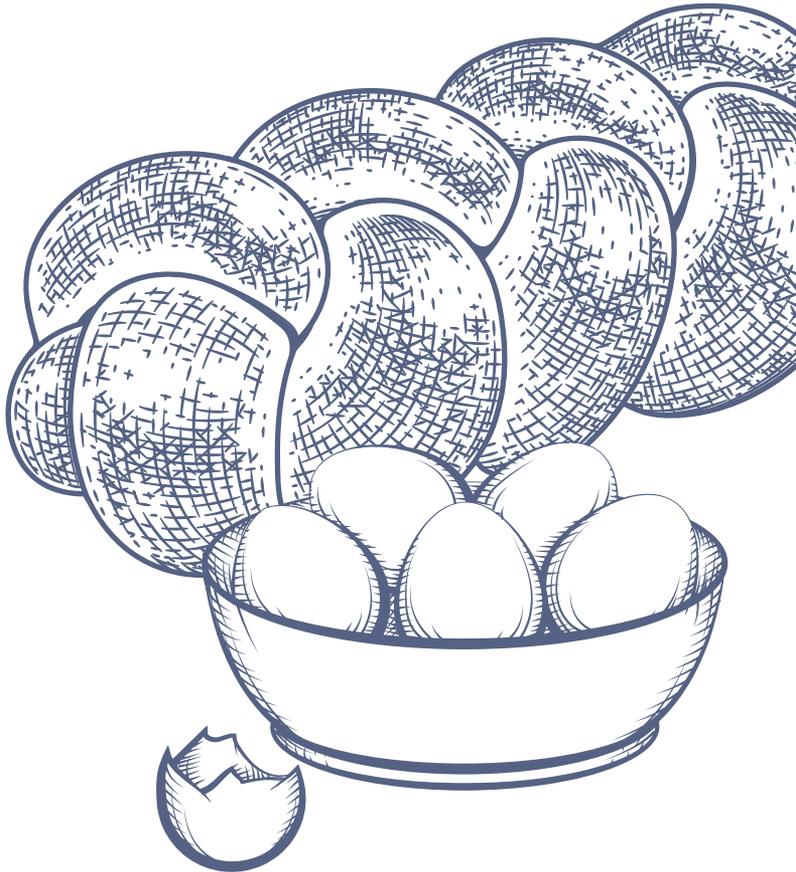
1/2 cup butter
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup firmly packed brown sugar
1/2 cup heavy whipping cream
1 tablespoon vanilla extract

DIRECTIONS:

- The day before: Slice bread into 1" cubes and leave out overnight to dry out. (Alternately, place bread on baking sheet and bake at 200° for 20 minutes, then let cool.) Increase oven temperature to 350°.
- In a large bowl, whisk to combine 2/3 cup sugar, eggs and egg yolks, vanilla, salt, and nutmeg if using. Whisk in milk and cream. Add bread and raisins if using, and toss to coat. Let mixture sit 10 minutes to allow bread to soak up custard.

- Transfer mixture to a large baking dish. Sprinkle top of bread pudding with remaining tablespoon sugar and bake until pudding is set, 40 to 45 minutes. Let cool 35 minutes before serving.
- Bake until warmed through and bubbling, about 30 minutes.
- Serve with vanilla ice cream (optional) and drizzle with Vanilla Sauce.

Recipe from [delish.com](https://www.delish.com)



CANDLE LIGHTING *Liturgy*

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:1-20

Reader 1:

“In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger because there was no guest room available for them.”

Reader 2:

“And shepherds were living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’”

Reader 1:

“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.’”

Reader 2:

“When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’

“So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”



Reader 1: (While Lighting the Hope candle)

Tonight we come to remember and proclaim the light of hope.
Hope in the promises of God; hope in the power of the Holy Spirit; hope in the person of Jesus Christ. Hope for each of us and hope for all of us.

Reader 2: (While lighting the Love candle)

We come to proclaim the light of love. Love conceived by the Creator; love enlivened by the Holy Spirit; love fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Love within us and among us.

Reader 1: (While lighting the Joy candle)

We come to proclaim the light of joy. Joy in our relationship with our Creator; joy in the fullness of the Spirit; joy in our salvation through Jesus. Joy deep within us—in times of happiness and sorrow.

Reader 2: (While lighting the Peace candle)

We come to remember and proclaim the light of peace. Peace as we trust God's power; peace as we know the Spirit's presence; peace as we follow Jesus' path. Peace within our hearts and peace throughout our world.

All:

*For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onwards and forevermore.*

(Continued on next page.)



All: (While lighting the Christ candle)

We come to receive the light of Christ as we celebrate his miraculous birth; we receive this light that illuminates the holy path of hope, love, joy, and peace.

Prayer (All):

Loving Father,
we celebrate and thank you
for your love revealed in Jesus.

In this moment, we pause to
reflect and remember the
significance of God becoming flesh and
coming to be with his creation.

By the leading of your Holy Spirit,
give us new appreciation and
imagination for all this season holds.
May your hope, love, joy, and peace
fill us as we follow you, Jesus.

We pray this in your name.
Amen.



Merry
Christmas





NEPAL PEACE PROJECT

AN EDUCATION INITIATIVE

AN ADVENT GIFT TO THE NEPAL PEACE PROJECT

The BIC Church of Nepal has begun an educational assistance program to provide children from local Nepalese villages with education and mentoring. They have asked for Canadian Be In Christ churches to partner with them in providing the following resources:

- School Uniforms
- School Fees
- Stationery
- Tutoring
- Basic Healthcare
- Spiritual Mentorship
- Faith-Based Organization Enrolment



Our faith calls us to recognize that everything we have is a gift from God, and giving back is a major part of our following of Jesus. Our faith also calls us to be people of action.

Will you prayerfully consider partnering with us, and our sisters and brothers in Nepal, as we seek to extend Jesus' message to others?

To give your Advent Gift to the Nepal Peace Project, visit:

www.NepalPeaceProject.com



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2700 Bristol Circle
Oakville, ON L6H 6E1
905.339.2335
www.beinchrist.ca