


O Little Town



O Little Town Of Bethlehem


Phillips Brooks

G C F C/E G C Am G Am Dm C/E Dm/F G C G




O lit - tle town of Beth - le - hem, how still we see thee lie! A -
 For Christ is born of Ma - ry, and gath ered all a - bove, while
 How si - lent - ly how si - lent - ly the won - drous gift is given! So
 O ho - ly child of Beth - le - hem, de - scend to us, we pray; cast

5 C F C/E G C Am G Am Dm C/E Dm/F G C Am



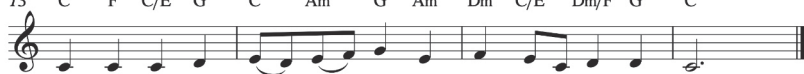
bove thy deep and dream less sleep the si - lent stars go by. Yet
 mor - tals sleep, the an - gels keep their watch of won - d'ring love. O
 God im - parts to hu - man hearts the bless ings of his heaven. No
 out our sin and en - ter in; be born in us to - day. We

9 Em F G C Am G C Dm Am G



in thy dark streets shin - eth the ev - er - last - ing Light; the
 morn - ing stars, to - geth - er pro - claim the ho - ly birth! And
 ear may hear his co - ming; but in this world of sin, where
 hear the Christ mas an - gels the great glad tid - ings tell; O

13 C F C/E G C Am G Am Dm C/E Dm/F G C



hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee to - night.
 prais - es sing to God the King, and peace to men on earth.
 meek souls will re - ceive Him, still the dear Christ en - ters in.
 come to us, a - bide with us, our Lord I - man - u - el!

Where Our Communities are Found

Alliston - Ancaster - Armenia - Belleville -
Bloomfield - Boyle - Brampton - Brantford -
Brockville - Brooklin - Burlington - Cambridge -
Clarksburg - Collingwood - Delisle - Fordwich -
Fort Erie - Hamilton - Kearney - Kincardine -
Kindersley - Kitchener - Kirkland Lake - Kuwait City
- London - New Dundee - Newmarket - Niagara
Falls - Oakville - Parry Sound - Penetanguishene -
Peterborough - Port Colborne - Saskatoon -
Sauble Beach - Scarborough - Sherkston -
Springvale - Stouffville - Tavistock - Thorold -
Tillsonburg - Toronto - Richmond - Ridgeway -
Wainfleet - Waterloo - Welland - Whitby

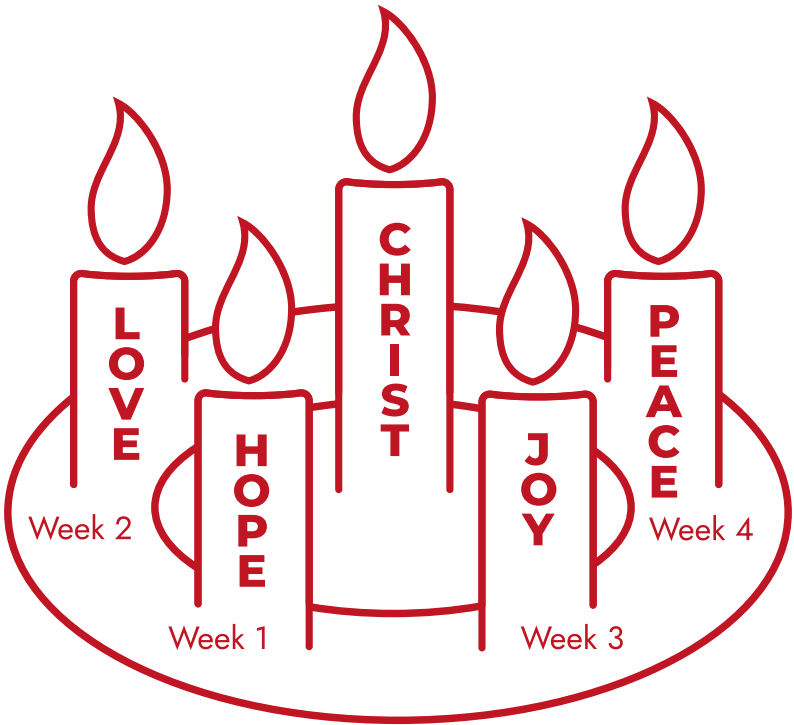
The Advent Wreath

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.

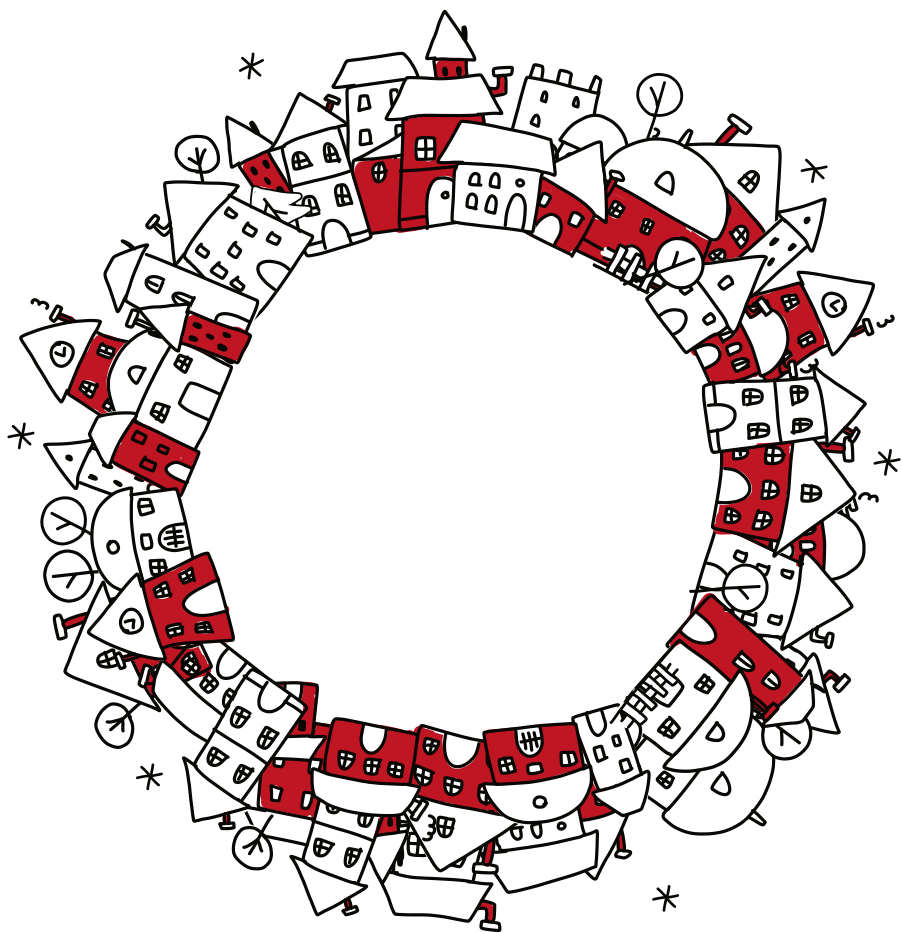
Advent wreaths come in many shapes and sizes however the traditional shape is a circle that symbolizes God's never-ending love for us.

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



November 28 - December 25, 2022

O Little Town

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.

John 1:14 from The Message

I was privileged to have my life overlap with the presence on television of Mr. Rogers. He always seemed to me to be such a loving and unassuming person. I imagined that if I ran into him in the grocery store of my little town that he would greet me with a "Hello Neighbour."

Christmas is a nostalgic time when we consider a better world where people actually would greet each other instead of just looking down at their phones. Inwardly we long for relationships that are replenishing. We want generosity to be on display. We think of the people who have marked our lives from Christmas' past. We read the accounts of the incarnation of Jesus and try our best to experience them anew. We bring our weary souls to be restored.

For our Advent experience this year, we are focusing on these kinds of stories - about the love of God being displayed through the moments of Christmas and the people we have known. Our hope is that your heart may be full of the joy of the season - that your joy might overflow to the people in your neighbourhood. May Jesus be known through your words, through your actions, and through your presence this Christmas! This was Jesus' mission, and it continues with us.

To you and yours from all of us across the BIC Church in Canada, have a very happy and blessed Christmas!

Charlie Mashinter

Rev. Charlie Mashinter
Executive Director,
Be In Christ (BIC) Church Of Canada



w e e k o n e

Hope



CANDLE LIGHTING **Liturgy**

Reader:

We come together amid a busy season to take a breath.
To breathe in together the life that God gives us.
To listen to the beat of God's heart and
the blessings and lessons this season brings to us.

Each week of Advent, we light this Advent Wreath.
With its light comes our prayers and our stories.
The candle of this first week of Advent is a candle of hope.
Today the flame of this candle reminds us of
the hope that came to this world when
Jesus was born and his presence with us.
Jesus said, "I came so that everyone
would have life in all its fullness."

Light the candle.

Let's pause for a moment to consider
the hope that Jesus has given us.
When have you experienced the gift of hope?
When have you experienced God's rescue in your life
or the lives of the people around you
– in the big things or the small?

Pause for a Moment...

Prayer:

We thank you, Jesus, that you want to bring
fullness and hope into every life.
We thank you for the hope you have brought to us.
We bring to you now prayers of hope for the
people and places on our hearts this morning.
Trusting in your powerful name.

Amen.

Missional Advent Jar

Throughout the guide you will find ideas to serve and bring

**Hope,
Love,
Joy &
Peace**

into your community throughout the Advent Season.

Maybe you have some ideas of your own that you can add to the mix,
you know your local community best!

Simply cut off the tabs and place them into a mason jar.
Draw as many as you would like to weekly.

Have fun with it.
Invite friends, neighbours and your small group to participate!

week one



**Prayer walk
downtown**

**Serve a meal at
your local soup
kitchen**

**Support a local toy
drive**

**Throw a Hot
Chocolate Party
with your
neighbours**

Notes

November 28

PROJECT GIVE

Melanie Wigg, BIC Next Gen



Verse Acts 20:35b

"You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

During Advent several years ago, our church decided to focus on stripping back the trappings, busyness, and consumerism that get layered onto the Christmas season and instead focus on worship, celebration, and generosity. The conversation about centring on "the reason for the season" isn't a new theme, of course. We all struggle with this tension every year. But in that particular year, we leaned into this refocusing effort with great intentionality.

As a part of that season, we held an event in mid-December. We called it Project Give. After our Sunday morning service, the chairs in the auditorium were cleared out and replaced by tables, craft supplies, quilt racks, and personal hygiene items. Our church community, from the youngest to the oldest, hung around that day and packed hygiene kits for Mennonite Central Committee, knotted quilts, designed Christmas cards for the inmates at the Grand Valley Institution for Women, and made gifts for the residents of the Forest Heights Long Term Care Centre, located next door to the church.

The event was simple but powerful. I was moved by seeing our community come together to focus on serving people who are easily forgotten. We trusted that these simple acts of kindness communicated to people in difficult and lonely situations that they were remembered and valued.

It was also powerful to see multiple generations serving side by side. I remember a young dad sitting on the floor with his two-year-old daughter while she wrapped toothpaste and toothbrushes into a hand towel. Seniors and kids knotted quilts side by side. It felt like such a

simple and easy demonstration of the church being the church. I also remember the joy and energy in the room. Acts 20:35 tells us that Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive. I think he knew what he was talking about.

The beautiful thing is that Project Give became a tradition at our church. What was originally planned as a one-time event became a regular part of our Advent season. For years to come it remained a simple, tangible way to put Jesus back at the centre of Christmas.

Ponder What is one simple, tangible way that you could communicate love and care to someone who may feel forgotten during this Christmas season?

Prayer Lord Jesus, thank you for being “God With Us” and showing us that we are not forgotten. We are grateful for your love and care in our lives. Help us see how we can embody that love in service to others. Fill us with compassion and courage to step into those opportunities. Amen.



November 29

EAT, DRINK AND BE NEIGHBOURLY

Wes Wood, REUNION Belleville



Verse *Luke 2:8-21*

It's Christmas 2018. Our family was new to our community and by far the youngest and loudest on this well past retired street. We're as loud as coloured lights on rooftops in our "white lights only" culture. We don't fit in. So we had an idea. Let's throw a party because nothing breaks down barriers like good food and drinks. Our neighbours agreed. They all came. And as we gathered around our home, the conversation was light but honest.

"I only came because I wanted to see what the house looked like," one person said.

"Yea, I'm a bit of a snoop," another responded.

But as we laughed, others shared how they'd spent over 50 years on the street and had never been in the same room together. Others shared how they'd said hello but never knew how or where to go from there.

One lady chimed in, "I came because I'm alone," and with that almost everyone around the room nodded in agreement. So neighbours, for decades with children now gone, passed this precious season alone.

Luke tells us about a group of people left out of the party for many reasons we don't have time to get into. There was a group of people up the hill as the party went on in town.

Alone...

But not for long...

God has a soft spot for the lonely.

Does our church?

We throw parties and services with budgets galore for people we hope will show up when right next door sits someone alone. What if the deepest sense of peace, hope, love, and joy isn't found in our children's pageant, candlelight service, or hippest rendition of the manger stations? Maybe our simple willingness to eat, drink and be neighbourly "would be good news that will cause great joy for all the people." Yes, all people.

Ponder Are there neighbours in your midst that sit alone during the Christmas Season? What would it look like to invite them into your home to offer them food, drink, and belonging?

Prayer To our Lord who sees the lonely, may we be blessed with eyes and a heart to welcome the shepherds in our midst. Amen.



November 30

FREE TURKEY DINNERS!

Matt Vincent, The Reunion Network



Verse *Hebrews 13:16*

“And don’t forget to do good and to share with those in need. These are the sacrifices that please God.”

As usual, I walked into my kitchen and headed straight for the coffee maker, but on this particular Saturday morning, I had to weave my way through an obstacle course of frozen turkeys all over the floor. I smiled to myself, thinking about the busy but exciting day ahead as Bobbi and I, along with a few other neighbours from our street, would deliver these turkeys with all the standard fixings to families in our local area who had a need. Let me back up...

Four weeks earlier, a group of moms from our downtown Hamilton neighbourhood had an idea. These moms had become friends over the past year, spending time together with their young kids at a weekly play day Bobbi organized and hosted at a local United Church. They knew that there were families in this friendship circle who would most likely be going without a Christmas Dinner this year as times were tight. They began to brainstorm ways they might be able to work together to bless and encourage other families but wondered how they would spread the word and how they would be able to afford this. They decided to share the opportunity to participate and post it on the local community bulletin boards offering a Free Turkey Dinner to those in need. “Family To Family” Christmas Dinner began to take off!

The phone began ringing, and we had the privilege of meeting people all through our neighbourhood with the most incredible stories. Some were refugees; some were on long-term disability, while others had lost their jobs and fallen on hard times. When they saw the flyer on the bulletin board, many thought there was some mistake. How could this be a real thing?

As the dream came together, sponsor families began to really step up and get to know their recipient families, learning their stories and identifying other needs and ways they could help. Beautiful friendships were created, and practical needs were met through this joint act of love and kindness.

After the deliveries, Bobbi and I had the chance to have coffee with some of our neighbourhood friends, and many tears were shed as they shared story after story of those who had been loved and impacted by this simple project. That was a Christmas in Community that we will never forget.

Ponder Is there a practical way you sense Jesus calling you to demonstrate your love and care for others during this Advent Season?

Prayer Dear Jesus we thank you for the communities you have placed us in. We thank you for our neighbours and the opportunity we have to share your love to those around us. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear the needs of those around us. May you help us to be present each and every day as we bring your hope to the world around us. Amen.



December 1

ONE SMALL ACT OF KINDNESS

Hailey Tollefson, The Meeting House, Oakville



Verse *1 John 23:18*

"Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with action and in truth."

Over the last several years, I have been volunteering at my local food bank. For me personally, it was a great way to be the hands and feet of Jesus to my local community in a very practical way. Part of my volunteer position was to do intake for the new families coming each week and hang out with the kids while their parents collected the items they needed. I loved it because I heard so many incredible stories and caught a glimpse into people's lives.

Over December, we would hand out Christmas hampers to each person and family that would walk through our doors. We would meet with hundreds of people from all different backgrounds and walks of life, and bless them with something extra that Christmas season.

I will never forget one cold and snowy Tuesday afternoon; I was asked to help collect the gifts and food hampers for families while they collected the other regular food for the month. I had been handed a piece of paper with a family's name at the top along with a number. So I went and collected the gifts and the Christmas Food Hamper that correlated with that family. Once everything was ready to go, I brought the cart to the team that would help load everything into this family's car. Very quickly, that family's name on the paper in my hand became more than just an ambiguous name; I chatted with the woman receiving the items and her beautiful daughters. Hearing their story of how they landed in Canada after fighting for their lives and seeking refuge. They had only been in Canada for a couple of months, and this

mom looked at me with tears in her eyes and said, "I've never had someone do something so kind for me before. Giving me hope in the midst of all my fears that God will be able to provide for my daughters and me. I never feel like just another face or number here... I feel so seen and loved."

I will never forget that. A simple act of Kindness by a group of people gave someone hope that God is providing for her and her family amid so much hardship. He always meets us where we are. He gives us what we need to be His hands and feet to those around us.

Ponder What is in your hands this advent season? How can you practically be Jesus' hands and feet in your community?

Prayer Dear Jesus, Thank you for meeting us where we are at. For giving us daily reminders of your goodness and Kindness. Jesus, I ask this advent season that you will help me see ways in my community I can be your loving hands and feet to those around me. Amen.



December 2

JUSTICE AND MERCY, LOVE AND HOPE TO ALL!

Jonathan Manafo, The Village, Whitby



Verse *Isaiah 61:1*

"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed."

We have a line that we go back to often with our church community, The Village. It's this, 'We take Jesus seriously; we just don't wanna take ourselves seriously.' All this means is that we hope to be busy doing good: Loving God, loving our neighbour, and making the world better.

When the pandemic was upon us in full force, we were displaced and have been displaced for about 30 months. But, like everyone else, we figured it out. One thing remained, 'keep loving Jesus and loving our neighbour.'

I was so proud of The Village for using the money we saved on our school lease to help and bless others. We looked for opportunities and said yes to them all.

One of our favourite partnerships was with Whitby Caremongers. Every month in 2020 and 2021, we were given the names of two families to help. We'd then prepare and drop off grocery cards to each family.

In 2021, we pulled money from our reserved fund to help with the overwhelming need for clean water during the pandemic in Indigenous communities throughout Ontario.

In 2022, after two years of virtual races, which were still able to generate funds for local charities, we brought back Running4Home in person and were overwhelmed with the response – 300 local runners and 30+ Village volunteers. Being able to give away almost \$7000 to three causes.

Incredibly, this all happened during a season of displacement, loss, sickness, and much disillusionment in and around churches.

In Proverbs, we read these words, “Righteousness and Justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice” (21:3). This verse is also in line with Jesus’ words in Luke 4, borrowed from Isaiah 61. You may know them well.

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

Doesn’t this beautifully encapsulate the theme of this year’s advent reading: The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight? When we step out with acts of justice, mercy, and love, we give hope to our neighbours who are living with fear - fear of poverty, rejection, illness, and brokenness.

Ponder What is one thing you can do, today or this week, as an individual or a community, too meet fear with hope?

Prayer God, open my eyes, in this season, to see what others fear and to respond with hope and love. Even while I’m questioning, and struggling, use me to be the answer to someone else’s prayer. Amen.



December 3

PRAYERFUL EXPECTANCY

Grant Cotton, Clearview Community Church,
Kindersley, Saskatchewan



Verse *Luke 2:25 MSG*

"In Jerusalem at the time, there was a man, Simeon by name, a good man, a man who lived in the prayerful expectancy of help for Israel. And the Holy Spirit was on him."

In August, Rosanna and I returned to Ontario and joined her family for their annual cottage trip to Chesley Lake. Rosanna hasn't missed a year yet, so it was really special that we were able to go.

I have now had the privilege of joining the family at the cottage for three years; I really enjoy the fishing out on the lake, but while I spent those hours out in the canoe, I was also sitting in times of prayerful expectancy, just like Simeon was for the help of Israel. In 2019, I was waiting on God for the go-ahead to propose to Rosanna, I had wanted to months earlier, but I sensed God saying to wait and pray. In 2020 I was in my new role as Youth Director at Sixth Line, and I was in prayerful expectancy for how God would work in the youth's lives amidst all the restrictions from COVID. In 2021 Rosanna and I were living in prayerful expectancy as we waited to hear back about whether I got the lead pastor position at Clearview Community Church in Kindersley, Saskatchewan. And this year, we are living in prayerful expectancy for what God will do in our family, our Clearview Community family, and our community.

The cottage is a very special place for Rosanna and me. I find it is a place where I can hit the pause button and catch my breath. When I do, I am reminded of how we need to be living in a state of prayerful expectancy, just like Simeon was. That includes both the small and big things. Are we coming to God with everything, the good and the bad, or are we only seeking him out when things are tough? Do we have Holy Spirit on us like Simeon and many others?

Ponder Where's your cottage? And where is God asking you to live in prayerful expectancy?

Prayer Dear Lord, we thank you for being so invested in our lives and caring about each of us so much that you gave your son for us. Lord, help us this advent season to pause and catch our breath; help us to remember your son's birth and what that means for us. Lord, also help us to be like your servant Simeon who lived in a state of prayerful expectancy. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.



w e e k t w o

Love



CANDLE LIGHTING **Liturgy**

Reader:

We come together amid a busy season to take a breath.
To breathe in together the life that God gives us.
To listen to the beat of God's heart
and the blessings and lessons this season brings to us.

Each week of Advent, we light this Advent Wreath.
With its light comes our prayers and our stories.

The candle of this second week of Advent is a candle of love.
Today the flame of this candle reminds us
of the love that came to this world when Jesus was born
and his presence with us.
Jesus said, "As the Father has loved me,
so I have loved you; remain in my love."

Light the candle.

Let's pause for a moment to consider the love that Jesus has given us.
When have you shared in the gift of love?
When have you known God's love
come into your life or life around you
– in the big things or the small?

Pause for a Moment...

Prayer:

We thank you, Jesus, that you want to bring love
and relationship into every life.
We thank you for the love you have brought to us.
We bring to you now prayers of love for
the people and places on our hearts this morning.
Trusting in your powerful name.

Amen.

Missional Advent Jar

w e e k t w o



Prayer walk
around your
church

Drop off a treat for
teachers at your
local elementary
school

Invite a friend for
lunch and
encourage them

Join in a
community event
hosted by your
town

Notes

December 5

YE OLD PIANO

Charmaine Stulp, Welland BIC Church



Verse *Luke 2:10*

"The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody worldwide. A saviour has just been born!"

Scrolling through Facebook marketplace led to an old piano moving into my garage for a time. As Christmas 2020 approached, I wondered about making use of the wheels on that piano and rolling it down the street in the subdivision where we live. It had occurred to me that perhaps some of my neighbours wouldn't go to church for Christmas Eve, considering the pandemic, and I got the idea to bring a short service to them.

I made some inquiries and found that two elderly ladies lived a few houses apart, and neither would be attending church. Another couple who caught wind of my plan asked if we could stop at their house too.

I had shared the crazy idea with my husband and some friends from church, and we ended up loading that old piano in the back of an open trailer and strapping it down. We grabbed some battery-operated lights and jumped on the trailer. As we pulled out of the driveway, the most perfect, big snowflakes had begun to fall. Falling snow has always felt like Jesus whispering He loves me. As we drove slowly around our subdivision, it felt as if God wanted me to know He saw what we were about to do. At the first house, the woman couldn't come outside, but her family had helped her to the closest window and opened it so she could hear us sing. A few other neighbours heard what we were doing and walked down the street to meet us. My two girlfriends and I began to sing, "Joy to the world, the Lord has come"! We only sang a few songs, as loud as we could, at three different houses while the piano keys went slippery and my fingers tingled.

Later, a neighbour told me she had teared up and was so moved by this gesture. It felt so simple yet so holy. Jesus shows up in these kinds of things, doesn't He? He meets us where we are. It isn't about the show or the crowd.

On that night, it was in the simple falling snow, and in the precious moments we shared with family and friends, we could hear Him whisper, "I see you. In the midst of your hopes and fears, I am here."

Ponder What is your "old piano in the garage?" How can you bravely "play" it?

Prayer Dear Jesus thank you for being our greatest gift. We are grateful that we have this time of year to stop and reflect on your arrival and what that means for humankind. Jesus I ask that you inspire me this Advent season to find ways to proclaim your love to others through creative acts of loving kindness. Amen.



December 6

THE RIGHT PATH

Curtis Zoerb, Massey Place,
Delisle, Saskatchewan



Verse *Matthew 1:20-21*

"But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.'"

Have you ever been lost? I mean, like really... lost... Shortly after Jamie and I were married, we took a 6-hour trip to Calgary; well, it should have been 6 hours. We printed off our directions from MapQuest, loaded into our 1983 baby blue Mercury Lynx, and headed off on our journey. After several turns that took us onto back roads and past long forgotten farms, we realized that the directions provided were for the shortest distance, not the best route. And while it might have been fewer kilometres, it was definitely not 'shorter.' So, we had a choice to make. Do we go backward to find the well-traveled road, or do we trust the internet... and continue following the map.

We decided to keep on the journey, to trust the instructions given by something we didn't fully understand (the internet), and make our way to Calgary. It became a peaceful trip as we had an amazing adventure, across wooden one-lane bridges, through ghost towns, up dirt switchback roads through the valleys, and past freshly harvested fields. Just a few kilometres before we reached Calgary, the directions had us pull back onto the same tried and tested road we had turned off many hours earlier.

Joseph had a plan; he was about to marry the girl of his dreams, and for a reason that he didn't yet understand, his journey came to a fork

in the road. The peaceful confidence in his plans came to an end. Do I quietly leave Mary or stay with her even though my trust has been broken? But God spoke to him in a dream and encouraged him to stay strong, keep on the path of marriage to Mary, and trust the directions of one he likely didn't fully understand.

We might not fully be at peace with everything God is inviting us to do, but just like Joseph, I have come to realize that I can trust Him. I now see that everything He invites us to do also plays a role in "saving people from their sins" (vs. 21). I've seen it through my own journey, our family, and our churches. So trust in the path laid before you, and have peace and assurance that the journey may take you through some strange and fantastic places, but God is at work in the end!

Ponder What is the journey God has laid out for you to take? Do you trust in His directions?

Prayer God, grant us the faith to hear you and the courage to follow you through whatever road you ask us to take. May the journey be filled with surprises of your hand at work around us, and may we experience your peace through all life's twists and turns.



December 7

HOT CHOCOLATE FOR GOATS!

Corinne Jones Chua, Bluewater Church,
Kincardine



Verse *Hebrews 10:24*

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

For one night every November, our little town closes her main street to host Kincardine Downtown Christmas. Shops stay open late, storefront windows show off their decorations, carollers sing familiar songs, and children wave from the big wagon as the horses' harnesses jingle with bells.

Last year, one of Bluewater Church's Moorings (small groups) decided to do something special. Using some seed money for a mission project, they purchased ingredients to bake cookies and serve hot chocolate to the townspeople who stopped on the sidewalk by our downtown ministry space. Proceeds from donations went to Mennonite Central Committee's program to buy a goat for a family overseas. There were also handcrafted miniature Christmas trees and wooden stars laced with twinkle lights on offer.

Hometown Christmas is always charming, and that year felt extra special. It was the first public event Kincardine had done since the pandemic began over a year before. For a place with such a strong town spirit, it had felt strange to be quiet for so long. That night, there was an atmosphere of joy mixed with sadness for time lost and a bit of trepidation.

In the midst of it all, there was a little Mooring offering hot drinks and homemade crafts. "Hot Chocolate for Goats," their sign read. That hot chocolate stand was like an icebreaker for passersby. Hot chocolate for what? Goats! It was like a warm smile to relieve an awkward moment.

And it reminded us that we are all part of a bigger world. We all have something for which to be grateful, and we all have something to give.

I imagine that Mooring asked, "What can we give this Christmas?" "Let's raise money for goats!" someone suggested. "I'll make cookies!" "I have branches to use for stars." "Well, I can try my hand at a few Christmas trees." One idea sparks the next, and before you know it, you've raised enough money to provide 20 families with a much-needed goat. I wonder if that's how it goes in the Kingdom of Heaven?

Ponder What is one thing you can do with a friend to bless someone else this Christmas?

Prayer Dear Jesus, thank you for designing us to flourish in community. Where I have experienced community hurt, please bring healing. Where I have experienced community connection, please spark our hearts and minds to love and serve others together this season. Amen.



December 8

REDEEMING LOVE

Leonard Chester, BIC Archivist, Port Colborne



Verse *1 John 4:19*

“We love because he first loved us.”

A volunteer makes a difference! As a volunteer at the Portal Village Retirement Residence in Port Colborne, Ontario, I encourage JOY in the lives of residents and staff through music. In 1994, I began leading a monthly hymn sing from the piano and have continued this to the present. Currently, I am at their piano three times per month. Even during the Covid lockdowns, we had some outdoor hymn sings with recorded background music.

Portal Village is a town within the town of Port Colborne; the Village has a population of around 700. The Retirement Residence is one part of this community. My wife, Ruth Ann, and I live across the street in the Village at Gilead Manor.

I have seen several cycles of residents in the Retirement Home pass away and have assisted in an annual Memorial Service for them. Music brings joy to many. Favourite gospel songs, rendered in a lively style, brighten the faces and help the residents clap their hands or tap their toes. Knowing which song is someone’s favourite and including it is very comforting—“ I want that sung at my funeral!”

Prior to Covid, several pastors in the community conducted a Sunday afternoon service for residents. I shared in this rotation and led the midweek hymn sings. The town within the town has had many features. Christmas is the season of “Redeeming Love,” a love that never dies. Most residents who participate in the hymn sings accept that they will die, but God’s love never will cease. Observing joyful responses in the residents reveals the difference you can make as a volunteer.

Ponder In your community, how might you volunteer?

Prayer Father, thank you for your love which redeems each of us as we place ourselves in your care and reach out to encourage others. Amen.



December 9

ANGELS WITHOUT WINGS

Aaron Holbrough, The Parish, Peterborough



Verse *Luke 1:39-40*

"At that time, Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth."

Two weeks before Christmas, a visitor walked in late one Sunday and sat at the back of our church. I had been preaching about Mary's two angelic visits. We only ever talk about one of them, often the one that filled her with fear—that Angel had wings. However, I like to talk about the other Angel, the one that filled her with joy, and that Angel was pregnant and living in another village. Mary—having accepted the news that she would bear the messiah, travelled to be with her relative after hearing that she was also expecting. The story is remarkable. Mary is so encouraged by her time with Elizabeth that she returns to Nazareth prepared to be misunderstood. Elizabeth was a messenger from God without wings in Mary's life.

I closed my message by reminding everyone to be amazed at the right parts of the story, like Mary's courage, Elizabeth's comfort, and Joseph's obedience, not just the bright stars and shiny visitors.

At the end of the service, I asked if there were any questions or comments. The visitor put her hand up. I nodded towards her, and she stood up and told us she had been waiting for a bus to take her downtown that never came, so she decided to warm up in our church. She said that morning, our little community was her Angel—her messenger from God reminding her she's not alone and that she felt love and hope being among us. When she was done, I told her that she may have been our messenger from God, reminding us of how the Christmas story is a livable experience if we can find ourselves in

it. I thanked her for coming and asked what her name was. As she sat down, she said it was Angela. The gasp was audible.

Ponder How can we be God's messengers in this season, and what might that look like?

Prayer Loving God, help us to be amazed at the parts of the story that amaze you—like the courage and strength to trust. May we be your messengers and listeners to all the ways you are letting us know we are not alone.



December 10

THE KING IS HAVING A BANQUET

Dave Stimers, Westside Church, Hamilton



Verse *Luke 14:12-14 (MSG)*

"Then he turned to the host. "The next time you put on a dinner, don't just invite your friends and family and rich neighbours, the kind of people who will return the favour. Invite some people who never get invited out, the misfits from the wrong side of the tracks. You'll be—and experience—a blessing. They won't be able to return the favour, but the favour will be returned—oh, how it will be returned!—at the resurrection of God's people."

Several years ago, a group of us sat in a room trying to figure out what we could do to impact our community at Christmas. The season has a way of adding pressure to do something big. We scanned the usual options - a pageant, a nativity scene, some sort of musical performance. Nothing felt quite right until a prayerful moment yielded the thought: The kingdom of heaven is like a banquet...

Of course! It seems to be one of Jesus' favourite images. Throw a banquet, and when you do, invite everyone to come and experience the joy of relationship. So that's what we did. We bought decorations and cooked turkeys. We wrapped presents and set as many tables as we could. And then we went out with invitations. We looked for anyone who might not be invited to a Christmas feast and ensured they felt welcome.

When the evening came, people piled in, and a beautiful scene began to unfold. The older couple who lived in a big lonely house, sitting next to a man struggling with homelessness. The young woman who was paying her tuition by working as an escort, talking to the parents who were grieving the loss of their son. Young adults who were estranged

from their parents and immigrants who were a world away from their families.

There were no fees, no lengthy sermons, and no strings attached. The medium was the message. The King is having a banquet for his Son, and everyone is invited! Looking back, that shared meal turned into many small and big steps of faith. The stories are still unfolding. Some hadn't been in church for decades, and others had stepped in for the first time. It reminded everyone of the joy of God's love and the power of an invitation.

Ponder Who needs to be invited into your celebration this Christmas?

Prayer Heavenly Father, thank you for inviting us into your presence. Thank you for loving us. Give us the courage to extend that same invitation to those around us and to lengthen our tables this Christmas. Amen.



w e e k t h r e e

Joy



CANDLE LIGHTING **Liturgy**

Reader:

We come together amid a busy season to take a breath.
To breathe in together the life that God gives us.
To listen to the beat of God's heart and the blessings
and lessons this season brings to us.
Each week of Advent, we light this Advent Wreath.
With its light comes our prayers and our stories.

The candle of this third week of Advent is a candle of joy.
Today the flame of this candle reminds us of the joy
that Jesus brings into this world and his presence with us.
Jesus said, "Until now, you have not
asked for anything in my name.
Ask, and you will receive
so that your joy may be complete."

Light the candle.

Let's pause for a moment to consider
the joy that Jesus has given us.
When have you tasted the gift of joy?
When have you known God's provision,
bringing happiness into your life or life around you
– in the big things or the small?

Pause for a Moment...

Prayer:

We thank you, Jesus, that you want to bring
answers and joy into every life.
We thank you for the joy you have brought to us.
We bring to you now prayers of joy
for the people and places on our hearts this morning.
Trusting in your powerful name.

Amen.

Missional Advent Jar

w e e k t h r e e



Prayer walk in
your
neighbourhood

Reach out to a
single parent in
your community
and offer a meal

Purchase socks
and donate them
to your local
shelter

Round up some
friends and sing
carols at your local
hospital

Notes

December 12

A SEASON OF SECRET GENEROSITY

Todd Lester, BIC Leadership Team



Verse *Matthew 6:3*

"But when you give to someone in need, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing."

One of the things I enjoyed about the Christmas season was the secret generosity practiced by many people. During the month of December, it became a tradition that certain people would visit me early in the month and request that I act as a broker, a kind of Santa Claus, you might say, and deliver gifts that they would provide to those in need. My role was to ensure that the recipient would not know the identity of their benefactor. Those mentioned above would bring to my office a variety of Christmas gifts, including turkeys, food goods, gift cards, toys, and other items that they wanted me to then pass along to single mothers, the elderly who were alone, families where the income earner had lost their job, and so on. It was a privilege to be the messenger of their secret generosity. I considered the idea theologically sound from Jesus' point of view. He said in Matt 6:3, when giving to the needy, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Jesus' illustration is comical in its overstatement, but it clarifies the point. Generosity should be motivated not by recognition but rather out of love.

As the broker of this secretive generosity, I personally got to witness the results. Those who received the gifts felt loved because someone had thought to share with them out of their abundance. I often noted how the kindness had an impact well beyond the gift's monetary value and provided hope for those who needed it. The charitableness deeply touched people. Typically, it was my role to provide some Kleenex to manage the tears that inevitably followed.

Generosity, secretive or not, is part of the Christmas tradition. It seems appropriate given that Christmas is the celebration of the most generous act towards humankind in all of its history. Christmas celebrates that moment in time when God shares generously of himself and comes to earth in a lowly manger to express his love to us, his people, to provide hope that overcomes our fear and joy that overcomes our sorrow.

Ponder Is generosity an act or an attitude?

Prayer Help us to be grateful to you, God, for the abundant generosity expressed in Christ Jesus and so many other ways. Amen.



December 13

A CRAZY CHRISTMAS OFFERING

Chris Higginson, Sauble Christian Fellowship



Verse *Hebrews 13:16b*

"God takes particular pleasure in acts of worship - a different kind of "sacrifice" - that take place in kitchen and workplace and on the streets."

Kincardine, ON, is home to a beautiful Be In Christ church plant called Bluewater Church. For about 7 years until 2021, it was my distinct honour to pastor this innovative, brave, but fledgling congregation.

It was November 2017 when we had a church "family chat." We had been renting Sunday space for 3 hours per week in an out-of-the-way community center, and the group felt strongly Jesus was calling us to find our own 24/7 space downtown on the main street. We wanted to have a downtown touch and dreamed of beginning a Drop-in ministry we believed our town needed desperately.

Once we discovered that a 1200-square-foot storefront would cost approximately \$50,000 for 3 year's lease costs, utilities, and minor renovations, we were a little intimidated. Ok, a lot intimidated.

By this time, it was December. We asked each other, "Is it crazy to think we can have a Christmas offering and raise \$50,000?" We agreed it was indeed crazy but decided to do it anyway. A crazy Christmas offering. This was a lot to ask of a congregation that sometimes numbered in the teens on a Sunday morning.

Of course, we knew we were doing this all wrong. We had no campaign with branding and banquets. It was the wrong time of year. We had no drawings or models. We didn't even have an address other than "somewhere downtown"! But, that Christmas, we counted the offering. \$55,000!

Bluewater is now in its 5th year of ministry from its wonderful downtown ministry space. The first Sunday service was June 3, 2018, with our Drop-in ministry starting the next day.

When Covid hit, Bluewater's Drop-in necessarily morphed into a meal delivery program, delivering high-quality frozen meals prepared by volunteers and delivered at no cost to community people living on the margins. By the time you read this, they'll have delivered their 5000th meal since the pandemic. The feeding of the 5000, sort of...all because a group of Jesus-loving adventurers didn't know any better than to have a crazy Christmas offering.

Ponder What seemingly crazy idea might Jesus be stirring in you to show His love to those on the margins? He's quite gentle with risk-takers.

Prayer Dear Jesus, you came into this world and experienced life on the margins right from the moment of your birth. You take very personally how we treat those at risk of being last on our lists. Would you help us to put our "yes" on the table in advance, offering ourselves to you as an act of worship, even without knowing all the details of how you want to love others through us? Amen.



December 14

MINI PASTORS!

Charlene Neuman, Westheights Church,
Kitchener



Verse *1 Timothy 4:12*

“Don’t let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity.”

Our neighbours at Forest Heights Long Term Care first reached out, looking for pastors to lead a Sunday service.

“No...” I replied when asked if I could be spared to lead a morning service in December.

“But...I know 40 mini-pastors, give or take, who might fit the bill. Are there any restrictions on size and height?”

And so began a wonderful, mutually-enriching relationship between Westheights Kids, Westheights Student Ministry, and the staff and residents at Forest Heights.

Each weekend through the fall, as a different team of kids rehearsed their parts, we sat in a circle and talked about what it might be like to live with so many others in long-term care. And what it might mean to those who had few visitors - to hear the good news of God With Us. We talked about how God could use us - our 5-year-olds, our Sr Highs, and everyone of every age in between - to bring to one of His children whatever it was that they needed. How only God knew what that was, but that we could be a part of His gift to them. And we prayed...Sometimes 6-10 year-olds prayed aloud, to my surprise, because they were so concerned - for the residents, visitors, and staff who might see and hear our worship that day.

And finally, the first day came - with all the excitement of kicking off the Christmas season. We gathered to rehearse one last time, to watch each other's work, and giggled at our "fast-forward" version of the service. Then we picked up our shakers, Bibles, crafts, fabric, rhythm sticks, tambourines, drums, and scripts and walked across the parking lot to join the service next door. We went as worship leaders, i.e., singers and dancers, instrumentalists, percussionists, actors, readers, preachers, sound techs, gift-makers, gift-givers...People of all ages were learning how to be comfortable with complete strangers.

We left remembering the cheer, the clapping and tapping along, the faces peeking into the room to hear what it was all about: "Mary, did you know?... The sleeping child you're holding - is the great I AM!"

Ponder Are there ways in which you've minimized or dismissed someone's - or your own - ability to bring the peace, healing, and freedom of Jesus to others?

Prayer Lord, You are Peace on Earth - in us. Thank You for giving us Your peace. We offer ourselves to You to be Your instruments of comfort, joy, and goodwill to all those You set in our path. Help us to listen for You, hear from You, and trust in Your ability and intent to change the world through us. Amen.



December 15

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

Steve Jensen, Brooklin Village Church, Brooklin



Verse Acts 20:24

"What matters most to me is to finish what God started: the job the Master Jesus gave me of letting everyone I meet know all about this incredibly extravagant generosity of God."

Several years ago, we had a guy by the name of Allen show up at the church who had just moved to town from Nigeria for work. He joined us one Sunday morning, early December, looking for the local Baptist church and decided to stick around when we pointed him in the right direction without trying to convince him that our church was better! Weird, right?

As Christmas approached, I had the opportunity to connect with him on a couple of occasions and came to learn that he was here in Canada on his own. He had a wife back home, whom he had married only two days before moving, and the only people he knew in town were the family he was working for. I don't know about you, but I tend to be protective of my family time over the holidays; maybe it's in response to the busyness of Christmas as a child, but for just a few days each year, we do our best to unplug. However, this year, no matter how much I tried to justify protecting our time with the family, I knew things would look a little different.

Have you ever experienced a nudge from the Holy Spirit? How about its persistence when you try to ignore it? Looking back, it's ridiculous how concerned I was about my comfort instead of doing what I knew I should, but I eventually gave in, and we invited him for Christmas; I should add, by this point, it wasn't begrudgingly! We had the best time, sharing stories of our family traditions and the different ways our cultures celebrated Christmas. It's funny. It was simple, easy, and didn't cost us anything more than our time.

I received a message the next day from Allen thanking our family for inviting him into our home, saying it was one of the most special Christmases he could remember. Because I responded to what I felt God was calling me to, I could tell him the same. It was a Christmas we won't soon forget, and I was reminded of the opportunity we have in those moments to reflect the love of Christ through our willingness to simply save space for people, even when it disrupts our plans.

Ponder Who might the Holy Spirit be nudging you to disrupt your plans for this Christmas? Are you willing to?

Prayer Jesus, thank you for entering our world to be with us. I confess that I am often more concerned about myself than those around me. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear when you are calling us to open our lives and extend our table to those who are alone this Christmas Season and throughout the year to come. Amen.



December 16

DO NOT BE AFRAID

Jennifer McWilliams, The Meeting House



Verse *Luke 2:10*

"But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."

As you probably know, this past year has not been easy for my faith community. There have been moments of heartache, grief, rage, hopelessness, and fear. It can be frustrating as a congregation leader to feel like you're being thrown around by circumstances that are out of your control but wondering if it could destroy the community that you have come to love. When you focus on the outside circumstances and forces at play, it is very easy to freak out and, in some cases, to run away.

Incredibly, this is not what has happened. Of course, there has been deep pain and heartache and "all of the things," but somehow, it has not been the meta-narrative of our community this year. Instead, our people gather to worship God, enjoy fellowship, serve one another, do life together, and grow in their understanding of what it means to follow Jesus.

As the outside has become noisier, it's become even more important to focus on the One who guides us. "*Do not be afraid.*" I am sure those shepherds must have been pretty freaked out with a shining angel appearing to them! But there was nothing to fear. In fact, the greatest Hope had just been born! Through Jesus, there is peace, calm, and a focusing point when life gets crazy.

That is what has stayed with me this season. Jesus, God incarnate, is with us. The Holy Spirit continues to move and work in his people. We

have the greatest Hope to share with the world. And that's why we are (still) here. May the ultimate gift of Jesus at Christmastime be a reminder of the peace offered to an out-of-control world.

Ponder Where might the peace of Christ be needed in your life or the life of your community? What is one practical step to realign your focus to Him alone?

Prayer Lord Jesus, prince of peace, remind us of your ever-present Hope. When our circumstances cause us to question, bring us gently back to you. Amen.



December 17

EXTENDING YOUR TABLE

Dean Morris, REUNION Richmond, B.C.



Verse *Luke 22:28-30*

"You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom."

I didn't grow up in a Christian home, so our family traditions around the Christmas season were rooted in the gathering of family, sharing delicious meals, reading, and watching the holiday classics, my favourites being the 1964 classic stop motion animation Rudolf the red nosed reindeer with Burl Ives as the snowman narrator, and of course Home Alone. And although these traditions did not encompass the celebration of the birth of Jesus, our family always made an effort to express the love, joy, peace, and hope that I now cherish as a central part of the season.

One year, in particular, my parents truly embodied the welcome and hospitality we have come to associate with the incarnation of Jesus. Our neighbours who were new to the street experienced a house fire just before Christmas. Thankfully no one was hurt, but it was obviously devastating and traumatic. Without a second thought, my parents invited the family to share Christmas with us. The table was extended, another pot of "stove top" stuffing was made, a few more bottles of wine were added, and a Christmas dinner between neighbours, who were suddenly more than just neighbours, was shared.

I was too young to remember this meal myself, but the story was often told around the table on Christmas day of how we were able to offer a sense of hope and joy to our neighbours amid a very difficult time.

I love this story because it reminds me of the welcome of Jesus, that even in the midst of darkness, with no room to be found, in a less than

hopeful situation, he was born. People of all kinds have found their way to Him to experience the welcome, joy, and hospitality of Christ.

Ponder This year, I want to invite you to imagine how you can extend your table, literal or metaphoric, to share the goodness of Jesus and the joy this season can bring. Who are the 'neighbours' that may need an infusion of peace, joy, hope, or love, and how might we be able to be present to them to help meet that need?

Prayer Lord, help us to be a reflection of you to the people in our lives. May we have a keen awareness of the welcome you are constantly extending, and may we excitedly add chairs to our tables and fill them with people who are longing and hoping to share in the goodness you offer. Amen.



week four

Peace



CANDLE LIGHTING **Liturgy**

Reader:

We come together amid a busy season to take a breath.
To breathe in together the life that God gives us.
To listen to the beat of God's heart and the blessings
and lessons this season brings to us.

Each week of Advent, we light this Advent Wreath.
With its light comes our prayers and our stories.

The candle of this fourth week of Advent is a candle of peace.
Today the flame of this candle reminds us of the peace
that Jesus brings into this world and his presence with us.

Jesus said, "I give you peace, the kind of peace
that only I can give. It isn't like the peace that this world can give.
So don't be worried or afraid."

Light the candle.

Let's pause for a moment to consider the
peace that Jesus has given us.
When have you felt the gift of peace?
When have you known God's presence driving out
fear in your life or life around you
– in the big things or the small?

Pause for a Moment...

Prayer:

We thank you, Jesus, that you want to
bring peace and freedom into every life.
We thank you for the peace you have brought to us.
We bring to you now prayers of peace for the
people and places on our hearts this morning.
Trusting in your powerful name.

Amen.

Missional Advent Jar

w e e k f o u r



Prayer walk
around local
schools

Write out
Christmas Cards
for a local
retirement home

Donate personal
care items to a
local women
shelter

Email your mayor
a note of
encouragement
and wish them a
Merry Christmas

Notes

December 19

GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY

Andres and Ale Rincón, REUNION, Armenia



Verse *Luke 2: 8-14*

"That night, there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Saviour—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

Since 2020 we have started to see a lot of families with small children walking on the streets of Colombia, families with dirty and old clothes, bags, and nothing more than a hope of a new life. These families are refugees from Venezuela that started to come to Colombia and other countries in South America after their country's economic and political crisis. The Colombian government estimates that over 2 million Venezuelans are now living in Colombia as refugees after Covid increased the crisis. It was really hard for us to see a lot of families walking on the main roads of our cities without anything, begging for food and water for their small children, and we decided to do something about it. Some friends and I created a small kit called "The Walkers Kit," a small backpack with water, crackers, medicine, fruit, candies for the kids, and a handwritten note of hope.

I'm not sharing this because we want praise or anything like it; I know that what we do for them does not fully fulfill all of their real needs, but

as one walker said to me, crying when I gave him the kit: "Thanks for giving us hope of a better world."

This situation also reminded me that one day our Lord Jesus was walking as a refugee with his family on the dirty streets of the middle east with just their clothes towards Egypt, just like these Venezuelan families here in Colombia. Still, it also reminds me that the night that Jesus was born, a new hope, a new humanity, a new light, and a new world were also born, and for that, I praise and adore Him like the shepherds in the gospel.

Ponder Are you enjoying, living and spreading the good news that brings great joy to all people?

Prayer Lord Jesus, We give you thanks for deciding to come and live among us in the midst of our broken humanity. We also give you thanks for shining your light and bringing good news for all of us. We pray that we could be your messengers and testimonies of joy, peace and good news to many. Amen.



December 20

THE SERÃO AT CHRISTMAS

Rob Foster, REUNION, Kuwait



Verse *Psalms 126:2*

“Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.”

The story I’d like to share took place in a little town on a Swiss mission station in Angola called Kalukembe, where I had the privilege of growing up.

The community at Kalukembe was a tight-knit group of medical and ecclesiastical folk, with communal life centred around the church and the hospital. There were events and celebrations throughout the year, but the ones during the Christmas season were always my favourite. One event, in particular, stood out: the serão, an evening of games, skits, and songs put on by hospital and church staff for the community. Angolans, Canadians, Americans, and Swiss – nurses and doctors, orderlies, seminarians, nursing students, pastors, choir directors, and youth – would come together to put on a Variety Show for their friends and family that was unparalleled for the joy, laughter, hope, and warmth it brought to everyone. Nurses lampooned surgeons like my dad, whose mutton chops and short temper in the OR were renowned; Three Blind Mice was translated into the local Umbundu dialect and taught to the audience; a no-hands eating contest left prim and proper Swiss ladies buckled in laughter and covered in chocolate pudding; doctors competed to see who could empty a baby bottle of milk the fastest. In short, the serãos were legendary, and for a good reason.

But beyond the hilarity and joie de vivre, the serão also served a deeper function, for Kalukembe was effectively under siege, like so many settlements and towns across the country. A brutal civil war permeated every aspect of our lives, with travel all but impossible by

road and fighting always close enough that casualties appeared regularly at the hospital. Close friends and community members had been lost. In this setting, the serãos became instruments and vessels of solidarity and encouragement, of emotional succour and spiritual sustenance amidst the bloodshed and privations that predated upon our community. It was no coincidence that there would always be a serão at Christmas, for in a season where Christians reflect on the Hope, Joy, and Love of Christ, I cannot think of a better example.

Ponder How has laughter and shared joy nourished your life or community?

Prayer Lord Jesus, may we never forget that you smiled and laughed among us! May you use us to build communities that love and laugh together and bring Peace and Joy to those around us. Amen.



December 21

A SIMPLE INVITE

Kenol and Rachel Bernard, Falls View Church,
Niagara Falls



Verse *Ephesians 2:18-19*

"For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household."

In 2017 Falls View Church held our annual community easter egg hunt. The kids had a great time. Afterward, Rachel called the house of the boy who won the jellybean guess. His mother, Caroline, said she would be right there to pick up the prize, as she lived across the street.

This was the first time Caroline came to church. Rachel chatted with her for a few minutes, and as Caroline was leaving, Rachel invited her to come to church the next morning.

That simple act of kindness changed everything for Caroline and her young family. Sometimes all someone needs is to be invited.

Caroline told us over lunch a few weeks later that she would never have imagined she would be welcome in a church. Eyes brimming with tears, she told us how unworthy she felt to be welcomed somewhere so holy. But, we told her that churches are filled with people just like her, and she was not only welcome in the family of Christ but that she belonged there. She accepted Christ before the meal was finished, smiling through her tears.

Caroline had zero Biblical background; hearing her talk about her encounters with the Lord was incredible. Caroline quickly became a special part of our Church Community. Her hunger and passion for

the Lord were contagious. She constantly asked questions that made all of us stop and think. “Why do we say Amen? Why do we lay hands on people when we pray for them? What is in anointing oil that makes it special?” Our church took Caroline under our wing from day 1. Caroline was mentored, disciplined, and even tutored by our church family. As a result, her faith, knowledge, and passion for Christ multiplied.

Our church immediately stepped up when Caroline shared that her cancer had returned with a vengeance. Her previous battle was a dark and lonely one. We made sure she never went to an appointment alone, she had a constant flood of cards and calls, and the church provided meals for her and her boys weekly for almost a year. In addition, one of our church families made it their mission to give Caroline’s family a Christmas they wouldn’t forget, complete with gifts for everyone and Christmas dinner. Caroline was completely overwhelmed by the kindness, love, peace, and, most importantly, the acceptance she found at church. It all started with being invited to come.

On her last day on this side of heaven, we went to see Caroline and say goodbye. Her last words to us were a whispered, “Thank you.”

Ponder Is there anyone in your life waiting to be invited into the family of God?

Prayer Lord, open our eyes to those around us who are waiting for an invitation. Give us the courage to invite others and share your love with those we meet. Amen.



December 22

A LAST MINUTE INVITATION

Jason DeRoche, The Pier, Brockville



Verse *Luke 2:8-10*

"There were shepherds camping in the neighbourhood. 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."

My first year in ministry was at a small church in a small town in the Ottawa Valley. Each year, a couple at the church would go to the local seniors' residence to play and sing Christmas carols. They were tried and true veterans at this. So in my first year there, they asked me to come along.

The thing was, they asked me last minute. I think they assumed that because I'm a musician, I'd be fine. So we didn't have a rehearsal. We were given songbooks about 10 minutes before start time, which had no chords. And all I got was the announcement of the key, a count in, and away we went. I did my best to follow along. But I pretended to play much more than I actually did. It was pretty humiliating.

But I remember another thing: the joy of the people there. They would sing along with us or close their eyes and enjoy. Music has the power to transport us to distant lands and memories. And, afterward, they'd light up when we'd sit to talk and listen.

Looking back, I realize there's a lesson in that. It didn't matter that I was a bit unprepared. What mattered was that we were there, present. We were present with people who may not have been able to sing their favourite carols otherwise or even see family or friends. God worked through our presence to bring joy and comfort. And I realize that if I didn't go because I felt unprepared, I wouldn't have been a part of all that.

In the Christmas story, many are unprepared for what was happening. Take the Shepherds, for example. We read about their unpreparedness in a vivid way: "They were terrified." But they were willing to go and see Jesus firsthand, and, as a result, God used them to be among the first to announce to others the good news of great joy of Jesus' birth.

Ponder How might God call us to show up and be present this Christmas, regardless of how prepared we feel?

Prayer Dear heavenly Father, thank you that you didn't need to wait for humanity to be ready for you to send your son. Jesus, your presence is the greatest gift we could ever receive. Holy Spirit, thank you that you invite us to partner with you, promising to work in and through us, even when we feel unprepared. Use me to be a blessing to someone this Advent season. Amen.



December 23

A SHOE BOX OF CARDS FOR THE NAMELESS

Bobbi Vincent



Verse *Isaiah 40:26*

"Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power, not one is missing."

It was becoming a Christmas Tradition in the Vincent household; I would buy several boxes of beautiful Christmas Cards and lay them on the dining room table. Then, for a number of days, the kids and I would gather around the table and fill out the cards with, Season's greetings, Christmas blessings, and other such sentiments. As I watched our children take their time with each card, it always amazed me the time and effort they would put into every one. Often, each card would have a hand-drawn picture in a beautiful array of colours, with lovely sentiments inscribed with a "Love the Vincents" at the end. The only thing missing was who the card was for.

Odd, right - so much care and effort would go into something without a recipient...

There were, however, several recipients, 87 to be exact. They lived in the Manor a few blocks away. These men and women were sent to the Manor to live out their final days, a government-provided residence for Seniors. Many of the clients at the Manor had significant health issues and dementia; many had lost their sight and mobility. The general sense you felt as you walked through the doors was that many of these people had been lost and forgotten by family along the way.

I will never forget the years we would show up with shoe boxes full of cards and a small parlour guitar, and we would roam the halls looking for lights on over the patients' beds inviting us to stop and say "hi." Sometimes we would wait while the PSW finished up a bath or toileting, and then we would enter the room and gently sing some carols and place our card in the hand of the individual, asking their name, learning a bit about who they were and what life they lived.

Several months after Christmas, we would return for visits, and it always blessed our hearts to see the card addressed to "no one" hanging above Diane, Peter, Herb, Dorthy, and Robert's bed well into the spring like a cherished possession. However, this time we knew their names.

Ponder Is there a Manor in your community where the nameless have gone to live? Is Jesus inviting you to enter into their lives this Advent Season? What will be your box of Christmas Cards?

Prayer Jesus, thank you that we are all a part of your Grand Family. We have all been called and given a name and belong to you. May we, while living on this side of heaven, be the family that we have been called to be to the marginalized, forgotten, and nameless. Amen.



December 24

JUST WAIT

Anne Cook, Wainfleet BIC



Verse *Isaiah 40:31a*

"Those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength" (NASB)

"Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength" (NIV)

Christmas of 2020 was looking grim for everyone in Ontario. Our church, like yours, was attempting to navigate lockdowns and restrictions while still trying to foster some sense of celebration and connection with each other. For us, this meant a Christmas Eve drive-through live nativity, complete with sets, actors in costume, and live animals (the highlight of which was definitely George, the donkey).

But as Christmas Eve approached, the news was buzzing with a dismal weather prediction. A huge system consisting of high winds and freezing rain was predicted to settle over our church on December 24th. There was no way we could expose our people, animals, or sound equipment to these kinds of elements, and everyone assumed we would cancel.

I don't know if I had ever felt so much conviction about a specific event needing to happen. It felt so clear to me that this drive-through was what our community needed, and as I wrestled with what to do, I kept hearing God say, "Wait. Don't make the call yet. Just wait." So to the flood of text messages pinging their way through my phone over the next couple of days, I always sent the same reply: "We are still waiting!" Finally, as the morning of the 24th arrived, miraculously, the weather system also decided to wait. It waited all day, and then as vehicles began showing up in our parking lot at 5:30 pm that evening, it did arrive, but in the guise of the most beautiful, gentle, fluffy snowfall you have ever seen. The joy coursing through the heart of everyone who attended that evening was palpable, clearly a gift from God. Hope had been restored, and for a brief time, our strength was renewed.

Wait. Hope. The Hebrew word *qavah* can be translated either way, and sometimes it is even translated as "hopefully wait." Isaiah often sees these ideas of waiting and hope tightly woven together. We are blessed to serve a God of hope who works for those waiting for him!

Ponder Where in your life do you need a burst of hope? How can waiting for God to "work" be an active part of your hope?

Prayer God of Hope, I thank you that my waiting is never wasted when I choose to fix my eyes on you. I humbly ask that you would enter into my waiting, transform me with your presence, fill me with hope, and give me new strength. Amen.



CANDLE LIGHTING **Liturgy**

Reader One:

This is a night to remember.
A night when God broke in on us
and moved into the neighbourhood.
A night when we were not forgotten
or alone or abandoned.
This night is the night when here and
there became one when past and future
combined in a breathless present.
This is a night when we are home, in ourselves,
in this family, in the God who
loved us enough to walk beside us.

Reader Two:

We shrug off despair and embrace hope.
We set aside conflict and choose peace.
We push away despair by claiming joy.
We overcome hate by rising into love.
Because this night, we know, even in the shadows
of our doubts, we know that we are loved.
That's what it means to belong and to be home.

Reader One:

We light these candles, hoping to become
the light and radiate light through how we live our lives.
We light these candles to create a space
called home where all are welcome.
We light these candles to declare that unto us
a Saviour is born, who is Christ the Lord.
Welcomed home by angels singing
and shepherds kneeling.
Welcomed home by those like us
who have worshiped for thousands of years.
Welcomed home again tonight,
right here, right now, in us.
For ALL of us.

Light the Christ Candle and all candles on the wreath.

Reader Two:

Let's pause for a moment to consider
the wonderful gift of Jesus.
What does this mean to you,
that God would come and dwell among us?

Pause for a Moment...

Prayer:

We thank you, Jesus, for loving us
so much that you came to earth
and became human.
The one who called creation into
existence became part of creation.
We celebrate and give thanks this evening.
Jesus, Immanuel, God with Us!

Amen.



Merry Christmas

f r o m B e i n C h r i s t C a n a d a





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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