

**BRECKSVILLE UNITED  
CHURCH OF CHRIST**

**ADVENT TO EPIPHANY  
DEVOTIONAL BOOK**

***2018-2019***



**Advent**

# INTRODUCTION

Every Sunday I have the wonderful privilege of “preaching the Gospel” - proclaiming the Good News of Divine Love, which is revealed in and through Jesus Christ. To do so, I often start by exploring the Scripture Readings which are designated for that particular Sunday - both Old Testament and New. I also try to find a “Continuing Testament” - a contemporary reading that helps illuminate the day’s general theme and provide focus for the underlying message. You now hold in your hands an entire booklet of “Continuing Testaments” written by members and friends of Brecksville United Church of Christ! In the following pages, the Good News of Divine Love is once again revealed in words that are inspired and inspirational!

Advent is the season in which the Church remembers and celebrates the coming of Jesus Christ - the Word made flesh. In these following pages, that Word is brought to life through the reflections of 32 different people! Our thanks to each of them for taking the time to meditate on these texts and to share their insights with us. Thanks also to those who helped edit and publish their writings, especially Jon Thompson and Jeannette Kroeger.

I hope you will all enjoy the following compositions And I pray that by reading and reflecting on these thoughts, we will all hear God’s Still-Speaking Voice more clearly, and be inspired to draw closer to the Holy One in this Holy Season.

Peace and Joy!  
Pastor Dave

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**Sunday, December 2, 2018**

Psalm 25: v. 4-5

*Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation, for you I wait all day long.*

I frequently do a walking meditation in the park and I use this time also to clear my mind of its daily clutter. When I start walking, I make an agreement with myself: for the first part of the walk I allow my mind to chatter about my concerns, but when I turn around and start back I need to keep my thoughts at bay and listen. When I write in my journal at night, I often draw a STOP sign along with the word "listen" to remind me to stop my own thoughts and listen for wisdom from God. I have learned that the best way to hear God's message is to stop my own mind from talking so I can hear messages of wisdom. I believe that by listening to God we learn how to walk on His paths.

**Reflections of Carol Miller**

**Monday, December 3, 2018**

Psalm 25: v. 10

*All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep God's covenant and God's decrees.*

Psalm 25 is a short Psalm and will not take much time to read during this busy holiday season. I would suggest you read all of Psalm 25 and not just Verse 10.

The first three verses deal with the enemies and may they be put to shame. "Do not let me be put to shame nor let my enemies triumph over me," David wrote.

In the next section David asks for guidance. How do we recognize guidance? First, we must want to gain guidance. Second, we must search for God's guidance and we will find a primary guidance plan in the Bible.

Think of the content of verse 10 – "All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep God's covenant and God's decrees."

No, take a big step forward and study the Bible looking for guidance. In addition to guidance to get us through these tough times. Where do you need Guidance?

**A. Family** \_\_\_\_\_

**B. Work** \_\_\_\_\_ **C. Church** \_\_\_\_\_

**D. Friends** \_\_\_\_\_

**E. Personal (health, financial)** \_\_\_\_\_

**F. Others** \_\_\_\_\_

More than you thought, huh? Start with Psalms 25 and create a path of guidance to solve your issues.

**Let's pray together for the courage to look for the guidance you need and want.**

**Merry Christmas, David Ritchey**

**Tuesday, December 4, 2018**

Jeremiah 33: v. 15

*In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.*

At our retreat a few weeks ago, we learned that without justice there is no peace. And peace is what we all crave, whether it is peace in our personal lives, or peace throughout the world.

John Lennon of Beatles fame once stated, "If everyone demanded peace instead of another television set, then there'd be peace." One of his most famous songs says, "Imagine all the people living in peace. You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us, and the world will be as one."

When we look around, it's hard to see peace in the world around us. Here close to home, we have horrific gun violence and greed and corruption among our politicians. In the world, there are dictatorships and terrible wars in places like Yemen and Syria. The best we can do is to seek and create peace in our own lives and demand peace on a wider scale by those we choose to achieve it.

**Prayer: Dear Lord, we pray for peace in our time, whatever that may mean. Peace in our community, peace in our nation, peace in the world at large. Peace in our dealings with our families and at school and at our jobs. Thank you for the righteous branch we know as Jesus. Amen.**

**Jon Thompson**

**Wednesday, December 5, 2018**

Luke 21:25-26

*There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

Every evening before going to sleep I read the daily passage from "These Days". In October one of the scriptures was Psalm 91, which is the perfect antidote for combating the distress swirling around us now.

It begins, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." It continues, "If you make the Most High your dwelling - even the Lord, who is my refuge - then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent."

It is so important for our mental and physical health to find a quiet space away from the constant noise of cell phones, TV, social media, and other stressful situations; to listen for the still, small voice of God. Mindfulness is being in the present, listening to our breath, and praising God for the many blessings He has given us.

"There are only two days in the year that nothing can be done. One is called yesterday, and the other is called tomorrow, so today is the right day to love, believe, do and mostly live."  
Dalai Lama

"Write it on your heart that every day is the best day in the year. He is rich who owns the day, and no one owns the day who allows it to be invaded with fret and anxiety. Finish every day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in. Forget them as soon as you can, tomorrow is a new day; begin it well and serenely, with too high a spirit to be cumbered with your old nonsense. This new day is too dear, with its hopes ►



and invitations, to waste a moment on the yesterdays.” Ralph  
Waldo Emerson

**Dear Father, Mother God: Help me to keep a positive outlook and to be grateful for every blessing – for my family, for my church family, for my eyesight, for my health. Amen.**

**Joy Garapic**

**Thursday, December 6, 2018**

Luke 21:27-28

*Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*

I read Luke 21 – “Signs of the End” to find out what “things begin to take place” and it is pretty frightening - wars, famines, epidemics, earthquakes, great fear- but then again, hasn't it been this way since history has been recorded? But the tools of war are now capable of destroying our planet and corruption and greed are rampant and that makes us all more fearful and makes us feel the need to do something – to make an impact for good.

I believe we need to be fully aware of the path we appear to be on and through the Grace of God use that knowledge to try each day to be honest in our beliefs, to be kind and helpful, to be respectful, to pray, to actively listen, to live joyfully and to know we are all sisters and brothers and children of God.

I love that a synonym for “redemption” is recovery because to me it means that even though I am human and flawed there is hope for deeper awareness and understanding.

**Carole Snider**

**Friday, December 7, 2018**

Psalm 50:22-23

*Mark this, then, you who forget God, or I will tear you apart, and there will be no one to deliver. Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me; to those who go the right way I will show the salvation of God.*

At Christmastime especially, we are thankful to God for his gift of his Son who teaches us to honor the gift of life, and for his teachings of the best way to live.

We honor this in the tradition of gift-giving.

**Betty Gifford**

**Saturday, December 8, 2018**

Psalm 50:4,6

*Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb.  
Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come  
home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.*

How I remember this hymn when I was a little girl.

Sunday School class and singing was led by my father (Herman Roller) and although he did not have a marvelous voice he belted it out and we sang like little lambs, although most of us did not know what sheaves were. (I did not).

Now being a sometime gardener, I love planting seeds and seeing the abundance that God provides from zinnias, snap dragons and the like.

Years ago, my dad and I planted rows of potatoes, sweet corn and sunflowers and amazingly, with rain and sunshine, they otherwise seemed to grow on air.

Thank you, God, for such abundance and the memories they provide.

**Dear Lord, In this treasured time of your birth we look forward to love, peace and growth within ourselves and others. Amen**

**Dorie Gabor**

**Sunday, December 9, 2018**

Luke 1:78-79

*By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

It's difficult to explain to anyone in the process of deep grief that things will "get better." In fact, many times the promise of good to come in our hours of greatest suffering is not only not helpful, but quite possibly infuriating.

As much as we dislike the sight of other people's difficulties—whether it is because we are uncomfortable ourselves or frustrated by the others' lack of perspective—it's easy to trivialize those difficulties with a platitude. Not being able to see because we are in the middle of uncertainty and fear is understandable. Sometimes it's impossible for there to be consolation when everything around us seems shrouded in darkness. Sometimes all we can do is exist in the darkness until the sun comes up in its own time. We can't make the sun come up faster for someone, nor can we hope for it ourselves.

However, the sun eventually comes up again; and with it the consolation of the clarity and comfort it brings. It's helpful to remember this when we are in the most despairing times. The light always, always returns.

**Kate Klonowski**

**Monday, December 10, 2018**

Malachi 3: v.1

*See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.*

Who was this messenger the bible talks about? It is generally accepted that this messenger was John the Baptist, one of the most colorful characters in the bible. He was unkempt and wore camel hair garments. He lived in the wilderness where he ate honey and locusts. An unusual choice it would seem, but as we know now, Jesus was an unusual messiah. He would not lead an army with a fiery sword to drive out the Romans, but instead saved mankind through his message of love and compassion.

**Chad Sproul**

**Tuesday, December 11, 2018**

Malachi 3: v.2

*But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap*

Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament and is only a few pages long. So in order to better understand this passage I just read the whole thing.

As with most of the Old Testament, I came away feeling that God is very displeased, hurt, disappointed, angry with the way we humans behave some of the time. Some people may feel that those are human feelings and that God does not feel them. But maybe they are Godly qualities that we also experience because we are made in His image. Who knows how it all works. It seems we all have our own understanding.

What I do know is that I am glad there is a New Testament. In it I find the behaviors and attitudes that God desires of us through someone we can relate to, someone who is the best example we could ever ask for. We are encouraged to try to be our best self, to try to love God and our fellow man as God loves us.

**May this holiday season be one filled with faith in the power of love.**

**Kathy Pastor**

**Wednesday, December 12, 2018**

Malachi 3: v.3

*He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness*

We often hear people mention their ability to 'keep the faith'. They say it in re-telling of a story about themselves or others. Example: '...I just kept faith until the task was done, or against all odds, they called on their faith to get them through'. As Christians, We can relate to this! Faith is a beacon in one's mind. It is a reliance on what we know of both the path and garden of the Lord. It's what we're taught, experience and aspire to all in one.

The gold and silver in this verse are gifts *presented* as human works of *purity and refinement* which exemplify intent to *include future generations in God's plan*.

**Tia Began**



**Thursday, December 13, 2018**

Philippians 1: v.6

*I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.*

Paul's letter to the church at Phillipi, written while he was in prison, reminds his friends that God is still working among them, and that the "good work" will be completed with the return of Jesus. That was expected momentarily.

Earlier than that, the birth of the Messiah Jesus was in a way the start of God's "good work" on earth. The teaching and example of Jesus was a prelude to His crucifixion and resurrection.

In our time, are we a "work in progress" as we get ready to commemorate the birth of God's son? Is the process that started so many years ago still working in our lives? Can we live the life that Jesus described, in the twenty-first century? Do we have the confidence that Paul wrote about? I may be prejudiced, but as I look around me in the life of BUCC, I see signs that it just may be possible. We look forward to celebrating the birth of Jesus, the savior.

**Prayer: Dear Lord, please keep working in our lives, as we are moving toward the days that lie ahead. Amen**

**Bob Chandler**

**Friday, December 14, 2018**

Philippians 1:9-10

*And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless...*

I like the tone Paul sets in this very short verse. He doesn't pray that God will send a mystical beacon and show the church at Philippi exactly what to do. He prays that the Philippians will gain knowledge and insight to help them determine what is best.

The Philippian church was full of turmoil when the letter was written to them. Factions had formed, and infighting for political gain threatened to tear the community apart (sound familiar?). Paul knows that they don't need a hero or an angel... they need to have the wisdom to pause and listen to each other. They need to find common ground, so they can work through their conflicts together. I believe we need the same kind of conversations today. It was very heartening to attend the Teatime for Peace meeting at our church this fall and see that such conversations are taking place at the grass roots level.

**May we all gain the knowledge and full insight to help us determine what is best! May we all strive to be pure and blameless!**

**Matt Wolbert**

**Saturday, December 15, 2018**

Luke 3:1-3

*The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins...*

Quoting from the website "Got Questions?" – "Although John the Baptist's name implies that he baptized people (which he did), John's life on earth was more than just baptizing. John's adult life was characterized by devotion and surrender to Jesus Christ and his kingdom. John's voice was a 'lone voice in the wilderness' as he proclaimed the coming of the Messiah to a people who desperately needed a Savior. He was a man filled with faith and a role model to those of us who wish to share our faith with others."

John the Baptist is generally regarded as a prophet of God, and many people probably thought he was the Messiah. This was not his intent, as he had a clear vision for what he was called to do. In John 3:28, he said "You yourselves can testify that I said I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him." John cautioned his disciples that what they had seen and heard from him was just the beginning of the miracle that was to come.

**Prayer: Dear Lord, we thank you for the miraculous life of John the Baptist. We thank you for sending him to lay the groundwork for the ministry of Jesus Christ. May we emulate him in his simplicity and his determination to spread the Good News. Amen.**

**Jon Thompson**

**Sunday, December 16, 2018**

Luke 3:4-6

*"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"*

This psalm dates back to the time of the return from the exile. The psalmist is talking to those who seem to have forgotten God, and is reminding people that there is a price to be paid for that. However, there are ways to avoid this. The words in Micah ("do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with your god") come to mind, as does the words of the "Golden Rule" ("do unto others...").

As the time of the birth of the son of God draws nearer, it is appropriate to think about how we conduct our lives in the world of the twenty-first century. Sacrifice and offerings are one thing, but doing things God's way is another.

The one who will teach us God's way is coming. His words and examples will show us the way to peacefully get along in this world.

**Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to remember the teachings and example of your son. Help us to find ways to use them in our lives. Amen**

**Bob Chandler**

**Monday, December 17, 2018**

Isaiah 12: v.2

*Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.*

In one week, we celebrate the birth of Jesus who becomes our means of salvation on earth. At Christmas we are all celebrating a blessed happy event. The birth of a baby is usually a happy occasion with much preparation and ultimately joy that arrives with a great deal of fanfare and celebration. But the birth of Christ is not the only "gift" we receive. We also receive the gift of salvation.

There are so many times when we can turn to Jesus to be our strength and place our faith in his love and kindness. The grace of God is manifested in Jesus and to trust in him is all that we are asked. Having that faith to know we are protected from harm, relieved from fear, and granted the strength to bear the physical and emotional hardships that we all face is truly amazing. Surely a tiny baby can't deliver all that???

Like Isaiah, we should believe that our God can surely deliver the salvation that is very much needed in our hurting and troubled world. Surely it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid. Sing the praises of the Lord, for he has done great things.

For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense; and he will be my Savior.

**Sing the praises of the Lord, for he has done great things.  
Diane Gressley**

**Tuesday, December 18, 2018**

Isaiah 12:3-4

*With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on God's name, make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that God's name is exalted.*

As I watch, look and listen to the world around me today, I have many emotions! I feel anger, frustration, fear and sadness. The list could go on and on.

And yet there are many times when I am overwhelmed with with gratefulness. I am in awe of the beauty of nature. I marvel at the animal and plant kingdoms. I thank God for my daughters and amazing grandchildren. They bring so much joy and pleasure to my life. I am blessed with loyal, caring and loving friends who challenge me to be a better person.

At our church retreat in October a small, but impressive group of people gathered. Our topic was "Peace and Justice". Are you kidding me? Let's see, we have about 6 hours to do this...

How will this little group deal with the challenge? At the end we actually did come to a conclusion. And beginning. Each one of us can strive to create peace in our little part of the world, in our own lives. We can affect and teach and guide and LIVE showing an example that personifies peace and justice. We can do this daily. Try it! It's not easy, but keep at it. It will be the small things that people do within their own tiny realms that will make a difference. You can choose to be a part of the change in the world.

**Give thanks to the Lord and call on God's name!**

**Challenging, loving and encouraging God, please be with us as we strive for peace in our world. Hear us when we call for strength and guidance. Your name is to be exalted! Amen**

**Submitted Humbly by Jill Zedan**

**Wednesday, December 19, 2018**

Psalm 85:4-6

*Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us? Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations? Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you?*

The day I seriously began to consider gathering my thoughts about this advent verse selection, several catalogues filled with lovely Christmas décor and gift ideas arrived in the mail. I am always so tempted but have made a pact with myself that I could be using the money I would spend on these tempting items to help someone or some cause. So I continue to drag out the “almost Charlie Brown tree” that I got on clearance 10 years ago and decorate with the mostly end-of-season ornaments and home-made décor.

About Psalm 85, it seems the people of Israel had returned to Judah from exile in Babylon (after 539 B.C.) and were encountering new problems. They began to wonder if God would always be angry with them and if God’s anger would pass to their future generations. This was many years before the birth of Christ, the gift that promises what God’s followers so badly wanted in the era of the psalms’ origins.

Unbelievably we still are searching for so many of the same blessings: peace, forgiveness, goodness, love, justice. These verses record prayers for being restored and revived so that they could rejoice in God.

The advent season with its wonderful music and preparations does revive us to give those gifts to others. The gifts we make, and purchase are really not the only gifts that matter. We can strive harder for peace, forgive, do good acts, love each other, and work toward justice. Christmas gives us the impetus to restore our attitudes and goals. ►

**Prayer: Dear God, we are so thankful for the son you gave. We will rejoice in the inspirations of this advent season. Help us to show our love and gratitude by giving our best to others.**

**Dot Bailey**



**Thursday, December 20, 2018**

Psalm 85:8-9

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

Those are comforting words. We need to hear words of peace in these troubled times. Surely, we all need to listen to those words to have any chance turning our hearts, so as to bring His Peace and Justice into the world.

Aunt Jill and I have been "birthday buddies" for 64 years as of today. She had a bit of a head start, but I feel that I am catching up. We were blessed that she moved up here in 2013, since we had only been together on our mutual birthday once in the first 50+ years. Now we can celebrate our birthdays as well as the Christ Child's each year.

By the way, we also share our birthday with another from our church (Welcome to the Club - Naomi K.)

**Heavenly Creator, as we celebrate holidays this year, let us hear Your Voice in our hearts and be an instrument of Your Peace in this world. Amen.**

**Jim Duffy & Jill Black**

**Friday, December 21, 2018**

Luke 3:10-11

*And the crowds asked John, "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise."*

Luke 3:10-11 is about caring and sharing. I believe that sharing is most meaningful to the giver and receiver when caring is a part of the equation. When we care, our sharing also sends a bit of love energy with whatever we share so the receiver gets more than a can of food, a piece of clothing, or shelter from the elements. And, the giver receives a bit of joy. Honest caring does not attach conditions or judgements to the giving.

### **A Family Christmas Story**

A couple of years ago my son and his wife wanted to have a special Christmas experience with their two elementary age children. The family discussed what to do and decided to tour a hunger center. The parents made an appointment for the tour. In place of expensive gifts for one another, they made a sizable donation to the hunger center. On Christmas Day there were a few inexpensive gifts under the tree. But, the family had a most beautiful Christmas filled with the joy of caring and sharing.

**May we all find the joy of caring and sharing not only during the Christmas Season, but always. Amen.**

**Pat Rehm's Reflections**

**Saturday, December 22, 2018**

Luke 3:15-16

*All were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah. John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."*

Scripture relates that after King Herod put John the Baptist in prison, John heard of all the things Jesus was doing. It seems like a moment of doubt when John sent his disciples to Jesus to ask if He truly was the Messiah. Jesus responded by telling the men to tell John what they saw and heard – that prophecies were being fulfilled. Jesus didn't rebuke John – instead, he sent evidence that he was the promised Savior. Jesus told the crowd that John was the prophesied messenger who would come before Messiah. Jesus also said, "Truly I tell you, among those born of women, there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom in heaven is greater than he." (Matthew 11:11).

**Prayer: Dear Lord, there is so much we can learn from the life of John the Baptist. Thank you for his humble yet fierce determination to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. Thank you for the love and mutual respect that these two men had for one another. Thank you for the gift of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen**

**Jon Thompson**

**Sunday, December 23, 2018**

Psalm 80:4-7

*O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure. Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.*

The word that caught my eye when selecting this bible passage is "angry". "...how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?"

Who is really the angry one here, God or the author?

I do not believe that God is ever angry with us or with our prayers, but God may be angry or at least disappointed with our sins. If our prayers are not being answered that does not mean God is angry with us or with something in our past that we are being punished for. Unanswered prayers just may be a sign from God for us to do something to help ourselves, change our attitudes or help us to take action to push ourselves in a different direction.

God gave us free will, the ability to act at our own discretion. Humans throughout history have been dealing with right vs wrong, and action vs inaction. Whatever the choice we make, we are accountable for it. I am sure God does not care if we choose Coke over Pepsi, or coffee over tea. He does care when we sin or commit crimes and hurt one another.

God is the loving creator who gave us life, put us in our mostly comfortable lives, and most importantly is still speaking!

**PRAYER: Heavenly Creator, please continue to guide us thru our lives and help us to remain calm and focused on you while facing the trials and tribulations of life. Make anger and rage non-existent, no matter what the circumstances. Amen**

**David Pastor**

**Monday, December 24, 2018**

Psalm 97

*The Lord is king! Let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad! Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. Fire goes before him, and consumes his adversaries on every side. His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles.*

At this time each year, we celebrate the coming of Jesus. We know he was a special person who recognized a power much greater than himself. During his short life, he probably frequently repeated and embraced the words of today's psalm reading.

I remember many other times when I have rejoiced in our Lord and celebrated in Jesus' coming among us; usually not with the awe expressed in the Psalm but with gusto, just the same.

My earliest memories were in a little rural Baptist church in western Pennsylvania where the choir, often off key, would sing out heartily using an old moth-eaten upright piano as their only accompaniment. Later, in Europe, I would sometimes celebrate in one of the big cathedrals, sitting among all of the adornment they possessed, with a professional choir doing a professional job of celebration. And I also relished my celebrations in a small church in the Hague, a part of its mostly American protestant congregation, helped by a choir including many voices with Dutch accents, in a celebration of Jesus' birth and also as a help for them to practice English as their second language.

But the best celebrations have been in our church in suburban Cleveland where our whole church family, friends, and neighbors could enthusiastically join in on traditional hymns and carols to express our confidence that the teachings of Jesus will continue to be important in each of our lives. ►

**Prayer: Oh, You who is beyond our human understanding, we celebrate your presence, your gifts, unearned, to each of us, and the teachings of Jesus, which all helps us to appreciate and respond to the generosity we have received. Amen**

**Max Roha**

**Tuesday, December 25, 2018**

Psalm 96:1-4

*O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised...*

This psalm was written after the return from the exile. The people were joyful and happy – things were going to get better. When people are happy, they often break into song. The psalmist is urging people to join in the singing.

Fast forward to modern times. Sometimes we have to look hard to find something to be happy about. However, all around are sources of joy and happiness. One example is our community at BUCC. Not only do we share in fellowship, but we can participate in sharing that joy. A good example is the sharing of the joy of music during worship and at other times.

A special time to sing joyful music is when we commemorate the birth of Jesus. The hymns and carols bring a special touch to this time. May we join in singing the joy and praise of God at the time of His son's birth.

**Dear Lord, help us to hear the joy in the songs and music around us. Help us to join the singing of the songs of praise of God.**

**Bob Chandler**

**Wednesday, December 26, 2018**

Luke 2:4-5

*Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.*

While the Bible writers may be trying to place Jesus' birth at a certain point in Biblical history, these verses are saying to me that family was important in the upbringing of Jesus – a sense of belonging as well as a support system.

My father's mother died when he was 4 years old and his father had TB so the family was split between 3 relatives. He mentioned several relatives who helped him over the years e.g. finding him a summer job while he was in college. He was proud to have been a role model to one of the cousins he grew up with. The cousin made the comment that if Barnes could do it so could he (going to college).

Christmas is a great time for families to get together, exchange phone calls, and letters. Families shouldn't be taken for granted.

**We give thanks for our family and friends who have given us love and support over the years.**

**Caroline Chandler**



**Thursday, December 27, 2018**

Luke 2:6-7

*While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

This passage spoke to me significantly. This year, my junior year of high school, has been one of the hardest things I've thrown myself into. I think the parts of this particular quote that relates the most with this year, is Mary going into labor. Now, I don't want to confuse any of you - I have not, and don't plan on anytime soon, having anything to do with labor. It's the fact that nothing went as planned for Mary and Joseph. They gave birth to Jesus in a barn, after all. It gives me a little hope. Nothing went as planned for them, and yet they created this amazing wonderful person who would bless the earth. When I think about it, it gives me a little strength, as nothing is really going as planned for me right now, either. I have faith though - something good will come out of this. It won't stay this hard forever; this struggle will end in accomplishing happiness, even if just because I made it through.

**Lindsey Maier**

**Friday, December 28, 2018**

Luke 2:8-9

*In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.*

When I was 20, I went on a 2-week long camping trip through NY and Vermont with my two closest friends. Of the three of us, one was a very experienced tent camper and backpacker, having grown up camping with her family. My other friend and I not only had no experience, we grew up believing that the only reason anyone would willingly sleep outside – and on the ground, no less! -- was because of personal tragedy

So, it was late August – well into the “off season” – and the further north we went, the fewer fellow campers we saw. Somewhere north of Watertown, NY, we found ourselves on a low cliff, overlooking a serene inland lake, and apparently the only humans in the park. It was a perfect place to set up camp for the next few days, and later we'd agree that it was the most unspoiled and gorgeous stop of the trip. Up to this point, I don't think my ears had ever heard such quiet, if that makes sense. The only sounds were songbirds and the nearly imperceptible lapping of the lake on the muddy bank. And when the air was occasionally disturbed by the calls of loons, I thought it was the most magical thing I'd ever heard.

So, you can imagine our confusion when, the next morning, we were rattled awake by a heavy, rolling rumble that didn't let up. We rose and searched the cloudless blue sky for some clue to the cause of the sound, but there was nothing. Meanwhile, the rumble was growing into a roar -- we were frantically scanning the sky and treetops for the slightest hint of an explanation. The sound had intensified to the point where we had to hold onto the trees to keep from falling down. It physically shook me to my core, and I'll never forget the feeling of that tree trunk vibrating under my hands. Suddenly the sun was eclipsed, and we looked straight up at the underside of a low flying, black aircraft. ►

It was flying just barely above the tree canopy, shaped like an arrowhead. And then it was gone, leaving us in stunned silence. Later that day, during a trip into town, we learned that what we saw was an F-117 Nighthawk stealth attack aircraft, "out for a spin" from the nearby military base. That might explain why we were the only campers in such a beautiful park, too!

The reason for the existence of an F-117 Nighthawk was to defend me if needed, and to ensure the consistent safety of myself and the country I love. Yet when I was in the presence of my protector, I was terrified! And the same can be said about the shepherds mentioned in the verse above -- before they realized that what they were seeing in the sky wasn't going to harm them, they were scared to death! However, the same cannot be said about the constant undercurrent of terror felt by people in war torn countries. There are children who have grown up with the sound of warning sirens, and people who regularly experience the heart-rattling roar of fighter jets over the roofs of their homes. But their terror isn't relieved by any sense of ultimate safety. There's only the repeated realization that they are powerless to stop the violence in their lives, and powerless to protect the ones they love. So please join me in praying for their safety. Please pray for their protection in any of their efforts to find a way to safety, and for continued strength of body and spirit. Please join me in praying that they don't succumb to despair, and that they experience freedom and relief from danger soon. And as always, please pray for our Pastor and our Church, and thank the Creator that we were born in a land free from war. Amen.

**Anne Melfo**

**Saturday, December 29, 2018**

Luke 2:10-11

*But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."*

I can imagine myself as a shepherd just hanging out with my sheep and doing my job, and just living a nice quiet life on a beautiful hillside. It is a great job and not a lot of excitement beyond the normal predators that want to attack my sheep and the unpredictable weather. I have plenty of time to read or sing and I know I would get plenty of exercise. I also have a great relationship with God and nature.

At some point, I would have to go to town and interact with plenty of people that would behave like people (not like my sheep), and there would be plenty of bad news and rumors of awful events, and crazy things happening that I would want to get back to my hillside as soon as possible. I know I don't need the stress in my life that would elevate fears and increase my stress level, so sitting quietly on my hillside would be ideal.

But what would I think when in the midst of my blissful sheep watching an angel appears. First, I would be afraid. I have never seen an angel so not sure what I would do. Maybe run. But I would not leave my sheep. So most likely I would listen to what the angel has to say. In this particular case, it sounds like there is good news. I know I have been waiting for a Savior and this seems to be something to celebrate or at the very least, worthy of checking out.

Like I said, I would prefer to just rest and stay here on the hillside, but the angel does say this is good and now my curiosity has peaked, and so most likely I will go to the city to see what all this fuss is about.

**Diane Gressley**

**Sunday, December 30, 2018**

Luke 2:12-14

*"This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"*

Boy -- wouldn't it be great if we were alerted to every important thing in our lives that we need to pay attention to by a multitude of heavenly host? It would sure save us a lot of wonder and worry. But then again, the world would probably get really loud really fast, and then how would you know if the multitude was singing for you or for someone else?

What we can do is be still - be still, breathe, and listen to that little voice that speaks to us. It's there, we just have to stop looking everywhere else. It will let us know what we really should be paying attention to.

**Sue Maier**

**Monday, December 31, 2018**

Luke 2: 15-16

*The shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So, they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.*

A child is born! This is the good news that was delivered to the shepherds. They moved as one to Bethlehem to see this baby and found him with his mother Mary and Joseph in a stable.

It is no different today than it was when Jesus was born. A baby is a wonder to behold. Families the world over share in this experience and are ready to tell their family and friends about it.

A Christmas carol that describes this event is quoted from the Pilgrim hymnal:

While shepherds watched their flocks by night, all seated on the ground,  
The angel of the Lord came down, and glory shown around.

Fear not," said he, for mighty dread had seized their troubled mind,  
"Glad tidings of great joy I bring to you and all mankind.

"To you, in David's town this day is born of David's line  
The Savior who is Christ the Lord; And this shall be his sign:

"The heavenly babe you there shall find to human view  
displayed,  
All meanly wrapped in swathing bands, and in a manger laid."

Thus spoke the seraph; and forthwith appeared a shining throng  
Of angels praising God, who thus addressed their joyful song:  
"All glory be to God on high, and to the earth be peace;►

Good will henceforth from heaven to men begin and never cease.”

**Heavenly Father/Mother, our heartfelt thanks to you for sending this child to us as Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen**

**Jan Renovetz**

**Tuesday, January 1, 2019**

Luke 2:17-19

*When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.*

Shall not this Child  
(When we shall hear the bells of His amazing voice)  
Conquer the winter of our hateful century?

And when His Lady Mother leans upon the crib,  
Lo, with what rapiers  
Those two loves fence and flame their brilliancy!

Here in this straw lie planned the fires  
That will melt all our sufferings:  
He is our Lamb, our holocaust!

And one by one the shepherds, with their snowy feet,  
Stamp and shake out their hats upon the stable dirt,  
And one by one kneel down to look upon their Life.

Excerpt from *A Christmas Card*, poem by Thomas Merton (1915-1968).

**Dave Debick**



**Wednesday, January 2, 2019**

John 1:1-3

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.*

Although we understand that this is a reference to Jesus, this phrase initially made me think of the scientific beginnings of everything, then led me to think more about God's spiritual Hand in the miraculous order of creation over millions of years to where we are today. It is beyond our knowing and full understanding, as perhaps it should be. My grandmother often used the phrase "the grand scheme of things" when things just worked out for the best in spite of the odds.

By personalizing the concept of the Word and God's spiritual Hand maybe we can all find an active "word" to guide our thoughts and actions each day. I took THE WORD and made a pneumonic to help me:

Trust in God and be a trustworthy person.

Hear with an open heart and mind.

Enjoy the present.

Work in small ways to brighten someone's day every day.

Offer your skills and knowledge to raise up someone else.

Remind yourself that you deserve to be loved.

Dedicate yourself to peace and justice through prayer or action.

**Dear God, help us to understand that, as your creations, we were all created in Divine Love. Show us our common threads of compassion and spirit when differences are so much easier to find and make us the active embodiment of your Hand at work each day. Amen.**

**Sherrill Witt**

**Thursday, January 3, 2019**

John 1:3-5

*What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

This verse spoke to me about one of the hardest times in my life when I was 20 years old. I suffered a traumatic injury at a summer job that almost took my life. I was angry with God why this happened to me; feeling like I was being punished for something. Years later, through counseling, I was able to see that I was fortunate to have survived and that God was with me the whole time in my months of recovery. Over the last 45 years, I have realized how blessed I am and how even in my darkest moments, God was with me. He never leaves even when we question life's events.

**Mark Lehman**

**Friday, January 4, 2019**

Hebrews 1:1-2

*Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days God has spoken to us by a Son, whom God appointed heir of all things, through whom God also created the worlds.*

This letter to the Hebrews (? written by Priscilla?) refers to the many ways God had been speaking to His people over the centuries. As we continue to celebrate the birth of His son, we acknowledge that Jesus can be described as the word of God living among his people. Does God continue to speak to us through others? Are we listening for the continuing words of guidance from God? These are things that we can contemplate as we go about our daily living.

**Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to learn how to listen for your word. While we might miss a word here and there, help us to get the message. In Jesus' name. Amen**

**Bob Chandler**

**January 5, 2019**

Titus 3:4-5

*But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, God saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to God's mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit*

Paul wrote these words about 66 AD to his companion Titus who was to visit Crete, infamous for its sin, and restore order to house churches there. Part of his job was to replace corrupt teachers in the churches with godly leaders. Paul also reminded Cretan believers that while they lived in a sinful culture, they could be transformed into a new humanity by the same grace that Jesus demonstrated when He died to redeem them.

To me, today's verses tell us the reason God sent his Son – the meaning to believers for the birth of Christ.

These verses fill me with an overwhelming thankfulness, joy and praise to God. To think that just by my faith alone I have been saved and that all my shortcomings will be forgiven is the most wonderful feeling.

Today's scripture is calling us as saved Christians to live as if all our conduct is seen and we have nothing we wish to conceal. If we are filled with Christ's love we will want to walk honestly and peaceful without contention and disputes with others. We will strive to behave ourselves decently and without shame, not because God **REQUIRES** it of us, but because we desire it in our hearts, and it becomes those to whom God's mercy has so precious been given.

**Prayer: Dear Lord, We are so thankful for your boundless gifts to us, for your son Jesus Christ and your Saving Grace. Help us to live each day as you would have us live. Amen**

**Joanne Cook**

**January 6, 2019**

Titus 2:6-7

*This Holy Spirit God poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by God's grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

The Holy Spirit is indeed poured upon us richly at BUCC! I am always amazed at the large accomplishments of our small congregation! From the fantastic music of Dave Debick and all the other musicians and choir members, to the timely and thought-provoking sermons that Pastor Dave delivers each week. From the ways we take care of others through hunger meals, our SARA contributions, our volunteer work at Thomas Jefferson school and Cleveland Roots, and all our other outreach programs; to the ways we take care of each other through our various membership activities. We are truly blessed to have the church family we have!

**I would ask you to take a few minutes today to reflect on our church family and the blessings it has brought to your life. Sometimes it is easy to overlook what a great asset this community is to each of us!**

**Matt Wolbert**

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*Graciously Proof Read by Pastor Dave, and Marge  
Culver. Thank You!*