

Advent Devotional Booklet 2020



"You are the light of the world." Matthew 5:14

**Each day's Devotional will be available online at
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Dear Friends,

This has been an extraordinary year filled with trials and tribulations for all of us. It's times like these that rituals of the church year, that sometimes we take for granted, seem filled with new meaning. Advent is traditionally a time for reflection, and a time of waiting. I think we are all pretty familiar with waiting this year! Waiting for test results, waiting for schools, restaurants, and churches to reopen, waiting to hear when we can get back to "normal."

Here at Liberty we have waited for guidance, prayed for clarity, and discerned after careful study about how to best serve our residents, staff, and the larger community, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. We are thankful for the many prayers offered up on our behalf and for the many ways individuals and communities of faith have supported our efforts. We are so proud of and grateful for the whole Liberty family.

More than ever, we are pleased to share this Advent Devotional. This year's Devotional contains thoughts, prayers, and reflections that are based on the personal experiences and perspectives of individuals who are in one way or another part of our Liberty family. .

The candles of Advent symbolize hope, love, joy, and peace. We pray that the devotions offered here bring you hope, love, joy, and peace, on your journey to the celebration of Christmas.

As we continue to navigate this journey together, please rest assured that you can count on Liberty Lutheran and our family of services as an empowering resource for vulnerable individuals, those facing life-changing situations, and their families.

Christmas and the hope of the resurrection at Easter, remind us that we are never alone even during turbulent times.

Advent Blessings,



Luanne B. Fisher
CEO, Liberty Lutheran



Sunday, November 29, 2020

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence...

Isaiah 64:1

O that you would come down, Lord! Tear open the heavens and create herd immunity to wipe out COVID-19 in every community of the earth. Come down and whip up a vaccine that is effective, safe, and inexpensive. Come down and end racial strife. Tear open the heavens and bring more jobs.

Israel saw God's awesome power in earthquake and fire, in thunder and lightning. Such an appearance is called a theophany (theo meaning God, and phany meaning to show). Theophanies continue to this day. God certainly acts in milestones marked by Hallmark cards. Yet God is more often seen in everyday happenings around dinner tables, on walks, and in the pages of a book. What are some of the theophanies in your life? Our congregation has a whiteboard out for people to jot down theophanies from their week. These are popularly called God-sightings. You might want to keep a list of your own through this Advent-Christmas cycle.

May we also remember theophanies experienced more broadly in our communities, nation, and world. How God is coming down to scientists working on vaccines and studying the inner workings of this virus. How God is tearing open the heavens to bring racial and economic justice. How God is working through community leaders.

The simple yet powerful cry of Advent is "Come, Lord Jesus." Come he does. Once as a helpless babe in the manger. Today through theophanies both personal and communal. Then one day, coming down again in end times. Always and forever in love and mercy.

God of might, tear open the heavens and come down. Bring your healing and understanding to our hearts, bodies, neighborhoods, and planet. Amen.

Laura Csellak is Pastor, Christ's United Lutheran Church, Ashland, PA.



Monday, November 30, 2020

He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;

They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks;

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

Micah 4:3

In a garden of the United Nations, New York, stands a bronze sculpture, titled, "Let Us Beat our Swords into Ploughshares." It depicts a man, hammer raised, bending a sword into a plowshare, and "symbolizing man's desire to put an end to war and convert the means of destruction into creative tools for the benefit of all mankind."

For those engaged in the work of ELCA Advocacy and ELCA World Hunger, this vision of Micah's has special meaning as we strive for justice.

Micah pronounces judgment on Israel in a time of grinding inequality. The people and their leaders were failing to care for, even oppressing, those whom Jesus would call "the least of these." Micah warns, Zion will be destroyed.

Yet in the midst of this judgment, there is hope that God offers ultimate reconciliation. Micah speaks of a time when all peoples will stream to the place where God is found. "They will go there because they want to know justice and peace, to walk in the ways of the Lord," Micah writes.

The pandemic has revealed deep inequalities tied to race and wealth. Even with inspiring examples of generosity, our ministries cannot meet the overwhelming need. The strife tearing us apart may not look like ancient warring nations, and the weapons are different, but this does not look like peace that allows us to plant seeds for a hopeful future.

The prophets did not prescribe one divine solution to the injustice of their day, and neither do we. However, as Americans, we have considerably more power than the average ancient Israelite to create change.

As Christians, we believe that we have been given what the Israelites were longing for - Immanuel - God with us. In our baptism into the life, death and resurrection of this longed-for child, God's spirit has been poured upon us.

Immanuel, This Advent, show us how we can begin to turn weapons of division into creative tools for healing. Amen.

Tracey DePasquale is Director, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pa.



Tuesday, December 1, 2020

Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and forgive our sins, for your name's sake.

Psalm 79:9

In the time of this pandemic and violence raging, we can be brought very low. Thus, I encourage myself not to look for a lifting up or relief except by God only; therefore, I cry out, "Help us, O Lord."

Do you ever find yourself trapped in situations that you want to break free from but find yourself unable to do so? Sometimes I do, but this is not the end of my story.

God wants to bring healing to our lives and our land. When we turn to God, he will deliver and forgive us for his name's sake to move to where God has designed us to be.

If we want God's healing in our land, we need to cry out to him from our hearts. What is clear is that God is interested in the heart, not superficial action. I, along with you, can receive healing and forgiveness from God for all the things we do wrong – but we need to cry out to God from our hearts. With the pandemic, racism, and all of the killings happening around us, we need the salvation of the Lord.

In such times, when circumstances batter me, when my inner reserves are drying up, we can feel as if life is just too much, and that we are not going to survive all of this.

In such times, like David, I cry out to God for mercy. I call out to God to lead me to a place of safety and security. The rock that is literally "higher than" I am signifies God's protection and presence.

David cries out to God in Psalm 61 and expresses the desperate prayer of one who senses a great need for God.

Hear our cry O Lord and attend to our prayers! May we press on to you, the God of our salvation, despite the challenges we face today. Amen.

The Rev. Regina D. Goodrich is Pastor, Mediator Lutheran Church, Philadelphia, PA.



Wednesday, December 2, 2020

Every day [Jesus] was teaching in the temple, and at night he would go out and spend the night on the Mount of Olives.

Luke 21:37

In the week leading to Passover and Jesus' crucifixion, we find the great teacher teaching crowds in the temple. From his Triumphal Entry to Maundy Thursday, Jesus taught about the coming of God's kingdom with parables some may find unsettling: a cursed fig tree, cataclysmic war, the destruction of Jerusalem, its temple, and the upending of creation. 21:38 tells us that "early in the morning all the people came in the temple to hear him;" not exactly the teachings that would get me out of the house first thing in the morning. Crowds were captivated, most likely because Jesus' end-times teachings connected with their own lived experience; most probably because for Jesus, that end was much closer than anyone realized.

2020 has felt like its own end-times teaching from Jesus: COVID-19's global spread and death toll, a contentious election cycle, the outcry for racial equality on local, national, and global platforms. My wife and I have navigated her cancer diagnosis, two surgeries, and long (but successful) chemotherapy treatments. I'm sure similar has happened in your own households. 2020 has us praying all the more fervently, "Come, Lord Jesus." No wonder the crowds flocked to him. Jesus taught as someone who knew death, but was all the more convinced of resurrection. In the face of persistent uncertainty, Christ persisted in proclaiming God's steadfast love and mercy, nurturing hope in the face of hopelessness.

Jewish tradition holds that Messiah's return will happen on Mt. Olivet, where Jesus concluded his teaching. In the same way crowds were drawn to Jesus, so he draws us, taking the hopes and fears of his people with him to the place of his coming, where he too prayed and recharged from a day spent steeped in death. May we learn from Jesus' teachings where we might turn for comfort, relief, and hope, praying all the more, "Come, Lord Jesus."

Teach us your ways and draw us near to you, that when you return in glory, we might find rest; in the name of The Father, and of The Son, and of The Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Rev. Brandon Heavner is Pastor at St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bethlehem, PA



Thursday, December 3, 2020

**Because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only,
But also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction;
Just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among
you for your sake.**

I Thessalonians 1: 5

Advent is a time of expectations – great expectations – and perhaps this year more than ever before. We are expecting an end to the pandemic, a vaccine to save lives, a return to a strong economy, an end to racism and violence. Over the past months, there have been many promises made in words that have elevated these expectations in our hearts. While we remain hopeful, we know from experience that these kinds of expectations are rarely met – and we will mostly be let down by those who make such promises.

Advent is a time of expectations – great expectations: a time when we remember the promises of God to break the bounds of heaven – to bring light into the world – to come and be our Emmanuel – the God with us. We listen to the promises of God that have elevated these expectations in our hearts. We receive the word of God and are called to hope as we wait. But we wait knowing that we will not be let down, because God's promises are more than mere words. God's promises come to life by the power of the Holy Spirit – and in the life of the promised savior of the world, Jesus.

Advent is indeed a time of expectations – the greatest of all expectations.

God of expectations – grant that we may hear your Word and witness its power in the world. Amen.

**The Rev. John T. Heidgerd is Pastor at Emmanuel Lutheran Church,
Souderton, PA.**



Friday, December 4, 2020

**Alas, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak;
I am too young.**

Jeremiah 1:6

This text may sound familiar as it is part of the call of the prophet Jeremiah. What is immediately apparent is that Jeremiah seems to think that somehow God dialed the wrong number. How can he be a prophet when he is too young and doesn't even know how to speak?

I wonder how many of us have had the experience of feeling like we are not up to the tasks to which God calls us. I'm guessing that many of us can relate to those feelings.

God doesn't accept Jeremiah's protest. It is God who formed him and knew him from before he was born. When Jeremiah begins to protest God's call, God does not back down, God reassures. "Don't be afraid...I have put my words in your mouth", God tells him. In modern language, "Jeremiah, I got ya!"

Jeremiah would have tough words for the people to whom God sends him. It would not be easy. But the God who formed him called him and sent him. How amazing it must have been for Jeremiah to know how God's eyes saw him. This advent season we are called as well. Called to witness salvation come into the world. Called to tell on the mountain what is being birthed into this weary world.

Called with Mary to sing the song of salvation and to joyfully live that love and mercy in the world.

We might be tempted to say that we don't know how to speak. We might be tempted to assume the world is not listening so there is no point in sharing the Word. But God knows better. God formed us and gave us the words to speak of the Word made flesh. God, knowing us, calls, sends, and assures us. How amazing to imagine how God sees us. How amazing to be formed and called and sent.

Loving God, teach me to answer your call and to go and tell that Word of salvation over the hills and wherever you send me. Amen

The Rev. Ghislaine Cotnoir is Director of Pastoral Care at The Artman Home and The Hearth at Drexel.



Saturday and Sunday, December 5 and 6, 2020

Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish;

2 Peter 3:14

Over the last several months many of us have felt unsettled and anxious while trying to adapt to life in a pandemic. In a world full of uncertainty where do we find hope and peace?

During the season of Advent, as we wait with anticipation for the coming of our Lord Jesus, Peter's instructions to be diligent and know where to go for hope and peace serve as a reminder of where to put our trust: in Christ alone. Ours is a God of abundant grace and mercy who makes unforgettable things happen.

The presence of God in every member of our community has been a source of strength that is leading us beyond the uncertainties of the pandemic, and unforgettable things are indeed happening. On account of what he has done for us we are made holy, without spot or blemish and granted hope and peace. This gift and grace has freed us to reach out and be sources of hope and peace to others in need.

Gracious and loving God, we put our trust in Christ, finding peace amidst uncertainty. May we be a blessing to others now and in the year to come. Amen.

The Rev. Julie Stumpf is Director of Spiritual Care at Paul's Run.



Monday December 7, 2020

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

Psalm 27:1

"A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor." This quote from FDR was printed on a piece of fabric I was using to make masks during the coronavirus outbreak and subsequent quarantine. As a World War II baby boomer, this is the stormiest sea I have ever encountered.

The Gospels have given us many examples in Jesus' life where He showed us how to weather stormy seas. In Matthew 8, the disciples awakened Jesus because they were afraid of the storm which had washed waves into their boat. Jesus calmed the waves and ended the storm. First, trouble appeared, then help was requested and finally calmness prevailed.

On the Sabbath, a woman came to a synagogue where Jesus was teaching. Luke 13 goes on to say that she had been sick for eighteen years. Jesus called her to Him. He had compassion and healed her, yet was criticized for working on the Sabbath. He reminded His accusers that they lead their livestock to water on the Sabbath and wasn't that much the same? Again, trouble, healing, more trouble, and then peace as His wisdom is revealed.

Matthew tells the story of the vineyard workers in Chapter 20. Laborers were hired at the beginning of the day and were promised a set wage. Additional people were hired throughout the day and given the same promise. At the end of the day, all workers received the same wage and of course, those who had worked all day thought this was unfair. Jesus puts this in perspective. Regardless of how long you believe in Him while on earth, you will receive a full wage, eternal life. Again, first trouble, then we hear the wisdom of the Master, and finally crises are averted.

David had it right in Psalm 27. "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" Yes, we have troubles, and we need only to look to the Lord for inspiration and calm.

Dear Lord, help me to remember to look to You for help in the stormy seas. Amen.

Kathleen Joyce is a retired history and English teacher and a member of Messiah Lutheran Church in Downingtown, PA.



Tuesday, December 8, 2020

If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?

Acts 11:17

2020 has been a year for the record books. For me personally, as the coronavirus crisis began for the world, I was beginning my own difficult journey. The discovery of a small ovarian tumor in early March soon gave rise to surgeries, a cancer diagnosis and chemotherapy. This certainly was not the way I had imagined 2020, not to mention the early years of my marriage and ministry. This year seemed to be themed, “what next?” and there were very few answers.

The disciples are in a similar place in the Book of Acts. They are trying to get their bearings in a new reality after Jesus’ resurrection. What will come next? Who can be a disciple? What are the requirements and qualifiers? There was resistance and suspicion towards these Jesus followers—what new dangers would they face, and could they survive? What next? These are some of the very same questions I’ve found myself asking throughout a chaotic 2020.

The truth is there’s no way to predict what will come next in life and there are very few certainties. This truth is hugely unpopular with us human beings. And so we expend lots of energy controlling as much as we can to make us feel safe and secure. Except...things still happen. People get sick. We lose loved ones. We lose jobs and worry about basic needs. What next?

JESUS.

Try as we might, we simply cannot predict what the future will hold. What we can hang onto is this sure and certain hope: in the ups and downs of life we have a Savior who is on the loose in the world, meeting us wherever we are, assuring us that in life, and in death, we are his--today, tomorrow and to the end of the age.

Merciful Lord, in the uncertainties of life give us strength to focus on you, your will and your ways. We pray in the name of Jesus who is our all in all. Amen.

The Rev. Jenny Heavner is Pastor at Star of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Bethlehem, PA.



Wednesday, December 9, 2020

**The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?**

Psalm 27:1

In August of 2016, I went on vacation with my husband, daughter and friends. One gorgeous day we had the opportunity to do some deep sea fishing in the Gulf of Mexico. The ride was fine as we headed out of the bay area, but as we headed into the Gulf, the waves got a bit rough. I don’t normally get seasick but this time I did; focusing on the horizon seemed to help a bit.

I kept my mind busy by praying silently. I prayed that we would have a good day of fishing and that we would return safely. I also prayed for my family, friends, and those I keep in my heart. I thanked God for the many blessings He has given to me; a roof over my head, food to eat, the love of family and friends. I prayed for His guidance and strength through life’s stormy days. I gave to Him my inner struggles. I told Him how I understand that He is at the wheel and in control and I only need be a passenger (not always easy just ask my husband when he is driving).

It has been a very unsettling year. He is, and always will be, our guide and protector, our light and our salvation. I hope that you will take a moment each day to be still and hear His voice. Whether it is early in the morning, on your drive to work, or somewhere in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico, He hears you. I pray that every day you will see what blessings God has given to you, that you will take care of each other through the sunny days and the days we struggle with. Today, I give you my gift, a hug and a warm smile. God Bless!

God, you are our light and salvation. We need not fear what lies ahead for you have seen the days we have not yet seen. You are the stronghold of our life. Amen.

Barbara Hupfer is Food Pantry Director/Lay Assistant, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Dingmans Ferry, PA.



Thursday, December 10, 2020

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.

Philippians 3: 8-9

Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians when he was in prison. How liberating for him, to not be attached to anything the world calls worthy. Paul regards all things apart from Christ as garbage. This year has been one of reckoning with our attachments. What risks do we take in the midst of a pandemic because we want or miss something? What things and experiences are we so attached to that we are willing to risk our own or someone else's health for?

A changing climate might also challenge our attachments. For me, I know I am attached to the freedom to drive my car wherever I need to whenever I want to. Is that independence something I am too attached to?

What do we need to regard as rubbish for the sake of future generations, for the sake of those who are oppressed in the US and around the world? What is reasonable? Is it reasonable to trash our health care, or retirement plans, our reputation, in order to walk humbly and in lock step with brothers and sisters in order that they can experience good schools, safety in their own communities, and the security of housing and food? Certainly there is a balance and need to take care of ourselves and our families, and value in building our own resiliency, but our own self-care, safety and security cannot be at the expense of others' self-care, safety and security.

What do we need to regard as rubbish to share Paul's joy of liberation in Christ, and to share in the oneness of all creation?

Just God, help us long for the taste of the liberating power of the resurrected Christ. Amen.

Julia Menzo is Director of Community Outreach, Liberty Lutheran/Lutheran Congregational Services. She leads Lutheran Disaster Response efforts in eastern PA and worships at Trinity Lutheran in Lansdale, PA.



Friday, December 11, 2020

Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.

Philippians 3:13

I've always been a believer in learning from the past. Our successes and our failures inform us about how to move forward. During the past year, I have read about the 1918 influenza and the AIDs epidemic to help me understand COVID-19. I have studied slavery, reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement of the 50's and 60's to inform me about our nation's legacy and struggle with racism. So my first reaction to Paul writing that he is "forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead" made me stop and say "hmmm."

Paul admits that he doesn't have it all together yet. That's a relief because I don't either. But in spite of that, Paul is pressing forward toward the prize for which God has called him. He is not resting on his successes or ruminating over his mistakes. Perhaps Paul is not so much ignoring the lessons of the past as he is letting it go so it won't hamper his path forward.

2020 has been a difficult year and this will not be an easy winter. COVID is still with us. Social justice issues need to be addressed. Natural disasters will happen. There will be challenges for our residents, clients and staff at Liberty Lutheran. So far in 2020, we have seen significant successes and some heart-breaking losses. But God has been with us and now, like Paul, we must let go of the past and press on, fixing our attention on our mission to serve our clients and care for our staff. We are freed to renew our strength and focus on our goals, to look forward and get on with it, always "straining" to "win the prize" for which God has called us.

Please, God, renew our energy and resolve so that we can move forward in joy and confidence with the tasks You have called us to perform. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Linda Breckenridge is a retired educator, member of Upper Dublin Lutheran Church in Ambler, and member of the Liberty Lutheran Board of Directors.



Saturday and Sunday, December 12 and 13, 2020

For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them.

Isaiah 61: 8

Fear, anger, despair – we experience so many emotions caused by this pandemic. The prophet Isaiah talks to a captive Israel who probably had these same emotions. He offers hope and renewal in God’s covenant of blessings, grace and love.

Yet, for some, that hope may feel out of reach. We’ve been reminded by the virus and recent events of the many ways that people of color are treated differently, often with deadly consequences. Racial injustice exists in healthcare, housing, education, employment, our justice system - in fact, practically everywhere.

While Isaiah’s message is one of hope, it’s also a warning. “Love justice, hate robbery and wrongdoing.” As a white woman, I will never experience or truly know the pain and consequences of racism.

I can, however, embark on a more earnest quest to learn how my own actions or inaction might be contributing to that pain. I can also advocate for and invest in the kinds of change needed to right the injustice that our brothers and sisters of color know all too well.

During Advent, hold onto the hope of Isaiah’s words, but also heed the warning in them. If 2020 has taught us anything, it’s that there is much work to do in righting the wrongdoing of racism as we prepare the way for the coming of Christ.

God, we are grateful for your promise of hope and everlasting love. Open our eyes and hearts to see all people in your image, and give us wisdom and courage to change those things that cause injustice in our world. Amen.

Patty Cline serves as Director of Advancement at Liberty Lutheran and is a member of Grace Presbyterian Church in Jenkintown, PA.



Monday, December 14, 2020

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Ephesians 6:13 (NKJV)

Why do people hate us?

How do you respond when asked that by a child? As a Black American, I have asked my mother that question. I vividly recall how my mother grappled to keep her composure trying to explain how some people do not know God and therefore do not believe that they should love their neighbor. I can still remember how sad I felt learning that some people could actually hate someone with no true cause. My mother further explained that God loves us all and keeps a hedge of protection around us. She reminded me of the lyrics of “Jesus Loves Me” and assured me.

The truth is we are a fallen world. Paul’s scripture focuses on a spiritual warfare with enemies who take many forms, principalities, powers, rulers of darkness, yet it also describes that hedge of protection my mother explained. The Bible offers many references to “letting go and letting God” (Exodus 14:14; 1 Peter 5:7; Proverbs 6:3) and that can only be done when you trust and obey Him realizing that you are cloaked in God’s armor.

When you take up the whole armor of God, you find yourself collected when everyone around you is unnerved by a pandemic. This does not mean to say that you are not impacted by the world’s events. The message is that you are confident that God is in control and that nothing goes on that is outside of His divine order.

In my lifetime, I’ve experienced and seen too many social inequities. Because God fulfills His promises, I can follow His command to trust and obey. He will do the rest because when you truly understand that you are protected by the whole (not partial) armor of God, you can stand firm.

Dear God it is a privilege to be a child of the Most High God. I pray for your perfect peace and divine presence in all of our lives in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.

Charmaine R. Maddrey-Smith is Director of Employee Engagement Training at Liberty Lutheran. She attends Calvary Chapel and St. Paul’s Baptist Church, Philadelphia.



Tuesday, December 15, 2020

When the company of prophets who were at Jericho saw him at a distance, they declared, “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.”

2 Kings 2:15a

Our Advent experience is a complicated mix of waiting, generosity, frenzy and, if we are honest, selfishness. As Elisha waited his turn in the spotlight, knowing Elijah was about to depart this world, his own desires got the better of him too. “Give me a double share of your spirit,” he asked of his mentor. We all want to do good in the world, but we can get distracted by our own need for recognition.

Sometimes we resist rolling up our sleeves to wash dishes after a community meal, instead preferring the role of gracious host. Rather than quietly contributing to a relief fund, we want to “adopt a family” for Christmas, showing up at the recipients’ door to receive their gratitude. True generosity of spirit looks a little different. At Hope’s Table, a Eucharistic Table ministry in Reading, PA, leftovers are always boxed up and sent home.

One evening John and Kathy were washing tables after dinner when Stanley arrived late. There was no more food for him to take home for himself and his two sons, so John slipped out to his car, where he and Kathy were living, and retrieved his boxed leftover shepherd’s pie and quietly gave it to Stanley. Truly, the Spirit rested on John that evening.

Generous God, grant us a share of your spirit and use us to share your abundant gifts with the world, especially during this season of giving. Amen.

The Rev. Mary Wolfe is Pastor at Hope Lutheran Church, Reading, PA.



Wednesday, December 16, 2020

But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him.

Mark 9:13, NIV

When I read this verse, I thought what an odd verse it is. I had to go back and look at the context to get the meaning. Jesus and some of the disciples are coming down from the mountain after the transfiguration, and he told them not to tell anyone until he has risen from the dead.

My question was, what did it mean that Elijah had come? So I looked at a few different versions, and found a pretty clear explanation in The Message: “Jesus replied, ‘Elijah does come first, and get everything ready for the coming of the Son of Humanity. They treated this Elijah like dirt, much like they will treat the Son of Humanity, who will, according to Scripture, suffer terribly and be kicked around contemptibly.’” Mark 9:12-13

Oh! It seems that this may be our calling right now. In this very difficult time, a double pandemic, COVID and violence, as I have heard it called. Jesus still calls us to be faithful and live out justice. It seems particularly difficult in this time of much chaos.

But if we ask what would Jesus be doing, He would be working for justice, walking with the marchers, crying out against violence, as He did when He was living on the earth. I am reminded of this hymn:

Jesus calls us o’er the tumult of our life’s wild restless sea; day by day His voice still calls us, saying, “Christian, follow me.”

Dear Jesus, may we continue to walk with you each day and work for justice for all. Amen.

The Rev. Sandra Brown is Pastor at Peace Lutheran Church, Bensalem, PA.



Thursday, December 17, 2020

The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Hebrews 1:3

When I started to read the book of Hebrews, I learned that the theme of this book is the absolute supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ as revealer and as mediator of God’s grace. Throughout these verses is the inspiration to keep going in the faith. In my work as a bereavement counselor, I look back at all the times I have tried to help grieving people to “keep going on in the faith.” And then it was my turn to be the “grieving widow.”

I lost my husband of almost 50 years in July. When I was able to pray during this time of loneliness, emptiness and pain, I found myself crying out to Jesus to help me... to rescue me from this darkness. Thoughts would enter my being as I cried and prayed. My thoughts went to the many sad, devastated people who asked me if I was sure that their prayers were heard; they wondered during these difficult times, “Where is Jesus now?”

Voltaire said, “Faith consists of believing when it is beyond the power of reason to believe!” This is the time in one’s life when the words from Hebrews resound. “The Son sustains all things through his powerful word.” It is when the realization sinks in to our grieving hearts that he ‘sits at the right hand of God’ and will hear our prayers and bless us with his comfort and grace.

Good and Gracious God, I pray that you will grant us renewed strength as we face the challenges of loss in our lives. Grant us renewed hope and comfort along the way. Amen.

Sylvia Havlish is Bereavement Counselor at Lutheran Congregational Services and a member of St. John’s Lutheran, Emmaus, PA.



Friday, December 18, 2020

I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers.

Psalms 89:25

The Latin root of the word virus means slimy liquid; poison. As my family and I continue to adjust and adapt to daily life amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, I find it fitting that the root of “virus” means, simply, “poison.” One of the most unexpected side-effects of COVID-19 has been a slow but steady injection of additional anxiety, uncertainty, and fear into my daily life.

As a parent of two rambunctious boys – ages 3 and 4 1/2 – I’ve gotten accustomed, somewhat, to the natural worry and uncertainty that accompanies the life of a parent; however, I find myself struggling to process the overwhelming uncertainty and fear that COVID-19 presents for me and the ones that I love most.

While reflecting on today’s verse, the respective titles of Psalms 88 and 89 (TEV) – “A Cry for Help” and “A Hymn in Time of National Trouble” – resonated deeply with me. In Psalms 88 and 89, God promises to give David rule over a wide kingdom from the sea to the rivers. The image of God’s hands reaching from the sea to the rivers is a palpable reminder for me of God’s literal and figurative reach; God’s hands are outstretched before, beside, and behind me even when I’m not able to see through the fog of uncertainty and fear that threatens to engulf me.

In these uncertain times of COVID-19, natural disasters of increasing strength and frequency, and ever-present racial and cultural injustice, I find myself clinging – sometimes with cracked knuckles and bloody hands – to God’s promise to never abandon us. Though some days it is an on-going struggle to find hope, I am comforted by the image of God’s outstretched hands offering me rest. In the face of the greatest uncertainties of my life, God has never failed to show up – not always in the way I expected, or wanted in some cases – but I can rest knowing that God is, once again, with me.

God, when hope seems out of reach and impossible, remind me to be still and know that your promises of love and rest are never-ending. Amen.

John Pyron is the Program Director for Lutheran Disaster Response-US.



Saturday and Sunday, December 19 and 20, 2020

The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”

Luke 1:30

How wonderful would it be to hear an Angel of the Lord say those words to you? You have found favor with God. Wow! As I read the passage, a verse from the song “Oh Holy Night” came to mind. “Fall on your knees, oh hear the angel voices.” Surely, anyone would fall to their knees if an Angel of the Lord appeared to them telling them they found favor with God.

The Bible does not tell us why Mary found favor with God. Mary is an ordinary person, betrothed to an ordinary carpenter, living in an ordinary town. She began her day thinking it would be as any other day, but an angel of the Lord came to her to tell her she found favor with God and would give birth to the savior of the world. Mary responded to the angel without hesitation. She responded in true faith knowing that it was God’s will for her to do what was asked of her in spite of the consequences. We too must respond to God’s will without hesitation or complaint. We must show our love for God to all those we meet.

I recently told my husband what I’d like my gravestone to say: “Well done good and faithful servant.” But, have I earned God’s favor? Can anyone earn God’s favor? No, but we can show our love for Him to everyone we know and meet.

During this Advent season, make a point of going out of your way to be the Lord’s hands and feet by sharing His love, and with great joy may we all enter the gates of Heaven hearing our heavenly Father say, “Well done good and faithful servant”.

All powerful Lord, through your grace, please find favor with all of us. Amen

Chris Naessens is Administrative Assistant for Human Resources at Liberty Lutheran and a member and deacon at Oreland Evangelical Presbyterian Church.



Monday, December 21, 2020

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

Luke 1: 52-53

Upon first glance, this verse can feel like an opportunity to fall into the “us vs. them” mentality. It is easy to picture those in positions of wealth and power being sent away empty handed, and thus miss the far more personal challenge to this verse. In the surrounding passage, Mary speaks of how the Lord does not forget His people, despite their conditions, and that he favors those who trust in Him.

Throughout our lives, we will find ourselves on both sides of this coin many times over. Our pride pulls us away from God. We are brought back to him, often through painful means that are necessary to keep the wealth of the world from ensnaring us. But when we are in our lowest points – fraught with worry or loss, that is when the Lord makes his presence known to his people. Whichever way we are being brought, therefore, means that God is pulling us closer to himself, saving us from despair on both ends.

Mary speaks of the descendants of Abraham to bring this story to life. God brought the enslaved into freedom. He separated the idolaters from their false gods. He brought the wanderers to their home, and then allowed that home to be taken when they turned from His law. And most importantly, when He saw the oppression of sin, God sent His son to establish a new covenant of salvation that would change the world forever.

Rather than fear which side of this seemingly ever-swaying pendulum we are on, we can instead trust that God will always pull us closer to Him. Any losses or gains that come from this pale in comparison to the ultimate gift of Jesus, the one who sets all injustices and losses to right.

Dear Heavenly Father, we pray that you make yourself known. Whatever our story, and whatever our struggle, we pray that our feet are led back only to you. In your precious name we pray, Amen.

Carter Bowman is Digital Media Specialist at Liberty Lutheran. He attends Covenant Church in Doylestown, PA.



Tuesday, December 22, 2020

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Psalm 96:1

“Wow, hasn’t 2020 been a terrific year?”

Haven’t heard that line yet, have you? The lowlights of this year, including the global COVID-19 pandemic, and the ugly continuation of centuries-long, deep-rooted racial injustice and inequality, don’t have 2020 lined up for any glowing “year in review” retrospectives. In fact, many of us people of faith are wondering where God is in the midst of all this tragedy and heartache, or how long it will be until he calls us all to his heavenly kingdom.

Admittedly, the vast majority of my prayers this past year have been cries for help: for healing, for justice, for reconciliation, for health, for comfort, for peace, and for basic needs to be met. Nothing about what I see in the world, on the news, or on social media strikes up an instinctive urge to sing.

However, throughout the Bible we are reminded that God is good in all circumstances (including 1 Chronicles 16:34) and worthy of our praise (Psalm 145:3). Singing to the Lord may not always come of our “natural” human volition, nor does it permit us to neglect the problems that continue to plague our society; even so, let us sing to the Lord during our earthly tribulations as we remember that this fallen world is not our home.

Lord, although many loved ones and I may be experiencing overwhelming pain and suffering, I sing to you. Please bless and heal us, both in this season of advent and throughout the upcoming year. Amen.

Brandon Frank is the Manager of Financial Reporting for Liberty Lutheran.



Wednesday, December 23, 2020

The night is far gone, the day is near. Let us lay aside the works of darkness and put on an armor of light.

Romans 13:12

In order to see the good in people we have to set aside the bad things and come together. As a society we need to be there for each other and see the good instead of the bad. We live in a society full of hatred, lies, harm, and much confusion. But God’s word tells us to “cast off the works of darkness and put on an armor of light.” We have to put ourselves out there almost like a shining light “let your light shine before others” (Matthew 5:16a). We shouldn’t light a candle just to hide it. We have to let our light shine bright to indicate individuality. As one church song says, “This little light of mine I’m gonna let it shine, hide it under a bushel no! I’m gonna let it shine!”

Whether you are part of the LGBTQ+ community or you are black or white, or you come from a different country, all of it is okay! People run from their home countries to be here in America so they have a safe space to come. For some, the safe space they imagined is not what they hoped it to be and there is terror out of our control. In a world full of very different people God says to put away your differences, and come together as one. All are welcome as brothers and sisters because together we are God’s children.

God of light, help us let our lights shine, and make them shine bright! Amen.

MaryElizabeth Soffera is a student at Wilson Area High School in Easton, Pennsylvania, and attends Good Shepard Lutheran Church.



Christmas Eve, December 24, 2020

**Say among the nations, “The Lord reigns.”
The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity.**

**Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
let the sea resound, and all that is in it.”**

Psalm 96:10-11

This passage made me think about the many hikes I did throughout Pennsylvania this summer. I saw God’s amazing creation from the tops of mountains, under waterfalls, along rivers, inside caves, and among the trees. Spending time with creation in this way brought me closer to God.

Just like the psalmist writes, I too have witnessed the mountains and rivers rejoicing, the leaves of the trees singing in praise, and the fields jubilantly praising God’s name. I have felt the trees sway and heard the rivers roar at the sound of his name.

On this holy night, we remember His coming, and tomorrow as we celebrate with friends and family, let us lift our hallelujahs to God. Let our songs be more than sweet lullabies and old hymns. Let us proclaim that Christ’s birth is bringing righteousness to all the world.

As we look forward to 2021, make worship and praise part of your daily routine. Come January 30 or March 27 or September 8 when we are hopefully back to experiencing ordinary days, let us remember this night and how “heaven and nature sing” when the “earth received it’s King.” I pray that as we think about the birth of the Savior of the world, we would reflect on God’s promises, not only on December 24, but on those ordinary days, too. Because you never know, God may make tomorrow earth-shattering.

So, let us indeed raise our voices with Creation. “For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised. Through all the earth, let us worship the King. The Savior has come. Let all the nations sing. The mountains ring out with angelic praise. The heavens rejoice. For the earth receives her King. Come let us worship the King.”

Creator Lord, May we never take your gift for granted; may our songs never fade, and may we treasure your creation in our hearts forever. Amen.

Sadie Wallace is a 7th grader in the East Penn School District. She and her family attend Nativity Lutheran Church in Allentown.

Christmas Day, December 25, 2020

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

Titus 3: 6-7

Being called an “heir” reminds me of what I have been given from those who have gone before me.

On a typical day, I might think about the land I live on, the faith I live by, and the body I live in. I would recognize that the land we live our lives upon did not always belong to us. I would remember that the faith I put my trust in is one that has been given to me through moments with all types of people. I would acknowledge the white skin I live my life within carries with it privilege that comes with a responsibility to amplify the voices of those who do not look like me.

These are all important observations.

But today, on Christmas, I notice another inheritance of mine: traditions.

Beloved family festivities and faith practices have been turned upside-down in 2020 for many of us. Fewer cookies are shared, songs are whispered rather than belted out, and more gatherings take place through a screen than not. These are not the traditions we have passed down for so long. Even on this day of great joy and celebration, these changes can feel particularly disappointing.

And yet, the purpose of this Christmas Day remains true. And here we are yet again, celebrating this new baby born – a gift from God for all of humanity. This Jesus promises not that we are heirs to sweet Christmas treats and holiday traveling, but instead we are “heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” We are heirs to the Holy Spirit, “poured out on us richly” and continually making us new. Thanks be to God.

Christ has come. Hope has come. Yes, hope even in 2020.

Holy One, grant us renewed hope on this Christmas Day. Be with those who are disappointed by and grieving a year like no other and show us the light of life anew. Amen.

Sammy Kelly, Director of Youth, Young Adult, and Faith Formation Ministries of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA.



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