

Butter Cookies - from Mary Penrod

2 1/4 c. sifted flour

1/2 t. salt

1 c. butter

2/3 c. sugar

1 egg

1 t. vanilla

Sprinkles and food coloring - optional

Sift flour and salt. Set aside. Cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Add egg and beat well. Add vanilla. Add dry ingredients and blend only until smooth (can color dough with food coloring). Roll into balls. Coat bottom of glass with butter (dip in sprinkles) and flatten balls of dough with glass. Bake at 350 for 10 minutes.



White Christmas Pie - from Martha Broughton

1. 9 inch pie shell - baked
2. 1/2 c. sugar, 1 envelope unflavored gelatin, 1/4 c. flour, 1/2 tsp. salt. Blend in a saucepan.
3. Stir in 1 3/4 c. milk
4. Boil for 1 minute - place in cold water to cool until mixture mounds when dropped.
5. Blend in 3/4 teaspoon vanilla and 1/4 teaspoon almond extract.
6. Make meringue - 3 egg whites and 1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar.
7. Make whipped cream with 1/2 c. whipping cream.
8. Mix meringue, whipped cream, gelatin mix, 1 c. coconut
9. Place in the pie shell and chill overnight.



Glorified Rice - from Darlene Topp

I love this dish and it looks so pretty on the table.

Cook 1 and one half cups of rice. After cooking, rinse with cold water.

Add one can crushed pineapple (don't use juice).

Slice 2 cups of grapes

Add 1 cup walnuts - cut into small pieces

1 container of Cool Whip and add 1/4 c. sugar

Mix together and put in pretty dish. Cut up maraschino cherries. Put the cherries on top of the rice. So good and easy. (Note: Some people also add a cup of miniature marshmallows)



ADVENT DEVOTIONAL — 2025 —



Rockford United Methodist Church

DEAR FRIENDS,

Greetings to all who will be reading and using this Advent and Christmas Devotional this year! Thanks to all who helped make this Advent Devotional possible! I look forward to using this Advent Devotional as we prepare ourselves for the Lord!

Advent means “Arrival or Coming.” Not already here, but coming. Advent is important because it is time for us to prepare for the Lord’s coming. In today’s society, we tend to rush into things without taking time to enjoy and recognize God’s grace in each moment. I hope during this Advent, we pause and take each moment as we wait for the coming of the Lord. And as we do so, we may find wonderful steps leading to the “Coming.” Advent is that time when we remember all the prophets God used to prophesy the coming of the Messiah. Even that blank sheet between the Old Testament and the New Testament, which reminds us of 400 years of silence, of no prophecy, but waiting for the Messiah to come to deliver His people.

I am so grateful we have the opportunity to use this Advent Devotional to take each step as we wait upon the Lord’s coming, not only when Jesus was born 2000+ years ago to deliver us from sin and death, but also for Jesus’ Second Coming. We await Jesus’ return, “Coming Soon,” and as we wait, we prepare ourselves for His second coming as we are reminded of His 1st coming. We are reminded to “Prepare the way of the Lord!” (Isaiah 40:3) Preparing our hearts, our minds, our homes for the coming of Christ Jesus!

What are your favorite stories leading up to Christmas? Maybe Angel Gabriel is visiting Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, and/or Joseph. Or perhaps even watching the *Charlie Brown Christmas Special*, which I love, especially the music. That is one of my Spotify song lists for Advent/Christmas time. Another is listening to Handel’s *Messiah*, which begins with Isaiah’s prophecy of the Messiah, another Spotify playlist. Whatever you would love to do during Advent and Christmas, let us not just seek the “feeling” of Christmas but prepare ourselves for Jesus’ “Coming” and celebrate Christ Jesus!

Jesus said, “Surely, I am Coming Soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! Maranatha!
(Revelation 22:20)

Blessings in Christ Jesus,



Pastor Anna



Mema’s Coffee Cake - from Robbin Sheasley

Mema (David’s mom) is not with us anymore. She used to bring her coffee cake to all of our family gatherings. When she stopped being able to make it herself, I took over. No family gathering/ holiday would be complete without it.

(Tube Pan)

Batter:

¾ cup sugar
1 stick butter
1 tsp vanilla
3 eggs
2 cups flour
1 tsp baking soda
1 tsp baking powder
1 cup sour cream

Filling and Topping:

1 ¼ cup brown sugar
1 cup chopped pecans
2 tsp cinnamon
6 Tablespoons butter (melted)



Grease and flour 10” tube Pan. In large bowl beat sugar and butter until light and fluffy. Add vanilla and eggs, mix well. Lightly spoon flour into measuring cup/level off. In small bowl, combine dry ingredients. Add flour mixture and sour cream alternately to the sugar mixture, beginning and ending with flour. Combine filling in small bowl. Spread ½ of batter in prepared tube pan. Spread ½ of filling on top. (repeat)

Bake 350 for 45 minutes or until clean toothpick test. Cool upright 15 minutes. Cool completely before removing from pan.

Cranberry Cake with Butter Rum Sauce - from Pam Woven

1/2 T. butter
1/2 c. sugar
1/4 c. water
1/4 c. evaporated milk
1 c. flour
1 t. baking soda
1 1/4 c. cranberries, sliced
1/2 t. salt
1/2 c. walnuts

Butter Rum Sauce:

1/4 pound melted butter
1 c. sugar
1/2 c. evaporated milk
1 t. vanilla
1/2 tsp. or more rum flavoring

Heat all ingredients in a sauce pan until sugar is melted.



Cream butter and sugar. Mix in the rest of the ingredients, adding cranberries and walnuts last. Bake at 350 for 25 minutes in a greased 8x8 square pan. Serves 6-8. Can be doubled and baked in a 9x13 pan. Serve with warm sauce.

Jeweled Coconut Crisps - from Diane Lautenbach

Makes 5 dozen

- 1 c. butter
- 1 c. sugar
- 2 Tbs. milk
- 1 1/2 tsp. vanilla
- 2 1/2 c. flour
- 3/4 c. finely chopped red and green candied cherries
- 3/4 c. finely chopped pecans
- 1 c. coconut



Cream butter and sugar. Beat in milk and vanilla. Stir in flour, cherries, pecans. Shape into 2 - 8" logs. Roll in coconut. Wrap in plastic. Chill 4 hours. Slice into 1/4" slices. Place 2" apart on ungreased cookie sheet. Bake at 350 for 10-12 minutes, or until slightly brown. Cool on wire racks.

Christmas Rice Krispie Treats - from Ruth Reickard

- 6 T. butter or margarine (I use 12)
- One bag of mini marshmallows (I use 2 bags - don't use the cheap brands)
- 6 c. Rice Krispie Cereal (largest box or two small)
- Red and green food coloring



In microwave, melt butter and marshmallows in large bowl for 2 minutes. Stir after 1 minute. If not all marshmallows are melted, microwave for 30 seconds more at a time. Stir in 5-6 drops of red food coloring (until Christmas red). Stir in 6 cups of Rice Krispie cereal. Put into greased cake pan but don't press yet. Repeat steps again but with green food coloring until Christmas green. Press green layer into red layer as hard as you can. They will become half green and half red. Cut and serve.

Christmas Wreath - by Jill Mackie

I have made these for my kids ever since they were little - and still do!!

- 1/2 c. butter
- 6 c. Corn Flakes
- Green food coloring (lots)
- 38 marshmallows
- Red cinnamon candies - about 12 per wreath



Melt butter and add marshmallows until melted. Remove from heat and add green food coloring. Add Corn Flakes and stir to cover (there will be some Corn Flakes showing). Spray butter on hands. Place a small amount of the mixture on parchment paper and shape into a wreath. Add cinnamon candies (3 in a cluster - maybe 4 clusters on each wreath).

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

We hope this devotional will enrich your journey through the seasons of Advent and Christmas. Inside, you'll find selected scriptures paired with prayers and reflections featuring both well-known and often-overlooked characters from the Advent and Christmas story. Each prayer or message has been lovingly written by members of our congregation. We invite you to read the scriptures and reflections assigned for each weekday and listen for how God may be speaking to your heart.

You will also discover a film guide highlighting several beloved holiday movies, each accompanied by thoughtful questions that connect these classics to the themes of Advent. In addition, many members of our congregation have shared their favorite hymns, contemporary Christmas songs, meaningful lyrics, cherished nativity characters, and treasured Christmas traditions. You may find that some of their favorites are yours as well!

All of the hymns and songs mentioned have been gathered into a special Spotify playlist. If you have the Spotify app on your phone (it's free to download), simply scan the QR code below to enjoy the music throughout the season.

This devotional concludes with a recipe section filled with special Christmas favorites from our congregation. We hope you will enjoy trying—and perhaps sharing—some of these delights during the Advent and Christmas season.



Blessings and peace,

The Prayer Team

Motu Johnston (chair), Susan Arceo, LeAnn Hart,
Jeanine Holen, Judy Ludlow, Jacque Melin, Sandy Radunzel

ADVENT EVENTS AT RUMC

Wednesday Advent Study

Wednesdays, Nov 19 – Dec 17 (skipping Nov 26), at 6:30 pm in Fellowship Hall

Sunday Advent Study

Sundays, Nov 30 – Dec 21, at 10 am in the Fellowship Hall

50+ Potluck

Thursday, Dec 4, at noon in the Fellowship Hall.
Special Christmas program by Darlene Topp, *Share the Spirit of the Season*.

Senior Connections Open House

Friday, Dec 5, at 3 pm at Jim and Linda Larson's home.

Zentangle Christmas Ornament Class

Monday, Dec 8 and 15 at 9:30 am.

Rockford Christmas Nativity Night Warming Station

Friday, Dec 19, at 7 pm. Cookies, hot chocolate, and caroling

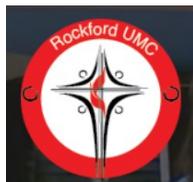
Cookie Exchange

Saturday, Dec 20, at 9 am. Bring your favorite cookie doughs and we will bake them and exchange them once they're cooled. Don't forget your containers to take them home.

Christmas Eve Services

Wednesday, Dec 24, 7 pm Family Friendly Candlelight Service

Wednesday, Dec 24, 11 pm Traditional Candlelight Service



Strawberry Pretzel Dessert - from Marjorie Brinks

Step 1:

2 1/2 c. coarsely crushed pretzels

3 T. powdered sugar

3/4 c. butter, melted

Mix and press into 9"x13" pan. Bake 10 minutes at 350.

Step 2:

8 oz. package of cream cheese

1 c. powdered sugar

Cream and fold into large container of Cool Whip and spread over Step 1.

Step 3:

2 packages strawberry Jello (3 ounces each)

2 c. hot water - dissolve the Jello

2 - 10 oz. packages frozen strawberries.

Stir into Jello. When slightly thickened, pour over Step 2.



Real Red Salad - from Judy Mayhak

Exported from MasterCook. This is a simple recipe, but my family always requests it.
Note: I have substituted strawberry Jello and frozen strawberries.

2 c. water

1 can jellied cranberry sauce

1 - 6 oz. package raspberry gelatin powder

1 - 10 oz. package frozen raspberries

Dissolve Jello in boiling water. Stir in mashed cranberry sauce and frozen raspberries. Let set.



Raspberry Junket Dessert - from Nancy Hinton

Crust: Cut 1 1/2 sticks of oleo into 1 1/2 c. flour. Add 1/2 c. brown sugar and 1/2 c. chopped nuts. Bake in a 9"x 13" pan at 375 for 12 minutes.

Cream 1 - 8 ounce package of cream cheese, 1 teaspoon vanilla, 1 1/2 c. powdered sugar. Fold into 2 packages Dream Whip or 1 large container of Cool Whip. Pour over cooled crust.

Drain 1 package frozen raspberries. Prepare 1 package raspberry Junket (follow directions on package). Add raspberries to red junket. Put on top of cream cheese layer. Top with whipped cream if desired.



HOPE

Jerry's Pizzelles - from Diana Stevers

Serving size - 144

Ingredients

Pizzelle Iron

7 eggs

1 c. butter, melted

2 c. sugar

2 T. Amaretto

2 T. anisette

2 T. vanilla extract

3 1/2 c. flour

2 t. baking powder

1 pinch salt

1/2 T. water as needed

Confectioner's sugar



Directions:

Beat the eggs until smooth. Melt the butter in the microwave or in a small saucepan on low heat. Allow the butter to cool briefly while you blend and mix the sugar, Amaretto, anisette, and vanilla into the eggs.

Add the melted butter into the mix, sift the flour, baking powder, and salt into the mix and blend vigorously to ensure uniformity.

Heat the Pizzelle Maker.

Add a dollop of dough. It will spread as the iron comes down. Cook for 30-60 seconds. Pizzelles should be golden brown. Remove and place directly on a cooling rack. Let Pizzelles cool completely and then dust with powdered sugar.

Notes: If too much oil is used to season the iron, prepare for the first batch to flop. Consistency of the batter will be stiff, but it should be adjusted until it drops off the spoon as a ribbon in two to three seconds. The spoon will retain some of the mix. If the mix seems too stiff, stir in one or two tablespoons of water and retest the flow from the spoon. If the mix seems too thin, blend into the mix a few tablespoons, or enough flour to give the right consistency.

This week we light the candle of Hope, remembering God's promise in Jeremiah 33:14–16: *“The days are coming...when I will fulfill the good promise I made.”* Advent invites us to hold onto that same promise. Just as God assured His people that a Savior would come, we remember that God's word is trustworthy and His timing is perfect. As we enter this week, may the hope of Christ steady our hearts and remind us that God always keeps His promises.

“‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. “In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior.”’

JEREMIAH 33:14-16

Message for Week 1 of Advent

Written by Diane Lautenbach

This beautiful hymn by Charles Wesley encompasses the prophecy in Jeremiah 33:14-16 that was for Israel and for us. It may be sung as a prayer.

"Come, Thou long expected Jesus, Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us; Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, HOPE of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart.
Born Thy people to deliver, Born a child and yet a King.
Born to reign in us forever, Now Thy gracious Kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit, Rule in all our heart's alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit, Raise us to Thy glorious throne."



SCRIPTURES, PRAYERS, AND MESSAGES

FOR WEEK 1 OF ADVENT

Monday, December 01

Prayer by Jacque Melin

Luke 1:26-38 - *Gabriel*

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank You for sending Your messenger Gabriel to bring words of hope and joy to Mary. Through his message, You revealed Your plan of love and salvation for the world. Help us, Lord, to have a heart like Mary's - open, trusting, and willing to say "yes" to You. And like Gabriel, may we also carry Your message of peace and encouragement to others. Let our words and actions remind people that You are near and that Your grace is with us. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Nutcracker Sweets - from Deb Rinehart

1 # white chocolate or white chocolate chips
3 cups of rice Chex
3 cups corn Chex
3 cups Cheerios
2 cups mixed nuts
2 cups pretzels (I use the butter snaps - checkered ones. They hold up better)
1 # M&Ms
Very large mixing bowl
Wax paper sheets -lay out on the counter.



Melt the chocolate in the microwave, keep stirring. Set aside. Mix all the dry ingredients being careful not to break the Chex cereal. Pour the melted white chocolate in with the dry ingredients and carefully mix until coated. Dump out on the sheets of wax paper and spread out to dry. Break it down into manageable pieces and store in a well sealed container.

Peanut Brittle - from Robb Johnston

Ingredients:

1 cup white sugar
½ cup light corn syrup
¼ cup water
¼ teaspoon salt
1 cup peanuts
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
1 teaspoon baking soda



Directions:

- 1 - Have all ingredients measured out before starting.
- 2 - Grease a large rimmed baking sheet. Set aside.
- 3 - Combine sugar, corn syrup, water, and salt in a heavy, 2-quart saucepan over medium heat.
- 4 - Stir until sugar is dissolved and the mixture comes to a boil, about 5 minutes.
- 5 - Stir in peanuts and set a candy thermometer in place. Continue cooking, stirring occasionally, until the temperature reaches 300 to 310 degrees F (150 to 155 degrees C)
- 6 - Remove from the heat. Quickly stir in butter and baking soda, then immediately pour mixture onto the prepared baking sheet. Quickly use 2 forks to lift and pull the mixture into a 12x14-inch rectangle. Let cool until completely firm, at least 30 minutes.

Notes:

- Add other nuts for added variety (pecans, hazelnuts, etc.)
- Once you pour the hot mixture onto the baking sheet, it will be quite "foamy" from the baking soda. If you leave it as-is, the final texture will be lighter and airy, like sea foam. If you spread it around, the bubbles will collapse and you'll have something a bit more hard and dense, like toffee.

The "Big Hit" Peppermint Chocolate Chip Cookies - from Ann MacDhubhain

This recipe is a crowd-pleaser, delivering a delightful blend of warm chocolate and cool mint. It starts with the reliable classic recipe found on the back of many chocolate chip bags and adds a festive twist.

Prep time: 15 minutes **Cook time:** 10-12 minutes per batch

Servings: Approximately 3 dozen large cookies

Ingredients:

2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon salt

1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened or butter flavored Crisco

3/4 cup granulated sugar

3/4 cup packed brown sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

2 large eggs

1 bag (12 oz.) semi-sweet chocolate chips (or milk chocolate, your preference)

1/2 bag (approx. 4–5 oz.) peppermint chips (crushed candy cane pieces—often found in the holiday baking aisle)

Instructions:

1. **Preheat Oven:** Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C).
2. **Combine Dry Ingredients:** In a small bowl, whisk together the flour, baking soda, and salt.
3. **Cream Butter & Sugars:** In a large mixer bowl, beat the softened butter, granulated sugar, and brown sugar until light and creamy.
4. **Add Eggs & Vanilla:** Beat in the vanilla extract, then add the eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition.
5. **Mix in Flour Mixture:** Gradually beat in the flour mixture, mixing on low speed until just combined (be careful not to overmix).



Tuesday, December 02

Prayer by Mary Knapp

Micah 5:2-5 - *Micah*

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be our peace when the Assyrians invade our land and march through our fortresses. We will raise against them seven shepherds, even eight commanders,

Prayer: God Almighty, you have chosen the smallest place, Bethlehem, to send the biggest gift—Jesus. You, Jesus, stand and lead us—you feed us, and love us with the strength that comes directly from your Father God. Because of your obedience, we will live in safety. Your greatness, oh God extends to the whole earth. You, oh Lord, are our peace. No matter our circumstances—our heartaches, our joys and our trials—you, Jesus, have become our hope for all eternity. Thank you Jesus. Amen.

Wednesday, December 03

Prayer by Jeanine Holen

Luke 1:26-38 (see December 01 for scripture) - *Elizabeth*

The story of Elizabeth is such an important story in the Bible. Not only does her life link the prophecy of the old testament to the new, it tells the story of hope, faith and patience.

Elizabeth, a devout Jewish woman of Judea, wife of the priest Zechariah, is a cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Jesus's lineage. Elizabeth, who was considered well past child bearing age and had been barren, conceived and bore a son. Her hope of bearing a child was answered. While in her sixth month of pregnancy, Elizabeth's cousin Mary, who is the mother of our Lord and savior, came to visit her. When Mary greeted Elizabeth the child in Elizabeth's womb leapt and Elizabeth became the very first person to declare that Mary's child was the long awaited Messiah.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, God of heaven and Earth, we praise you for your steadfast love. We thank you for the grace you give when our patience runs thin because of what we perceive to be unanswered prayer. Help us to remember the story of Elizabeth. Help us to remember that your timeline and your purpose are sometimes beyond our comprehension. Help us to praise you and grow ever stronger in faith each and every day of our lives. Amen.

Thursday, December 04

Prayer by Mary Knapp

Luke 2:36-38 - *Anna*

There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for the example of Anna. She suffered the loss of her husband after only seven years—yet she continued to praise you. She chose to go to the temple daily to worship you in spite of her great sorrow. She fasted and prayed day and night for 84 years. When she saw Jesus, she burst into praise for she knew she had seen the Messiah. She told everyone she saw that your son Jesus was the anticipated Messiah. Father, give us your strength and your fearlessness to tell others that you, Jesus, Messiah are here, healing our sorrows and turning them into joy. Thank you, Father for sending us your salvation. Amen .



Friday, December 05

Prayer by Motu Johnston

Luke 1:26-38 (see December 01 for scripture) - *John the Baptist*

Prayer: Dear God, as we prepare our homes and place of worship in anticipation of our Christmas Day celebrations, help us remember the words of the prophet Isaiah regarding John the Baptist. Just as John proclaimed your message of preparation, help us Lord to prepare our hearts and our minds to receive your son Jesus not just on Christmas Day but on every day of our lives. Loving God, please remove all obstacles that stand in the way. In your Son's precious name we pray, Amen.

Swedish Tea Ring - from LeAnn Hart

This is a hand-shaped, filled yeast bread that can be made ahead and refrigerated, then baked in the morning. Sprinkle chopped, toasted almonds over the ring if you wish. Nuts and raisins can also be added to the filling.

Cook Time: 20-30 minutes **Servings:** 24 **Yield:** 2 pastries

Ingredients

For the Dough:

- 1 cup lukewarm milk
- 1 egg, beaten
- 2 tablespoons butter or Crisco, room temperature
- 3 tablespoons white sugar
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 3-4 cups bread flour
- 2 teaspoons active dry yeast

For the Filling:

- 4 tablespoons butter, softened
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 3/4 cup packed brown sugar
- 1/2 cup raisins
- 1 cup chopped walnuts

For the Icing:

- 2 cups confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 1 teaspoon almond or vanilla extract
- 3 tablespoons milk, or as needed

Soften yeast in 1/3 cup warm water with 1 tsp of sugar, allow to raise until doubled. Melt butter with milk in pan, let cool until lukewarm. Mix sugar, salt and flour, adding in beaten egg, warm milk with butter and softened yeast alternately. Once mixed, blend thoroughly to make a moderately smooth, elastic dough. Add additional flour as needed to reach an elastic texture. On floured surface, knead 4-5 minutes and place in a greased bowl. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise until doubled, about 2 hours. (Hint: punching down dough to repeat the raising process a second time yields better results.)

1. Flour 2 baking sheets or line them with parchment paper; set aside.
2. Divide dough in half. Roll each piece out into rectangles about 12x16 inches. Spread each dough rectangle with 2 tablespoons softened butter. In a small bowl, combine 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon, 3/4 cup light brown sugar, and 1/2 cup raisins and chopped walnuts.
3. Sprinkle cinnamon mixture onto buttered dough. Roll them up jelly-roll fashion, along long side. Pinch edges to seal. Stretch and twist into rings, pinching ends to seal. Place them seam-side down onto prepared baking sheets. Using clean scissors, cut 2/3 way of the way through the loaf at about 1-inch intervals. Fan slices out to create a wreath-like effect.
4. Alternately, cover each ring with a clean towel or greased plastic wrap and let loaves rise until double, about 40 minutes.
5. Arrange two oven racks so that both baking sheets will fit. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C).
6. Bake for 10 -15 minutes in preheated; rotate baking sheets. Bake until rings are light brown and the filling is oozing and bubbling, about 10 minutes more. In a small mixing bowl, combine confectioners sugar, almond extract, and milk until icing is desired consistency. Drizzle icing over cooled pastries.



Christmas Cinnamon Rolls - from Nancy Grossman

Makes 2 Tins

2 packages of rapid rising yeast	2 large eggs beaten
1 cup hot milk(scalded)	4 cups of all-purpose flour (sifted)
½ cup shortening	12 Tbsp butter
¼ cup sugar	1 ½ cups sugar
½ tsp salt	6 tsp cinnamon



Dissolve each yeast package in ¼ cup of warm water and 1/2 tsp sugar in 2 cups. Combine the hot milk with the shortening, ¼ cup sugar and ½ tsp salt. Stir until the shortening is melted and the sugar and salt are dissolved. Cool but do not refrigerate. Once cooled, add the well-beaten eggs and the yeast. Mix thoroughly. Add the flour a little at a time. Mix well but do not knead the dough. Brush the inside of a bowl with shortening. Put the dough in the bowl and cover. Let it rise approximately 1-2 hours. In a small bowl mix ¾ cup of sugar with 3 tsp cinnamon for each pan. After the dough is risen, using a pastry cloth, spread flour over the surface. Split the dough in half. Roll the dough out into the shape of a rectangle, making sure it is 1/8 inch thick. Melt 6 Tbsp butter. Baste all the dough with the melted butter. Sprinkle the sugar/cinnamon mixtures on top evenly. Roll the dough lengthwise into a log. Cut the dough into 1 ¼ inch pieces. Re-roll the dough if it separates. Place the pieces into the tin, separating the dough approximately ½ inch apart. Cover the tin and let it rise again 1-2 hours. Bake 375degrees for 20 minutes or until brown. Enjoy!!!

Isabelle's Cinnamon Applesauce Jello - from David Fox

- One 6 ounce box of red Jello (cherry, cranberry, strawberry, or raspberry)
- One or two (2-4 ounces) of cinnamon candies, add to taste
- Two cups of unsweetened applesauce



Prepare Jello as instructed on the box and add cinnamon candies while still hot until they are mostly melted. Discard any undissolved candies after stirring for several minutes. **Instead of cold water, stir in two cups of applesauce.** Pour into serving bowl and refrigerate until set.

FAVORITE CHRISTMAS HYMNS

Angels We Have Heard On High

-Mary Knapp, Kathy Myrkle

Away in a Manger (to me this hymn is all about Jesus and the 3rd verse is like a prayer)

-Lynne Harms, Motu Johnston

Boh Predvichnyi (Ukrainian Carol "God Eternal")

-Diana Stevers

Coventry Carol

-Susan Groover

Gloria in excelsis Deo

-Brandon Teunissen

Go Tell It on the Mountain

-Brenda Black

Hark the Herald Angels Sing

-Nancy Grossman, Diane Lautenbach, Darlene Topp

Joy to the World

-Lee Aldrich, Julie Wendtland, Pam Wolven

Little Drummer Boy

-Anonymous, Deb Rinehart

Mary Did You Know

-Ruth Brod, Cindy Caywood, Pat Tefft, Carol VanderZanden

O Come All Ye Faithful

- Maureen Kaule, Linda Larson, Sandy Radunzel, Mark Self

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

- Cindy Beel-Bates, Robb Johnston,

O Holy Night

-Sue Arceo, David Bates, Marjorie Brink, Barbara Crowder, Steve Decker, Linda Duncan, Doris French, LeAnn Hart, Ann MacDhubhain, Judy Mayhak, Carol Murphy, Valerie Northcutt, Michelle Palma, Chip Stevers

O Little Town of Bethlehem

-Jill Mackie, Brenda Perkins

O Little Town of Bethlehem -

I remember singing this song as a kid when I was in "Children's Choir"

-Robbin Sheasley

Silent Night and Silent Night with Candles

-Anonymous, Sue Bakita, Ruth Brod, David Fox, Jeanine Holen, Dave Johnston, Jacque Melin, Scott Murphy, Mary Penrod, Kathryn Ricker, Julie Roach, Resa Szokowski, Abby Teunissen, Susan Witte

Sydämeeni joulun teen (Finnish Christmas Song)

-Tuovi Cochrane

The Friendly Beasts - #227 in the hymnal

-Lorraine deBaptiste, Suzanne J. DeVries-Zimmerman

There's a Song in the Air - by my relative Josiah Gilbert Holland

-Jackie Decker

What Child is This

-Nancy Hinton, Maureen Kaule



FAVORITE CONTEMPORARY CHRISTMAS SONG

A Manger in Bethlehem

-Pam Wolven

Agnus Dei (Amy Grant)

-Judy Ludlow

All I Want for Christmas is You

-Jackie Decker

All is Well

-Deb Rinehart, Pam Wolven

Breath of Heaven (Robbin Sheasley to sing)

-Carol Vanderzanden

Breath of Heaven (Amy Grant)

-Robbin Sheasley

Blue Christmas (Elvis) My father loved Elvis and this brings fond memories of him.

-Julie Wendtland

def gospel: Hark the Hearld Angels Sing (Mahalia Jackson)

-Lee Aldrich

Do You Hear What I Hear

-Robb Johnston

Emmanuel

-Mary Knapp, Kathy Myrkle

He Shall Reign Forevermore

-Ann MacDhubhain

Here Comes Santa Claus

-Linda Larson

Here With Us (Joy Williams)

-Robbin Sheasley

How Many Kings (Marc Martel)

-Robbin Sheasley

I Wonder as I Wonder

-Judy Mayhak

It's Such a Strange Way to Save the World

-Barbara Crowder

Jingle Bells

-Anonymous

Jingle Bell Rock

-Abby Teunissen

Joy to the World (Bebo Norman)

-Robbin Sheasley

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

-Cindy Beel-Bates

Mary Did You Know

-Brenda Black, Lraaine deBaptiste, Jackie Decker, Steve Decker, Linda Duncan, Nancy Grossman, LeAnn Hart, Dave Johnston, Mary Knapp, Jill Mackie, Jacque Melin, Carol Murphy, Kathy Myrkle, Valerie Northcutt, Mary Penrod, Sandy Radunzel, Ruth Reickard, Julie Roach, Chip Stevers, Diana Stevers, Resa Szokowski, Pat Tefft, Pam Wolven

O Holy Night

-Motu Johnston, Diane Lautenbach, Michelle Palma, Kathryn Ricker

Prince of Peace by Cross Point Music

-Mark Self

Rocking Around the Christmas Tree

-Jeanine Holen, Brandon Teunissen

Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer

-Abby Teunissen

Tonight is Christmas (Alabama)

-Brenda Perkins

What a Beautiful Name

-Scott Murphy

White Christmas

-Ruth Brod, Doris French



Cream Cheese Roll up Cookies recipe of Lyn Beel (Cindy Beel-Bates mom)

8 oz. cream cheese (softened)

2 sticks salted butter

2 cups flour

Filling: candied fruit (cherries, pineapple) dates, walnuts

1-2 cups powdered sugar (to shake cookies in after they've baked)

Directions: Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Cream butter and cream cheese together until smooth. Slowly add flour until mixed. Place dough in tinfoil- flatten and place in the fridge for at least 1 hour. Remove dough from foil-place onto floured surface. Roll to 1/4 inch thick. Cut into strips about 3-4 inches long by 1 inch wide. Place 1 piece fruit, date or nut onto each strip and roll closed. Place on cookie sheet. BAKE FOR 15 MINUTES AT 375 DEGREES

After removing from the oven let cookies cool for 5 minutes. Place 4-5 cookies at once into a gallon size plastic bag filled with 1 cup powdered sugar and gently shake until cookies are covered with powdered sugar. Allow to fully cool before placing in a tin or box otherwise they become "soggy."



Mom's Swedish Pie Crust - from Suzanne DeVries-Zimmerman

<u>3 Crusts*</u>	<u>4 -5 Crusts*</u>	
3	4	Cups Flour
2	3	Teaspoons Sugar
1/2	1 1/2	Teaspoons Salt
1 1/2	1 3/4	Cups Shortening, (preferably Crisco)
1	1	Beaten Egg
1	1	Tablespoon Vinegar
6 Tbl.	1/2 cup	Iced Water

Blend dry ingredients together, then cut in shortening until mixture resembles large crumbs. Add egg, vinegar and iced water. (Add enough of the iced water to make a pliable dough. All of the listed quantity may not be needed). Mix dough until just blended. Divide dough into desired number of portions. Roll dough to desired size for pie plate. Remaining portions may be shaped into round, flattened discs, wrapped in plastic wrap, and frozen. Crusts freeze well for several months.

Fig Pudding with Lemon Sauce - from David Beel-Bates

FOR FIG PUDDING

1/2 c. Crisco shortening

8 oz. of light brown figs, cut into dime size pieces, then soak in brandy for an hour or so...

11 slices, crust removed and cut into quarters, of Brownberry whole grains Health Nut bread

1 1/2 t. baking powder

1/4 t. salt

1/2 c. milk

FOR BUTTER SAUCE

1 c. sugar

4 T. cornstarch

1/2 t. salt

6 T. lemon juice

Grated rind of 2 lemons



Cream the shortening, drain brandy, then add figs, beat well. Add bread, baking powder, salt to the fig mixture. Add milk and stir into fig mixture. Beat eggs until light and foamy, add sugar gradually, and beat well. Add this to the fig mixture...beat well and then add vanilla. Using a double boiler, grease the top pan, then line the bottom of this pan with parchment paper. Pour in fig mixture and then steam for 2.5 hours. When done, remove the top pan from the boiler, put a serving dish upside down, over the pudding, then flip. The fig pudding will then settle nicely on the serving dish. Remove the parchment paper. Serve warm with lemon sauce.

For the lemon sauce: Mix sugar, cornstarch, and salt together in a 2 quart pan. Gradually add 2 cups of boiling water to mixture, stirring, and bring to a boil, then reduce heat to simmer. Stir constantly until smooth/thick/clear. Serve warm.

Smoked Salmon Quiche - from Suzanne DeVries-Zimmerman

1 unbaked deep 9-inch pie crust shell

1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper

4 oz. smoked salmon

Dash of ground nutmeg

8 ounces Swiss cheese, shredded

1 cup milk

2 Tablespoons all-purpose flour

3 eggs, beaten



Break salmon into flakes and evenly distribute in bottom of pie shell. Mix flour, pepper, and nutmeg with shredded cheese and sprinkle over salmon. Mix milk with beaten eggs. Then pour over salmon/flour mixture in pie shell. Bake at 350°F for 50–60 minutes. Quiche is done when there is a slight wobble to the filling and a knife inserted near the center comes out clean. Cool slightly before serving.

FAVORITE CHRISTMAS CAROL LYRIC

5 Golden Rings!!!!!!

-Abby Teunissen

10 Lords a-leaping!

-Robb Johnston

A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

-Jacque Melin

And when you kiss your little baby, You've kissed the face of God...

-Pat Tefft

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay Close by me forever, and love me, I pray; Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care, And fit us for Heaven to live with Thee there.

-Suzanne J. DeVries-Zimmerman

Come and behold him, born the King of Angels.

-Mark Self

Fall on your knees; O hear the Angel voices!

-Kathryn Ricker, Chip Stevers

Glory to the newborn King

-Carol VanderZanden

Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere - Jesus Christ is born!

-Nancy Hinton

Guide us to thy perfect light...

-Judy Ludlow

Grandma got run over by a reindeer, walking home from our house Christmas Eve.

-Scott Murphy, Julie Roach

Hallelujah Chorus from the Messiah

-Jill Mackie

Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ. And He shall reign for ever and ever, King of kings, and Lord of lords. Hallelujah!

-Cindy Beel-Bates



Hark, the herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King!

-Maureen Kaule, Sandy Radunzel

It came upon a midnight clear...

-Linda Larson

It is the night of our dear Savior's birth.

-Majorie Brink

Jingle bells...

-Cindy Caywood

Joy to the World, the Lord has come, let earth receive her King! Let every heart, prepare Him room. And heaven and nature sing...

-Lee Aldrich, Doris French, Darlene Topp

Long lay the world in sin and error pining, til He appeared and the soul felt its worth.

-Ann MacDhubhain

Mary, Did you know...

-Tuovi Cochrane, Resa Szokowski

Mary, Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?; The blind will see the deaf will hear; the dead will live again! The lame will leap; the dumb will speak; The praises of the Lamb!; Mary, Did you know the sleeping Child you're holdin' Is the Great I AM!

-Mary Knapp, Kathy Myrkle

Mary, Did you know that the babe that you delivered will soon deliver you!

-Jackie Decker, Steve Decker, Linda Duncan

Oh come all ye faithful...

-Nancy Grossman, Susan Witte

Oh come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

-Diane Lautenbach

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining; it is the night of the dear Savior's birth. Long lay the world in sin and error pining, till He appeared and the soul felt its worth. A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn! Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices! O night divine! O night when Christ was born!

-Motu Johnston, Michelle Palma

Pa rump pa pa pum and Fa la la la la - because EVERYBODY sings!

-Robbin Sheasley

Crescent Roll Christmas Tree (author Kristyn Merkley) - from Carol VanderZanden

2 (8-ounce) cans refrigerated Pillsbury Original Crescent Rolls (8 count)

1 (5.2-ounce) box Boursin garlic and herb cream cheese

1 egg

1 T. water

Grated parmesan cheese

Fresh parsley (chopped)

Preheat oven to 375. Line a large cookie sheet with parchment paper. Set aside. Separate dough into 16 triangles. Using a pizza cutter, cut each triangle in half lengthwise to make 32 skinny triangles. Add a heaping 1/2 teaspoon of the cream cheese mixture to the largest side of each triangle. Roll up each crescent roll, starting at the large side and rolling up towards the pointy end. Place each roll on the prepared sheet to make a tree shape starting with one roll at the top, adding a second row with 2 rolls, a third row with 3 rolls, and so forth until you have 7 rows. Use the remaining rolls to create a square trunk. Before baking, make an egg wash by whisking the egg and water and brushing over the rolls. Sprinkle with grated Parmesan cheese. Bake for 16-18 minutes or until golden brown. Sprinkle with chopped, fresh parsley.



Jill's Spinach Salad - from Jeanine Holen

2 large packages of spinach

1/2 lb. bacon (cut off fat, cut in small squares)

1 small onion - finely chopped

Mix onion with washed spinach and store in large plastic bag wrapped with damp paper towel. Cook bacon, drain and cool. Add to spinach just before serving.

Dressing:

1 egg beaten

3/4 c. sugar

1/2 c. vinegar

1 t. salt

Bring to a boil for one minute. Stir constantly. Cool.

Jeanine's version:

Double the dressing ingredients. Use only 1/2 of a small SWEET onion, chopped very finely. Then use thinly sliced RED onion as salad garnish. Also, add chopped (or sliced) hard boiled eggs (1/2 egg for each person). May add sliced fresh mushroom. Use homemade croutons or good quality purchased. I strain the salad dressing to remove any lumps and chill it before using.





RECIPES

In Loving Memory of Larry Lindemer

We are honored to dedicate this year's recipe section to Larry Lindemer. Larry was a man of deep faith, a loving husband, father, and grandfather, and a passionate cook—gifts he joyfully shared with his family. His warmth, kindness, and love for creating delicious meals helped shape many treasured holiday traditions.

Larry's family has graciously shared two of his favorite Christmas recipes with us. Whether it was Shrimp-Scallop Chowder on Christmas Eve or the Monster Cookies he looked forward to each year, these dishes were part of the joy and togetherness that filled their home.

As we include these recipes in our Advent Devotional, we give thanks for Larry's life and for the love and faith he shared so generously. May these recipes remind us of the simple, beautiful ways God's love is passed from one generation to the next.

Larry's Shrimp-Scallop Chowder

- 1/2 lb shrimp
- 1/2 lb scallops
- 1 recipe of soup base
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 1 Tbsp fresh basil
- 1/4 cup dry white wine
- pepper

Peel and devein shrimp then halve shrimp lengthwise. Set aside.

In a large saucepan, combine soup base with milk, basil and pepper. Heat till bubbly. Add shrimp and scallops. Return to boiling and then reduce heat. Cover and simmer for 3-5 minutes or until seafood turns opaque. Stir in wine and heat through. Garnish with basil sprigs. Makes 3-4 main-dish servings.

Soup Base

- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- olive oil
- 10 1/4 ounce can cream of celery soup

In a large saucepan cook onion and garlic in olive oil until tender but not brown. Stir in celery soup. Can be made 2-3 days ahead of time if stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator.

Pam's Monster Cookies (Larry's favorites)

- 6 eggs
- 2 1/2 cups brown sugar
- 2 cups white sugar
- 2 tsp vanilla
- 2 tsp corn syrup
- 2 sticks butter
- 2 cups peanut butter
- 9 cups oatmeal
- 1 1/2 cups chocolate chips
- 1 1/2 cups M&Ms

Heat oven to 350°F. Mix ingredients in the order listed. Use an ice cream scoop to portion the dough. Place six scoops on a large cookie sheet and bake for 12-14 minutes.

Peace on Earth, good will to man.

-Cindy Caywood, Judy Mayhak

Silent Night, holy night; all is calm, all is bright!

-Barbara Crowder, Jeanine Holen

Sleep in heavenly peace...AND ...Christ the Savior is born.

-David Fox

The Italian Christmas Donkey, la, la, la

-Brandon Teunissen

Then He smiled at me, pa rump pum pum pum...

-Anonymous

There is room for everyone on the nice list!! (Buddy the Elf)

-Carol Murphy

This is the night of our dear Savior's birth.

-LeAnn Hart

To save us all from Satan's power when we have gone astray.

-Ruth Brod

Truly, he taught us to love one another. His law is LOVE and His gospel is PEACE.

-Valerie Northcutt

What a blessed place the world would be if we had that Christmas feeling all year (1946 Perry Como, "That Christmas Feeling")

-Diana Stevers





PEACE

This week we focus on Peace. Jesus brings a peace the world can't give—a peace that holds us, calms us, and leads us forward. As we light the candle of Peace, may we open our hearts to the gentle reassurance that God is with us in every step and every season.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways...to guide our feet into the way of peace.

LUKE 1:76, 79

Prayer for Week 2 of Advent

Written by Valerie Northcutt

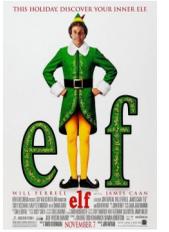
Father in Heaven, we look to You for stability and truth. You are our rock and our shelter. Let your peace guard our hearts and calm our souls. Heal divisions between friends, families, communities and nations. Help us to see each other with the eyes of love, to recognize our similarities and overlook our differences. We can acknowledge and accept our differing opinions in peaceful ways. May we seek Your will and rest in the knowledge that you know what is best for us, what is best for our families, our church, our neighbors, and our world. We know that peace is more than just the absence of conflict. True peace is the presence of God's calm spirit in the middle of our trials. God's peace surpasses all our earthly understanding.

You came to us as a helpless baby but you are actually the Wonderful Counselor, Almighty Father and Prince of Peace. Forgive us our selfishness and our lack of compassion. In this season of Advent, as we remember your servant, John the Baptist, who helped us prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus, help us also to remember and be thankful for the gift of salvation and grace. Amen.

Elf - Advent is a season of anticipation and awakening — a time to rekindle belief that God is still at work bringing light into our darkness. In *Elf*, Buddy's joyful innocence and unshakable belief challenge a weary, disbelieving world to see goodness again. His story reminds us that hope, peace, joy, and love can melt even the coldest hearts.

Discussion Questions:

1. What gives Buddy courage to set out on his journey?
2. How does his hopeful spirit inspire others?
3. What are you hoping for this Advent, and how can you nurture that hope in faith?
4. Where do you see conflict in the film, and how is peace restored?
5. How can you embody God's peace in your family, work, or community this season?
6. What makes Buddy's joy contagious?
7. How does his delight in simple things challenge your own perspective?
8. What might it look like to share joy as an act of faith this Advent?
9. How does Buddy's unconditional love bring healing?
10. In what ways can love overcome cynicism in your own life?
11. How can you be a bearer of Christ's love in small, joyful ways?



A Christmas Story - Advent invites us to pause, wait, and look beneath the surface of the season for signs of God's presence. *A Christmas Story* reminds us that life is rarely perfect — yet grace shines through family warmth, humor, and small moments of love. Ralphie's longing for his "perfect" Christmas gift becomes a lesson in what truly satisfies the heart.



Discussion Questions:

1. What do you find yourself "hoping for" this season?
2. How does Ralphie's focus on one gift mirror the ways we sometimes misplace our hope?
3. How can Advent re-shape your sense of what hope truly means?
4. Where do you notice glimpses of peace in the story?
5. What simple practices could help you find stillness and gratitude during Advent?
6. Which scenes made you laugh or smile most, and why?
7. How can laughter and humility open your heart to joy this Advent?
8. How does the father's hidden kindness illustrate unconditional love?
9. Who in your life shows love in quiet, faithful ways?
10. How can you reflect that kind of love during Advent?

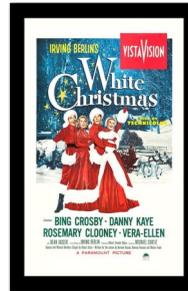


WATCH YOUR FAVORITE CHRISTMAS FILMS WITH AN “ADVENT” FOCUS THIS YEAR

White Christmas - While *White Christmas* isn't explicitly about Advent or even directly religious, it beautifully reflects several Advent themes: hope, peace, joy, and love. When viewed through a spiritual lens, the story's longing, generosity, and renewal parallel the deeper longings of Advent.

Discussion Questions:

1. **Hope:** Which character in *White Christmas* seems to be waiting or hoping for something? How is that similar to the Advent spirit of waiting for Christ?
2. **Peace:** How do the main characters bring healing or reconciliation to each other?
3. **Joy:** The song “Count Your Blessings Instead of Sheep” emphasizes gratitude—how might gratitude prepare us spiritually during Advent?
4. **Love:** What motivates Bob and Phil to help the General? How does their selflessness reflect the love we're called to show in Advent?
5. **Transformation:** What changes by the end of the film—for individuals and for the group? How might this mirror the transformation Advent invites in our hearts?



It's a Wonderful Life - The story of George Bailey reminds us that even when life feels disappointing or ordinary, God is at work in unseen ways. Advent, too, invites us to pause, look deeper, and notice the light of Christ already shining in our world.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does George's despair mirror times when you've lost hope?
2. What “angels” — people, moments, or memories — has God sent to help restore your hope?
3. What robs you of peace during this busy season?
4. How does George's acceptance of his life show us the peace that comes through surrender?
5. What brings George true joy by the end of the film?
6. How can we “count our blessings” this Advent as a spiritual practice?
7. How does George's life reflect Christlike love?
8. What is one way you can share love and kindness in your community this Advent?



SCRIPTURES, PRAYERS, AND MESSAGES FOR WEEK 2 OF ADVENT

Monday, December 08

Prayer by Robb Johnston

Matthew 1:18-25 - **Joseph**

Joseph Accepts Jesus as His Son

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”¹ (which means “God with us”). When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly God, We come before you in this season of advent with humble, grateful hearts. We thank you for all the blessings you fill our lives with each and every day. So many things in this life can cause us to feel disoriented, confused, afraid, or unsure. We reflect on the story of Joseph, and how strong his trust and faith in you must have been when he learned that Mary was going to have a baby. We pray that you will give us that same strength and courage, to have humble, servant hearts and follow you even when the path is unclear, knowing that you will guide us to where we need to be. Please go with us each day so that we may shine your light out into the world. We ask all this in Jesus' name, Amen.



Tuesday, December 09

Message by Judy Mayhak

Luke 1:5-23 - *Zachariah*

The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

Zachariah was a priest who worked at a temple teaching the people the scriptures and direction during worship Services. He and his wife Elizabeth were righteous in the eyes of the Lord observing all God's demands and decrees, but they were childless and they were very old. One day when Zechariah was chosen to be the one to go into the temple to burn incense. An angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah. Zechariah was afraid when he saw the angel. The angel told him to not be afraid because his prayer had been heard and he and his wife would have a son and he was to be called John and he would be filled with the Holy Spirit and be a great prophet. He would make people prepared for the Lord. Zachariah doubted the angel Gabriel because he and his wife were old. Because of his doubt Zachariah was to remain silent until the child was born. Elizabeth was grateful and obedient that the Lord had chosen to find favor with her and she would give birth to John.

Message: This story is a lesson for us to be patient with God no matter how impossible our prayer request may be. God's promise will come at the right time and in the right way. God hears our prayers and his will shall be done. He has a plan for us and he will take care of us. Do not be afraid. Trust and Obey.

Wednesday, December 10



Prayer by Barbara Crowder

Matthew 2:1-7 - *King Herod*

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

Prayer: Holy Father, As we approach this season of Advent, we seek your peace amidst the chaos and the noise. Remind us that your Grace and Mercy applies to everyone, including the "Herods" of this world. Help us to put aside the busyness and need for control. Calm the "Herod" in all of us and grant us your peace; the peace that passes all of our human understanding. Thank you for the precious gift of your son who came to us in the form of a baby. May we embrace the true peace of Advent and share it with all of your people including those that we sometimes think they don't deserve it. In Jesus name. Amen.

Wednesday, December 24

Prayer by Pastor Anna Moon

Please read Luke 2:1-20 - *JESUS*



Christmas Prayer...

Dear loving Father,

We thank You for this day, Christmas Eve, as we remember You so loved the world, You gave Your one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to be born in the midst of chaos and darkness. Jesus Christ, being born as the light and hope to the shepherds in the fields, wise men from a far distance, Jews, and the whole world to fulfill Your way of salvation.

Jesus Christ being born, just as You promised through many prophets, in Your perfect way and at Your perfect timing, is Your love and grace revealing to all people. While we were sinners, You sent Your Son; while we were still in darkness, without knowing we were in darkness or how much we needed You, You sent Your Son, Jesus, so that we can be saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus!

As we sing *Silent Night* to remember that night, as we sing Joy to the World, the Savior is born, we give You thanks! We also look forward to Jesus' second coming as we wait and live daily living in the light of Christ Jesus, sharing His light and love with others who may also need His light and Salvation!

Lead us and guide us to light Christ's light in us, so others may also see Christ in us to receive Your light and find true, unchanging love in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Happy Birthday, Jesus! As the wisemen brought gifts fit for the King, we offer ourselves to You! We are forever grateful!

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen!



Tuesday, December 23

Prayer by Cindy Beel-Bates

Luke 2:9-14 - *Angels*

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Prayer: Dear Lord, we are so thankful that you created angels to assist with your divine plan for our redemption. In this passage of scripture they played critical roles in the Christmas story. They delivered the good news to the shepherds as they tended their flocks, probably the only creatures who could find the shepherds to give them the news. The angel calmed the shepherds with a heavenly voice saying "Do not fear". The shepherds were motivated by the angel to seek out the Christ child so that He could be worshipped, then the shepherds spread the news to others. Finally, the angel was joined by the heavenly host to create joyous harmony between heaven and earth as they sang "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth!" Every intricate detail was orchestrated by your omnipotent power. We are in awe of everything you create. We praise you and love you with our whole being for the wonderful way you brought the Christ child to be amongst us. Amen.



Thursday, December 11

Prayer by Suzanne DeVries-Zimmerman

Luke 2:25-26 - *Simeon*

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Like Simeon, we await Christ's birth with the arrival of Christmas. We wish, we hope, we pray for the fulfillment of God's promise of eternal life through him and his son, Jesus Christ. However, we often stumble on the path of righteousness, becoming distracted by the proverbial hustle and bustle of the holidays and falling short in our attempts to live a devout, faithful life like Simeon's. Lord, grant us the patience to pause and ponder the great gift of your son, grant us peace as a balm to the whirl of the holidays, and grant us the wisdom to choose faithfulness over busyness. In Christ's name, Amen.



Friday, December 12

Prayer by Michelle Palma

Isaiah 9:2-7 - *Isaiah*

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for the promise you gave to us through Isaiah and for sending the light of Jesus into the world. We praise you, Jesus, for your names: Wonderful Counselor, for your wisdom and guidance. Mighty God, for your power and strength. Everlasting Father, for your love and care. Prince of Peace, for the peace you bring to our hearts and the promise of a future filled with peace. Please help us to be a light to those around us today and bring peace to our hearts. Amen.

FAVORITE NATIVITY PERSON/THING

Angel - I believe in angels and they watch over us and show us the way.

-Sue Arveo

Angel - When my daughter was about four years old, she was an angel in the annual Christmas program at RUMC. She was all dressed up in her white robe and gold halo, looking so “angelic”. Unbeknownst to us (because she was sitting in the front pews and we were in the back), she fell asleep. Someone snapped a photo of her and that is the only reason we were aware. She looked so precious and peaceful. Oh how I miss the days when my children were involved in church programming. I am so grateful for the love and support this church shared with my children and family. These memories remind me of our loving church.

-Julie Wendland

Angel who told Mary she’s to have a child -

Because he assured her that all would be well.

-Pat Tefft

Animals

-Susan Groover

Baby Jesus - Who died for our sins.

-Anonymous

Baby Jesus - Just puts the “focus” of the Reason for the Season for me.

-Marjorie Brink, Lynne Harms

Baby Jesus - He’s a miracle!

-Cindy Caywood

Baby Jesus - He is Jesus!

-Tuovi Cochrane

Baby Jesus - His birth culminated in my salvation.

-Jackie Decker

Baby Jesus

-LeAnn Hart, Michelle Palma

Baby Jesus - He is Our Savior

-Stever Decker, Jeanine Holen

Baby Jesus - He saved us.

-Dave Jobnston

Baby Jesus - He is the reason we celebrate Christmas. There would be no Christmas without Jesus.

-Motu Jobnston



SCRIPTURES, PRAYERS, AND MESSAGES FOR WEEK 4 OF ADVENT

Monday, December 22

Message and Prayer by Ann MacDhubhain

Luke 2:8-20 (see December 18 for scripture) - *The Innkeeper*

Message and Prayer:

Dear Lord,

I write this to You in a state of wonder and some confusion after the events of this night. A young couple arrived at my door late, weary from their long journey, the young lady clearly in the final stages of pregnancy. They had traveled all day, she riding some and walking much, just hoping for a simple room.

My heart ached for them, but as You know, the inn was full. Every room was double-booked due to the census. I truly had no vacancy and wrestled with what to do. I couldn't just leave a woman about to give birth on the street.

I offered a quick prayer for guidance, and You provided a divine idea: the stable below the house. It wasn't much, but it was shelter. The sounds of the animals helped muffle her cries as she labored.

Thank God, it was a healthy baby boy. We made a small bed for him in the manger, and he fit perfectly.

Now, as they are finally resting, a whole batch of shepherds have shown up! Your angels apparently told them all about this baby. They are everywhere.

God bless this lad. He has a birth story that no one in my innkeeper's association will ever believe.

But Lord, I really have to go see these shepherds.

Sincerely,

The Innkeeper.

Today, let us pray:

Dear Lord,

As we navigate the demands of this season, help us to be resourceful and compassionate. Guide us to see all the possibilities in moments that may seem unplanned or challenging. Grant us the grace to live within Your perfect plan, just as Mary found peace in a stable over an inn. Help us to be like the innkeeper who thought beyond the circumstance and into the needs of others. Above all, make room in our hearts for You. Amen.

LOVE

This week we light the candle of Love, remembering the beautiful truth of 1 John 4:9. Advent reminds us that God's love is not distant or abstract—He came close. In Jesus, God stepped into our world, our joys, and our struggles, to show us what love looks like in real life. As we move closer to Christmas, may we open our hearts to this incredible gift and share that same love generously with one another.

“This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him.”

1 JOHN 4:9

Prayer for Week 4 of Advent

Written by Jacque Melin

Loving God, as we light the candle of Love, we thank You for showing Your love so clearly in the gift of Your Son. In Jesus, You came close—entering our world so we might truly live. Fill our hearts with that same love today. Help us to see others with compassion, to speak with kindness, and to share Your love in all we do. May the light of Christ's love shine through us this Advent and always. Amen.



Baby Jesus - For whom I am eternally grateful

-Julie Roach

Baby Jesus - He changed the world and saved us all!

-Mark Self

Baby Jesus - Miracle, power, devotion

-Brandon Teunissen

Drummer Boy - He gave all he had (music) to worship the newborn King.

-Barbara Cronder

Drummer Boy - Young, small, easily intimidated - yet he gave a gift.

-Chip Stevers

Drummer Boy - Sweet song, symbol of children, he gave what he had.

-Susan Witte

Goat - He's calm

-Mary Knapp, Kathy Myrkle

Joseph - He wasn't prominent in the Nativity Story, but he went on to raise a fine son.

-David Fox

Joseph - He was a righteous man, sensitive to God's leading and obedient. His role in the life of Jesus was significant. Did he recognize the fulfillments of scripture pertaining to Jesus as he had a part in them? It appears he died before Jesus was crucified—perhaps by God's grace.

-Diane Lautenbach

Joseph - He was patient and a caring husband.

-Scott Murphy

Joseph - I imagine that life didn't unfold the way he planned, and he embraced the unknown through faith.

-Diana Stevers

Joseph - He was Mary's support and trusted God and obeyed his instruction.

-Carol VanderZanden

Magi - They sought a King that didn't belong to them, they bowed and worshipped our Lord and Savior, they gave generously, they were obedient.

-Jacque Melin

Mary - For her courage and the love for and trust in God for her to mother his son.

-Sue Bakita



Mary

-Lorraine deBaptiste, Pam Wolven

Mary - She believed the Angel. A young girl with amazing faith.

-Linda Duncan

Mary - Her perfect love and devotion.

-Doris French

Mary - Because she is a strong, faithful and loving woman who has vulnerabilities and relatable emotions of a mother.

-Nancy Grossman

Mary - She was strong, yet gentle. Much faith!

-Nancy Hinton

Mary - Because of her place as a mom.

-Judy Ludlow

Mary - She was so brave and obedient, and endured so much more than I can imagine.

-Valerie Northcutt

Mary - Her Faith

-Carol Murphy

Mary - Gave birth to Jesus

-Kathryn Ricker

Mary - She believed and was so brave.

-Deb Rinehart

Mary - She was very brave

-Robbin Sheasley

Mary and Baby Jesus - Mary's story is so powerful. Of course the life of this baby to manhood is inspiring to us all.

-Darlene Topp

Sheep and Shepherds - In the New Testament the various scriptures that refer to Jesus as our shepherd and us as his lambs (followers)

-Brenda Perkins

Shepherd Boy - He is one of the least and still welcomed to the throne. Also symbolic of our Great Shepherd - Jesus!

-Maureen Kaulle

Shepherd Boy - It's presumed he left his flock to see the miracle— a decision that could have angered his father, his manager, or his owner. The miracle was greater than the threat of ___ or punishment.

-Lee Aldrich



Matching Jammies/Football/Diehard

-Brandon Teunissen

Matching family pajamas and reading *The Night Before Christmas*

-Abby Teunissen

Midnight candlelit church

-Chip Stevers

Putting up the Christmas tree

- Darlene Topp

Singing *Silent Night* with my family at church family by candlelight.

- Cindy Beel-Bates

Singing *Silent Night*, holding candles at midnight service.

- Cindy Beel-Bates

Spending time with family

- Michelle Palma

Spending time with family and sharing the true meaning of giving our talents, time, and gifts.

- Sue Bakita

Unpacking manger and Christmas decorations and celebrating with family.

- Cindy Caywood

Watching *Christmas Vacation*

- Scott Murphy

When my kids were young, I always put candy in their Christmas stockings. Then I decided to start putting a new toothbrush, and an orange in to counteract the candy. Now, my daughter has taken on the tradition for her kids!

- Barbara Crowder



Christian Symbolism and the Candy Cane

Shepherd's staff - Jesus, our "Good Shepherd"

"J" shape - the name of Jesus

White color - purity and sinless nature of Jesus

Red stripes - the blood of Jesus shed on the cross

Hard candy - "solid rock" of Jesus

Peppermint flavor - spices offered by the wise men

Getting the whole family together!

-Linda Duncan

Getting our Christmas tree with our kids and decorating it while drinking homemade eggnog!

-Maureen Kaule

Giving candy canes to co-workers and kids, and explaining its Christian symbolism.

-David Fox

Going to church as a family at midnight or Kids Christmas Program

-Ann MacDhubhain

Going to the Christmas tree farm, selecting and cutting down a tree with family.

-Brenda Black

Having a REAL Christmas tree

-Deb Rinehart

Having my son and his family spend Christmas Eve day with me.

-Brenda Perkins

In Finland, visiting family grave sites, bringing burning candles

-Tuovi Cochrane

Looking at Christmas lights

-Judy Ludlow

Making and decorating Christmas cookies with my daughter

-Sandy Radunzel

Making Christmas Cookies

-Jeanine Holen, Jill Mackie

Making Christmas cookies to give out to family and friends (my Mom baked cakes to give out to family and neighbors)

-Motu Johnston

Making cinnamon rolls.

-Nancy Grossman

Making Molasses Cookies (and eating them!)

-Kathy Myrkle

Making Pizzelles - It is a peaceful time for remembering, reflection, giving, and all that Christmas represents.

-Diana Stevers

Shepherd - Because he's a protector to his sheep.

-Resa Szokowski

Shepherds - They go to witness the heavenly host of angels.

-Brenda Black

Shepherds - The shepherds came with no extravagant gifts or political agenda. They came out of an expression of their faith and left with the grace of the newly born Christ Child.

-Suzanne J. DeVries-Zimmerman

Shepherds - It was amazing the way they showed up!

-Lynne Harms

Shepherds - Considered to be lowly in status. Were the first to be informed by God - what an honor!

-Jeanine Holen

Shepherds - Because they are the ones who most made me feel like one of them - called to witness the birth of Jesus.

-Jill Mackie

Shepherds - Overcame their fear and turned to joy as they went to see the baby and proclaimed his birth.

-Judy Maybak

Star - Guides the shepherds to Baby Jesus. An example of God's wonder and majesty.

-Abby Teunissen

The Holy Family - Joseph and Mary - their obedience to God's will. Jesus - humbled himself to become human for our salvation.

-Cindy Beel-Bates

The Stable -

-Ann MacDhubhain

Wisemen - They had no knowledge of what was to come, but they had great insight that they were to travel to find the King who would reign over all.

-Ruth Brod





JOY

This week's candle is the candle of Joy—a light that shines even on hard days. Advent joy isn't loud or flashy; it's a quiet confidence that God keeps His promises. As we move closer to Christmas, may we look for joy in everyday moments—a kind word, a song, a prayer, a smile—and let that joy point us back to the One who came to bring us life.

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

LUKE 2:10

Message for Week 3 of Advent

Written by Dave Johnston

As the Angel said to the shepherd's "don't be afraid". In our daily lives we can have many things that make us fearful. Surgeries, difficult pregnancies and so many things. Through prayer and belief many times the things we were afraid of can bring us great joy. That difficult pregnancy becomes a beautiful baby. The knee replacement that improves our quality of life. Prayer and faith in Jesus can make anything possible.

Cutting down our Christmas tree

-Carol Murphy

Decorating the tree and hiding the Christmas Pickle

-Jacque Melin

Decorating the tree with my family (not literally though :-)

-Suzanne J. DeVries-Zimmerman

Driving around looking at Christmas lights. I remember doing this as a kid.

-Robbin Sheasley

Family

-Anonymous

Family Gathering

-Linda Larson, LeAnn Hart, Susan Witte

Family talking about what they are thankful for on Christmas Day

-Lynne Harms

Fondue and family on Christmas Eve.

-Julie Wendtland

For 30 years I went to church with my family at 6:30 am on Christmas day. It is a Swedish tradition. I still do it, even after the 11 pm service at RUMC.

-Mary Knapp

Getting together with Edicks on Christmas Eve.

-Dave Johnston

Giving Gifts

-Susan Groover

Going to church on Christmas Eve and coming home to eat warm cinnamon rolls and opening presents.

-Sue Arceo

Going to church on Christmas Eve with my family when I was a child and closing the service with a candlelight rendition of "Silent Night."

-Jackie Decker -

Gathering in fellowship with friends and family

-Mark Self

Gathering with friends and family to celebrate the season

-Lee Aldrich

FAVORITE CHRISTMAS TRADITION

All of the family gatherings to hunt for the best Christmas tree.

-Doris French

An eggnog toast before Christmas dinner

-Ruth Brod

Attending a huge Christmas craft show in Ohio with my mom, sister, and daughter!

-Julie Roach

Attending Christmas Eve Service

-Marjorie Brink

Being with family

-Steve Decker

Candles - They remind me that Jesus is the light of the world.

-Judy Mayhak

Candlelight service

-Pat Tefft

Christmas brunch with family

-Robb Johnston

Christmas Eve 11:00 service and gathering with family

-Kathryn Ricker

Christmas Eve fondue

-Diane Lautenbach

Christmas Eve, last verse of Silent Night, everyone raises their candle above their heads.

-Anonymous

Ch]ristmas Eve service

-Lorraine deBaptiste, Carol Murphy, Pam Wolven

Church - Christmas Eve service; Home - all our families get together; Touring Christmas lights in neighborhoods.

-Nancy Hinton

Cinnamon buns on Christmas morning

-Resa Szokowski



SCRIPTURES, PRAYERS, AND MESSAGES FOR WEEK 3 OF ADVENT

Monday, December 15

Prayer by Robbin Sheasley

Matthew 2:1-12 (see December 10 for scripture) - *The Magi*

Prayer: Dear Lord, What would it be like to just drop everything and head out to follow a star, searching for a King? At this time of year when To-Do lists and calendars seem to be overflowing, help us to focus more on You and less on the trivial things that really don't matter. Help us to prioritize people over projects and love those you have brought into our lives. Help us to keep our eyes on you, like the Magi, staying focused on where you want to lead us. Even when you want to lead us on "another path" ...one we have not planned on, Lord we trust you. Keep our eyes and our hearts focused on the real reason for this season so that we may bow down and worship our one true King, Jesus and offer up our gifts. We love you Lord. Amen.

Tuesday, December 16

Prayer by Diana Stevers

Isaiah 1:3 - *The Animals*

The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.

Prayer: Father God, you created a world of beauty beyond our imagination. Every creature on land, sea and sky exists because of your greatness and power. Even the smallest ant has purpose and meaning, and we stand in awe of all that surrounds us.

Forgive us, Father, for those times when we seem to forget whose majesty created the goodness and beauty that surrounds us. Even the lowly animals like the ox and donkey know their master, and yet we as intelligent beings so frequently forget the reality of your truth. Forgive us those times we allow our own pride and ego and inflated sense of self-worth to cloud and distort our view of who is truly the master of this world and beyond.

Despite our stumbles and falls, there you are, Lord, always extending open arms. Thank you, Lord, for your steadfast love and continued presence in our lives, giving us each new sunrise as yet another new beginning to live as your son Jesus showed us. Another new day to give you thanks and praise for all you have done for us yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Help us remember, Lord, that you are our Master, our Creator, and our Redeemer. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Wednesday, December 17

Prayer by Jackie Decker

Luke 2:19-20- *Mary*

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Prayer: Lord, may I be more like Mary, treasuring what I have learned from you and celebrating your plans for my life. May I trust you and praise all that I have seen and heard in accordance to your Word and deeds. Mary did not know that the son she would give birth to would someday die on the cross to save us from our sins, but she knew that she was being used as part of your plan, God. May I also accept the role you have for me and be an instrument of your love. Amen.

Thursday, December 18

Prayer by Jill Mackie

Luke 2:8-20 - *The Shepherds*

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Prayer: Father God giver of peace and grace, we come before you in faith as the shepherds came so many years ago. How humbling it is that You chose shepherds to be a part of the story of the birth of Jesus. We, just as the 'lowly' shepherds, come before you today with our love and thankfulness that we also are part of the story of our savior's birth. The shepherds felt great fear when the angel came before them and announced the birth of the Messiah Jesus born for them and for all people. The shepherds overcame their fear, were obedient, and went to see the Christ Child. Let each of us be an example of obedience just as the shepherds were so long ago. In Jesus our savior we pray, Amen.

Friday, December 19

Prayer by Chip Stevers

Luke 2:19-20 (see December 17 for scripture) - *Zephaniah*

Prayer: Dear and Gracious Lord.

How awesome and comforting is Your love. I marvel at Your works and the grace You've shown me. You are worthy of my worship and devotion.

As a loving Father, You provide me bountiful gifts. When I fail to recognize them, or offer You thanks, please forgive me. Help me to recognize Your works and be thankful for all my gifts, including those that are difficult to accept.

Even when it is hard to listen, let me hear Your words, like those spoken by the prophet Zephaniah. I repent, as he warns, and simply seek to follow the path You have chosen for me. I live relying upon Your promises, including Zephaniah's words that there will be no punishment.

Thank You for your promise. Thank you for Your kindness. Thank You for giving me hope.

And thank You for your greatest gift- a hope that the shepherds sought and found in a faraway manger. Please grant me the same courage they possessed to spread the good news, amazing people, and glorifying Your name. Holy be thy name, Jesus Christ.

Lord, this Christmas, I want to experience the wonder Mary felt when she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. May I feel Your Spirit move in me with the love, peace, and joy You would have for all Your people.

Thank you, Father, for hearing my heart and these words. I ask this in the sweetest name I know, Jesus Christ. Amen.

