



***ADVENT 2025***  
***Written By The Parish Family***  
***St. Peter By-The-Lake Episcopal Church***  
Denver, North Carolina

**COVER ART CREDIT:** *Used with permission,*

***“Light of Love” by Mark Missman, Courtesy of  
Marrott Art Licensing***

“American born master artist **Mark Missman** first became aware of the transcendent power of art at age fourteen while viewing an original Rembrandt painting.

At age twenty-one he made a commitment to live the spiritual life of a monk and for the next eighteen years his artistic endeavors were nurtured by his spiritual order, as he was given abundant opportunities for advanced study and worldwide travel while devoting many hours a day to painting.

The paintings and drawings on this site, which the artist refers to as Poetic Realism, are the product of natural artistic talent, heartfelt passion, and more than fifty years of study and observation.

His formal training includes the Angelo Frudakis Academy of Classic Realism in Philadelphia, the Barnstone Studios in Allentown, Pennsylvania, a private art academy in Florence, Italy, and the La Jolla Atheneum and Watts Atelier in San Diego, California.

Museums, corporations, celebrities, such as George Harrison and Michael Jackson, former Monarchs the Prince of Saudi Arabia and the Princess of Iran, as well as prominent art collectors in the USA, China, and Asia have acquired Missman’s work.”

His website is [www.markmissman.com](http://www.markmissman.com)

## **The Episcopal Church of St. Peter By-The-Lake**

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### **JESUS CHRIST, HEAD OF THE CHURCH**

Ministers, all members of the Church

The Rt. Reverend José A. McLoughlin, Bishop

The Reverend Dr. Ronald B. Taylor, Rector

Advent means approach or coming, and when as Christians, we celebrate Advent, we remember the coming of our Lord and Savior. Advent should find us preparing for the entrance of Christ into our lives and homes. Advent is a time to remind us of the sacredness of the birth of Christ. It is more than a festive time. It is more than a holiday season. It should be a holy time in our lives and to make it holy, we have to start now. If we do, Christmas will be a happier and a holier one. This year we continue to add artwork completed by parishioners and/or family members. Whether you're writing about a Bible verse or painting a scene from Scripture or family treasures, you're engaging with God's word. This year we are blessed with having the **Sisters from the Community of St. Mary, Sewanee, TN** provide inspirational Advent messages. Late this summer, Father Ron started his sermon discussing the history and outstanding service the Sisters provide to our community being great witnesses for Christ. His message inspired us to contact them. ***Thanks to all the contributors who have shared their inspirational thoughts and artwork for this season as we prepare to welcome, once again, God's gift of Love and peace, His son, Jesus Christ ..*** We hope the Parish Family is blessed, inspired, and given peace as they read it. .... ***And a special "Thanks" to all our youth who participated ..... In so many ways, their participation enriches our lives .....***

***P.S. Please be sure to drive by SPBTL during the Advent season (AT NIGHT) and view the beautiful lighted Nativity Scene in front of church. Come join and worship with us on Christmas Eve .....***

***Bud & Jeanne Hawkins***

***Advent Devotional – Volume XXV 2025***

# *Advent*

The name of the first season of the church year, Advent gives the basic meaning of this brief season. Advent means arrival or coming, and the Advent season is focused on the coming of Christ. But, it is also a time of looking backward.

We look backward as we prepare to celebrate the historical birth of Jesus of Nazareth at Christmas. Before that birth, people longed for the Messiah who would restore Israel to her former power. We identify with that ancient longing for restoration as we await Christ's coming more fully into our lives, and His final coming to judge the world.

Thus the symbol of Advent is the intertwined Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, representing the eternity of our lord.

Originally, Advent was known as "Little Lent" or "Winter Lent". Its emphasis was penitential, focusing on the Second Advent or Christ's coming on Judgment Day. In the sixth century, the season was shortened from forty days to the present four weeks, and the more joyful theme of the coming Nativity was added. Penitence remains an important part of Advent, for it is a time to prepare ourselves to receive God's perfect gift, His Son Jesus Christ. Thus, the liturgical color for Advent is purple; the color of preparation, penitence, and royalty, for Christ comes as King.

# Advent Wreaths



Advent wreaths were common in Northern Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the custom probably was brought to America by German Lutherans. Lighting candles in an Advent wreath is a simple, effective way to start a tradition of family worship in the home and can provide both children and adults with cherished memories.

To make an Advent wreath, start with any circular form ( Styrofoam), plywood, a bent coathanger) on which greens can be tied. Space four candle sockets evenly around the wreath and insert four purple candles (or three purple and one pink). Decorate the wreath with purple ribbons if desired.

The circular shape of the wreath represents eternity: it is without beginning or end. The evergreens show that God's gift of life is here always and also are symbolic of the Christian's hope of eternal life in Christ. The four purple ( the season's liturgical color) candles ....one for each week of Advent.... Are a symbol of Christ, the light of the World.

On each Sunday, another candle is lit until all four are burning. This represents how the "Light of the World" draws nearer, eager to enter our lives. A white candle, the Christ Candle, may be placed in the center of the wreath and is lit on Christmas Eve.

The wreath is blessed at the evening meal on the Saturday before the first Sunday in Advent. The following prayer is suggested:

*O, God, by whose word all things are sanctified, pour forth your blessing upon this wreath, and grant that we who use it may prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ and may receive from you abundant graces. Through Christ our Lord, AMEN*

## A Christmas Tradition



*(Picture from SPBTL Christmas Eve Service 2024)*

You may or may not have heard about this before ..... If you have not, it is a great way to learn about why we celebrate our savior's birth ....

**In addition to reading the daily scriptures from the devotional ...  
Beginning December 1<sup>st</sup> read one chapter of the book of Luke in the Bible each day.**

*There are 24 Chapters*

**On Christmas Eve you will have read an entire account of Jesus's Life and wake up Christmas morning knowing WHO and WHY we celebrate!!**

**Sunday, November 30<sup>th</sup>**

**Father Ron**

The Church Seasons of Advent and Christmas are times of great promise and fulfillment. We enter Advent longing once again for the coming of the Christ Child. We live this out in our worship each week with the lighting of the Advent Wreath, and hearing once again the stories of waiting and anticipation. Then on Christmas Eve, the colors change from Purple to White and we experience the joy of the Christ Child through sacrament and song. Every year it's different. Every year it's thrilling.

Yet, in the midst of the anticipation and fulfillment, it is a good thing to pause and remember that not everyone in our midst is feeling happy, contented, and blessed. The time between Thanksgiving and Christmas are, for many people, a time of pain, grief, anxiety and depression. In many instances it's because someone important is missing from the table. I have been feeling the weight of this myself this year. Since the onset of Covid, I've lost one person from my family each year. Since 2021 I've lost a brother, a sister, a sister-in-law, and a nephew. These were all faces that graced our families table over the generations. They ranged in age from 45 to 84. I have precious memories of each one. And I know that there are folks in our congregation who suffer, sometimes in silence as they grieve the absence of a loved one. Whether the loss was incurred this year, or in years past, the time doesn't matter. There is no expiration date on grief and loss.

It can be difficult to stand with those who are experiencing pain and grief when the culture around us expects everyone to be celebrating and festive. It's OK. Being with someone who is sad can be just as simple as sending a card of love and in solidarity with the person suffering. A text, e-mail, or phone call can be helpful as well. Words matter much less than presence. Just being with someone who has experienced the loss of a loved one lets that person know that they are not forgotten, that they are loved just as they are, sadness and all.

*Continued on next page*

*Sunday, November 30<sup>th</sup> Continued*

**Father Ron**

The days before the coming of Christ into the world were dark days. There was a longing for a new light to come and bring truth into a hurting world. God heard those cries, and Jesus was born to a Virgin named Mary in a small village called Bethlehem. The light was small at first, but it grew into a force that has changed the world. The Kingdom of God is breaking into this tired old world each and every day. This Advent and Christmas, remember that you and I are partners with God in helping others to see this light. A light that can never be overcome by darkness. In the toughest of times, when we stand with our brothers and sisters who are hurting, we help to bring the light of Jesus.

Faithfully,

Father Ron  
Advent/Christmas 2025



**Monday, December 1<sup>st</sup>**

**Nick McDonald**

“Where meek souls will receive Him, still the dear Christ enters in.”

~ *Hymn 79*

It had been a rough Fall for the tiny Episcopal church located in South Baltimore, just blocks from Fort McHenry, where Francis Scott Key had penned the lyrics to *The Star-Spangled Banner* in 1814. Several beloved church members had died in the past year and there was a feeling of uncertainty about the future of the scrappy -- yet, dwindling -- congregation.

The church had been “greened” on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, Christmas cards had started to be distributed by hand among the members, and the Christmas lights on the Washington Monument were just visible on Mount Vernon, yet a pall hung over the small flock -- and their interim rector. I was splitting my time between a hospital chaplaincy position and the church, and I felt pulled in a thousand directions most days, which started at 6:00 A.M. to beat the traffic and frequently ended after 6:00 P.M. in the cold darkness of the coming winter.

One night on my way home past M&T Bank Stadium, my cell phone rang. There was no caller ID on mobile phones yet, so I took the call. In response to my “Hello,” the voice on the other end said, “Pastor Nick! Where are you?” I was still getting used to being called “pastor,” because the Vestry had decided that “Father” was already taken by the Roman Catholic priest on the corner and “Reverend” was being used by the U.C.C. pastor down the street.

My first thought was, “Who Is this?” followed by, “Oh no! What have I missed now?” I’d become accustomed to the directness of our South Baltimore parishioners, but I also recognized through his impressive “Bawlmerese” the voice of Roland, one of our regular worshippers and a tireless worker in the church. A retired Longshoreman at the Port of Baltimore, Roland frequently cut corners in the etiquette department.

*Continued on next page*

## *Monday, December 1st Continued*

**Nick McDonald**

“Hi, Roland, what I can do for you?” I answered, wondering if there was a plumbing, electrical, or interpersonal issue that needed to be addressed. Cheerful and upbeat, Roland replied: “Pastor, I’ve got something for you and wanted to know if you were in the city!” Still thinking and feeling like Ebenezer Scrooge, I considered the possibilities: Did Roland have a receipt, an invoice, a dun notice, or a piece of diocesan mail that was supposed to be answered back in September? Before I could ask, Roland asked again in his inimitable accent, “Where you at?”

Too tired to fight, I suggested a mini-mart near the interstate. Roland had a better idea: “I’d rather not do this in public. Just drive down Towson Street and *I’ll find you, Pastor!*”

Crawling down Towson Street on the packed snow and ice from an early storm, someone suddenly leapt in front of my headlights and rapped on my window. As the window came down, I recognized Roland all bundled up. He thrust a bottle through the open window and said, cryptically, “We just finished the last run and I wanted you to have the freshest batch.” By the light of a streetlamp, the bottle read “Bacardi Rum,” but the contents were unmistakably the delicious and much-prized homemade eggnog from Roland and Patty’s kitchen.

While I was not prepared to receive such a thoughtful gift delivered in such a personal and heartfelt way, that brief encounter on a cold, dark Baltimore street a week before Christmas changed everything, breaking open my hardened heart and allowing the joy of the season to enter in. Best. Eggnog. Ever. ~ Nick McDonald

**Tuesday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>**

***Sister Egeria Mark+, Community of St. Mary, Southern Province***

***This One Advent***

One year I heard an Advent sermon  
about braving the dark abyss of the unknown.  
I, three toes into that particular abyss and sinking fast,  
took comfort in the notion  
that my painful and untidy circumstance  
might be within divine providence.

Walking home from church I said to God,  
Fine  
send what you will  
just please can we change everything?

One night two weeks later a keen incomer  
looked at me like I was *someone*  
and talked to me like I was of significance.  
(I was.) (I still am.)

Three days later I deemed  
the life sentence I was serving  
null and void.

In the John Irving novel  
that is my call story  
a stranger urging me to not dye my hair  
was God's first step in changing *everything*.

**Wednesday, December 3rd**

**Vickie Jordan**

I don't have a composition this year but would like to include a favorite from the prayer book.

I love to pray free style, but I don't always know what to say. This morning devotion from our prayer book is a favorite daily start.

**Psalms 51**

Open my lips, O Lord,  
And my mouth shall proclaim your praise.  
Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.  
Cast me not away from your presence  
and take not your holy Spirit from me.  
Give me the joy of your saving help again  
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.  
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:  
as it was in the beginning is now, and will be for ever. Amen

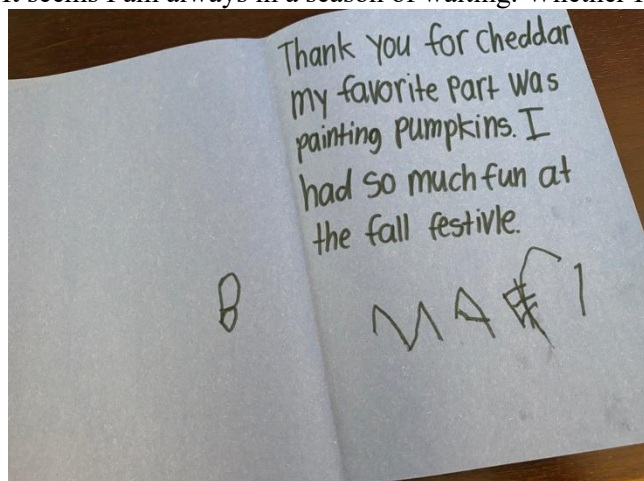
<b>Ps 119:1-24*12,13,14   Amos 3:12- 4:5   2 Peter 3:1-10 Matthew 21:23-32</b>
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**Thursday, December 4<sup>th</sup>**

**Rev. Tara Bartal**

Advent arrives as a season woven with waiting and preparation. As the days shrink and darkness deepens, we kindle candles that echo the promise of a heavenly light come down to earth. Hope, peace, joy, and love flicker as beacons, reminding us that even in the darkest times, light endures.

It seems I am always in a season of waiting. Whether I am inching forward



in a store line, stalled in traffic, longing for spring or the first snowfall, counting down to my next day off, or wishing for more time to savor what I love, I am forever anticipating what comes next.

Looking back on

the year that has nearly passed, I see how much of it was spent in anticipation and preparation, even as life unfolded in unexpected ways. I waited and readied myself for a new role, then stepped into it. Now, my days are filled with preparing for the next service or gathering. I poured my energy into organizing a fall event, and it unfolded better than expected. Yet after all the anxious waiting and the feeling that my efforts might fall short, a simple card from a four-year-old became the most unexpected gift. All my careful waiting and planning could not have prepared me for the joy of that small, meaningful card. As I keep waiting and getting ready for what's next, I see that life is already moving and happening. In this, I am changed, and my view of waiting is different. Now, instead of longing for a distant light, I notice and can be that light, even as I wait and get ready for what comes next.

Only by grace, Tara+

**Friday, December 5<sup>th</sup>**

**Patricia Higbie**

***THE LIGHTS OF CHRISTMAS***

One day in November, I head to Walmart to purchase 44 AA batteries. Not for toys but for my 22 Christmas candles for my sunroom windows and other windows throughout my house. These candles go on at dusk and off five hours later. It's time for the lights of Christmas.

My first memory of candles, besides those on our birthday cakes, is when I was in the eighth grade Christmas chorus. It was a special day for us: singing for students, teachers, and our parents. Our school did not allow real candles and there were no battery-operated ones. In the darkened auditorium, we used flashlights covered with assorted colors of tissue paper as we sang "Oh Holy Night" and "Angels We have Heard on High."

We find lights and candles everywhere during Advent: The Advent Wreath, the lights on Christmas trees, the candles in our windows and throughout our homes, decorative lights outdoors, the candles on the altar, the Star of Bethlehem and the candles we light at the end of our Christmas Eve service.

Advent preparation usually begins with the Advent wreath with candles to be lit once a week and on Christmas Eve. Advent is the sign of the pending Light of our Lord into the darkness of the world and into our own lives.

Christ is the Light. This Light is a literal and spiritual guide: the early setting of the sun and the upcoming birth of Jesus Christ.

The lights in our lives, especially during Advent, help us to find ourselves in our search for peace, hope, joy, and love. The hope of this devotional is to incorporate the Light into our lives. Just as the Star of Bethlehem guided the Kings to the birth of Jesus, it inspires us to have hope that we too will look to the Light for divine direction and be the light in the lives of others.

***Continued on next page***

**Patricia Higbie**

The Bible refers to the Light in many passages including those in John and Matthew.

***John 8:12***

Then spake Jesus again unto them saying, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life.”

***Matthew 5:16***

“And he opened his mouth saying, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

*Final words: It is better to light one little candle than to stumble in the dark.*

**Merry Christmas!**

**Saturday, December 6<sup>th</sup>**

**Claire Tracy**

Wanted to share prayerful message from my first cousin's son, **Jamin Eastman** whose family were missionaries.

***A Prayer of Faithful Service***

I will walk with you until your legs will carry you no further,  
I will walk with you without concern for how much strength I have,  
For the Lord is my strength, He carries me.

So I will walk with you, I will talk with you,  
Uninhibited by my own shortcomings  
And unashamed of the message I bring.

I speak for God; I speak His truth.

So I will talk with you.

I will lead you and teach you and encourage you.  
Not because I'm a great leader or brilliant teacher,  
But because Christ is,

And through his children he leads and teaches and encourages.

I will serve you selflessly.

For through Christ I have the means,

And by Christ I have the desire.

So I will serve you.

There may come a time when you don't want to walk with me or talk with  
me,

A time when my leadership and teaching and words of encouragement are  
ignored,

A time when my service is no longer desired.

And then I will pray for you.

For the prayers of a righteous man are powerful and effective.

And ALWAYS, I will love you.

For is the message of Christ.

And by love, you will know I am one with Christ.

And when you truly, truly understand why I love you

Then, I will call you brother.

***Mark 3:35 "For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister  
and mother."***

<p><b>Ps 20,21:1-7(8-14)*110:1-5(6-7)  116,117  Amos 5:18-27   Jude 17-25   Matthew 22:15-22</b></p>
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**Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Steven Mortenson**

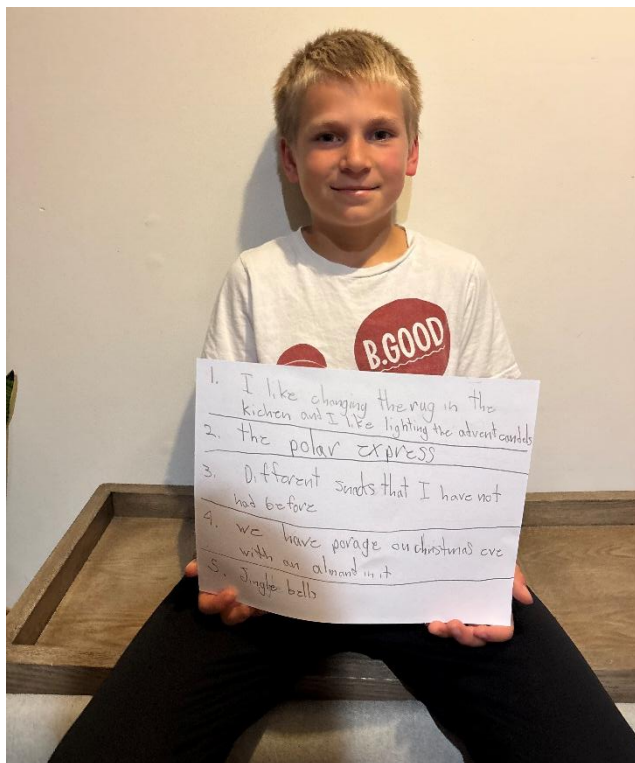
***The Advent Season***  
***From Childhood Wonder to Mature Faith***

The Advent season carries different meanings depending on where we are in life. For children, this is a time of joyful anticipation as Christmas draws near, often with traditions such as decorating the Christmas tree, Christmas shopping for friends and loved ones, singing carols, and listening to stories about the birth of Jesus. During this period, children anticipate receiving gifts under the Christmas tree and their thoughts swirling around what Santa Claus and their parents may have selected for them, rather than reflecting on the religious significance of Jesus' arrival.

As we grow older and our faith matures, our understanding of Advent shifts from these childhood joys to a deeper, more spiritual focus. The season becomes an invitation to reflect, anticipate, and prepare, drawing us into the mystery of Christ's coming—both at His nativity and in His promised return. During this season, Christians focus on reflecting on themselves, engaging in prayer, and serving others, all with the goal of renewing their faith and welcoming the hope, peace, joy, and love connected to Christ. Advent encourages intentional reflection on God's presence and motivates individuals to share His light with others in meaningful ways.

Thus, the Advent season becomes an intentional journey that prepares believers' hearts for both the celebration of Jesus' birth and the anticipation of His return, fostering spiritual growth and inspiring acts of love toward others throughout the season.

**Ingeliv (7) & Tobias (10) (Liz and Torgeir Rui)**



**Monday, December 8<sup>th</sup>**

**In Remembrance of ..... William Lifsey from 2010**

***And the 2nd Great Commandment is like unto the 1st..***

As Jane and I were driving home from Washington, DC last October, I started to grin from ear to ear as I thought of what we had been doing for the last two months and of a conversation with a Charlotte Habitat home owner two years before. We had been working in preparation for the Jimmy & Rosalyn Carter Work Project 2010 during which time had started 6 new homes, two rehabilitation and 4 demolitions that would soon be rehabbed. Just before we left, the Director of Construction in DC had told us that the new homes and the 2 rehabs would be ready for the families by Christmas and that caused me to think of Ms. Mae in Charlotte.

I had worked on Ms. Mae's home in 2007 and in Dec. of 2008 I was working on another Habitat house in the same neighborhood. Ms. Mae had put an artificial wreath on her front door, she had a simple white, electric candle in each of her two front windows and she had placed a banner of aluminum letters that spelled Merry Christmas on the railing of the front porch. Very often we do not know who will receive the Habitat home where we are working, but I had seen Ms. Mae because she would come directly from her job to her home under construction for the express purpose of thanking the volunteers, so when I saw Ms. Mae in her new driveway that day, I stopped to compliment her on the Christmas decorations. She put both of her hands on my forearm and started to sob as she thanked me profusely. It is thanks to you Mr. Bill that I can put up those decorations, that we can celebrate God's gift to us within the walls of God's gift. This will be the best Christmas of my life. With moisture in my eyes, I protested that I had not done very much, but Ms. Mae continued; Oh, Mr. Bill, I am so grateful for this home. I wish the Lord would bring everyone of you dear people (volunteers) to my door so I could thank you all individually, but you are the only one here, so I just have to thank you.

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**Monday, December 8<sup>th</sup> *Continued***

**In Remembrance of ..... William Lifsey from 2010**

Will you please tell the others Thank You again for me? I replied that she had told us all thank you many times before and that we all knew how grateful she was. No, Mr. Bill, however happy and grateful I was before I got my home, cannot compare to how grateful I am since we have moved in and have the joy of Christmas in our own home. My children thank me for getting such a nice house for them and for having their own bedrooms. I never in my life expected to receive a gift like this. It is people like you and the good Lord that have given this house to me. I am so grateful, thank you, thank you. To me this house is a greater gift than gold.

And so, on our return trip, I was so happy that the Lord had given me the right mission. I was so thankful to be able to do His work. That He had put Jane and me and many others in the right place at the right time so that those 8 families in DC would receive the same gift that Ms. Mae had the year before. The good Lord had brought the volunteers together with the family partners to fulfill the 2nd Great Commandment and to give the families a Christmas gift greater than gold.

**Habitat is Love in Action**

**Tuesday, December 9<sup>th</sup>**

**Sister Madeleine Mary, Community of St. Mary, Southern Province**



Many of us probably know that the Advent Wreath has pre-Christian roots, but I wonder if we all remember how it got its shape. Gertrud Nelson, author of “To Dance with God”, reminds us that “As the days grew shorter and colder and the sun threatened to abandon the earth, these ancient people [from the far north] suffered the sort of guilt and separation anxiety which we also know. Their solution was to bring all ordinary action and daily routine to a halt. They gave in to the nature of winter, came away from their fields and put away their tools. They removed the wheels from their carts and wagons, festooned them with greens and lights and brought them indoors to hang in their halls. They brought the wheels indoors as a sign of a different time, a time to stop and turn inward. They engaged the feelings of cold and fear and loss. Slowly, slowly they wooed the sun-god back. And light followed the darkness. Morning came earlier. The festivals announced the return of hope after primal darkness.” ( Nelson, 63) Advent still carries some of those primal emotions for us today, when we really engage in the season. It is a time of paradox and mystery, a time when we hear apocalyptic readings of the world’s end, of death and judgment, and prophecies of a new creation, of hope and redemption. We often move through darkness and cold interiorly even as the earth mirrors that spiritual reality in the natural world. But I wonder if we don’t have a more difficult time experiencing that reality than our ancestors did.

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## ***Tuesday, December 9<sup>th</sup> Continued***

**Sister Madeleine Mary, Community of St. Mary, Southern Province**

Gertrud Nelson challenges us to imagine how our lives would change in this season if we just removed the right front tire from our cars and used it as our wreath. And while we may think that literal suggestion is impractical and ridiculous in our day and age, it might teach us something of value if we loosed our imaginations for a moment. Our lives would certainly change for a while, wouldn't they? Instead of us rushing about to work, school, pre-Christmas parties, and feverish Christmas shopping, we would spend more time at home with our families, walking to our destinations through the cold and maybe through the snow. We would have to stock up food and fuel for the winter and become more creative about how we use our time - given that much of our television broadcasting would take a hiatus. Who knows what would happen with our telephone service, the news, social networking, church attendance, live entertainment, etc. For sure, life would be more locally- based.... Am I scaring you yet? In our culture, cars are a symbol of our independence and freedom of movement, of status, of productivity, of our ability to get things done or to leave a situation and to go where we want to. In contrast, we Episcopalians, perhaps unwittingly, proclaim through our Advent wreath that Advent is a time of waiting, of quiet anticipation, and preparation - interiorly and exteriorly- for the birth of Christ. Waiting is often associated with a lack of productivity. We ourselves call it a "waste of time." We don't like it; we want to gratify our desires quickly, and advertising incessantly reminds us that we should do just that because "We are worth it." But frequently that sales pitch is merely about accumulating more unnecessary, expensive stuff that adds little significance to our relationships or to our sense of self-worth. Americans work extremely hard, compared with some other industrialized nations, in order to get more things than we really need. And, as a result, we often spend less personal time with our friends and family. I am not opposed to sacrificial generosity at Christmas as a loving response to all that we have received, but I wonder if our gift giving couldn't become more meaningful. Personally, I feel that one's presence is one of the most significant gifts we can give to one another. Christ himself showed us that truth in his incarnation.

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## ***Tuesday, December 9<sup>th</sup> Continued***

**Sister Madeleine Mary, Community of St. Mary, Southern Province**

Christ valued us and continues to value us by coming among us, by taking on our flesh and our human condition, and by teaching us through his life. His whole life, not just his crucifixion and resurrection, was a gift to us beyond any of our efforts, any bank accounts, any merits that we might offer in exchange. As one Christmas carol reminds us, “No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.” (“O Little Town of Bethlehem,” Brooks) In Advent we wait in faith and hope of Christ’s coming. Insofar as we try to avoid or fast forward through Advent’s discipline of waiting, listening, anticipating, and preparing our hearts to receive Him afresh, I imagine that we lessen our ability to experience Christmas with the depth of meaning that it would hold for us otherwise. Perhaps we can learn something from our pre-Christian ancestors. Perhaps our Advent wreath can remind us to stop and turn inward, to acknowledge our darkness and fear, but also to yearn for and trust in the coming “heavenly light that will usher in the morning” who is “our confidence and joy, the power of Satan breaking, our peace eternal making.”

Sr. Madeleine

**Wednesday, December 10<sup>th</sup>**

**Cathy & Fred Littlejohn**

**Advent Calendar**

**Matthew 6:2: “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.”**

**Each day add an item to a box. On Christmas Eve, donate the contents to East Lincoln Christian Ministry (ECLM).**

**Dec 1 - Box of Cereal**

**Dec 2 - Peanut Butter**

**Dec 3 – Stuffing Mix**

**Dec 4 – Instant Potatoes**

**Dec 5 – Macaroni & Cheese**

**Dec 6 – Canned Fruit**

**Dec 7 – Canned Tomatoes**

**Dec 8 – Canned Tuna**

**Dec 9 – Brownie Mix**

**Dec 10 -Applesauce**

**Dec 11- Can Sweet Potatoes**

**Dec 12 – Cranberry Sauce**

**Dec 13 – Canned Beans**

**Dec 14 – Box of Crackers**

**Dec 15 – Package of Rice**

**Dec 16 – Spaghetti Sauce**

**Dec 17 – Package of Oatmeal**

**Dec 18 – Chicken Noodle Soup**

**Dec 19 – Package of Pasta**

**Dec 20 – Tomato Soup**

**Dec 21 – Can Corn**

**Dec 22 – Can Mixed Vegetables**

**Dec 23 – Can Carrots**

**Dec 24 – Can Green Beans**

**May your holiday season be blessed and the New Year brings you and your family good health, wealth, and much happiness!**

**Cathy & Fred Littlejohn**

**Ps 38\*119:25-48 | Amos 8:1-14 | Revelation 1:17—2:7 | Matthew 23:1-12**



**Thursday, December 11th**

**Georgia Rummage**



What is more of a Christmas tradition for those of us “raised in the church” , than the children’s Christmas pageant ? When we can get dressed up and vie for the role of Mary or Joseph....and when we are the youngest in the group and have to settle for being angels or shepherds. Shortly after I moved back in NC from GA, I joined Community in Christ Lutheran in Cornelius. The pastor’s wife had recently given birth, so of course she was Mary and their baby boy was Jesus. It’s hard to compete with the real thing. My precious grandmother was Superintendent of the Sunday School department at her church in Goldsboro, NC and I still have pictures of myself and my cousins when we participated in her pageant. Such wonderful memories. I never got to be Mary. The above painting is one I did of my grandson Brodie. The photo I worked from was taken at the Community in Christ Christmas pageant. I titled it “Angel with a Crooked Halo”.

***Continued on next page***

***Thursday, December 11<sup>th</sup> Continued***

**Georgia Rummage**

Brodie was looking down into a box of lights that were given to the children instead of flaming candles. I was drawn to this photo because of the way the light reflected so beautifully on his face and hands. Anyone who paints, or does photography, knows that it is all about the LIGHT. Without LIGHT, the painting or the photo has no LIFE and no interest. The word LIGHT is used about 95 times in the verses of the New Testament....depending on the version you are reading. Jesus is the LIGHT of the world. He came to give us abundant LIFE. HE gives LIGHT to the canvas that is our life. Without HIM, there is just a dull picture of what could have been had we chosen to paint our life using his brush. I think that on the night Jesus entered the world, there must have been the most spectacular display of light. Let's soak it up !

<b>Ps 37:1-18*37:19-42 Amos 9:1-10  Revelation 2:8-17   Matthew 23:13-26</b>
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**Friday, December 12<sup>th</sup>**

**Nancy Brandt (2002)**

***My Daily Morning Prayer***

Dear Lord, Good morning  
Thank you for this day  
Please help me today to live a simple life,  
To control my stress, anxiety, and all my discontent.  
Make me cheerful, tolerant, and generous.  
Help me to listen more and honor silence.  
Please help me be faithful this day in prayer,  
Exercise, eating, and sleep and to make  
Wise choices and decisions.  
As I can not do these things on my own,  
I ask you to help me.  
Amen

**Nancy Brandt (2013)**

As a customer service leader for Novant Health Lakeside Family Physicians, I come across quotes that ‘speak’ to me, said by famous people, but can be lived by all of us.....

***“One of the deep secrets of life is that all that is really worth doing is what we do for others.”***

***"Life is a gift that offers us the privilege, opportunity and responsibility to become more by giving back"***

**Saturday, December 13<sup>th</sup>**

**Ron Horne**

Perspective. How we see the world, other people, and our faith is a matter of perspective. What we mentally and visually bring with us. I have recently had a medical procedure which has put me into recovery mode and given me a chance to look at things from an unfamiliar perspective. I have received some visitors from our church family and from a neighbor who is originally from behind the Iron Curtain in Europe. He is a man who has seen life and the world from a very different place and time than I have, yet we rank many things in life in the same order. We discussed the usual things men talk about: work, his offer to help me in any way he could, cutting down trees, building things, children; and then we spoke of religion. He is from the Orthodox tradition of his home country, but the closest he can find here is a Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Charlotte, which is close, but it is not the same as home. He attends an American Protestant church each Sunday and is involved with the congregation.

All this is by way of introduction to my main point. To my friend, there is an order of importance to things in life. First God, next Family, next Community and Friends, next the Larger Community, the Nation, and the World. Yes, even under the harsh communist rule of the USSR, God was first, even though to disagree with the Communists was dangerous and subjected people to harsh punishment.

Seeing the strength of my friend's faith and his dedication to it shows me a different perspective, one born of making a choice not to follow the easy path. I am reminded by his faith and dedication to God of the early Christians who could only look forward, who had to be careful to avoid being persecuted and stopped from worship and teaching. We know from scripture that often they did not escape persecution and that faith in God and following Christ would often lead to imprisonment or death. My friend reminds me of the great need for faith as a sustaining force in our lives and that God is first and most important.

*Continued on next page*

**Ron Horne**

During Advent, we look forward to God, as the early Christians did. I see in my friend the same strength of faith and love of God that was the hallmark of Christianity so long ago and still is in many people. Seeing things from a different perspective, isn't that what Christ and his teachings are all about? As we look forward during Advent to Christmas, we must look forward by setting our perspective to include all people of all nations, of all races, of all genders and of all beliefs. We must honor them, share the Good News of Christ with them when possible, but try to see things from their perspective as well. We do not need to accept and/or adopt religious beliefs which are contrary to Christianity, but we must allow others freedom of religion. Being a Christian can be difficult and can force us to look beyond ourselves and toward others we may not like or agree with. We are asked to follow Christ's lead. My friend has made his life here in the US by hard work, honesty, his unswerving faith, and his willingness to see things from the perspective of others.

**In Faith, Ron Horne**

Sunday, December 14<sup>th</sup>

**Advent discussion during Kingdom Kids session 11-9-25**  
**Esther (7) (Ginia Edwards), Abigail (6) & Avery (4) (Emile Radkovich), Ingeliv (7) & Tobias (10) Rui (Liz and Togeir)**

*1. What do you like most about preparing for Jesus's birth, Christmas, and Advent season?*

**Esther:** Putting Christmas decorations up & making cookies

**Abilgail:** Baking cookies and delivering to neighbors

**Avery:** Decorating Christmas tree and placing star on top of tree

**Ingeliv:** Making cookies & watching Christmas movies, decorating the tree, lighting the Advent Candles. We put up lights on Tobias's birthday (11<sup>th</sup>) and then put up tree just a day before Christmas Eve.

**Tobias:** I like changing the "rug" in the kitchen (rug is green on one side and on Christmas Day we flip it over and it's red) and lighting the Advent candles.

*2. What is your favorite Christmas movie?*

**Esther:** Home Alone

**Abilgail:** Mickey Mouse Christmas movie, Polar Express, & Grinch

**Avery:** Rock Around The Christmas Tree, Polar Express, Rudolph The Red Nose Reindeer

**Ingeliv:** Polar Express

**Tobias:** Polar Express

*3. What do you like to find in your Christmas stocking?*

**Esther:** Squishy Ball and candy canes

**Abilgail:** Candy canes & toys

**Avery:** Candy & candy corn

**Ingeliv:** "Suprises", presents, & candy

**Tobias:** Different snacks that I have not had before

*Continued on next page*

*Sunday, December 14<sup>th</sup> Continued*

## ***Kingdom Kids Advent Discussion***

### ***4. What are your favorite activities your family does during the Christmas season?***

**Esther:** Throwing snow balls, making snow men, and making ginger bread houses

**Abilgail:** Making snowmen (making snowman look like Olaf from Frozen), Shopping for Decorations, singing songs in front of Christmas tree

**Avery:** Throwing snow balls, decorating tree, baking cookies & ginger bread houses

**Ingeliv:** Making ginger bread houses (using skittles and Halloween candy), throwing snowballs at Mr. Bob Tracey's house

**Tobias:** We have porage on Christmas eve with almonds in it

### ***5. What is your favorite Christmas song?***

**Esther:** Frosty, the Snowman

**Abilgail:** Rudolf the Red Nose Reindeer

**Avery:** Jingle Bell Rock

**Ingeliv:** Jingle Bells

**Tobias:** Jingle Bells

**Monday, December 15<sup>th</sup>**

**Dick Lunney**

***A Special Christmas Memory***

The Christmas Season at my house was always special thanks to my mother's efforts to create surprises and excitement. One year thanks to her involvement in activities at Syracuse University where she was the alumni advisor to the Chi Omega sorority, our family hosted an Indian graduate student who had a profound affect and a lasting memory on my sisters and me.

My sisters immediately remembered Grewal (not sure it was his first or last name) who I recalled as a tall and sophisticated gentleman. He wore a burgundy turban and was a Sikh. He spoke sincerely about his family back in India where his father served in a high government position and he had several brothers and sisters (we can't agree on how many), but I recall 6 or 7 siblings. One of my sister's most meaningful memory was Grewal removing his turban and then rewinding it on his head. He talked briefly about his Sikh religion but was very interested in our traditions around Christmas. He was interested in our menu of Turkey, mashed and sweet potatoes, green beans, Yorkshire pudding and of course apple and pumpkin pies. He shared some of his family traditions and values which were extremely interesting and informative.

The insights we gained and the new perspective we learned about opened my eyes to the diversity that exists around the world where religious differences often needlessly divide us from what is really important. I had lived a somewhat privileged life in a nice suburban community surrounded by a loving family with several generations of relatives who helped give me a solid foundation, but the opportunity to meet and get to know Grewal opened my eyes to the broader, bigger and more nuanced world outside my community. It helped me look for opportunities during my life to step out of my comfort zone to do things for the broader community from becoming foster parents years ago and becoming a member of a church community with a strong focus on outreach into our world and local communities.

My Advent wish for all is that we all look for ways and opportunities to expand our understanding of the world around us. Step out of our comfort zone and learn more about the wide world around us.



**Catherine Maslow**



*My mother-in-law made this cross stich picture for us 45 years ago ....*

Tuesday, December 16<sup>th</sup>

**In Remembrance of ..... Leo Soorus (2024)**

Thank you for asking me to write an advent devotional.

I have never done it before, so I looked up, what is an advent devotional?

Thinking about what I might want to say, I could not help but think of the quote

that has been in front of my daily planner for over 55 years (and which I still use).

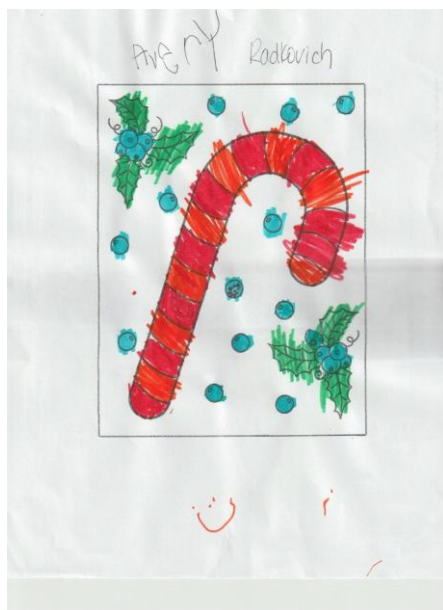
This quote has helped guide me and kept me from overreacting to many situations or experiences over the years and is a great motto on the way to live.

***"A good reputation is the sum of a thousand forgotten acts-ordinary everyday human decencies ..... which pile up through the years and become the only fortune that really matters."***

Thanks,

Leo

**Abigail (6) & Avery (4) (Emilie Radkovich)**



**Wednesday, December 17<sup>th</sup>**

**Michelle Stewart**

***My Christmas “Flashbulb Memories”***

I am hoping that you all read Our Daily Bread every day. Today Tim Gustafson wrote about “Flashbulb Memories.” His article hit home especially as it relates to me about Christmas’ past.

What I remember about my childhood Christmas’ were:

Having my picture taken with the BEST Santa Clause ever at the Miller and Rhodes in Richmond, VA. My first pictures were by myself and then taking my small amount of money into the Christmas shop to buy my presents for my family and friends and always something for myself. Starting at the age of 5, my sister went with me. She did not particularly like the bearded man. I am not sure I really understood the idea of giving gifts.

When I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, we were living outside of Pittsburg, PA and Santa came to our house and we got candy canes and sat on Santa’s lap. Living in Pittsburg we were close enough to Indianapolis, IN to visit my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins at Christmas. These trips really made Christmas more enjoyable.

There seems to be a gap in the memories during the years when we lived in Vestal, NY and Fairfax, VA. The “Flashbulb Memories” returned with the birth of Taylor. That is when we started our own memories, of taking Taylor to see Santa, then the Advent Festivals, Children’s pageant, and the Christmas Eve service. As Taylor grew older, we would do the candlelight service with all its beauty. One of the traditions that started in my childhood that continues is cheese fondue on Christmas Eve. And, we have now added grits casserole to Christmas morning. I love these “Flashbulb Memories” and hope to create more of them centered around the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ.

**Thursday, December 18<sup>th</sup>**

**Sister Hannah, Community of St. Mary, Southern Province**



Since the 8th century, monastic communities have prayed the *O Antiphons*; a series of seven titles of the coming Messiah that originate from Isaiah. These antiphons are sung before and after Mary's Magnificat at Evening Prayer. They begin on December 17th with *O Sapientia* (Wisdom) and continue each subsequent day with *O Adonai* (Lord), *O Radix Jesse* (Root of Jesse), *O Clavis David* (Key of David), *O Oriens* (Day Spring), *O Rex Gentium* (King of the Nations), and finally *O Emmanuel* on December 24th. If you take the first letter of these titles in a reverse order, you will form the acrostic: *Ero Cras*, which is translated *Tomorrow I will Be (Coming)*. The titles from these antiphons describe the future Messiah's wisdom, redeeming power, universality, majesty, and reign of peace.

***Continued on next page***

*Thursday, December 18<sup>th</sup> Continued*

*Sister Hannah, Community of St. Mary, Southern Province*

Throughout the centuries, these antiphons developed into the modern-day hymn we recognize today as “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.” Out of all of these titles for the Messiah, the one that seems most pertinent for this year is “King of the Nations.” The description of this title from the modern-day hymn reads:

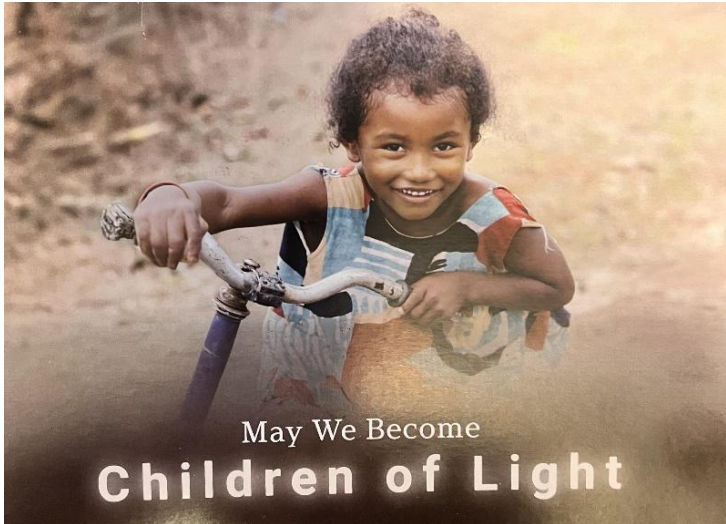
*O come, O King of Nations, bind  
in one the hearts of all mankind.  
Bid all our sad divisions cease  
and be yourself our King of Peace.*

How many people can identify with the yearning these words carry for the King of Peace to begin his reign? How many are waiting for an end to their sad divisions? How many hearts need to be bound, healed, and unified? The prayerful expectation for this Messiah is stronger now than ever before.

As we enter this season of Advent, we long for the one who will both enter our divided and broken world, and be broken with us in the process. We look for the one who will shelter us in our lament. We hope for the one who will cast away the shadows that loom over us. We, once more, wait for the one who will enter the shelter and shadow of our world and our lives. O come, O come Emmanuel!

**Friday, December 19<sup>th</sup>**

**Bud Hawkins**



**“You are all children of the light and of the day”: 1 Thessalonians 5:5-8  
“Believe in the light, that you may become children of light” John  
12:35-36**

***“What does it mean to “become children of light”? John reminds us that as Christians we are meant to be a beacon of hope and light to the world, just as Jesus was. God Promises to redeem us by sending Jesus, born in Bethlehem. God uses the light of a star to guide the shepherds and kings to Jesus’ cradle. In today’s world it can sometimes be hard to find the light in the darkness. But if you look closely, it is there.” ..... Robert Radtke, President, ERD (Episcopal Relief & Development)***

This quote was Radtke’s introductory comments on a recent ERD solicitation letter ..... accompanied by picture above ... When I opened the letter, viewed the picture, and read his thoughts on “being the light” I was inspired and wanted to understand better what this meant.

***Continued on next page***

**Bud Hawkins**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke about “*becoming children of the light*” in his writings and prison letters: “*The followers of Jesus are the visible community; their discipleship is visible in action which lifts them out of the world*”. C.S. Lewis stated, “*Joy is the serious business of heaven. When we let His light fill us, even our sorrows become radiant.*”

As I reflect on these scriptures and thoughts, I think supporting the work and missions of SPBTL (including ERD), local charities like East Lincoln Christian Ministry and our neighbors in need, are ways we can become “children of light” .... This is my Advent wish .....

**“Lord Jesus, Light of the World.**

**Fill us with your presence this Advent.**

**Let us be salt that preserves Your truth. And light that reflects Your  
love.**

**May our lives point others to you, until the day You come again in  
glory.... Amen**

**(author unknown)**



**Saturday, December 20<sup>th</sup>**

**Jeanne Hawkins**

***God is where the joy is***

I attended a Bible study in which we attempted to read through the Bible in a year. We listened to an audiotape and the leader ended each session with the words “and God is where the joy is”. I found myself intentionally looking for and being thankful for all my recognized opportunities for joy. There is joy in my morning walks with my dog as I take in the beauty of nature. There is joy in beholding the sun rise, and I am reminded of God’s faithfulness. Acts of kindness and words and smiles of encouragement to give and receive are so meaningful to us all. I am especially thankful for my friends, family, and church family. I am an early riser, so I am thankful for the extra time available for communion and prayer with my Lord. I am thankful for the gift of peace He gives during these devotion/prayer times. I am thankful for the sense of His presence in times of adversity. I am thankful for His strength that He provides in my life, for I am weak. I have realized that “joy is more about our connection to Christ than about our circumstances”. As we enter this season of Advent, we are especially focused on the greatest gift ever given – Jesus Christ. Through Christ, we receive forgiveness, hope, and eternal life. “Joy to the world, the Lord is come! ”Thank you, God, for this greatest gift! My heart is filled with gratitude that overflows to joy. “Joy isn’t found in everything going right – it’s found in remembering who is with us, no matter what happens”. God is where the joy is!

I pray during this season of Advent, that we will all experience the rebirth of Christ in our hearts anew. We treasure and are thankful for each member of our SPBTL church family. We wish you all a blessed and joy-filled Christmas and new year!

<p><b>Ps 55*138,139:1-17(18-23)  Zechariah 8:9-17   Revelation 6:1-17   Matthew 25:31-46</b></p>
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**Isabella (7) (Jacob & Brittany Seminara)**

**Advent Nativity**



**Sunday, December 21<sup>st</sup>**

**Dave Pittinaro**

I grew up in a large Italian family. There were many old traditions we had and Christmas had its share of them. Church was always a large part of my families' focus. We never lost sight of what the reason for Christmas was.

Besides the usual church traditions, one of our traditions was food. Christmas time had its own special time for food. It started out that about a week before Christmas, the homemade cookies had to be made. This was actually a big production that myself and siblings all took part in. It usually was an all day event. There were several different types of cookies. All were decorated with a Christmas theme.

Christmas Eve was filled with anticipation of the big day. The big meal that day was fish. There is an Italian tradition called the feast of seven fishes, also known as the Vigil. There are many hypotheses for what the number "7" represents. There are several theories for this. One theory is that the number represented completion, as shown in Genesis 2:2: "By the seventh day God completed the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work." During the feast of the seven fishes, we celebrated the completion of God's promise of the Messiah through baby Jesus.

There were the standards of baccala, (salted white fish) squid, smelts etc. were always there. My favorite was one that my mother would spend hours preparing. It was stuffed squid. After cleaning the fish she would stuff the squid with a mixture of cheeses, bread crumbs, and seasonings. This was cooked in homemade tomato sauce. I have tried to recreate her recipe but can't come close to her quality.

*Continued on next page .....*

## *Sunday , December 21st Continued .....*

*Dave Pittinaro*

Christmas day started out with early mass after the gifts were opened. After church my mother and sisters devoted the next several hours to cooking the Christmas day meal. Several of our relatives would gather at our house to share in the main meal. The main meal would start out about 4:00PM. This meal would last for several hours. This truly was a “soup to nuts meal”. It always started out with the traditional “wedding soup”. There were several main courses consisting of homemade pastas, and several different meat dishes. After that there was the salad and homemade bread (It only came with Italian dressing). Desert time consisted mostly of different kinds of pies and the Christmas cookies that were made earlier in the week. This was followed by different fruits, and finally by the nuts that were cracked open and eaten at the table. You definitely had to pace yourself on this meal and only eat a little of each item or you would miss out on the next course. Having five sisters means that I and my two brothers didn’t get involved in clean up duties.

I have tried to keep most of these traditions going in my own small family. We still always celebrate the feast of seven fishes on Christmas Eve, although we don’t do the baccala anymore.

I feel really blessed to have grown up in such a wonderful close knit family. As time marches on the old traditions are fading away but the wonderful memories will never die.

**Monday , December 22nd**

**Christine Lamano-Scaglione**

I like to dabble. Ten years ago, I had a whim to learn knitting. The first year, I spent the better part of the year knitting. Why in the world was I knitting? I had no clue, but God knew why. He knew that sedentary time my family and I were spending – while doing nothing in particular – and joking I was too young to be knitting, was a gift. A gift none of us knew we needed. You see, this endeavor was quieting me, making me present with my family at a very crucial time. Although we didn't know, it was the last year of my husband's life.

Since then, I've listened more to the little nudges. God has brought me to a new chapter in my life – where I found love again – so I've been doubly blessed. I've dabbled with learning ukelele, although I still am not sure if there's a special reason for it, and I only pick at it for myself. I still knit some really cool socks, and now an urge to paint is nagging me and even though I know it will be a tough task for me, who knows where God will take me on these dabbling adventures! We shall see!

Maybe something new or fun is in your future. This coming year, be sure to listen to that little voice – there may be a real treasure in the journey. Blessings and peace be with you.

***11“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.”***

***~Jeremiah 29:11-12***

***Continued on next page***

*Continued ..... Monday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>*

**Christine Lamano-Scaglione**

Please see the attached photo of a stained-glass nativity, made for me by my deceased mother, Sarah Beard



**Ps 126 | Habakkuk 2:1-4 | Hebrews 10:35—11:1 | John 20:24-29**

*Painted by Andrew Anzalone (Lisa & Joe Anzalone)*

**“Charlie Brown Christmas Pageant”**



**Tuesday , December 23rd**

**Boone Russo**

As most of you probably know, the Russo family are camping around the country for the next 3 years and have ended up in Florida for Christmas this year. I can't wait to see all of the decorations at all of the parks, especially at Disney and Universal. Another thing I am excited for is to see all of the palm trees with Christmas lights. A few more things I am excited for are seeing all of the different decorations in Orlando as well as getting to see my friends that are also going to be there. Lastly I am very excited to see my elf "Dez". He always ends up in the weirdest places and does the funniest things. Then, there are always the things I miss from back home, like everyone at St. Peter and all of the fun games and traditions we had. I will miss the Christmas pageant we have every year, but I will not miss the costumes I had to wear. A few more things I will miss are the Advent festival and the midnight services and lastly the amazing Christmas sermon. I hope that everyone has a wonderful holiday!

**MERRY CHRISTMAS !**



**Ps 66,67\*116,117 | 1 Samuel 2:1b-10 | Titus 2:1-10 | Luke 1:26-38**



**Wednesday , December 24<sup>th</sup> ..... *The Vigil of Christmas Eve***

*Painted by Mother Tara*



**Wednesday , December 24<sup>th</sup> ..... *The Vigil of Christmas Eve***

**Kay Herring**

***God in the Details (2022)***

I recently read a devotion titled “God in the Details”. The story outlined the needs of a mother who was struggling to take care of four young children while her husband was in the hospital. While worrying and praying about where the next meal was going to come from, the mother had an inexplicable craving for carrots. Within the hour, friends showed up with an entire homecooked meal for the family - including the craved carrots. This devotion provided me with a name for all of the unusual things that I have been experiencing over the last couple of years – God in the Details!

After losing my beloved husband, Jack these moments of ‘God in the Details’ began happening almost immediately. A particular blessing here, followed by a blessing there - like a light in my dark night of the soul. There were big blessings and little ones, but all seemed to be especially for me – like manna from heaven – that brought the same beautiful grace to my heart and made me feel that Jack was still present with me. I found myself daily saying “Thank you, Jack and Jesus.” (I don’t think Jesus minded sharing my gratitude!)

Some things were pretty big – like avoiding several car accidents and others were very detailed – like finding the last bottle of my favorite milk on the shelf in Food Lion (seems small, but it made me feel the presence of Jack and Jesus watching over me!). I could go on and on about all the detailed answers to prayers that I intentionally prayed and the times that God recognized my need without me having to even ask. All of these blessings led me again and again to say “Thank you Jack and Jesus!” This devotion also opened my eyes to so many stories in the Bible of how Jesus saw the “details” of our needs and surpassed every one of them.

***Continued on next page***

**Wednesday , December 24<sup>th</sup> ..... *The Vigil of Christmas Eve*  
*Continued* .....**

**Kay Herring**

Hopefully you have already recognized some of the ‘**God in the Details**’ times in your life, but if not - start looking for them.

In closing, I would like to share a special morning of my life. November 2019, Jack and I were completing our morning devotion with the sun shining in through the windows making a beautiful imprint of scattered leaves on the wall, and I heard a voice say: “I will be there for you.” At the time, I didn’t understand, but 2 months later Jack passed away and I knew why God gave me of that promise and reminds me of it often. It is a promise for all who love and need the Lord. Hebrews 12:1 tells us: “...therefore since we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses...lay aside every sin that snares and run with endurance the race set before us.” Each detail in my day- to- day life reminds me of these witnesses and assures me that Jack is standing in the front row watching me run the rest of this race and waiting for me to join him with Jesus. God wants us to recognize his hand in every detail of our lives and with gratitude run the race.

Thursday , December 25<sup>th</sup>

## Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ

*Painted by Pat McCabe .....*



## *Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ*

**In Remembrance of ..... Deacon Judy Cole**

### *God's Marvelous Light (1999)*

Can any of us who have sight imagine what it would be like to be in total darkness of blindness? Do you suppose a blind person's world is totally dark? It cannot be! God's wonderful light in Christ shines in and through the hearts of the physically blind just as brightly as it does in those with sight. In fact, I hope to have the privilege some day of hearing a blind person describe the bright light of Christ as he or she "sees" that marvelous light.

There is so much light in Advent. During this late fall and winter season when few flowers bloom, and the tree's colored leaves have fallen to the ground to nourish the earth, Christians decorate with bright colors, and place lights outside their homes. "Christ is coming! Christ is coming!"....these lights seem to say. And we prepare our hearts anew for the receiving of the Son of God, the Light of the World.

In the word of God, we read, "His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. The brightness was like the sun; rays came forth from his hand...." (Habakkuk 3:3b. -4) "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." ( 1 Peter 2:9)

God's brightness shines out like the sun. The full light of the presence of God-with-us we see at the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. May our seeing eyes and hearths rejoice as we wait for the fullness of God's light during Advent, and then see and receive anew the awesome light given to us in Jesus Christ our Lord – who is the light of our lives!!

*Ethan Graham (Stephen & Kathryn Graham)*

*“Christ Is Born” ..... painted by Ethan*





## *Christmas Eve... St Peter by the Lake*





*"As we rejoice in the coming of our Savior, may the  
peace of Emmanuel—God with us—fill our homes,  
our hearts, and our church.  
May His hope shine through us into the world."*