ADVENT ACROSS THE AGES

Devotions by and for the People of Second
Advent 2026



"Sing Love" by Hannah Garrity | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

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This year's devotional book is titled *Advent Across The Ages: Devotions by and for the People of Second.* You will see that it not only draws from the words of Second members written this year, but it also holds the wisdom from ages past. There is no mistaking the faithful witness to God's love that stretches across our congregation's history.

With gratitude for the voices new and old included in this devotional book, and to Joanne Olson-Biglieri for curating devotions from past books written by Second members (2012, 2013, 2014), we offer this devotional book as a companion for your Advent journey.

Let us watch and wait for God with fervent hope and steadfast prayer.

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Sunday, November 29 — Isaiah 64:1-9

By Lindsay Harrell (2026)

Hurry Up and Wait

I wouldn't say I was the most patient of children. When I was around ten, my mom brought home a cardboard children's Advent calendar from the grocery store…the kind that hides twenty-four festive-shaped chocolates behind each corresponding day of Advent. Being young, antsy, and shamefully tempted by the taste of mediocre chocolate Santas, my calendar lasted a whopping forty-eight hours. I knew the story of Jesus' anticipated arrival, and how we should use those days to prepare our hearts and minds…but why wait, when you could just enjoy the good stuff now?

Fast forward several decades to December of 2021, a very different-looking Advent from years past. Family and close friends gathered at my parents' house on a frigid, wintry night. It was my mom's last Christmas—after a grueling year of cancer treatments and bad news, we knew her time was short.

Per Mom's request, we arrived wearing our ugliest Christmas sweaters. Too weak to cook the turkey, she patiently instructed me—a vegetarian at the time!— to clean, season, and roast my first bird. Once the food was warming, I sneaked away to an empty bedroom and cried. I asked God to make this awful time of waiting pass, that it was too sad, too brutal, and too uncomfortable to sit with. I knew it was Advent and that joyful anticipation abounded, but what if your world was simultaneously falling apart?





In the Old Testament Isaiah chapter 64, the prophet Isaiah dramatically petitions God to come down to earth amidst a broken world full of sin and imperfect people—"yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand."

I think Advent welcomes it all. The excitement, the pain, the dread, the joy, the sadness, and the messy blobs of clay that we are, with the knowledge that God sees us all lovingly, and continues to mold us when we bring our honest selves to Him. Despite the darkness that surrounds us, He beckons us towards the light—towards the promising arrival of Jesus.

My mom saw joy on that December night, and despite my grief, I came to see it too.

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for the gift of hope and for the joy of Christ's birth. Thank you for your continued grace, even when we come to you tired and broken. Thank you for your ever-burning light that shines in the darkness. Amen.

Monday, November 30 — Matthew 22:15-22

By Becky Drahovzal (2012)

He Came into the World

He came into the world a Jewish baby,
swaddled in bands of cloth.
Worshiped by shepherds and magi,
poor peasants and wise and wealthy men from exotic lands,

He came to teach justice that would roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
He came to bring the Kingdom of God,
to teach the Way of God in accordance with Truth.
He came to teach peace on earth, goodwill to all.

He came to bring Love.



Prayer

Lord of all creation, in this season of Advent we thank you for your gift of Jesus. We pray that we may follow his way—his way of justice and righteousness, his way of peace and goodwill, his way of truth and love. In his name we pray. Amen.

Tuesday, December 1 — Luke 2:4-7

By Gary L. Anderson (2026)

My Favorite Christmas Music

How is it possible to choose my favorite Christmas hymns and carols from the hundreds I have sung, taught, heard? How is it possible to choose only a few hymns and carols that bring people together in the celebration of Christmas? How can we move from my favorite Christmas music to our congregation's favorite Christmas music? One piece that our congregation sings beautifully, and is one of my favorite Christmas hymns, is Once in Royal David's City, tune by Henry J. Gauntlett and text by Cecil Frances Alexander.

This hymn text was included in Alexander's Hymns for Little Children (1876). She wrote it to illustrate and teach the clause in the Apostle's Creed, "I believe in Jesus Christ…our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary…." The tune was written specifically for this text and included in Gaunlett's Hymns for Little Children.

Henry Gauntlett loved to listen to organ music, and he wished to become organist at his (vicar) father's church…at the age of nine! A new organ was being installed and Henry offered to learn all necessary hymns and service music so that he could be the first person to play the new organ. He practiced and learned every note of every piece at age eleven. Henry spent the rest of his life composing music for the church. Once in Royal David's City is one of over 1,000 hymns he wrote for the church, and it is one of my favorite Christmas hymns.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of music without which our lives, souls and minds would be less filled with joy and beautify. With gratitude. Amen.

Wednesday, December 2 Matthew 22:37-38

By Andy Henderson (2013)

What Advent Means to Me

Memories of my children at the Advent Workshop …A time to reflect on what the rest of the year is all about. A time to remember who and what is really important to me ...Colder weather and warmer hearts.

A time to avoid too many presents and material things… Family getting together to visit, love and eat meals together again. Memories of our oldest daughter's first Christmas in this church 35 years ago.

Ringing bells and hungry hearts…Music and joy and hope and love. A time to rest our weary bodies and souls. A time to think of giving and not receiving. A time to think of the needs of others.

Time to pray for each other and the world we live in…Snow shovels, sleds, winter mittens and boots. Baby Jesus, wise men, a star in the sky and the manager. Hope for the world.

Forgiveness and love in our lives…Our loving God who gave us Jesus and hope and Peace to everyone.

Prayer

Lord God: Advent can be a wonderful time of the year. It can also be a time of heartache and heartbreak. Help us to remember those who are struggling, suffering in pain. We pray that you would bless them with your loving kindness. Amen



Thursday, December 3 — Jeremiah 33:14-16

By Gale Reece (2026)

Thy Kingdom Come on Earth as in Heaven

Over the last two years, the Lord has stretched me through a mission that began twenty years ago and is now being restructured. Without a conversational relationship with our Heavenly Father—daily, hourly—this mission would have been impossible.

Living in God's Kingdom

Jesus came to teach us to live justly and rightly as people of God's kingdom here on earth.

Guided by the Holy Spirit

Through his death and return to the Father, Jesus made way for the Holy Spirit to come to each of us, empowering and guiding us in our daily life and work.

Prayer

"Lord Jesus,
I am blind, be Thou my light,
ignorant, be Thou my wisdom,
self-willed, be Thou my mind.
Open my ear to grasp quickly Thy Spirit's voice,
and delightfully run after His beckoning hand.
Melt my conscience that no hardness remain…

May I always see Thy beauty with the clear eye of faith,
and feel the power of Thy Spirit in my heart.
For unless He move mightily in me
No inward fire will be kindled."

(from The Valley of Vision – Puritan Prayers)

Friday, December 4 — Isaiah 2:1-5

By Lynn Reynolds (2012)

Finding God in the Snow

When I was a freshman in college I had one of those "only in the movies" God moments. It was a perfect moment that reset my perspective and helped me focus and survive what I thought was the most daunting thing in my life at the time – my first semester college finals.

It was finals week and the week before Christmas. I was facing my finals and I was beyond stressed and more than a bit overwhelmed. In the middle of that week, The Presbyterian Church in Danville had a Lessons and Carols Candlelight service, and I decided that would be a good thing to attend to help me forget about studying for a while. The service was unbelievably beautiful. The church was lit only with candlelight, the music was beautiful and the readings particularly poignant. When the service was over and we walked out of the church the most beautiful snow fall I have ever seen had just begun to fall, right on cue. I half expected an orchestra to start playing, but huge white fluffy snowflakes slowly drifted to the ground, just like you've seen a hundred times in the movies but never in real life. In that moment, everything reset for me. My stress went away, I knew I would make it through my tests just fine and that I knew someone was watching out for me. God had chosen that moment to reveal himself to me.

Even if God doesn't send you fluffy snowflakes to remind you of his presence, know that he is with you and is just waiting for you to ask him to walk this journey with you. The asking may be as simple as attending a service, spending a weekend at camp or saying a simple prayer. Let this season of Advent be the time when you ask God to hold your hand and play in the snow with you!

Prayer

Loving God, help us, in the midst of this joyful time of year, not to let anything come in the way of experiencing your love, your comfort and your light. Amen.



Saturday, December 5 — 2 Peter 3:8-9

By Catherine Hunt (2013)

An Invitation to Wait

Some people can't bear to wait. They honk their horns in traffic and push their way through crowds. Others heave a resigned sigh when standing in line. I don't know anyone who actually LIKES to wait. Yet Advent invites us to wait.

God waited 400 years after the last of the prophets before sending Jesus to be Emmanuel, God with us. Some scholars have speculated that the Roman Empire was crucial in the explosive growth of the early church. Roman roads made long-distance travel feasible. The empire's insistence on public order suppressed piracy on the seas and banditry on land. The gospel's rapid spread among the Gentiles strongly suggests a deep hunger for hope and meaning. God displayed the patience to wait for the right time. Advent invites us to consider how and when to act, instead of acting from a compulsion to do something.

During Advent we wait for Christmas, to celebrate the day when Jesus was born as a little baby. Because God chose to bring His son into the world in the same way the rest of us entered it, Mary waited nine months for His birth. I remember waiting for the birth of each of my children. It was a time to prepare – to turn the office into a nursery, to gather tiny clothes and mounds of baby paraphernalia, and to shift gears mentally for the ways life was about to change. Advent invites us to prepare our hearts for something new in Jesus' birth.

Prayer

Loving God, help us to replace anxiety and frustration with patience and hope as we wait for a joyous Christ-mas. Amen

Sunday, December 6 — Isaiah 40:1-11

By Colette Crown (2026)

Prepare Ye The Way Of The Lord

When our daughter was around 10 or 11, she was cast in a youth theater production of "Godspell." The rest of the cast were 4-8 years older. I watched this tiny thing next to high schoolers, all doing what they loved. During rehearsals, I realized that she was playing a character I had never seen in any other production. It took me a while to understand why the director had included her.

All dressed in white, she was the first to enter the stage, leading the procession of dancing actors in their ragtag costumes as everyone joyfully sang, "Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord". She was quietly present as the Jesus character faced difficult decisions. And she stood next to him as he hung on the cross, powerfully and silently reaching up to touch him as the last breath left his body.

It gave me great comfort to imagine that Jesus had the Holy Spirit with Him in times of jubilation, times of discernment and times of pain. It gives me great comfort to know that I have the Holy Spirit with me.

Celebrant, Counselor, Comforter.
Presence … Present.
Freely given if I choose to acknowledge and accept.
Prepare – me – the way of the Lord.
This Advent season
I will Be Still and listen
For Presence and Peace.

Prayer

Dear God, help me to find the stillness to hear the voice of the Spirit that is your gift to me. Amen.

Monday, December 7 — Mark 1:1-8

By Ron Smedley (2026)

Introducing the World to Jesus Christ through John the Baptist

God sent John the Baptist to prepare our hearts for Jesus' coming.

Think of what this means to us. How blessed are we with these words from Mark?

The Son of God is coming soon.

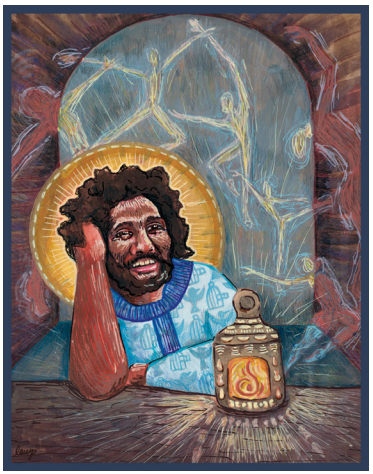
John baptized with water highlighting repentance ahead of Jesus but acknowledging that the Son would baptize with the Holy Ghost.

This message in Mark has so many redeeming values. Just a few include hope, love, forgiveness and good news of our redemption.

For the time period of this scripture to today we are to receive the greatest gift of life — Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

One thing I promised myself recently was to honor my lovely wife, Marilyn, who passed on July 31st, 2026 at every opportunity. Now is the perfect time to do so. She loved these verses in Mark and lived these beliefs to the benefit of everyone around her . . . always leaving me in deep admiration.

Marilyn truly believed in Christ and her faith culminated with the assurance of eternal life.



Prayer

Gracious Heavenly Father, thank you for the blessing of your Son. Thank you for sending John the Baptist to prepare the way and the gift of baptism that points us to your grace. Help me to live faithfully. In the name of Jesus the Christ. Amen

Tuesday, December 8 Psalm 86:1-2, 8-13

By Jenna Coy (2026)

The Kiss of Shalom

Peace.

Where are you in this time of waiting? Where are you in the long hours of despair, in the noise that crowds our days?

Peace dwells within you. It has always been there, a quiet gift only God can give, waiting for you to notice its presence. Let it move through every part of your being, whispering of God's faithfulness and the promise never to leave us.

Trust this promise.

When you lie down at night, imagine God kissing your forehead, and shalom stirring awake within you. May peace walk with you through this season of hopeful waiting.

Prayer

God of Shalom, thank you for your promise of peace and may we be reminded that You are always with us. Amen



Wednesday, December 9 — Isaiah 11:1-10

By Amy Finley (2026)

God Keeps His Promises

"God keeps His promises." Such a simple phrase, but this was a sticker my daughter had received in her worship bag at church one Sunday. She had worn the sticker home and then stuck it to her bulletin board. Little did she know just how much those words would mean to me in my dad's final days. It would have been easy to lose hope and question God's plan as I watched my dad's condition worsen. When we are often discouraged with the things happening in our lives or around the world it seems hard when life feels so unfair.

Isaiah was also living in uncertain times. He could see the growing threat to the northern kingdom of Israel at the hands of Assyria. It would have been so easy for someone in his situation to give up hope and to feel as though God had abandoned his people. But he too did not give up hope. In Isaiah 11: 1-10 it is written, "A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots."

Isaiah gives us a vision of hope that where all seems lost God is still at work. He gives us a vision of the world to come when all things will be made right.

Prayer

God, we thank you for the promises that you have fulfilled through Christ so that we may look forward to when all things are made new. Help us to always remember your faithfulness. Amen.

"The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them."

Thursday, December 10 — Psalm 23

By Bill Moody (2012)

Caring for My Sheep — An Advent Experience

Part of my job as a young boy growing up on the farm was to feed and care for the sheep. This responsibility not only consisted of the usual feeding and management that goes along with the proper care of farm animals, but it also required that I spend extra time at the barn on many nights in December through February when the ewes were lambing.

As a good shepherd I tried to care for my sheep much like the Lord cares for each of us.

I can remember getting up in the middle of the night in the dead of winter, putting on my overshoes and winter coat, and with flashlight in hand, trudging through the snow to the barn to check on an old ewe that I thought would give birth to twins that night. I felt it necessary to check on her in case she had any problems and to make sure her newborn lambs were dried off and able to nurse.

Lambing season on the farm was a waiting time much like the Advent season that we Christians prepare for when anticipating the birth of our Savior. Being there in the barn with my sheep in the stillness of the night reminded me of how Mary and Joseph went to the stable in Bethlehem where the baby Jesus was born among the animals about 2000 years ago. Growing up close to nature has always been an important part of my life as it makes the Christmas story and the birth of our Savior more real and meaningful to me. I hope during this Christmas season that you will find the meaning of the season more real in your life, too.

Prayer

Good Shepherd, thank you for caring for each and every one of us as well as for all of us. Amen.

Friday, December 11 — Psalm 42

By Joan Bush (2014)

Never-Ending Hope

There is so much evil in our world about which I despair, and I am not optimistic about its end. Still, I can remain hopeful. I embrace hope because Christians are called to be people of hope. Our Sacred Scriptures are comedy, not tragedy. They begin with God speaking the world into being and close with God wiping away our tears, dwelling with us, and declaring that death is no more.

In the familiar 1 Corinthians passage, Paul speaks of faith, hope, and love as supreme virtues for Christian living...love being the greatest. A friend of min lived her last few years with dementia. When I visited, even though she couldn't tell you my name or remember anything about me, her response to me was unmistakably a response to someone she loved. Paul got it right. "Love never ends."

Likewise our should never end. As we see the light of Advent candles, we are reminded that Light once came into a dark world, invading our lives with Jesus and Jesus' words and deeds as sources of hope and power for our daily lives. During this Advent season and throughout all seasons, may our hope never end.

Prayer

God of faith, hope, and love, we thank you that the Light that lies beyond the darkness of evil will continue to give us courage to live and act with hope — always and forever. Amen.

Saturday, December 12 — Hebrews 11:1

By Jackie Graves (2014)

The Best Gift

When we were younger girls, my older sister and I would plan and carry out elaborate schemes to find our Christmas gifts to see in advance what we would be getting. It wasn't enough to hope for certain things. We had to see for ourselves what was coming be sure we were getting the good stuff for Christmas.

These many years later, I am rethinking the Christmas gifts thing to The Christmas Gift—the incredible gift of a Savior. This gift that I can't see I know by faith is mine.

The Gift that I can spend time with through God's word, can enjoy in times of prayer, can have an everyday life, just for the taking. Perfect fit! Just what I wanted! I don't have to worry about what I'm receiving. Don't have to wait for a special day to unwrap this Gift because the light of Jesus promises to be present always.

Christmas Light. Christmas Present.

Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace…



Prayer

Out of your extravagant love, Holy God, you sent us you Son. Gently lead us to seek your presence with reverence, purpose, and unquenchable awe. May our purpose this season be to first dwell in Your light so that we may shine light to our world. In Jesus we pray. Amen.

Sunday, December 13 Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

By Nathan Lee (2026)

The Waiting Is the Hardest Part

As busy as the Christmas season is, we end up doing a lot of waiting, don't we? Waiting for a better price on a present; waiting for the turkey to reach the right temperature and for the cookies to cool enough to be frosted; waiting (until the last minute!) to get the Christmas cards out. Indeed, the Advent season is all about waiting – waiting for the promise of Christ's birth to heal the world. And maybe the waiting is good. Patience is a virtue, after all, or so they say.

But what if we could skip the line? Instead of waiting for the Year of the Lord's Favor, what if we could advance it a bit? What would it look like to bestow crowns of beauty instead of ashes right now? To offer oils of joy instead of mourning today? To render garments of praise instead of despair as soon as possible? What if we decided every day to bring the Kingdom of God to Earth in all our actions? By offering a kind word. By preparing a meal. By loving the stranger. By loving the planet. If we are to be the hands and feet of God, we needn't wait for instruction from a burning bush, or even some future time when we think we'll feel more ready. We're all equipped to act now – right now - in ways big and small. Tennis great Arthur Ashe put it this way, "Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can."

May it be so.

Prayer

Lord, make all I do, all I say, and all I am, an act of praise to you. Amen.

Monday, December 14 — Psalm 25

By Stan Adkins (2013)

Don't Miss Advent

And don't miss the presence of God in your life. Yesterday our grandson and his girlfriend called to tell us that they were getting married. A few hours later another grandson called to tell us that he had landed his first teaching job as a high school chemistry teacher. These are things we have prayed about. This is God working in our lives. With each small step we move toward God, he takes a giant step toward us.

Watch and enjoy the presences of God in your life. Advent is a good place to start each year. Following the four weeks of Advent leading up to Christmas helps us focus our actions and thoughts on the real meaning of Christmas.

Sometimes it is difficult to keep God at the center of our lives. Maybe we can't do that for a whole year, but we will try to focus on God with us for the four weeks of Advent.

Prayer

Lord, help me to keep you the center of my life and my action for one day at a time, starting first with Advent and then expanding to more. Forgive me for my failings and watch over my family. Amen



Tuesday, December 15 Psalm 126

By Melanie Gabbard (2026)

The Music Between

Some of my earliest memories are tethered to music. When I was very young, my Granny often kept me. In addition to learning about trees and poetry, she taught me to sing. We sang in the car, before nap, while learning to read, and nearly every time we went for a walk. She taught me hymns and nursery songs. She made up songs about holidays and roller-skates. Before I could write, I knew Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; he is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored and every consecutive word in verses two, four, and five.

Music followed me in significant ways from childhood into adulthood. I played the piano and sang in choirs. I studied music and performed. There was hardly a season of my life that did not include music.

As life marched on, it became increasingly crowded with obligations, responsibilities, and the everyday demands of raising a family. Somewhere along the way, I began to feel a little tangled in the busyness of it all… And rather than setting aside the burdens that weighed more heavily, I somehow managed to set aside one of the lightest parts of my life.

Music.

Of course, that didn't mean we stopped listening to it. Not too many years ago, our family sprang for Spotify Premium Duo when we thought having a teenager in public school entitled us to the luxury of having almost every imaginable song at our fingertips for the low introductory price of $12.99 per month. We were, after all, a family who loved music. Somewhere along the way, I got cast out. Between Jesse — with his true crime podcasts and 90s rock — and Avery's love of pop and country, there were almost no moments when I could sneak a listen of my own without interrupting.

Couple that with bittersweet remembrance that most of my playlists were curated from a beach-salted swing on the nighttime porch of the Clacking Oyster as my father offered an errant title,

some chorus lyrics, or a hummed portion of songs he wanted to revive and hear. I collected those songs and protected them like a glass menagerie.

Over time, music had become something I remembered more often than something I made. Only at church did I occasionally feel a familiar nudge to sing, play and create.

This year, for reasons unknown and slightly irrational, I returned to music. My mother's enthusiasm for the idea helped overcome my rather impressive collection of excuses for remaining comfortably in a pew on Sunday mornings.

What a wellspring of welcome awaited me. I immediately rekindled my relationship with music and discovered a joy that seemed to spill from every corner of the choir loft. In just a few short months, a transformation occurred. I found myself returning to the piano, finding new music to consume, and filling quiet with chorus.

Sunday mornings, though much different from the vantage point of the loft, are the true gift. From the choir loft, worship has an extraordinary way of echoing back. The Sunday we sang How Lovely Is Thy Dwelling Place, I saw it happen -faces in the congregation visibly moved and the song we offered coming back to us from below. To share a smile, witness love, acknowledge loss, comprehend sorrow, and experience joy is a gift beyond measure.





Tuesday, December 15 (Cont.)

We have the privilege of offering our instruments in praise, but that offering is multiplied as a shared experience with the congregation.

In Psalm 126, the Israelites recall a time when God's goodness was so extraordinary that they were like those who dreamed. Their mouths were filled with laughter and their tongues with songs of joy. Yet even as they remembered their restoration, they continued to pray for it. Their song was one of both thanksgiving and longing, of tears sown and joy yet to be harvested.

Perhaps that is the extraordinary gift of music. The notes of a familiar hymn can summon the memory of someone we love, even as the voices singing beside us remind us of the blessings still unfolding. Music holds joy and sorrow, past and present, in major and minor keys, offering a voice to both the beautiful and the broken. We need not be free of sorrow to experience joy, nor must we abandon the past to embrace what God has yet to give.

And isn't that the very promise of Advent?

We remember the birth of Christ while living in a world that continues to long for peace. We celebrate the fulfillment of God's promise while awaiting the restoration of all things. Like the psalmist, we sing of joy even as we sow through tears.

Perhaps it is fitting, then, that the most extraordinary gift the world has ever received arrived in the humblest of circumstances. Not with the triumphant flourish we might have expected, but in the quiet tenderness of a mother and her newborn child.

Not with a fanfare… but a lullaby.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for the songs that remind us of Your goodness, the memories that sustain us, and the voices that join ours along the way. Help us recognize joy even in seasons of sorrow, and renew our hope in the promises yet to be fulfilled. May our lives become a song of gratitude for all You have done and all You have yet to do. Amen.

Wednesday, December 16 Isaiah 35:1-10

By Sally Scherer (2026)

A Renewed World Exploding with Joy

I was reminded of Kentucky poet, novelist and environmentalist Wendell Berry after reading Isaiah 35: 1-10. Berry, who died earlier this year at age 92, embraced a poetic and agrarian vision much like the Isaiah scripture.

As a farmer, he believed that human life, health and culture are deeply connected to the health of the soil. His work told of healing ruined places, restoring the land and finding a quiet grace in the natural world.

Berry's poem "A Vision" mirrors the prophetic imagery of Isaiah, describing a healed landscape where the river runs clear, forests return to the steep hills, and the earth is renewed.

"If we will have the wisdom to survive,
to stand like slow-growing trees
on a ruined place, renewing, enriching it,
if we will make our seasons welcome here,
asking not too much of earth or heaven,
then a long time after we are dead
the lives our lives prepare will live
there, their houses strongly placed
upon the valley sides, fields and gardens
rich in the windows. The river will run
clear, as we will never know it,
and over it, birdsong like a canopy."

And lest this choir member forgets to mention, sound and singing have a place with Berry and Isaiah. Berry writes of "birdsong." Isaiah says: "The desert and the dry land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom like the crocus. They will burst into bloom, and rejoice with joy and singing."

Restoration. Healing. Joy. Singing. All gifts of God to God's people.

Prayer

Loving God: May the good news of your love for us, of restoration, healing and joy penetrate our Advent season. Amen.

Thursday, December 17 Zephaniah 3:14-20

By Stephanie Gilbert (2026)

Joy in the Waiting

How is joy part of waiting? Am I waiting for joy to come? Or how do I discover joy right here, right now, in the middle of my waiting?

I guess to start with, joy is so much more than my mood that accompanies favorable outcomes of my circumstances. Joy resides somewhere deeper than the highs and lows of my emotions, beyond the rising and falling of the stock market, and beyond the shifting tides of governments and their actions. My faith journey is not a graph of my circumstances. I am called to joy now.

Now, as I sit with things just the way they are.

Now, in a world that is interconnected yet broken.

Now, in a time of rapid information and confused truth.

Now, when everyone seems to be talking and no one is listening.

Now, when our big blue marble seems a little pale and beat up.

I enter this moment, this now, carrying my many questions to God as I wait for the day He has promised will come. The King will come, and everything will be different! The river of worldly power will reverse its course. Children will be safe. Fear will no longer have a place among us. We will breathe in the very perfume of glory.

I wonder if Abraham felt joy as he waited for God's promises to be fulfilled.

I wonder about all those years before Jesus was born, when God's people waited for the Messiah. Was joy still possible under Roman occupation? Under oppression? In the long seasons of wondering whether God's promises were true and whether God would remain faithful when everything around them suggested otherwise?

Could joy still be present in the now?

In the earlier chapters of Zephaniah, the prophet comes down hard. There are warnings of God's wrath and judgment, a reckoning with the people's failures and their turning away from God. Zephaniah calls them to attention: Refocus. Reorder. Return to God. There is a sense of urgency Because God, the Great I am is

going to be giving them an amazing gift, and He wants them to be ready.

And then, almost unexpectedly, we arrive at these verses in chapter 3. The tone changes. The warnings give way to celebration. The prophet's words become an invitation to sing, shout, rejoice, and be glad.

What is happening here?

When I read these verses, I imagine myself as God's precious daughter, opening a very special present. "Daughter of mine, get excited! Rejoice! Sing! Jump up and down! The things that have been breaking your heart and weighing you down will not have the final word. Your enemies will be gone. Death, which you have watched steal the life from people you love, will be no more. Fear, war, injustice, the anxiety of a world changing faster than you can understand, the loneliness of people no longer caring for one another—all of it will be made new."



Thursday, December 17 (Cont.)

And there is something even more astonishing.

God doesn't simply promise to make everything right. God promises to be right there with me.

The Lord my God is in my midst.

Perhaps this is where joy begins. Not at the end of the waiting, but in discovering that we are not waiting alone. The God who promises a future is present in this moment in this now. The God who will gather, restore, and renew His people is already among them.

And then comes the verse that stops my heart: God will rejoice over me with gladness.

God will sing to me.

Prayer

Father,

I am your daughter who waits for you to kiss my boo-boos and to make everything right. I wait for you to heal my heart. What does it even mean to imagine you singing a song for me? You do not look at me with a deep furrowed, disappointed, impatient brow, but with delight.

So Maker and Creator God of this big, bruised blue marble thank you for calling me daughter. Let me discover that your joy is not something I have to manufacture, but am invited to receive. Let me find joy in my now as I am loved and trust that the story you have is not finished. I am still waiting; the world is still broken. I still have questions, but I don't have to postpone joy until your promises are fully realized. You are here. You are faithful and you are singing. Let me hear your song. Something extraordinary is coming. Come, Jesus, come. Amen.

Friday, December 18 Psalm 46

By Bobbi McAllister (2013)

The Real Gift of Advent

Do you remember the Christmas gifts you've gotten over the years? Maybe some, but not all. Do you have any of those gifts? Maybe some, but not all. Would any of them last a life time? Maybe some, but not all.

The Advent season is filled with the hustle and bustle of decorating, cooking, Christmas plays, concerts, parties and searching for the perfect gifts. Psalm 46:10 says: "Be still and know that I am God." This Advent season take time to be still and wait for the perfect gift that you will always remember and always have with you all the days of your life…the Christ child.

Prayer

Loving God: It's so easy for our focus to get out of focus. We're baking dozens of cookies, we're worrying about purchasing the perfect gift for a loved one and we're stressing out about what to wear to the holiday party. Help us to keep our focus on you. Amen.



Saturday, December 19 Luke 1:26-38

By Beatrice Crittenden (2026)

For No Word From God Will Ever Fail

We may be called by God at any moment in our lives. There's no way of knowing when or what He will ask of us. It may be for something simple, or it may be for something life-changing, as it was for Mary. The thought of this can be intimidating, as it surely was to Mary. I imagine her, in the moments after Gabriel came to her, wondering what the angel's message would mean for her. I like to picture that she'd planned out a life for herself, as so many of us do.

The honor of being the mother to the Son of God comes from Mary's great and unwavering faithfulness, yet she still questions how this would even be possible. Her experience shows us that even the most faithful can wonder how the power of God could make the impossible possible. Mary concludes her conversation by pledging her faithfulness to the Lord and accepting that the life she had planned was not the life that God had planned for her.

It's daunting to think that the life I've been planning for myself may be uprooted at any moment, yet the core message of Mary's story is that by trusting in God, we can find a greater purpose than we could ever picture. Ultimately, we can find comfort in knowing that God has a plan for each and every one of us. All that's left for us to do is listen when we are called.

Prayer

Lord, give us the strength to answer your call. Allow us to trust in your power as you trust our ability to do your will. When we are faced with uncertainty, quiet our doubts and remind us that no word from you will ever fail. Amen.

Sunday, December 20 — Philippians 4:4-7

By Will Adams (2026)

The Light Is Coming!

There is something remarkable about the timing of Advent. As we approach the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, darkness seems to have its longest reach. Yet there is an interesting detail often overlooked: the latest sunrise, earliest sunset, and shortest day form a trinity of related, but different, astronomical milestones. Here in Kentucky, the sun has already begun setting a little later each evening, even as the days continue to grow shorter. The earliest sunset is behind us, and though the longest night is still ahead, the return of longer days has already begun. The light is on its way!

This is a fitting image for the hope of Advent. For generations, God's people waited expectantly for the promised Messiah, often in seasons of uncertainty, hardship, and darkness. They could not yet see the fulfillment of God's promise, but the promise itself was sure. And just as the return of daylight begins almost imperceptibly, before the darkness has run its full course, so God's redemptive



Sunday, December 20 (Cont.)

work was unfolding even as His people waited. The light was coming, even when the night seemed longest.

Paul understood something of that kind of waiting. Writing to the Philippians from the uncertainty of imprisonment, he nevertheless opens the letter by giving thanks. And as he brings his letter to a close, he returns to that same posture of faith, reminding us not to worry, but to make our request known to God with thanksgiving.

It is no coincidence that Paul bookends his letter with thanksgiving. Gratitude is not dependent upon favorable circumstances, nor does hope require certainty about tomorrow. Rather, both are rooted in confidence in the faithfulness of God. Paul reminds us that we can bring our anxieties, uncertainties, and deepest requests before God, who will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

As Christmas draws near, we may still find ourselves in seasons of darkness, waiting for answers or longing for things to be different. But Advent's promise is not diminished by the darkness. The Messiah has come and will come again. Even when the night has not yet reached its end, the Light is coming. That is something worth rejoicing!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, teach us to rejoice and give thanks even in seasons of uncertainty. As we await the celebration of Jesus' birth and look forward to His return, replace our anxieties with trust, and fill our hearts with Your peace. Help us remember that Your light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it. Amen.

Monday, December 21 Luke 1:46b-55

By Jo Greene (2026)

Mary sang a hymn of grateful praise upon hearing she had been chosen to be the Mother of Christ our Lord. Oh, what deep joy when we hear good news! We just feel like singing - Mary did so - maybe a dance step or two - she had been Chosen! Mary, a young girl of modest circumstances - NO princess - just an average young girl - Chosen - CHOSEN by God - Not from a list of 'want-to-be' contestants!

Have you ever been chosen for a prized event?... the teacher picked me - ME - to do the honor - the heart pounds with excitement. But also with many question .. Am I worthy? Will I be accepted? What will I wear? But most of all WHY?

Mary had questions far deeper than these. We so often question the circumstances to the point of saying "Nope, can't do this," but Not Mary - this young girl embraced the role because she believed - believed that God spoke to those who looked to him to do great things.

Why do we miss so many opportunities to allow God to do great things in us and through us? Maybe it just seems beyond all reason that poor little Me could possibly attain lofty things. Mary must have felt totally overwhelmed by the words she heard. But what IF we just leaned on the promises of our Lord to supply the needed power to do great things? Now, how we define 'great things' is often our biggest stumbling block in our quest. MY great things and Your great things may be world's apart - God knows this far better than we; let His wisdom guide us as he did for Mary in her journey to Bethlehem.

Be open to the possibilities that the three-letter word Y E S can mean in our daily lives. Rejoice and sing praise to the Lord, as Mary did, for the great things He has done in Your life (I'll be doing the same).

Prayer

Lord of All, help each of us, see ourselves as worthy vessels of Your love and grace. Amen

Tuesday, December 22 — John 1:9

By Scott Walz (2013)

Sharing the Light of Christ

Light gives warmth and comfort. Light lets us see the tasks we have laid before us. Light purifies and cleanses. Light gives us confidence and hope. Light gives life to the world.

The birth of Jesus was and is all of these things. As we gather on Christmas Eve with our wonderful tradition of singing praise we light candles as a symbol of his light and his gift to us. That has always been an emotional time for me as my heart is filled with hope and love. A love he so freely gives to us all. The glow of the candles combined with the voices of friends and family is but a reflection of the light and joy that is Jesus.

During this season let us focus that light and love on our fellow travelers on this journey through life. May we all be patient, kind, warm, clear, hopeful and full of life. Let us join our voices and our lights to do the work our Lord has laid before us and help those who are ill in body, mind or spirit. Let us all fill the world with Jesus' light.



Prayer

Jesus, our light and hope, thank you for loving us and cleansing us of our sins. Be with us throughout this advent season as we share your light and love with our brothers and sisters throughout the world. Amen.

Wednesday, December 23 — Luke 1:76-79

By Rachael Gilbert (2012)

Advent Poetry

A star
Streaking over
The sky
A prophecy foretold
Through sand
Rain
Storm
They traveled on
Tailing a star struck
Speck in the darkness

Snares ensnared them
Lies threatened to
Catch hold
In their Minds
And yet they journeyed
On
Tracking the minute sun
That lay ahead

Finally,
Care-worn
Dirt-smeared
And
Exhausted
Their steps led
Them
To that
Heavenly manger
In which Jesus Christ
Was born
They fell to their
Knees
Following yonder
Star

An angel,
From the heavens
Descended
And closed her
Fate
As the first light in the darkness
Appeared

A star
Leads three
Weary
Woe be-gone travelers
Trudging through
The silent darkness
As the second candle
Is lit

Doubting, troubled
Joseph worried
When a light
Fell on him
And graced us with
The
Third light.

Flocks
Of white
Observe silently
As staffs fall
To the
Ground
In awe
As the forth light
Brings us closer

In a cold
Ramshackle barn
The greatest light
Comes forth

Prayer

Light of the world, help us to be a bright light of your love to everyone we meet this Advent. Amen.

Thursday, December 24 — Isaiah 9:2-7

By Malcolm Guite (2022)

(Malcolm is an ordained Anglican priest, poet, and scholar whose poetry brings fresh insight within historic Christian traditions.)

A Tale Of Two Gardens (A Poem for Christmas)

God gave us all a garden once
And walked with us at eve
That we might know him face to face
With no need to believe.

But we denied and hid from him
Concealing our own shame
Yet he still came to look for us
And call us each by name.

He found us where we hid from him
He clothed us in his grace
But still we turned our backs on him
And would not see his face.

So now he comes to us again
Not as a Lord most high
But weak and helpless as we are
That we might hear him cry.

And he who clothed us in our need
Lies naked in the straw
That we might wrap him in our rags
Whom once we fled in awe.

The strongest comes in weakness now
A stranger to our door
The king forsakes his palaces
And dwells amongst the poor.

Thursday, December 24 (Cont.)

And where we hurt he hurts with us
And when we weep he cries
He knows the heart of all our hurts
The inside of our sighs.

He does not look down from above
But gazes up at us
That we might take him in our arms
Who always cradles us.

And if we welcome him again
With open hands and heart
He'll plant his garden deep in us
The end from which we start.

And in that garden there's a tomb
Whose stone is rolled away
Where we and all we've ever loved
Were lowered in the clay.

But Lo! the tomb is empty now
And, clothed in living light,
His ransomed people walk with One
Who came on Christmas night.

So come, Lord Jesus, find in me
The child you came to save
Stoop tenderly with wounded hands
And lift me from my grave.

Be with us all, Emmanuel,
And keep us close and true
Be with us till that Kingdom comes
Where we will be with you.

Friday, December 25 — Luke 2:1-20

By Ron Byars (from a Christmas Eve Sermon)

(Ron served as Second's pastor from 1980 to 1993. His profoundly beautiful sermons preached on Christmas Eve ring true across the ages.)

"For behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people."

What is this joy? This joy, I think, is not something that needs explaining, although books have been written to explain it. We can't be argued into joy. One can only catch it, somehow.

Luke is trying to say something like this: The Lord comes to us amidst all the noise and confusion of anxieties great and small. While we're tossed and turned by forces over which we have little control, God comes to us in the midst of our breathlessness and uncertainty.

The Lord comes in the night, as a parent answers a child's call in the night. The darkness is broken, and there comes a presence alongside, and a familiar voice says, "I'm right here."

In the dark of night, while the world mutters and moans beneath imperial decrees and the grumbling of regular travelers, the Lord comes out of the scary distance and draws near to us with the unspoken assurance: "You are not alone." And there is relief. And there is joy.

Prayer (Adapted from a prayer by Rev. Sarah A. Speed)

As we journey into Christmas light, may you speak the truth in love, may you hold fast to courage, may you be quick to joy, may you listen for the angels, and may you build each other up,
until we reach God's promised day—
when the lion will lie down with the lamb
and the sun will rise over all of us.
That is what we move toward.
That is what we dream of.
So look toward the horizon,
and live with hope. Live in peace.