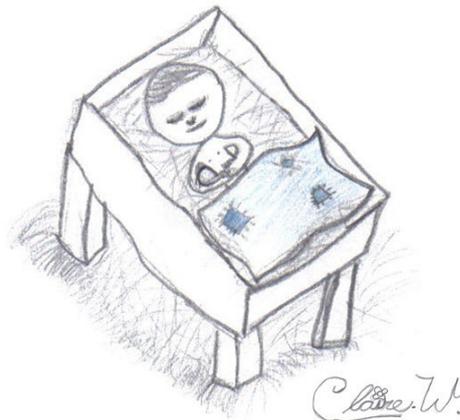
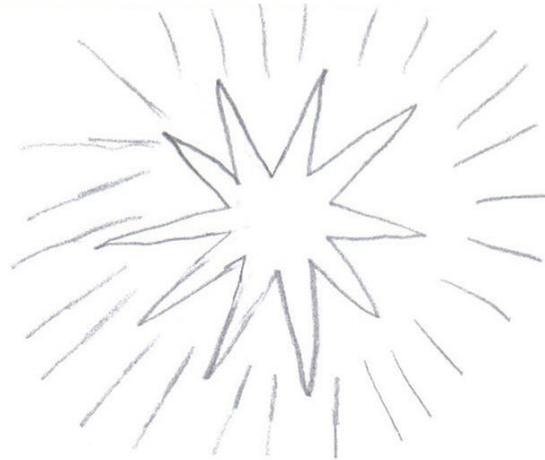


West Vancouver United Church  
Advent Devotional Guide  
2011



Journey towards Christmas with reflections from members of your West Vancouver United Church family!

**Sunday, November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read Isaiah 64: 1-9

*“We are the clay, you are the potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.”*

I once heard Chicago-area pastor Lillian Daniel tell a story of going home at Christmas to help her Mum, now a widow, downsize their family home in preparation for a move to a condo. Years and years of books and lamps and cookware along with other household items presented a daunting task. Lillian dove into the downsizing project with great gusto and one day stood before the fireplace surveying her parents’ great collection of pottery vases.

For years these vases went unnoticed by Lillian since they were kept up high away from running children and frisky dogs. Only then did she notice that one vase in particular looked in terrible shape. It was cracked in multiple pieces, the old yellowed glue bubbled over in many places. “Oh Mum,” Lillian said, “I know you love these vases but this one *has* to go.” “No!” her Mum blurted out in an uncharacteristically emotional tone. “No,” she said again, “when you were a little girl your Father was a reporter in the Vietnam War. He would be gone for long periods of time and he missed us so much. He would always bring a new vase home from southeast Asia as a gift, knowing how much I loved vases. One time he came home from the airport and you were standing by the screen door. You were so excited to see the yellow taxi pull up, that you ran out and met your Father as he was stepping out of the cab with that vase in his hands. You missed him so much that you leapt into the air and he instinctively dropped the vase and caught you in a warm embrace. The vase smashed into a hundred pieces on the pavement and your Father could not have been more happy than to hold you in that moment. I said up all night,” Lillian’s mother said, “gluing that vase together and now it is one of my happiest memories of your Dad.”

***Prayer:** Creator God, we thank you for the knowledge in Scripture that we are wonderfully and fearfully made in your image. We come before you this Advent season acknowledging those parts of our lives that are broken in order to find your salvation – your wholeness. We are the clay, you are the potter – create in us once more the glory of your image. In Jesus name...Amen.*

Rev. Dr. Ross Lockhart

**Monday, November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8

*“There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under heaven...”*

I don't know how to say Traffic Congestion in Spanish but Mexico City is famous for the most congested streets on earth. It was Christmas week and we were in a cab for what was going to be a 2 hour ride through Mexico City to my Mother-in-Law's home and we would have to stop enroute for flowers and a bottle of wine.

Our driver had stopped for a red light when I looked over and saw that poor little guy. His twisted, disfigured little body somehow balanced upright between two crutches begging at the curb. It was like someone slapped and shook me at the same time. I was literally overcome with pity and as quickly as my eyes welled up with tears, the light turned green. In a broken voice I called to our driver to stop. “Please stop now!” I ran back between the cars and placed what cash I had in his pocket then quickly back through the angry blocked cars and busy alleyways.

I don't know why that particular beggar had such a profound impact on me. I just couldn't get his image out of my mind. The cab driver stopped by a large shopping mall where we could get the flowers and wine. We ran in and after a short while found what we needed but when I went to pay I realized my wallet was still in the cab alone with the driver. My wife said “OH NO” I bet he's gone by now. We ran back to where we left the cab and there was the driver standing outside his cab with my wallet in his hand waiting to give it to me.

For everything there is a season and a time for everything under heaven ... That little guy at the red light showed me and a cab driver the season of humanity and the time for giving.

***Prayer:** God of compassion, in this Christmas season keep our eyes open for the need of others and our hearts open to your gentle surprises. In Jesus name...Amen.*

Michael Masterman

**Tuesday, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read 2 Peter 3: 1-10

*“Instead he is patient with you...”*

Preparation and patience. Often these two do not go together. Preparation suggests activity; getting things done; perhaps working through a to-do list. Patience, on the other hand, suggests waiting and, perhaps, slowing down.

Each year my children and I come up with a different idea for a Christmas gift that we make for family members and friends. We have made Christmas ornaments out of wire and beads. We've rolled candles from sheets of beeswax. We've made fudge and truffles, gingerbread men and bookmarks. One year we decided to paint glass ornaments. This involved pouring paint inside the ornaments and swirling it around. We were all prepared with everything we needed and it was time to get started. There were conversations about patterns and colour combinations and a great deal of excitement. However, patience was absent from the process. New paint colours were added before the first ones had dried, patterns ran together and paint pooled at the bottom of the balls and was still a wet puddle days and days later.

2 Peter 3: 1-10 talks of the second coming of the Lord; a time of judgment and destruction. Those who read the letter are challenged to prepare themselves despite being surrounded by “scoffers.” Throughout all the references to death and destruction, where is the hope? Where is the motivation to put any effort into preparation? I think it is in vs. 9. “The Lord... is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” This makes me think of a loving parent patiently supporting a child; a parent who wants his or her child to succeed.

So what happened to those Christmas ornaments? Did we throw them out and start again? No, we let them dry (sort of!) and gave them as gifts the way they were. Our preparations were not perfect but the gifts were received with gratitude and patience, particularly when my children handed them over with instructions of “don't turn this upside down or the paint might spill into your bag!”

***Prayer:*** *Gracious and loving God, as we get ready for our Christmas celebrations, help us to be patient as you are patient with us. Help us to prepare our hearts and minds to be ready to receive the gift of your Son. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

Brian and Fiona Watts

**Wednesday, November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read James 2: 14-18

*“...faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”*

For me, Christmas often feels like riding a wave; warming up in the weeks before as decorations start adorning stores and houses, the frenzy of getting everything done, the business of visiting and entertaining, finally reaching the calm waters of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. In those early weeks we often focus on “doing” rather than “being”, making it easy to forget the true meaning of Christmas. In the midst of it all, I try to remind myself of what it means to be a Christian during Christmas, to be faithful during this hectic time.

Our house has always been the place where the entire family gathers for Christmas. It has a special feeling, one that is hard to describe in words. Perhaps the most wonderful thing is that the door is always open; no matter how full the table, there is always room for one more. Anyone who comes to the house, no matter their relation, becomes part of the family.

Faith is not just thinking about being faithful. It is acting and it is this kindness and openness that makes Christmas so special. I’ve often heard people talk about “The Spirit of Christmas” and have wondered what they mean. For me it means keeping the doors open all year; acting in faith and sharing in faith. When you open the door to your home, you open your heart to God and to those around you.

***Prayer:** Heavenly Father, remind us what it means to be faithful; how to open our hearts to You and to others. Give us strength during this busy time, to focus on Your love. Help us share Your love with others. Amen*

Debbie Collingwood

**Thursday, December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011**

Please read Luke 19: 1-10

*“Zacchaeus, hurry and come down,  
for I must stay at your house today.”*

My first attempt at a Christmas turkey was a bit of a disappointment. As you might expect, Christmas is a very busy time for clergy. At the time, I was serving four wonderful little country churches outside of Sussex, New Brunswick. After four Christmas Eve services I was a little tired but still determined to cook that turkey the next day. My family was visiting from Ontario and on Christmas morning Ross was driving up from his church in Halifax for the big meal. It would be a full house (including two Airedale Terriers!) and nothing but the biggest turkey in the grocery store would do.

After presents were opened on Christmas morning, coffee poured and the Queen’s address heard on CBC – I turned next to the major task of the day. The turkey somehow looked bigger in person on Christmas Day than it did in the grocery store. I struggled to get the bird in the pan and then into the oven. Even with my generous time allotment I was still surprised by mid-afternoon when the bird was clearly not done. I cranked up the heat and hoped it might come out of the oven cooked in time for my hungry guests. Just as Ross entered the house that day the juices from the bird overflowed the meager pan and started a small kitchen fire. Our little puppy ran away in fright and all hands on deck began to swat wet tea towels at the bird that somehow had transformed the holiday from Christmas to the flames of Pentecost. We had a feeling at that point that we were certainly in for a “supertime surprise.”

In today’s reading from Luke, Zacchaeus, the tax collector of small size, but large reputation, is surprised by Jesus’ presence that night at his house for supper. Zacchaeus had expected to remain a spectator that day but when he encountered Jesus his life was changed. Around the table that night Zacchaeus was moved to make amends for all the wrongs in his life and in the process discovered why a faithful translation of salvation is wholeness. Jesus’ presence at the table moved the little man from self-centred to selflessness and his life was made whole.

At Christmastime we refer to Jesus as Emmanuel which means God with us. Whenever we gather at the table with others, Jesus is present in our fellowship whether we are having a simple meal or a burnt turkey at Christmas. And just like Zacchaeus discovered the presence of Christ at the table can, and will, change lives for good.

***Prayer:** Welcoming God, you gather us around tables this time of year with family and friends to celebrate the coming of your Son in to the world. Help us to be mindful of the needs of others as well as thankful for your presence with us always. Amen.*

Rev. Laura Lockhart

**Friday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011**

Please read Isaiah 40: 1-11

*“...prepare the way of the Lord...”*

It's interesting how Christmas always brings back childhood memories for me. The magic of that season is huge in a young life and is perhaps never quite matched thereafter.

We were a post war immigrant family. A father who had landed at Normandy and survived and a mother who had served with Britain's home guard and survived two house bombings. My brother was born in the middle of the war, I was born shortly after the war and our sister was born several years later after our emigration to Canada.

My parents arrived in Canada in 1949 with two small children and little else, except the hope that the trials of the Second World War would be left behind and a better life, without rations, would be available to us. My recollections of Christmas in the early 1950s include not sleeping too well on Christmas Eve as my brother and I waited for one of our parents to deliver two pillowcases, masquerading as Santa sacks, to our bedside. This was in the time before king size beds and so the pillowcases were not very large. We still believed in Santa Clause in spite of the strong evidence to the contrary and the gifts were priceless to us.

As I look back now, I don't think that it was so much a case of expectations being low as it was one of appreciating what we had and so this reflection is as cherished a childhood memory as I have.

These were the magic days of new beginnings when past horrors were being replaced. So much has come our way since then and maybe more importantly, so much has not.

***Prayer:** Lord, let us be grateful for the new beginnings that you create for us as we prepare your way. May we always be aware, even in the darkest of our days, that a better path will take us to a better future. Amen.*

John & Debbie Baxter

**Saturday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011**

Please read Numbers 6:22-26

*“The Lord bless you and keep you...”*

This story is about a burning bush, though perhaps not the kind you’ve come to expect. When I was 18 or 19 years old, my cousins started a rather dangerous tradition, one in which all the male cousins in the family competed for the highly coveted role of “Captain Cousin”. The winner of the year’s event was given all praise and admiration for 12 months, partly because they became the contact person between our notoriously mischievous cousins and the always intimidating and all-powerful “Council of the Aunts.”

And so it was that one Christmas, while The Aunts were busy counting their blessings, my cousins and I started packing snow at the foot of a long, steep hill in the hopes of building the tallest jump in modern history. The goal? All cousins were to slide down simultaneously. The winner was the cousin who would successfully fend off others and be the first person to hit the single-lane jump. Twelve guys, one narrow jump, and a whole lot of ego. “Wait!” said Nathan, always one to take an already dangerous event to a whole other level. “There’s something missing!” He ran into the forest, and emerged with a dead, bushy branch. “This is perfect.” He set the branch at the foot of the jump and, producing a lighter from his pocket, lit the crinkly, dry leaves (kids, don’t try this at home!). While the visuals were, in reality, short-lived, they had their intended effect: intimidation, trepidation, awe. Down that slope we raced!

Swoosh. Snap. Bang. “Ahh!” Thump.

It was James who reached the jump first, leaving behind him a trail of bodies, writhing in various stages of pain, including my brother François who, having slowed down too much, hit the jump perfectly, but landed right in the now-extinguished burning bush.

I never understood why parents counted their blessings until we grew old enough to seriously injure ourselves. Luckily, no one ever did, even when the challenge was to chew on glass Christmas ornaments (a whole other story). So, whether this is your first, your tenth, or your one hundredth Christmas, may the Lord indeed bless you and keep you!

***Prayer:** Lord, in this season of joy, may our actions and thoughts put a smile on your face. As we count our blessings, may you continue to guide us safely through the perils of life. Amen.*

Simon LeSieur

**Sunday, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read Mark 13: 24-37

*“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”*

“You’d better watch out, you’d better not cry, you’d better not pout, I’m telling you why – Santa Claus is coming to town.” Growing up hearing stories about Santa Claus is part of the Canadian experience. Part of the fun of Santa is going to bed at night as a kid, leaving out the milk and cookies and never really knowing the hour of Santa’s arrival.

A number of years ago we took our children Vivian and Ben to a “Walk to Bethlehem” at a local church and the children (3 ½ and 1 ½ at the time) were absolutely amazed as we went from room to room experiencing the Christmas story culminating in a visit to the manger and seeing baby Jesus.

When we returned home Vivian went straight to her bedroom and emerged moments later with a cozy blanket. Rummaging around in the kitchen she added a cookie and a chocolate to the pile. “This is for baby Jesus,” she said confidently placing the items in my lap. “The blanket is to keep him warm and I’m sure he’s hungry so the cookie and chocolate will make him feel better.” It was one of those “theological moments” for parents and as I tried to figure this one out Vivian added, “Now, how are we going to get this to baby Jesus?” Right. Now I was really in trouble. I could have quoted Mark’s gospel “you do not know when the owner of the house will come back” but that probably would not have helped. Instead, I realized that St. Nicholas had a standing appointment at our house on Christmas Eve with cookies and milk. “Well, why don’t we write a note to Jesus and Santa and have St. Nicholas deliver these gifts?” A broad smile crossed Vivian’s face and the joy of Christmas filled our home.

*Prayer: Surprising God, thank you for the times and places when you show up unexpectedly in our lives. During this season of Advent, help us to remain open to your revelation in our church and in our community. In Jesus name...Amen.*

Susan Senkler

**Monday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read Hebrews 1: 1-3

*“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors...”*

Preparing for this Advent Devotional, we feel privileged to have been part of our church families in West Vancouver, South Africa and our African families, we so enjoyed. It was a special time, preparing together for Advent and Christmas.

Once again we come, to make time, to be still, to reflect, to listen and hear once again, at a deeper level the Good News of God’s Love for all people. When our children were much younger, John used to get a real charge watching them opening their gifts, ripping away the Christmas wrappings which Joan had so carefully prepared and decorated. They were interested only in what they might find inside the parcel. The wrappings were simply a nuisance - which delayed the element of surprise and excitement of the gift.

In the same way God prepared His people as we read from the book of Hebrews:

*In many and various ways God spoke of old to our Fathers – through the prophets, but in these last days – he has spoken to us by a Son.*

Advent is not only looking forward to one who is to come, but to celebrate again, the challenge of the One who has already come on that first Christmas Eve nearly two thousand years ago. To reflect on the meaning of that coming for us today. To remind ourselves of the mystery of that humble birth – that in that birth God’s word became an event in the stream of human history.

Maybe part of the meaning of Christmas is that we need to make it our message. The challenge is to respond with Joy to the meaning of Christ’s birth. Don’t let us discard this priceless gift as we would a Christmas wrapping.

*Prayer: Transform us, O God, from being casual followers of Christ. May this season of Joy and Peace inspire within us a true commitment to His way and those values which enrich all life. Amen.*

Rev. John and Joan Gouws

**Tuesday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read Psalm 86: 6-7

*“Lord hear my prayer: unto the voice of my request attend...”*

In the darkest days of WWII merchant ships battled U-boat infested waters carrying supplies to Great Britain, where food and clothes rationing and shortages of many necessities were a way of life.

Each evening in my home, heads bowed in silent prayer while Big Ben tolled nine o'clock. Then the steady voice of a BBC News Reader announced the 'shipping losses'.

On one trans-Atlantic convoy the merchant ship 'Clan Murdoch' developed engine trouble shortly after leaving the Eastern USA. It could not keep up speed and soon fell behind the other ships and their escorts. The Captain gathered his men to consider their options. One, return for repairs and join the next convoy. Two, lag behind and become a target.

Either way they would not be home for Christmas.

They turned and headed for St. Johns, Newfoundland, where after some days in dock the ship was made sea-worthy. They were anxious to be on their way and decided to cross the treacherous ocean alone. During the next seven days and nights the Captain and his crew rarely slept. They safely arrived in port with their ship and cargo intact.

Christmas Day had come and gone

On a well-earned leave, a young sailor gathered his gear and treasure trove of gifts and boarded a train for his home town. It was a joyful blessing that prayers had been answered: he was safely home with his family. Soon, the ceremony of opening his treasure trove was greeted with excited anticipation. Each item was carefully retrieved from his collection and presented with gestures of love and caring. In turn, the thoughtful gifts were graciously accepted.

The chosen items were not gold, silver or 'precious gems' but warm socks for his father, a brooch for his mother and silk stockings for his sisters. Finally, items for sharing with family, friends and neighbours, tea, coffee, sugar, jam, canned fruits and many other treats were presented.

Seven days later, the young sailor was recalled to his ship – 'to go down to the sea again'.

***Prayer:** Dear Lord. We thank you for our privileged lives and the beauty that surrounds us. Bless all who are separated from their loved ones at this time. We ask that we do not take our family and friends for granted and that we share our gifts of love, friendship and caring in the spirit of Christmas. Watch over those who are weary and in ill health, and give them comfort. Amen.*

Christine Gardiner

**Wednesday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read: 1 Corinthians 1: 3-9

*“Grace and peace to you...”*

One word stands out as I read the selected passage from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians. That word is grace. When I complete the harvest of my Christmas trees in Nova Scotia I return to West Vancouver. The pressure involved in the harvest is over and I am ready to enter a period of reflection during the Christmas season.

Several of the reflections that have emerged into my awareness came as complete surprises as I looked back on my journey. Experiences and pictures from the recesses of my memory, that were long since forgotten, returned with new understanding. A few of them were gifts of grace. Those gifts of grace have been significant along my journey.

An event that is a gift of grace differs from all the other events. Each gift of grace has no connection with what I have done to earn it. For this reason I feel blessed. I believe that my soul has been involved with the Soul of the Universe in the process. A gift of grace is relative to, but not the same as the special gifts received from friends or family. Gifts of grace are few over a life time. I did not expect the gift and I have not asked for it. Reflecting on my journey, I discover that the gift made an impact on my life.

Two of those gifts were the cause of turning points in my life. An individual may have been involved as the carrier, similar to a soul-like federal express. The source of the gift is always the Soul of the Universe. Why I have been selected is a mystery.

How different my life would have been had not the Soul of the Universe intervened when I was eighteen years old. Was John Ball my minister the medium? There was that one brief encounter in my Grandfather Reid's driveway, when John Ball asked me if I had thought of going into the ministry. That gift of grace changed the direction of my life.

My soul-friend relationship with a long-time friend was neither expected nor earned. It just happened. There is no clear beginning and it is my expectation that it goes on into eternity. The ways and means that our souls use to make this happen are a mystery. This one gift of grace did not have any one moment of surprise. I reflect on this particular gift. It came gradually over the years beginning with our first meeting more than forty years ago.

A thing of beauty can be experienced as a gift of grace. I know of many influences that led to my decision to travel around the world on my retirement. Other people were involved. I do not understand the power that led me to go out of my way in India to see the Taj Mahal. I did not know the story behind its creation. No one suggested that I make the train trip out of Delhi to see it. I just went, not expecting anything wonderful. As I experienced the beauty and read the story behind its creation I seemed to be responding to one of the great fundamental unchanging elements of the Soul of the Universe, beauty. Why did this experience have so great an effect on me? I believe that one of my soul-friend relationships was involved. Those of you who know the story behind the Taj Mahal will understand.

The Christmas season becomes a time to reflect on those major gifts of grace. Such reflection adds richness to the gifts from family and friends. The simple gift of being together around the dinner table on Christmas day has its own special meaning as I continue my journey.

*Prayer: God of surprises, help us to be aware of your presence this day and to share your love with one another. Amen.*

Rev. Dr. John Stewart

**Thursday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read: Mark 13:24-37

*“No one know about that day or hour...”*

Growing up, my family always traveled to spend the holidays with family, so we never spent much time around our Christmas tree. We dragged it out of storage, decorated it with a hodgepodge of ornaments and tinsel, then promptly abandoned it for the holidays. I never particularly noticed or cared that our tree lacked a certain natural luster.

One Christmas, there were murmurs around the house of a different sort of Christmas. Maybe we would spend Christmas at home in Toronto. This was confusing, but kind of exciting. In hindsight, I now know and understand more about the complexities of families and divorce, and the need to be with others when times are tough. At that time, I knew that we were getting a real tree for the first time! The tree was lopsided, and smelled like air freshener. It needed water to keep the needles from falling off. There was something magical about bringing a real, live tree into the house, with all of its wonder and imperfection. That tree was more than a tree. My parents showed me what it's like to be attentive to where God's moving, and to what they were invited to be part of, even though it was tough. They accepted the invitation to respond with love as they welcomed life into their lives with all of its beauty and mess.

***Prayer:** Father, thank you for the opportunities you give us to love you by loving others. May you help us be watchful of the ways you show up around us, and grant us the courage to jump in and respond with love. Amen.*

Katie McBride

**Friday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read 2 Peter 3: 8-15a

*“...waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of the Lord...”*

When I first read this passage I was struck by the theme of waiting. Waiting and what we do while we wait. As I was reading the passage I heard the roar of a rescue helicopter go over my home and I paused, as I always do when this happens, and silently prayed for whoever was waiting to be rescued and for the patient work of Tim Jones and his North Shore Rescue Team. Naturally, the theme of waiting was now stuck in my brain.

How was that person spending their waiting time? Were they regretful or content about choices in their life? Were they using the time to reflect on their lives or were they just sad, angry and frightened?

This bible passage comments on how we should act while we are waiting. It urges us to act in a positive and peaceful way. We could apply this instruction to our Advent season.

As Christians most of us remember waiting with great anticipation for Christmas when we were children. As adults we have fond memories of Christmas; but what about Advent? What did we do while we were waiting? Did we do something we think Jesus would be proud of? Will we look back with satisfaction at our actions during Advent? Maybe this season we can contemplate how best to spend our waiting time.

***Prayer:** God of surprises, help us to remain open to your loving and grace filled presence during this hectic and stressful season. Amen.*

Katherine Ives

**Saturday, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read Luke 1: 47-55 - Mary's Song

*"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant."*

We have a dear friend who was a church organist for 65 years. In addition to his Presbyterian Church position, he also played the organ at a Jewish synagogue for several decades. Gerry and I were expecting our first child, and I was due within the next 2 weeks. My back hurt almost constantly, my skin was stretched beyond what I thought was possible, and I was heartily sick of wearing the same clothes yet again. I selfishly made sure that Gerry suffered along with me.

One Sabbath evening we decided to go to the synagogue and hear our friend play organ. As we entered the synagogue we were greeted by an old, wrinkled, Jewish man. He greeted me with the words "That's what I love to see, a good and beautiful Jewish girl going to synagogue on the Sabbath". We didn't have the heart to tell him we were not even Jewish. He asked when the baby was due, and ended the conversation by saying "You never know, it might be the Messiah!" Instantly I was flooded with an amazed joy, my back ache totally eclipsed and forgotten. His words opened up an unexpected realm of possibility. Being pregnant with our baby was taken out of the everyday humdrum into a place of exciting possibility! As a Christian I already knew Jesus as the Messiah, but my inner being recognized and responded to the hope and longing in this Jewish man's voice. Being "with child" was a miracle that might bring in the long-awaited Jewish messiah.

Mary's song - called the Magnificat - is similar to Hannah's song in the Old Testament book of Daniel. At the heart of Mary's song is her deep understanding that there can be profound meaning behind the ordinary aspects of life. When we really look, with eyes of joy and amazement, our world turns upside down with possibility. Mary shows us how gratitude, humility are used by God to affect important change in the world around us.

***Prayer:*** *Dear God, as we come together with friends and family, help us to consciously bring joy and amazement into our everyday world. Teach us to look for Your presence in our lives, and see Your reflection in the presence of those around us. Amen.*

Cora vanWyck

**Sunday December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read Revelation 22: 17-21

*“Let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.”*

When moving to Vancouver with small children we began a tradition on Christmas Eve of delivering Christmas parcels on our way home from the 4 o'clock Christmas Eve children's service. Our first stop was the furthest, St. Paul's emergency where my husband's godmother Ellen always volunteered to work on Christmas Eve. Over the years we began to not want to miss our visit with Ellen on Christmas Eve. She was busy but always had time to chat on her break when we arrived. This was always a different Ellen; there was a sense of love and grace that was evident in all of her dealings with the patients. She seemed to know most by name without checking first and over the years we began to recognize a few regulars. We saw her smiles, heard snippets of conversation as she spoke with such comfort to hurting people. As we watched her work with the loneliness in the midst of crowds, we came to see how important it was for her to be there on Christmas Eve. As she got older we asked if she might consider giving up the strain of working the Christmas Eve shift but her reply was that this is where she felt the Christmas Spirit, her heart was full of joy and peace as she saw the regulars and greeted them with grace and hope. Not only did our children learn a very valuable lesson from Ellen, Peter and I saw and understood that her acceptance of what is, just as it is, was grace at work.

***Prayer:** Heavenly Father, Help us to acknowledge and to share your love in the world in which we live and may we remember this Advent season that we are accepted by you just as we are. May the Grace of Lord Jesus be with us all. Amen.*

Madelyne MacKenzie

**Monday, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read John 1: 19-28

*“What do you say about yourself?”*

Some very high powered folk went out into the wilderness to question John about his identity. Was he the Messiah; maybe Elijah or some other prophet? He denies being so important as any of those: just a common guy, living his simple life and speaking what he believed that one much greater than he was among them.

I have to admit that Christmas is my most favorite time of the year. It's a time when everyone seems to get caught up in the excitement, anticipation and flavour of the season. Except those, of course who are particularly politically correct with their winter festivals and secular songs-only philosophy, most people whether religious or not like the story told of a baby born to insignificant parents in a stable in a remote, backwater village, near Jerusalem.

The background music in the malls and shops has already begun to blast those secular winter ditties along with the more religious ones that sing of this tale of the infant Jesus, who would drastically change the nature of the world. And who is out there that doesn't like a celebration that comes with good food, special treats and gift giving, and my absolute favourite: receiving!

Some have criticized that Christmas has become so commercialized and secularized that we Christians should avoid it, shunning all unnecessary practices associated with it. We should rather become pious and focused on holy worship as we contemplate our Saviour coming into the world to redeem and saved all who are lost.

Well that's exactly the reason I like to get engulfed by all that the secular Christmas has to offer. Because the more I get swept up by the shopping, visiting and partying, the more I am reminded of the immense gift that God has given each of us. And while we may not be confronted by folk from the highest powers on earth, as was John, asking who we are and what on earth we are doing. We do get to encounter people we normally wouldn't see, or meet, who are likewise embraced by all that the season brings. And it is precisely then, like John that we have an opportunity to reflect on what it is that we do believe in a receptive atmosphere. We need not jump on the bandwagon of evangelization knocking on doors or handing out leaflets announcing the end of the world. But we can speak about giving and receiving, about love and peace and joy and certainly, hope. It may well be that on the simplest level people can be touched by the one they do not know by the Christmas cheer and wonder of the holy season.

***Prayer:** Revealing God, help us to see you at work in the world and alive in the love we share with one another. Amen.*

Rev. Dal and Helen McCrindle

**Tuesday, December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read 1 Thess. 5: 16-24

*“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances...”*

My parents were married in 1932 at the height of the depression. Both were in their early twenties. No work was available in the Ottawa Valley, so they moved to northern Ontario where mining towns were doing relatively well. Dad’s first job was a clerk in a hardware store. My sister was born ten months after they were married, and I arrived seventeen months later (my brother was born after more than three years). As a result of these humble beginnings, my family never had much of this world’s goods, so Christmas presents were usually something we three children needed anyway – like a snowsuit, winter boots or second-hand skates. Sometimes relatives gave us new mitts that were store-bought – what a treat! Stockings (remember the brown ribbed ones we girls wore back in the thirties and forties?) were heavy with apples and oranges and a few little things such as crayons and colouring books. With no television to hype us up, we heard only a little about Santa Claus from other children. There was no middle of the night visit from Santa; we were told he was like a fairy-tale person who represented the spirit of giving at Christmas time. The focus was much more on the ‘real’ Christmas story of the birth of Jesus. Even though we had very little of life’s material goods, we weren’t aware that we were ‘poor’. I still remember the exciting anticipation and the wonderful, happy Christmases of my childhood.

**Prayer:** *God of abundance, thank you for all the blessings in our lives. Help us to always live with an attitude of gratitude in this world you love so much. In Jesus name...Amen.*

Elinor McLean

**Wednesday December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read: Luke 1: 26-38

*Therefore the child to be born will be called holy”*

I don't think my grandson Jordan would care to be considered “holy” or special, but my family consider themselves blessed to have Jord in the family. This is especially true at Christmas, when Jord, who is developmentally delayed, is among us. At thirty years of age he is sweet, kind, loving, and uncritical, and totally devoted to all his family. He is also a great achiever who does his absolute best at everything he takes on. As his parents are each one of five siblings Jord is fortunate to have a great deal of family. He has been a great gift to us, because he has truly brought compassion and understanding to the lives of his cousins and the older folk, and small children especially adore him. He has taught us patience and the ability to see developmentally disabled people in an entirely different way than we perhaps would have done. Jord excels in cross country skiing and art, and the Special Olympics has made a great difference in his life, providing him with an outlet for his energy and skills, and also giving him many friends. We would have wished otherwise for Jord, and sometimes it has been difficult, but he has been a special gift to us, and has taught us all so much.

***Prayer:** Dear God, we should not take our life for granted or criticize what we do not understand, but be supportive and loving.*

Helen McDonald

**Thursday, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read John 3:13-21

*“God so loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son,  
that each man that believeth in him perish not,  
but have everlasting life.”*

This Bible passage is familiar to all of us. It talks about light in relation to truth and goodness and positions darkness in relation to evil. At this time, there is no shortage of negative things in our world. People face hunger, violence, repression, poverty and illness throughout the year but somehow these challenges seem more tragic during Advent.

Christmas is a time of sadness and loneliness for many and a time of happiness and love of family and friends for others.

For us, a memorable Christmas took place almost 20 years ago when my very close friend was gravely ill. She and her family confided that they were not looking forward to Christmas as they knew it would be her last. We invited her to join us along with her sister, brother-in-law and her father. My mother came over from Victoria and with our daughters, we had 3 generations at our table. As the Christmas lights glowed through the dining room window, the candles flickered, and the conversation flowed, I could tell by the light in my friend's eyes that she was having a wonderful time.

After dinner, we gathered around the piano for a carol sing-a-long. Our friend had to lie down due to exhaustion but she could hear us singing our hearts out . . . some better than others. But she loved every carol, thanked us many times and joined us for a final “Silent Night.”

Two weeks later she died peacefully in her sleep. Despite our overwhelming sadness, all of us knew that we had truly helped her enjoy her last Christmas.

Many Christmases have passed since then. My mom is still alive at 94. Our immediate family of 4 is now a family of 10. We are grateful for a life filled with light but each holiday season, we remember the Christmas of 20 years ago when we were blessed by the friendship of someone who filled us with Light and love.

***Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father who knows all and sees all, we ask you to bless those who are suffering in darkness during the Christmas season. Help us to help others see the light and let them feel the love that people have for one another. May they also feel the Love of your Son, Jesus Christ, whom you sent as a baby to become our Saviour.*

*In your name we pray, Amen*

Judy and Gary Grafton

**Friday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read: Isaiah 40: 1-11

*“comfort, comfort my people,…”*

During my college years, I visited a care camp for teen prostitutes in a suburban area of Seoul. The mission cared for girls aged 14-16 who were forced to work for a foreign army. Every Saturday afternoon I visited there and had some activities like praising God with gospel songs and having Bible study. One day after I was no longer involved in that activity for 6 years, a young lady with her baby visited my mission office. She told me she used to be a teen prostitute but got married recently and has happy days and felt blessed and thankful for my serving for her and her friends. I experienced great joy and pleasure from her testimony. That moment is one of the utmost happiness in my life. I never expect such gratitude from her. But God reward me and pleased me for doing good things.

After long sorrow and suffering, God proclaimed to Israel a recovery and much hope. During this Christmas season God reminds me that He still takes care of us who are in difficulty and distresses through his precious son Jesus. I wish you could find another pleasure and joy in whatever circumstances through helping others and prayer.

**Prayer:** *Thank you God for your constant love and care for us. Please encourage us and have a new hope and plan for our life. Amen.*

Rev. Dr. Abraham Chang

**Saturday, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read Mark 12: 28 - 31

*“Love the Lord your God...”*

Having left Africa as a teenager some twenty years earlier, returning with my wife and our first child - a chubby eight month old - was the start of a particularly special Christmas. Our traditions over the holiday seasons had become ensconced with our Canadian family and it was new to be spending Christmas in the heat of Africa with relatives and friends that we hadn't seen in years. There was much familial upset about missing our traditional Canadian Christmas with all the trappings...a decorated house, lights, a real tree, Christmas Eve service, turkey dinner, gifts, snow and spending it in our own home. However, we quickly learned that the star of the show was our daughter and that the connection with her extended family was the important event. With that new found knowledge the rites of Christmas were put in a different perspective. We came around to the heat, braais, fake Christmas trees and we quickly grew used to cool gin and tonics poolside with a plastic Santa with a tinsel scarf looking on approvingly knowing that sharing our new baby and renewing family bonds was what made it so memorable. Keeping perspective about what is really important at this time of year is what I still recall about that special time. A little more ice in that drink, please!!!!

In essence, we were reminded not to get caught up in sticking to rituals and traditions for their own sake, but to better understand what the spirit of Christmas is truly about. Through that special time with family we were reminded that the blessings we receive are what we should celebrate and be thankful for.

***Prayer:** God of abundance, thank you for all the ways that we come to know your love and the dear ones that we are privileged to share life with on this journey of faith and hope. Amen.*

Greg Smith & Kari Ridd

**Sunday, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read Luke 1, verses 26 -38

*“For there is not a thing that God cannot do”*

As we read our assigned passage from the New Testament, Luke 1, verses 26-28 we were reminded of our impression of the Virgin Mary formed in our early years. Growing up in Ireland the Virgin Mary was usually associated with the Roman Catholic religion.

Over the years there have been many sightings: she is said to have appeared in a yucca tree, a privet hedge, a muddy field of cabbages and onions, and many other places; sometimes weeping blood, sometimes tears, sometimes oil and sometimes milk. She frequently spoke to the visionaries, delivering messages, warnings and instructions. Her image was photographed in the window of a finance company in Florida and in the dents and rust spots of a late model Camaro in Elsa, Texas. She is one of two women, separated by 2,000 years, to most often appear on the cover of Time magazine; - the other is Princess Diana.

As we approach the Christmas season we try to make sense of the commercialism of this holiday, the tragic events in all corners of the world on one hand, and the kindness, selflessness and sacrifice so many people make in their everyday lives but I find comfort in the coming of Jesus Christ and hope for the world which God loves so much.

We have all practiced the seven deadly sins of pride, avarice, lust, anger, gluttony and envy but also the seven virtues of faith, hope, love, prudence, fortitude, temperance and justice.

***Prayer** – Dear God help us to keep all these sins and virtues in proportion and help to make our homes, our neighbourhoods and the world better places, for Jesus Christ’s sake...Amen*

Doreen and Cowan McKinney

**Monday, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read Psalm 90

*“So teach us to number our days  
that we may get a heart of wisdom?”*

NUMBERING OUR DAYS: "How many sleeps until Santa comes" our children asked at bedtime, one December. I can't remember my answer but I have always remembered the question which struck me as simple yet very profound.

As we journey through Advent towards that day when, not the arrival of Santa, but Christ's birthday, it would behoove us to count the days we have in hand for the preparation of that celebration. It would help our preparation to read again the Biblical story recalling the events surrounding Jesus Christ's birth. It would facilitate the preparation if we meditated upon the promise of prophecy about the One who is to come. Read the message of the shepherds who were minding their flocks in the fields. Then read in Matthew's gospel the story of the Wise Men from the East who came to witness the birth of the Christ Child.

How many sleeps/days until the day to celebrate Christ's birth? The number of days is not important - it is the actual personal journey that is!

Through Advent season, we as a community of Faith and Love, God's People, will make this preparation journey. We will journey as we worship together, through prayer and praise, and by hearing God's word telling the story of Mary and Joseph.

At the end of the journey we will return home praising God for this indescribable Gift - namely Jesus Christ. Our faith will be stronger, our life's journey more meaningful and our dedication and discipleship deeper!

Let us not be busy counting the days toward Christmas but use these days in preparation to give thanks to God for Christ's birth.

***Prayer:** Almighty God, we give thanks for your gift beyond words for the birth of Jesus Christ. Prepare our hearts and minds to travel spiritually to Bethlehem to behold our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen*

Rev. Cliff & Ann Henning

**Tuesday, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Please read Matthew 1: 1-17

### ONE GOD – MULTIPLE ENCOUNTERS – ONE LORD

During a study of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' choice of the greatest commandment, one of my students noted that Mark, Luke and Matthew gave us different reports. Mark's was lengthy and included praise for Jesus' answer from a teacher of the Law. Matthew's was brief and Luke hid it in a passage introducing the Good Samaritan. He asked, "What reason did each have for reporting this episode differently?"

Since it was the time of Advent and I thought that a more appropriate event to illustrate my answer was the Gospel accounts of the birth of Jesus. Mark tells us that as a man Jesus was adopted Son of God at his baptism by John. Matthew notes Jesus' birth two sentences: "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. His mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they were married, she found out that she was going to have a baby by the Holy Spirit". This is followed by claims for the significance of the name "Jesus", his immaculate conception and a prophecy about a virgin birth. It is Luke who gives us the tradition of Christmas in all its drama, the inspiration for centuries of art and music. "What can we learn from each writer's reporting of this event?"

My answer to both questions took me back to my days as a student minister appointed to the village of Little Prairie (now Chetwynd) in the Peace River block of Northern B.C. It was 1956-57. Both the P.G.E. Railway extension and Natural Gas Pipelines were carving paths through the bush, changing the face of the village and the countryside almost daily. In the summer of 1957, the new Natural gas line, huge pipes two feet in diameter and thirty feet long were now welded together, buried in the ground from Fort St. John to Little Prairie, ready for testing. Days before I took up my second posting, the line exploded just north of Little Prairie. Understandably, this event was the talk of the town.

I heard multiple stories describing the sound of the explosion, the height of the column of flame, how long it took authorities to extinguish it, how much adjacent forest was burned, how the intensity of the heat turned the soil red, and how dangerous it was to the village. All that I could do was visit the site to confirm for myself that the event had taken place. I knew the witnesses and accepted that some with personal concerns exaggerated their report but never did I think to deny that the event happened. As expected, the Pipeline Company played down the significance of the event.

Applying this to our questions about the relative importance given certain events in the life of Jesus, we can identify with the broad consensus of Scripture uniting Christians of every age, in affirming God's unconditional Love. Advent is another opportunity to re-assess our response in the light of Scripture to the Love of Jesus.

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, we recognized you as God's anointed. In obedience to God's Love, you purchased with your life, the forgiveness of our sins. May we continue under your reign, the*

*loyalty professed by those whose writings have become our Scriptures. May this Advent see the re-birth of your love, winning over of the hearts and minds of many to your righteousness. Amen.*

Rev. Dr. Paul McKinnon

**Wednesday, December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011**

Please read Matthew 1:18-25

*“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him.”*

In 1957 I moved with my husband and 8 month old son from our home in Ireland to a snowy land called Canada. My husband had accepted a pastoral call from the Presbyterian Church in Canada to three small congregations near Owen Sound, Ontario. Why God called us away from family, away from all that was familiar, to this far away land I do not know, but my husband accepted this call from God without even first seeing where we would spend the rest of our lives.

That first winter in Ontario was snow-filled: snow banks were over 12 feet high in places. However, a fresh fall of snow was often followed by brilliant sunshine and we would build an igloo as engineered by an Irishman: no roof and a snow wall that trapped the warm sun. For a pregnant minister's wife in a new setting, this little igloo was a small respite of warmth, calm and solitude. It was there that I could overcome the pain of homesickness and enjoy the wonder of this new land.

Since that first Christmas we organized and enjoyed many Sunday school pageants, concerts and candlelight services. Advent is a busy time for any minister, but those times were joyous, for at the centre of it all was a God who was with us: Emmanuel. The God who was clumsily proclaimed by five-year old shepherds wearing their cousins' bathrobes and tea towels, was the same God who invited a pregnant woman to obediently give life to the Source of Life, and invited her husband to suffer the embarrassment of an unplanned pregnancy, and invited an Irish clergyman and his family to live in an unknown land.

It was been over a year since my husband died of colon cancer. From the time we moved to West Vancouver during his illness until now, the Lockharts and this congregation have obediently and wonderfully exemplified “God with us”. The Incarnation of Jesus at Christmas is popularly described as “Love with skin on”. That is a good description of the many activities of this congregation towards its community and especially to a recent widow – thank you.

May you all enjoy a Christmas when you can respond to God's invitation with the same obedience shown by Mary and Joseph. May you also find your own “igloo” where you can find the same warmth, calmness, solitude and joy that Mary found as she first gazed upon the baby Jesus. And may you know in your heart that God is always with you, even in a cradle or on a cross.

***Prayer:** Dear Father: We thank you for always being with us. Give us the courage and humility to respond to your life-giving commands in obedience. Give us the love to respond to others in need. Amen.*

Mildred (Milly) Jennings

**Thursday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011**

Please read Luke 2: 8-20

*“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared  
with the angel...”*

When I read Luke 2: 8-20, there is this feeling of happiness, excitement and even mystery. It makes me think of the Christmas Pageant. In the Christmas Pageant, I have had the experience to do almost all of the different roles, from fluffy sheep to the glittering angel Gabriel. The Christmas Pageant is always a wonderful experience. It makes you feel happy and the people around you happy. Even though I have done the Christmas Pageant about 7 or 8 times, I still sometimes get butterflies before it starts.

Luke 2:8-20 is a great passage; one of my favourites. When the sheep come on, you never really know if they are going to wander off, or scream “mommy!”, “hi daddy!” or “I see you!” I hope that people who are watching feel excited for what is coming.

Reading Luke 2: 8-20 helps me to think about the birth of Jesus. It makes me think of Jesus proudly.

***Prayer:** Dear Lord, Thank you for sending your only son to us so we could learn about you. And on Christmas, we shall praise him. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

Claire Watts

**Friday, December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2011**

Please read Luke 2: 1-7

*“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born...”*

Although Christmas day was always the day of laughter and joy, it was Christmas Eve that was entirely holy; a most miraculous event. And, indeed, we would climb into the car in minus 25 degrees to go to midnight mass back in the day. Usually the kids would all fall asleep but not always as we began to realize the importance of this season, beyond the wrapping and gifts and food and company

Now as a mother, when I think about Mary about to give birth on a cold night away from the comforts of home, with only Joseph to give her support, I think of the gift that she had wrapped up for the world in a humble manger. What may she have been feeling and thinking? I would imagine fear and loneliness may have been a part of her experience.

From the stillness of darkness and cold, came angels with news of warmth and love. All sorts of support came in the form of wise men, kings, and peasant boys. I imagine that it was Mary's faith that all will be well, that allowed the space for miracles to happen.

**Prayer:** *Lord, In a world of confusion, uncertainty, and pain, may you grant us faith that, should we wait in stillness, trusting we are loved and supported in ways that may be hidden to us, that miracles happen. Amen.*

Lesya Adehlph

**Saturday, December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Hebrews 2:10-18

*“I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.”*

Christmas in the years following ordination has been tricky for our family. A combination of being a great distance from both of our families and the insanity of the Christmas season in the church has greatly altered the way we do Christmas post-ordination.

Christmas Eve no longer is about eating and relaxing with family. It's more about worrying who will look after our children, which restaurant has the quickest drive thru and when will we get the opportunity to pop home to let the dog out for a quick bathroom break.

Last year Ross and I decided to try to instill some sense of family on what should be a time for family. The Watts have been very kind the past two years, offering to look after Emily and Jack while we lead the 8:00 pm service. We decided that we wanted to spend as much time with family and friends as possible last year. So I made a big casserole ahead of time and after the children's service at 4:30 pm, the Watts, Simon LeSieur and our family headed back home for a family dinner. Gathered around that table Christmas became embodied in those “brothers and sisters” of our congregation. No longer were our children celebrating elsewhere with another family and Ross and I quickly eating Big Mac's in the van. As we sat around the table, Christmas music playing in the background, the tree lit up, our children delighting that we were together on Christmas Eve and Day became sanctified after all these years. Hallelujah! Christ is born in our hearts, in our families through the gift of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Prayer:** *Loving God, thank you for the gift of family and friends that sanctify our annual Christmas experience. You continue to bless us richly each day. Thank you for the blessing of our church family that demonstrate God's incarnational love for us. Merry Christmas! Amen.*

Rev. Laura Lockhart

**Sunday, December 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

December 25<sup>th</sup> – Christmas Day

Please read Philippians 2: 5-11

*“...at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow...”*

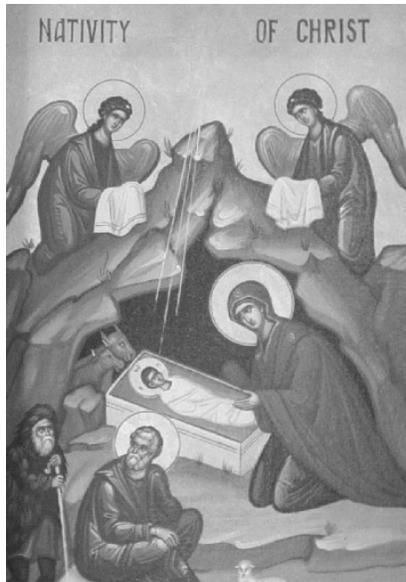
This morning will find many of us on bended knee. While some may be in prayer, most of us will be bent over reaching under the Christmas tree hauling out gifts with delight and excitement as we both give and receive tokens of love from those most near and dear to us. Christmas morning is, for many of us, an almost magical moment where time slows down and we celebrate not only where we find ourselves this year, but also experience the flood of emotions as we remember Christmases in years gone by. While every Advent season brings with it the predictable hand wringing of clergy and church goers regarding the place of Christ in the media and retail fed secular Christmas culture, *there is a sense of holiness for many* in the quiet Christmas morning gathering of family and friends.

Paul writes that when we pause to reflect on what God has done for all humanity, and indeed all creation, in the sending of Jesus to the earth, we cannot help but fall to our knees in praise. Jesus, while equal to God and the Spirit, accepted the mission of living among us to reveal the kingdom of God in our midst and suffering the limitations of our humanity including the brutal death by his jealous peers on a roughhewn wooden cross at Golgotha.

This day, when you bend down beneath the Christmas tree to retrieve yet another gift, I encourage you to remain on your knees just a moment longer. Give thanks to God for the gift of life, laughter and love you have experience throughout the years and, once again, give praise and glory for the way that the call, conversion and cross of Christ have transformed your life.

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus Christ, our Emmanuel, we thank you for this day of rest and celebration. Help us to pause and recognize the significance of your presence in our lives and may this day not pass us by without a profound sense of gratitude for your birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection. Amen.*

Rev Dr. Ross Lockhart



Merry Christmas from your fellow disciples at  
WEST VANCOUVER UNITED CHURCH

2062 Esquimalt Avenue, West Vancouver, BC V7V 1S4  
Tel. 604 922-9171 • [office@wvuc.bc.ca](mailto:office@wvuc.bc.ca) • [www.wvuc.bc.ca](http://www.wvuc.bc.ca)