



**West Vancouver United Church
Advent Devotions 2015**

Sunday, November 29th, 2015

Please read Luke 21: 25-38

Jesus said, "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world...know that the kingdom of God is near."

One of my favourite preachers Frederick Buechner writes of this passage: "I don't know any other passage in the Gospels that is harder to understand...As the day approaches...the powers of the heavens themselves (will be) shaken. Is he speaking literally or simply in poetic hyperbole? Does he mean there will be real eclipses and strange comets that have never been seen before, maybe a reordering of the constellations themselves to scrawl some fateful starlit message across the night sky? Or is he speaking symbolically of some upheaval not of the world without but of the world within - an upheaval of the hearts and minds and spirits of the human race?"

We are waiting. That is what is at the heart of it. Even when we don't know that we are waiting, I think we are waiting. Even when we can't find words for what we are waiting for, I think we are waiting. An ancient Advent prayer supplies us with the words. "Give us grace," it says, "that we may cast off the works of darkness and put upon us the armour of light." We who live much of the time in the darkness are waiting not just at Advent, but at all times for the advent of light, of that ultimate light that is redemptive and terrifying at the same time. It is redemptive because it puts an end to the darkness, and that is also why it is terrifying, because for so long, for all our lives, the darkness has been home, and because to leave home is always cause for terror.

So we wait for Christ to come in his fullness. We wait for Christ as best we can by being Christ to those who need us to be Christ to them most, to bring them Christ's healing and hope because unless we bring it, it may never be brought at all.

Prayer: God of hope, lead us as we travel once again the holy road to Bethlehem. When the journey wearies us, we are thankful for your unfailing presence, wisdom and encouragement. Grant us courage and comfort, confidence, and challenge on the way. *Amen*

Rev. Philip Newman

Philip Newman is the Lead Minister of West Vancouver United Church. He often finds the questions relating to the mystery of God more entertaining than the answers we humans provide.

Monday, November 30th, 2015

Please read Psalm 24:1-10

This psalm is about God's gifts: His creation: the earth, the world, those who dwell in it; God's gift of nearness to us; God's gift of guidance on how to live having clean hands, pure hearts, worshipping only what is true, being truthful; God's gifts to us of blessing and righteousness and salvation, because if we seek Him we will find Him; God's gift of His Son. Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord of hosts. He is the King of glory.

For King David, this psalm was likely a liturgical procession song for returning with the ark of the covenant, containing God's commands on how to live; and instructions to pass on these values to future generations.

As we think of Advent and Christmas we think about gifts. Our family has spent Christmas in many different locations with an abundance of material gifts. When I asked them which Christmas stood out in their minds as memorable they each had a different answer. None of the answers was about an exotic place or material gifts. For each of them it was about sharing an experience with family. For my husband it was when four generations (his two grandmothers, his parents, ourselves and our two children) were gathered in his family home in

Rothesay, New Brunswick. For one daughter it was getting dressed up and going downtown together to The Nutcracker. For one daughter it was Christmas in her grandparents' 'big house' in Rothesay, New Brunswick because of all the family that were there and because it felt so special to be dressed up, and to be at the big table with all the grown-ups (children usually had to eat separately in the kitchen).

These memories of generations gathering together are possible because of the values that have been passed from one generation to another. It all started long ago because God loved us and commanded that we love Him and one another. He also instructed us to teach this to our children. Love is a gift from God.

Prayer: Strong and mighty Holy One, as we anticipate the celebration of Christ's birthday, let us open the gates of our hearts so that the awesome glory of Your presence, the King of glory, may come in as we experience Your gift of love now that will produce cherished memories from the past for many generations in the future. We ask this in Jesus' name. *Amen*

Lynda

Lynda introduced WVUC to Community Bible Studies Canada; when she is not travelling, she leads the group which meets weekly in the Lounge.

Tuesday, December 1st, 2015

Please read Jeremiah 33:5-6

Reading this scripture, I am reminded of how "God set it right for us / me".

In the 1990s, we had a very dear friend of mine, Patricia, living with us for a while. She was moving to Vancouver from Chatham, Ontario, ahead of her life plan. She had always planned on retiring here, but a series of events sent her to us early.

David and I had always wanted children but had been unsuccessful in having children and we made a decision to move forward with adopting a child, and started our home study. It is a series of questions which we answered to convey to complete strangers (adoption agencies and birth families) our values, beliefs, family history, dreams, education, plans, etc. so they will consider you as a parent for their child; tough process for both sides. In addition to the questions, references were required and Patricia was one of our references.

When we were about three quarters of the way through our home study, Patricia, phoned me at home one night, and she told me she had a friend back in Ontario, whose 19 year old daughter was having a baby and putting the daughter up for adoption. Patricia's friend was managing the adoption for her daughter. (About two months before, Patricia had mentioned to this friend, Amy that she was a reference for a couple that was hoping to adopt a child and that she would be happy to introduce her to us if she wanted.) Patricia was phoning to let us know that Amy wanted to meet us.

This was actually no problem as I was working in Chatham, Ontario at the time. So David and I made a video of our life, house, pet, and favourite walks. I made a lunch date with Amy, and we talked about adoption, and at the end of the lunch, Amy and I both decided to move forward with the adoption. (It was unreal to even allow myself to think that we were going to have a baby.) In short, the baby came 5 weeks early on February 29th, our home study wasn't complete and there is a law that when a baby is being adopted out of province that is goes into foster care until the timeframe is up until the mother can change her mind and keep the baby (30 days). (And there was a lot of praying. I basically gave it up to God.) I met the baby on day 8 of her life and her birth mother, and then the next day, I went to the foster home in London, Ontario and met the foster family. At the end of the day, the foster Mom, invited me to live with them and Anna, until the 30 day timeframe was over. What an angel and what a miracle!

In the end, Anna came home with us. Our prayers were answered and we experienced miracle after miracle. It confirmed for me to live in possibility.

The joy and glory of life will come to us if we walk in the Spirit, and that is inevitable.

Prayer: Dear God, The fruits of your Spirit are all around. We are not alone. We live in your world and when you are with us there is always a spark of hope. God, please help us be aware of the signs marking your advent. We celebrate your presence. *Amen*

“Alf”

Alf is the energetic Project Manager who has been assisting WVUC in the transition to a new web-based on-line Community called “The Vine”, which will help us keep more accurate information about our Church family.

Wednesday, December 2nd, 2015

Please read Psalm 25:1-10

“To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul, O my God, in you I trust.”

It was close to Christmas and our children were immersed in all of the Christmas traditions and whispering about what they hoped Santa would bring. Our 5 year old daughter wanted a two wheeled bicycle so badly and was convinced that all you had to do was hop on and glide away, just like her 3 year old brother did on someone else’s bicycle. He showed up at home one morning riding this bicycle from some child’s front yard. After finding the owner and returning the bike we explained that he would have to wait a few years until he too might ask Santa for a bicycle. We heard whispered conversations between the two children about the magic of riding a bike and our daughter asked her brother how he learned how to ride the bike all by himself in a matter of minutes. He explained in 3 year old logic, all you have to do is believe in the wheels and you won’t fall over. Christmas came and Santa did leave a shiny two wheeler for our daughter. She couldn’t wait to try it out across the street in the school yard, ready to hop on and glide up and down the path. With Dad’s holding on to the seat she went a couple of feet and crashed to the ground. After a couple of tries, with tears in her eyes she cried, how come Craig, her little brother, didn’t have this trouble. We tried to explain that her job was to look ahead with absolute trust and know that Dad was there to hold her up. The secret was to believe that he would always be there to catch her.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, losing control is scary. Teach us to trust the tests and unknowns in our life to You .In this season of Advent help us remember and have hope, faith, and trust in you and know that you have greater plans for us than we can possibly imagine. *Amen.*

Madelyne

Madelyne is Adult Ministry Coordinator at WVUC. Her caring heart is put to good use with the shut-ins and friends in the congregation as well as with the North Shore Homeless people.

Thursday, December 3rd, 2015

Please read 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

“How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”

Paul's profound love for the Thessalonians is clear in his longing to see them again 'face to face'. Christmas is a time we too long to see people we love face to face but often those faces are far away or no longer with us. Often the best we can do is see each other 'face to face' on Skype. In those circumstances, when we feel the deep pain of separation, Paul gives us, and the people of Thessalonica, instruction in Christian hope. To paraphrase, he says, we may not be able to change our current circumstance but we do not have to focus on it, because as Christians, we view our circumstances through the light of God's promise of Jesus' imminent return.

When Rev. Phillip Newman blesses our congregation with the words, "May we see the face of Christ in all we meet and may they see the face of Christ in us," he speaks of bringing forward Jesus Christ's presence into our midst. It motivates us to look expectantly into the hay and the smell of dung in our own lives filled with the pain of separation, to see a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes as the infinite promise of God. We look for something extraordinary, in something as ordinary as the birth of a child.

As for Paul, our faith in this miraculous event is experienced with others who faithfully walk with Jesus Christ. At Christmas, when the people we most love or have loved, are not around us, we spend time in prayer, as Paul did, for our family of faith, in gratitude for the strength they give us, requesting God increase our love for one another, and that as a church we live into the light of our holiness. In that practice, we move just a little closer to becoming a holy family.

Prayer: Lord, during this time of Advent, restore our faith. Open doors for us to feel the strength of walking with other people of faith and help us to live into the light of holiness, increasing in love and gratitude for all who walk with us on this journey of faith.

Amen.

Jillian

In her own words, Jillian is "a Christian immigrant from Australia" and student at Vancouver School of Theology.

Friday, December 4th, 2015

Please read Jeremiah 23:5-6

Jeremiah tells us that men were not behaving properly "bad things" were happening. He was reassuring his people a Messiah was coming, HOPE for the future. The Messiah came, Jesus Christ is here. We walk with Him through life and are fortunate to know Him.

My children were ages five, seven and nine when my husband was a burn victim- 35 % of his body. While in hospital, I had surgery and lost the use of my right arm. It was a very difficult time. A few days later my daughter came into the kitchen before school and showed me the spots on her body. God's gift to me has been my sense of humour and I started to laugh, 'Of course! Why not now? - the perfect time to have chicken pox!' I phoned my friend for sympathy and she was happy, her daughter also had broken out with the pox, so our families could be together.

Out of adversity was sunshine and walking with Jesus helps lead us through the worse with confidence and hope. I trust in God's promise and He is always beside me, helping my decision making and humour is a gift – The Best Medicine

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank You for the strength to meet adversity, walking with us on our journeys in life. You have given us Hope for a better tomorrow. Thank You for our greatest gift: Jesus Christ. *Amen*

Marjorie

Marjorie is a busy, hands-on Grandmother and volunteers each week in the WVUC office.

Saturday, December 5th, 2015

Please read Isaiah 40: 3-5

“A voice of one calling: In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Little did I know, when I was growing up and living in the Middle East, how lucky I was. I was actually living and experiencing life right in the land where so many of the Bible stories that we are familiar with, took place.

I remember one Christmas in particular when we lived in Libya, our school produced a play of the Christmas Story; the real one. There was no fear of political incorrectness, or fear of reprisal, or feeling that we were forcing our religion on those with differing beliefs. We were all in it together; Muslim, Christian, and non-believers alike. It was the most amazing experience.

It took place outside on our desert dirt school playing field. An audience of all nationalities and religions watching all of their children bring the story of Jesus' birth alive, as one.

The manger was built. Real sheep munched on hay in the foreground while their owner watched over them with the help of similarly dressed assistant shepherds. Then Joseph wandered in leading Mary seated on a donkey and they settled in the manger. Luckily, all the angels of all sizes, one of them being me, filed in and took their places. I say luckily as the donkey had been tied to the fence behind the manger and decided to give it a good kick. The angels saved the night by catching the teetering structure and held it up. God knew where those angels were needed! And closing in after the wondrous birth, three wise men appeared; not on foot, but on plodding camels, the real furry and occasional spitting ones. Perhaps ones that descended from those that traveled the earth so long ago in Bethlehem. The black night sky was lit up with stars that special night back in the late 60's, with all people enjoying together this beautiful recounting. There was a sharing between all in attendance; a love for people and family. And there was PEACE.

Prayer: Dear Lord, We ask you to be with us as you are always, to be with all the peoples of this Earth. We ask that you bring us together regardless of colour or creed. Give us strength and surround us with your love as we experience so many memories both sad and happy at this so very special time of year. Please help us all to stand together in Peace for this world that you so love. We ask this in your Son Jesus' Holy name. *Amen.*

Toni

Toni has attended WVUC from the time her parents were members. For the last several years she has served on the Nursery and Ushering Teams and the Youth and Family Committee. The 2015 Mexico Mission trip was a major growth point in her faith journey.

Sunday, December 6th, 2015

Please read Psalm 133:1-3

“ *How good and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in unity!* “

The two foundations of Scottish Presbyterianism , which in one of the traditions of the United Church, were the daily reading of the Bible and keeping of the Sabbath. This special day of rest was guaranteed for all, from the lowest laborer to the laird and pastor: to take time to be holy, to set aside a day of rest, to meet others, and renew for the week ahead.

This practice challenges us to think of the Sabbath. Is it a day apart? Need it to be a Sunday? Does the rhythm of life change in retirement? Amid all the pressures of modern shopping hours, the demands of work often from home, the immediate access of cell phones and Internet, how can we be renewed? How can each of us make a Sabbath happen in our own lives? Is Sabbath merely a time to play – ski, kick a soccer ball, run on a beach, or can it be more than that?

Does it come from attendance on Sunday at church? To meet in unity ? Or is it connecting with family and friends in the old - fashioned Sunday dinners in the dining room with the roast of beef and perhaps Yorkshire pudding? Are there other ways of finding a retreat from worldly cares? To meet like-minded ‘brothers? To recharge the spiritual batteries ?

For me it is the ritual of the liturgy, singing the hymns- yes with the screens-, transporting to new realms through the voices of the choir.

Can I the observance of the Sabbath be intentional or merely at random? For each of us these questions must require some attention, if not answers.

Prayer: Dear God, guide our steps in the week ahead, as we search for ways to celebrate coming together in unity. *Amen.*

Ruby

Ruby is an artist. She loves to create beautiful pictures using pencil crayons and teaches others this skill in weekly classes.

Monday, December 7th, 2015

Please read Malachi 3:1-4

“See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me”

Last week, we were having a conversation with some friends who recently moved to the Sunshine Coast from Ontario. “The thought of Christmas away from Ontario makes me homesick,” said the wife. Christmas tends to do that, doesn’t it?

Last year, in the midst of similar emotions, we spotted a small wooden whale in a gift shop on Bowen Island that would make a perfect gift for Meghan’s mother’s beachfront home. As the early darkness of a late November night settled in, we bought the whale and huddled in a small, warm restaurant waiting for the next ferry. Looking around us, sipping on the most fragrant warm mulled wine, the world seemed, in that moment, perfect.

There is so much imagery leading up to Christmas around the theme of “preparing the way”. In sharing this memory with our newly relocated friends, we were able to, in a sense, use our experience to prepare the way for them, helping them look for the warm, hope-filled moments that the season has to offer.

So wherever you might find yourself this Advent season, whatever might be going on, may you find time to pause and soak in the best of this season. And may your own story and reflections prepare the way for someone who might need a bit of direction this season.

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for the gift of community. Thank you for those who have gone before us. Bless them this season in the sharing of their story. Prepare our hearts too for those who might need our gifts to find a place to call home this season. All of this we ask in Jesus’ name. *Amen.*

Simon and Meghan

Simon is Youth and Family Pastor at WVUC; Meghan a teacher in WV School District. Among many exciting things going on in their lives, is the expectation of a baby daughter, early 2016.

Tuesday, December 8th, 2015

Please read Luke 1:8-16

John the Baptist's life was preordained centuries before he was born when Isaiah spoke of "the voice that cries out in the wilderness," who would prepare the way of the Lord. The angel Gabriel confirmed it when he spoke to Zacharias in the temple and told him he and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son who would be great in the eyes of the Lord and he would be filled with the Holy Spirit. He said his name would be John.

John grew up being taught in the temple. When Zacharias was killed by King Herod, Elizabeth fled with John to the wilderness, where he started preaching. He did not seek the multitudes or do miracles. He preached repentance, preparing the way for the Christ. He fulfilled his purpose in his life with the baptism of Jesus. He went to his death as a final offering to God.

Looking back over the eighty-nine years, I can see God's hand in my life. My Mother abandoned us when I was three and my sisters, six and nine. Our stern, but loving Father and a young Stepmother brought us up. My Stepmother saw that we went to Sunday School and Church. I taught Sunday School as a teenager.

In 1944, at the age of eighteen, I joined the Canadian Women's Army Corp., where I trained and served as a secretary. After the war, I married my army sweetheart in 1947. We were blessed with two daughters and a son. Sunday School and Church were a part of our week.

Sadly, Tom died of cancer in 1970 at the age of forty-five. With little time to grieve, I retrained as a secretary and returned to the workforce. With my eldest daughter at home to oversee things, I was able to participate in two tours with West Vancouver United Church. One trip was to Israel and the other to the Passion Play in Oberammergau in Germany. Both unforgettable memories.

I retired after working for thirteen years after the children left home. My second love, John and I were able to travel extensively in Europe, Britain, Mexico and Alaska. We enjoyed six more winters in Yuma, Arizona. Unfortunately, John died in 2005. I returned to my hobby of writing. I wrote and had published a Family History, a small book of poetry and various short stories. I feel very blessed.

Prayer: Thank you God for your guiding hand in our lives, for the people that have touched our lives, for happy memories and the promise of heaven. *Amen.*

Jean

Jean attends our Community Lunches regularly and enjoys keeping in touch with her friends at WVUC in that way.

Wednesday, December 9th, 2015

Please read: Philippians 1:3-11

When I read the words of Paul to the people of Philippi, I am overcome with his profound sense of gratitude and a deep love. He speaks of always remembering them and thanking God for their partnership in the gospel from the first day. He feels just in his love for them and confident that the good work of Jesus will be carried out with them even though he is in prison. He talks about sharing God's grace with these people and longing for their companionship with a love like that of Christ Jesus. He prays for them; a prayer for a love so deep and profound that they may have insight into what is best and pure. He wishes for them a life filled with the fruits of righteousness found only in Jesus and to the glory and praise of God.

It reminds me of moments in my own life when I thought my heart would burst with joy! Those moments when I think, "how can words express this feeling of surprise, elation, gratitude, or happiness?" "How can I be so lucky, fortunate, or blessed?" These moments usually involve family, music, nature or a combination. I tend to feel overwhelmed with love when my children reach a new milestone. I feel gratitude, like that of Paul, when people show time and effort in caring for me. Sometimes I feel pure elation when beautiful music washes over me or I take in a breathtaking sunset. The older I get, the more often I find my eyes welling with tears of joy because I realize how lucky I am to lead the life I do.

Prayer: Lord, today let us be ever mindful of God's gifts of caring people in our lives. Let us give thanks to you for your only Son and his great sacrifice. May we never take any of these gifts for granted and may we have the wisdom of Paul to remember them, tell them we love them and give thanks often. In Christ we pray,
Amen.

Erica

Erica is a faithful member of the choir, in spite of living in Port Moody. Her solo performances are always appreciated at Worship, Memorials and Concerts.

Thursday, December 10th, 2015

Please read: Isaiah 45:1-3

Cyrus, the Persian monarch, was chosen by God. His rule was prophesied from even before his birth, and he would go on to rule and subdue nations, making paths smooth for God's people. These are the sorts of things we come to expect from faith leaders like Moses and Saul. But Cyrus is different. He doesn't appear to seek God's guidance: "I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me." (Is 45.5)

So often, if we pay attention, Scripture surprises us. God is surprising. To redeem the world, God used a helpless babe, not a powerful ruler. Those times that we think we have everything figured out, that we know all that we need to know, and that we are in control, God shows up in a way that isn't expected-- and sometimes is even unwelcome.

In the midst of everything- the busy, the wonderful, the confusing, and more- the words from Isaiah can be helpful: "I will give you hidden treasures, riches in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name." We have been summoned. Each of us. So let's turn to God. Let's see what this wonderful mystery is all about. Let's look forward to the coming of the King--into our lives and our world.

Prayer: God, help us to turn to you. And in our turning, may we hear your voice, and find that you have been busy at work all around us and in our lives. Help to prepare us for the birth of your son, Jesus. *Amen.*

Dylon and Katie

Dylon and Katie's joy in 2015, was welcoming their daughter Nova into their family. Sleepless nights, but heavenly days!

Friday, December 11th, 2015

Please read Isaiah 48:17-19

"I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is good for you and leads you along the paths you should follow." v17

Imagine travelling 1000's of miles, following a star to an unknown destination. This is exactly what the wise men did, they followed a sign from God to signal the arrival of his son Jesus. And when they found him they

responded with joy, worship and gifts. When it was time to return to their own country, they did not return to Herod as he had asked, but instead listened to God through a dream and took another route.

God reminds us in v17 that he is our Father, our parent.....our Dad! And just as any loving parent would do, He wants to teach us and guide us. And we in return, like the magi, need to listen. By listening and obeying his word, we will receive peace and righteousness (v18).

There is nothing better in life than knowing and feeling Gods peace. This Christmas, may you be reminded that a child is born, a son is given, he will be called “Wonderful Counsellor,” “Mighty God,” “Eternal Father,” “**Prince of Peace.**”

Prayer: Our loving Father in heaven, Thank you for the gift of your son Jesus, our Prince of Peace. Thank you for your Word, the bible, that speaks to us and teaches us. Thank you Lord for your Holy Spirit that resides in us, and nudges us along the path we should follow and the decisions we should make. May we know your peace as we navigate the pathways that we call life. *Amen.*

Dawn

Dawn is Bookkeeper at WVUC. Her skills and creativity have generated the craft group that meet in the Lounge each Wednesday to create amazing greeting cards that comfort and encourage many during times of challenge.

Saturday, December 12th, 2015

Please read Zephaniah 3:14-17

“Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart.”

Unlike what is expected of this season of Advent, this time of year is often quite busy and stressful for many people. For most students Advent is not a time of celebration, but one where you barely look up to take stock of what is around you. Instead of appreciating the festivities the season only seem to create more work with, what seems like, an insurmountable supply of classes, labs, exams and projects. During my first year of university, I spent the beginning of December studying for one exam and then the next, and jumping from one task to another with no time for anything else. It was only after the relief of my last exam completed, as I was leaving Capilano University that I took note of the Christmas lights and the festive spirit around me. As I ate dinner with my family instead of at school I was reminded that this is a season of joy and love. It is important to remember to look up from our tasks and trials and to remember how wonderful and beautiful this season is and to take time to celebrate it.

Prayer: Dear God, please help us, in this chaotic season, to stop and remember that this is a season of joy. A season in which you gave more than everything we need: peace, joy, hope, and especially love. *Amen.*

Vivian

Vivian is our Sunday Custodian, making sure that everything is in place for the many celebrations and events that take place on a Sunday at WVUC.

Sunday December 13th, 2015

Please read Luke 3:7-9, 15-17

I think there are times in our faith journey that we recognised when God speaks to us. It is almost always unexpected and often overlooked in the moment. For me one of those moments was Christmas morning mid

1990's. After the huge crowds of the Christmas Eve services we were a much smaller group at 10am on the 25th. One of our families with their 4 small children were sitting in the second pew, children quietly playing with the 1 new toy that they were allowed to bring to church. Duncan was about 3 and very comfortable in the sanctuary. As the service progressed, he started wandering around the with his toy stopping to look at decorations, say hi to people and wave at John in the pulpit as he was delivering his sermon. The congregation was captivated by him. He made his way to a gentleman sitting alone looking very sad and isolated. Duncan jumped up beside him on the pew and show the man his toy. The demeanor of the man changed visibly while Duncan explained how his toy worked.ith a smile. Duncan then leaned in and gave the man a hug and walked back to his family. I don't know what was said in the sermon that morning but I can promise you that the gift of a child was on everyone's mind.

Prayer: God, may we all learned to welcome those in search of your guidance with childlike grace. *Amen.*

Julie

Julie heads up the Oppenheimer Project and supervises the sandwich-making for this monthly outreach.

Monday, December 14th, 2015

Please read Philippians 4:4-7

A posting ran across my Facebook page recently, "I'm not anxious. I am just extremely well educated about all the things that can go catastrophically wrong." I literally laughed out loud when I read it, but it has stuck with me in a more serious tone since then, especially when I read this scripture. Perhaps all of us have times when we find ourselves dreaming up fearful possibilities. As a normal parent, or maybe one with health concerns or job struggles, the human side of us naturally goes to the dark side of what might happen. Indeed, I've been accused of being the superhero, Anxiety Girl! – able to jump to the worst conclusion in a single bound! Truly, I'm in need of this LORD, the One whose peace surpasses all understanding, and this God who guards hearts and minds through our brother Jesus. I want to learn to live in Joy, to rejoice with the gentleness that has been made known to us through the Christ Child. By praying with a thankful heart instead of an anxious mind, could it be true that the peace of God might silence the imagined catastrophes!?!

Prayer: Dear God, help me to learn to pray like that, to pray with thanksgiving in the peace of your presence and with the confidence of your everlasting love. *Amen.*

Gwen

Gwen is the backbone behind all church communications, a busy volunteer and passionate Grandma. Unfortunately, her grandchildren live at the other side of the US, so she has also become a jet-setter! Amongst other events, when she is here, she leads the Tuesday Bible Study group, discussing the previous Sunday's sermons.

Tuesday, December 15th, 2015

Please read Isaiah 12:2-6

The context of these verses is important. The verses are the final verses in a long diatribe of prophecies addressed to Israel, starting with Isaiah 9, verse 8. Then, as now, the Middle East is racked with intermittent, intensive, internecine, inter-tribal and international strife which extends all across the region. In earlier verses in Isaiah, he looks at Jerusalem and Judah and he sees the corruption in the community and denounces its wickedness in all its forms, which include a denunciation of women in their finery who "walk with necks outstretched and wanton glances, moving with mincing gait and jingling feet". As the Lord's punishment, he prophesies the destruction of Israel from all sides, with the final blow being the Assyrian whom Isaiah sees as the rod that God wields in his anger against Israel. He says, however, that the Lord will back off when his anger comes to an end - and the remnant of His people, those that are left, will return from Assyria and Egypt, from Pathros from Cush and Elam, etc.

But the return will not be entirely milk and honey, because the Lord will gather all the scattered remnants “from the four corners of the earth” in such a way that the various groups will not fight one another, but will unite and “swoop down on the Philistine flank in the west and together they shall plunder the tribes of the east”. This sounds to me like the ongoing strife in the region! Bear in mind that Isaiah was writing this around the middle of the 8th century BCE!

It is on their anticipated return that Isaiah writes the verses we read today. Isaiah is saying that, although bad things will happen as a result of our own folly and “wickedness”, God will eventually forgive us and then we can be “confident and unafraid”.

Prayer: Dear God, at this time of Advent we pray that you will help us all to solve these immense problems related to the refugee crisis in the Middle East. We Christians can not do this on our own – we must reach out to one another and to Islam in all its sects and vestments and recognize all the faults we have in common and our own partial complicity in the misery that we see in the region today. We ask for your grace in helping us all to accept our differences and pray for your wisdom in co-operating with other religions and peoples. *Amen.*

Colin

Colin is a writer and has published volumes of his poetry. But his real love is golf and he is grateful that heart surgery this year has made it possible to resume this passion!

Wednesday, December 16th, 2015

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

John and Joan served in ministry at WVUC for many years and brought their own special gifts of caring and inspiring the membership.

Thursday, December 17th, 2015

Please read Jeremiah 31:7-9

When I read this passage from Jeremiah, it reminded me of a family gathering, where members came from all parts of the country – some from Northern B.C., some from over the water (Vancouver Island), some from far away and others from close by. The occasion was my father-in-law's 80th birthday. Needless to say, there were family members of all ages, right down to toddlers.

It is always a blessing to get together and thank God that once again we have been spared to enjoy these precious times, especially the Birth of Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for our families and we are grateful for the times when we can gather together. We would remember at this time, those who are separated from one another and those who are homeless. We pray for refugees who are seeking safety and a better life for themselves and their families. In Jesus name we pray. *Amen*

May

May is a faithful member of the Tuesday Bible Study Group and enjoys the discussions around the previous Sunday' sermon.

Friday, December 18th, 2015

Please read Jeremiah 31: 31-33

Have you ever experienced an “ear-worm”?

An “ear-worm” is a metaphor for a catchy melody, which, after you've heard it, sticks around with you all day. Perhaps you find yourself humming it under your breath, or having it go round and round in your mind as you are walking, or performing mundane tasks. Sometimes you're not even aware that it's present. Any tune that catches your interest can quickly turn into an ear-worm – you certainly don't have to be a musician to experience them.

God's presence in our life, and the anticipation of Christ's birth during this busy Advent season can sometimes feel like an ear-worm: it can create joy, or it can sit in the background while we perform the tasks at hand.

But the prophet Jeremiah invites us to a newer, deeper experience of God in Jesus: an experience that moves from the unconscious to the conscious. We are invited to experience God with our entire being: with our heart, *and* our mind. It is an invitation to listen to the voices of our loved ones, to pay attention to strangers, to participate in the music of the season with real presence, with real consciousness, with real love. Jeremiah challenges us in this time of tradition to be open to newness, to listen as if we are hearing for the first time.

Jeremiah invites us to turn that ear-worm into a symphony!

“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.”

Prayer: Dear God: in this season of the senses, let us renew our covenant with you to be deeply present in our minds and in our hearts throughout these days. *Amen*

Gerald

Gerry is Music Minister at WVUC and world- renowned Choir Director. We particularly like seeing him ride his motor-bike to church when Carmen, the dog, sports her “shades”

Saturday, December 19th, 2014

Please read Micah 5:2-5a

Mentioned fourteen times in the Old Testament, six times in the New, the “Little Town” of Bethlehem has a big history. One of the sweetest love stories in the Bible took place here when Ruth, a Moabite widow, settled in the town and married her kinsman-redeemer Boaz. This strengthened the line from which Jesse’s son David was born, making it necessary for Joseph, who was descended from the house of David, to travel here for the census which had been decreed, even although his wife, Mary was heavily pregnant.

Our passage today is from the short book of the prophet Micah, who lived in the time of Isaiah, about seven hundred and fifty years before the birth of Christ. To those in Judah who would listen, he warned that judgment was coming, but added the promise of a Ruler being born in this very town, one who would “shepherd” them and bring security and peace. Micah risked ridicule at the time, but we can look back across centuries and millennia and see that he was right.

If Micah could relate a message from God telling of an event that would happen generations after his death, why do we find it so hard to trust God for tomorrow?

As this anniversary of the promised Messiah approaches, you may have things weighing on your mind, robbing you of the peace that God can supply. Take a moment now to put these cares in God’s hands. Leave them for the Prince of Peace to handle for you.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord, “plans to prosper and not to harm.
“Plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11.

Prayer: Eternal God, you prepared the place for Jesus to be born many centuries ahead of time. All-seeing, All-knowing God, help us to believe that each day you are planning for us as we agree with the New Creed “We are not alone”. *Amen.*

Liz

Liz is the Wednesday morning volunteer and helps create the Large Print Hymn sheets. She loves all the neat volunteers that pop up in the office as well as the interesting visitors.

Sunday, December 20th, 2015

Please read Luke 1: 26-36

The Christmas Pageant for the re-telling of the age old story has been an essential involvement and fond memory for me over the years, way back to the time of Tom Oliver in the ’70,s. There has been little change in the script which sets out in seven episodes the Christmas Story allowing hymns, choir and or solos in between.

With the willingness of parents and youth leaders for the casting of parts, for costuming and make up (beards for shepherds) along with the brief rehearsals following three Sunday services, the pageant takes shape. Roles assigned: Mary, Joseph, Shepherds and sheep (lambs for the very young). Wise Men, Innkeepers , then of course the host of Heavenly Angels. The Angel Gabriel and with King Herod (crown and sword) carefully considered for the two main speaking roles. Finally on the Saturday morning before the service the essential dress rehearsal, always a problem with soccer games and other activities. Will the Pageant ever be ready for presentation in the morning ? Somehow it always is !

Working with young children, you never know just what they might do experience. I recall one time when Mary places the just born baby in the crib. Instead of revealing the baby from a wrapped covering she carried--- for this birth she had her own idea and produced the baby from under her skirt, to the delight of the congregation. She knew a thing or two this no-nonsense Mary ! So Many rich and fulfilling memories being part of this annual happening over so many Christmases involving such a gathering of children , dedicated volunteers and of course the richness of the always carefully chosen music.

The final scene, the gathering of readers and costumed characters around the baby Jesus for the singing of Away -in -a Manger. Could anything be more moving !

It is Christmas to me. May it continue in one form or another for all the years to come.

Prayer: God so loved the world that He gave us the best Christmas present of all. His only son. And we can give Jesus the best Christmas present of all, remembering that Christmas is His birthday. *Amen*

Michael

Michael is often around WVUC, assessing paintings for the Flea Market, hanging banners or helping in the kitchen.

Monday, December 21st, 2015

Please read Luke 1:39-45

In this reading, one of the first chapters of the Christmas story, we hear about Mary rushing to the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth to share her miraculous news. The Christmas story continues with the familiar chapters of Joseph taking Mary to Bethlehem, the shepherds leaving their flocks behind to look for the stable, the three “wise guys” (as our daughter, Madelyne, called them when she was a toddler) coming from the east following the star etc. On reflection, so much of the Christmas story references MOVEMENT and the idea of travelling to a destination to connect with others--whether family or strangers--as part of a community focused on the miracle of Christ's birth.

By the time this devotional is read, the modern day movements of Christmas will be well-upon us: people packing into vehicles with the presents and trinkets for others, people heading to the airport to leave or to pick up, homes being speedily cleaned, frantic runs to the grocery store to find perhaps the last decent turkey, guest rooms being primed; all of this traffic and bustle is a well-understood phenomenon of Christmas. Movement. Travelling. Anticipation. Preparation. Though we recognize this in modern life it is interesting to think that this has been part of the Christmas experience since the very beginning.

We remember a very special time of movement and travel dating back to Christmas of 1998 when our two families (some living locally and others from Ontario and Manitoba) came together to share Christmas in a rented chalet in Whistler. It was the first—and as it turned out, the only—time when our entire families were able to be together in one place for the holidays. It was pretty special - and a rather monumental undertaking involving planes, trains and automobiles. Some of us took the train from Pemberton station in North Vancouver on a crisp and snowy evening for what seemed like our own “Polar Express” adventure; some of the group were driving there after taking flights which had been delayed by eastern snowstorms. We all remember how wonderful it felt to be greeted at the front door of the chalet with everyone so happy at being together, safe and warm.

On Christmas morning, everyone sat in a big circle around the little Christmas tree we had brought up. Terry and I handed around some special Christmas cards: one for every member of the family. We asked them to wait to open them all at the same time. (“I think it’s a cruise someone exclaimed hopefully) The cards said things like “Merry Christmas Grandma and Grandpa” and “Merry Christmas to an Awesome Uncle”. What made these cards particularly special was that inside each one was the first ultrasound picture of our baby who would be the

first grandchild and nephew to the MacKenzie family and the third grandchild for the Honcharuk family. The joy and emotion was overwhelming, and it was a beautiful moment that none of us will ever forget. We had travelled from far and wide, gathering to celebrate the birth of Jesus, together as a family.

Whether we physically travel to be with others, or with our church family to celebrate Christmas, we are reminded that we are all travellers united in Spirit on a journey together to seek and celebrate Christ, the light of the world.

Prayer: Lord, be our guide and our protector as we journey to be closer to you. Keep us always moving towards you, the Light of the World, mindful that YOU are what Christmas is all about. Help prepare our hearts to receive your abundant gifts of hope, love, joy and peace that, with your grace, we may live our lives to share these blessings with all of your world. In the name of your precious son Jesus we pray. *Amen.*

Heather and Terry

Heather and Tony worked with the group from WVUC that went to Ensenada, Mexico, to build houses for local families.

Tuesday, December 22nd, 2015

Please read Isaiah 11: 6-9

*...the wolf will live with the lamb,
...the leopard will lie down with the goat,
The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.*

*They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea".*

Years and years ago, when I was a girl in England, it snowed one Christmas like no other. Snow was deep and lay in heaps everywhere like wet laundry. Snow on snow on snow....

No one came out of their houses except the man across the street, dragging a sack of coal home to his wife. Nothing moved except the tiny yellow Blue Tits, who flitted about from door step to door step, chipping at the silver tops of the milk bottles for the frozen cream. During the days, the clouds dissolved and the sun warmed the frozen Hertfordshire countryside. The snow softened like wet meringue; icicles dripped and the thorny tips of the black hawthorn poked through the snow on the hedgerows. Repeatedly every night, snow would fall and the temperatures would collapse. Over and over this happened until the frozen landscape became like a formless glossy confection.

One frigid night, the sky was clear and the moon was a brilliant orange. My father got up from his chair by the kitchen fire, put on his boots and his scratchy wool jacket and tuque, and said quietly, "Come on Mare. Let's go out."

We stepped out of the gate and into an unknown land. The mounds of iced snow were like whipped bowls, overflowing with shiny batter. It was impossible to tell where the road ended and the path began. The snow glistened, gold and orange and the frozen fields were heaped with Sticky Toffee Pudding. We trudged up the crisp car tracks to the top of the first field and looked down on our cottage below, buried like gingerbread under whipped cream and toffee sauce. I wondered, is this place home or have we stumbled into Heaven? Had the twigs and branches we gather nightly for firewood turned to white chocolate? Were the summer pastures now piled high with fluffy scones and clotted cream? Was the brook now frozen barley sugar? The world was inside

out: suddenly filled with sugarplums - what was soft was hard, what was dark was light; what was bitter was sweet.

My father said, Come on Mare, and he took my mittened hand. Together we stepped over the hardened brook and up onto the three foot deep, ice-glazed field of snow. We stood amazed on top, neither of us breaking through the crust! And then, like taking a spoon to a glassy crème brûlée, I raised one boot and stomped down, heel first, shattering the crisp glaze, my foot sinking to the fluffy snow below. Laughing we both did this, and took another step, and another and another, until we looked back at the path of our deep tracks. It was like writing on a huge white Christmas cake. We both knew what to do next and, as we stomped out our message, we sang at the tops of our voices, our steaming breath illuminating the frigid night:

*Good King Wenceslas looked out,
On the Feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about,
Deep and crisp and even.
Brightly shone the moon that night,
Though the frost was cruel.
When poor man came in sight,
Gathering winter fuel.*

Later that week, as the snow began to finally melt, my father and I would look up the hill from our cottage window to the top field and smile. No one knew who had left the Word, but we had been to Heaven and back and had shared the message.

Noel! declared the field. Noel! Noel!

Prayer: Creator God, surprise us with the beauty around us, within us and between us. Help us to bring Heaven to our daily lives on earth. Keep our eyes open to your Grace. Amen.

Mary

Mary was a faithful member of WVUC choir for many years, but a move to Roberts' Creek made it impractical to continue. Recently she illustrated the children's book, "A Giraffe Named Geranium". (Available in the Church Library)

Wednesday, December 23rd, 2015

Please read: Luke 1:57, 76-80

Today's scripture reading is about the birth of John the Baptist. It talks about preparation, the tender mercy of our God and giving light to those who sit in darkness.

Preparation makes me think about preparing for Christmas. My family has lots of different ways for preparing for Christmas. One of them is decorating our Christmas tree at the beginning of December and also the tradition of me and Claire pushing our parents to put up the Christmas tree. Last year's Christmas tree preparation was very interesting. Our cat, Mellie, was very curious about the Christmas tree. He was only 8 months old and this was his first Christmas. He climbed into the Christmas tree and started to explore. While we were decorating, everything that we put up, he took down. Eventually, he jumped out of the tree and that was that, but only for that night. Throughout the Christmas season, he climbed the tree many, many times!

The tender mercy of our God makes me think about the gentle touch of when someone gives me a hug. It reminds me of Mary caring for Jesus. God sent his only son as a baby that Mary cared for. Jesus didn't come as a grown up. He came as a baby. Maybe this was to teach us that we should care for each other like how Mary cared for Jesus; with gentleness and compassion.

Giving light to those who sit in darkness makes me think about when people who sit in darkness are helped by people who shine light upon them. This can be when people who don't have a lot, are helped by people who have many things. It can also be like when a person shares a few nice words or a smile with someone who is sad. I hope that I can shine a light on someone's darkness this Christmas and I encourage you to do the same.

Prayer: Hey God, thank you for Christmas. It's a great time for people to get together to share laughter and celebrate the birth of Jesus. Remind us that we can be a light in the darkness for people that are in the shadows. In Jesus name, we pray, *Amen*.

Robbie

Robbie has been coming to WVUC with his family since birth. He loves Sunday Club and is a leader-in-training for Vacation Bible School.

Thursday, December 24th, 2015

Please read Luke 2:1-20

Life is full of uncertainties and unknowns, obstacles and scary situations. Growing up, I was always told that life would get easier, and that things would be less complicated when I got older. Well, they lied. The challenges I faced as a child are gone, but each day brings new things to overcome and learn to cope with.

This past year has presented its fair share of challenges. Since May, a number of friends have passed away, my long term partner and I split, two friends stepped out of my life, I broke a rib, and was diagnosed with a chronic illness. It had seemed that at every turn there was a new obstacle with another pitfall and another loss. After receiving the diagnosis of my chronic illness I decided it was time to make some changes.

I started eating three meals a day and getting more involved with my nutrition. I began exercising and thinking more about the health of my surroundings. I looked at the people in my life and thought about why they were there. I started spending more time doing the things I love with the people I love. My health improved, and I formed deeper connections with the important people around me.

Life doesn't stop presenting challenges, and it continues to be full of uncertainties, but as I grow I learn more strategies of how to deal with life's lessons. While the passing of a loved one, or a diagnosis can be scary things, they are also an opportunity to reflect on life and draw your attention away from distractions and back to the important things in life.

Prayer: When life's lessons seem too much to bare, Lord, give us the strength to look around at the beauty that surrounds us and reconsider what life has to offer. *Amen*

Tristan

Tristan is a long-time member and gifted soloist with WVUC choir.

Friday, December 25th, 2015

Forty two years ago Helen and I were celebrating Christmas on our first Pastoral Charge in rural Manitoba. The birthing of Jesus was a little more on our minds that year as Helen was pregnant with our first child, due in a few months. While pondering Mary's delivery in a humble stable somewhere near Bethlehem with Joseph presumably close by, we recounted the events recorded by both Matthew and Luke: Angels, Shepherds, Magi, dreams, Herod, escape! Our night was not to be disturbed by heavenly or unexpected strangers, but by a couple

of parishioners (now dear friends) who tried to make us feel at home in this town of 180 souls. Like Joseph and Mary, our dreams were filled with thoughts of our future and the baby's; to be raised so far from what we had both known.

When Bruce was born, delivered by the Chair of the Church Board at Kenton and attended by the Sunday School Teacher of Shiloh, Doctor Hames' nervous singing of the "Teddy Bear's Picnic" was overtaken with our laughter and tears of joy as we held our son for the first time. Our thoughts quickly spun back to that Christmas night when we had thought about Mary and Joseph holding their firstborn son, Jesus. Their joy and dreams must have been what all parents have and hope for. How could they ever have imagined what would transpire? Both Gospel writers indicate that they had some inkling from what the angel had said but did they really comprehend what lay ahead? Mark Lowry says it best in his poem that follows:

Mary did you know that your baby boy will one day walk on water?
Mary did you know that your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?
This child that you've delivered, will soon deliver you.

Mary did you know that your baby boy will make a blind man see?
Mary did you know that your baby boy will calm a storm with his hand?
Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?
And when you kiss your little baby, you have kissed the face of God.

The blind will see, the deaf will hear and the dead will live again.
The lame will leap, the mute will speak, the praises of the lamb.

Mary did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?
Mary did you know that your baby boy will one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect Lamb?
This sleeping child you're holding is the great I am.

Prayer: Loving God, may we all be blessed with the presence and influence of the Christ Child today and in whatever future awaits us! *Amen*

Rev Dal

Rev. Dal is retired from ministry in the UCC. He helps at WVPC as Life Events Minister and keeps fit as an active participant in "Fit Fellas" when he is not travelling.

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