



**West Vancouver United Church**

**Advent Devotions 2016**

**Sunday, November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Please read Psalm 119:105

What is God's will for my life? Am I on the right path? When I come to a fork in the road, which choice should I make?

We all know those times in life when we feel uncertain about our direction. We want clarity but we know only confusion. The good news is that God doesn't leave us in the dark. Not only does God give us a path, but God also provides a lamp to light the way.

The colourful light of the rainbow reminds me of this good news.

The Sea to Sky highway is a stretch of coast where the rain can come in the form of sudden and heavy downbursts followed by a brilliant sun that provides the perfect formula for rainbows. In fact, these conditions treated me to a brilliant double rainbow in mid-September. It was breath-taking.

Each time I see the gorgeous light of the rainbow I am reminded of God's covenant of faithfulness with us. God will always penetrate my deepest darkness and help me to discover the next step along the path.

God penetrates the darkness of the world with the surest light that is born at Christmas. It is a light available to all creation, a light of enduring hope in God and in God's ways — rain or shine!

**Prayer:** *Lord God, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Thank you that you don't leave us in the dark, alone. You give us light. Your Word instructs us. Your wise people provide counsel, and your Spirit leads us. May your will be done on earth and in our lives. In the name of Jesus, the light of the world. Amen.*

Rev. Philip Newman

**Monday, November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Please read Zechariah 9:9

***"Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See your King comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey."***

As a little girl one of my fondest memories is receiving Richard Scarry's *Christmas Animal Story Book* from Santa and it has been a Christmas favorite ever since, with my children and grandchildren as well. *The Long Ago Donkey* was the favorite of the tales, telling the Christmas Story from the donkey's perspective. Included with the book was a sweet little donkey ornament for the tree. Over the years the ornament disappeared and I have never found one with the same sweet and humble look. The story's premise is that the lowly donkey on Christmas Eve is being questioned by the other animals as he is not as grand, or as important or as useful as the others. He quietly answers them by telling the story of having been chosen to carry Mary to Bethlehem and being present for Jesus' birth and later to carry him on his journey to Jerusalem as the King of Hope and Peace.

This Advent may we take the time to reflect on that hope and peace. To figure out what it means to live in the tensions between God's kingdom and the other empires that surround us. So maybe in this season of Advent there is an opportunity to pause and reflect on what it means to follow the Prince of Peace who comes humbly to us as a baby in a manger and then again humbly to the cross.

*Prayer: Jesus, we thank you for humbling yourself to live among us and we praise you that you are our Prince of Peace. Amen*

Madelyne

**Tuesday, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Please read : Psalm 30: 1-5

***“Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning” Ps 30:5b***

Oh, the tears that God has seen and heard from me over the years! But, joy comes WITH the morning. Praise Him for that continual hope on the horizon.

When we first moved to Vancouver six years ago, it was with two pre-teens, four suitcases, and a TWO-year adventure plan! OUR TWO year plan.....if only we knew then that God had other ideas.....

After six months, Gary’s work situation changed that locked him into a three-year contract. We had to adjust our thinking. Realising that we’d have to reapply for Permanent Residency before it expired, we decided to apply for citizenship instead giving us the option to stay if we needed to. We thought we had it perfectly timed, but the Citizenship application came with major delays, resubmissions, mountains of paperwork, frustration and many tears. And the window for our kids finishing school in South Africa narrowed. Part of God’s plan? Part of God’s timing?

Here we are, dual citizens of two magnificent countries, having options to live in both; a Canadian passport which opens doors of opportunities for our kids’ futures in work and travel. And we are filled with joy knowing that God has provided us with these opportunities and experiences, thanks to His timing and not ours!

*Prayer: Dear Lord, we praise you and thank you for the plans you have for us, plans to prosper us and not to harm us, plans to give us a hope and a future! Amen*

Dawn

**Wednesday, November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Please read: Psalm 147:11

***The Lord delights in those who fear him,  
who put their hope in his unfailing love.***

We are the Boutin family, Chris, Christine, and Melanie. It wasn’t always this way. As a matter of fact, Christine and I met not more than seven years ago. Yes, it’s true. Good things are definitely worth waiting for and there definitely is such a thing as love at first sight. So, just over six years ago, we were married. And a year or so after that, we bought our first home together – a lovely little condo in North Van.

Now, what happens next is quite tragic but don’t worry. It ends well. Shortly before we met, Christine was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation. In an effort to help her heart, she was prescribed several medications and had a pacemaker implanted in her chest. These have helped a lot but haven’t been without their cost. The drugs have definitely sent her system for a biological spin.

It gets worse. It always does before it gets better. A few months after we bought our condo, I was struck by a vehicle while walking home from work. It was a dark and rainy night (shouldn’t that be the beginning of this tale?), and the driver was too hasty, and I was in the wrong place at the wrong time, and so bang, I went down.

Crack went my left knee. Smash went my left shoulder. And snap went two of my ribs. I recovered in hospital for a while, and then faced months of rehabilitation so that I could walk again and regain full motion in my left shoulder.

OK, this is where it starts to get better. But not all at once. I began the slow road to recovery, and we learned that Christine was expecting a baby. A miracle, of sorts, considering my condition and the chemicals that were floating around in her body that could have prevented such a thing from happening. While conducting tests, the doctors discovered that Christine had heart failure. They now warned us that this would be a high-risk pregnancy and that they would need to monitor her and the baby very closely.

Our due date was January 9<sup>th</sup>! How wonderful. We might have a New Year's Baby; But that wasn't God's plan. Beginning in the second trimester, we were at the doctor's weekly. In the 33<sup>rd</sup> week of pregnancy, they conducted a non-stress test to determine how well the placenta was functioning – you know, the part that provides oxygen and nutrients to the baby. Oops! It wasn't doing so well. We knew this was coming, we'd been warned that if the doctors felt at any time that either mother or baby were at risk, they'd go to the next stage.

And so, on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012, seven weeks ahead of schedule, Melanie Patricia Boutin was born prematurely weighing a mere 3 lbs. 12 oz. She was very tiny but feisty, ready, and determined to thrive. Her birthing cry was strong and loud, allaying any fears of underdeveloped lungs. Her ultrasound measurements had already revealed that she had all her parts and pieces and all were functioning as they should, but now we could see this for ourselves. Still, she had to spend her first days out of the womb in an incubator connected to monitors and had to be fed oxygen through a tube to ensure that she continued to breathe. Meanwhile, Christine was recovering from a C-Section while nurses monitored her heart functions. Within a few days, she was released from hospital but Melanie had to stay in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) so that she could continue to get the around-the-clock care that she needed. We visited every day, stayed as long as we could, then headed home, exhausted and empty handed, feeling more and more anxious about when we would be allowed to bring our baby home. Would it be in time for Christmas? Every day seemed longer than the previous and there was always the fear of complications as is so frequently the case with premature babies.

On December 12<sup>th</sup>, we received the best news. This is where it gets good. Melanie was being discharged the next day! She was to be home before Christmas. There was no tree, no decorations, no stockings hanging on the mantle, and it was the happiest Christmas ever.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, all you ask is that we have faith and keep hope in our hearts that your unfailing love will carry us through. We thank you and praise you, always, for the grace that you bestow upon your beloved. Amen.*

Chris

**Thursday, December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016**

Please read Romans 12:9-13

The phrases that resonate for me in this reading are 'Let love for our brotherhood breed warmth of mutual affection' and 'practice hospitality'.

My method of spreading love is to take music to people at Christmas time, and also other times of the year, but particularly with singing Christmas carols. I am asked to play for carol singing at various locations over the Christmas season, and also have created a group of Seniors called 'The Londoners' who take music and sing-alongs to Seniors' Care homes, etc in the community. We have even been known to perform at Caring Ministry lunches. I know that singing builds a feeling of community, and also releases endorphins which are the 'feel good' hormones.

We have a great tradition of carol singing in Dundarave, where some friends hold a big party for the neighbourhood every Christmas, at which I play for the carol singing. This has been going on for 30 years

John and I also 'practice hospitality'. The image of hospitality for which we strive is inspired by the One who is born at Christmas and who's invitation is to open our lives to the people and possibilities around us. With large garden parties, when we can find an anniversary to celebrate, as well as theme parties, e.g. Scottish for Robbie Burns, English on Shakespeare's birthday/ St Georges Day. Many in this community know they can rarely get away from a Peirson party without a sing along.

*Prayer: Creator of the Universe, we give you thanks for Christmas. Not just for the birth of your Son, who showed us how to live, but also the opportunity it creates to keep in touch with friends all over the world, and share expressions of love with those around us. Amen.*

Marny

**Friday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016**

Please read Matthew 22: 8-10

8 Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet. 10 Those slaves went into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad, so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

### **Two Faces of Faith**

Sunday School was very important in my childhood: the pleated skirt, blazer, patent leather shoes, crowned with a white felt hat, or a straw with a posie. Each Sunday children sat in the front pew until after the first hymn and gazed at the arched, stained glass windows, especially the figure with long black hair, lambs at his knee.

Once I dropped a hymn book and the white-gowned minister glared at me. Wiggles earned more frowns. I banged the prayer footstool and had to leave.

The fall I was eleven I heard about a different kind of church: a few rows of chairs, a table and a piano. There was clapping and saying 'Amen' during hymns, and pretty cards with Bible verses to learn for the next week.

Our minister confronted me. "What this I hear about you going to Gospel Hall?" My mother soon had it out with him!

Then it was Christmas: trees gleaming with lights, candy, prizes for perfect attendance. But I was sick— steam, Fryer's balsam – nothing worked! No prize – sick days earned half a mark.

A knock came to the door. A young woman said, "Hello! I heard about you." She handed me a Japanese orange, candy, and a book of Bible verses, treats so special to a child of the Depression.

For me so long ago that humble place and the people there still embody the spirit of love, the heart of Christ's message to the world, of the meaning of life itself.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, as we approach the season of celebration of the birth of Jesus, may we always be mindful of the needs of others less fortunate than ourselves. Help us to extend a welcome to all by fostering a place where the rules are not so important as the caring welcome and the kindly smile. Amen*

Ruby

**Saturday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> , 2016**

Please read 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8

Christmas, more than any other time, brings back memories to me of my grandfather, who personified this beautiful scripture. My parents were divorced when I and my sister and brother were very young - an unusual thing in those days and as always traumatic to a family. I was sent to live with my grandparents to help my mother cope. My grandmother had long been in a depressed state since losing a daughter, so my grandfather was already having to look after her and the home on his own while still working. My grandfather also took on supporting my mother and the two younger children financially. This went on for many years and for as long as he lived he was always there to help us all, with never a thought for himself.

As a family I cannot imagine how we would have managed without this "rock" of a man . He was also there for anyone else who needed help - our small community always went to him if there was a need. He never asked for anything for himself except for all of his broken family to reunite at Christmas at his home. And because of our love and respect that is what happened - even though it was a difficult trip to our remote community. My mother, eventually with a new family, and my father also with a new family, would be there. My memories of those Christmases with him are going up in the woods to cut the tree, stringing many lights, bringing out the old decorations and stocking up on lots of food and drink as he was a great host and took such delight in having everyone together.

I don't know what made my grandfather such a good person, but I do know I have never met another that showed his love for people as he did - much as this scripture describes. He did not start going to a church until retired where he had Mennonite neighbours that he liked - I guess they welcomed him because they recognized that he truly lived the Christian principles that we all try to follow.

*Prayer: Dear God, everyone needs a "rock" like this in their life, especially during this time of Advent. May we be that person to others as we live as Jesus wanted us to live and inspire others around us to do the same. In His name we pray, Amen.*

Pat

**Sunday, December 4<sup>th</sup> , 2016**

Please read Psalm 24:1-6

*Who can ascend the eternal mountain? Who can rise to the place where holiness dwells? The clean of hands and the clear of heart.... Such ones will carry with them a blessing from God.... This is the generation of those who seek out your wonder. [trans. Rabbi Pamela Greenberg from *The Complete Psalms*]*

Did you note a tone of judgement in this Psalm? We usually think of Advent as the time of preparing for the coming of Jesus. In times past, when Christians thought of the coming of Jesus, they thought of a great day of judgement. Advent had shades of the self-examination of Lent. (Some might even remember when our Advent candles were purple as in Lent, instead of blue.)

Today, however, many face the thought of God coming to our world very calmly. We have become so attuned to the message of God's love and grace, taking in the pleasant aspects of the faith, we forget that God also places certain demands on those who would follow him. Psalm 24 speaks of people who have "clean hands" and "pure hearts" as they go about the work of God in the world.

This psalm is an invitation for us, in the midst of this season of glad tidings and festive activities, to once again examine how our lives live up to God's expectations. As Christians, our hope is in a God who is with us in our self-examination and offers us the assurance of the grace of Divine presence, not just at Christmastime, but every day of the year.

*Prayer: O Holy One, you are with me in each breath. You know the innermost secrets of my heart. Be with me today in those places of my life that I would prefer to keep hidden. May I feel your loving grace and presence the darkest corners of my being. May the light of Christ cast away despair and gloom and fill me with a great hope in You. Amen*

Rev. Dr. Michael Caveney

**Monday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Please read Revelation 1:4-8

*"... who is, and who was, and who is to come"*

It seems each year around Christmas time, as we enter into the mystery of God being born a Child, a child will ask in Sunday club "where did God come from?" We all want to know- it helps us to have certainty in our faith if we have answers to questions like these. And yet the difficult truth is that none of us were there in the beginning. None of our parents were there. And not even our parents' grandparents. History, archeology and science can't give us the complete and total truth about these things.

So where can we turn? We can marvel at the mystery of Jesus, born a fully human baby. Faith is a challenge sometimes. It requires us to trust beyond the boundaries of reason, to live beyond what is comfortable and safe. We can have faith because we can experience the goodness of God at work in our lives and our world. And we can ask for the grace to know this Christ Child more dearly; who is, and who was, and who is to come."

*Prayer: Holy God, You are such a beautiful mystery. Thank you for the ways you give us glimpses of who You are, especially through the birth of your beloved Son. In this season, may we come to know you more deeply through Christ, and rest in knowing that You transcend all our questions. Amen.*

Katie and Dylan

**Tuesday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Please read Matthew 22:34-40

Early in our marriage, Conal and I relocated to Seattle, Washington from Ontario. Mac was a young toddler, I was pregnant with Keira, and we knew absolutely no one in the area.

As Keira's due date approached, our concerns about how to manage this experience on our own were growing. Given that we had only lived in the area for a few months, all of our friendships were new and we weren't sure where to turn. Would Conal be able to manage wrangling an unpredictable toddler and a wife in labour into the car and to the hospital? What would we do with Mac during labour? Would Conal be able to be present for Keira's birth? What if there were complications?

All of these questions swirled in our minds, when a brand new friend came to the rescue. Without even being asked, she offered to take Mac as soon as my labour began (day or night) and keep her for as long as we needed. What a tremendous gift that was to us. We were able to focus completely on Keira's birth, knowing that Mac was well looked after.

After Keira's birth, not only did our friend return Mac, but she also delivered bags of groceries, beautiful homemade, individually wrapped meals for our freezer (in both adult and toddler friendly versions!), and the most thoughtful little bag of 'busy' presents for Mac.

I have often thought back to this time in our lives. Although we lived in Seattle for 4 years, this friend moved away about a year into our time there. I've always thought of her as such a blessing to us – perhaps God placing someone in our path exactly when we needed it. Someone who so clearly embodied Jesus's message of loving your neighbour as yourself.

*Prayer: Dear God, you are the Lord of time and know all that we have to accomplish during this busy season. Keep us alert to the ways in which we may fill others' needs at this time. Help us to remember to see the face of Christ in those we encounter, trusting that they may see the face of Christ in us. Amen.*

Heather & Conal

**Wednesday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Please read: Isaiah 9:1,2.

The year was 1983 and we were busy making our annual Christmas plans. One afternoon in December, I received a call from my dear friend Bev with an invitation. "Would we like to join her and Roger to spend Christmas up at Egan Lake in the Chilcotin?"

After much consideration, it was decided we would head up on Boxing Day after spending Christmas with our family in Vancouver. Early on the morning of December 26<sup>th</sup>, we set out with our daughter Katherine who was just 2 years old.

It was an unusually cold and blustery day and as we headed North, the weather deteriorated with heavy snow and wind. Egan Lake is in the area of 100 Mile House where Winter weather can play havoc. It was bad driving on the Hope/Princeton Highway but we took it slow and easy.

THEN we turned off on a rural road to head towards Egan Lake hoping and praying to find our destination in the midst of a blizzard! A snow plow was unheard of and we followed the ruts in the snow, hoping not to go into the ditch. It was pitch black except for our headlights catching the snow. No houses to be seen and just fields and barbed wire fencing stretching forever.

I was actually terrified and felt like a mother bear with our daughter, Katherine. We travelled on down the country road for what seemed like an eternity, hoping we were on the right road, when suddenly, out of the deep darkness, there appeared this brilliant beaming light! It was Roger, our host, out in the storm watching for us at the crossroads.

I will never forget the sense of relief and safety this light gave me. Somehow, I had a small sense of what the promise of a "great light" must have meant to the people who walked in darkness in the time of Isaiah.

*Prayer: Oh awesome Heavenly Father, you are the light of the world – fill our hearts with your love and our minds with your peace. Amen.*

Sheila

Thursday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Please read: 1 John 2:7-11

### God's New Commandment

*1 John 2:8 ...the new commandment...  
is true in him and in you...*

Just before Christmas when I was young some relatives came to visit us in our home. They began to make some disparaging remarks about some other family members who were not present. My father was so outraged he asked them to leave the house immediately if they were going to continue to be that disrespectful of other family members. My brother and I were astonished for two reasons, firstly that anyone would dare be disrespectful of family members and secondly, that our father acted so insistently and risked offending our guests in order to uphold a value that is important in our family. Generous hospitality was a very important value too but we were absolutely not allowed to criticize other family members.

My father's behaviour set such an example for us about what constitutes loving behaviour. We may all agree that we love God by loving our neighbour but we may disagree on the best way to do that. Having the courage to speak up and set an example about respecting others and asking others to do the same was a good life lesson for us. We show our love for God by respecting those around us, by being willing to see the light in them as children of God. The way we talk shapes our behaviour and affects those around us. Our father expected us to respect others as God expects us to respect others. Behaving in a loving way makes a difference and makes the world a better place. We children were listening as God is listening.

Thankfully, with God's grace (and my father's wisdom), we hosted a lovely and harmonious Christmas gathering which included ALL of our family.

*Prayer: May the Holy Spirit guide us so that we know where we are going, what we are doing and what we are saying, so that we may love others, abide in the light and have no cause for stumbling. Amen.*

Lynda

Friday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Please read Isaiah 35: 1-10

*“v 10...And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,  
and come to Zion with singing;  
Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
They shall obtain joy and gladness,  
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”*

Many of you will remember the songs that come out of the dark days of the Second World War. One in particular, made popular by Vera Lynn, expressed the longing for that day when the war would finally be over and the world would be at peace.

*“ There'll be blue birds over the white cliffs of Dover  
Tomorrow, just you wait and see,  
There'll be love and laughter and peace for ever after  
Tomorrow, when the world is free.”*

Long before, during the dark days of their exile, the Hebrew people, too dreamed of better days. A time when God would intervene in a new way and finally bring His kingdom of peace and righteousness.

Their prophets spoke of that new day when the Messiah would come to save and redeem His people. Some saw the coming Messiah as a Warrior King – like David who would come again and restore Israel to its former power and glory. That was the popular belief of those times.

But one of the greatest of their prophets – Isaiah- understood that God’s kingdom would be established not through the sword, but through the power of love.

The Messiah would come, he said, not with the pomp and circumstance of earthly power, but as a Servant and Healer and One, who through the sacrifice of his own life, would save his people from the bondage of their sin.

It is surely God’s will that all people should be set free from oppression and injustice – but Isaiah knew so well that people could be politically free and still be in bondage. That true freedom peace and justice begins within the minds and spirits of men and women.

He knew that if the world is to be reborn, then men and women must be born again and made new in the image of God. And so, in the fullness of time, the ancient prophecy is fulfilled and a child is born, in a stable in Bethlehem, in the days of Herod the King.

Today, we look forward to the coming of God’s kingdom, when love will triumph over hatred and prejudice; righteousness over evil and justice over oppression.

This is, after all the prayer our Lord taught us:

*“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”*

But as we pray and work for the coming of the kingdom, let us remember that our God is one who comes in the everyday events of our lives- in the unexpected- He is there at the crossroads of choice and decision – in the dark hours of grief and despair. In our moments of joy and celebration God is closer than we think.

For this Advent meditation, we would like to share a poem by a contemporary Author, Ann Weens.

#### The Coming of God.

*Our God is one who comes to us in a burning bush, in an angel’s song in a newborn child.*

*Our God is the one who cannot be found locked in the Church, not even in the Sanctuary.*

*Our God will be where God will be with no restraints, no predictability.*

*Our God lives where Our God lives. And destruction has no power and even death cannot stop the Living.*

*Our God will be born when God will be born. But there is no place to look for the one who comes to us. When God is ready God will come. Even to a God-forsaken place like a stable in Bethlehem.*

*WATCH For you do not know WHEN God comes.*

*Watch that you might be found WHENEVER, WHEREVER God comes.*

**Prayer:** *Guide us, O God by your word and the Holy Spirit that in your light we may see light; in your truth find freedom; and in your will discover our peace and joy, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Rev. John & Joan G.

Rev. John Gouws passed into eternal life on May 7<sup>th</sup> this year. This devotional is reprinted from the Advent Devotional of 2012, with the permission of his life-long partner, Joan.

**Saturday, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Please read Haggai 2:4-7

“...For I am with you,’ declares the Lord Almighty. ‘This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.’... I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the Lord Almighty.

Christmas is our family’s favourite holiday, not just for the gifts and two weeks off of school, but the time our family could really spend together and celebrate the true meaning of Christmas, which is the welcoming of the life of Jesus on earth. This scripture really takes me back to the times of the Christmases we spent with our family back in Toronto. Of course coming to Vancouver was awesome, but we were spending Christmas somewhere different from what we were used to. The words that stood out to me from this scripture, “...For I am with you. And my spirit remains among you. Do not fear...I will fill this house with glory,” these verses give me confidence and have given our family happiness knowing that although we were far from our cousins we still had Jesus and his love. He is always with us.

**Prayer:** Lord almighty, thank you for all your love and being there with us always. Continue to guide us into the Christmas season and not let us get carried away from reality and the gifts under the Christmas tree but the gift that you have given us. *Amen*

Mariam

**Sunday December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Please read **Psalm 150**

### **Praise God and Dance!**

Doing a little research on this passage, I noticed that Duke Ellington once organized a series of three ‘Sacred Concerts’ taking their theme from Psalm 150:4 – “Praise God with tambourine and dance!”

I am not a jazz expert but those who study the genre note that jazz musicians need to know their music and their instruments at an exceptionally high level. With inspiration and creativity borne of an ‘inner hearing’ plus interacting with others, something begins to happen. The process is intuitive, free and almost impossible to define in an analytic sense. The ‘spirit’ of the moment guides the music.

Psalm 150 is unique in not giving the reasons for praise to God. All the reasons have been well discussed in the 149 previous psalms. Every human failing, every challenge to living lives of obedience and faithfulness have been listed and presented to God in word and in song.

Finally comes the insight, the revelation – It has been building like a simple tune from Psalm 145 onward. Praise increases as the wonder of God’s creation, love and grace is experienced in community. The song is known but now other voices and instruments join in. This is the opportunity for every living creature to praise God – in the heavens, in the sanctuary, with voice and instrument, with dance.

Advent, like many of the Psalms, helps us to consider the obstacles to obedient faith, but Christmas holds forth the promise of our participating in the joy of God. Pure gift, pure blessing – our only response is praise.

**Prayer:** *Thank you God for this season of Christmas and for the opportunity for even us ‘serious Christians’ to hear the music ‘beyond the music’ to ‘praise God and dance’! Amen.*

Rev. Glenn Inglis

**Monday, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Please read Please read Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

*Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand,  
the son of man you have raised up for yourself.  
Then we will not turn away from you;  
revive us, and we will call on your name.  
Restore us, LORD God Almighty;  
make your face shine on us,  
that we may be saved.*

There is an exercise often performed at choir workshops in which participants are invited to place their right hand on the left shoulder of the singer next to them as a song is being sung. A beautiful living chain of sound is thus physically connected. Through your right hand you become wonderfully aware of the breathing, the sound vibrations, and the positive energy you receive from the singer beside you, while through your left shoulder you are equally aware of the passing on of this musical/physical experience to the person on your left. As well, placing one's hand on another's shoulder is akin to giving a blessing: the passing on of God's richness and gift of unconditional love to the person on your right, while simultaneously receiving the same gift from the person on your left.

Perhaps, the Psalmist in the words "the son of man" is referring to the promised arrival of Jesus into the world, the very arrival we are awaiting in twelve day's time with such great anticipation at the celebration of Christ's mass.

Either way, there is such hope in these words for we who endure the rain-soaked, light-deprived days of December here the Lower Mainland. What a comfort it is to hear words such as "revive", "restore" and even "shine". Rather than overwhelm us, perhaps this year the busy-ness of the season with its message of sharing, blessing, and the irremovable presence of God might resonate through us as we stand and sing those wonderful carols together.

***Prayer:** May the love that God expressed through the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ, revive, restore and shine on us all. Amen.*

Cora & Gerry

**Tuesday, December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Please read Psalm 33: 20-22

*"We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you."*

Christmas is a time of hope. Children hope Santa will bring them what they asked for.

Parents hope the children, as they tear the festive paper off their gifts, will take time to be thankful. Mothers hope the turkey will be cooked in time for dinner.

My RCMP father was "Santa" in the Manitoba towns of Russell and Minnedosa where we lived. On Christmas Eve my sisters and I would fill small bags with candy and wrap toys in festive paper, all donations from local merchants. Dad would dress in his "Santa" suit, have my Mother put rouge on his cheeks and nose, then he would climb into a horse-drawn sleigh. His helper would stow the big, red bag of gifts and with a jolly "ho, ho, ho" they would be off to deliver Christmas cheer to underprivileged children. We went to bed happy to have been able to share Christmas joy.

Hope saw us through the hard times when money was scarce, in times of sickness, worrying about jobs, and dealing with death. My husband died of cancer at age forty-five. I became a single mom to our ten, fourteen and seventeen year old children. Over the years hope was what kept me going. My training and work in the Canadian Women's Army Corp. (1944 - 1946) helped me get back into the workforce.

Our children graduated, left home, married and blessed me with three grandchildren.

I look back over my ninety years and I am amazed and grateful for God's love and direction. I have been truly blessed.

*Prayer: Lord may your will be done, not mine. Amen*

Jean

### Wednesday, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Please read John 3:16

Gift giving is a big part of Christmas. Last year I went to see Santa Claus at the Stanley Park Christmas Train. My family and I waited patiently as the long line of children went forward to take their spot on Santa's knee. He would ask each child, "What would you like for Christmas?" I overheard lots of answers like "a teddy bear", "an X-Box", "20 skirts, "an elephant", "Barbie dolls, and then it was my turn. I sat on Santa's knee. "Madelyne, what would you like for Christmas?" and I said, "I would like for you to give my gift to someone in the world who really needs it." Santa sat still for a minute, then said, "Wow" and filled my hands up with lots of candy canes. I didn't think I had said anything special, it's just how I really felt. Santa said to the crowd of people, "Did you hear this little girl? Now that is the spirit of Christmas!"

I didn't understand what the big deal was. As nice as it is to get a gift, I think it feels way better to give a gift to someone. I think that we forget that the original gift-giver is God. This passage from the bible reminds us what Christmas is all about, it is about celebrating the greatest gift of all, Jesus, so that we have everlasting life in Heaven.

This Christmas maybe we should think about giving our gifts in a way that makes God happy. We could bring cookies to a neighbour, knit a blanket for someone who needs it, or listen to someone who really needs a friend. Give the best gift of all which is listening and caring. These are gifts we can give all year long to thank God for giving us his greatest gift, Jesus.

*Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for the amazing gift of your son, Jesus. How can we ever thank you enough for such a gift? Help us to share this gift with all the world through sharing our love. Help us to know all the ways that we can share your greatness, and may we always remember the true spirit of Christmas. Amen.*

Madelyne

### Thursday, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Please read Zephaniah 3:14-15

*“Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel!  
Rejoice and exult with all your heart...  
The Lord has taken away judgement against you.”*

Coming upon this assigned scripture and being asked to relate it to my childhood memories of Christmas, I almost shouted for joy. How is it that I was assigned a passage that so suited me? I was not permitted to **sing aloud** in our elementary school Christmas concerts. The music teacher had **judged** that I could not carry a tune and so let me to stand on stage with my classmates, but only if I promised to just mouth the words. Such a judgement might turn a sensitive child against Christmas music forever. But a neighbour lady used to take my

sister and me to church. There I could sing my little heart out—off key or not! Our Sunday School teacher even let me and another youngster sing “The First Noel” as a duet at the church’s Christmas Eve service. My non-church-going parents absolutely had to attend, and, pretend that their daughter sang well.

I still sing off-key, and usually quietly. But on Christmas Eve, or any other carol-singing occasion, I belt out “The First Noel” as if it was written for me.

*Prayer: Thank you, God, for sending your son to bring joy to our hearts. I hope many children will find the nourishing love and kindness offered by a Christian community. Amen*

Cathy

**Friday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Please read Psalm 102: 25-28

*<sup>25</sup>Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth,  
and the heavens are the work of your hands.  
<sup>26</sup>They will perish, but you endure;  
they will all wear out like a garment.  
You change them like clothing, and they pass away;  
<sup>27</sup>but you are the same, and your years have no end.  
<sup>28</sup>The children of your servants shall live secure;  
their offspring shall be established in your presence.*

On Hope – even when the familiar is fading or seemingly falling apart, God is there. There is hope that God is there, and will be there in generations to come.

Eighteen years ago, just one month before Christmas, my husband walked out. The concept of family as most of our culture recognizes it was changed. Not shattered at that instant, but to all who looked, different. Passed away. And with it, Christmas customs passed away too. New ones would take hold.

That Christmas, my daughter – barely 7 years old – noticed that there were no presents under the tree for me. Presents for her and her brother, and presents for them to give to their Dad, but nothing with my name on it. Well, she went to work. She got out tissue paper and ribbon, and went to work in the kitchen: wrapping up empty Tupperware containers. With a great sense of achievement and justice, she marched into the living room and placed these under the tree. There. There would be presents for Mummy on Christmas Day.

And on Christmas Day, she insisted that I open each of the tissue wrapped Tupperware boxes. With great satisfaction, each of those seemingly empty boxes was filled with hope, hope of joy, of happiness when none was apparent.

We don’t exchange Tupperware anymore. And even though those glass-lock containers are far superior, there are always one or two of those old plastic containers with lids that have become warped and don’t quite shut anymore jumbled about in the back of the cupboard, seemingly outdated. But each one that tumbles over and gets in the way reminds me: hope was there, hope is here, hope will be there for my daughter and all in generations to come.

*Prayer: Quietly you came, as a tiny baby. Ready my heart for the miracle of your birth. May hope and burning love take root in me and grow until they blossom on Christmas Day. Amen*

Christine

## Saturday, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Please read Titus 2 11-13

A few years ago a group of 70 people from West Vancouver took a tour to Israel and I was among that group. It was an uneasy time in Israel, as there was unrest on the Gaza Strip. As we entered Tel Aviv we were in the middle of a rocket attack and upon arrival at the hotel were shown the bomb shelters! Rather disconcerting for a group of Canadians who are so unaccustomed to the whine of rockets flying through the sky.

The next day we travelled on the highway north and passed many tanks heading to the border. Ironically, when we were at the site that we know as Armageddon, we could watch the fighter jets leaving the air base on the horizon.

The following day we were staying on the Sea of Galilee, a site that has so much meaning for Christians as we have learned the stories of Jesus around and upon the Sea. It was a Sunday morning, and we had the privilege of boarding a boat, sailing out to the middle of the Sea of Galilee and celebrating Communion. We sang "Amazing Grace" along with the Captain of our boat. Across the water we could hear other voices of other Christians on their boats with their celebration of Communion and singing together.

At Christmas, along with celebrating Jesus birth, we think about his life and the people who still walk the paths that he walked and live in stressful situations.

*Prayer: We live in the hope that the salvation that Peter promised to Titus in Crete, will be accepted by all people of Faith. May all the people of the world know the Peace that passes all understanding. May we look for Jesus' grace that is available to everyone. Amen.*

Heather

## Sunday, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Please read Matthew 28:19-20

"Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age." (The Message)

These words attributed to Jesus following His resurrection were most likely Matthew's based on an early creed summing up the Great Commission that Jesus' followers held dear and lived by. Following Jesus was not a mere assent to a belief system but it was a call to action and a life style.

Each Advent Season the church, our community and society as a whole helps us to remember our calling. As a Minister of the Gospel, it is not always easy to express one's faith or instruct anyone in the practice of Jesus' commandments. But as the Christmas Season approaches, there is magic in the air, that causes even those farthest from the centre of faith to be drawn near. Oh, there are always skeptics and those who would wish to ignore the season but overall those we meet on the street, at the Mall, at school, at work, or at play are caught up in the approaching festivities. Festivities which focus on God who broaches His Good News in a captivating story of a child, born in humble surroundings, threatened by dangerous circumstances who is revealed to be none other than God who will never leave us as we live our lives.

I've selected the translation from The Message, as I like the phrase "I'll be with you, *as you do this*." The Christmas Season is God's great reminder that being faithful, living our discipleship is not done in isolation. God is with us, each and every step of the way, since Immanuel ( ) – *God with us*, will never leave us 'til the end of time!

*Prayer: O God, Immanuel, help us to be reminded that you are never far from us. Fill this season with the expectation and joy that will carry us throughout all the challenges and difficulties we might face in our attempts to be your disciples. Strengthen us, so that our witness may be the instruction that will bring You honour, praise and glory. Help us, that ours may be a living faith that issues in action through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen*

Rev Dal McCrindle

**Monday, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Please read Jeremiah 31, 31=34.

1962 - nearly Christmas 1962 in England, the Big Freeze was upon us! Very little heat (coal could not be delivered) no water, the water pipes had frozen! Three little boys excited about Christmas! School holidays had started, our little house was freezing and so were we! We clothed in many layers and tried to keep busy. Every day was a struggle, what could we do! All we could do was hope and pray that somehow we would be able to enjoy Christmas. Bed-time was hope-and-pray time for my little boys, every day was hope-and-pray time for me!

I didn't have any idea how help could or would come, but it did! A kind neighbour brought us a box of coal! A lorry arrived with water and would come once a week! We were allowed a few hours of electricity each day and that included Christmas Day! We had been rescued and we thanked God daily for our good fortune.

*Prayer: All-knowing God, somehow may those who are suffering in so many ways in so many countries including ours, be able to find a way to cope to feel love and have hope for a future that will be better. May love and peace someday replace hatred and war. Amen.*

Jane

**Tuesday, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Please read Matthew 1: 18 – 20

“Joseph descendant of David, do not be afraid  
to take Mary for your wife.”

This passage reminds me of the faith and trust we must have in God and trust that He has a plan for us.

When I was 11 or 12 living in Windsor, Ontario with an older sister. I asked my mother for a dog or a baby sister. A teacher friend of my mother was looking for a home for her young dog, she was in an apartment. My mother brought Freckles home. I was thrilled. A short time later my mother found herself pregnant 2 yrs. past when she could conceive. You can imagine her disbelief and my dad as well. Of course I was so excited. Due to her age it was a difficult time health-wise and she was put to bed. At first they did not expect the baby to live. Their concern worsened so she was sent to a hospital in Detroit, Michigan to a specialist. My dad was at the hospital praying for my mother's safety. They were ready to do a Caesarean Section when my mother gave birth on her own. The Doctor came out of the delivery room with tears in his eyes and said to my dad, “I have just seen a miracle”.

That miracle was my sister Jeanne, who has continued to be our miracle and blessing to us. As Joseph learned; God has a plan, miracles happen if only we would have faith and believe. Jeanne is a Christian, working in her church in Truro Nova Scotia and a blessing to all, as she has been for me. Belief in Jesus Christ means nothing is impossible.

*Prayer: Dear Lord may we continue to put our Faith in you and give us the courage to follow in your ways. In the name of your son whose birth we celebrate every day with thankfulness , not just Christmas. Amen.*

Marjorie

**Wednesday, December 21<sup>st</sup> , 2016**

Please read Luke 1:39-45

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb..."

At this time, life for Mary is anything but certain. She's having a baby. She's not yet married. Also, she's young, perhaps 12 to 15 years old. This all puts her in a very vulnerable position. In this passage Mary is visiting Elizabeth. When Elizabeth hears Mary, the child in her womb (John the Baptist) leaps and Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. We see Joy breaking through to overpower the uncertainty of Mary's life. We see a glimmer of hope.

My own pregnancy with my first child, Vivian, was anything but certain. At the time of my pregnancy I was running an office downtown, so kept working until my due date. However, I was terribly ill, all day, every day. I would show up at work and only be able to get a couple of hours of work done. I had migraines for a month of my pregnancy. By the time I was five months pregnant, my pelvis had broken, and it stayed that way until Vivian was born. However, despite the problems, there were glimmers of hope. When I first felt Vivian move, I too felt joy breaking through the uncertainty. Joy that tells you all will be well.

*Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father thank you for the joy you bring to us that can overcome the uncertainty we face many times in our lives. Amen.*

Susan

**Thursday, December 22<sup>nd</sup> , 2016**

Please read Luke 1:46-55

"My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour. He looks on his servant in her lowliness; henceforth all ages will call me blessed.

The Almighty works marvels for me. Holy his name! His mercy is from age to age, on those who fear him. He puts forth his arm in strength and scatters the proud-hearted. He casts the mighty from their thrones and raises the lowly.

He fills the starving with good things, sends the rich away empty.

He protects Israel, his servant, remembering his mercy, the mercy promised to our fathers, to Abraham and his sons for ever."

My favourite expression of spirituality and faith has always been found in music. I believe music is the language we turn to when words fail us, when we wish to communicate directly with the universe. Music is the language of thought and emotion. It is the language of God.

The Song of Mary is the prayer spoken by Mary when she is visited by her cousin Elizabeth who is pregnant with John the Baptist and John stirs in Elizabeth's womb when he senses the closeness of his messiah. Perhaps this is the first moment Mary truly believes with all her heart that she is carrying the son of God, perhaps she is merely caught up in the moment, but whatever the reasons, she is moved not only to prayer but to song. The text

has been frequently set to music, perhaps most famously by J.S.Bach in his Magnificat which I had the great fortune of performing last year.

Music is magical, unknowable, and transformative. It is an essential part of life not to mention the Christmas season. Music unites people and strengthens relationships. It enhances joy, soothes grief, and it is a gift to be shared.

*Prayer: Lord, as we move through the Christmas season, let your words and music move in us and through us, helping us to connect with others and see them as they wish to be seen, as you see them. Help us to see your glory in all things and light our way as we continue deeper into the darkness. Amen*

Sophia

**Friday, December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016**

Please read Luke 1:57,76-80

*“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, when the day shall dawn upon us from on high, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace”*

In essence this is Zechariah's song giving God thanks for allowing him a vision of the coming Messiah, for whom Zechariah's own baby son, John, would be called by God to be the fore-runner, to prepare people's hearts to accept His offer of salvation.

The coming Messiah would usher in light and peace to a world in torment, much like our world today.

Growing up in Barbados, a tropical climate, our Xmas were very different from Canada as the weather was warm and sunny, although cooler than in the summer, but still in the 20's C. Xmas trees were locally cut cherry trees which were placed on a bed of white cotton wool to imitate snow, and balls of cotton wool were placed on the branches to imitate snow .

The big event was the Xmas morning service at 5 am on Xmas morning when it was pitch black and the coolest part of the day. The early English settlers had picked this time because the darkness reminded them of winter in England and the coolness gave the impression that it was not in the tropics, at least for an hour or two until the hot tropical sun came up.

It was a wonderful feeling to go to Church in complete darkness and come out of the Church into bright light of the tropical Sun, you could really feel that Christ had brought light to the world.

We too like Zechariah's son, John, have been called by God to show Christ's light and peace to others, particularly the shut-ins, the sick, the lonely, both adults and children. By doing so, we allow others to meet Christ through us. This is God's purpose for each of us, to show Him to all the other people in our lives, family members, work colleagues and those in material need.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father as we pass through the season of Advent give us the courage to promote our own Christianity and show Christ's light and peace to all people that we come into contact with without exception and encourage the participants in the brutal Civil War in Syria to see the light too and restore peace and tranquility to its innocent citizens. This we ask in Christ's Holy name. Amen*

Trevor

**Saturday, December 24<sup>th</sup> 2016**

Please read Luke 2.1-20

*<sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed  
at what the shepherds told them.*

And in those days, all the world headed home for the land of their parents for Christmas. It was no different for us as a very young couple. No longer expecting a child, but journeying with our firstborn, Morgan, to celebrate her first Christmas with family.

Like many young families, we worked hard to make ends meet. The gifts? Mostly handmade. The car? A small, used car bought before kids. The baby paraphernalia? A different story because we'd been gifted so much already. After all, Morgan was the first grandchild, the first of a new generation on both sides of the family. We experienced true generosity when she was born.

Now, how to fit all of this into that small car for a long trip? We planned the tight seating for the three of us, carefully placed a suitcase, then packed in too much of that baby gear and finally tucked gifts into the nooks and crannies that were left. The last step? Bill sitting on the hatchback to get it to latch.

We were off! No surprise, the highway packed. Fifteen minutes into our trip, that hatchback decided it didn't want to stay latched after all. It exploded open and the last packed items, the handmade gifts, flew out the back. All the work that had gone into those gifts, it was all we could think of as we pulled off to the centre median and actually backed up a bit. Cars flying past us so close, the car shaking from the turbulence. One of us got out and tried to salvage gifts while the other sat with Morgan.

Fortunately, within a minute, bright lights shone upon us. Our angel was a police officer. He quickly sized up the situation, reminding us of what is important: you are safe, you are blessed, go share that with your family. What you lost can be replaced. Of course, he was right and we restarted our journey.

Back on the road, we rode stunned for several minutes, silently lamenting all of that hard work put into those now lost gifts. Then, we remembered the wise words we'd heard Gwen's mother speak so many times, "people are more important than things." Of course!

No surprise, that Christmas turned out wonderful. The miracle of love that God created and shares with all of us ... we basked in that love with our family. Despite all those gifts we had made and lost, our gift all along was going to be Morgan, the first of a new generation that we were able to share with our family. Praise be to God!

***Prayer:** God of wonder, God of light, renew in our hearts the wonder of your love. Amaze us with your face to face favour to bring us tears of joy, songs of praise, and lives that reflect the holy peace only you can give. Glory to you, O Lord! Amen*

Gwen and Bill

**Sunday, December 25<sup>th</sup> 2016**

Please read John 1:1-5

***“The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness did not overcome it.”***

Our last grandparent, Sjoukje Smit, passed away this Fall at the beautiful age of 90. We knew her as a woman of tremendous faith - a woman who daily read Scripture, a woman who prayed for her 36 grandchildren and great-grandchildren by name every single day. At her funeral, we were reminded of the extent to which she surrendered her life to being a light in the darkest of places. At the age of 16, she was drafted into the Dutch Resistance during World War II. After immigrating to Canada, she founded her community's first food bank. Later in life, she became the first female deacon of her church. In her final years, she invested and entrusted her life experiences into the minds of young people - inviting them over for tea to listen to their dreams, and, at times, to discuss Bonhoeffer's theology!

On this Christmas day, we're reminded that the baby whose birth we celebrate today grew up to show us how to be fully human, and how to live passionately in all of our living - just like our grandmother did. What are the places around you that need joy? Or justice? Or love? Or passion? And how might God be calling you this Christmas to be the one who brings these things to your surroundings? Your love makes a difference.

To you and your loved ones, a very merry Christmas.

***Prayer:*** *God, on this Christmas day, guide our actions and guide our words, that we might live the way Jesus lived, and love those around us the way he loved them. We pray this in Jesus' awesome and holy name, Amen*

Rev. Simon and Meghan LeSieur

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