

West Vancouver United Church

Advent Devotions 2017



The ninth issue of WVUC's Advent Devotional

Advent 2017

The word 'Advent' comes from Latin and means "coming;" its purpose is to look forward to the coming of Christ to Earth; it is a season focused on waiting. So, Advent means something new is coming. The dawn of a new and better era. This is really what the Christmas season is all about, isn't it? It's the celebration of the ADVENT of a new era. God broke into time and space and entered our world" (Daniel Darling, "What Advent Is and Why We Should Celebrate").

Through prayer, we can enter into God's world and ask that our hearts be prepared in the way God prepared all of history to receive the gift of the Son. Ask the Father to use this time during Advent to cut away the distractions and make your life a place of warmth and openness. You can use the following themes to create your own Advent prayers to help you make sure there's "room at the inn" of your heart this year.

Sunday, December 3rd, 2017

Please read: 1 Thessalonians 3: 9-13

“How can we thank God enough for you...and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all.”

The scriptures throughout much of the year focus on the work of the Holy Spirit and on our roles, our tasks, our calling to be faithful disciples. But, as often revealed in scriptures, as well as our lives, we discover that we can't do it—we can't save the world, much less ourselves.

And so, we begin that strange journey called Advent. It's a season in which we hear the promise of hope. God will come. God's Kingdom will thrive.

Today's scripture begins with a word of thanks for the people.

The home I grew up in was often the centre of hospitality, witnessing gatherings too numerous to count. A gracious holiday welcome awaited family, friends, church groups, and anyone who cared to stop by. These visitations were safe and supportive places where people found restoration and friendship. Not to mention delicious Christmas baking!

I am thankful for the increase in the number of visitors to my childhood home as we moved through the month of December. The coming and going of people was a reminder that we should not navigate Advent alone. Too much depends on God's people gathering together and 'abounding in love'. Our home was the better and healthier for the many gatherings. I thank God for them all.

Prayer: As we begin our annual pilgrimage to Bethlehem, God of prophets and of the poor, may we discover you revealed in the hope that interrupts our lives this season. *Amen.*

Rev. Philip Newman

Monday, December 4th, 2017

Please read: Jeremiah 23: 5-6

“This is the day the Lord has made,
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Each Sunday as I prepare for worship, the minister's Scottish voice still resonates after almost seven decades. I was a young bride attending my first service in the United Church that became my spiritual home. As newly-weds and strangers to Victoria, Fairfield United was an important part of our lives for nearly ten years. There was service on the Church Board (men only!), the Women's Missionary Society, and Couples' Club. Our son and daughter were christened. Sunday morning meant the ritual of black patent shoes, hat and gloves, navy blazers, shirt and tie.

Then it was back to Vancouver and Knox United in Kerrisdale. The kids were involved in CGIT and Scouts and later Confirmation. Members of the Church board delivered Communion cards each quarter. My husband served as superintendent of the Sunday school and I was involved in United Church Women, the new title.

Early retirement brought a move to Crescent United and for twenty three years, it was a busy time. There were walks on the beach each week, book studies, and creative writing groups, and service as Chair of Council and Presbytery representative, and on Search committees for a new minister. Extensive renovations were fun too. There were visits to Naramata, and Pilgrimages to England and Scotland, Ireland and Germany. One Christmas, we were stranded in Halifax and our family was amazed at the numbers of letters and phone calls we received from Church members!

Then failing health brought a move to West Vancouver and we joined West Van United. I helped with the flea market and served on small committees, including the Adult Ministry. Now there is inspiration from Sunday worship, meeting friends and helping with small tasks.

So what then does Church Membership mean: Caring, Commitment, and Communion. In the words of the new Creed:

Prayer: In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us
We are not alone.
Thanks be to God. *Amen*

Ruby

Tuesday, December 5th, 2017

Please read: Isaiah 40: 3-5

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness."

I do not think we need to go to the wilderness to hear the voice of one crying. I do believe, though, we listen better to the voice of the Lord in a quiet place. In a busy, noisy city where so many of us live, surrounded with so many distractions it is so much harder to hear the voice of the Lord. We must become quiet, sit still and make ourselves available to what the Lord is telling us. Our church offers us a quiet place, to become pensive. BUT - we still have to walk to get here.

" Make straight in the desert a highway for our God".

We are GIVEN a task of paving the way. Do we walk or stay seated? Hmmm. I visualize Jesus asking us, " Where do you want to go?" We answer, " Down this mountain, through the valley below and to the top of that mountain. It looks so beautiful over there."

Jesus would likely say, "It's a good project. START WALKING. I will be right behind you. When you come across rough places, I will smooth your difficult but worthy walk. I will assist, so that all will know that with God, all is possible. You may sit and rest, but don't lie down. Remember who you are walking for, whose message you are carrying."

It makes me smile to imagine Jesus words, but I try never to forget that I am not walking for myself. I want ALL to hear the words from the mouth of the Lord. Although I feel poor, weak and not up to the task, I am able to slow down and let Him help me over the obstacles, let Him clear the road ahead.

So we ask each other. "Have you begun your walk or are you still waiting for a "sunny day" when the road has been cleared?"

Let us GET UP! START WALKING! For if all of us walk together, we will open ways for "the glory of the Lord to be revealed".

Prayer: We know you never leave any of us behind, even when we tire,
we are comforted by your grace. *Amen*

Ingelise

Wednesday, December 6th, 2017

Please read: Luke 3:1-6

In this passage, John is acting as a herald, letting us know that Isaiah's prophecy will be fulfilled and we need to prepare for Jesus' arrival. He is asking us to change ourselves from the inside out. This process of changing can happen at any age and any time.

When my children were young, I had no idea how to deal with their constant fighting. My husband and I went to a “Sibling Rivalry” course that gave us a process to deal with it. I still remember the first time I tried the process out. The kids were fighting outside. I took all their toys away and made them sit on the driveway (it was summer and warm). They couldn’t move until they each could tell me what they themselves had done or said that was wrong. There would be no punishment as long as they could acknowledge their own mistakes. I hovered around nervously. Every five minutes, Ben would tell me, “We’ve sorted it out” and Vivian would say, “We have not!” After forty five minutes, they both said they had sorted it out. They traced back the pattern of the fight something like, “I shouldn’t have hit her”, “I shouldn’t have kicked him” ,”I shouldn’t have called her a name”, etc. I was impressed by how these two young children (5 and 7) could figure out what they could have done differently.

Prayer: Thank you Lord Jesus, for the ability to change, the ability to hear your Word, examine ourselves and try to become the people You know we can be. *Amen.*

Susan

Thursday, December 7th, 2017

Please read: Malachi 3: 1-4

Advent is my favourite time of the Church year. It reminds me so much of my childhood. We prayed the Advent collect prayer every Sunday at home, as we lit another Advent candle at the centre of the supper table. With three brothers, it worked well. No fights, we had one each! I value the four weeks of Advent today as it helps me to slow down, to resist the Christmas rush and twinkles in the shopping malls, and to focus on not only the forthcoming Incarnation of our Lord at Bethlehem but also our preparation for the coming of the Lord at the end of time. This second part doesn’t really fit well with twinkly lights in the shopping mall. But as Christians, we believe that Christ will come again, and this reading from Malachi tells us that it could be sudden and asks ‘who can stand?’

Advent is a time of expectant waiting and longing, a pregnancy of hope. We will be refined and purified. When we sing in Advent ‘*O come, O come, Emmanuel*’ – we are calling for something far more overpowering and earth shattering than another Christmas in West Vancouver. We are joining Malachi and other prophets in the cry for our Lord to come again. In doing so, we must fasten our seat belts, prepare ourselves, and be ready to be transformed. To be refined, purified and become part of God’s Advent.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to prepare for your Kingdom here on earth. Lord Jesus, give us grace to be ready to be transformed, and become part of your Advent. *Amen.*

Rev. Canon Jonathan Lloyd

Friday, December 8th, 2017

Please read: Luke 1: 8-16

Zechariah was on duty. He was not just at work, or on-call; he was performing his responsibility. It was a task that God had originally given to the priests: to enter into the temple past the basin and altar for washing and sacrificing, into the temple where there were instruments to help prepare them to come close to the holy of holies. The priests were the only ones allowed to enter. Why? Because God is to be revered. The thought was that the priests would represent God's people and in turn be God's voice to the people.

Sometimes we can approach life too haphazardly, forgetting God's call to be a people set apart. Sometimes the busyness and routine of life can distract us from what God is saying and doing. Our focus dissolves and our ability to hear from God is clouded.

For Zechariah, carrying out his duties meant listening to God's voice. Through that he learned God was giving him and his wife a child that would help prepare all people for the coming of One who would save all people, and the entire world, from sin and its affects.

Maybe God won't speak to us like that. But what if God is trying and we're not listening? Perhaps God is asking us to clear away some of the clutter and create some space in order to open ourselves again in preparation for the coming Christ, to be born again in our lives and in our world.

Prayer: Holy God, like Zechariah, may you help us to step into the duties you have called us to. May you clear our vision and open us up to hear your voice so that we may be messengers of love to your world. *Amen*

Dylon and Katie

Saturday, December 9th, 2017

Please read: Philippians 1: 3-11

Paul was writing from prison to "all the saints of Christ Jesus at Philippi," together with overseers and deacons. He thanked God for them, encouraged them and prayed for them to be bold in their faith.

My two sisters and I grew up with a Royal Canadian Mounted Police father. As with ministers' sons we were expected to be "exemplary". Not always easy.

I joined the Canadian Women's army Corp.(C.W.A.C.) on my eighteenth birthday, May 10, 1944. My father saw me off on the train from Flin Flon to Winnipeg. He gave me a letter to open after I was sworn in. As the train pulled out of the station he stood in his red serge uniform and snapped off a salute. We both had tears in our eyes, knowing this was "goodbye" for an unknown length of time. It was two years before we saw each other again.

The letter he gave me said. "ADVICE TO A SOLDIER

Do your darnedest to be a good soldier, but do not forget you are a lady and a Christian. You may live in tough company, see suffering, cruelty, coarseness but do not let it get the better of you.

War is hell, but a soldier does not need to be a devil. The world is going to need a lot of women with ideals, morals and decency after the war is over. Pray God, you may be one of those women to build up what war and crime has torn down, God bless you. Dad.

Prayer: God, may our heart and ears be open to hearing you and may we be strong in our faith. *Amen*.

Jean

Sunday, December 10th, 2017

Please read: Isaiah 45: 1-3

Cyrus, of the House of Archaemenid established the Persian Empire the largest the world had ever seen around 550 B.C. stretching from Greece in the west to India in the East. Credited with upholding human rights and respect for the religions of his conquests he liberated Israel that had been held captive in Babylon, permitting them to return to their "holy land," to rebuild their Temple and nation. Because of this he was called a "messiah" or anointed one, the only Gentile to be so honoured. So unexpected that Israel saw this as a sign that God was with them and had never abandoned them even in exile.

Advent and Christmas are somewhat like that. When we least expect it, God breaks into whatever captivity we might be experiencing. All we need to do is to be open and ready to see and find God – most likely in an unexpected place, time, or event. May the season be a time for new hope, new joy and new confidence.

Prayer: O God of deliverance, help us to be ready for the unexpected this Advent and Christmas. Shine through any gloom that can overshadow our days and nights. And bring us to new places where You call us to rebuild celebrate your presence. *Amen*

The Rev. Dal McCrindle

Monday, December 11th, 2017

Please read: Isaiah 48: 17-19

This passage brings to mind issues that arose in my previous job in Health Care. I had one particular client who had multiple medical problems and ended up in the hospital. Before he was discharged, I spent a lot of time teaching he and his wife new strategies to manage his care. They were both very resistant and I found it quite frustrating. If only they would follow my instructions, then their journey would not be as difficult. I wasn't sure if they were in denial or they felt that if they complied with the changes they were giving in to the disease. Sometimes we must put our trust in someone else who is more knowledgeable so that our journey is not as difficult and leads us in the right direction.

Prayer: Teach me The Way Lord and give me the strength to follow your path. Help me walk aright, more by faith and less by sight. *Amen.*

Cindy

Tuesday, December 12th, 2017

Please read: Luke 1: 26-38

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."

I cannot imagine a more creative testimony in support of Jesus as Son of God than the one in Luke's Gospel. We celebrate the birth of Jesus through the unique experience of Luke's background as a physician. In his account Israel's guardian angel, Gabriel, tells Mary that by marriage to Joseph she will have the honour to bear a new king of David's line. Throughout Jewish history, prophets, priests and kings, and especially David, were recognized as sons of God by their faithful service of God's Spirit. Consequently, as servant of God's will, Jesus qualifies as Son of God. Luke's reference to Elizabeth's unexpected pregnancy signals the beginning of the physician's story.

We are reminded that the Apostle Paul, as Luke's mentor, did not recognize Jesus as Son of God until his spiritual confrontation with the resurrected Jesus on the Damascus road. By way of contrast, we are reminded that in Matthew's account of the birth (Ch. 1:18), the Holy Spirit is literally the father of Jesus (as in Greek mythology!). This support for Jesus as Son of God denies Luke's emphasis of Jesus Messiah Son of God a descendant of David. Luke knows that David's line comes through Joseph as father.

The discrepancies that we note confirm the human interest and bias of the witness. It is the testimony of each contributor that challenges us today to express the belief today, of Jesus as the Christ (Messiah), Son of God in a way that approaches the loyalty, devotion and dedication of the New Testament witnesses and the saints of the Church.

Prayer: *"Help us rightly to remember the birth of Jesus. Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world. Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil by the blessing that Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clear hearts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake. Amen."*

Robert Louis Stevenson

Rev. Dr. Paul McKinnon

Wednesday, December 13th, 2017

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

Poppy and I sat down one Saturday morning together to find the Luke passage assigned. Poppy read it out loud to me but paused, "Hey mum, I thought this was about Luke, not John." So we talked about how Luke was just the name given to the first person to tell the story. We talked about how the people of Israel were expecting God to send them someone to save them. Some people wondered whether it was John. But John humbly denied it and told them to expect someone greater. As it so happens, that person turned out, unexpectedly, to be a child - Jesus. Here is some of the conversation we had that lovely fall morning together.

Jill: *What was special about your baptism Poppy?*

Poppy: *There were a lot of people there and gifts. And my Dad was there too because it was such a special day so he had to come.*

Jill: *After your baptism, did you feel any different?*

Poppy: *I felt good, like I belonged.*

Jill: *What do you think you belonged to?*

Poppy: *God's people. Hey, Mum, are all these stories in the Bible actually true?*

Jill: *Hmm, when you read that story about Kenny during the war, is it true? (yes) And when you read that story about the hippo, is it kind of true too? (yes) And when you watch David Attenborough documentaries, are they true? (yes) Even when the camera speeds things up, is that true? (yes) and the Pokemon stories you tell me, are they true too? (no) But are they true for you Poppy? (yes). Well, the Bible is kind of like all of those true stories all in one book but maybe more like that last one, the Pokemon one, because it is true to you. Hey Poppy, what do you think the Holy Spirit is like?*

Poppy: *I feel it in my heart and it feels happy.*

Jill: *One more question Poppy, if Jesus came tomorrow, what would it be like?*

Poppy: *Everything would be nice – hugging and kissing and dancing and singing.*

Jill: *Like Christmas*

Poppy: *Yeah probably.*

Prayer: *May the advent story of hope and mystery, anticipation, preparation, and a king appearing how we least expect, open your eyes to hope for this world today. Amen.*

Poppy and Jillian

Thursday, December 14th, 2017

Please read: Philippians 4: 4-7

Christmas for me is one of the most important days to celebrate. Working abroad and away from your family, especially from your kids, is very painful when Christmas day has come and you're not there with them.

I remember back to December of 2013, two weeks before Christmas day. I was booked for a flight on a holiday to spend Christmas with my family. At that time, I was not a permanent resident yet here in Canada, so I needed to apply for a re-entry Visa so I could come back and continue to work. Unfortunately, for some reason, my passport didn't come on time. I had to cancel my flight twice. It was very stressful. I wasn't able to go to work and earn money, because I had already taken my vacation leave for four weeks. I did nothing for two weeks but wait for my ongoing visa application. I stayed for two weeks, alone in our apartment because my room mates had already left and were in the Philippines spending time with their families.

I was depressed, crying in bed and didn't have the appetite to eat. My employer phoned me and asked if I want to go back to work while waiting for my Visa so I could have some income, but I said no because I didn't have the energy to work and I knew I wouldn't be able to focus and do my work well.

Back home then, my kids kept asking, "When is mommy coming home?" they were very excited because it had been three years since the last time we had spent Christmas together. I was so anxious about everything. Worried about my papers, worried that my visa wouldn't come on time and worried about spending Christmas alone, worried about my bills when I got back because I didn't have money in my pocket. And the worst thing is I was worried about my kids being disappointed again if I couldn't make it to be there on Christmas day.

Everyday I kept on praying and telling God "Lord I will leave it all to you, I trust You and I believe in You." I still thanked Him for all the other blessings that I had.

December 22nd, my passport visa came. I was very happy, so glad and of course, very thankful. I flew right away on the next day the 23rd. Early morning on Christmas day, (Yes ! I made it !) my family and my kids were waiting on my arrival in Manila, Philippines. The joyfulness and the happiness that we had on that Christmas day is the most precious gift that we received from God. God Blessed Us All.

Prayer: We praise and thank you oh Lord for all the blessings and guidance. Help those people who are under pressure, anxious and feel worried about everything. God, we know You work in ways we cannot see and You always make a way.
Amen.

AnalyN

Friday, December 15th, 2017

Please read: Isaiah 12: 2-6

"I will trust in Him and not be afraid"

As parents of teenagers our only hope is in the Lord.....! I LOVE my teens, and they're great kids, but with all the pressures to conform in a world of materialism and of instant gratification and the choices they must face daily, I'm grateful God gives me the strength and might not to be afraid, (and to be able to sleep at night knowing that HE is in control!!)

The Advent story reminds us of a frightened mother who trusted in God for the safety of her baby. Jesus felt secure by being held in her loving arms.

May we also know and feel that loving embrace around us, even when we find it hard to trust.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to show others that are living in fear, that trusting in you is what brings strength, might and salvation. *Amen.*

Dawn

Saturday, December 16th, 2017

Please read: Zephaniah 3: 17-20

It was December 11th, 2016 and I was having a Christmas brunch with my children and grandchildren at the Sylvia Hotel. By chance I read a new email from my niece in India informing me that "Dad left the body at around 11:00 pm" in the ashram. I knew that my brother was very ill but news of his passing jolted me. I was thankful for the wording of the news "Dad left the body" because it affirmed for me that he was alive but had moved on.

That afternoon I attended a performance of Handel's MESSIAH beautifully sung by the Pacific Spirit Choir and it was truly a transcendent experience given the circumstances.

While reading the passage from the book of Zephaniah, the following lines jumped out at me and I recalled my experience of one year ago.

“The Lord your God is in your midst...he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.”

Prayer: Heavenly Father...help us to be sensitive to the beauty and power of great music to heal and renew us.... and to know that you are always with us as inner strength to call on when we need it. *Amen*

Eleanor

Sunday December 17th, 2017

Please read: Jeremiah 31:7-9

As a member of our church choir, I feel wonderfully blessed. We are privileged to sing both the Sunday hymns and the pieces that have been chosen to fit with the sermon. Congregation members appreciate and often thank us for the music. But, did you know that singing, either in the congregation or choir, gives us enormous physical and emotional benefits?

In Jeremiah we hear the Lord telling Israel to sing! It turns out that singing is really, really good for us all. Recent research suggests that **group** singing is the most exhilarating and transformative of all. When we sing, musical vibrations move through our body, altering your physical and emotional state. Singing in a group (such as in Church) imparts a feeling of solidarity and community. It promotes spiritual harmony by synchronizing our heartbeats, and de-stressing our lives. It promotes wellbeing and connection with those around us.

Physically speaking, singing lights up the right temporal lobe of our brain, releasing endorphins that make us smarter, healthier, happier and more creative. People who sing have reduced levels of cortisol, the stress hormone. When we sing with a group of people, the benefits are **amplified**.

In Jeremiah's time, creating music together was an important tool of social living. The Israelites were in exile – a captive people in a strange land. Groups sang and danced together to build hope, and loyalty. Unbeknownst to them at that time, singing also gave them a better survival rate. What's more, the benefits of singing regularly are cumulative.

Sing your heart out this Christmas! It's really, really good for you!

Prayer: Dear God thank you for giving us the joy of music to fill our ears and our hearts. Bless all those who give their time and talents to glorify Your name in this way. *Amen*.

Cora

Monday, December 18th, 2017

Please read: Isaiah 7: 10-16

The Lord spoke to Ahaz, telling him to ask for a sign from God. Ahaz didn't want to bother the Lord. Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking God doesn't want to be concerned with our problems, so he gave us a sign – in the form of a wee baby whose name was to be called Immanuel.

At this Christmas season may we turn our thoughts to the signs God gives us and not be afraid to ask for guidance. When I was thinking of moving back to West Vancouver I prayed for a sign from God. I put my Langley townhouse on the market and it sold in two weeks. At the same time my daughters found me a lovely apartment with a wonderful ocean view close to West Vancouver United Church. How was that for a sign!

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, Help us not to be afraid to ask for signs to help us in our everyday life and in doing so we need not be afraid of the dangers around us. Amen.*

May

Tuesday, December 19th, 2017

Please read: Micah 5: 2-5 King James Version (KJV)

Now gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops: he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek.

² *But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*

³ *Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel.*

⁴ *And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.*

⁵ *And this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land: and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men.*

1943: It is another snowy Christmas in Vancouver. The country is at war. Three of my brothers are in RCAF uniform, one of them systematically bombing Europe. For a young boy age 10, it is all very exciting. Butter and gasoline are rationed and oranges non-existent, but the extent of the global catastrophe does not penetrate family life in East Vancouver. Christmas revolves around the Swedish Lutheran Church at Princess and Pender, on the fringes of Chinatown. A huge Christmas tree with candles on it, in a huge church, listening to sermons in Swedish, which I do not understand. Cousins and uncles. Stern rectitude.

Reading Micah 5 today reminds me of the vigour of Christianity in its founding years. A small band of followers, shepherds, overnight in a cattle stable under Roman rule, seven shepherds – the “remnant of his brethren” will carry the word and Christianity will recruit Rome and become the driving ethic of the world – even into far-off Scandinavia. We are so fortunate to be its believing disciples, two thousand years later.

Prayer: Dear Loving God, we thank You for equipping some with the gift of carrying the Good News of the gospel all around the world. May we also be faithful in “seeing the face of Jesus in others” and becoming “the face of Christ to others”. *Amen*

Ralph

Wednesday, December 20th, 2017

Please read: Malachi 4: 1-6

Adventures with contained fires are a common theme through the generations in our family. There was the time Mom burned the garbage in the campground campfire, having forgotten a bottle of mercurochrome had been thrown away. The permanent orange spots on Uncle Tom's new sweatshirt at the time are stuff of legends. Then there's Dad's old tradition that burning the Christmas wrapping paper in the family room fireplace was a good idea, until the chimney caught fire, too. Taking the kids on a friend's boat overnight, including cooking the breakfast bacon on board in the morning seemed like so much fun until the grease fire. The image of our friend tossing the entire griddle overboard to extinguish the flames is forever embedded to memory.

We don't know if any of these family sagas qualify as an Elijah moment, but they do all point to the fact that in our family, from generation to generation, even these flawed parents' hearts all turned toward their children in spite of the fiery scenes. Through loving each other unconditionally, even if not so carefully, from generation to generation the children's hearts turned toward their parents, too. So until the next flaming moment, and likely even afterward, we give thanks for every loving generation of our family.

Prayer: Dear God, in spite of our utter humanness, we live in the confidence that through our unconditional love for our children and our children's children, Your love can be also known to them. Through these Advent days, give us the awareness to look in the face of each other in order to see the face of your Son. With thankful hearts, *Amen*.

Gwen and Bill

Thursday, December 21st, 2017

Please read: 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

It was in mid December, many years ago, when young Tim phoned me at home. "My ma refuses to see you at your office, doc. Didn't need a psychiatrist no more, she said to me, but was so, so much depressed again," he said, worried.

I agreed to the house visit as I had a few days off at Christmas, and I took my young daughter, Marilyn, with me, as she was on holidays from school. We found Barb's address on Davie, an old run down, shabby four-story apartment building with no elevator and Barb's family lived on the top floor.

When we walked in, it was a small unit, unkempt, messy and cluttered, with two teenaged children living in the one bedroom. The youngest, Tim took us to his mother, Barbara who was on the couch, depressed but sweating with a fever, coughing and under a shabby, thin blanket.

I could see that Marilyn was appalled at the poverty, as I spoke with Barb. "Are you taking your meds, Barb, and eating? You've lost weight. Drink lots of water, maybe some orange juice, also. It sounds like you've got bronchitis," I said, sitting at the end of her sofa.

"Orange juice? Ain't got none, doc. In the ice box, maybe. Had some, once. Maybe yesterday," she answered meekly, as Marilyn whispered that there was no Christmas tree or presents about. Sadly, her son, Tim, took over the paternal role after the father died of an overdose years ago. Marilyn and I went into the small kitchen to look in the fridge. "See, Barb doesn't have any food, Dad. In that fridge," she said. Tim, standing close by, remarked tearfully that they were waiting for their social assistance money to come at the end of the month.

"They need some food in that fridge, Dad. And an antibiotic. I saw a Safeway, next door. Let's go," Marilyn said, pulling me to the door, as Tim followed.

In Safeway, Marilyn insisted on getting a shopping cart. Before I knew it, she had filled the cart to the brim with groceries, orange juice and a turkey. She picked up a box of chocolates for Tim's sister, a pot of flowers for Barb and a box of Mandarin oranges for Tim.

"For Christmas, Dad," our daughter reminded me.

We carried the four bags up to Barb's room, stopping twice to catch my breath. After loading the bags into the fridge, giving Barb the antibiotic I picked up, and some orange juice, I left assuring her that Tim, her son would help her out, and I'd see her again, soon.

"That was nice, Dad. I hope Tim and his sister will be able to cook that turkey," Marilyn said, as we left. In January Tim brought his mother to my office. She was much better, her bronchitis cleared up, the anti-depressants were working and Susan, the eldest daughter, cooked the turkey for the family. I thanked God that Marilyn was on holiday from school, and came with me.

Prayer: Dear Lord. We thank you for the gift of your son, Jesus. May we never forget that You are the source of our every blessing. We pray that you will give comfort, courage and guidance to all those who are suffering and in need now and hereafter. Let your light shine throughout the world. *Amen*

Larry

Friday, December 22nd, 2017

Please read: Luke 1: 46-55

Several years ago, our family lived in the Interior of BC. We had moved to the community in mid December just before Christmas. We really didn't know anyone. My husband had just joined a Forestry Company, and we had met several people from the Company, but no one invited us to share Christmas with them. We had joined the Church, and learned they were putting on a Christmas dinner for people who were homeless and less fortunate than ourselves. Of course, they were looking for volunteers to help with the dinner! We volunteered.

The church members cooked hams and turkeys as well as vegetables and desserts. We all gathered with our cooked offerings in mid afternoon at the church. The tables had been set, and looked very festive. The food was assembled on tables at the front of the room, and the volunteers were given assignments. Some were greeters, some were kitchen helpers, some helped the guests get their dinners.

As the guests arrived, I watched with anticipation to see their response. They were all so thankful for a lovely home cooked dinner. As they sat down, they would chat with the volunteers and tell them their stories. They all had different stories to share, but all the guests were so thankful of the kindness and Christmas spirit offered by the volunteers. The love and companionship was evident throughout the evening. When we sang Christmas hymns the glow and love on the guests faces was something that I will always remember.

My husband and I felt joyful as we drove home to our family. What a wonderful opportunity to help others and create a place where they too could enjoy the love and joy of Christmas.

Prayer: Dear God, wherever we find ourselves this Christmas, may we be used as Your servants, to bring "comfort and joy" to our guests as well as the strangers amongst us. *Amen*

Marilynne

Saturday, December 23rd, 2017

Please read: Luke 1: 57, 76-80

The scripture passage reveals God's purpose and plan by choosing to speak through an old unlikely couple; thus transforming Zechariah's and Elizabeth's disbelief. It takes courage and trust to obey. John the Baptist was born to these aged Jewish parents who were of priestly family; and they were both righteous before God. John's name was divinely given, signifying "Jehovah is gracious." As an elderly couple, they gave back to God, the gift of their only son so that His will be done. Isn't it wonderful to know that even during fear and doubt God slowly reveals His purpose and transforms our disbelief as He did for Zechariah and Elizabeth.

Advent is a time for pondering and remembering. It is also my time to relinquish habitual busyness. Memory serves me to relive a Christmas like that in Washington, D.C. My heart was full of gratitude with the anticipation of family and friends arrival. Our hospitality was harmonious. The beauty of our festive home decorations, was intensified with the glow of candles, and the warmth of a wood burning, fire. Our festive feasts with six happy children were filled with joy, laughter and contentment. Our Christmas preparation for them included a flight to Disneyworld and a beach destination for the New Year. My energy time was wrapped in love for all. I nourished the families but neglected to nurture my soul.

Since that “Eventful Christmas”, my practice is to pace the Advent Season with reflective soul-caring time. I block out much of the jolly, jolly, jingling and take time to listen to His will over the demands of pressurized Christmas events.

Prayerfully, I want to remember the courage, trust, and obedience of both couples; Elizabeth and Zechariah, and Mary and Joseph. They played a humble role in unfolding God's redemptive plan.

"when will we have the time to make the long journey
across the desert as did the Magi? Or sit and watch the stars
as did the shepherds? Or brood over the coming of the child,
as did Elizabeth and Mary? For each of us there is a desert to travel." Author unknown.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, Bless parents, grant peace, keep safe their homes. Fill them anew with the same peace and hope you imparted to Elizabeth and Zechariah, as they consider the future of their children. Grant your church blessings of holiness and to all people insight of your generosity of love. Keep safe the weak. Use me to serve you. *Amen.*

Lea

Sunday, December 24th, 2017

Please read: Luke 2:1-7

I always relate to the activities surrounding Christmas, so decided to start with Christmas cards. The notice in the book shop stated “50% off all boxes of Christmas cards”, while another very small notice alongside in much fainter ink stated “Buy one box and get the second one half-price.” It took me some time to work out what I’d pay just buying one box! Then I read the words of one of our Christian leaders, “Christian festivities are meaningless; the world does not recognise the path of peace; the Christian Festivities seem empty in a world that has chosen war and hate.” That made me think.

Christmas – a world-wide event, indiscriminate buying of gifts, because it’s “the thing to do”; a few days’ holiday, excessive food and drink and festivities “over the top” with the main body not going near a church. It is of great concern to me when I read the majority of cards with the words “Happy Holidays”.

As a Christian, this scene changes, we can still include the gifts, the food and the festivities without going “over the top”, but overall, Christmas means to me “The Crib” – the nativity scene says it all.

I’ve always been glad there was “no room at the Inn” Now picture the stable with the crib in the centre around which sat Mary and Joseph, along with some of the farm animals. They must have relished this quiet time, the peace of the stable and their own time just sitting by the crib, honouring the birth of their son, sent from God and being much in awe of the situation; time to realise the significance of the birth and realising their lives would never be the same again.

We can all sit by the crib in silence, welcoming Jesus and knowing our lives will never quite be the same again. Surely, we all have our special “crib” scene.

During World War 2, when I was but a little girl, an evacuee, living with my Grandmother, while my father served with the British Navy, I loved going Carol Singing in the deep snow around the small farming community. The stars in the sky were brilliant, with the moon lighting our way. (No lanterns or flashlights allowed). We were accompanied by a few Military Personnel, recovering from battlefield scars.

Recalling this scene many years later, I realise that for me, anyway, the crib was in our midst and my life would never quite be the same again.

I love Christmas!

Prayer: Dear Father, help us not to get carried away with the glitter of Christmas, but to keep our eyes on the humble crèche and worship “Immanuel – God with us.” *Amen*

Helen

Monday, December 25th, 2017

Please read: John 1:1-5

The Light of All People

“They have no idea,” I (Simon) found myself thinking. It was a few weeks before Christmas, and I was sitting in a small church outside of Cape Town, South Africa. As I looked up during the service, I saw a young white girl walk up to a young black boy. Her clothes were immaculate: a delicately ironed white dress. His, on the other hand, were dirty and torn at the knees. She was the youngest of a wealthy family. He was the youngest of a family that lived in the cabin near the church.

With a great big smile on her face, she took the boy’s hand and smiled at him. He smiled back. Together, hand in hand, they ran around the sanctuary, laughing and giggling. And then, exhausted, they walked to the front of the sanctuary and innocently sat at the feet of the pastor, still hand and hand.

It struck me that these two young children had no idea how beautifully symbolic their unlikely friendship was in a country often divided by racial and socio-economic tensions. Yet this was a church that understood that the Gospel meant acknowledging differences and working towards overcoming them in order to build a new kind of community. After all, as the introduction to the book of John reminds us, this life that we celebrate today, Jesus, the Christ, “was the light of all people.”

All people.

So this Christmas, may God’s Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, encourage you to extend a smile and a hand to those around you whose ways you might not understand. And in that, may there be a blessing for you and for those you meet.

A very merry Christmas from our family to yours.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, this Christmas morning, remind us that you are a light to all people. Bless us with the humility needed to embody your ways in truly life and community-changing ways. In Jesus’ awesome and holy name we pray.

Amen.

Rev. Simon and Meghan LeSieur

West Vancouver United Church
2062 Esquimalt Avenue
West Vancouver, BC
604-922-9171

wwuc.bc.ca

Youth website: www.westvanyouth.com